Every relationship starts with a series of first times and first experiences. Hakuno and Gilgamesh were no different as they moved from barely trusting one another into something too unsure and too precious to name.

Notes

So, this is more or less an experiment with me. I adore this couple, and I really want to write out some stories and scenes with them, and their progression from totally not trusting one another into the best pair in the Fate franchise. Some will be shorter, but others will be more like short stories. Hope that you enjoy!
The First Time Hakuno Saw Gilgamesh as More Than Death Incarnate

The first time Hakuno saw Gilgamesh as more than just someone who would kill her was after their defeat by Lancer. She’d known that Gilgamesh wouldn’t kill her for no reason. At least, not as long as she was entertaining, Hakuno knew that her problems were entertaining enough for Gilgamesh to want the story to keep going. Though she was always a little worried that he enjoyed her life the way that someone enjoyed a kind of boring afternoon drama. If there was something better, he’d end the contract himself regardless of promises.

She also didn’t trust him not to just kill her on some imagined offense because she’d managed to get a blanket for her sad little corner of the room where she was supposed to sleep while the golden servant lounged around on his stupid throne, which was in the corner of the room where the bed used to be, but clearly that was more important.

She wished she had the courage to speak her mind to him.

She was in a bad mood already, and honestly, the blanket felt like it was going to be enough of a fight.

Gilgamesh didn’t even notice it as he slumped into his giant throne, and Hakuno just headed to her corner, feeling exhausted down to her bones, and sore, but she sure wasn’t going to complain aloud.

She grabbed the blanket around herself, sighing as she thought about that bed. She hadn’t complained to the others about her servant. After all, it wasn’t as if there was much that anyone could do, and for another thing…she wanted to deal with him herself. She glanced over at him, sitting on his throne with his eyes half open, looking at his wine goblet. He seemed strangely despondent for a man who clearly was under the impression that the sun rose specifically to greet him in the morning.

If Gilgamesh noticed her looking at him, he didn’t show it, but he did start talking.

“This isn’t good. While it has been a delight to experience the dilemmas of the weak, there is a limit…and to be pushed about by some second-rate Servant…it’s almost disheartening.”

He was glaring at her as he said it, as if it was her fault or something that…

But it was her fault.

Hakuno knew that she was a half-baked mage who, by all rights, never should have gotten as far she as she could barely remember getting, and it had been her misdirection, her bad planning that had caused their loss more than anything else. Yes, he’d degraded, but…she couldn’t just pass off all responsibility just because of that. She still resented his cheerful declaration that she was suddenly in charge of powering him up again, she couldn't deny she had her hand in this.

“I should have worked harder,” she muttered, leaning against the wall and closing her eyes. “I wasn’t giving enough support and direction. If I was better…”

But Gilgamesh’s voice was suddenly sharp and cold as it cut through her monologue.

“Fool. How many times must I tell you not to consider us at the same rank. Your conceit is tremendous. My recovery and your growth are completely separate matters. Don’t even dream that we fight together.”

“I wasn’t saying we’re on the same level!” That was out of her before she could stop herself.
She knew that they weren’t companions. He’d told her as much from the start. He was only there because he was hoping that her misery would entertain him until she couldn’t take it anymore, but her protests completely died at the look that he was giving her.

The killing intent she had felt from that Lancer was nothing compared to that look in his eyes. Lancer’s was a threat of pain and blood and death that would last. This was something that felt to Hakuno of gold and blood and something so old that it had never even been given a name by any human. It wasn’t a threat. It wasn’t even a promise. It was an absolute. She would die.

She couldn’t even apologize for her outburst. The most she could do was sit there, back against the wall, waiting to see just what was going to happen and what he was going to do.

“Mongrel, sew you mouth shut and keep that loose tongue in place. If you were a retainer of mine, you’d have been beheaded by now…. However…”

He paused, closing his eyes.

“Currently, I cannot claim my usual glory. I am nothing more than a normal king, descended from my Gorgeous throne. For that degree of irreverence, you should be profusely dosed in water to cool that flame of defiance. Be grateful for that.”

Hakuno looked up suddenly, sure that the Gate of Babylon was suddenly going too open a throw the equivalent of a bucket of water on her head, but nothing happened. The ceiling stayed intact without so much as a ripple.

For a moment, she just sat there, waiting, until a sound broke the tension. Gilgamesh started laughing. It was the same sudden, almost joyful sound he had made when she’d given him her command seals, and it made her stomach sink slightly. She looked back down to see him leaning against the side of the throne in his mirth.

She failed to see what was so funny.

“Oh, little mongrel, not yet,” his voice was soft, but his grin was far too toothy for her liking. “All punishments must come in their good time. But yes…I must judge as an ordinary king, descended from his Gorgeous throne…”

He continued making that illogical, stupidly elevated point, and he’s just throwing ‘Gorgeous’ around…

Did he…like that class name that Lancer gave him?

She’d sort of seen him as someone who was immune to flattery, if for no reason other than the force of an ego so large that any flattery just seemed normal to him, but there he was, playing with that class title like some new toy.

Gilgamesh shifted from his throne, taking the goblet of wine and drinking it, obviously thinking about something. Hakuno should have just let him talk. That was what he really wanted anyways…

“However, despite your pretense…it is good that you reflect on your own failings, rather than placing the blame for your defeat on your Servant alone. It is there that you have shown your merits and stayed my hand. That constant questioning of oneself leads to servility, but there is also a discerning form of humility there. I believe it is referred to as a submissive disposition…”

A shudder worked its way up Hakuno’s spine. There was no way that she had a submissive disposition. Particularly not to this Servant. Even if he could kill her in an instant, realizing where she...
could improve rather than just throwing all the blame on someone else and pretending that she was perfect wasn’t *submissive,* and if he repeated that she was going to tell him just that regardless of if it killed her!

But Hakuno knew better than to push Gilgamesh further. He had decided not to kill her, but she had no idea how far that was going to get her. Thankfully, he hadn’t noticed the anger on her face, or if he did, it amused him too much.

He was snickering to himself too much.

“I suppose that Lancer was right, sadism excites this ‘Gorgeous’.”

He…really just liked that class name didn’t he?

But…he had said something else that interested her, and if he was in the mood to talk, she was going to use it.

“A lot of masters blame their servants for things, don’t they?” Hakuno said thoughtfully. “Even when it’s really just their fault with bad planning and stupid choices….”

She frowned at the lack of memory. It was one of the many things, like Leo, and her connection with Rin that made her feel like she *should* remember something. Hakuno could see Shinji treating his Servant like crud. He treated everyone like crud, and he’d definitely blame them for anything bad that happened, but there was nothing to base it on, other than a feeling.

“Mages are proud for mongrels, and in their absurdity put themselves above all that they can. It is natural then, that they would refuse to examine their own deficiencies, and rather force them on their own Servants.” Gilgamesh said. “Such behavior has grown more common. I would suppose that you saw plenty of it on the Near Side.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Hakuno said, not liking that feeling of bitterness that came into her tone, and she decided to just keep going. “Did…did you have other Masters…ones who acted like that?”

That wasn’t pushing into his past, was it? Well, it wasn’t his real past, so she supposed it would work. Besides, Gilgamesh seemed like he was in the mood to chat, and he'd never told her she couldn't ask specific questions.

“If I did, they are not worth recalling,” Gilgamesh said, shrugging and taking another drink. “I have acknowledged no one as worthy of that title to begin with, so their petty attempts to protect their dignity have never mattered.”

No one had ever been worthy… That…sounded about right for him.

Hakuno couldn’t see Gilgamesh like Gawain, who was loyal to Leo regardless of the situation, or even Hans, who, regardless of his anger and clear hate for Kiara still served her faithfully. Gilgamesh wasn’t going to do that.

Therefore, how could her improving have anything to do with his reclaiming his own lost powers? He didn’t even see himself as her Servant. He was an observer. Even that statement about her reflecting on her failings… Gilgamesh was more or less commenting on how she dealt with defeat as a person. Judging her value separately from how it affected him.

It didn’t really make her feel better about how she’d done, but at the same time, it did remind her that this was *her* fight.
Hakuno looked up from her thoughts, realizing that Gilgamesh was still watching her. His red eyes bored into hers, the slit pupil giving her the uncomfortable feeling that she was staring down something that at some level really wasn’t human.

He was waiting to see her reaction, she realized. He wanted to see if she was going to get offended over being told that she wasn’t worthy of him. He was testing her. Well, she wasn’t going to give him that show.

“I wonder what a worthy Master would be for you,” Hakuno said carefully.

Gilgamesh snorted.

“Such a thing will never exist,” he said, looking back into the wine glass.

He seemed remote again, and Hakuno guessed that the conversation was over now. She hadn’t given him whatever he’d been looking for, but he didn’t seem overly disappointed. Just…bored.

But…he still wanted to call himself the ‘Gorgeous’ class. It was strangely…self-conscious. Then again, she was looking at someone who had literally summoned himself a golden throne to sit on in a tiny little room that felt like a converted storage closest.

It almost made him seem human.

“Hm, did you say something?”

Had she said that out loud?!

“Nope,” Hakuno said, shaking her head quickly.

It was a bad lie, and she knew it, and he clearly knew it too give the look that he was giving her.

If she was right, she was on dangerous ground. But at the same time…she hadn’t really expected him to be flattered by something so stupid. In the Labyrinth, and when they’d met, Hakuno always felt that she was dealing with someone who honestly felt nothing about killing, and would have killed her as easily as a monster. He was more of a storm than a man.

But seeing him talking about that…It made her realize that maybe, just maybe, it was actually possible to understand the Servant that she had contracted with in sheer desperation.

“I guess even kings have their secrets…” she muttered.

“Hm? You mean like the Secret Garden that you summoned from Rin?” Gilgamesh smiled, but it was more like he was baring his teeth at her. “I have no dark past, if that is what you are considering, but of course I have my secrets. As many as there are stars in the sky. I am one who gathered all the treasures of the Earth and no lack of liaisons…though nothing I would tell the public. A king’s legend though, is what people make of it, so you cannot see that as a delusion, or even something that I would tell you.”

So he was more or less telling her to figure it out for herself.

He did have an SG though, Hakuno realized. Even if…from the sound of it, she’d be more likely to be able catch a falling star than to learn the things that he was hiding.

At the same time…she wanted to try. Gilgamesh, whatever else he was or had done, was fighting for her, even if it was just because he was bored. She wanted to understand him, and…for the first time,
she felt that it might be possible to do it.
The First Time Hakuno Realized Gilgamesh was a Liar

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Gilgamesh and Sir Gawain’s blow up has Hakuno struggling with what’s she's been told and what she's starting to see.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time that Hakuno realized that Gilgamesh was a liar was after his fight with Gawain.

Secretly, Hakuno was pretty sure that he was still annoyed after the absolute verbal lashing that Hans Christian Anderson had given him. How the King of Heroes had been able to stand there, looking strangely refreshed while he was verbally torn apart, she’d never know.

Even now, after one trip into the Labyrinth dealing with Rani’s weird rules, the words haunted her.

A ruffian that brought suffering to his country and his people. A fool who united heaven and earth, ruling over men without governing his country. A King of Heroes and only that…a storm with will. To call you a king of men would make me laugh. You destroy and cannot promise a good harvest, and then you gather up all the riches that your subjects produce. Greed, cruelty and conceit. Those three vices achieved their ultimate forms and were made one. That’s what you are. Surfs raise their crops. Kings raise their kingdoms, but you did nothing but kill and pursue your own satisfaction. Your nation, followers and legends are all dust and only you remain. This contract is nothing to you but a way to alleviate boredom. You’re an adjudicator who enjoys human emotions but will never understand them. That is your true nature, King of Heroes.

Hakuno, you will never be able to understand this man. Act as his master and nothing else.

Maybe Anderson was right. So far, it seemed that there was no way to really understand him.

There was a logic to Gilgamesh, she could see that in the lectures that he’d randomly give her when he was in the mood, ranging from topics like the purpose and value of money (apparently, Rin amused him) to what would happen if Lancer did beat him (she’d be the one to suffer, but he couldn’t care less either way). But that logic was so convoluted sometimes that she doubted that she even could understand it.

It was honestly a little depressing.

She didn’t want to just use Gilgamesh as a Master and be done with it, but it felt like that was almost what he wanted.

And then after what started as an almost fun ‘student council moment’ Gilgamesh had cut his way through the warm atmosphere like some specter, malevolent grin in place, eyes tracing over all of them until settling on Gawain, and, like with Karna before him, Gilgamesh decided to start a fight.

Gawain was ready, discounting Gilgamesh’s critique of Camelot and turning the accusations. While Camelot had failed, and Gawain took his blame for it, Gilgamesh was a unrepentant tyrant, brutally selfish and a mass murderer.
“The ways of my King's heart are far removed from those of a despicable mass murderer who takes riches for his own selfish desires and takes people's lives for no reason!”

It was basically just like what Anderson had said. He was irredeemable and the worst possible of Servants. He had and would kill with no remorse. He'd even said that he saw nothing wrong with a Servant killing their Master if the two didn't have the same 'path'. The others were nodding in agreement, but this time, Hakuno felt herself hesitating.

No…that wasn’t right…

“Hakuno?”

Everyone was looking at her in shock, including Gawain. Only Gilgamesh hadn't moved, his eyes firmly on Gawain, never wavering from his stance, or that smile.

Hakuno jumped, realizing that she’d been thinking aloud.

"I... it came out without my realizing," Hakuno said.

“I know that since he’s your servant, you’re inclined to support him, but…” Leo said, eyeing the golden Servant dubiously.

"Yeah," Rin said, the same unsure look clear on her face while Sakura nodded. "Why support him?"

“It’s not that. I'm not supporting him because he's technically my Servant.” Hakuno said. “I…” how did she say this? “Sir Gawain isn’t wrong… Everything he said is right. Gilgamesh…he’s cold blooded, he’s selfish, and he’s probably killed more people than I want to know under the name of ‘king’, but… I don’t think mass murderer is the right term. I’ve worked with him. He’s temperamental, but…I don’t think he’d just start killing indiscriminately because he was in a bad mood…”

There was a logic to his actions.

Even in his heartless words about what would happen to her if Lancer managed to beat him (completely ignoring his own defeat) it had also been a reminder of what was at stake, and…almost a reprimand that mercy wasn’t always going to work like it had on Rin and might work on Rani. Oh, he’d mocked her standards, but he hadn’t just ignored them. That was what a mass murderer would do. Mass murderers didn't save people or even recommend mercy...

“I’ve heard enough,” Gilgamesh cut in, glaring out at all of them. “I’m no longer interested. Like that dog in armor howled, I am a tyrant with no concern for the people I ruled. My path and existence are nothing like yours. Never forget that.”

And with that, he was gone, vanishing into that astral form that Servants had.

But what was strange was that he hadn't looked at her.

Gilgamesh usually sort of spoke to others through her. While he certainly didn’t see her as worthy of being his Master, he had no inclination to actually talk to someone who she hadn’t forced via command seal to. The only time he talked to others was occasionally, when he thought that he was facing someone who he could fight, like Gawain or Karna. This…this wasn’t like him at all.

She was getting used to this incorrigible Servant at least.

Leo sighed.
"I suppose that is our cue to stop," he glanced at Hakuno, but that somewhat confused look was still in his eyes. "Good luck."

Hakuno nodded, and glanced at Gawain, but he was averting his eyes from her too. Rin's disagreement was clear on her face, and when she shut the door, she could make her muffled voice saying. "I suppose she'd have to find some way to mentally deal with who she's contracted to..."

Maybe Rin was right. Maybe she was just making excuses.

The hall seemed weirdly empty outside the council room. While before, there had been some people, and Shinji, hanging around, most of the NPCs seemed to be on the upper floors. But it didn't feel lonely. Light from the perpetual twilight streamed through the windows, promising the freedom of after school shenanigans...

“Your schoompy school romantic comedy life…” That was what BB had called it. A serial that never ended... The same day on loop, over and over again...

There was another mystery, but it wasn’t something Hakuno was going to think about. She had to break Rani out of…whatever BB did to people.

She walked down the hall, planning on her second crack at Rani's SG, but the sudden heavy atmosphere around her made her stop. It wasn't the knife blade like before in the student council room. This was the feeling of someone towering behind her, arms crossed, and expecting immediate results.

Gilgamesh.

He might have vanished, but it was clear that he hadn’t gone anywhere, and if her instincts were right, he wanted to talk. And from experience, if she didn’t do this now, it was going to happen eventually, including in the middle of a battle.

With a sigh, she headed back into the former supply closet with a little pink sign that a very well-intentioned Sakura had put up, cheerfully proclaiming it ‘My Room’.

Gilgamesh was already in his throne when she came in and was watching her closely as she shut the door. She didn’t sit down in her little sleeping corner, but she did stand there, facing him.

She opened her mouth to ask what was going on, but Gilgamesh beat her.

“I would have expected you to agree with that dog, mongrel,” Gilgamesh said, his eyes were different than usual.

He seemed annoyed, but the oppressive feeling that if she didn’t say the right thing she just might die wasn’t there. Honestly, she’d been expecting him to have taken offense to the fact that she’d said, to his face, that Gawain was right about him, but that didn’t seem to be something he cared about. He cared that she didn’t agree with all of it.

Hakuno shrugged.

“I stand by what I said.”

“And I repeat what I said to that pack you consider friends. I am a tyrant with no concern for the lives of those under me. Did you think to carry favor with me by flattering me?”
Of course, he’d think that was what she was trying to do. Because clearly that was what someone meant when they said that they didn’t think you were a mass murderer. Honestly, if she’d really wanted to flatter Gilgamesh, she’d just have called him the Gorgeous class again. Though, given her luck with her servant, he’d decide that she was trying too hard and promise to dump more water on her for the offense.

His eyes were boring into her again, the slit contracting until it was barely a sliver, but…it felt wrong. Like he was willing her to back down like she always did. Like he wanted her to be afraid of him and call him a tyrant.

Maybe it was just easier if she did.

_Act as his Master and nothing more._

“No,” Hakuno said. “You’re an observer. I know that this isn’t your fight, but you’ve still given me the chance to fight on my own, even if it means you could be defeated. That isn’t something a mass murderer would do. That was my logic. I didn’t really mean to tell off Sir Gawain publicly. I was thinking aloud.”

Gilgamesh continued watching her, his expression no different.

“A naïve argument,” he said. “But…like your justification for your continuing on your path to your death…not one without merit. I see you have started rising above your penchant to ask others for their opinions and take them at their word. For that, I will forgive that pack of mongrels for their mindless agreement with a mindless dog and his pretty ideals. I will occasionally be attending your little ‘council meetings’ when I see fit. You will inform that armored dog to keep his tongue between his teeth if he will not stand by his own convictions.”

As if she was going to be able to say that to poor Sir Gawain. Also, why go back? Why had he decided to appear in the first place? Was it just to finally annoy Sir Gawain or was it some other reason that she didn't understand yet.

“You…really don’t like people who don’t hold to themselves, do you?” Hakuno said.

That seemed to be the crux of his hatred of the knight.

“Such a life is worthless. The Knight of the Sun blames himself for the fall of his ideal but does nothing to change what caused that fall. Were his king to appear again, Gawain would behave no differently, and would swallow his own opinions for the sake of his king, believing and standing for nothing, and proclaiming that kind of mindless servility _noble_.” Gilgamesh sneered. “I would be amused to see the king who had inspired such devotion, if only to see them collapse under the weight of the high ideals that his followers so stupidly tossed on him.”

It was an absolute declaration, and the cruelty was unmistakable, but… If he put it that way…she almost preferred Gilgamesh’s ruthless statements that they were not comrades to someone sacrificing everything for her, even if it was against their own principles. It didn’t make someone like Lancer better, and she didn’t agree with Gilgamesh that what Lancer did to her Master wasn’t a betrayal, but…

She sure wasn't going to give him any kind of verbal sign she agreed with him!

Gilgamesh hadn’t moved from his position on the throne, that same dark look on his face that wasn’t quite directed at her. A tyrant who couldn’t care less about his people. A storm that had once
governed a city-state. A Servant who would weigh his Master to determine their worth. A man who despised those who refused to stand for and pursue their own principles.

Something wasn’t adding up.

He was lying.

Somewhere, in all of these things that he’d said was a lie, and she wasn’t sure what and where it was. He also hadn’t really mentioned anything she’d said now that he seemed mollified that she wasn’t trying to flatter him.

"I still think what Lancer did was a betrayal," Hakuno said. "If they'd been that different, why didn't they just talk about it?"

"Because the Master was a fool," Gilgamesh said, his tone making it clear that that should have been obvious to the most casual observer. "The mongrel likely just assumed that they were owed their Servant’s loyalty by virtue of summoning them and never gave that dragon child a moment’s more thought. Still, you should be grateful. She has proven herself more entertaining than I had originally assumed she would be. And you are given the opportunity to aid me in growing stronger."

Gilgamesh laughed loudly at his own statements. If there was anyone who enjoyed having to get stronger more than him, she’d be shocked. She was also starting to get a suspicion that the NPCs were starting to vacate the area because they were getting tired of hearing him.

His smile as he stopped was content. That of a man who was entertained by the perceived stupidity of other people, which he most definitely was, but...something was wrong in it. He wouldn't have gotten so worked up about Gawain if that was all it was. He would have just complained, like when he’d complained that there were too many girls set up as Hakuno’s opponents. (To be fair, it was kind of one sided and really awkward.)

It wasn’t that he didn’t enjoy watching the struggle or her suffering. But...there was more to it, Hakuno realized. Everything he said...it was what he wanted people to see him as. Gilgamesh wanted all to see and fear him as the tyrant king who couldn’t care less about anyone but himself, and he would go out of his way to prove that to people, to the point of picking a fight with another person's servant. But again, that wasn't the complete reason...

“Now, mongrel, I am bored with this little room. Let us return to the Labyrinth. I wish to see this new attempt that your homunculus has conceived of to try to stop you.”

Hakuno sighed.

But...somehow...she felt like she’d realized something important. If she wanted to understand the King of Heroes, or maybe the King of Liars, she couldn’t focus on what he said. She needed to focus on what he was doing.

She still wasn’t sure if Anderson or Gawain were really right, and she was just trying to justify him for some reason, but she was sure about one thing: she refused to just act as his Master and nothing more. That was the mistake that Lancer's Master had made.

And maybe even that Leo was making by not encouraging Sir Gawain to speak his mind.

Chapter End Notes
So, I sort of felt like I wanted to examine just how Hakuno felt about literally everyone saying that her Servant was the worst. I'm also, going through more and more material and rewatching things, thinking that Gil's definition of 'tyrant' is a little different than most people's, given that he's weirdly fine with Hans calling him a horrible king and a horrible person to his face, but can't stand Sir Gawain, who has the deferential behavior that most traditional tyrants like to the point of actively coming to pick a fight with him.

Next Chapter: Something a little more humorous

"Panties. Are. Forbidden."

Please comment if you have any suggestions or just want to say hi!
Chapter Summary

In Rani's dungeon, everything is a mess. Both because of the situation and because of a difficult Servant that won't stop telling Hakuno that she shouldn't feel any shame in 'freeing herself' because she has his special permission.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time Hakuno was actually embarrassed about anything that the King of Heroes thought of her was in Rani’s second Secret Garden.

Specifically, the thing that she would always call the Panty Incident.

It wasn’t as if Gilgamesh hadn’t insulted her before, or even humiliated her. He’d stolen her bed and made her sleep on the floor, after all. Now she just usually curled up, tugged her blanked around her and faced that wall so she didn’t have to see anyone having comfort around her. The best revenge she could think of was to give him none of the anger that she was sure he wanted.

This wasn’t the same thing. At all.

When she got to the floor, something was already strange. The locked door blocked their path from the get go, and Rani seemed to want her to strip naked and run around like that from the start.

What was worse was that Gilgamesh decided, with a strange smirk on his face, to give her permission to “free herself” in front of him. Proclaiming that her naked body was ‘proof of her origin’. She didn’t particularly feel the need to prove anything to that man, and she certainly wasn’t going to strip in front of him!

But that wasn’t the worst. Oh, no, it was Leo promising to ‘avert his eyes’, with Julius off doing… something and Gawain agreeing with him.

She was starting to understand why Gilgamesh hated Gawain. He was a knight. He was supposed to defend women! Not stand there idly while something like this happened! He knew better.

At the moment, Leo was lower in her personal opinion than BB. Worse was that her very vague memories of him had been completely different. She was vaguely starting to wonder if he was some plant, or BB had just decided to somehow rewrite his personality for kicks. Either way, no one was going to stop him.

And then Leo had the audacity to seem…disappointed when Rani relented and accepted her just weakening herself.

Hakuno ripped of the mystic code without a second thought. She’d rather die to some stupid monster down here. Though, to be fair, that might have been the point.

Still, she’d managed to get by, ignoring Rani’s statements around the freedom that Artemis had experienced when Acteon had spied on her (freedom that had gotten that guy killed). Hakuno ripped
off mystic cold on mystic cold until she was at the last of the doors. When there were no more codes. She had to come up with something.

And then the axe fell.

“Panties. Are. Forbidden.”

For a moment, it was all she could do to just stand there and not make a fool out of herself, but then she glanced up, trying to figure out where the monitor cameras were.

“I’m so sorry,” Rin said. “I know how you must feel, but the only thing that I can do for you is to cut off the monitor feed for thirty minutes. I promise no one will see you.”

That was easy for Rin to say. Rin was safe in the student council room, probably having some of Sakura’s tea, her humiliating SG nothing more than a bad memory. Hakuno was the one being told to…free herself…in a dungeon in front of the King of Heroes, who looked horribly amused by this turn of events.

She could have sworn she heard a disappointed noise from Leo.

Maybe he just wanted revenge for something?

Maybe she’d been underestimating the fact that while he might have been younger than her, but he was still a teenage boy who might die in the Grail War.

Somehow, Hakuno’s eyes drifted towards her Servant, who was watching her with an almost expectant look on his face.

“How? What are you so confused by? Why shouldn’t my Master have to remove one or two undergarments? As my contractor, you should have no trouble stripping three times,” he said, a glint in his eyes.

He was seriously enjoying this, wasn’t he.

“That’s not the same thing at all!” It was out before Hakuno could control herself, but for once, Gilgamesh managed to not take offense.

His grin just got bigger.

“Oh? Have you not exposed yourself and life to me already, mongrel? Laying yourself at my mercy? All in all, I see this as less intimate of an exposure than what you have already achieved.”

Well, that sounded dirty.

And why was it that the one time he called her his Master was when he was telling her to strip!?

“Or could it be…that you were not wearing any from the start?”

The malicious gleam was even brighter in his eyes as she felt herself starting to blush, and finally turned away, unable to so much as look at him or that smile.

“Ah, um, the monitors! I’ll shut them off! It’s fun. I’ll make absolutely sure that no one on the student council can see!” Sakura’s voice sounded nearby, seemingly completely worried.

She at least sounded unhappy about this turn of events.
“Thanks, Sakura,” Hakuno sighed. “Wanna have some tea in the nurse’s office later?”

While I hide on the bed from my Servant who will probably come barging in anyways?

Hakuno waited just a minute longer. Junako was online as well, and honestly, she wasn’t sure if she didn’t put it past the woman to keep her monitor on and then sell the results to Leo. Clenching her fists, she took a breath and prepared for the worst.

“Could you…turn around..?” Hakuno asked her Servant, feeling heat rising to her face.

“Whatever for? I have already given you my permission. There is no need to be ashamed to revealing your body before me,” Gilgamesh said. "While your rage is rightly directed at those others, anything more is completely unnecessary. Proceed. However, if you **must**, you are permitted to turn around."

King of Nudists! Hakuno wanted to scream, but the grin on his face stopped her. She’d originally thought it was just malicious, but…there was something else in his grin…

Was he…**teasing her? NOW** of all times? It was actually **worse** than Leo’s ‘promise’ to avert his eyes!

Also, she realized that even if they couldn’t see her, the student council could still hear that, and no one was going to save her from this humiliation.

So, red faced and trying to hold on to the remaining dignity that she had, Hakuno turned around quickly, biting her fist to keep some insult from getting her impaled by something on the spot. Slowly, hesitantly, she grabbed the hem of her skirt. Maybe if she did it right, at least he wouldn’t have to see anything but her panties…

There was a sudden fizzing sound and a startled cry and some unhappy noises from Jinako. That made Hakuno jump. She had been recording! Stifling another scream, Hakuno stiffened, prepared to yell at Jinako for what she had been about to do, but she stopped.

Someone was snickering quietly.

Slowly, Hakuno glanced behind her, where out of the corner of her eye, she could see the golden Servant. Gilgamesh’s hand was raised slightly, head turned to the side, and his eyes closed, shoulders shaking with quiet laughter now that there was no one there to observe him be anything less than stoically amused.

She’d just become **A tier entertainment**, hadn’t she?

For some reason, maybe just because she had to focus on something other than her own humiliation, her brain registered that his nose crinkled when he was actually laughing, and not giving that loud…megalomaniac laugh that he seemed to like.

Why was she even thinking this!? Was she that desperate not to think about what she was about to do?! Yes, yes she was.

But he eyes were also closed! This was her chance!

Hakuno acted as fast as she could, removing…what had to be…and stuffing it into her inventory before she could hear the snickering stop. The moment that the chime told her that the ‘item’ had been added, the laughter completely stopped.
There was dead silence. Even the monsters that were normally roaming around seemed silent and distant as she stood, back towards her Servant, not sure what she was waiting for.

Hakuno refused to turn around to face what she knew was still staring at her now that his laughter had ended. She could feel Gilgamesh’s eyes on her back, as she crossed her arms, trying to hide her increasingly red face with her hand.

The lock clicked as the door opened, revealing the guarded door to the next level and Rani.

…Now that she was there…Hakuno didn’t want to move, but she clenched her fists, gritted her teeth and kept going. She wasn’t going to give up because of this! She refused! Even if this was that hardest thing that she had ever done to her memory!

She walked forward, making sure that her skirt didn’t move too much as she headed towards Rani, who was watching

“Greetings, how do you feel?” she asked.

Rani didn’t want to know the answer to that.

“The refreshment that comes from discarding everything extraneous – the best natural condition.”

“…best..?” Hakuno said weakly.

Rani, given that this version of her was insane, smiled slightly, and touched one hand to her heart.

“…I’m glad. I’m extremely glad that is seems to appeal to you. And I must thank you too, golden Servant. I would not have dreamed that mankind’s most ancient king endorsed my theories.”

Apparently, Rani had lost the ability to read body language. Also, she wasn’t sure if Gilgamesh actually endorsed her, or just thought that the results of her theories were funny.

“We have the same ethos. I would assert that cultures originating from the Middle East are cutting age, even in modern times.”

“Fool. Do not state obvious facts which such gravity. It will not please me or anything. That aside. You are Rani, correct. When this is over, come to me. You will be in charge of garments for the King.”

Hakuno really wished Gilgamesh would just make up his mind on whether he hated flattery or was weak to it. And he’d managed to contradict himself within two sentences.

“It’s more than I deserve King of Heroes. Perhaps something in the style of the Pharaohs? Would you like to be naked and dressed in bandages?” Rani asked, completely ignoring her.

“I hadn’t considered it, but it might be entertaining.”

Hakuno opened her mouth to object, tried to picture the image that Rani was coming up with and was horrified to find out that she could. That was enough to make a slight shiver run up her spine as the question of if the insanity was catchy came to her.

Rani smirked at her.

“So, my true goal of winning over my opponent’s Servant is complete! That was my goal. Perfectly calculated. Not an SG of any kind.”
That was the worst lie that Hakuno had heard all day. Including Leo’s promise to avert his eyes. This was so obviously an SG that it wasn’t even funny. Also…she still wasn’t sure if Gilgamesh could be won over, or, again, if he was just going along with this because he decided that this was funny.

Gilgamesh had turned to face her, that expectant look that he’d had from the start was back.

Oh.

...was that what this was all about?

Putting on her best smile, which was probably more of a grimace, she faced Rani.

“We match, don’t we, Rani?”

Rani took a step back, eyes wide.

“Match…match…yes…yes we are now seeing one another with no defenses…that is true… My… heart…it’s racing…” Rani whispered, closing her eyes. “I…just can’t stop that word from repeating. We match…it’s like my heart has…become my brain…”

Hakuno didn’t want to think about that, but a familiar pain in her hand was starting and Rani finally started to glow.

“Go!” Gilgamesh roared.

The SG activated.

Not stopping to think, Hakuno rushed forwards, grabbing at the light that was coming from Rani and pulling it out, rushing past her to grab it tightly. It was strangely warm in her hands, like always, and pulsed slightly before it vanished, entering into her own coding, waiting for her to be able to use it to help Kiara with her opening of the heart.

The locked pathway and Rani’s double vanished almost at the same time. Thank goodness. She didn’t want to know what that version of her friend was going to say about this level of exposing herself.

Hakuno sighed, straightened and was about to turn around when she realized…

She’d just jumped in the air.

She’d just jumped in the air to get Rani’s SG, and she didn’t have underwear.

If there were any gods that BB didn’t eat...please don’t let him have seen anything...

Slowly, Hakuno turned around, hoping against all hope that she wasn’t going to get greeted by that smile, but Gilgamesh didn’t seem interested anymore. Oh, he was looking at her, but that glint was gone. He was looking at the place where Rani had been thoughtfully.

Please don’t let him be thinking about mummy wrap.

“That went rather well, mongrel,” he remarked. "I was not entirely sure you had caught on to the nature of this SG in your focus on the homunculus's tasks. But your are persistent, if nothing else.”

Hakuno was just going to ignore that he was acting like the last half hour hadn't happened.

“Are the cameras still off?” she asked, waiting for Rin to tell her, but no sound came.
“There is interference with the sound,” Gilgamesh informed her, and that smirk started to reappear. “The sorrow of that yipping puppy who styles himself a president will no doubt be large when he learns that any hastily constructed backup plans failed in their infancy.”

Wait, had Leo dropped in Gilgamesh’s estimation as well?

With a sigh, Hakuno turned around, taking the panties from the inventory and putting them on, trying hard to keep herself from blushing anymore than she already was. She’d given up trying to get him turn around, and decided to just get it over with. Thankfully, there were no more snickers from behind her.

She was wearing tights from now on. For the rest of her life. Or pants. Either one.

Sighing, Hakuno turned back, noting a slight glow from the Gate of Babylon being Gilgamesh, before there was a crack of static.

“Ah, we’re back in,” Rin’s voice suddenly sounded. “Great! Hakuno…did you manage to see Rani?”

“…Yeah…” Hakuno said. “I’ve got her SG. It was…weird.”

“And…”

“Of course!” Hakuno said quickly, feeling heat rising to her face again.

Leo signed a little.

“I suppose that everyone has their vain hopes,” he said softly. “I would have been nice to have something more subtle for a story about a cheerful student council.”

Leo was insane. That was all there was too it. He’d been driven insane somehow, and now he kept trying to have some idealic student council life because it had been denied him in the past.

“It’s strange. I disabled the monitors, but the sound went out on its own,” Sakura said thoughtfully.

“Urg, mine too,” Jinako complained. “And the Great Jinako’s usually the one causing the interference.”

Hakuno had nothing to say to Jinako, though she was pretty sure that Karna had something to do with Jinako’s monitor fizzing out at just the right time. At least, she hoped that he had better standards than Sir Gawain. Otherwise she might never trust a Servant who was too loyal ever again.

But…she glanced at Gilgamesh, who had clanked over and resumed his place right behind her. What had he been summoning, and why did he look weirdly satisfied by both Jinako’s and Leo’s statements…?

He hadn’t…

No. The person who had happily told her that she had his permission to ‘be free’ and go traipsing around the Labyrinth in nothing but her underwear certainly wasn’t going to do something like that. He’d also been enjoying himself far too much. Unless of course it was because he wanted to be sure that the student council never saw him laugh like that. That she could see. Yet...somehow...

“Well, we should chalk this up to a victory at get moving!” Leo said, all of his behavior suddenly behind him. “Hakuno, head down to the next level and you can warp out!”
“And you’re all going to destroy the footage from this floor!” she called out, but there was no response.

Glancing at the way down, all Hakuno could think about was her blanket. And tights. As Gilgamesh walked behind her, down the stairs, Hakuno tried to…find some kind of acceptable ground between them again.

“You looked like you knew what was going to happen when Rani started pretending that this wasn’t an SG. Did you…guess Rani’s plan?”

Gilgamesh made a noise that showed just how stupid he thought her question was.

"Of course I was aware that this was the nature of the SG. I told you from the beginning. This was a focus on confinements and intimacy. There were some twists that I did not foresee, but in the end, the result was the same. Also, cease that shamed face. You were given my permission and therefore should feel no disgrace in progressing as you had to, however, if you want recompense, focus on the punishment you wish to visit on your homunculus and that ‘president’ you have rather than the event itself.”

Don’t get mad, get even, was it? Also, it appeared that he was arrogant as ever. As far as he was concerned, it wasn’t embarrassing because he said so. Because clearly his opinion was the only one that mattered. But…at the same time…she almost got the feeling that he was trying to make her feel better somehow with that repeated arrogant statement. She shouldn't feel embarrassed if he'd seen her, and no one else had...

She had to be overthinking this.

She never did learn just how much Gilgamesh actually saw when she captured Rani’s SG, or if he was the reason why the cameras shorted out during her greatest humiliation.

Chapter End Notes

This was a surprisingly hard chapter to write out...

This was a little more of an action based chapter, as well as again, a bit of an adaptation, but honestly, I wanted to look at this whole thing, as well as play with it a little. I thought that some deviation would be fun, as well as a way to make Hakuno a little more off balance than just being embarrassed.

Next up:

BB’s attempt to cause division through silence forces Hakuno and Gilgamesh to actually work together for the first time.
The First Time Hakuno and Gilgamesh Worked Together

Chapter Summary

BB's private conversation ban causes no end of trouble; however, it forces Hakuno and Gilgamesh to communicate without the way that they took for granted before.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time they really worked together was thanks to BB.

With the Panty Floor behind her, Hakuno was ready for just about any kind of insanity that was going to follow, but this version of Rani seemed…different. She claimed that she didn’t have an SG, and seemed smug about it, but somehow, Hakuno was pretty sure that she’d find a lie.

Everything had gone well until Hakuno tripped...something, BB’s Channel activated, and the woman, flanked by someone she couldn't see, decided that banning all private conversation was a good idea, under some weird rant about upholding morality in the schools or something.

The second that things were back to normal, she glanced at her Servant.

Gilgamesh’s mouth moved slowly, and then faster, and then for all appearances he was shouting in rage, but there was no sound. Hakuno opened her mouth to see if anything would work, but wasn’t surprised that there was nothing. She tried to find some way to message the student council hoping that maybe there was something that they could do, but even with them, she couldn’t talk.

“Please calm down,” Leo’s voice sounded calm, and clearly no longer the persona that he’d had on the Panty Floor. “We saw BB’s broadcast as well, and we’re looking for a way to remove it. Sakura, have you got anything?”

“No…” Sakura said, sounding worried. “Originally, I thought that it was just a status aliment, but it doesn’t look like that. I think that BB’s using special permissions. I can’t rescind it.”

“Well…this isn’t good,” Leo muttered. “We still haven’t penetrated much of the SG, and this kind of rule was forced on us… Still, if BB came out against us directly, I think it’s reasonable to assume that there is something here that we can use. Hakuno, can you keep going? Even like this?

Hakuno looked at Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh shrugged.

Hakuno nodded. While she was still annoyed with him over everything that had happened on the last floor, he was at least asking her. That was…different than his personality in the War, she vaguely remembered. Leo had seen himself as the little king of the world, though…it hadn’t been malice.

Maybe that was why he was helping them.

Hakuno nodded, stepping forwards and hearing the clank of metal coming after her. The sound, which was normally just annoying and somewhat jarring, almost felt eerie, alongside her footsteps. It
wasn’t that they were always talking to one another. Really, they didn’t talk much during missions. Gilgamesh might make some remark after a battle, but for the most part, he was there to observe, and her conversation, other than that last floor, wasn’t something he was interested in.

As she ran, she felt something click underneath her, and a green, foul smelling mist was suddenly all around her, smothering her. She waved her hand in front of her face, but even her coughs didn’t seem to do anything. She stepped back, bumping into something hard and cold and metal.

Gilgamesh was standing right behind her with a scowl and his mouth moving, probably calling her an idiot for walking into a trap.

Hakuno opened her mouth to say that it was fine, and she didn’t feel bad at all, other than heavier, but again, there was nothing. For a moment, the two stared at one another.

Sakura’s voice came through, sounding worried.

“That’s a trap…but I don’t think that it was there originally…”

Well, that was probably what BB’s new friend was there for. She tried to figure out just how to explain this to Gilgamesh, but other than a charade scenario that sounded pretty stupid, even in her own head, there wasn’t much, other than pointing at the traps and spelling ’BB’ in the air.

Gilgamesh gave her a look that told her just how obvious he thought that that statement was, and Hakuno scowled.

“Hm…well, Hakuno, please watch your step as you proceed. We have no clear way of knowing what that does,” Leo said.

Hakuno sighed, and somehow that managed to have sound. Because naturally BB would enjoy that, and started walking. The route stretched on and on, but when she took another sharp turn, the same feeling came. Hakuno tried to jump back, but the gas came too quick and she felt the heaviness increase.

She looked around, trying to see where the thing was, but there was nothing. The floor still seemed smooth and translucent. She couldn’t even see where the trap itself was, just the smooth floor looking innocently back at her.

This time, she didn’t even bother to look at Gilgamesh. She knew he was glowering and saying things that no one could hear.

After a second, she tested her body out, trying to be sure that she could still move around, but in the next step a jolt of electricity hit her.

Now that hurt.

For a moment, she felt like every bone in her body went numb, and for a second, she felt like she couldn’t move anymore. Whatever that was, it was almost like the second part of that attack. She staggered back, trying to turn around but another shock hit her. Was she in some mine field or…

A hand grabbed her roughly, jerking her away from then path.

Gilgamesh forced her down to a sitting position, towering over her with an annoyed look. His mouth didn’t move but it was clear what he was saying: You are going to kill yourself in the stupidest way possible, and I refuse to be associated with it.
He pointed down to the ground, and, sighing, Hakuno looked around.

She glared up at him a second later. There was nothing. It looked the same as the first time. Just the same, translucent floor, covered in sakura blossoms. But Gilgamesh was staring at her, red eyes hard, and that attitude of expecting results at that very moment radiating off of him. With another sigh she looked back down.

Maybe if she moved the blossoms around and showed that there was nothing there, he’d realize that there was nothing visible there, but, as she moved her hand…something made her stop. In front of her, something suddenly shown just a little too bright, at just too good of an angle. Hakuno squinted, shifting a little as she realized what she was looking at.

So that’s what they’d done

She glanced at Gilgamesh, nodding. Gilgamesh gestured ahead of them. The implication was clear: There are more.

Hakuno pointed to her eyes.

I know what I’m looking for now.

He nodded, stepping back and allowing Hakuno to get to her feet.

She pressed on, keeping her eyes on the ground as they kept going. Little sheens of displaced light were everywhere now that she knew what to look for, blocking off whole parts and paths. It looked like it had mostly been sheer dumb luck that she hadn’t managed to step on more of them.

As they explored, and Hakuno edged around yet another wall of traps, Gilgamesh stopped, watching a treasure chest with a line of traps around it with a hard look, and then glancing at her.

He wanted it.

Slowly, they went near it, but she couldn’t see any point where there wasn’t a trap. Hakuno glanced at him and made a jabbing motion like she was holding a sword. Why didn’t he trick the traps using something from that infinite treasury he gave her.

Gilgamesh shook his head, waving one hand at the chest, but then scowling. He didn’t know the value of the treasure, so he wasn’t willing to risk something more valuable for something less valuable.

Well, she didn’t have anything.

Hakuno pointed ahead, but made a circle with her finger. When they were done, they could come back and see if they could disarm the trap. Gilgamesh paused, but nodded once in a sort of definitive gesture, more giving assent than actually agreeing to anything. He’d already forced her to go after the treasures that Rani hadn’t let them take the first time around, though she was pretty sure that that was mostly just because the idea of unopened treasures personally offended the King of Heroes.

The pathway kept going until she reached a branch, one that was leading to a platform and the other taking a more curving route to the same place. They were both covered in traps. Obviously just to be sure that she was at her worst when they came in. Hakuno shifted a little, trying to see if either one managed to be less booby trapped than the other, but it looked like they were about the same.

Hakuno glanced behind her at Gilgamesh, but he had his armed folded with the expression that told her that he wanted to know just what she was going to do to try to get through this. Or at least what
she was planning.

She could almost hear him telling her that he had no part of her actions and he was just there as an observer. Who also happened to fight.

Backing up a little until she could almost feel Gilgamesh’s armor, Hakuno set off at a run, waiting until she could see the first line of traps before jumping, tucking her legs up in hopes of clearing the whole thing.

She managed to clear about two rows, but a hard shove from behind had her stumbling forwards and falling on her face. The scream was completely cut off, as was the cry of pain, but at least she didn’t hear that click from before or feel either gas or that electric shock again.

Breathing hard, Hakuno managed to get to her feet where Gilgamesh was standing in front of her. He was grinning. It was a hard, fierce look, that offered no reassurance or no compassion. The joy that he radiated was something that felt too old, too inhuman for her to really understand, but there was triumph in it as well.

Hakuno nodded, and pointed at the platform. Something had to be there.

As they walked, a familiar saccharine and hateful voice came to her.

“Come on, would you hurry it up? And what is with these traps? Are you just cutting corners? I’d have thought you’d have something harsher than just slowing people down and some shocks. You have the Yew Tree, right?”

She was standing over someone while they worked, tapping her pointer and clearly annoyed.

“Welp, it depends on the materials I’ve got. And the funds,” the person with her, who she recognized from the outline of BB’s video. “This is the best you get from what you gave me.”

The man turned around, and for a moment, Hakuno…almost remembered something. Who… He had red hair, dressed in a green cloak and…Hakuno could have sworn she’d seen him before. He was…

She’d known him in the second match. A master of traps, poison…

Robin Hood.

“Besides, why use this? Don’t you have some giant monster or flashy thing to use? You’ve been picking up things from the Near Side. Why not bring them out if you’re so big on stopping a little girl and a dude in golden armor?”

“It’s hard alright?” BB said, pouting a little in that ‘impish kouhai way she was trying to cultivate. “It’s not easy to divvy up my power like that. I can’t exactly just put a driver meant to counteract the Moon Cell into this arena. This is a delicate job…and since you’re a thief…”

“Yeah, yeah, best guy. Thanks a bunch,” Robin said, no actual enthusiasm in his words. “Oh look, your friends are here.”

BB turned in an almost human gesture and blinked at the two of them.

“Seriously? I cut off communications and you’re here already?” she asked.

Hakuno could feel Gilgamesh’s smug look, but she was looking towards Robin.
He should be dead. Hakuno knew that he should be dead. But…there he was.

“Oh, you look surprised, senpai!” BB said, bright smile returning. “Of course, I can just absorb servants, like that pirate that you faced in the first round, but I can also just bring them to me and put them to work. Great, huh? Now,” BB turned to look at Robin. “Kill her.”

Hakuno tensed, taking a step back, but Robin was already prepared.

“Sorry, little lady,” he said, a somewhat sad smile on his face. “We don’t know one another, but…I guess that’s life, isn’t it? I’ll have to kill you here, but I’ll make it quick and easy-like.”

But they did know one another. Hakuno knew that, and-

The arrow moved faster than she could even react. She hadn’t even seen his arm move. All she could do was stand there like an idiot, starting at it, when a flash of gold suddenly appeared, knocking the thing out of their air as Gilgamesh took his face in front of her, face set into a scowl.

He seemed…angry. Actually annoyed, and that killing intent that she’d felt before suddenly was focused on someone else.

“Well…who’s this new face…” Robin muttered. “You’re nothing like the last guy… Reading my attack first try even…I almost wanna call you an Archer, but, I don’t think that’s quite right… I do my tricks, and but you…you look like an artillery type. My last Master probably would have loved you. …I don’t know if you were some king or something, but just looking at you makes me want to puke.”

Gilgamesh just smiled, but his eyes remained cold and hard, and the pressure of that killing intent didn’t let up. He seemed…really mad about something. Still, as they both stood, watching one another, Hakuno couldn’t help the sinking feeling in her gut.

How could they fight? She couldn’t give a single order, make a single strategy. All she could do was just stand there looking stupid while Archer was able to act on his own.

With BB’s ban on conversation, she was useless.

Or rather, more useless… A Master who couldn’t support her Servants noble phantasm was utterly pathetic, but a Master who couldn’t even give orders to her Servant in a battle…

That was just worthless.

But… Maybe…

This was stupid, and Hakuno knew it was stupid. It was also something that, if anything went wrong, would kill her. Gilgamesh, if he wanted to, could probably deal with Robin Hood without her directing him. Hakuno knew that. But it didn’t matter.

Maybe she was still upset over what Lancer had told mentioned about her inability to support Gilgamesh’s noble phantasm, but she wasn’t going to just do nothing. Even if she was the worst Master that had ever managed to somehow stagger through every rank of the Holy Grail War, then she was going to find another way to do her job.

She wouldn’t give up. Not now, not ever.

Hakuno ran to the side, away from the traditional place that Masters tended to take, safely behind their Servants, making sure she was in Gilgamesh’s vision, and stopped. For a second, his eyes
flickered towards her, dilatating somewhat, but Hakuno knew raised her hand in a block gesture and then did three attack motions in midair.

If she couldn’t give the orders, then she’d give the signals.

Robin turned, changing from aiming at Gilgamesh to her, but as Hakuno ran to a new position, Gilgamesh was suddenly in front of her, blocking the next attack and summoning the Gates to attack with. The storm of swords barraged with incredible force, and Robin jumped backwards, eyes very wide, but Gilgamesh rushed forwards, pressing his advantage as Hakuno found a new position.

The drill sword was out in a second, firing out a round of...something, and then being used to further push Robin back.

Hakuno was in his vision again, and she made a cutting motion before a blocking one, in time for him to summon his duel swords and block off a barrage of arrows.

Robin jumped back, breathing hard, and BB seemed to be watching with growing worry. Hakuno braced herself to run again, not sure what was going to come out of this, but Robin just shook his head.

Gilgamesh returned to standing in front of Hakuno, giving her a hard look that she didn’t understand before facing Robin again with the same smile.

“Welp, Little lady, you’ve certainly grown...” Robin Hood said, an almost painful smile on his face. “Guess the old man was right in the end...The little chick is starting to take flight.”

BB made an angry noise.

“You sure look happy for someone getting crushed by a pair who can’t even communicate,” she hissed.

Robin just shrugged.

“I mean, if you hadn’t banned me from my Nobel Phantasm, this would be different, but then, you can’t authorize it now, can you? Unless you want to look sillier. Ah, what’s that face? You’re really not used to things not going your way are you? I mean--“

But whatever Robin meant, he never got to say. BB waved her pointer and a hole appeared beneath him.

“No more internal problems,” BB said. “That’s my new rule. But...Senpai...looks like you and that Golden Servant worked together with no internal discord at all... well...I guess than it’s back to the drawing board... Still, I’m fair, so I’ll lift that ban. When you get back to rest, it’ll be gone. Not like it’s helping.”

That last part was more of a mutter.

“Anyways, Senpai! I’ll be leaving the rest to Rani. See you soon!” and with a smile that looked wholly wrong on Sakura’s face, stepped into the hole and slowly sunk down.

She was gone.

Thankfully, after retrieving the chess set that apparently was worth something, the Student Council
didn’t want her to come. Hakuno had a feeling it was because they were worried that Gilgamesh was going to materialize and just glare at everyone until they finally let them rest.

Gilgamesh didn’t bother waiting to even sit down in his throne before using his reinstated ability to speak by hurling out abuse at BB.

“How dare she,” he snarled, placing both hands on the arms of his throne.

He clearly had really resented BB’s cutting off his voice.

“Vile woman!” he shouted. “An amalgamate of the worst of goddesses. That female incarnation of inadequacy, thinking that she has the right to look down on me and confine me by her own rules. I will not permit mercy towards her for this offense! Now, Hakuno, I believe we can be a little early in this. Let us decide on what punishment we will visit upon her.”

Hakuno honestly had never seen him this worked up about anything. So far, the most anger that he’d shown had been towards her when she said something he didn’t like, and Karna and Gawain.

“You’re going to be the one who punishes her?” Hakuno said with surprise.

“Hardly,” Gilgamesh scoffed, “But you will not be forgiven if you show her mercy. This is why I grant you the chance to decide with me on what will be done.”

He always told her that this was her fight, but he also always ordered her around.

“I would like to raise my objection to this,” Hakuno sighed. “While I’m sure not thrilled by her actions, I’m not sure I’d call her ‘evil’. At least, not when we don’t even know why she's doing this...”

Gilgamesh gave her a disgusted look.

“Are you taking issue with such a small matter? I have proclaimed her as ‘evil’, and therefore, she is evil. If you consider it a priory to defeat evil than you must visit punishment on her without hesitation.”

And back to the punishment.

Ignoring her servant’s usual staggering arrogance, Hakuno frowned. That... She’d learned to pay close attention to Gilgamesh’s word choices. When he wasn’t lying, he tended to be very specific in how he decided to state things.

“That sounds like you don’t really have a part in this.”

A smile, completely without any form of humor started to show on Gilgamesh’s face.

“Well, you are growing preceptive, aren’t you, Mongrel?” Gilgamesh said, those silted pupils contracting just slightly. “You are correct. I have no intention of laying a hand on BB personally. I have no reason to. Her punishment is for you to decide, which is why I warn you of the consequences of your failure. If your foolishly softhearted nature stays your hand, I will break our contract.”

This was strange. Hakuno had never really seen Gilgamesh act with any other options other than ‘kill’ and ‘let live’. Something of her thoughts must have shown, because Gilgamesh laughed shortly, more of a shout than anything else.
“Confused? I suppose I could enlighten you. I do not kill unless attacked first, or their very soul offends me by its very ugliness and uselessness. Currently BB, while utterly vile, has done neither, but still warrants punishment. Therefore, I will entrust that punishment to you. I will not simply kill. Do you understand?”

He was glaring at her, as if daring her to bring up any kind of objection at all, but the usual killing intent wasn’t behind it. He just seemed determined that she was the one who punished BB.

It was strange, but…when it put things like that… Hakuno was starting to get a glimpse at his mindset.

Gilgamesh proclaimed himself a tyrant. Someone who hadn’t cared even slightly for the people who he ruled. A man without blood or tears.

But…

When she considered what he’d said as a sort of foundation, and coupled it with what little she knew about him… He didn’t kill unless either personally offended by ‘ugliness’, whatever that was, or attacked… He wouldn’t ‘just kill’ someone else for no reason.

Somehow, if she looked at it that way, while narrow minded and rigid…it wasn’t evil. If anything, it was a self-imposed restraint. He seemed like a coherent, rational human being…

Hakuno nodded.

“I think I do,“

Gilgamesh glowered slightly as he sipped his wine. “Think on your ideas for her punishment. I will hear them so long as you do not attempt one of your SGs on her in some pitiful attempt to ‘redeem’ that creature.”

Hakuno suppressed a shiver.

“Honestly, I think she’d enjoy an SG too much,” she muttered.

Gilgamesh chuckled slightly into his wine and Hakuno smiled a little.

“Don’t speak of such things, woman,” he said softly, swirling the wine glass, but something almost like a smile tugged on the edges of his lips. “Lest I start comparing BB to that depraved nun that wanders the halls of this school.”

“…I almost see the resemblance…” Hakuno muttered.

No offense for Kiara, but the woman scared her.

Gilgamesh stopped suddenly, glancing up at her, but his usual anger or even indolence was gone.

“You will also never engage in that strategy from the last floor again, baring emergency. Your luck is far better than your ability to preserve yourself. Had BB decided to become involved, it would have been your death, and I will not loose a contractor for such a reason.”

Because her death reflecting poorly on him was the problem. King of Pride.

“I didn’t plan on doing it regularly, and I know that you could have acted on your own,” Hakuno said. “I just…it was the only thing I could think of that worked.”
Gilgamesh watched her for a moment, setting down his glass.

“You were aware that I did not require your direction, but still did such a thing. Your conceit remains great,” he said softly.

A shiver ran up Hakuno’s spine.

“However, this time, I will forgive it. It was a decent, if risky move, and more importantly, it annoyed BB,” Gilgamesh smirked, taking his glass again and drinking. “Now, sleep. There will be another level for you to conquer when you wake.”

The conversation was clearly over as Gilgamesh glanced out of the one window, his eyes narrow, only sometimes drinking out of his goblet and even then almost distractedly.

Somehow…the atmosphere in the little room felt different, better, than it ever had before. It wasn’t like one time where they’d really had to work together had changed anything, but…well…this was also the first time she’d felt like she could actually speak her mind to Gilgamesh without risking death.

It wasn’t trust, Hakuno knew that. She was still not completely sure that Gilgamesh wasn’t going to get bored at kill her for some imagined reason, but…as she sat in their small corner of the Moon Cell, a moment a genuine shared mirth between them…

Maybe this was where trust began.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, this was longer than I thought it was going to be. I wanted to warm up with a fight scene, and I thought that this floor was honestly an important scene, even though it was honestly a pretty short part of things in the long one. Hope everyone enjoyed!

Next chapter: The reveal of the Alter Egos causes Gilgamesh to do something he didn't expect to, and Hakuno is truly praised.
The First Time Gilgamesh Praised Hakuno

Chapter Summary

The introduction of the Alter Egos has Gilgamesh reflecting on Hakuno's determination.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh realized that he did not necessarily want Hakuno to die was after Rani’s punishment. If it could be called that.

The only enjoyable part of the entire thing had been during the fight with Elizabeth Bathory, the young incarnation of a mongrel so obsessed by her own beauty that she had murdered anyone she could in some insane plot that that would preserve her beauty.

Even other dragons would be ashamed of such a stupid reason for atrocities.

Bathory decided that her proper place, as a useless thing that could only be pretty, was to be an ‘idol’, and in some feeble attempt at honor, decided to sing for them before killing them.

His mongrel contractor’s face had been a sight to behold.

She stood, staring blankly ahead, her usually lively eyes dead as they were bombarded with a strong, beautiful voice that belonged to a woman who was utterly tone deaf and incapable of even the most basic comprehension of harmony.

“There may be no gods in this world,” Hakuno had said softly.

Gilgamesh disagreed. This was proof, as far as he was concerned, that the ancient pantheons were alive and well.

Unfortunately, other than removing that blight on the name of sound, the rest of the session was rather dull in comparison to the last floor. The story of friends turned against one another was an old one, and never had been a tale that he'd ever been particularly invested in, and this did little to add to it, other than having a more pleasing ending than most of these tales.

The only real change was Hakuno herself.

Hakuno Kishinami was average in almost all respects, other than as a mage, in which she was sub-par. However, Gilgamesh liked the spark of resentment that always hid behind her eyes. Hakuno herself was the only actually entertaining part of this, if only because of her stalwart refusal to permit herself to give up so far in the face of trial and embarrassment.

Here though, she seemed more content to just vent her feelings at the girl before forgiving her. It was a foolishly tenderhearted act, but one that he could ultimately forgive. Foolishness for the sake of friendship was one of the few forms he had ever forgiven.

With Rani the Homunculus delivered safely to the depraved nun, Gilgamesh glanced towards the girl.
“The exit to the Labyrinth lies before us, Mongrel. Perhaps the appointed time has arrived already,” he said, watching her.

Hakuno turned to face him, saying nothing but her eyes worried.

“The end of the Labyrinth is the end of our contract. You know what awaits you, do you not?”

He’d prodded her like this before, reminding her again and again of what was coming, yet every time, even when the end loomed in front of her, Hakuno did not falter. Oh, there was a flash of anxiety in her eyes, and her fists clenched, as if she was trying to give herself the strength that she would need to face death after sacrificing so much to grasp life a little longer, but that despair he always waited for never arrived.

“It doesn’t matter,” the mongrel said, her voice hard. “I’ll think about it when I get there.”

She turned away from him, looking towards the entrance, but Gilgamesh’s eyes lingered on her. Still so defiant in the face of death. She had been more frightened of the thought of her body being visible before him than on her own destruction. Gilgamesh brushed it off to a result of the amnesia, but her determination was impressive.

That was likely why he had saved her from Robin, aside from the fact that she was his to kill or to spare, unless her own inadequacy caused her to lose, or she gave up and that spark in her finally faded.

She had maintained herself longer than he had expected. He had assumed the appearance of BB would have been the end, but the girl had bounced back quickly, stumbling through her challenges and flailing around, going so far as to risk herself to perform her duty as a Master, even when necessarily.

Gilgamesh found that he was eager to see just how she reacted to the end. If she broke and asked him to finish her or allowed the Moon Cell to do it just to grasp at life for a heartbeat longer.

However, something prickled at the back of his mind. Something that one third of his nature had not felt in so long that the feeling was unfamiliar and the other two had never known to begin with.

“I will take her back,” the depraved nun said, her voice dripping with a false innocence so sensuous that Gilgamesh always found himself reminded of Ishtar at her worst. “You go on ahead, Hakuno.”

He despised the way that the woman pronounced his contractor’s name in that breathy tone; however, like that false priest who ran the one shop on the Far Side, she refused to give him any excuse for disposing of her but continued her play as one who was a savior. The woman never so much as met his eyes in the rare instances that they conversed.

Hakuno set off, paying no more attention to the nun (which was something he wholeheartedly approved of), and he followed after, down to the exit to find just what she would do once death was before her.

The floor below was incomplete and cramped. The world, dark and the code that made up the Dark Side of the Moon well visible. In the center of the space, what was likely the exit glowed. It was little more than a beam of light, but the power, and the fact that it cut through the weakened floor

The still loyal AII’s voice managed to break through the channel.

“Miss Kishinami! You’ve reached a place that isn’t part of the Labyrinth! We’re checking if this could be the end but…this is definitely someplace new!”
“Yes!” Rin Tohsaka, the avaricious girl who had been the first victim of BB’s mind altering abilities, called out. “I wasn’t sure if BB was telling the truth, but we’ve found it!”

Something was approaching. The atmosphere had not changed. Not yet, but this feeling brought him back. It was both exhilarating and angering at the same time, but the oblivious members of the Student Council kept speaking while Hakuno watched the beam of light with a thoughtful expression.

That was interrupted by the puppy who happened to head the student council, Leo. Why the others listened to the child, Gilgamesh could only assume was some prowess in battle that he had not shown, other than showing off the fact that the Knight of the Sun had contracted with him as if it was a form of accomplishment.

“BB is still an AI, even if she is out of control” the child said, his Charisma, lower than his own but still noticeably high in full effect. “I’m fairly sure that she can’t lie to us.”

This child had a dull comprehension of the term ‘lying’ and one that, in a true Grail War, he would have exploited in an instant.

The pressure was increasing, and finally, Rin, who Gilgamesh currently had the highest opinion of in the student council, noticed the tension in the air.

“Hey, Sakura, something’s wrong with the moni-”

Her voice abruptly cut off, leaving them well and truly alone in the Labyrinth for the first time since he had rescinded his permission for the Student Council to observe during Rani’s second floor. (The sight of his contractor’s humiliation was for him alone to behold. Otherwise…well…it would reflect poorly on him.)

Hakuno seemed to sense something as well, as she tensed, watching with him as a familiar figure appeared, walking with her head down, almost as if she did not see them, but Gilgamesh knew better. He could sense her and…something else…something…unfamiliar.

And for someone like himself something unfamiliar was an experience in and of itself.

It appeared that this story had finally become interesting.

BB turned to face them, a smile on her face.

“Oh, you’re done?” her voice, “Well good work, Se-en-pai.”

She drew the word out, like some maiden trying to tease the man she had chosen. Which was, judging by Hakuno’s face, roughly as effective as Ishtar’s attempts had been on him. So far, that had been disappointing as well. Hakuno clearly had no potential romantic interest in the women who seemed to make up the core of the Labyrinth, so a potential note of tension never existed at all.

But all of BB’s act was a farce, an attempt to draw their attention while something else approached swiftly. Something that Hakuno herself seemed to be being deceived by, as she watched BB with close attention and worry growing on her face.

“Seeing you take down Elizabeth, all while you just can’t use your Servant’s Nobel Phantasm makes me think just a tiny bit better of you. It even gave me the chance to learn more about you. You’re a surprisingly tough and outdoorsy senpai aren’t you? It makes my heart all aflutter.”

BB was likely short for Babble. That seemed all she was capable of, but as the mask of a human
started to fade, Gilgamesh prepared himself to move. The smile was gone in a second, leaving nothing but the cold stillness of a thing that had never been human, but still attempted to put on that farce.

“It makes me sick. I want to crush you like the insects under your feet in the summer.”

It was here.

“Mongrel, stand behind me. An indescribable filth is approaching,” he said softly.

Why was he warning her?

Hakuno stiffened and the step she was preparing to take towards the woman faltered, but that was all the time she had before the attack came.

No doubt, the two beasts thought that they were clever. The double attack was well coordinated into a plain and a line, almost impossible to see or react to by any class of Servant in time.

But Gilgamesh was hardly a normal Servant. He blocked both attacks in a second, not bothering to open the Gate of Babylon, but the force of the attacks caused him to step back. However, he shifted so that Hakuno remained shielded behind him, and swiftly righted his stance, prepared for another assault.

Two more women, naturally, now stood beside BB. Both were hideous contortions of a human frame, and both appeared to have different versions of BBs face.

“I’m sorry, Mother,” the first abomination said in a voice that reminded him of something soft, fleshy and hollow, blinking large doe eyes at BB while her…chest, if such a lump could be called that, heaved. “I was too late…”

“You’re rough with us BB, we were just born and you expect us to be able to kill yet?” The other abomination, a creature of knifes and edges, spoke, though clearly enjoying itself.

Hakuno, shifted from behind him, clearly moving for a better look, and Gilgamesh moved to shield her again.

If she moved into their direct line of vision, one of them, most likely the second abomination, would kill her.

“Do not move from behind me,” Gilgamesh reprimanded.

“Gilgamesh…” the girl said.

She sounded surprised, and that made him suddenly aware of just how…disgustingly attached that this made him look.

“Do not misunderstand me,” he said quickly. “This is a special circumstance. When faced with something of this nature, even I cannot stay silent.”

Even in his own ears, there was a rushed sound that he did not like. Hakuno’s life or death had been something that meant very little to him. He himself had threatened her when she displeased him, yet…when faced with something such as this…

“Well, isn’t that cute,” BB cooed. “You seem to getting along so well now… Well, allow me to introduce my Alter Egos. Offshoots of myself I suppose you could call them. They’ll be acting in
Elizabeth’s stead now. While I’m the brains of this outfit, they do the heavy work. And they’re plenty strong too. I suppose it would be impossible for them not to be. They’re Hero Complexes after all.”

BB was giggling, but Gilgamesh ignored them, keeping his eyes on the two.

“Hero Complexes… So… Artificial Heroic Spirits,” Hakuno whispered.

“That is not all,” Gilgamesh said, not turning around. “Even speaking of it disgusts me, but their limbs are filth beyond compare.”

There was nothing human about them whatsoever.

Heroic Spirits were interesting because they were human. They grew, changed, struggled, and tried to fight against their own fates long after the end had come. While a fight with him was laughable, Gilgamesh always enjoyed seeing them struggle against one another. Much as Hakuno’s struggle was interesting for the same reason. Even the most wretched, vile excuse for a human being had that same potential, unless they willingly gave up all of their motivations and goals.

But this…utter stagnation was something that only belonged to the gods. Something that had never lived, would never live, and would never comprehend that it meant to live. They existed, nothing more. Eternal and unchanging, they were suited for nothing more than to be ornamentation for some temple, if that.

“That Golden Servant is right,” BB admitted, though she did not look pleased at having to agree with his words. “My Alter Egos came from some very important Heroic Spirits. You could even call them divine. I drew them from the goddess series. The kind that I like to call ‘High Servants’. You’ve got no chance against them, you know. Do you still want to play with me, Senpai?”

The word was not drawn out this time, but in a falsely light tone. Gilgamesh however, wasn’t interested, his turned his head slightly, so that he could observe her face as well as watch those two compilations of refuse.

She would despair. Hakuno Kishinami was many things, most of them average, but she was not a fool. Not in that sense. She had proven to him that she comprehended her own weakness in a way that most mages never seemed to accept. While he had reprimanded her harshly, she had accepted her own place in a failure rather than pushing blame away and proclaiming herself powerful.

She would know that if he, the first and most powerful of heroes, even in a weakened state, had been required to warn her, than she would have no chance at all.

Her skills were poor. Her magic, weak. She had no ability to use his Noble Phantasm, and he would not permit it even if she had all the power of an A class magus. She had no way to win. The best she could do would be to ask him for a painless end.

Yet…

Hakuno looked afraid. Her eyes flickering between the three women, but fear was not giving way to despair. Rather, anger was kindling behind her eyes, and that same spark that had woken him from his dreams.

“Whatever,” Hakuno said, biting the word out, eyes narrowing.

The little mongrel’s body was tensing as if she was planning on making a dash directly for BB or the exit herself.
She was going to kill herself!

“Mongrel, I will not permit you to make this mistake. This is the time to withdraw. You may kill yourself whenever you choose; however, I will not allow myself to be defeated at the hand of those goddesses,” Gilgamesh said, forcing his voice to stay calm, but some edge remained.

Hakuno hesitated.

“She’s right there,” he heard her hiss. “She’s expecting us to run. If she hesitated…”

“Be that as it may, if you take one step beyond my arm, they will kill you,” Gilgamesh snapped.

Didn’t this woman understand the situation she was in!

And why did he care?

Hakuno made a frustrated noise, but…she did know. She knew perfectly well how utterly overpowered she was and had been from the beginning. She just refused to allow that, or ever other time she was faced with impossibility and inevitability, to deter her.

And he did not want that to kill her.

If she was going to die, it would be in a manner that he accepted. There would be some glory, some purpose, that he perceived. It was why he had been so angry with that Green Archer who had presumed to attempt to kill his contractor in his presence, and why he acted to defend her now.

He would not permit her to die when her story had suddenly become interesting and she had defied his expectations so.

For his own sake.

Hakuno finally nodded.

“Are you done talking?” BB asked sweetly. “Well, you can run off than. I have no interest whatsoever in ants that flee the inevitable.”

She was smirking, but it was too convenient. She wanted to put on airs, but only a fool allowed an enemy to escape time and time again. Her attempts to keep her ‘sempai’ safe and contained were almost laughable in how transparent and annoying they were.

The two abominations looked towards their origin point.

“Um, Mother?” the fleshy one started hesitantly. “The corruption has reached the third layer. You were going to give that to me, right?”

“Do what you want. I want the core. Kill them if they come down,” BB shrugged, now an image of uncaring. “So, this is the point where the villain says that if you want to capture me, you’ll need to get through them, but that’s impossible anyways, so I’m not going to! I think you should stay nice and huddled up in that old school building you’ve managed to salvage. If you do that than…um…basing time off of physical sensations…you’ll start to die from boredom in about a year, but that’s better than really dying, right? Alright! Back you go!”

BB blew them her kiss, but Gilgamesh continued on guard, in case one of those things decided that it would attack, but she only taunted like a child.

“Thanks to Rani and all the time you spend saving her, we’ve got a whole new level of the Labyrinth
all ready for you! I wonder what will happen once I get all the way to the bottom! Look forward to it, Se-en-pai!”

Finally, the sound of her voice was out of his ears, and they were standing where they had been when rescuing the homunculus.

“I won’t give up that easily!” Hakuno burst out as she turned to face where BB had been, fury on her face, but then she stopped, sighing. “Another Labyrinth…”

Was that the thing that bothered her the most? Her efforts had been wasted and mocked, her life was still forfeit to him, and she was no closer to retrieving who she was then when she had started. She had been returned to the exact same position as she was before everything began. With the added challenge of two new horrors the likes of which even he had never dealt with before, and while justly frustrated, her eyes blazed with defiance against a fate that seemed unchangeable.

Perhaps she was not completely average after all.

“She expects you to return,” Gilgamesh remarked.

“I know, but if I lose heart here…what’s the point?” she asked. “I’d rather die like this than slowly in the school building I guess… Let’s just head back to the Student Council. They’re probably worried.”

Hakuno Kishinami’s back straightened as she walked to the warp point, unyielding, even as it had been when she refused to accept death that first moment they met.

So, she preferred a dangerous life to a long, slow death…

Gilgamesh found himself smiling as he watched her, and for the first time, he truly wanted to know just how far that determination could take her.

The first time Gilgamesh praised Hakuno came out of nowhere.

After BB’s Alter Egos showed themselves, and they only managed to get back because the AI herself had decided that they should,

Hakuno felt exhausted as they walked through. More threats. Two new alter egos. Every time she got close to the end, it felt like somehow, BB was right there to take it away and put something new in her path.

Maybe the goal was to make his despair once hope had been visible and lost so many times. The stupid thing was that she was almost …relieved. At least her friends were safe now. She didn’t need to think about Rani or Rin being taken advantage of, and she just…couldn’t lose heart.

As she’d said to Gilgamesh, what was the point of that? If she had the choice of die now or decay in this place forever…what kind of choice was that? Or maybe… maybe that was the problem going on with the War. Hakuno might not remember much, but she could recall some things that Rin had said before. How the world was stagnant, dying slowly…
It had felt good to be with everyone again, though nothing really got done, since Gatou being, well Gatou, was distracting and Leo and Rin decided that she, Julius and Gatou needed rest, and ever being wished a good rest by Julius, she headed back to her room.

She was glad of the break, but it didn’t make things better. They still had to deal with this. Though… maybe tomorrow…

Sitting down in her corner, she didn’t really care what Gilgamesh did as he lounged back into his throne, but he was radiating a fierce kind of joy.

“Well, we have a new kind of foe,” Gilgamesh started, looking at Hakuno in the way she was learning meant that he was interested in a conversation. “Amalgamates of impudent goddesses… High Servants that woman called them…”

He laughed loudly.

“She has made something irredeemably hideous, but interesting all the same. I suppose that even low-quality products have value on occasion.”

He was still smiling a strangely pleased smile. Honestly, if he could be that confident when dealing with something that made Elizabeth, who’d been pushing them around through the Labyrinth, look like nothing, then maybe it wasn’t at all bad.

At least… Hakuno could admire that in him. Even if she wasn’t really all that optimistic.

“I guess you’ve finally got a good show. Those two are different at least,” Hakuno said.

If he was in a good mood and wanted to fight them, maybe he could give her some information.

“Hm? What are you saying? Those two are unique, but something made by those goddesses is hardly worth much attention. BB does not entertain me even slightly. The thing that entertains me is the expression on your face when facing down those women, Mongrel.”

He was leaning against one arm of the throne in a supremely indolent gesture, smirking at her in a gloating way.

Her?

“What… expression?” Hakuno asked carefully.

“Consider, Mongrel. The battles up until this point have been useless. Death still awaits you at the end regardless of what happens, your memories are no closer to returning now than they were at the beginning of your journey. You have rescued those two women and cleared their floors, but now two others appear, far more deadly than the last two and with no connections to draw off of, and that even I have never seen the likes of before. Everything you have done has been worthless.”

Hakuno felt cold. He was right. She’d felt the same thing since she’s seen those…things. Worse, she had no idea where to even start with those two. What did she know about fighting against goddesses?

But…

“Any normal human would have despaired and ended their contract with me,” Gilgamesh continued. “And it would be natural, particularly for the average mage, who is proud, stupid, and incapable of change. However, you, my contractor, the weakest life in this building…you defied my expectations
and remained remarkably unfazed in the face of all of this, keeping your eyes on the heavens.”

Hakuno looked away, not sure why she felt her face starting to flush.

“That’s not true,” Hakuno muttered. “I was scared. I was really scared. But…”

“That is because you are not stupid, Mongrel. You know when you face danger. However, you swallowed your fear and despair,” Gilgamesh continued. “There was once a philosopher who compared man to a thinking reed, but you truly act as one, bending before trials but righting yourself when you can. That solidarity…that is something that even I lack. You should be proud of that and cling to it with all the strength you possess, for it is your sole quality that is above average.

It was a backhanded compliment, yet…

Was he praising her for her refusal to give up?

She wasn’t sure if it was the fact that he was impressed or that…the one thing that had gotten her this far was seen as more than stupid, or dangerous or stubborn or so many other things…but it made her happy…

“It is a shame though…” Gilgamesh said, clearly not going to be lingering on the subject of her unwillingness to give up, “There were no Mesopotamian goddesses in those two. Had Ishtar’s essence been used, I would have unsealed Ea without hesitation, just to enjoy some part of her discomfort, but it appears that BB is aware of my weak points…”

He frowned at that.

“Do you know about the Mesopotamian goddesses, Hakuno?” he asked, a strange eagerness was glinting in his eyes.

“No really…if I did, well…” she didn’t remember.

Gilgamesh grinned.

“No matter, I will inform you of them and their follies as a reward for your performance today.”

And Gilgamesh launched into a long, very detailed explanation of what was wrong with Mesopotamian goddesses. From their clothing to their figures to their actions to their love lives to their very existence, everything was wrong with them. Hakuno nodded, making interested noises, but slowly she felt herself sinking deeper and deeper into her little blanket, with Gilgamesh’s voice, which, when her eyes were closed was…rather nice really...as her pillow, she started to drift off.

“How…” she heard Gilgamesh say softly as Hakuno slipped into a dreamless sleep. “I suppose I will forgive it this time, Mongrel, those goddesses are enough to put anyone to sleep…”

Maybe she was a thinking reed. She’d certainly started to get used to him…

Chapter End Notes

Geez Gil, you take a sentence to say something I want to say in a word. So, this was my first try from his POV, and while the scene isn't all that big, I sort of wanted to go into this as one of the big moments that he starts revising his opinion of Hakuno. As well as
trying to figure out just why he is starting to care about what happens to her!

Next Chapter:

"I suppose this is the first time I have ever told anyone that story."
The First Time Gilgamesh Talked About His Past

Chapter Summary

After a dream memory that Hakuno will not remember, Gilgamesh talks about the nature of the Mesopotamian gods, and just what caused him to be born in the first place.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first person that Gilgamesh told of his origins was Hakuno.

It had not been a planned event.

The Student Council, in a rare moment that denoted some intelligence, had decided to refrain from returning to the Labyrinth. While it was a maneuver that gave their enemy more time to complete whatever plan that she had been working on and to complete more floors to be conquered, when faced with an opponent like an ancient god, it was necessary to plan.

While the council worked, it left Hakuno with little to do other than attempting to help the insane monk Gatou in his attempts to contact the waste of human flesh that resided in a janitor’s closet to aid her in becoming less of a waste of human flesh.

It was a pity the Hero of Charity was present. Otherwise he might have enjoyed the spectacle.

It was dull. Terribly dull. As one who had sampled and mastered all pleasure, tedium was the worst punishment of all. However, he refused to stave it off as his contractor did, through attempting to meddle in the affairs of others in some misguided, foolishly tenderhearted, attempt at kindness.

The one who she was attempting to help would give nothing in return anyways. She was less then the ghost that haunted this school.

There was nothing to do but to sleep and recover his own power.

While Heroic Spirits such as himself did not require sleep, it was something that he enjoyed. Most often he would select a favored memory and lose himself in it. However, this time, he dreamed.

*It was not his memory.*

*Hakuno Kishinami lay on the ground, dying, and feeling her body shutting down. The doll that she had tried to fight with lay in a heap with the thing that she had tried to fight against, beside the body of the last failure.*

“And with this final defeat, the preliminary round is officially over…” a bored voice called, one that was familiar to Gilgamesh.

*The priest?*

I want to live…
It was a pathetic plea, little more than a child’s whisper, but it kept her conscious. It wasn’t the same as not wanting to die. It was not fear that drove her, but rather a desperate need to continue, not to fade again into the darkness that her mind had been in for so long.

She’d just realized something was wrong! She still didn’t understand what was happening, or why, and she didn’t care. She couldn’t let it just end like this!

I have to stand up…

Hakuno tensed, her hands gripping the smooth tile floor, and she pushed herself up with what little strength she had left. She could still fight…

Pain shot up her body, that little strength gave out, and she collapsed, pain and shock still coursing through her. Yet she still breathed and forced her eyes open.

I want to live.

As she lay there, trying to get her strength back to try again, Hakuno noticed the faint forms in the distance, blurry and instinct. She blinked, trying to focus, and the realized the truth with a growing horror.

_Hakuno was surrounded by corpses._

Scattered and piled around her here countless classmates, laying there, motionless. They were all dead, she realized numbly. All died and just flung around like toys that didn’t matter anymore. They’d been like her, drawn in as they noticed that there was something wrong around them, trying to solve the riddle of the school and then…failing… Like her.

She recognized some of them, Hakuno realized. They were vague, hazy memories, but still…a few had even talked to her. She saw the face of a boy who had asked her about the student registry… someone else who had wanted to know if she knew the answer to one of Taiga’s questions… Just people… Tears pricked at her vision, and she tensed herself to rise again.

I want to live!

Gilgamesh felt her body tense again, with the same painful, pitiful desperation, and the same painful result.

If I fail…That’s ok. If it hurts…that’s ok. But I want to live!

_They didn’t deserve this…to lay there piled up and forgotten like garbage…she had to get up…She had to get up… It didn’t matter if her body felt like she was floating…She’d be lighter then._

_There was a surge of energy around her and—_

The sound of the door opening jerked Gilgamesh out of the dream memory, and he jerked his head up.

Hakuno stepped into the small room, though she had not seen him awaken. She appeared distracted, as she sat in her corner of the room, but then turned a strange, speculative look on him, yet still unseeing. It appeared that her attempts to wring deals out of that false priest had been for naught, as had yet another overture of friendship to the waist of flesh.

And yet… No, he would not think of it. The woman remembered nothing of her past anyways.
“Hm, what is it, Mongrel? You’ve turned such a heated gaze on me. Have you finally giving into my Golden Rule?”

He smirked at her, as she shivered a little. If she was going to beg him for money, at least that would be entertaining while they waited. He had no intention of ever offering her anything from his treasury though. While she had proven herself worthy of being watched, she was hardly something more and she never would be.

“I am not falling into that nightmare right now,” she said, but collected herself quickly. “I was thinking about something else…” she trailed off, clearly meaning to steady herself as she prepared for some great request of him. “I’ve started investigating your story.”

She said it with a note of defiance, as if he himself had not given her permission to learn for herself about just what she had decided to contract with.

Ah, so that was it. She’d finally found his Epic, or at least the parts of it that had managed to survive which the Moon Cell generally provided. So that was that look.

He smirked, but a strangely bittersweet feeling came to him. Gilgamesh ignored it.

“Oh, so you’ve finally examined my story? Well, how was it? Have you come to regret your contract, knowing now that your partner is a demon?”

Hakuno gave him an expressionless look, but her eyes regained their old defiance. The outward sign of what he had seen in that memory.

“I got over my regrets ages ago,” she said. “No…I wanted to know how much of it was true.”

“It is all the truth. All things that the SE.AR.PH. records are the objective truth, are they not?” he smiled. “However, ‘truth’ is something that must be interpreted and understood by its observer. Facts themselves present nothing but the events.”

He took his goblet, looking at the red wine inside. He had grown fond of this drink, while it was vastly inferior to the beer that Uruk had once produced, drinking that vintage was…an unpleasant sensation at times, and the current beers were a mockery of good taste. He took a drink, considering Hakuno.

He had permitted her to investigate him freely, and at least now she comprehended that that did not mean asking the disgruntled children’s book author for his opinion, yet she came to him now. Did she truly expect him to answer her questions?

Still…he knew her persistence, and he had seen the memory of her trying to stand while surrounded by the dead, while she herself clearly did not now the event. He supposed as a sort of payment he would give her the ability to continue.

“However, your subjectivity remains vague, and the truth remains unreachable for you. In light of that quality, I will permit you to ask me a question. If there is anything in particular you do not understand, you may ask. I will stave of the tedium of waiting for the student council’s plans by speaking to you.”

Hakuno’s eyes widened.

Good. She understood the value of the favor he was granting.

“The story says that you mother was a goddess? Ninsun? Is that true?” Hakuno asked.
For a moment, he was mildly surprised. Gilgamesh had expected her to ask if he had truly been a tyrant or some such nonsense. And then she would have wasted her answer, and he could mock her for her foolishness of assuming that he was anything but.

The question in all honesty was a fair one for one of her age and environment. Many humans did not even believe that gods had ever existed in the first place, and for good reason. Though they also did not know that they had him to praise for the ability to be ignorant.

Besides…perhaps it was a good question in another way. While he had had no intention of sharing his full understanding of the divine, he could see if perhaps this mongrel could take his words and apply them to BB and her Alter Egos, to better comprehend just what she fought.

He accepted.

“Young lady, let me speak plainly. I accepted your question, but I will speak only of the past, and the nature of divinity. There are two kinds of gods, Hakuno. Those who were, are, and have always been gods, and those who became gods later on through rebirth. The gods of Mesopotamia were among the former. Consider them as natural phenomena with will and purpose, those were what humanity was made to worship.”

Gilgamesh trailed off thoughtfully, remembering his own visions and dreams for humanity. Something that the gods would have condemned as irredeemably ugly.

“But I will not speak of the future,” he decided. “You have asked me of the past, and of the nature of divinity, so I will answer that. There are two kinds of gods, Hakuno. Those who were, are, and have always been gods, and those who became gods later on through rebirth. The gods of Mesopotamia were among the former. Consider them as natural phenomena with will and purpose, those were what humanity was made to worship.”

And they had viewed humanity with the same indifference as those natural phenomena now. Humanity had been formed with no great design, only to serve and worship in their place for all eternity. Therefore, once humanity showed that it had some potential to be greater than that, the gods moved to restrain them.

“I was made by one of those ancient gods, and a king of men, as a midway between those two concepts.”

But that wasn’t entirely true, though it was not something Hakuno was required to understand. His nature had been created to be more divine than human. Even in their pretense of created an arbitrator who was impartial, he was always designed to be in their favor in particular.

Hakuno remained quiet, absorbing his words, though, unlike her behavior when he had discussed the Mesopotamian goddess and their deficits, she is more attentive. Though he had forgiven that offense. There is no one who would not be bored of listening to their actions, and it is less of an offense against him than a statement that even his ability to tell stories cannot make the utterly reprehensible interesting.

“Made…” Hakuno said softly. “I understand what you’re saying, but…that just doesn’t seem to suit you somehow.”

It was not true flattery. Hakuno was very poor when she tried to flatter. These was just her thoughts. Still, it pleased him, maybe more than if they had been meant to.

Foolish. He did not care what the woman thought of him! That was part of the point of this exercise!
“Oh? Is that what you think? Well, I think the same, yet it is the truth. I was made as the gods predicted and to their specifications. Do you know about the Counter Force of the planet and the Counter Force of humanity?”

Hakuno gave him a blank look.

Of course, she didn’t know. Why did he think otherwise? Hakuno was a mage of the lowest possible caliber. Of course, no one would have shared that information with her, and even if some very foolish person had, she had forgotten it as she had everything else.

For just a moment, he hesitated. Some strange part of his nature that he thought long dead wanted to tell her. To tell just what he had rebelled against. And why he had earned his title as King of Heroes, but he decided against it. He had agreed to answer her one question, and those memories…were not something he had an interest in reviewing. Besides, he…

“No matter. It’s a side issue. Forget about it. What I will speak of transpires prior to my birth. Your suffering has been pitiful enough that I will permit a small part to be revealed and discuss the nature of divinity and humanity.”

“Suffering-”

Gilgamesh ignored her and the insult of the interruption. Hakuno did not remember what she had seen in the preliminaries, and that suffering was hers to endure when she remembered it.

“Before you make foolish assumptions given to your era. The gods did not make me in order to give support to humanity,” Gilgamesh continued, watching her reaction closely. “Never assume any benevolence towards your kind from them. Humanity needed a king as they began to transcend their former existence as little more than animals, and the gods determined that they wished for a ruler who possessed the traits of both god and man. Humanity was learning to adapt and to alter the environment to suit their own needs in a way no animal had had before, as well as what you call the survival instinct: the ability to grow and change to suit a new place or situation. The gods are immortal and unchanging. How could such a thing adapt? Regardless of their power, they were never something more than what we ‘just there’. Humanity, despite the lacking nature of individuals, held a will to survive that far surpassed them.”

Gilgamesh paused for a moment, closing his eyes as, unbidden, he recalled Uruk. It was not like this time, yet the sense of danger outside of a small ring of safety was the same. Perhaps it was why he was more willing to lend his aid.

It certainly wasn’t any real quality of this mongrel, other than her endurance. Said mongrel; however, took his pause as an invitation to comment.

“So…the gods didn’t change, even if they were more powerful than we were, so…wouldn’t that give us an edge, even if it wasn’t much of one?” Hakuno said, she was shifting in her corner, but more out of thoughtfulness than restlessness.

“Yes. And the gods were in truth little different in personality and character than the mages you struggled against.”

Stupid, arrogant, sure that they were superior to all they surveyed, but also paranoid and weak. Worthy of little save for what they had managed, mostly by mistake, to produce.

“Do you see? The omnipotence of the gods can only reach a single conclusion and form a single personality. Humanity, the moment it was capable of that ‘edge’ as you put it, was a threat. There
was a difference in the number of minds...or rather the ability to adapt. Humanity's desires and ingenuity is vast, ever changing, ever growing, ever reaching, pushing past all boundaries. It spares no one, and leaves room only for itself,” Gilgamesh smiled.

It was the origin for the true Grail. Something utterly hideous and yet impossibly beautiful.

“The Mesopotamian gods looked upon this and trembled, saying among themselves ‘If humanity continues in this manner, and they multiply, they will change how the planet is ruled. There may come a time when we, the immortal gods of nature will be unnecessary.’” Gilgamesh said, smirking and his voice light. “As such, they determined that they would force that future to change by having a king born into the human world, clearly one of them, yet firmly on their side. Their Lynchpin of Heaven, made to hold and keep the world according to their own desires. It was thus that the folly incarnate known as Ninsun gave herself to a human king in a pitiful attempt to prolong a dying era. The death throes were truly unsightly, and the creature born from that union, mixing the blood of man and god, was meant to prevent the unavoidable. Unlike you, however, I was not formed naturally. My body was designed to stand as a warning to humanity of the power of the gods, a perfect, golden king, reigning over them, but little more than a mouthpiece for the gods.”

He grinned, remembering their shock, their fury when things had not quite gone the way they had thought.

When he had taken humanity’s side against them.

Hakuno was looking thoughtful.

“You don’t sound all that unhappy about your origins,” she said. “I mean...gods aside.”

“And why should I? You have a narrow view of human life, if you consider such paltry things. Consider your Homunculus. Do you consider her less of a life, given her origins?”

“No,” the reply was instant and defiant. “Rani might not have been born with a mother and father, but she’s still a person.”

Good. At least she was not so foolish. Though he had known that already. Someone who attempted to befriend a waste of like such as the one that resided in the janitor’s closest could never view any human life as less than another’s.

“Be they animal or puppet, all living things are made with the expectations of their parents and with the material their parents gave them. The only difference is that mine happened to be divine. All things are made by the hands of their predecessors, be it through natural reproduction, or other means. The only thing about us that is truly ours and no one else’s is the soul. The body is always a manufactured thing, and it always begins as little more than a reflection of another.

“The moment you stood in opposition to the fate dealt out to you, you acquired your own integrity, and that was not a constructed thing.”

Unbidden, the image of Hakuno trying to stand to fight again despite already being defeated, rose to his mind, but he dismissed it. He truly must have been bored to offer so much and to consider such things so much.

Hakuno smiled slightly, a rare expression on her usually blank and pinched face. It almost made her look attractive as her features softened and her kindhearted nature revealed itself. It was an invitation for anyone to take advantage of her.

“I guess the gods didn’t get what they wanted, did they?” she asked.
Gilgamesh smirked, taking another sip of his wine. It was a good memory.

“No, they did not. They might have designed me, but I was a new kind of being, and therefore not beholden to their ancient ideals. I lived according to myself and no one else,” he lied. “Even the fact that I was king had little to do with them. While this body was made for that purpose, I declared myself a king and governed Uruk because I wanted to. The path of kingship I followed was mine alone and one no god could ever ordain. To me, who is separate from all others, all beings, be they human or god, were simply “a life which would end now” and “a life which would end eventually”, and once I determined that a life must end, it did not matter to me if they were sage, follower, enemy, or deity. All were subject to my judgement. Their path of kingship would have been my playing mouthpiece. Mine is far more simple. I acquired those treasures that interested me and protected them with all my power, eliminating all that stood between me and my pleasure and entertainment.”

He laughed shortly at his own words, enjoying how they managed to be both false and utterly true.

Hakuno, as all others had before her, would assume he meant only the simplest thing by ‘treasures’ those items of value that humanity created which he carefully collected and protected. But he was one who had collected all treasures, holding them in the garden he protected, leaving them to thrive, and fail and grow in their struggle to live, safe from divine and monstrous interference until they were able to reach something new, and all who impeded that, or entered that place without his permission was subject to death.

And he did not need or want that fact understood.

“You may regard me as a demon or a tempest if you will, but as my mother was a goddess, is it not natural that I would be inhuman?”

And was it not only natural that something inhuman would never partake fully of humanity?

“You are an adjudicator who enjoys human emotions but will never understand them.”

While he smiled and laughed, something old, very old, pained him again, like a phantom limb that had long ago been removed. He had only told one other of his method of kingship, though that had been more straightforward and intentional.

For a moment, he wondered what his friend would have thought of Hakuno, her defiance of death, and her refusal to accept the impossible. Though he knew that answer. They would have loved her, and likely reprimanded him for being hard on her and not showing her the truth of his kingship.

But she had asked him of gods and beginnings. She did not need to know of death and the end. And as a life that would eventually disappear from his sight, he had no great interest in her and never would.

Besides, she had seen enough of that already. The unbidden thought was dismissed, but lingered, even after he would have preferred it be forgotten.

Hakuno listened as Gilgamesh drank his wine and lectured to her about the nature of gods. When he talked about some of it...there were things that she couldn’t help but agree with him in. The gods had wanted to use him to control humanity, and he’d refused. That was...almost admirable.

The question she had was if they hadn’t accidentally switched one group of tyrants for a worse one.
It looked like the conversation was over, as Gilgamesh was turning away from her, but before she
could decide if she wanted to see if she would be lucky enough to get more out of him, there was a
flash of light.

A single, glowing, golden orb rushed towards her, and Hakuno grabbed it on instinct.

“This is-"

“An SG?” Gilgamesh asked, surprise clear on his face for once.

While Rin’s and Rani’s had been warm to the touch, this was…hot. Not uncomfortably so, but still
noticeable. It vanished into her hands as she touched it, filling her with the same heat before it too
was gone.

“Hm…well…” Gilgamesh crossed his arms thoughtfully, the metal clanking slightly. “I suppose this
is the first time that I have ever told anyone that story… Very well. You may have it as a reward for
your surviving for this long. Accept it with all due reverence.”

He waved a hand in a magnanimous gesture, but Hakuno just looked at her hands and felt confused.

She’d been under the impression that SG’s were supposed to give insight into a person, or bring you
close to them. It was obviously something that really, really mattered to him, but…

“I sort of thought an SG would mean I’d understand you a little better,” Hakuno admitted, though
wasn’t sure what he was going to do in response to that.

She shouldn’t have wondered. Gilgamesh just laughed loudly, no doubt making the floor above them
shake with the sheer volume he produced.

“If you ever assume that you will grow closer to me you are a fool. In the first place, my desires are
far less than usual, and for another it is none of your business. I am here to observe. Nothing more.
Were I to incarnate into the human world, that part of my nature that I inherited from my father might
tend towards the humans of the time and I might be more understandable to you, but you have no
such luck here in a world of pure data. I am merely on a pleasure trip here in the SE.AR.PH. I give
you these secrets as my fare, provided you continue to entertain me.”

With that, he had turned away again. Clearly no longer interested in the conversation, but…was that
a faint…look of discomfort?

A hero from the Age of Gods, who lived according to his own principles, and had feared neither god
nor man. He hadn’t changed much at all.

How did someone who was so extreme an unreasonable manage to become a Servant in the first
place? She highly doubted it was because he wanted it…

Or maybe…

She remembered the warmth of his SG…blazing in her hand like some piece of the sun.

Maybe she had an answer, but she just didn’t understand it yet.

Chapter End Notes
Gil needs to calm down about Jinako, I swear. He's seriously got issues with the girl.

So, I added a few things to this scene and decided a blend a little actual Sumerian mythology with the Fate lore. Basically, according to them, humanity was made by the gods to be their slaves and worship them forever. It honestly wasn't that hard to add into this. It's a bit of a shorter chapter, but I'm considering having something of an aftermath chapter before I go into the next big scene.

Tell me what you think!
In the aftermath of Gilgamesh's SG, the man is strangely quiet. Hakuno looks for advice.

The first time Hakuno looked for help in dealing with her Servant was after the business with her first SG.

While before she felt like she understood people a little better, with Gilgamesh, it felt like the opposite had just happened. Oh, they were going through the Labyrinth like before, and had moved pretty quickly through the first level, given that Passionlip didn’t seem to want to fight her, something seemed…worse.

What little amiability was gone.

Gilgamesh, while sure to comment his disapproval of yet feeling weirdly challenged by…that, wasn’t talking more than necessary. Any attempt to talk just hit a wall. When they came back from the latest run, Gilgamesh had sat back, nursing a darker looking wine than usual and glared out the window until Hakuno decided to go and do something else.

It wasn’t that they’d been getting along before. They hadn’t. But this was different. It wasn’t even a death threat, and for some reason that actually bothered her more than the increasingly infrequent threats on her life.

Even his anger that Hakuno had giggled over the ‘Love BB Virus’ had been more distant than usual. (Apparently, he liked blondes with green eyes. Very specific.)

Hakuno had a suspicion what this was. She just…didn’t know what to do about it. Telling the King of Heroes ‘oh, don’t worry about the fact that you told me some secret that really means a lot to you’ felt stupid, and he’d just deny it anyways.

Honestly, while sometimes she felt like she at least understood at least some of his moods and motives, other times, Gilgamesh just left her confused. This was one of the later times. He’d been fine during the SG, but the next day, it had been silence from him. Almost as if he had been waiting for her to do something.

She headed to the infirmary, rather than the Student Council Room. She didn’t really want to complain about her problems in front of Leo or Gawain, who never seemed to leave that room, and while she trusted Rani and Rin both, she knew what they’d say.

They’d both tell her to ignore it, and focus on clearing the next level, rather than trying to figure out her Servant. If he was fighting, there was nothing else to think about. Particularly when they more felt sorry for her being contracted to Gilgamesh to begin with than anything else. They’d see him talking less as a blessing. Maybe he’d stop assaulting the school with very loud laughter at random
times.

But somehow, she just…wasn’t happy about it.

The door to the infirmary slid quietly and Hakuno stepped inside, blinking once when she saw who was there.

Julius and Sakura were talking quietly as Sakura looked like she was making tea. Sakura started a little as she walked in, but Julius just turned to see her, a small smile forming on his face.

“Oh, Hakuno, I didn’t expect you to come. You usually rest after a Labyrinth run,” Julius said.

“I guess I just wanted to chat and have some tea,” she said.

“Is Mr. Gilgamesh giving you trouble?” Sakura asked.

She honestly seemed worried, and even Julius stepped closer, a frown on his face.

“I assumed that things were going better for you,” he said. “At least, you two had seemed more amicable lately.”

“It’s not a hard time,” Hakuno said. “Not really…”

She wanted to just dismiss it and tell them not to worry about her, but from the looks on their faces, it was too late for that. It was a strange feeling… She knew, somehow, she’d never had the chance to do this with Julius, though sitting and having tea with Sakura wasn’t anything new.

Sakura made a motion for her to sit down at the small table in a corner of the room, and Hakuno stepped in. In some ways, she liked this room better than the one in the other school building. The wood gave it a warmer feeling, and the constant evening light made it seem more peaceful somehow. It might have been one of BB’s illusions, but it was one of the better ones.

Sitting down, Sakura set down the tea set, with the extra cup for Julius. He hesitated for a moment.

“You’ve changed the recipe again.”

Sakura smiled.

“I thought you might like a change. I used chamomile to help you rest a little. You’ve got a lot riding on you, so every bit helps.”

“Thanks.”

Julius had been watching everything, but was shifting slightly as though he wasn’t supposed to be in the scene.

“I should probably be heading back to the Council Room…” he said.

“Rin and Rani are there. I don’t think Leo can get into too much trouble, and Gawain can serve him tea,” Hakuno pointed out.

Julius smiled a little again.

“It is good to know he has other people,” he said, sitting. “But, about your Servant…”
Hakuno sighed.

“I unlocked an SG from him,” Hakuno admitted.

“Mr. Gilgamesh had an SG?” Sakura asked, her eyes wide and even Julius had straightened a little.

It was honestly a little surprising, even now. She knew that he hid things, like anyone did, but she’d honestly thought that getting something like that from him was impossible. Maybe it was just the connection between Master and Servant, but…she still couldn’t quite believe what had happened.

But it didn’t really feel like she understood him any better than she had without it.

Other than the fact that Gilgamesh, King of Heroes, really, really didn’t like the Mesopotamian gods.

“Apparently,” Hakuno said. “I was looking up his Epic and asked him some questions, and it just sort of happened. I’m not sure who was more surprised, him or me.”

“Well, that’s amazing!” Sakura said, clasping her hands together, a large smile on her face. “Doesn’t that mean that you two are getting along well?”

Hakuno looked back down at the tea. She would have liked that if that were true. She wanted to understand him. At least enough so that she could say that he wasn’t something completely foreign to her, but honestly even this far in, she only somewhat understood his motives and reasons for things.

“He’s acting weird,” Hakuno said. “Just…really quiet somehow. I mean, usually he’ll have something to say about everything that happened, and I was sort of expecting him to complain that he didn’t get to fight with…well…”

Both Sakura and Julius looked away, faces with some color in them.

“But he’s just sitting in that room, drinking and glaring out the window. I think I know what he’s doing, but I don’t really know what to say, or if I should say anything to him.”

“Do you…think he’s embarrassed?” Sakura asked. “I…might be a little embarrassed if someone saw my heart…”

“I think the answer is more complicated than that,” Julius said, frowning slightly. “Embarrassment might be part of it, but I think the problem is that he revealed more than he ever thought that he would. You surprised him, and he’s probably not used to that. Gilgamesh does not seem like the kind of Servant to allow any Master to get too close to him.”

He wasn’t. He’d been pushing her and everyone else away from the second that he made a contract with her.

Was this just his way of refusing to get closer to her? It was one of those times that Hakuno was almost surprised by how…normal…some of his motives could be. If stubborn and narrow.

She didn’t miss his talks, but they had become such a part of things that, well, not having them felt strange, she supposed. It was maybe the comfort of something normal when she came back, regardless of what was going to happen. Maybe it was proof that a person could learn to live with anything.

“I’m honestly not sure what to do about it,” she said.

Julius shrugged.
“Sometimes, you need to allow people to sort things out on their own,” he shrugged. “You worry about other people, and try to help, but sometimes…well…the problems aren’t ones you can help with. Just…keep working through things and trust yourself. From what I have seen of your interactions, it seems to work.”

Julius smiled a little at her.

“Did anything else happen on the route? I did not hear very much from the others.

“Er…well we found that one compressed folder but we’re not sure what’s in it. Whatever it is, there’s a lot of it. Kiara mentioned that Lip’s SG shouldn’t be hard to find though.”

Kiara also seemed to find the whole thing kind of funny.

“Kiara’s a strange one. I can’t say I really trust her,” Julius said, frowning a little as if remembering something that he wasn’t happy about. “Still, it’s good to know that things might be a little easier for you to clear from here on out. And Passionlip doesn’t seem completely hostile.”

Hakuno smiled a little. While her problems weren’t solved, she felt a little better, even involving Gilgamesh. She didn’t really understand his motives or how long things would last, but…maybe Julius was right. She’d keep pushing and trying to understand him her own way.

“Yeah, and I guess we might be a little closer to finding out something interesting, if that file ends up being something good. Passionlip said it was garbage, but who knows.”

“At least it could give us some clue,” Sakura nodded. “I’m still holding out hope that some memories could be there, or some data that might help us understand how this happened.”

For a moment, they just sat there, enjoying the tea, and the quiet. It was almost peaceful, at least more so than much else had been to Hakuno’s memory.

“Unfortunately, I must return,” Julius said softly, standing up. “While Rin and Rani are present, Leo is my responsibility.”

And Sir Gawain wasn’t going to do a single thing to stop any weird plan that Leo got into his head.

“Good luck,” Hakuno said.

She really meant that a lot more sincerely ever since the panty floor.

With a nod, Julius headed out the door. Sakura took his teacup and smiled a little.

“He was asking about better medicines and if I could make something that that Mr. Kotomine doesn’t have for you. I wish I had better, but unfortunately, most of my functions are maintaining this location.”

She’d forgotten about that.

“Don’t worry about it,” Hakuno said. “I think you’re doing a great job.”

She was doing pretty well with medicines, all things considered. Particularly right now given that Passionlip seemed to want to avoid a fight, and Hakuno wanted to understand what she was fighting before doing something she regretted. Sakura was probably doing a lot better with making sure that the school was safe.

Sakura smiled a little, and Hakuno looked down at her cup.
“I guess I’d better get going back to,” she said. “I need to rest at any rate."

At least it might be a little quieter, she supposed as she stood up. Maybe the problem wasn’t solved, but it felt nice to be able to take a bit of a break.

“Good luck with everything, Miss Kishinami,” Sakura said, as Hakuno got it. “It was nice to see you.”

That always made her feel a little bad. She had the vague memory of getting along better with her during the War than most of the other Masters. But now, well…every day was a hellish battle and then all she really wanted to do as sleep.

"I'll come back and drink tea with you soon!" Hakuno promised as she stood up.

She stepped out of the infirmary, but stopped, blinking.

Gilgamesh stood, waiting for her with his arms crossed, a bored look on his face. The golden armor that he always wore glittered slightly in the light of the setting sun.

“I see when you are free, you enjoy gossip,” he remarked after a very uncomfortable pause between the two.

Hakuno crossed her arms and looked away.

“Drinking tea with someone isn’t gossip,” she said.

Though asking for help on how to deal with a Servant just might be.

“As well as attempting to deny those unsightly faults,” he said, a strange smirk appearing on his face.

She couldn’t lie to him. She’d figured out pretty quickly that he could see thought that without too much trouble. Also what was he getting at.

“Or were you complaining to that AI about the build of that Alter Ego?” Gilgamesh asked.

“I am not even slightly jealous of that,” Hakuno said.

She was perfectly fine with her figure. Why did men always assume that women were jealous of things like that? Passionlip looked like she shouldn’t be able to stand. Why would she want a chest like that?

“Oh, so a gossip, and one who is insecure about her own flaws,” Gilgamesh nodded. “I suppose I can accept that as your SG. However given your revealing it through actions rather than merely telling me…”

What.

Hakuno blinked at him.

“Are you…”

She didn’t want to keep saying that, since he might just kill her, but was he looking for an SG from her?

Suddenly everything made sense.
He hadn’t been upset, or if he was, that wasn’t the only reason for his silence. He’d been actively waiting for her to give him some secret. Since he’d given her one. And from the awful smile on his face, he obviously wanted it to be something embarrassing, ugly or just stupid. Probably so that he could laugh at her over his wine.

“I give secrets for my fare” her butt. King of Caprice!

But…Hakuno sighed. She supposed that she sort of understood. He’d revealed something to her that he’d never told another living soul, and now he wanted something similar.

*Or maybe he just wanted some excuse to never do it again.* Hakuno blinked at that thought. Somehow…that made the most sense of all of this. Gilgamesh always pushed everyone away. So, when he found himself getting closer…

She didn’t have any real secrets that were worth sharing. Or even know enough about herself to show something ugly, which would probably be what he wanted more anyways.

“I don’t think I have enough memories for an SG,” she said after a moment. “You know as much about me as I do.”

That was the truth. Other than the preliminary round, he’d been with her about from the start of her memories. That was…a very strange thought. It didn’t really feel like he’d been there for that long, but she supposed that he really had been, even if all she remembered was about three weeks, he had been there.

Hakuno set off, walking down the wall, ignoring the clatter of Gilgamesh’s armor as he refused to dematerialize.

“Memories are inconsequential. You have a personality and a will. Those are the only things necessary for such a reveal,” Gilgamesh insisted.

He was going to keep hounding her for something until she gave it to him, wasn’t he?

As they walked, both were silent, other than the armor (it wasn’t personal, but that sound was becoming the most awful sound in the world to her). Though Gilgamesh was burning a hole in her back as he clearly expected her to give him some answer, and probably right that minute.

Why couldn’t he just ask her something? Was it against the dignity of a king to ask his contractor questions? If so, for all of his talk about absolute power, kings had a lot of really stupid restrictions on them.

That was probably not something that she needed to point out at the moment.

As they reached the door, with the cute ‘My Room’ sign on it, Hakuno paused. Yes. That might satisfy him. She didn’t really have secrets, but she had that.

Pushing the door open, Hukuno walked in, only for Gilgamesh to walk past her, lounge in his throne and give her that expectant look that he had when he assumed that she was going to do something right that minute.

Hakuno sat down in her corner and sighed. She needed to steal a chair from one of the other rooms. She was getting confident that he wasn’t going to murder her for sitting somewhere other than the floor, and her legs sometimes fell asleep when she was on the floor too long.

“I really don’t want anything from the Holy Grail,” Hakuno finally said. “I can’t really remember
anything about the war, but know that I should have a wish, but I really don’t. …I know that I was more just…fighting to survive. So…since I’ve made it to the fifth round, all of those people who died...died for no real reason.”

She didn’t even remember them, but the though of that hurt. Whatever dreams that they’d had died with them. She knew she had blood on her hands. She knew that she’d killed for no reason other than her own survival.

“So, you assume guilt over things that you have no control over,” Gilgamesh looked, if possibly, more unhappy than he was when he’d been reaching for gossip. “What a foolish SG. Mongrel, those people, each and every one of them, joined the Grail War of their own will. They fought and died of their own will and each of them knew or should have known the potential cost of failure. Had you stayed your hand in your foolish empathy, they would have killed you and likely felt no guilt.”

“It doesn’t change the fact that they’re dead, and I was the one who did it,” she said softly.

For a second, Gilgamesh paused, eyes boring into her. He looked, almost as if he was thinking about or remembering something, but he continued.

“If you wish to assume and drown in your guilt, that is none of my affair; however, your wish for survival is as valuable as their wishes. Even if you were to never regain your memories, and your only desire was to continue and survive, that would not change. The wish to continue to live is the most human of all wishes, all others are either conceits or impossibilities that never should have been granted.”

He sighed, looking away and for once, looking frustrated about something.

“Your SG is as foolish as you,” he said. “I suppose that I must accept it though. You are a gossip, a fool, and one who consistency assumes responsibly for things that were never yours, failing to see or understand your limitations.”

Gilgamesh stopped, taking his wine and looking into it with a scowl. Whatever he’d been looking for hadn’t really happened, and he seemed honestly unhappy about it. While his words were harsh, the usual bite of his insults wasn’t there.

That was in no way a compliment, but…he would have been more happy about the insult, she was sure. Whatever he’d been trying to do…had he failed?

Was he sulking?

“I guess…we need to figure out how to beat Passionlip...?” Hakuno said, testing something just in case.

“You are not permitted to show that one mercy,” Gilgamesh said, looking at her darkly. “It may appear human and innocent, but the true nature of that abomination of flesh is of a ravaging beast with no concept of what ‘humanity’ means. As I have given you a direct order, stay your foolish guilt as well. Continue learning information about the creature and when you are satisfied, end it.”

He was still scowling at her, but the weird pensiveness was gone as well, replaced by a more usual reaction of him. He drank more deeply from his glass than usual, reaching out to the Gates, where another bottle appeared to refill him. Gilgamesh apparently mostly used his godly constitution to drink as much as he wanted without ever having to worry about any negative side effects.

Hakuno sighed and turned around with her back to him. The conversation with probably over, knowing him, and at least he looked like he was going to stop that weird pensive silence.
Julius had told her to just push ahead and be herself. She wasn’t sure if that had worked, but…well, there wasn’t much else she could do when faced with Gilgamesh.

Chapter End Notes

Bit of a shorter chapter than normal. I wanted to have a bit of a breather starting big events, and I also wanted to make something that was more original. So we get a sort of short scene of Gil digging in his heels, looking for something to dislike Hakuno over and getting disappointed. Hope you enjoyed and tell me what you think!

Next chapter;

"If you do not break this contract, I will destroy this sector of the universe."
The First Time Hakuno Trusted Gilgamesh

Chapter Summary

An offer of complete safety forces Hakuno to make a choice and Gilgamesh to make a final judgement.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno truly defied the King of Heroes expectations was when she actively faced BB for the first time. The abomination known as Passionlip was a dull opponent. It contented itself with following them throughout the Labyrinth while making cow eyes at the more and more willfully ignorant Hakuno until finally, the thing had confessed that Hakuno was its ‘prince’ after it mistook his contractor’s frustration that the abomination and the green Archer were behaving like children and misplaced compassion for affection.

Her flustered confusion (and taking more issue to the gender 'prince' implied than the confession itself) was amusing. As was her quickly denying that this situation was anything but a terrible outcome.

The Green Archer, Robin Hood, as Gilgamesh now understood his identity to be, was also entertaining. That man was little more than a rat in human skin, but his tricks and attempts to delay them had been clever, when he was not being pushed and manipulated by the Ego’s ability to draw aggression to itself.

Indeed, when it had turned that insipid expression towards himself and Hakuno, even he had almost been tempted to give in.

Though, Gilgamesh was annoyed with himself for offering any assistance at all during that exercise of futility that had been the ‘invisible treasures’. He supposed that it was merely the fact that there had been a treasure, and, even if subpair, he had wanted to acquire it that had caused him to intervene. The puppy who acted as president’s attempt at acting like he had some measure of authority had been a somewhat worthy compensation for his efforts. Were the child to ever grow and admit to his failings, he might have been a decent minor noble, but he still refused to admit his own failures as a person.

The event had become dull when finally, it appeared that they were going to face the abomination.

“It is about time I received a taste of the novelty called an ‘Ego’,” Gilgamesh said softly, grinning at the thing, though its eyes remained firmly and unendingly on his contractor.

Hakuno, for her slight credit, had the sense to be wary of that expression. He had warned her once that the creature, for all of her pretense of humanity, was nothing more than a hungry beast, but until then, she had seemed to think that she was dealing with something rational, not the unhinged affection of a goddess with no direction or comprehension of anything past that.

The thing stepped towards them, but then paused, blathered about a calorie shortage and left them with nothing more than a slightly less common version of the things that he had fought already.
“So, we don’t get a direct confrontation with her this time either…” the puppy said, sighing and sounding honestly disappointed. “I was hoping that we’d be able to test her power before a decisive battle but… I suppose I’m just glad that your safe, Hakuno.”

The child’s subtlety was only slightly greater than the Ego, and far less when Gilgamesh considered his actions. It was…annoying.

“My, you’re worry prone…or maybe over protective?” Rin said.

“You can speculate however you wish. Good job, Hakuno, why not head back now?”

The communication shut off, leaving them alone again. Hakuno sighed and closed her eyes.

“I’m a prince now,” she grumbled.

Gilgamesh watched her calmly.

“Had you attacked from the start, this would not have happened,” he pointed out.

While her will to live was impressive, Hakuno’s compassion was her weak point. She felt guilt over triumphing over others in the Grail War on the Near Side, and went out of her way to show mercy time and time again. Should her drive to live be brought into conflict with that compassion, Gilgamesh had already determined which would win out, regardless of the reality. It was not that the mongrel wanted to see herself as a good person. She truly was as compassionate as she behaved, and it was the height of foolishness.

He didn’t care, but it was going to shorten his view of her life, just as it was starting to show signs of being interesting.

“I couldn’t just…attack her,” Hakuno said. “Besides, we were supposed to be getting SGs. I don’t think one would have fallen out if I’d beat up on her and started stuffing things into…Breast Valley…like that little girl. Also, we know that she has our memories now.”

While the reacquisition of memory was a high priority, for them, it was something that Gilgamesh saw as an ideal, but potentially unattainable. The more pressing matter were the hints that BB was dropping of her actively attempt to reach the core of the Moon Cell. Of course, it was their struggle, not his, so they were free to flounder around as they choose after whatever goals that they wanted, and he would not interfere .

They reached the check point rather quickly, with Hakuno pausing and looking behind her.

“I swear I feel like she’s still watching us,” she grumbled.

“You are merely imposing that on yourself,” Gilgamesh said. “The Ego has vanished.”

Likely stuffing its face with the remains of some goddess or other.

“I want to see if Kotomine has something that could help with detecting something like that.”

Gilgamesh scoffed at that. The false priest, even if in possession of such an item, would never permit Hakuno to use it. He would revel in her discomfort first.

“Do not linger too long near that one,” he cautioned, and scowled at himself.

The priest would take an interest in his contractor, and he would use her foolish nature to his own advantage. Under normal circumstances, he would have ignored it; however, at the moment,
Gilgamesh wanted to see how long she lived. As such, contact with that man was to be kept as limited as possible.

It was purely for himself.

Hakuno stepped towards the return point, but there was a crackle of static and a tug of some other power that Gilgamesh had only felt when it was driving them away from itself, rather than drawing them in. He vanished into his astral form, following his contracted as she was warped away from both the Labyrinth and the school.

The location was little more than a single speck of light all encompassing darkness. So, it was a plan between the two location, which could be created and destroyed in an instant, and likely where anyone outside would never notice time as it based through.

Hakuno stood alone, glancing around, the shock on her face turning to worry as, in a spark, BB revealed herself and she set herself into her usual expression. Was the Mongrel actually considering attempting to order him to attack BB at that moment, separated from all that could protect her? He smirked a little in spite of himself.

“What do you want?” Hakuno’s voice echoed, and she placed too much force into it. “And where is this?”

“You can’t tell?” BB asked, smiling a little. “It’s the space between the school building and the Labrynth. I would have thought you’d seen a lot of it. It’s the sea of imaginary numbers. I just… paused you a bit.”

The true appearance of the Far Side of the Moon. Gilgamesh knew this darkness well. Though Hakuno would be unable to feel the pressure as it endeavored to tear her apart, contracted to him as she was.

Normally, I’d just leave everything to Lip, but…she’s hopeless with this. So I’m doing a little cheat. I can’t ignore your situation. It might be against the rules, but I’m going to make a deal with you.”

Was she starting to get worried?

Gilgamesh revealed himself, noting with satisfaction that Hakuno must have sensed him enough not to jump, or was perhaps focused more on BB at this moment. While he disliked being ignored, he would forgive her for focusing on the threat that actively held malice towards her.

He crossed his arms, watching the rogue AI. He vaguely noticed that he had unconsciously placed himself in front of Hakuno in order to better converse with the thing, but dismissed it.

“Oh, I had presumed we had been interrupted in this transfer for some reason, but it appears the mastermind herself has decided to appear.”

The look of hatred that she sent him was almost cute. As was the attempted intent to kill.

“That face… You have some business with me, do you not, AI?”

The hatred on her face was clear, as was something else that was almost human: jealousy.

“I have nothing to say to you, Servant,” she bit out. “…but it is true that what I have to say does involve you.”

She turned back to Hakuno, but at that instant, her entire demeanor changed. Gone was the mask of
humanity that the AI wore, as was the tone that was similar to the Sakura who maintained the school building. This was…neither human nor divine.

Gilgamesh narrowed his eyes.

“Miss Hakuno Kishinami, you have expended all of your command seals, and contracted with this Servant.”

A statement of the obvious befitting a machine. It appeared that the Moon Cell and the AI were growing too close.

“The mistake of awakening this particular Servant can only bring despair. Do you understand? This Servant was never meant to be summoned or awakened at all!”

Gilgamesh smirked. Ah, so this was what it was about. The Moon Cell was finally getting around to attempting to correct the fact that he had been summoned. Its goal was to observe and better understand humanity, his presence was an impediment of that goal, as, if he did ever decide to fight in the pitiful excuse for a war that it had created, there would have been nothing to observe save his victory.

“Please sever your contract with him immediately.” The machine intoned, then as if shaking herself out from something, the normal demeanor of BB returned, and she smiled brightly, almost honestly towards his contractor. “If you do, I’ll guarantee the safety of you and everyone else in the Old School Building. From now until the end of the universe itself.”

Gilgamesh’s eyes flicked towards Hakuno. She had stiffened, and her eyes flickered towards him. Ah, so this was the conflict between her desire to survive and her compassion. It was not her own safety that would sway her, but rather that of the others. He could end this now. Refuse to allow such a deal to be made… but he didn’t wish it. Not yet. He wanted to see just what she did when faced with this conflict, and…to put something to rest at last

Still, he also very much wanted to tear this thing to pieces.

Gilgamesh turned a smile on BB.

“Until the end of the universe itself? How generous of you. If that is the case, will you end the universe if she refuses? It would hardly be balanced if you did not.”

“Gilgamesh-” Hakuno hissed.

“Of course I will end it,” BB said, her voice cold but not that of the Moon Cell. “If you do not sever the contract with this Servant, I will bring down all the electrical power in this sector of the universe.”

Well, well, she was finally learning to threaten. However…

“Oh? Really? Are you even capable of that?” he asked. “You are nothing more than a managerial AI. Even out of control, are you not still unable to actively attack a Master?”

He was baiting her, testing how far the Moon Cell’s influence had already gone. It appeared that the AI herself did not know, at least, not at this point.

“I do not presently have the right to kill Masters,” BB said, her voice returning to the mechanical tone of the Moon Cell. “However it is possible for me to make this sector collapse. I can end all of
you, as well as myself, if I deem it necessary. This is my worst and final measure. I am prepared to register complaints from all intelligent life in the solar system. Hakuno Kishinami, I will make my proposal again. Please sever your contract with this Servant.”

Clever little machine to have learned to lie so well. Though Gilgamesh was mildly flattered that it understood the level of a threat that he was to itself.

Hakuno’s face was blank, but her eyes had flickered from BB to him, a growing worry in them.

“So you say. What will you do, Mongrel. I do not care either way.”

And he didn’t.

He already knew the outcome. While Hakuno would be willing to push and to put her own life at risk, her foolish nature would demand that she considered the needs of others as well. She would, without a doubt sever his contract herself, under the impression that she was saving those others from destruction. They would be at BB’s mercy.

Still, Gilgamesh had been amused for this time here. He supposed that he would permit her to live to see the fate worse than death that BB likely had planned for her.

Yet… Why did he feel…disappointed?

Hakuno was silent for a time, and only the sound of her breathing seemed to disrupt the silence.

There was a rush of noise and it appeared that things were breaking up.

“Urgh…this space won’t last long..” BB’s normal intonation was back but vanished just as quickly. “Please reply in three seconds. Will I cut off the power, or will you cut off the contract?”

Gilgamesh watched and waited for her assent.

“I will not,” Hakuno said, her voice was trembling, but it managed to carry.

“Oh?” Gilgamesh barely suppressed the surprise laugh that wanted to erupt, and he felt the smile tugging on his lips.

He turned to face her, wanting, just for a moment to capture the face of the woman who had defied his expectations that much.

The fear glittering in her eyes was great, but it was overcome by that same fire that had burned brightly enough to catch his attention while she fell through nothing. The same fury, that in its essence had refused to be confined into a comfortable dream of a single perfect day, repeated for all eternity.

“That is illogical,” BB said, her voice managing to remain calm. “Even if you remain contracted to Gilgamesh, all that is waiting for you is your own destruction. You know this. So…why? Why do you value your contract with him over me?”

She sounded truly confused and almost hurt. As if unable to comprehend that her actions, thereto had been nothing but threat after threat.

“I do,” Hakuno said, taking a step forward. “I know that Gilgamesh isn’t my ally, and one day, he might cut me down, and even if he doesn’t, I’ll still die when I return to the Near Side… But… I want to believe his words. He said that he wouldn’t sever this contract himself since this was my
battle. I won’t let go of his one trump card I have. Gilgamesh is about as terrifying as you, but… I contracted with him. I’m the one who cried out for help, so the responsibility for awakening this Heroic Spirit is mine, and mine alone! I don’t need a deal to take it away from me. And… I know that the others wouldn’t want me to make this choice for them. They’re all working hard to get out, even if they might die. If I cut my contract with them in exchange for safety… then I’m also betraying their trust in me! Staying in that place forever… that’s worse than dying.”

Gilgamesh listened in silence. While some part of him was galled at the statement that she bore any responsibility for him whatsoever… a third of him couldn’t help but be impressed. She understood far better than he had assumed.

It appeared that he had undervalued her.

There was fury and hurt on the AI’s face.

“Fine then! Then as I said, I’ll take this place, you and all of your friends down along with myself!”

Gilgamesh stepped forward, feeling as the space started to disintegrate and pushing his own power into it.

“You will do nothing,” he said, as the space distorted around him. “What you have spoken of is impossible. You claim to be prepared for complaints, but you cannot process them. Not as you are, AI. You cannot implement orders that you cannot process. Your proposal was not a falsehood, but it certainly was not the truth. Besides, even if you possessed that capability, the most you could cut power to would be this space, and in that case, so long as this mongrel remains contracted to me, she would survive.”

It was will within his capability, even as fallen as he was, to protect himself and one other. And Hakuno, with her decision, had earned that protection. Had BB brought down this space, he would have brought out the Gates, shielded her from the corrosive effects of this place, and brought them both to the safety of the school to plan their next move.

BB watched him with a look that could only be called hatred. It was almost impressive to see such a thing show that kind of emotion.

“You… You brazenly stole away her command seals, and now you-”

“That isn’t-” Hakuno started, but Gilgamesh interrupted her.

“That was by her own will, AI,” Gilgamesh snapped, putting enough power into this space that his own transport was beginning, his armor starting to glow.

He smiled.

“This mongrel’s life is mine already. She chose that fate, and I accepted it. She has never given you a single thing, has she?”

“Gilgamesh!” the machine was back

Yes, Moon Cell, this truly was your worst case scenario wasn’t it? That he would appear and grant some Master victory on a whim.

He laughed shortly, not just in joy at her anger, but in the joy of finding something truly unexpected in this place where he had slept so long. This was something old, something that he had not felt in a very long time, and he relished in the feeling of it.
“You may leave my presence, Moon Insect. I may have undervalued her myself, but this Master, it seems, will not yield to your threats.”

Hakuno was squinting against the light of his armor as he took her arm, forcing the transport back. It was instant, but yet, he had time to consider what he had seen.

Why hadn’t she resolved the contract? The excuse she’d given had been incomplete. He knew her well enough by this point to understand her thoughts, and her desire for no one to die. So, when given the chance to prevent that… was she truly comfortable determining everyone’s fate? Was it just her refusal to be commanded, pride…or something else?

He would test her one final time, he resolved, and if she passed…

He would no longer try her to determine if she deserved life or death.

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The first time Hakuno trusted Gilgamesh with anything was after she refused to sever their contract, regardless of BB’s promises of their safety until the end of the universe, doubled with the threat of ending it.

She’d guessed that he wasn’t going to kill her for no reason up until then, ever after some near misses, but that wasn’t trust. Trust was different. Trust was something warm. Trust was knowing that someone would always have your back, and knowing that someone wouldn’t hurt you, at least not intentionally.

She didn’t trust Gilgamesh, and strangely enough, she knew that he approved of that.

But…

But…somehow…when faced with BB’s threats and the chance of safety for everyone…

…She couldn’t let him go.

She appeared in front of the Old School Building, where Julius was standing and waiting for…her?

“Welcome back, Miss Kishinami!” Sakura’s voice called. “Oh…your heart rate is up. Did something happen?”

That deal…it must have been no time at all really, even if he had felt like she’d stood there forever, determining both her fates…and all of theirs, for the sake of keeping her Servant. Rin and Leo would have refused anyways, that she knew. Rani might have weighed things out, but also ultimately determined that it was a bad choice. The others…

She didn’t like making the choice for them, but she’d had to. She’d had to believe that there was something BB wasn’t saying. Besides, if she was going to kill all of them, her agreeing to a deal didn’t necessarily mean anything.

Gilgamesh was strangely quiet, and, for the moment, she decided to follow his example.

“I’m fine,” she said. “I guess I’m just a little tired.”
“Oh, well, then you should probably head back a take a rest. There isn’t anything that the council needs from you. Your heart rate is getting better too!

Hakuno nodded and smiled towards Julius.

“Are you going to head in?” she asked.

“Yes, just to clear up a few things,” he said. “You’ve already done the heavy work.”

“Good luck,” Hakuno said, making herself smile. “Don’t let Leo push you too hard.”

Julius shook his head. “I’m not doing this for him,” he smiled a little at that statement, as if the words were something new to him. “Have a good rest, Kishinami.”

Gilgamesh was unusually silent as she headed back to the room, making sure to purchase some healing items from the priest. Usually, Gilgamesh would have hung back with an ugly look at the man and a generally disapproving air if she was close to him for too long, but he wasn’t there this time.

The whole place seemed…peaceful…pleasant. Maybe it was the fact that she’d felt like she was so close to have accidentally brought everything down around their ears, but for a moment…

No.

She shook her head, and headed up to her room.

The moment that she closed the door, it was like everything just was sucked out of her, and she all but collapsed into her little corner. It looked like she’d been acting out of pure adrenaline and hadn’t even noticed it…

Facing BB… honestly she was moving past her limit, wasn’t she?

With a spark of light, Gilgamesh appeared in his throne, watching her with an unreadable expression on his face.

“We are going to need to come up with a suitable place for you to sleep on. You won’t get any significant rest on the ground like that,” Gilgamesh said out of nowhere, almost like he was speaking to himself.

Seriously?

He was worrying about that now?

And whose fault was it that she was on the floor while he lounged around in the big throne that he’d summoned to replace the bed that had been in here from the first!?

But…had he…

Had he just worried about her? It certainly sounded like he was suddenly worried about how much rest she was getting.

But Gilgamesh pushed on, ignoring her surprised and confused look. He’d closed his eyes, almost as if in thought.

“That Passionlip…an Alter Ego clearly meant to fight against us yet possessing no desire to fight of her own will. I am curious as to see where they will go. However…at the moment, my interest
resides in this room."

He opened his eyes, but his expression remained completely unreadable.

"Hakuno. Why did you not sever our contract in that conversation? It was a fair deal for you, and in the end from your perspective, I am a god of death that you must cut loose from in order to live, though the instant you sever that contract, I might sever your life if that mood strikes me. While your ultimate goal might be escape, your contract with me is your greatest obstacle. BB promised you safety from that. You would not be able to escape, but you also would not die, and perhaps would not be forced to reside in this building. What is more, the lives of your friends and those in this building were also at stake. It was not a bad offer, so tell me, under those conditions, why didn’t you sever our contract?"

She was going to die.

The air felt like it froze around the sheer power of the killing intent that those last words held. She’d thought it was bad before, but Hakuno knew, without a doubt, that if he didn’t like her answer, he was going to kill her.

It was scarier than anything BB had said or what she’d felt then. He didn’t even need to say the threat. She knew it, and the look in his eyes told her so. That was the expression of someone who had decided that this was the time for her to either be ‘a life that would end now’ or ‘a life that would end eventually’.

And she knew that any lie she told, he’d be able to see through.

But...

She didn’t have a good reason. She couldn’t even fully name it herself. But...

It wasn’t that she couldn’t trust BB. She couldn’t, but that wasn’t the problem.

It wasn’t even that she’d been pretty sure that if she did sever the contract, Gilgamesh wouldn’t turn around and kill her for the presumption of thinking that she could sever the contact. It was the truth, but that wasn’t the reason.

It was more…stupid really.

"…I guess…I simply value the power called ‘Gilgamesh’,” she said after a moment. “BB’s trying to cripple me, and all of us. She knows that I’m the only one with a Servant who can fight. And while Jinako and a few others might be willing to stay here forever, and pretend that that’s safely…how does BB even register that Idea? And…Leo and Rin and Rani and Sakura and Julius and Gatou…they’re all risking everything to escape. They already know the risk. I can’t condemn them to this without asking… But… It’s not just that I want to escape. I mean, I do, but…before that. If I don’t want to lose to Lip…to the other one, or even to BB, or Archer or whoever else is there…you’re the most powerful trump card that I could have.”

Even if he was her death…she couldn’t let him go. Not yet.

Hakuno sat up, back straight, staring at him and ready for whatever he was going to do as she faced the freezing atmosphere and…the faint…smile on his face?

“…hah…”

The room exploded into laughter as the King of Heroes pounded on his throne with one hand and
clutched his stomach with the other.

“Wait!” he called between laughs. “You need to restrain yourself, Mongrel, do you intend to have me die laughing!?”

But he kept going until sinking into his throne with more easy grace and summoning his usual goblet and two bottles of wine, still chuckling to himself.

“No, but it’s fine. Rather, it was the best of answers!” he said, the smile on his face was…different than usual. There were less teeth in it as he poured himself a drink and seemed to savor it. “You claim that you value me as a battle asset! That a heavy weapon is more valuable thing than your own life, or rather than promise of a secure, easy life for yourself and others. Such a complete failure to even understand the danger you were in…”

He took another drink still smiling, and looking into it.

“Indeed, I must be losing my vision if I expected another answer. Of all the creatures of the world, mongrels really are the ones I can never truly despise…”

That last part was clearly not meant for her.

Hakuno sighed as he continued snickering to himself. She’s seriously been ready to die when she’d said that. She’d felt that assurance that she would, but now…

She sort of felt insulted somehow. She’d known how much danger she was in! She’d gambled with everything by refusing that deal!

Her sigh must have caught his attention, because he glanced up at her.

“Do not sulk so. I’m praising you. The desire to hold on to what you already have against all odd is harmless greed, is it not? That is how a woman who manages to haul in gold ought to be. Your friends should thank you. In your ignorance, you denied BB the opportunity to convert them all into that data that you have seen to ‘preserve it’ that is the safety that an AI offers.”

He finished up the glass and poured himself another.

“I am satisfied with your answer. If that is your mindset, then I will continue to watch this battle. Rest in an appropriate place, perhaps take one of those training mats from the gymnasium. When you are ready, we will face down that Ego.”

He smiled at her again, but then, clearly done, just decided to close his eyes and sleep. The change in his breathing was instantaneous.

Vaguely, she wished she could do that.

But even when she managed to get up and grab a mat (like she was going to pass that up), she was still…shocked.

That smile…

Gilgamesh smiled often, but there was always something cruel lurking behind it. He was either amused by someone’s stupidity, or smiling at the delight that he seemed to get in battle. It was always cold and hard, like the golden armor that he always wore, but that expression…

It hadn’t been kind. Kindness had no part with the King of Heroes, but…
It had been warm.

Almost like his SG when she’d touched it. He’d looked at her, for the first time, with reassurance in that smile. Almost like he was telling her, at some level, that she’d made the right choice to gamble on him rather than BB.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter killed me. I loved it, but it was murder to write out. I'm actually pretty excited, since it opens some really fun new interactions, and I always felt that this was the start of the turning point in their relationship, so I can actually have some slightly more relaxed conversation between these two now!

Next chapter I'm debating about it being Gil's conversation on the nature of love, or the fake date.

Tell me what you think!
The First Time Dating Came Up In Conversation

Chapter Summary

Hakuno starts to adjust to the King of Heroes' change in attitude towards her, but also ends up arguing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time dating even came up in conversation, was when they were trying very hard to get Passionlip to actually fight them. After the issue of the failed deal, Hakuno had noticed that Gilgamesh was…different. It wasn’t a huge change. The man was hardly suddenly being nice to her, but Hakuno had started to get good at reading his moods.

He seemed more relaxed somehow. He seemed more willing to be amused by the whole thing, which, from what she’d seen, meant that he was in a good mood. It wasn’t a huge change, at least, it wasn’t one that she thought that anyone else seemed to notice, and it wasn’t really towards anyone else. He still clearly didn’t like Kiara, but that feeling of a sword constantly hanging over her head was gone.

That wasn’t to say that Gilgamesh was friendly. She didn’t know how to phrase it, but it was different. At least he seemed more willing to talk to her and while it was in the same superior way as usual, something that she couldn’t describe was missing in it. Maybe he’d just found another target for his annoyance.

Passionlip.

She seemed to get the brunt of his hostility now. Particularly during her third floor where she was following them around and generally being creepy, and they’d been walking around for an hour with nothing better to do but try to listen for her, since they couldn’t even talk to one another or they might miss her.

Things had been weird with her since the incident where she’d come to the school, telling Hakuno that she wasn’t going to let them get their memories since the Hakuno that she’d come to love might vanish.

Hakuno tried to keep focused on listening for Lip, but her words still came back.

*The real Hakuno was nothing but hurt and sadness, and I want Miss Hakuno to stay the Miss Hakuno I know.*

Those words bothered her.

What if she learned something she really didn’t want to?

But…even if that was the case…Passionlip didn’t get the make that choice. This was a love that was so wrong it couldn’t even be called love anymore. Gilgamesh had apparently agreed.

“If she has no memories, you will not see her true nature? Ridiculous. Memory provides rationality:
a mask to hide one’s true nature. This woman is in her truest, most unvarnished state. Furthermore, you have no comprehension of what love is, Ego. While love is often well spoken of, its true nature is a scramble for personal interest. Making your own life and happiness the most imperative, you must compete for it, steal it from others, tend to and protect what you have gained and increase it!
Memory is utterly unnecessary to know a person’s true nature, but it is essential for memory to exist for anything that could be called ‘love’. How do you want love? How do you desire to be loved? When you can answer these questions present yourself before me again. Until then, do not speak to me of love.”

While there was a cynicism in his view of love, he was right in one thing: whatever Passionlip was feeling, it wasn’t love. Not really. What she felt…it was too twisted to really even be called that…Just starting at someone and thinking that they were great wasn’t love. Love…that would have to take time, she supposed. Whatever Passionlip felt might have been intense, and it might have been something that could have been love…but this wasn’t it.

There was a sudden feeling of a presence right before her.

Finally!

Passionlip was behind them again, and she could practically feel the annoyance radiating off of Gilgamesh as she whipped around, dashing towards the Alter Ego, who suddenly vanished with a startled squeak, leaving them both along.

Hakuno let out a growl.

“What do I even do about this,” she said. “I’ve faced more power enemies, people setting traps, the panty floor, even Rin Tohsaka demanding money…but I think the worst boss ever is the kind that runs away constantly before we can even do anything about it!”

“Whether it’s capturing or being captured that you want, be clear about it!” Gilgamesh snapped to the air, clearly annoyed as well. “This is the trouble with aggressive maidens.”

Hakuno glanced at him. While he certainly looked like he would have very much liked to kill Passionlip for this, he didn’t seem annoyed with her. So, she decided to test something.

“No girl alive would do this,” Hakuno said.

Normally, Gilgamesh would have at the very last snapped at her for the impertinence of daring to talk back to him, but he didn’t seem to even notice it at the moment.

“A parody a woman such as her certainly would,” Gilgamesh said, watching the place where she was. “That is all that creature is. Come, let us return. Clearly there is nothing to be gained from this besides more frustration.”

There was a buzz of static and even Leo weighed in.

“I think that it’s true. I’m sorry for putting you on this wild goose chase, but we’re starting to get an idea up here. If you can head back, maybe we’ll be able to get something right.”

Anything would be better than this. Even whatever Leo was planning.

With a sigh Hakuno led the way to where she’d seen the exit point. Seriously, they were going in circles that it looked like Lip was just going to stalk them…

Someone was right behind her.
Hakuno whipped around, looking at Passionlip as stood, watching them with wide, nervous eyes.

“Um...Miss Hakuno...can I...can I come closer to you?” she asked.

Her voice was hesitant, and she seemed to be shifting a little like some girl about to give her crush a confession letter. Yet, her eyes had that weird look that she’d seen before. It wasn’t hostility as much as it felt as if Hakuno was literally the only thing in her vision, and she’d rip apart anything that happened to block keep Hakuno from her vision. Maybe some people would find it sweet or flattering, but…it really didn’t feel right.

Hakuno hesitated. While this was the chance to ask about their memories and to get her to surrender them, there was something about that gaze that made her hesitate, even as she nodded.

The sheer intensity of it was honestly enough to send a shiver down her spine.

Passionlip moved forward suddenly, the giant claws scraping against the ground, but she stopped short.

Gilgamesh had placed himself between them, watching the Alter Ego with a dark expression.

“Do not even consider coming closer,” he said. “It would be an embarrassment to me if the woman I have traveled with so long with died in such a stupid way as a beast attempting to reach out and caress her.”

Passionlip stopped, watching Gil with a new emotion, one that Hakuno had never seen on the Alter Ego’s face: hate.

“...You’re in my way again,” she mumbled. “You’re always in my way. If Miss Hakuno didn’t have a Servant... She doesn’t need you! So...”

Was there a reason why BB and Lip both seemed to take Gilgamesh’s presence so personally? This went beyond the fact that he was a dangerous Servant who shouldn’t have been awakened, this seriously acted like the fact that she’d contracted with him had been an insult to both of them at a level that Hakuno honestly didn’t want to think about.

Gilgamesh grinned, but she could see his body tense. She wasn’t sure if that was a moment of caution when he was fighting something completely new or just the fact that he was getting ready for her claws.

“Oh, are you going to attempt to bare your teeth at me at last? Try to stop me with those claws then!”

For a second, Hakuno was ready for battle, but then the Alter Ego paused, blinking.

Her stomach growled. Passionlip had the grace to blush, but she also backed down a pace.

“Oh...I...there was something else I needed to do...” she mumbled.

And vanished again.

Hakuno just started, her mouth slightly opened.

“Again, you use that same excuse. Diet! It would reduce your unsightly form!” Gilgamesh called after her.

“Um...Gilgames...I...think her attract aggression skill is starting to affect you,” Hakuno said hesitantly.
She wasn’t quite sure how he was going to react to being called by name.

He seemed...really mad that his chance to fight had just run away, and she’d never seen him that annoyed over a fight that didn’t work out. It could just be the fact that they’d been running around all morning, but honestly, given that it seemed only directed against Passionlip, it was the only thing she could think of.

Gilgamesh paused, glaring at the point that Lip had been, breathed hard through his nose. She expected him to deny it, or to call her a fool for thinking that he could possibly be affected by such a thing, but he didn’t. Actually, he seemed to be weighing out her words and his behavior.

“That creature’s ability is truly staggering,” he said, which was probably as close as he as going to get to admitting that she might be right. “Let us return before it visits some new stupidity on us. And see what that puppy has planned for you.”

It was still very much her fight, but…was it just her, or was Gilgamesh just…generally more invested in the whole thing?

Hakuno nodded, taking the lead as they headed to the way point and back to the school. It looked like some of the NPCs were getting used to things, as they were sitting around, talking and reading. Sometimes, she wondered about them a little. Did they realize how wrong things were? Or were they just locked in a perfect afterschool afternoon that never ended?

She shivered a little and headed into the building, past Kotomine, and to the Council Room where everyone was waiting. Even Julius was there leaning against the wall, watching the proceedings with a cautious expression and Sakura had come in with tea.

“Oh, good, Hakuno, you got here quickly!” Rin said.

“Excellent. We’ve been planning something that that I think might help us,” Leo said. “We’ve been working on your catching her alone with your Servant right until now, correct?”

Hakuno nodded. She also noticed that Leo had a tendency to call Gilgamesh ‘her Servant’ as if saying his name would somehow attract his attention and summon him. It was too bad that he was already there. She could practically feel him behind her.

“Well, I’ve reasoned that it might be more advantageous for you to have someone else in order to work as a two man team to capture her. Another Master with a powerful Servant would likely work well. Besides, if all else fails, given her obvious interest in Hakuno, she’ll likely misinterpret the event as romantic in nature, which could draw her out.”

“That might cause her to attack the unlucky person,” Rani pointed out. “As I pointed out, her claws would compress anyone into a cube of data that would never be able to be righted, in a form of living death. The partner, therefore would need to be both in possession of a powerful servant and prepared for that possibility.”

“Of course, I would be willing to fulfill the part of the partner in this,” Leo said, smiling with an odd sort of draw to it. “It might be fun to work with Hakuno as a team.”

It…reminded her of something…

“I am sure that you will do admirably,” Gawain said, smiling. “Rest assured you will both be well chaperoned.”

How was it that this felt suddenly like it was serious? And why were Rin and Rani both smirking at
her with a knowing glint in their eyes.

“Oh, we’ll have to make you look nice for your date,” Rin said.

“Perhaps some new code…” Rani said.

Oh no.

A sudden chill cut through the air and Gilgamesh, who mostly seemed to content himself with being a looming presence in the back of her mind normally during Council meetings, appeared, arms crossed, and giving the three of them an unimpressed look.

Gawain tensed at the sight of the golden armored man, but Julius, who’d been in the back coughed a little, taking advantage of the interruption.

“. . .Leo, as the one in charge of your education, I think that it is too early. For you to be worrying about. . .relationships yet,” he said calmly, but his eyes were on Hakuno.

She sent him a grateful look though she paused at the realization of what that meant.

“I guess that means I need to get Jinako doesn’t it?” she asked.

There was no one else in the building with a Servant that might be able to stand up to Passionlip. Or a Servant at all for that matter.

That was . . . She might actually have a better chance running over Passionlip.

Gatou seemed to guess her thoughts.

“We’ve already discussed this. Rest assured, if you cannot convince her, I’ll team up with you! We’ll catch Breast Valley no matter what!”

The laugh he gave made a shiver run up her spine, and she didn’t dare turn around since she knew Gilgamesh would be grinning at her and . . .

The entire Student Council with the exceptions of Julius and Sakura was made up of perverts.

Hakuno sat up very straight.

“N-Nope that’s not necessary. Come on Gilgamesh, we need to go persuade Jinako no matter what!”

The slight snicker from behind her didn’t bode well for that evening’s conversation.

Getting Jinako to agree had been a delicate mix of flattering, onee-chan-ing, threats, and promises, and Jinako had used every single trick in her book to get out of it, including, at the end, the point that they were both girls. It didn’t help that Gilgamesh just stood there behind her, silently judging all of them and radiating his disapproval of the whole thing.

“Strategically speaking, it might work better,” Hakuno said. “I mean. . .if Lip’s really as obsessed
with me as she acts, than she’s probably be more update by my having a girlfriend and having a boyfriend, so she might come out faster.”

Maybe she’d been hanging around Gilgamesh too much…

“Arg, you all have an answer for everything don’t you?! And my useless Servant’ll nag me about making friends if I don’t…” Jinako crossed her arms, huffing as if she was doing them some huge favor. “…As long as I get to dig through our memories first. I want to see if you have any dirty little secrets that I can use or spam over the internet. And you don’t expect me to fight.”

If she tried that ‘useless’ thing again…

“We just need to show up and then…I get to leave right?”

“Rest assured, there is nothing that you’ll need to do other than be there,” Leo said, smiling.

It was a practiced expression, as if the guy had been training all his life to smile at people that he’d rather snap at.

“Alright,” Jinako said cautiously, but “…No…you know…”

“Absolutely not,” Hakuno agreed.

“You don’t have to agree so fast!”

But somehow, she’d agreed, and without another word, she’d turned around and walked out. Hakuno let out a sigh. The whole situation was a mess in more ways than one, but at least she didn’t need to worry about that anymore.

“I’m going to rest too,” she said. “When I wake up, I’ll get Jinako and head down to the Labyrinth.

“Good luck, Kishinami,” Julius said. He sounded like he meant it, and she was going to need it.

“Rest well,” Sakura said. “If you’d like, I could make my special tea so you have something to take with you!”

“That would be great,” Hakuno smiled at her.

“Make sure to stock up,” Rin called. “We still have no idea how strong that thing is.”

With a nod, Hakuno left, and headed back to her room, which…honestly, didn’t seem so cramped anymore. Maybe it was just the fact that things were going well between her and her servant, or maybe it was just the fact that more and more she was just exhausted, but she pushed the door and stepped in with a sigh.

Gilgamesh was waiting for her when they came in. While he looked comfortable on his throne, he was sitting with his arms and legs crossed in an annoyed posture.

“Are you still annoyed about Lip?” she asked, sitting down on her mat.

“That creature? While it’s habit of beckoning and then running away is nothing short of aggravating. The behavior of your Council is more so.”

Hakuno blinked.
“The…thing with Jinako she asked.

“No, a lover’s strategy is an old one, but quite effective, and something like that abomination would never conceive up. Do your best to make a decent farce of it, Mongrel.”

But he still sounded more annoyed than anything else.

“My issue is the choices you were presented with. That puppy seems quite certain of himself, as does the Knight of the Sun, but even when the ghost showed the good sense to hold him back, I am forced to behold the worst option in this.”

Ah, that was the Gilgamesh she knew.

“Um…I’m technically the one who is going down there with her,” Hakuno said. “I mean, I’m not really interested…but…”

“Do not be ridiculous. When you enter the Labyrinth with her I must play along and give my apparent approval of such a match. Even with my own preferences aside, that woman is even more of a ghost than the one who haunts the Student Council. She is nothing more than flesh birthed in idleness with any value long forgotten.”

Hakuno looked away, glanced back at him and decided to take the plunge of a full out argument to see if hat got a sword in her face.

“She might be futon bug and…apparently thought that she could sit in a closet and win the Grail War, but …she’s not a bad person. She helped with Rani after all, and she sometimes has some really good information!”

While Hakuno couldn’t say that she liked the woman (Jinako actually made herself less likable than Gilgamesh without the rare moments when he could show something that was almost compassion) but she couldn’t just listen to her Servant rip her apart like that.

“Good or bad has nothing to do with it. This is a matter of taste and the fact that she is an insult to yours and therefore to mine. She needs to lose weight, and then lose weight!” he said, crossing his arms, a scowl on his face. “The flab on her body and soul both are utterly unsightly! If you understood how unpardonably disgraceful she is, you would leave her in that Labyrinth and force her to either curl up and die like the sack of flesh she is or act in some capacity.”

Hakuno opened her mouth to object that Jinako was doing the best she could, but...the problem was that she wasn’t and both of them knew it, but honestly, she really did feel bad for the other woman. Just because she was...well...what she was...that didn’t mean that Gilgamesh could just verbally trash her because he decided he didn’t like her.

“You can’t just say that about people,” Hakuno said.

“I will say as I please. It is the prerogative of the king,” Gilgamesh said. “Or is it that you have a taste for such a woman?”

Hakuno blushed, and crossed her arms, looking away.

“I don’t even like girls like that!” Hakuno said. “And even if I did, …I don’t even know what I’d want in a partner. I can hardly date like…this…”

Amnesiac. Unable to even know what she really even wanted in a potential partner other than ‘necessarily skills to survive”. Honestly, she didn’t know why Passionlip was even focusing on her
other than the fact that she was really desperate to make up a fantasy where she was the princess saved by a ‘prince’ regardless of gender.

“Mongrel, you are discussing love. This is merely taste. Your discussion of her use only serves to stay my hand in merely ending her sad existence and sparing the Hero of Charity the sorrow of servicing such a worthless Master. Those are components of an existence that merits some right to survive, not one who you wish to know in any great capacity.”

“You really don’t like her, do you?” Hakuno sighed.

Gilgamesh’s eyes were cold and remote as he looked at her, and for a moment, Hakuno got the uncomfortable feeling that he was looking through her, at something else very, very away, and for a moment, she was reminded of just how old he really was.

“Such a person, who decides to curl up and die slowly, has no value. I would think that you would agree. You could not have someone more opposed to you in philosophy, Mongrel, nor to the very basis of humanity.”

Gilgamesh’s standards were still as weird as ever.

“If you hate her so much, why don’t you play the part?” Hakuno grumbled.

It wasn’t as if Lip didn’t already seem to think that Gilgamesh was her rival.

“Oh?”

Hakuno froze.

Seriously, was he going to take offense to that? But the expression on his face wasn’t anger. It was amusement.

“It has come to this? In your confusion, you attempt to court me?” An unpleasant smile started to form on Gilgamesh’s face and his settled into his throne, watching her with that same awful smile. “Very well. I will listen to your case. It will surely be amusing at any rate.”

What.

A cold sweat broke out on her back. Was he seriously...? She’d almost expected the Gate to open up and impale her with something for presuming to flirt with the King of Heroes, even if she wasn’t flirting, and she was just suggesting that he take the role of the lover if he was so against Jinako, but him sitting there with that grin on his face was something she wasn’t expecting at all.

Somehow, she wasn’t sure if Gilgamesh’s new attitude towards her wasn’t making this worse.

“No,” Hakuno said, eyes wide and shaking her head, and feeling heat rising to her face. “I-I didn’t mean that I- I was just saying that... -If we really wanted to annoy Passionlip-”

But it was far too late. Gilgamesh was smirking at her

“Very confused, aren’t you, Mongrel? Give up on such things, and be content with your place as my maidservant. That is the most you can attain, given your small frame. However, I will permit you to gaze upon me as much as you wish for the remainder of this spectacle.”

How generous. And maidservant? He’d actually decided on a position for her? And one minute he was trashing Jinako for being too fat, and now he was trashing her for being too skinny. Exactly
what was this man’s standard other than ‘not that’?

The King of Heroes was the enemy of all women.

Hakuno pitied the many wives that the Epic mentioned that he’d had. For all that the man talked about love, she was pretty sure that he’d never experienced it.

With a sigh and shaking her head, Hakuno decided to opt for a subject change.

“Why did you decide to show up to the meeting…in the flesh?” she asked, hoping that he took the bait and stopped giving her a look as if he was going to start gloating about how good looking he was.

“I meant to express my disapproval of that child’s attempt to court you,” Gilgamesh said, he was smirking still, but it looked like the bait was going to work. “He acts with the insolence of a child accustomed to getting his way prior to ever needing to act in straightforward way. His covert attempts reflect poorly on me if I would just sit back and permit him to do as his pleases like that knight. However, it wasn’t necessary, as the ghost held him back.”

He really seemed to be reaching for ways to disapprove of all of them.

“Gilgamesh…do you…dislike the lover’s strategy or something?”

“Hardly, as I said, it can be most effective, but only with one who is worthy of even the farce. As you are contracted to me, your actions reflect on me as well. As such, conduct yourself well, tomorrow, Mongrel. We can only hope that it ends quickly.”

She did. Because otherwise, he’d probably drive her insane from the sheer force of his disapproval.

But…she was right. Something had changed in him. He wasn’t better or more friendly, and he certainly wasn’t any less arrogant, but it was like she suddenly had a position to him. Even if it was one that was going to vanish.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter would be better named 'Gilgamesh takes one step forwards and two steps back and will regret his words later'.

So, this was probably a strange one, since I combined a lot here. Hope you liked it, since it was something of a breather episode.

Next chapter: Passionlip's defeat and a new Memory Dream from Hakuno cause Gilgamesh to consider several things.
The First Time Gilgamesh Saw Hakuno's Reaction to Death

Chapter Summary

Another of Hakuno's dreams occurs before the battle with Passionlip. While Hakuno makes a fateful decision, Gilgamesh considers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh saw Hakuno’s reaction to death was more the first time he saw her do so in the flesh. After all, he had already born witness to memories which still remained elusive to her.

The little girl was dying. She and her Heroic Spirit doppelganger lay curled in on one another behind the firewall, clinging together as slowly they started to vanish.

“Huh…it’s over…” one of the children, the girl in white, Master Alice, said softly

“Why…” the Servant Alice whispered.

Hakuno ran forwards, banging her fists on the wall, but nothing happened. It didn’t even hurt. Tears were starting to blur her vision. No! This hadn't been what she wanted! There had to be a way...

This wasn’t right! Alice was a child, but the Moon Cell didn’t care. It hadn’t cared with Shinji, and it didn’t care now.

“Alice was alone for so long...no one noticed me, or tried to find me... I was alone...and I was sad, but then...Then the you came…” The Master hold her Servant’s hands

“Alice found Alice to belong to...and we were so happy...we even had a home, and that was all we needed...forever and ever... Why does it have to end? Why did they take our happiness away?” The Servant was crying as she asked that.

They didn’t even understand what this WAS! Hakuno banged on the door again, but it was useless.

“Shh...it’s ok,” Master Alice said, smiling a little as they held one another tighter. “Alice knew...that things were going to go bye-bye eventually. I don’t really remember, but I think I’m already dead. My body isn’t in that hospital anymore...” she smiled weakly, but a sob bubbled up. “Alice...is a little like a box with nothing inside it... There wasn’t anything there from the beginning...even in the hospital, there was no more ‘Alice’ inside of Alice... That’s why no one noticed me...and I was alone...It hurt so bad...”

Her eyes drifted towards Hakuno. She’d given up pounding on the firewall, but was just standing there, her hands resting against this, tears were falling, but she couldn’t...wouldn’t look away.

“Even when Alice came here...to Wonderland...Alice was so alone... That...that’s why I know that this Alice, and this home...have to go away... But...Lady... You cared about Alice, didn’t you?”

Hakuno tried not to sob when she nodded.
“Yes… I did. I… it was fun… playing together.”

It wasn’t. It had been torture, but now… she couldn’t look this little girl in the face and tell her that. It had been a game to her, not death match. Alice had just seen Haknuo as a new playmate in a bizarre little world that she’d fallen into. It wasn’t her fault, and Hakuno wouldn’t let her die thinking that no one had ever cared about her once.

Everyone deserved that, didn’t they?

“I’m glad I met you,” she whispered.

Alice the Master smiled, even though she was turning black. It was a happy smile, even though there were still tears falling down her face.

“Uh huh! You always paid attention to Alice, Lady! I knew it was cuz you liked me! But… you have to have someplace real to go home to, right? Somewhere… So… Thank you, Alice. Thank you for being my friend, and for always, always being with me in Wonderland… And… thank you, Lady, for seeing Alice, and playing with Alice… I think if we’d been able to play longer… we would have been friends too… I… really, really wanted to play a little more with you, but… bye bye!”

Before Hakuno could say anything, give some final word of something… With a final smile, even as she cried, Alice disintegrated like sugar in water, leaving only the Caster behind. The other Alice, the one in black looked towards Hakuno, her face solemn.

“I am a reflection,” she said, her voice young, but also old. “This time, I am Alice in the looking glass. Even if I am summoned in the next War, I will not be the ‘Alice’ that I am now. I am always someone’s fanciful creation. My true ‘self’ is a mystery, but… being Alice’s servant truly made me happy.”

Tears started to fall again, and she bowed her head.

“I don’t know why I’m even crying… Even if I cry… I’ll never be anything real. But… Thank you for being here until the end…”

And then she was gone, vanishing into the darkness that claimed all the losers of the Grail War.

Hakuno’s legs gave out from under her, as the firewall vanished. It was her fault. She’d killed Alice. Even though she had no dream, no reason to fight other than to continue. While Hakuno hadn’t wanted her death, or Shinji’s or Dan’s… she was always the cause of them, wasn’t she?

“With Alice’s defeat, I proclaim the winner of this round to be Hakuno Kishinami,” the voice of Kotomine, which sounded… amused… called out.

Something lumbered up beside her and a hand that was not a hand was on her head.

“No… sad…” a garbled, broke voice said. “Safe…”

Hakuno sighed and looked up to see-

Gilgamesh opened his eyes, frowning as he saw the sleeping form of his contractor huddled on her mat in her corner, hair splayed out around her. She still dreamt but without coming closure that was little way to tell if her dreams mirrored his own.

What a miserable memory.
So that was what had become of the ghost and illusion that he had seen bullying the abomination, and why they greeted Hakuno with the easy joy of a child seeing an adult they were friendly with. They had been thrown into the Labyrinth and continued their play.

He sat up, frowning a little. While dream sharing was hardly an unknown phenomena, the fact that he had only obtained visions of her time in the war was peculiar. Dreams tended to be important events from the lives of the contractor and contracted. If all of Hakuno’s significant events had occurred in such a short time…

The creature had mentioned that Hakuno’s memories were nothing but pain and sorrow…

Gilgamesh decided that it was none of his affair. He was here as an observer, regardless of the fact that Hakuno had a worth he had not grasped before. This was her fight, and remained as such.

That worth was why he was permitting her to sleep while he sensed the Knight of the Sun skulking about outside. He was too much of a coward to knock on the door and incur Gilgamesh’s displeasure, but also too proud to ask another to complete the task. It was rather amusing.

The lover’s farce had been amusing if only for the sheer incompetence of both parties. Hakuno clearly had no idea what actual lovers did and the waste of flesh, while clearly aware of what was supposed to happen was so unused to contact with another living soul that she ended up being more awkward. The sheer stupidity had tempted him to take his contractor up on that offer she had made, but he resisted it.

After the abomination had appeared, it had been up to them to spare the waste of flesh the fate of being reduced to compressed data. The only interesting element of that had been Hakuno refusing to take the abomination’s hand, heeding his warning that in this world, there were some things which, by the very fact of their existence, were irredeemably evil even though they themselves held no malice.

It was time to challenge that creature now.

A soft grumble came from the mat as Hakuno opened her eyes, staring at the ceiling for a time before looking at him. There was no pain on her face, so Gilgamesh could conclude that, like before, that memory had been his exclusively.

“I guess it’s time, isn’t it?” she said.

“It is,” Gilgamesh nodded. “Are you prepared to fight against an enemy that truly and honestly loves you?”

She had fought against enemies that bore her no personal ill will before, but this was unique. Maybe it was a reminder, or maybe just cautioning her after that dream. It was simple to fight an enemy who hated you. It was harder, but still bearable to fight against a friend who you knew you would reconcile with again, but this was unique, and Hakuno consistently showed herself, while far more determined and willing to fight than he had originally thought, to be soft-hearted.

She looked troubled at his words, but slapped her cheeks a little, as if forcing herself not to consider something.

“I guess I won’t know until we do it,” she sighed. “I’ll talk to the Student Council and then Kiara. I don’t think that they’ll have the memories ready but at least, I want to check.”

Gilgamesh didn’t acknowledge that statement. More and more he came to despise that depraved nun who set herself up as some messiah, but whose eyes hungrily followed his contractor though the
He was not involved, but her actions grew steadily more annoying. She and the false priest both. Hakuno had already purchased some item to help stay the abomination’s power, avoiding the priest’s questions and leaving quickly as he watched from behind.

Hakuno opened the door to see the Knight of the Sun, who had contented himself with loitering outside of her door, and smiled at her arrival. The smile faltered slightly as he noticed Gilgamesh sitting on his throne, watching the proceedings.

“Good morning, Miss Kishinami, Leo asked me to come to speak to you. It is wonderful that you two seem to be coming closer together!”

The knight smiled, and Hakuno had the good graces to look away, her usually pallid face starting to flush.

Any fool could have see that she had no interest in the puppy, but it appeared that those two were far less than fools.

“The Council wanted to tell you that Kiara has already gone ahead, and everything is prepared. We are still currently working through memories, so there’s nothing to report yet, though we might be done by the time that you have finished.”

“Any sign of Jinako?” Hakuno asked.

Why his contractor cared what happened to that waste of flesh was an enigma to Gilgamesh. If the woman was fool enough to go headlong into the Labyrinth in a fit because she had seen something unpleasant in her memories and was too stupid to summon the Hero of Charity to defend her, than she truly deserved her fate.

“Not yet. Julius is going to return to searching for her.”

Hakuno nodded.

“Ok, I’ll keep my eye out too, just in case. Thanks. I’ll get going.”

Hakuno headed down to the tree and into the Labyrinth where the nun was waiting, her body a perfectly poised piece of sensuality as she started up at the relief of the Abomination.

“My, my,” she said as Hakuno came, “It’s the first time I’ve had the chance to look at her properly. She’s rather…big isn’t she?”

An astute observation stated many times before.

A crackle of static announced one of the Council member’s input as the Ai weighed in uncomfortably.

“Er…Miss Kiara…could you…avoid staring like that?”

The woman laughed lightly.

“You must excuse me. It’s very rare to see these offshoots of people’s desires and emotions. And in this case of brand-new desires born from an AI. That is even more fascinating to me. Well, at any rate, everything has been explained to me. Are you prepared?”

Hakuno nodded.
“Very well, though I am certain you know what is necessary, clear your mind and prepare to dive into her heart…”

Gilgamesh materialized, watching the woman as she performed her mediation and finally they were in the sickly softness of the abomination’s heart.

It was a dull fall, with only the creature’s mewling that however much she hated fighting, and how mean everyone was to her (through the fault of her own unsightly personality) all she tended to do was crush and maim those around her.

“It appears, Mongrel, that we have her reasons for why she leaves a mountain of corpses in her wake,” Gilgamesh said to the falling Hakuno, who, even after this many times, still seemed disoriented that they were falling through someone’s heart. “She cannot comprehend that she is the cause of the misery that she sees around her. She remains alone, hated by all the world for the lethal weapon she was made to be, but in her own arrogance, she refuses to acknowledge her fault.”

The monologue continued and centered on the one thing that seemed to truly exist inside of the creature’s heart: his contractor.

“Everyone looks away and holds up their hands when they see me. Everyone laughs and says I’m bad. But, Miss Hakuno was different. She looked at me with warm eyes. She spoke to me with a soft voice. Kindly… With a gentle smile like the one I’ve dreamed about over and over again, she asked my name. I love her…I love her…I love her…I love her…I love her… I knew her before we met. I liked her before we met. After we met… I really, truly fell in love with her. My kind, gentle prince. This is how my love became the real thing. I was just dreaming, but my dream came true. Hakuno is my everything. Hakuno is my ideal. Hakuno is, my love…! Yes, I love her, I love her, I love her…! More than anyone else, so strongly, so strongly I’ll smash anything that get in our way into pieces, I love her…!”

It was honestly disgusting. This was not love in any sense of the word. It was a soft, fluffy thing that held no comprehension for Hakuno herself but only for what the abomination thought Hakuno was. Or what the creature wanted his contractor to be. Even the selfishness of love required some comprehension of reality, but this thing seemed to think that the emotion itself was enough. This was the basest form of affection, holding nothing but fantasy and malice for all who would break that ideal, the object of that affection included.

Still, he glanced towards his increasingly embarrassed contractor.

“My you have smitten her completely, lady-killer,” Gilgamesh smirked at Hakuno, watching with pleasure as one hand covered her face, even as they fell.

“I don’t know why,” she groaned. “She keeps misinterpreting everything as some bad cliché from a shoujo manga.”

The abomination’s attraction for aggression was truly impressive. He was looking forwards to watching Hakuno’s eventually tearing the thing apart.

“But she wouldn’t take my hand…”

The world turned red.

“She looked at me, like something scary, something bad, something she hated. You can’t… You have to be kind. You CAN’T! I can never forgive you. Never, never, never, never, even if I die, even if I kill you, even if you hate me, I’ll never let you go. My prince, only mine. I promise. I’ll
treasure you, forever… so, you can live and die forever, in this trash bin in my chest, okay…? No one will get in the way, anymore…I won’t let anyone else, have you, so…”

Madness and love blended together into a mantra that dripped of promise and malice.

“I love you…I love you…I love you…I love you…I love you…I love you…”

“She will do it, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said. “I will give you advice this one time: I told you before that this creature is evil by the very nature of her existence. There is nothing within her that can be saved. Do not show her mercy.”

This was no ghost of a child, assuming that the deaths she caused were little more than play. This was a beast with the face of a woman, who confused a desire for prey for love.

“I know,’ Hakuno said softly. “…Thanks…by the way…for your advice.”

Gilgamesh nodded, pleased, and they landed.

The thing was waiting for them. Its eyes, usually filled with some insipid imitation off affection were now distant and cold, those of the empty shell that she truly was.

“Why did you come here?” it asked. “If you’d have just stayed in the school…then I could have watched over you forever, and I would have stayed happy. But…but you kept coming here… I don’t understand. You were kind to me, you spoke to me and saved me, but...in the end you’re making your Servant attack me…”

Gilgamesh would have liked to note that Hakuno Kishinami was not making him do anything. He was here by his own will, and would rather that she stopped the obligatory pre-battle chatter so that they could end this and he would be spared having to look at her.

“Did you really hate me this much? Miss…Hakuno…what am I to you?”

Hakuno looked away, but turned back again, the fire back in her eyes.

“You’re my enemy, Passionlip. No matter what. That hasn’t changed.”

The abomination stiffened.

“Enemies? What is this…convenient excuse… If I could somehow…if only I could forget…but as an AI, I have no capacity to forget.”

Her claws lifted in some parody of an implication, placating her contractor, as if by begging that would make her love reciprocated.

“I love you…so please… Please tell me. What can I do to make you love me? What’s so bad about me? Why can’t you love me?”

“Tell her,” Gilgamesh said, “With your own words, tell her what is ‘so bad about her’ and end this ridiculous farce that claims to be love.”

Hakuno sighed, her face hard, but there was pain in her eyes.

“You hurt people, Passionlip. You crush everyone around you with those claws. You’ve killed other Servants for no reason and eaten them. That’s what’s wrong with you.”

Her voice remained steady, but the abomination just remained still, looking at her with a complete
lack of comprehension of the things she had done.

“How…how can you say those things!” The creature cried, holding out her claws. “My hands are normal! I’m a completely normal girl! It…it’s just that I’m an Alter Ego, isn’t it? That’s why you would say something so awful, even though I love you so much I can’t live without you!”

Clearly the fact that she ate Servants was something else that was ‘normal’ to the Ego. She was truly self-deluded to have told herself to that level that she was the normal one. That there was nothing wrong with her, and she was merely a put upon victim in her life.

Her claws were extended and rage, finally, burned in her eyes towards Hakuno as the illusion that she had made of the woman began to shatter and she started to see even a fraction of the girl’s reality. And those emotions become something slightly more than a doll’s.

Gilgamesh smiled.

Well, this was both unexpected…and surprisingly welcome.

“Ah, there it is, the rage that I had waited for. It is almost as if she had finally become something close to a human, is it not?” Gilgamesh said, to Hakuno, stepping in front of his contractor. “Love is not a beautiful thing. It is ugly, inconstant, and breeds pain in those who feel it. That is why those things born from love are a light that is irreplaceable, but for humans, who always hold traits which are completely hideous, love must mix with hate for that emotion to have any truth to it, otherwise what you have is a beautiful illusion, born from something beautiful but with nothing of value behind it. Very well, Alter Ego. I will acknowledge your love as real, so there is one final action you must take: this woman’s life is mine, and I will not give her over to you. This is your final lesson from the king before you can become something like a human: life is battle, either physically or emotionally. If you wish to obtain your heart’s desire, you must kill me to claim her for yourself, because in your madness that is all you are capable of.”

She would never win over his contractor's heart. And that gave him great satisfaction.

He considered his contractor, weeping over her enemy in her memories and even now unhappy to fight, but still standing firm and gazing ahead. While the Alter Ego’s love might be real, it was still a pale imitation, and Gilgamesh would not give what was his to such a thing.

She rushed at him, claws extended.

“I understand…” she whispered, and a glow started to form around her.

Her Nobel Phantasm!

“If you won’t let me love you…than would you become a mess for me please!” the Ego screamed as her claws detracted, and both rushed towards him aiming to crush him into nothing but junk data.

Gilgamesh braced himself for the assault, eyes narrowing. Under normal circumstances, he would have fended off this kind of feeble blow with no difficulty. But fallen as he was...

Hakuno started to glow form behind him as she performed a code cast.

“Dust Cloud of Osiris!” she screamed.

Gilgamesh prided himself on not needing support from any Master, and Hakuno, while displaying her value in other ways, was a subpar mage whose presence in a normal Grail War would have been a cruel joke, and in this one seemed to indicate that the Moon Cell lacked the numbers it needed.
However, he was surprised at the power of the golden cloud of dust that managed to settle around him just as the first of the creature’s claws made its way to him. It slipped, unable to find a grip as Gilgamesh jumped out of the way, blocking the other, but the dust stayed around him.

The Alter Ego coughed, waving one arm uselessly around to clear the spell as the claws returned to her.

“W-what is…” she whimpered.

Osiris was not a deity that Gilgamesh had ever known personally, but it still galled him somewhat to have to rely on something like that. However he nodded to Hakuno. It had been a quick move on her part.

And now that the Alter Ego was busy, Gilgamesh had the time to counter attack.

“Loose the winds!” Hakuno called, and Gilgamesh smirked, reaching out one hand to summon a single jagged sword from his Treasury and rushing on the girl.

At the moment, Hakuno lacked the power to sustain his more deadly items, and even if she did, he would not have allowed her to see them, but perhaps a taste…

Passionlip moved to dodge, clearly going to try to use her Noble Phantasm again, but Gilgamesh was already on top of her, slashing down.

She made a satisfying gasp, but he spun around as she attacked, catching the claw aimed for his head and shoving her backwards. Before Hakuno could call another attack, or make another code cast, he raised one hand, feeling power raising in him.

“Chain of Heaven!” he called.

The golden ripples appeared form underneath Passionlip and suddenly the familiar glint and clank of the chains suddenly shot forwards, rapping themselves around the Ego and holding her tightly. Passionlip screamed, tearing at it with her claws but to no avail as it dug more strongly into her. Those chains had been forged with something far stronger than metal, and had been made to bind one thing alone: the divine. Those chains would hold her fast until either the end of time or when he finished her.

A shape intake of breath from his contractor made him retract the Chain, but Hakuno did not seem to acknowledge the sudden drop of energy. She continued, casting another code, something to help strengthen him as he rushed forwards on the winded creature, summoning the drill sword for a final assault, and firing at her.

Passionlip fell back as blackness encroached on her.

“I…I can’t get up. My…my hands are so…so heavy…why can’t I stand up anymore?” she mumbled.

She lay, crouched and beaten, hanging her head in the universal gesture of submission and defeat.

Hakuno stepped beside him, breathing hard. It appeared the Chains of Heaven, without his full permission to her for their use, had taken too much from her, but before her face was set.

He would approve.

“Here is your place to shine, Mongrel. Will you sunder this creature or grant her sympathy? The
choice is yours.”

This was a place where Hakuno could go one of two ways, depending on if her soft heart or her love for her friends triumphed over the others. He would not give her guidance here. He had already told her to avoid showing this thing mercy.

“I…I have to expose her. Don’t I?” she muttered, and pain again flitted across her face. She looked at Passionlip, who looked back at her. “It’s not right. A heart that’s just been born should be protected, not exposed, but…”

There was no other way, the unspoken words said as she vanished into the relief of Passionlip.

Yet…even though he knew that her choice was the right one, he felt somewhat…regretful…he supposed. Not of his own actions, Gilgamesh had never regretted a single thing that he had done, but more than she had been forced to make this decision. Still, it was her fight and would remain so.

Gilgamesh would not intervene until the end.

“You’re so mean, Hakuno,” the Alter Ego sobbed in the darkness of her own heart, “Coming to this point! I thought that you’d be my prince. I’m just a normal girl. I want to be a normal girl. It’s not my fault that everyone picks on me. They’re just so mean! I’m normal, even if I’m clumsy and a bit stupid. I’m normal!”

It was dull to listen to an SG. First the exposure and now the punishment. This one had been slightly more vile than the others, with a great deal of moaning and justifying and bringing everything back to Passionlip's supposed affections for his contractor."

“Passionlip,” Hakuno’s voice was strangely gentle. “You’re not human. You try to push everyone on to everyone else. So that you’re normal and everyone else is strange and cruel, but you know better.”

A scream pierced the darkness around them.

“No! That’s not true! I’m normal! I don’t have claws. I’m not a monster! They’re all wrong. My hands aren’t strange!”

“That’s not the problem,” Gilgamesh heard the pain again. “It’s not that your hands are claws. It’s that they’ve hurt people. You crush things that don’t live up to what you want or that you don’t think that you need without mercy. That’s why I say you’re not human. Just because you have claws, or don’t have claws…that doesn’t matter.”

“I-I-“ the Ego was floundering, trying to keep the conversation on herself rather than the things she had done. “I know I’m clumsy…and shy…and not very smart, but I love you. I want to be by your side… so…I just want to make anyone who gets in the way disappear. That’s all. Is that so wrong?”

“Yes!” the cry echoed louder than the scream from before, pent up rage and sorrow that the girl was not even fully aware of laced it. “That’s not ‘all’! Those were people, Passionlip! People with lives and dreams and hopes and wishes all of their own! They wanted to live! They had people that they
loved!"

It appeared that the creature had finally said something that even his softhearted contractor could not forgive.

Only someone who understood the value of the life they had taken could truly understand victory. For Passionlip, other’s lives were inconvenient unless they were the one she loved, but she had no comprehension of what she took. It was a child at play, much as the two girls, but this while they had not comprehended that their actions lead to death, this creature did not understand that the deaths of others mattered.

“Please, it’s so loud…”

“Of course it’s loud!” Hakuno cried. “People need other people. It’s what makes us human. We seek out others, we crave bonds, friendship, love, enemies, acquaintances. You would force me to be completely alone!? You call that love?!”

“I-I-“

It was over, because Hakuno was correct. There was no human living who at some level did not reach out for the companionship of others.

To be truly alone…with no companion or hope of one…that was a hellish thing.

“I was lying!” the creature said quickly. “That was a lie! Please- I’ll stop. I’ll stop if you tell me to! Please… You… You like me, right! That’s why you were nice to me, right? So…it’s ok if I make you mine! So we can stay together forever…”

Again desperate for and only truly caring about compliments, but…it brought another voice to him. A smaller, more plaintive voice that had smiled at his contractor through tears.

“But…Lady… You cared about Alice, didn’t you?”

“Uh huh! You always paid attention to Alice, Lady! I knew it was cuz you liked me!”

“I helped you because you didn’t deserve to be tormented,” Hakuno said, a deadness to her voice. “I might have liked you, but I will never love you. If you keep believe like you do…you’ll be alone until you die.”

The pained cry was growing tiresome, but at least it was fainter.

“I don’t understand…” the monster sobbed. “I don’t understand why you want to leave. If you don’t you’ll be safe and we’ll be together. As long as you thought I was cute, I’d be happy. You wouldn’t need anyone…I that’s why I thought…but…I don’t understand… do you…hate me?”

The pause lasted for far too long. Hakuno was hesitating, even in her rage. He did not need to even see her to know. Even in her rage, even in her hate, she was faltering. The flame that burned so bright in defiance against her own death seemed to offer her no strength to do what was necessary to an enemy when the chance to be merciful appeared.

He should be angry.

Very angry.

She was ignoring his advice, wasting his time, and giving him little to look at but base sentimentality
and naivety. This was something that should never be spared for what she could and would eventually become.

Yet…

“No, Passionlip, I don’t hate you.” Hakuno’s voice at last sounded. “I don’t like you. There’s a difference. There is more to this world than love and hate! …I have to leave. I can’t just be here and exist. No one could. Not for long. I know that you think that this is love, and…I guess I’m not that she what love is like either, but…I know what it’s not. You don’t love me, Passionlip. I was kind to you, and you don’t know what to do with that. That’s it. This is not love and never will be.”

The relief broke, leaving Hakuno and Passionlip standing on the floor again. The darkness was growing around Passionlip, her heart and soul on the verge of utter collapse. It would take one word, on final sentence form the woman that the Ego ‘loved’ to end this altogether. But Hakuno hesitated.

“I…don’t understand this thing called love… You don’t hate me, but you don't love me?” Passionlip said. “I…love and hate this pain, but… I know… I don’t want to disappear. I don’t want to be alone in the end… I think… I think I understand that… Please…”

Hakuno stepped forwards, eyes hard, but her hands shaking, but before she could act, the Ego spoke again, a small smile showing on her face, for a moment, it lacked that vapid, monstrous look, so that something like clarity showed.

“Even now…when you call me your enemy, you don’t want to hurt me…I can see that… You’re a kind person, Senpai. I…think I understand that…you can be kind to someone without loving them. I…I only thought that you were kind to the people you loved, but that’s not true… That’s why humans are different…and contradictory…” a painful smile appeared on her face. “…how could you love me when I hurt people around me and didn’t care…? How could I love someone, and not care about what they thought? That's...that's important, isn't it?” Passionlip said, her eyes down. “I…I’m sorry. I’m sorry I made you say those terrible things. I’m sorry I pushed you to this point. I'm sorry I wanted you to be all alone. I… There are things I still don’t understand, but I understand this much. Maybe i don't love you, but I...’like' you. …Please live, Miss Hakuno. Even if…”

But whatever kindness his contractor might have shown was never permitted to reach fruition.

The surface where they stood began to shake, and a brilliant white light shown from around it, Passionlip’s form seized and began to drift upwards as the entire landscape began to break apart into so many fragments of darkness. The darkness that had been feeding off of her began to consume her at last.

“Oh…I see. I guess…I’ve done too many bad things…” she turned her blackening head, eyes fixing on Hakuno and himself. “Sen…”

Something wet started to trail down her face.

So, she had become human enough to shed tears.

Gilgamesh grabbed a hold of Hakuno’s arm, raising another hand and forcing the place in front of them to be cleaved in two as they reappeared in the normal datascape of the Labyrinth.

It was silent, blissfully so, with no sign of the depraved nun, or some other threat from BB to worry about.

However, that begged a question: what had happened to kill Passionlip? Hakuno had not dealt the final blow, and it had been clear that she would have allowed the thing to live. Yet…While he
certainly was not unhappy with the results, something seemed out of place, even as he glanced around, sensing rather than watching.

And something felt...off. As if his vision was being obscured.

"I guess she couldn't take what I did," There were no tears in her vision, but there was a weariness that endured, even as her will to live and fight drove her on. "I know she was evil, and... she hurt so many people, but...I didn't want to kill her in the end... I wanted her to see but... I would've... I would have killed her, and I know it unless there was another way... Because I can't stop. I have to go on. What kind of a person am I?"

Hakuno had not truly wished for her death regardless of her rage, yet if she felt she had to, she would have brought down the sword and finished her, weeping afterwards. It was incredibly stupid. Yet, he sighed, closing his eyes.

Perhaps she was right, and this was merely the unstable heart of a new born monster falling apart. It was a logical thing. The Alter Ego had just been born, it made sense that it could not accept the intrusion and unraveling of the heart.

He frowned out at the maze.

She wanted to see if the creature would become human, and she was still reacting to memories that she did not even know she had, still seared on her own heart.

“I told you to act as you deemed necessary. That is what you did, regardless of the consequences. Perhaps that creature would have decided not to trouble you anymore. More likely, she would have haunted your steps and forced your hand. You were spared the choice and the responsibility to slay her completely by chance. Do not think on it any longer."

Some part of him...was pleased that she had not needed to shed more blood, but he ignored that thought.

"However, my acceptance of your pity for such a lost evil as her does not offer you the chance to show BB the same," Gilgamesh said.

He frowned at Hakuno, watching as a small smile appeared on her face. It did not completely reach her eyes, and he did not expect it to.

"BB is completely different."

Gilgamesh nodded.

"Now. Before you return. I will give you a prize for your defeat of the Alter Ego. Try descending into the next layer. As far as I can see, there is nothing below us. If you wish to investigate, this is the time."

Shaking her melancholy off, Haknuo nodded.

“Alright,” she said.

She stepped forwards, leading her way down her path. However, Gilgamesh paused.

Something had caused the death of that creature, something that his eyes couldn’t perceive. Perhaps he was wrong, and this was merely the result of her own weakness of heart...
This was not his affair. Not really. This was Hakuno’s battle, to stumble through, have her regrets and survive until the end. It was for her to realize that something was amiss and to do something about it, if there was anything at all.

However, what he had told that Alter Ego was true.

Hakuno Kishiniami had given her life over to him, and she was a woman of unknown value. He had determined not to throw her away, and he would not permit an unknown to take her any more than an Alter Ego. Her death would be something she accepted and decided on and he permitted.

However, as he looked over the Labyrinth, ignoring the call from the ghost who had found them in his hunt for the waste of flesh, he almost, almost sensed a warning of a threat to come.

Chapter End Notes

I'm never doing another SG from Gil's POV. It felt a little bit too much like he was just a bystander. At the same time, I sort of wanted to write out a few things he was thinking so yeah.

Hopefully, you enjoyed this this chapter!

Next Chapter:

"You look like some kind of...Emperor of the Night..."
The First Time Hakuno Gave Gilgamesh Something

Chapter Summary

While Hakuno struggles with what has returned in her memories and what hasn't, she decides to get Gilgamesh a Mystic Code that Kotomine is selling.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno gave Gilgamesh something was after she regained her memories. Well, sort of. It was less regaining and more getting some clearer vague pictures. She remembered who she’d fought against, but nothing much about the battles.

Of all of them, Leo was the most calm. His eyes had widened at the memories, but other than remarking that he was glad that he didn’t remember things before they started working together, he didn’t seem upset that he was fighting with his enemies.

Rin and Rani weren’t much better, they’d just been confused, looking at one another and comparing notes about the third round.

Where neither of them had won apparently.

Gatou, being Gatou had burst out laughing about..something, but wasn’t going to tell anyone what he was thinking was so funny. Before running out of the room before BB decided to hack in, do her channel, introduce Jinako as the new sentinel and then threaten her a little before moving on.

Shinji…hadn’t reacted well. He’d collapsed, sobbing as the memories of everything came back, and shoved her away when she’d tried to help. For a moment, their eyes met. And she knew just what was wrong.

The others didn’t need to know.

This wasn’t important to escaping.

The other…Julius…well…they’d mostly just looked at one another uncomfortably. He’d been her enemy. Hakuno realized. Not just her opponent, but he’d been her antagonist from the start for some reason.

It was a lot to chew on.

Worse was that there were still so many gaps. She’s obviously had a Servant on the Near Side, and it sure hadn’t been Gilgamesh, but whenever she tried to think about whoever they had been, she just started feeling dizzy and confused. There was nothing, no memory of a sword or a bow or magic or anything.

And she still had no idea why she’d entered the Grail War, or who she’d been before it.

Maybe that was why she’d ended up going to Kotomine’s shop. Gilgamesh’s presence wasn’t there at the moment, and she assumed that he’d decided to head back to his throne to consider something,
or more likely drink and contemplate how to better insult BB.

Since she’d been saving her money, she actually had enough to buy the school uniform that Kotomine was selling. She wasn’t sure why, but at least she could get a uniform for Sakura. She still had the official one from the Near Side, and honestly, she seemed a little upset over not being included.

“Ah, hello, Miss Kishinami,” he said, giving her that weird smile he always had. “We have some very interesting new items for sale.”

“Really?” Hakuno asked, but tried to keep her voice calm.

She’d learned from experience that if she sounded like she wanted something, he’d just overcharge her and enjoy it.

“Yes. It’s a Mystic Code for your servant. I troubled Sakura to allow us to use some strictly regulated Mystic Codes. While you never saw, my efforts were worthy of an action movie.”

She doubted that. Sakura probably was more than happy to agree.

“The price, of course, reflects that labor and the medical treatment needed to dive into the deeper parts of the Labyrinth. Good products must always come with a…necessary expense.”

She took one look at the code. 250000 in Sakura money.

“You know, I’ll wait on that. I was going to pick up a uniform actually.”

“Ah, I see. Well I shall enjoy the disappointment of your Servant,” Kotomine said smoothly.

As if Gilgamesh cared.

Still the weird smirk on his face had her move a little quicker as she headed to the infirmary with the gift for Sakura.

When she opened the door to the little room to see Julius sitting with Sakura, holding a small cup of tea in both hands, head bowed. Hakuno hesitated. Should she come in? While they’d honestly been getting along here…they’d been enemies in the War and…and she still couldn’t remember who won their match. Maybe things had happened before they’d even fought? But…neither of them had their original Servants so…

Julius looked up as Hakuno stepped in.

“Oh, Kishinami. I…thought that you’d be with your Servant,” Julius said, not quite meeting her eyes. “I should probably…”

“It’s fine,” Hakuno said. “I mean…we’re not enemies on this side of the Moon, right?”

She smiled a little, hoping that that put him a little more at ease. She’d sort of enjoyed the few chats that they’d had, even if it had mostly been a moment or two before they both were assigned something.

Julius smiled a little, but his eyes remained a little sad.

“That’s true,” he said. “We’re not enemies anymore.”

“I’m so glad,” Sakura said, stepping out from behind the screen where she’d been making more tea.
“I was a little worried that some tension would erupt after you got your memories…particularly after Jinako…”

Hakuno looked away.

“We should have gone deeper after her,” she said. “I don’t know what she saw, but it rather scared her.”

“It’s my fault,” Julius said softly.

“You did you best,” Hakuno said. “And honestly, I can remember now that you’re pretty good at what you do.”

Julius smiled a little at her.

“I’ll be honest, I’m a little surprised, Kishinami. We were enemies before this.”

Hakuno shrugged.

“Maybe I’m just getting used to having my life threatened. I guess it always seemed to me like you were protecting something that really meant a lot to you. Like you are now. I can’t resent that, not completely. And…maybe I’m hoping that, even if we have to resume our battle, at least it’ll be on better terms.”

But...she didn’t want to resume things.

And from the way that Julius was looking down at his tea, she was pretty sure that he didn’t either. Not that they had a choice. That was the Grail War. Something that she’d willingly signed up for, but had no idea why.

“Er...Miss Kishinami, would you like some tea?” Sakura asked.

“Oh, right. Yes. Thanks,” Hakuno smiled. “Actually, I’m here for another reason. Father Kotomine was selling school uniforms, and since you’ve still got the default one from the near side, I thought that you might like this one. You know...since even if you’re not a player in this, you’re still part of the team.”

She handed over the mystic code, but for a moment, Sakura just stood there, blinking a few times, but slowly look it.

“...Thank you,” she whispered, looking at it in surprise. “This really means a lot to me. I...I know that I’m not really a student here, but...this is really nice. I’m going to go change!”

She rushed back towards the screen, sending a quick smile towards Hakuno.

“You used to drink tea with her a lot, you know that?” Julius said, looking at and smiling a little. “I remember.”

“Really? There’s a lot that still hasn’t really come back,” Hakuno sighed. “I guess it was such a habit I came back to it.”

Julius nodded, setting down his empty cup.

“Unfortunately, I’m going to have to return to my own missions,” Julius said, standing up.

He made a move like he was going to head out the door, but paused, looking back towards Hakuno.
“It was nice to have some times we could share were we were out of the Grail War,” he said, a ghost of a smile on his face.

Without another word, and before Hakuno could say anything else, he was gone.

Sakura stepped out a moment later in an identical uniform under the labcoat.

“Does this look right?” she asked.

“Fine,” Hakuno said. “Way better than the default one. It looks like you’re the school nurse or something, if we actually were in a school.”

Sakura beamed at her.

“Thank you, Miss Kishinami. I love it!” she said. “It’s nice to be able to change clothes a little. I have to admit that I was feeling a little left out with the old uniform… It’s probably the hardest thing about being an AI or even a Heroic Spirit. Even when we want to change, we can’t unless someone gives us a Mystic Code.”

Hakuno nodded, but paused. That was right, Heroic Spirits couldn’t change like that.

Kotomine had made it sound like it was a big deal, but it just didn’t sound like it would be for her Servant, who claimed to already own everything.

Still…

She vaguely remembered how put out Gilgamesh had seemed when the treasure that they’d found had ended up being nothing more than her old uniform. He’d grumbled something about the ‘long awaited change of clothing’ that night. At the time, she’d thought he was more annoyed by the fact that he’d been denied a treasure (the man would demand that they go back and search each floor at least once for any extra treasure chest) than anything else. He’d been scowling all the way back through that dungeon, even when they’d gone back. Had he really been upset because he hadn’t been given something to alter his code?

There had been a new one that Kotomine had mentioned…

She knew that he wouldn’t appreciate it, but…well…at least it would make him stop clanking every time he moved.

“Yeah…I guess we don’t tend to think about it since most people can alter those. Anyways, I think there’s one other thing I need to get from Father Kotomine.”

“Oh, ok,” Sakura said. “Good luck with Miss Jinako’s floors. I know that you’ll do a good job but… Miss Jinako… I think even if she doesn’t realize it, she needs help more than Rin or Rani ever did, even if it’s just knowing that someone cares enough about her to call out to them when she’s hurt. That…that means a lot to some people…”

Hakuno smiled a little.

“Thanks, I just hope that I can help her, even if she doesn’t realize that she needs it.”

Opening the door, Hakuno stepped out, closing her eyes for a moment and steeling herself before going to see the priest.

Father Kotomine… always sort of gave Hakuno a bad feeling, but he was the only shopkeeper, and
he did get some pretty good stuff. Even if he was overpriced and clearly enjoyed any moment where she felt uncomfortable.

“Ah, have you changed your mind about that new item?” he asked as she walked over, smiling slightly even though his eyes stayed cold and dead.

“Yeah…”

“Excellent,” he said, smiling as he took her hard earned money the loss of which wasn’t going to be appreciated, and gave another one of those dead smiles. “Your items have been sent up to your room. You and your Servant may use them as you like…”

Ok…that actually sounded like good service. Maybe he wasn’t as awful…

“However, there will be cases when the delivery will be late. I invite you to cry and bear with it,” he said chuckling.

“You must get a lot of complaints…when you’re backed up or…”

“No, I simply do not deliver on time. This shop does not listen to complaints.”

Right, he was the worst.

“Er…thanks for actually delivering it then…” she muttered, taking a step back and heading up the stairs. She was already regretting this.

Hakuno also wasn’t going to mention just how much that horror had cost to Gilgamesh. She’d just be called Hassan again (he was the least fortunate of Servants because he Hasn’t. King of Terrible Puns.) That man had no concept of money.

She paused stopping outside the door, and let out a sigh. Well, she supposed she might as well explain what that was to Gilgamesh. She seriously doubted that he’d care, but, she reminded herself, quieter armor.

So, taking another sigh, Hakuno pushed open the door.

To be greeted by the sight of Gilgamesh, lounging on his throne, already in the new outfit.

If Hakuno had known what it looked like, she wouldn’t have bought it. Gilgamesh was wearing a leopard printed dress jacket with a black trim and a black silk shirt beneath it. She could see the glitter of a gold necklace under that as well. While the black dress pants and shoes looked…at least sane, she kept looking at the jacket.

Gilgamesh was going to murder her in this, wasn’t he?

But…rather than the dark look that she’d been expecting, Gilgamesh was smiling at her, looking very pleased with himself, as he crossed his arms and legs, showing off the outfit even more without having to get out of his chair.

“It appears that whoever designed these had good taste,” Gilgamesh said. “Do you not agree, Hakuno?”

He really seemed to like them.

And she wasn’t going to put him out of his good mood. Not when they were going to have to go down into Jinako’s dungeon the next day. Taking a breath, and trying to come up with something
that wasn’t a lie, she nodded a little, though weakly.

Could he detect it when you liked with your body?

“Gilgamesh…it…it’s really… You…look like an…Emperor of the Night…”

That was the only thing that could come out.

Gilgamesh sent her a scowl.

“An emperor? Do not associate me with those lowlifes. I am the king. The first story, and humanity’s first and most absolute. All others, like all other Noble Phantasm, are little more than pale reflections of the original.”

Great.

He was going to take offense to that now.

“However…”

Gilgamesh’s eyes were closed, and a faint smile was appearing on his face.

“It does ring with a sort of…decadence. It pleases me!” he laughed and smirked down at her. “Than, as is fitting for such a name, it will be necessary for us to find some way to display it. Perhaps beginning in the Venetian Macao, allowing all doors to open for us. And then continuing the evening, we will enjoy Roppongi and Ginza.”

He leaned back thoughtfully, clearly plotting out their route through various places that sounded… nostalgic.

Had he just…forgotten that they were both trapped on the Far Side and that even if they weren’t, he wasn’t going to be able to manifest in the real world to begin with. And what era was this Pleasure King supposed to be from again?! Because Hakuno was pretty sure that they didn’t have this kind of thing in Uruk.

“Of course, prior to any return, we will enter at least one auction. I wish to see what treasures this time period has to acquire. Despite that wonder of ugliness you are constrained to wear, in my presence there is no location that will not be open to you,” Gilgamesh continued, smiling to himself as he continued his bizarre little plans.

The absolute confidence that he said that while wearing that outfit was honestly…almost admirable. As well as the fact that he seemed aware of almost every luxury even at a time he’d never lived in. He hadn’t been joking when he’d said that he’d knew every pleasure, had he?

It almost made her wish that they could and ignore his jab at the uniform.

If he didn’t stop, she’d actually end up praising him!

“Ah, but there is little here on the Far Side worth showing these off too. Only the Labyrinth to watch those goddesses burn with enemy for my form. So, what is it that you are requesting of me? I will hear it.”

What?

Wait…
Was he just assuming that she’d bought him something to get something out of him?

Of course he was.

“I wasn’t really planning on asking for anything. It’s just…you were…” disappointed “…annoyed when there wasn’t a Mystic Code for you in that floor with Lip and Archer, so I thought that maybe you’d like it.”

Gilgamesh stared at her, his eyes in that speculative, gaging look that he sometimes got.

“If you don’t like it, I can probably give it back to Kotomine,” Hakuno said, looking away.

“Fool! I said that I was pleased. Just because you lacked the foresight to consider a request with your gift does not permit you to rescind your gift.”

“I didn’t say that,” Hakuno said. “I just wasn’t sure you wanted it with no strings attached…”

That speculative look was back, almost as if he wasn’t sure what to do with a gift offered to him with no strings attached.

Maybe she could just change the subject.

“I sort of wish we could go to those places,” she said after a few minutes of him staring at her. “Or at least remember something about those areas.”

“Ah, so that hasn’t returned?” Gil said, a beat…quicker than normal.

“It’s weird…I’m…remembering more of the Grail War, but…Nothing about anything before that. I sort of knew that, but…I can’t remember anything of what kind of person I was. For all I know I was some horrifically terrible person and just forgot about it.”

Gilgamesh snorted.

“You are fretting over pointless things. Whether a you were good or evil person, that will not change the fact that you are a mongrel. As you have no memory, for you, your ‘self’ is a life that was thrown into darkness. For me, it is a life that I happened to pick up. Even should your memory return, that fact is unalterable. Besides, you are far too young to have committed any atrocities. If you wish to speak of such things, first set out to do good.”

That was…was he trying to…comfort her?

“I was a little more worried about being like Shinji or something,” she smiled a little.

Gilgamesh stifled, and his eyes narrowed as if that was personally offensive.

“Do not speak such foolishness, Mongrel. If you insist on such fruitless worries, you are free to allow them to crush you and cut off your contract. That, however, will be the end of my entertainment, and I may yet reap that foolish head of yours without reserve for failing for such a reason.”

And it was straight back to threats. But…this wasn’t the same. The killing intent wasn’t there, and there was more…something else. Still, it was another reminder that he might kill her, and that in reality, he was an uncontrollable Servant who had never been on her side, and a few moments, and a Mystic Code weren’t going to change that.

She didn’t really know what she’d expected.
“I guess you’re right,” she muttered. “I need to keep focused, and you don’t care. Even if I’m worried or upset, it doesn’t matter.”

Gilgamesh frowned, his eyes still in that speculative look. She expected him to just snap at her again, but then-

“No, that is not the case. I have recognized the value of your complaints and worries, and I have heard them. What I will not permit is the strain of disrespect towards me for assuming that I would hold a contract with such pettiness. Your memories of the Holy Grail War are returning, but your greater memories remain lost to you. Most would be destroyed by such a lack of self. However, you have decided to have me to rely on. If you were afraid, you could submit yourself to BB, yet you persist and rely on me. Consider why.”

He watched her, and Hakuno was almost reminded of the conversation when she’d refused to give up his contract. Only, this time, he didn’t have that same intent, it was more that he was trying to remind her of what she’d said.

“Because that would be absurdly terrifying,” Hakuno muttered, but shook her head. “But that’s not the whole reason. I’m scared of this after all. I know that living usually means being afraid and worried about something, so…even if I’m scared, I really can’t do much other than keep pressing forward, can I?”

“I see your optimism rising over even your avarice towards me. It appears my judgement was off again… That is fine.” He closed his eyes and smiling a little. “You are a rare pleasure for me. It is been a long time since I have received such entertainment from actions like your well-intentioned blunders such as presenting a king a gift and desiring nothing in return.”

Hakuno was fairly sure that that was supposed to be a compliment. At least she was right that she’d become a tire entertainment. He also was really harping on the fact that she hadn’t wanted anything. He was probably baiting her to ask him for something so he could deny it, nothing else really made sense. He was a king, when he was alive right? As if everyone hadn’t always given him things when they wanted something as a tribute or…

Oh. Hakuno blinked at Gilgamesh, who was still admiring his new clothes and she got the feeling he’d object if she asked if he wanted to just wear his armor. This honestly couldn’t be the first time that someone had just got him something could it? He’d had parents, but…did people in Uruk celebrate birthdays?

While she was pretty sure that the main reason he had liked them was that they were new and…well made him look like an Emperor of the Night, it was…almost sad to think about.

Gilgamesh, thankfully, didn’t know anything about her thoughts.

“Regardless. One with a will like yours would not be satisfied with pettiness, and I would have never contracted with it. As I have stated, you are far too young to have committed great atrocities. Cease your pointless fears and focus on your path.”

That was bizarrely comforting.

Hakuno leaned against the wall, closing her eyes. When she opened them, she noticed that Gilgamesh had done the same, leaning back in this throne, relaxing and clearly asleep now that the conversation was over.

While he looked a lot more comfortable, he was frowning in his sleep, or maybe his pretend sleep.
His breathing hadn’t changed much.

Hakuno sighed, lying down.

She wasn’t sure she felt…better…for everything, but…it was weirdly nice to know that at the very least, her Servant thought that if she was going to be evil, she’d be evil enough so that she couldn’t have actually done much yet. She was still a little lost, and still had no idea what she’d entered the war for or what she’d wanted, but she supposed that she had to accept Gilgamesh’s words.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, I have to say thank you so much for all the comments, kudos, bookmarks and everything else. It's honestly shocking that this story is getting the love that it is!

So as an end note. I ended up changing things around and combining two scenes since the Emperor of the Night was too small, and honestly, I wanted to discuss more memory things.

Next Chapter: "Tell me, Hakuno, in what man's arms would you rather be?"
The First Time Gilgamesh Asked Hakuno a Personal Question

Chapter Summary

During Jinako’s Labyrinth, Hakuno is separated from Gilgamesh. Later, Gilgamesh asks Hakuno a question she never thought her Servant would ask.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh worried about Hakuno was during the sack of flesh’s Labyrinth on her second floor. While the first floor that she had displayed had been little more than a nuisance of contradictory signs they were very easily ignored and worthless treasures best forgotten, he had sensed that there would be more to come soon.

Still, even such a futile outing had been moderately more entertaining just by virtue of the expression in the Hero of Charity and his subpar Master’s eyes at his new appearance.

While his armor was a work of art in and of itself, Gilgamesh was pleased with this ‘Emperor of the Night’ garb that Hakuno had gifted him, though some part of him was still…troubled…at the confusion on her face when he asked what her request of him was. Her amnesia did cause some awkward situations, though Gilgamesh supposed that he would be generous.

When she gained enough of her memory to know how one gave gifts to a King, he would hear her request.

However, the issue of her memory was one that, even given his status as an observer, was becoming an object of curiosity. While her knowledge of the War was returning, she seemed to still be unable to recall anything prior to that. While he was pleased that his assessment of her had been correct and she had not changed with the new knowledge, her persistent lack of memories was…an oddity that he did not like.

Still, it was not for him to consider. That was for Hakuno to overcome and understand, and for him to watch.

After a dull discussion with the Student Council they returned to the Labyrinth, which had taken on a new appearance.

Normally, the different layers of the Labyrinth contained some element of their master. Be it Rani and her doors that refused to open with discarding some garment or other or Passionlip’s fog that attempted to entice as well as slow.

This floor was much like that, but more visual.

“Floor” was the correct term. It was nothing more than an endless expanse with no clear origin and no clear ending, stretching forward in all directions with nothing to give any indication of the correct route.

“What…is this?” Hakuno whispered, looking around, she seemed more nervous about this than the other floors, so Gilgamesh answered her.
“An astounding emptiness,” Gilgamesh said, furrowing his brows. “Essentially, it should be seen as a deep, gaping hole in the heart.”

He closed his eyes, allowing himself to sense the area.

“The best way to express it would be pain but without trouble and indecision without goals. Yes… that is what this place embodies.”

An empty life with no future, no desires, and not even fear. This was a Labyrinth that represented two things: stagnation and despair.

It was a truly wretched sight when humans fell to this point. While he certainly forgave his contractor for being forced to bear witness to such a thing, he did not forgive the sack of flesh who, in her unparalleled incompetence, had created such a thing.

“Let us go, Mongrel. Given your persistence, you will reach the other side soon enough.”

Hakuno was looking ahead, frowning somewhat, but she nodded once.

“It’s…not like there’s anywhere to go but forward is there?” she asked.

Gilgamesh made a noise of ascent but was pleased. This woman, average in many respects that she might be, would never contain a floor to her heart like this.

She stepped forwards, breaking into a run as they crossed the unchanging landscape. It was dull, though that was the purpose. There were no monsters, no treasures, nothing but the endless despair of a woman who had given up utterly on life that it was a true wonder that she still breathed at all. If that was not just another level of despair.

Even his contractor’s endurance was beginning to wain as she slowed in her run. Gilgamesh prepared to rebuke her, but he realized why she was slowing in a moment. There was a figure standing in the center of the room. The Hero of Charity stood, looking into the distance with a vacant expression on his face, looking head for something that would not come.

Hakuno and he stopped, facing the Heroic Spirit, who, for all clear purposes was standing idle with no clear goal in mind.

Gilgamesh narrowed his eyes.

“…This man is quite accomplished at making me lose my interest in fighting him. I cannot work up any desire to cut down a person with such a worn out, vacant look on their face. Speak to him, Mongrel.”

Hakuno sighed but nodded.

“Um…thanks…for all you’re trying to do here…” Hakuno said, smiling a little.

Gilgamesh glanced at her. Had she actually attempted to thank her opponent for obstructing them? While it was truly not his affair, the girl sometimes showed her kindheartedness in…a strange fashion.

However, it appeared that that was the correct way to communicate with the Hero of Charity, as he smiled faintly.

“I must admit, I am obliged to both of you myself for your persistence in trying to bring Jinako
back,” he said, “I wish I could offer you a warm reception with tea and cake, but I cannot. However, you’re welcome to go through Jinako’s room. She still has fried potato snakes, twig shaped wheat snacks, and bean paste mushroom and bamboo shorts are scattered around there, but…she’s not really in the state to consume those things.”

“She’s not eating?” the worry in his contractor’s voice was as obvious as it was misguided.

“No…this isn’t a calming place. I think she’s in a corner curled up. You can go look for her, she never gave me an order to stop you. Just to leave her be.”

And it was clear that the Hero of Charity was hoping that somehow, Hakuno would be able to be the savior of this woman. However, that was impossible. Hakuno’s gift was one that this woman’s vision was too clouded to comprehend value in anymore. One who had given up and desired nothing could never comprehend someone who persisted, even when all odds were against her.

“Ok,” his contractor said, nodding. “Thanks, Karna, I’ll do what I can.”

And she took off with renewed vigor.

“Mongrel,” Gilgamesh called. “When we return, you are not permitted to take any of those snacks in that woman’s room. They reek of idleness and decay. Just as she does.”

“Don’t worry…” Hakuno huffed. “I like sweet things anyways.”

Gilgamesh did not care what her preferences were. What he cared about was that she did not engage in the utter foolishness of this women, who seemed to do nothing but sit and acquire flab on her body and soul in her despondency.

It was not difficult to find the sack of flesh. She had found some little corner to curl into and was likely to stay there unless actively forced by some foolish person like his contractor. Looking at her infuriated Gilgamesh, but for different reasons. While the greater part of him merely wished to give her something to be despondent about a smaller part was simply incensed that she would adopt that pose when there were far too many people attempting to give her aid.

“Hakuno…” the sake of flesh mumbled. “You can leave me alone. There’s no co-opt mode in neglect kink. Only versus.”

Hakuno took a step forward, clear worry on her face.

“Oh?” Gilgamesh spat out, watching her. “So, the sack of rotten meat really plans to do this. Hakuno, that posture is humanity’s oldest cry for help. Those who take it acquire an almost magic art that calls out even to complete strangers to move their hearts for pity. I myself could not care less.”

He wanted to see the thing flinch, or for some expression to display itself on her face, but nothing did. It remained dead.

Hakuno gave him a frustrated look.

“You’re not helping,” she said.

“I have no intention of doing so,” Gilgamesh said, staring down at the woman. “That is your goal. I am merely here to see the state of such a pathetic thing.”

“You’re so nosy,” the woman said in a monotone voice. “Just when I got away from that nagging mother in law too. Fine… I guess that’s what it is.”
She looked up, finally something showed on her face: spite.

“You’re the big winner in Servants, aren’t you, Hakuno?”

Hakuno’s face turned into that amusing dead look that she acquired when someone made a statement so nonsensical that she lacked a response. While it was true that Hakuno’s luck had led her to the strongest of all Servants, her luck had also run out at that point, and he was aware of that. He would not return her command seals and yield her any control over him.

Yet, somehow…the woman’s stupidity regarding his contractor’s status…angered him. ‘Winner’ as if any of her accomplishments had been through some game that she had ‘lucked out on’.

“You know I originally thought we had something in common. We were matched with terrible Servants, even if they were powerful. but watching you two…” the woman glared at both of them

“People who are happy with their Servants should just explode!”

And with that, she vanished, retreating to some new corner of the Labyrinth where she could lick her wounds and pity herself.

Gilgamesh snorted. How cute. She was jealous of her betters.

“I…didn’t even get the change to say anything,” Hakuno grumbled. “and… I think she was complaining because we work together?”

Her voice made it sound like a question.

“She complains because she is required to exert effort even with Servants,” Gilgamesh said. “She likely came into the War expecting little more than a game, rather than comprehending that she was forced to interact with another living soul.”

There was a crackle of static as the Council decided to weigh in.

“…I’m starting to see what’s up with this floor,” Rin said. “It’s an endurance test.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not sure what you mean,” the puppy said.

“What she means is that this is a test to see whose endurance lasts longer, Hakuno’s refusal to quit or Jinako’s refusal to have company.”

“Oh…that sounds…dreadful,” for once Gilgamesh could not help but agree.

Rin Tohsaka let out a frustrated noise.

“Hakuno, Gilgamesh, sorry for this, but you’re going to have to play this game with Jinako.”

“This method is insufferably boring,” Gilgamesh said, crossing his arms. “However, it will be effective. Show your fellow mongrel your endurance, Hakuno.”

“This is going to take a while,” Hakuno said. “But I guess she can’t run forever, but…I’m not really sure this is enough…”

Ah, so she was starting to sense it.

“That is no matter,” Gilgamesh said. “You are not in this Labyrinth to save that sack of flesh. You are here to reveal her SG. If she decides to curl up in some corner of the Labyrinth and die afterwards than that should be no concern of yours.”
“It doesn’t work that way…”

“Yes, it does. She is a grown woman who has made the choice, regardless of that situation around her to stagnate. She deserves no mercy on your part.”

“You said that about Lip too,” Hakuno said softly. “But…Jinako’s not just an Alter Ego. She’s a person, and…I can’t just let this go.”

She took off again, and for a moment Gilgamesh paused, looking after her, something unfamiliar afflicted some part of him, and he wanted…something. He ignored it, coming to match her step. Her folly was not his business to correct after all.

As it ended, they were forced to confront the woman thrice more, each of them becoming more stupid and more rambling and complaining that she had not been gifted by fate with a Servant such as himself. She had no comprehension of her luck. He would have cut her down long before this event.

Though he found himself considering what would happen if she had contracted with the disgruntled children’s writer.

Finally, after finding the door that the Hero of Charity guarded and being told to find the key, they were able to find the one treasure chest in the entire Labyrinth.

One that was very obviously designed to hold something significant.

“What…is a model house doing here?” Hakuno muttered, leaning down to look at it.

“Hm, so it looks like a model house from your limited perspective, Mongrel? Take note of the roof, not the walls! It is obvious as day what this is, and my intuition, where these matters are concerned, is never off.”

Hakuno stood up, paying attention to the roof, but then blinking.

“It’s a…file folder?” she said. “But way…”

“To denote significance,” Gilgamesh informed her.

She reached for the chest and threw it opened only for them to both be blinded by the sudden light.

“What a vulgar-” Gilgamesh cursed “This is one of those, worse than those summer-things! The creature I hate most! Remember this, Mongrel, since ancient times such crooks that imitate the shape of treasure chests, called for their ability to mimic the…”

She was gone.

“What…”

The chest was open, still, but Hakuno was nowhere to be seen, even her presence was masked.

Without even stopping to consider, what he was doing, Gilgamesh had rushed to the chest and examined it, trying to determine just what the nature of this trap was. There were two options. The first was that she had been teleported randomly and was now open to assault, the second was better but, given the level of incompetence that he had seen from both Servant and Master in this Labyrinth...

He found it. It was a small, temporary hack, designed to move Hakuno to a prerecorded scene before
she could take the treasure, likely the work of the Hero of Charity… She was likely safe...

…

Why did he *care?*

Gilgamesh took a step back, closing his eyes. He was not listening to anything, nor was he particularly waiting for Hakuno’s return. However having his contractor stolen from him, would have repercussions. Particularly if whatever subpar idea from that fool damaged her.

There was nothing he could do but wait to see what happened.

Waiting was a practice that Gilgamesh despised, and mostly filled with the consideration of just how he was going to express his displeasure to the Hero of Charity for this, as well as noting just how much time was passing and how many things could likely go wrong with such a method.

Finally, in a puff of smoke that was likely meant to be comical, Hakuno reappeared. She stumbled, back, closing her eyes. Other than appearing upset and drained, she was not grievously affected, so he determined to leave the punishment to both to Hakuno.

“You’ve finally returned,” Gilgamesh snapped. “Your presumption remains tremendous to make me wait like that. And was there something you have gained that was worth my waiting for you?”

Hakuno shook her head at his voice as if coming out of a dream.

“Yeah…I think so,” she muttered. “I…I think I know what’s wrong with Jinako. Her parents died, and-”

“What is wrong with that sack of flesh is her own incompetence mixed with a refusal to accept the sorrows she has endured. Now have you found anything of *worth*?” Gilgamesh interrupted.

He could not care less about why she sat and sulked in this place, obstructing everyone else as if she was the only human who had never known pain, and ignoring any hopes that the dead had had for her. His contractor's life was worth more than that sack of fleshes personal miseries.

Hakuno looked into the chest and took out a small key.

“This?”

“Hmph, then at least we may continue and pursue this to its final stupidity. Come, Mongrel. I have lost my patience with this woman and wish to return to our room as soon as possible.”

He allowed Hakuno to take the lead again, but noted that she was looking back at him several times.

“Gilgamesh, you seem…upset?” Hakuno said after a few minutes of walking around in the endless expanse.

He scowled at her. The woman was growing far too familiar with his moods.

“I expect due punishment for the Hero of Charity as well as that sack of flesh for their audacity to separate you and force me to wait,” Gilgamesh informed her.

“I…see?” Hakuno said, giving him an oddly confused look.

“Do not take this the wrong way. I was not concerned for your safety, however their attitude is utterly presumptuous beyond reason, and I will not permit them to take what is mine.”
“I…remember that,” Hakuno said. “There’s Karna...let’s get this done…”

He was growing weary of this, as well as of how much it seemed to be slowly consuming her thoughts.

The first time Gilgamesh asked Hakuno a truly personal question was after Jinako’s SG.

Jinako’s SGs were so far, the worst that Hakuno had had to uncover. While Rin’s and Rani’s had been faults, but she’d felt like she’d understood them better, Jinako’s were…more like watching someone’s entire being unravel in front of her. Listening to her talking about the death of parents how she’d just…fallen apart had hurt.

Even the SG itself had felt…unfulfilling.

Hakuno honestly didn’t know what to say to Jinako. Hakuno couldn’t even remember if she had parents. Her only memories, now, were fragments of the Grail War. She…really couldn’t say whatever it was that needed to be said, just that she did think of Jinako as a friend, but that wasn’t really what she’d wanted either.

Finally, as she continued, talking about how she didn’t need friends, how she only needed people less fortunate than her (like Shinji) and that Karna wasn’t her friend because he was just too ‘super sparkly top class’ she felt the pulse in her hands.

Jinako was shaking, completely cornered, and it was showing.

“Agh…how many times do I need to say it! Don’t worry about me! Even I have some friends… somewhere, I…I just haven’t…really been trying to make them, that’s all. But, in the future…I’ll try, so…”

She was lying.

But…if she just took it…would she… There wasn’t much left to Jinako…would she accidentally tear her apart? Like what had happened to Passionlip?

She had glanced at Gilgamesh without even thinking. The golden Servant, who was now slightly less golden in that ‘emperor of the night’ outfit, was watching the whole thing with a bored expression. After she’d been drawn into Jinako’s model house, he seemed…more hostile than before to the other two. Positively glaring at Karna and watching Jinako fall apart with a look that contained absolutely nothing that even resembled pity. If everything the removed, almost bored look of a king before he set down judgement.

He had noticed she was looking at her, and gave her an…almost confused look.

“Are you asking me for advice? That won’t be necessary, I saw that pulse. It is the key to her undoing. She has told you that she is not looking for friends, and I have told you not to show her mercy. There is a final step left to gain her SG: the more primal of all human desires: “I want you to be here.” Essentially, something even babies obtain instinctively, but something this woman has lost. Show her that she is as human as you and be done with it.”

So, go ahead and do it…
So Hakuno stepped up and promised her, over and over again, that she wasn’t really alone. Even if she didn’t believe it.

“I’m here. The council’s worried for her. Karna keeps trying to reach out to you. You mock us, claim that you hate us, but in reality, you’ve lost something incredibly important to you and you just want to push people away because you can’t stand to be hurt again.”

In the side of her vision, Gilgamesh twitched.

“…I…J Seriously, stop it…It hurts me, here…it hurts so much, there’s nothing I can do… cause I don’t feel anything…so, aahh…ooww…ooww, it hurts…why am I lonely…?”

Finally, the glow started, and Hakuno rushed to grab the light. Loneliness. That was the name of this SG.

But before Hakuno even had the time to fully put the thing away, Jinako was up again, staring vacantly at Hakuno.

“Ah…looks like…BB’s getting mad at my main body,” she said. “Good job again, Hakuno. The Big Winner. You’re just another step closer to ‘outside’, but…you know, what big winners like you never understand is that, even if you have friends, even if you have your buddy buddy life with your super sparkly top class golden Servant…the place you’ll end up is the same as me. Next time, my counterattack’ll make you realize that.”

She vanished a final time.

“Good riddance,” Gilgamesh spat, leaving no time for Hakuno to so much as consider what was going on. “Come, Mongrel, I’ve had enough of this woman’s self-pity for one excursion.”

He really didn’t like Jinako. Honestly, she was getting to the level of Kotomine and Kiara given the level of spite he seemed to have for her. But Hakuno was too tired to object.

They found the way out easily, and with no word from the Student Council, Hakuno headed to the room. It seemed quieter than usual, or maybe she just felt quieter than usual. The whole thing just felt…depressing to her. Maybe she needed a break…

Too bad she wasn’t going to get one.

She mostly just wanted to sleep, but knew that that wasn’t going to happen. Not when she opened the door, and Gilgamesh was staring at her with a strange intensity from his throne. While his usual drink and goblet were right next to him, they were being completely ignored as he watched her sit down.

This had to have something to do with his weird mood after she’d been sucked into that treasure chest. She knew it.

Hakuno said down on her mat, leaning her back against the wall and closing her eyes.

“You know…” she said, not opening them. “I wanted to help her, but I think all I’m doing is making things worse. I… just don’t really get Jinkao.”

“Hmph, how could you? You two are fundamentally opposed to one another. Her Labyrinth is a den of a worthless human being wrapped in gloom and whimpering, other than a good place to relax given its dull nature, there is nothing more to it…though….I have already determined what her next SG is. Have you? It should at least be worth observing to see the height of her folly. However, I
have no interest in discussing such things.”

He crossed his arms, thoughtfully, but then a strange gleam came into his eyes.

“Investigating Labyrinth on Labyrinth is boring, and I see it is beginning to wear on you as much as myself. Therefore, Hakuno, speak of something you wish. Whim it may be, this is the ‘chat’ time that you seem so desperate for that you seek out the AI and the ghost.”

…Chat time?

Hakuno opened her mouth, but nothing came out on command. While it was rare for Gilgamesh to just decide that he wanted to chat, she had no questions or comments that she really could make that didn’t involve Jinako, who he clearly didn’t want to talk about.

Gilgamesh seemed to read her thoughts and gave her a scowl.

“Mongrel, you are even more boring than that Labyrinth. Were you to have an SG, it would likely be bland and tasteless.”

“I’m sorry, I just…don’t have much to talk about…” she sighed.

“I suppose that, as King, I will need to initiate this myself,” he said.

For a moment, he paused, but his eyes stayed on her, the pupils very narrow like they got when he was considering something, but he finally decided to speak. “Answer this question, Mongrel: what man would you want to hold you?”

“What-“

Are you stupid?

Thankfully, that didn’t come out, because if it had, he probably would have killed her. Hakuno stiffened, feeling her entire face starting to heat up and looking away.

What was this question? It sounded like something that Rin or Rani would ask if they ever had a sleep over!

“B…by hold…do you mean…”

“Of course. What else could that possibly mean? Ultimately that is all that can exist between a man and a woman.”

“There are several things wrong with that statement.”

But Gilgamesh wasn’t listening. Rather, he’d crossed his arms in thought, and started scowling at her.

“However, if you were to name some man that I did not know from the Grail War, it would not be particularly interesting for me. Therefore, I will limit my question to the Student Council, and not that Servant. Therefore, among those, which would you prefer?”

Hakuno hid her face in her hands. She felt like she was going to explode out of sheer embarrassment. No! She was not going to let this question beat her! She didn’t care how embarrassing it was! But she sure wasn’t going to give him an easy time.

She scowled at him.
“Gatou,”

Even saying it made her shiver a little, and Gilgamesh nodded, even if the scowl on his own face stayed the same.

“Mongrel, even in jest, do not say such things. And wash your eyes in ice water. Your aesthetic sense is broken.”

Hakuno couldn’t help but giggle a little, but Gilgamesh’s face remained the same.

“Alright, fine, I’ll try to answer seriously. Leo’s good looking, but…honestly after the Panty thing and with everything that happened between us before and knowing what he wants…I just can’t. Gatou…” she paused, watching his eyes narrow. “No. Just… I mean… he’s a nice guy but…”

“Hmph, at least you are not completely bereft of taste.”

“I guess I’d rather go with Julius. Even if we didn’t get along before, I’ve gotten to know him better now, and…”

Gilgamesh looked completely unimpressed.

“Revise that preference. A taste for ghosts like that one is unbearably dull and depressing.”

“Gilgamesh…there isn’t anyone else who happens to be male on the Student Council. Do you want me to say you?”

He started laughing at that, crossing his arms and all but shouting with mirth. Hakuno crossed her own arms, looking away and blushing. Did he seriously have to just laugh at that?

But he wasn’t done. Not by a long shot.

“Idiot, do not pick the most obvious of answers. What would I do you answer seriously to questions meant to be amusing distractions? Though, I suppose it was unavoidable. You have done well so far to contain yourself, but being exposed to the aura of the king at such close range for so long will cause such insolence to occur…”

What was he even…

“Therefore I will forgive it, but give up! You are far from being to my tastes, and at least four thousand years too early for me!”

What a complete and total rejection.

“I wasn’t being serious!” Hakuno objected.

She didn’t understand why some part of her felt…hurt, but his words. As if she’d want that arrogant king to ‘hold’ her anyways.

“I was just saying that there was no one else other than Leo, Julius and Gatou!” she continued, still blushing and then looking away.

Gilgamesh frowned.

“That has some truth to it, though it reeks of denials. Well then, curse BB for throwing you down where the only man are either unworthy or too far above you. However, in light of that, you may gaze upon me as you will. I will permit that at least.”
He’d just given her some consolation prize hadn’t he?

It didn’t matter, Hakuno told herself, but also resolved to never *ever* fall for the King of Heroes.

She refused to taste that kind of rejection when it mattered to her if it had actually hurt when it hadn’t.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter should be named The First Conversation Gilgamesh Would Ever Regret. Seriously, the amount of Tsun in this chapter hurt.

Gil can be a little hard to write with Jinako because he honestly and truly feels no pity for the woman, and I find myself feeling terrible when I do it, even if I know his reasons.
The First Time Hakuno Cried

Chapter Summary

Jinako’s final SG demands a sacrifice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno cried in front of Gilgamesh was in Jinako’s Labyrinth. After essentially turning over and going to sleep after what might have been the most brutal rejection to a non-confession ever, she’d headed to the Student Council room to hear what was going on.

Thankfully, Gilgamesh wasn’t talking, even if she still felt him…looming around them.

She wasn’t sure if she was angry or hurt, but she really, really didn’t want him to bring it back up. Honestly, she’d probably avoid any more random talks about dating that he decided to get into. She still wasn’t even sure what Gilgamesh had been after.

Gatou told them how, during his battle of the Grail War, he’d been slated against Jinako, but she’d just never come, never collected the keys that she needed and just…never showed up. So, she’d been slated for death from the beginning. She’d hidden in a janitor’s closet away from the war.

But since she’d essentially forfeited the match, the second she left that closest, the Moon Cell would recognize her as a defeated Master and delete her. So, she hadn’t won. She hadn’t even survived.

She’d just bought herself a little more time…

Hakuno clenched her hands into fists.

It was honestly terrible. And that had to be why she’d panicked and run off. Because at some level, she wanted more time, and when she’d remembered just what was waiting for her, Jinako had run into the Labyrinth. At some level, Hakuno could understand, particularly given that the exact same fate was waiting for her. But…

It didn’t change the fact that what she was doing was wrong and hurting other people. Vaguely, Hakuno wondered if something might have changed if they’d met, but really, she supposed it didn’t matter. It hadn’t happened. And…in all honestly, from her memories, it had been hard enough to befriend Rin and Rani, and if they had met, it might have been Hakuno going up against Jinako.

And then, they would have fought. And someone would have died.

As Rani and Gatou started to get into a ‘discussion’ involving human nature that was really more Rani mocking Gatou’s strange ideas, and Gatou sort of claiming that cats were more human than most humans, Leo looked at his phone blinking.

“Sakura’s just sent me a message. It sounds like the new floor in the Labyrinth opened up,” he said, glancing at Hakuno.

“Great. Let’s get going,” she said.
The Labyrinth was waiting.

It seemed deceptively quiet at first, but the second she took a step, there was a flash of red light, and a counter appeared in front of her, with red flashing numbers and a little skull all counting down to something.

Hakuno jumped back for a second, but nothing happened, at least, not until there was a sudden spark of static.

“That’s a countdown,” Jinako’s dead voice said, echoing slightly through the Labyrinth. “It’s to Kishinami’s final sentence. When the counter reaches zero, Kishinami dies. No replies. No take backs. That’s it. Dead.”

It sounded positively eerie.

“You got that? Great. Everything else is up to you.”

Was this a…floor with a bomb or something? But…that was way too long for that.

Hakuno frowned at it, and found herself glancing at Gilgamesh, who was looking with narrowed eyes at the counter as if it had personally insulted him. He looked towards her, frowning still.

“Mongrel, I have told you in the past to show me your faults, but falling apart under pressure is not one I have any interest in. It is inevitable that something like this would make you rush; however, all you are ever faced with in life is countless clocks that slowly count down to some ending. If you are controlled by the death right before your eyes, you will fall prey to that one which lies under your feet.”

While he seemed annoyed, he seemed unfazed by the counter itself, it did distract her from the sight of it.

“…I’m not scared,” Hakuno muttered. “I’d…sort of guessed what this was going to be. She said that the ‘place we’d all be was the same’. And to be fair, I’m probably a little more used to death threats than most people by this time. It was just kind of disconcerting to look at.”

Between Gilgamesh, Julius, BB and now Jinako, she was probably a little too callous at this point.

“Besides, given how long that that counter is…it’s days or…years from now. And…” she glanced at him.

They both knew that she wasn’t going to live that long.

“I’m honestly a little more worried about what this is saying about Jinako herself. I mean, Rin and Rani didn’t want visitors, but this…is more repulsion of anyone. I am pleased that you show no fear of it.”

“It is one who has shut out everyone and everything, leaving room for nothing,” Gilgamesh said, but the tone didn’t seem particularly sympathetic. “I am pleased by your lack of fear in the face of this thing. As such I will tell you this: she is your opposite, a waste of flesh and life in every respect. One who has known great suffering but refuses to grasp it. Little will be gained from this floor in understanding.”

And she’d thought he hadn’t liked Passionlip.

“I guess we need to find her…”
Could she really give Jinako hope though? What hope did she have? Hakuno mostly dealt with Gilgamesh’s eventually staying on this side and her death by focusing on the others and keeping herself moving.

She took off, stopping when she saw the point of light at a dead end with only another floating portion of the Labyrinth.

“The Great Jinako’s Round-About Warp System. You can waste that counter on this all you want,” Jinako said, and then she was gone.

Gilgamesh looked head at them with a bored expression.

“This is by far the most unimpressive of the floors we have seen. Come, Mongrel, let us finish this quickly,” he said, though he eyed the counter over her head thoughtfully.

For a moment, she was worried that it would drop or something every time she used a portal, making things so that she couldn’t do anything more than a few times, but when she stepped on a point, an in a flash of light, she found herself across the barrier of nothing with no change, she sighed.

“I was sure something was going to happen.”

“That defeats the purpose of what the sack of flesh is attempting to prove,” Gilgamesh said. “A truth that is universal, but that she believes that she has somehow comprehended more than any other by virtue that her suffering is, in her own mind, so much greater than any other soul to live or to have ever lived before her.”

There was a bite to his words that Hakuno didn’t recognize. Even at his worst, he didn’t usually sound so…resentful.

Jinako had color coded her points, so as Hakuno pressed ahead, they were able to make good time until they were on a larger part of the Labyrinth, where…Jinako had set up a computer.

She wasn’t playing games, just looking at messages as they flitted by, not really writing anything or doing anything at all. That was…wrong. While Jinako might have never left her closet, she’d been active enough online, and clearly been interested enough to engage.

Gilgamesh looked around, but when she glanced at him, shook his head. So, Karna wasn’t anywhere around. That…that was probably a bad thing.

Was this the end? There was still a path, but…Jinako was right there….

“Well, hole in one. Always the big winner, huh, Kishinami?” Jinako asked. “Here’s your prize: this SG is called curse of death. If you want it, someone has to die.”

Something cold ran down Hakuno’s back. Someone…had to die? She said it with such total indifference that for a second, Hakuno actually thought that she’d misheard, but it felt like a gunshot.

For a second she saw everyone she’d already fought…Shinji…Dan…Alice…Gatou…and an old feeling like she’d just had her innards scooped out came back.

Gilgamesh, however, stepped forwards, raising one hand the way he sometimes did when he was about to give something he considered a proclamation. He was smiling, but his eyes reminded cold and hard as he looked down at her. It wasn’t a removed look like he’d had when he’d judged her, but the sense that a judgement was being made was there.
She was being ascertained as a life that would end now.

“Oh?” he asked, the smile far too wide. “Any life will do? In that case, I see a perfect candidate before us, Mongrel. There is a sow before my eyes who appears ready to be roasted. How fortunate.”

He stepped forwards, bloodlust on his face, but Hakuno stepped forwards, grabbing the sleeve of this leopard printed shirt.

He almost almost jumped at the contact, whirling the face her with a very strange look on his face, but Hakuno pressed on. There was no way she was going to be able to appeal to his mercy. Not when he’d already decided that Jinako was going to die, but she could appear to his reason, and he had reason.

“We can’t kill her,” she said. “If you kill her, without an SG, that wall’s going to stay up, and everyone from the Student Council stays stuck. And the show is over for you.”

There was a crack of static, and Leo spoke up.

“Yes, we cannot allow that,” he said. “Besides, she claimed someone would die that might mean something in regards to Hakuno’s condition. Is the curse of death something laid on everyone who enters this Labyrinth.”

The counter?

She glanced at the thing again, still counting away and being awful.

Gilgamesh did not look happy, though he did stand down.

“Isn’t that obvious?” Jinako asked, not turning around. “But if they get the SG and complete the Labyrinth, it’ll stop. I think. I don’t really know.”

She shrugged.

“Simple, isn’t it? You don’t really need to know much about this floor. That’s all I’ve got for you.”

Gilgamesh remained where he was, his crimson eyes still fixed on Jinako’s back as if contemplating the perfect place to run his sword through her.

“This is awful,” Rin said. “But it has got to have some kind of loophole.”

“BB’s exploiting some part of the Labyrinth,” Leo said thoughtfully. “Then…”

“Yes! I know that it would come to this!” A new voice, one that was far, far too loud to just be on the server, rang out. “There is life in the midst of death, and I possess a brilliant IDEA!”

Hakuno winced as the sound of the man’s voice reverberated through every corner of the Labyrinth, but somehow, at least she couldn’t think about that counter anymore.

“That old man…” Jinako muttered.

“Message suspended due to volume,” Rani called out. “Gatou is observing you from the vicinity of the entrance. Please go to meet him before our camera’s sound equipment is damaged.”

“What’s he doing?” Sakura called out. “Huh…that’s…amazing, but…also frightening…”
“Yes! I am glad you are prepared, Treasurer!” Gatou roared. “Please convey this message to Hakuno Kishinami!”

Hakuno sighed, staring ahead into the darkness of the Labyrinth. He’d just decided to go down here without a Servant even when warned not to, and he had no idea that they could hear him from the other side of the Labyrinth.

“HAKUNO!” Gatou yelled, though thankfully, Rani was kind enough not turn on the microphone. “Oh, is this too loud? Apologies! I have a super secret way to beat this Labyrinth, I wish to help and instruct you to the best of my abilities! But…well…I have no problem with the countdown, but those enemies…those… They are like the gods and Buddha’s that I have seen! So, now you must answer my summons! COME BACK HAKUNO!”

“That was the most obvious confidential message ever,” Hakuno sighed, and her eyes trailed towards Jinako. She looked annoyed, but just shrugged.

“Let us go,” Gilgamesh said. “He is a noisy man, but not necessarily the kind who throws around empty words.” A smirk appeared on his face. “Besides, that monk is much like a boy collecting good deeds, is he not?”

“I…guess…?”

It was only then that she realized she was still holding his sleeve and dropped it. Glowering and looking away. He was going to see this as another attempt to ‘seduce him’ or something.

At least Gatou had distracted Gilgamesh from murdering Jinako outright.

“If he gives some stupid idea that he came up with three seconds ago, I’m turning him into chill shrimp stir-fry,” Rin said.

Returning didn’t take long, and Gatou was obviously waiting for them.

“So, shramana, what of this bright idea of yours. Do you know of a way to pass through death?

Gatou smiled awkwardly, and finally crossed his arms and laughed to the sky.

“Indeed about that…forgive me… I know nothing of the kind. That is to day that it was an expedient lie!”

Hakuno stared at him.

“Wha-“ Rin started.

“What,” Leo said flatly without a hint of inflection.

“…a lie,” Rani said faintly.

“Wha….what is this old man on about!” a new voice cut in. “Did he really think that this was the time for jokes? Are your lungs filled with a vacuum?!”

“Shinji!? Are you listening in?” Hakuno yelled.

“No! He’s just…loud! And stupid! I’m totally not hacking anything!”

He was totally listening in, and probably had been the whole time despite being ‘too good’ to join.
Gatou had the gall to keep laughing.

“Mm, I have resigned myself to accept your anger. But, right or wrong, I, Monji Gatou, must face Jinako. To that end, I can’t afford to get mixed up with the traps and enemies in this Labyrinth, given my present level. Hakuno Kishinami. Lord Gilgamesh. With apologies, I ask you to assist me in my egoism. Now, let us go to our pessimistic Sentinel! There’s no time to relax, with that counter above your head ticking down!”

Hakuno opened her mouth to tell him that what was a very, very bad idea, but Gatou had already plunged on.

“Follow him, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said. “While he is deceiving you, I sense no malice in his actions.”

His eyes were following the man, and…maybe it was a trick of the light in the Labyrinth, but they almost seemed to be a little bright.

Gatou was…lying? But there wasn’t much she could do other than plunge on.

The first encounter was a disaster. While Gatou was surprisingly calm with her, taking her abuse and mockery with a smile. Continuing to try to convince her of…something either to pray to his goddess…or to at least talk to him about her pain.

Jinako was having none of it.

She didn’t believe in any god because the gods abandoned her. She didn’t move forward because it was only natural to fear death, and therefore her refusal to do anything was fine. She wouldn’t try because why should she?

This wasn’t really desperation; this was a well established mindset that had had plenty of time to be established. This was the philosophy of life that had allowed Jinako to hole herself into her room and refuse to change, even when she knew that she couldn’t stay the way she was. But…while there was a note of truth in it…it wasn’t right.

Because this wasn’t that Jinako was refusing to move. She’d missed the point. This was that she resented others for trying to move.

“Enough,” Jinako finally said. “Haven’t you spent enough time with me? There’s no point pursuing me further. You won’t find anything down that path but death. Not murder or anything. Just death, that’s all. Hakuno, Gatou, neither of you will be saved. Everyone in the Student Council, the AIs, the NPCs, no one will be saved. No one at all. All of us are fated to become spiritron particles and disappear.”

And then she was gone, vanishing further into the Labyrinth with Gatou in hot pursuit.

“Again, is it! Doronpa! I’ll be waiting, JINAKO!”

His voice carried even as he continued.

Gilgamesh laughed softly, looking at the retreating form with something strange on his face.
“He claims to be a priest with no where to return to. He is quite hot-blooded for a religious man… Hm…I cannot ascertain his intentions yet, but he cuts to the heart of the matter. Now, then, Mongrel, let us follow and observe the struggles of the common people.”

He said that as if both of them were somehow removed from that category.

The followed after, and Hakuno was a little disturbed to note the even the monsters were starting to stay away as they quickly reached the center with relief, where Jinako was clearly waiting for them.

The now familiar stone relief was there, showing Jinako’s true body, sinking into it, but it was behind something else. Something that had haunted her nightmares on the Near Side: the firewall. It was still surprisingly simple, just a normal red wall with glittering golden lines through it. But she knew it.

So, was this way Karna wasn’t here? Was it that he was against this?

Or was it just that Jinako’s wishes were so vague at this point that there was nothing that the Heroic Spirit could do?

“If you step through that barrier you’ll die,” Jinako said, staring at Hakuno.

“I know,” Hakuno said, keeping her face blank.

Her entire body was reacting to it. Every muscle tensing up in a silent scream for her to run, just like she’d felt when she faced down every opponent in the Grail War.

This was the fate that always awaited losers. BB must have managed to bring it here too.

“This is my last SG. You can just walk up and take it, but if you do you’ll die,” Jinako said. There was the faintest remnant of her usual smirk.

So, she thought she’d won.

“So, this is the wall that descended on those defeated in the Grail War and burned the thread of their souls,” Gilgamesh said. “I presume it was simple enough for BB to take it, given that that wall is meant for you and none other.”

He glanced at Hakuno.

“So, will you play these stakes?”

Hakuno turned back, looking at Jinako in the eye.

“Of course I will,” she said.

Jinako stiffened once.

“I mean it,” she said. “You’ll die if you move forward.”

“Whatever,” Hakuno muttered, stepping forwards, clenching her fists.

It didn’t matter BB was probably somewhere snickering at the thought of their cowering before death, and there was no way she was going to give anyone that show. She was already slated for death. This counter, this wall…none of it mattered. If she could get the last SG, then Leo and Gawain could finish things.
“I guess the shows going to end a little early,” she remarked to Gilgamesh, taking a step forward.

She felt a sudden drain from her, but before she could take another step,

“No,” another voice said, softer than she’d ever heard it. “I will not let you die, Hakuno Kishinami. You will live.”

Gatou stepped out from behind her, walking past her to face the barrier. Hakuno turned to face him, but a golden glow in the corner of her eye made her look towards Gilgamesh, just in time to see the glitter of…something long and silver and gold vanish as Gilgamesh’s eyes settled on Gatou.

“Ah, so you’ve finally arrived and showed your true plans. Nothing can happen while the leading man is late. Settle this now.”

“Indeed,” Gatou nodded. “It is time. I will take with me all of Jinako Karigiri’s worldly desires and guilt.”

He smiled at Hakuno, but…everything about him was completely different. Gone was the man who had annoyed them, made off comments about Passionlip’s…figure, and sort of been a nuisance. The expression on his face wasn’t really anger, or even fear. It was…compassion.

“Gatou…”

“No, Hakuno, this is not your sacrifice. This is my duty,” he said. “A monk is supposed to give counsel to those who are spiritually in need of it. You, while shining as brilliantly as Aruna, are not the one for this task. This is a task for a worthy priest, but an unworthy one will suffice.”

He stepped forward slowly, walking through the barrier as if it meant nothing, and Hakuno suddenly felt the Moon Cell’s program beginning to initialize.

Jinako took a step back.

“W…what are you doing?” she said. “Old man… That can’t be stopped. You’re going to disintegrate now. Every last bit of you will be removed from the Moon Cell, and you’ll die… Even if takes out a little longer…”

Her voice was almost cracking.

Gatou laughed, raising his arms to the sky in something like…Joy.

“Old man? You should be calling me ‘dead man’!” he laughed. He turned, facing Hakuno with a smile. “I know that I told you I didn’t have a plan, but I deceived you, Kishinami. I’m sorry, but I knew you wouldn’t allow it. You see…once I heard that someone had to die, I knew that my time had come…after all…I’m already dead!”

The corruption, black and spreading had already started on his legs, creeping up like it had the last time.

When he’d fallen to his knees and begged his Berserker goddess to speak to him.

“Gatou that isn’t-“ Hakuno started but Gatou kept talking.

“I always knew, or sensed, but once I received my memories, I was certain. Now, I have bypassed this trick! An SG obtained by the death of an already dead man! I had never heard of a plan more brilliant!”
He laughed again, and Hakuno’s chest hurt. Of course, she knew. *She’d been the one who’d killed him.* She wasn’t sure why BB had brought him here. Maybe by accident. Maybe because she thought he’d be angry with her and stop her, so much of BB focused on her, but…

“That wasn’t…you didn’t have to…” Hakuno whispered. Something hot and familiar was starting to burn her eyes. “Even if you were already dead. You… I…”

“Do not grieve for me, my splendid rival. There was no sin in your desire to live.” he said, turning back to face Jinako. “I am a foolish monk who accomplished nothing in life, sought after a miracle, and in the end returned to dust with no respite. To grieve for a man long a corpse is backwards. Think of it like this: There was once a dead man who laughed once more. An ultra-truth seeking monk, even the second time around, who found a purpose in death.”

Tears were starting to blur Hakuno’s vision, she tried to say something, but her throat was closed, even as Jinako stepped back, shaking her head.

“No…you…you’re making fun of me. How can you laugh? If you’d died in the War, and then were alive again, and happy to be saved and then reality was thrust on you again… You’re wrong! You have to be more angry! More sad! You’re lying and trying to make yourself look better! I…don’t understand… You claimed you’d save me, but you were never saved!” that came out as more of a scream than words. “You’re talking about gods, but they never saved you! Don’t you think that’s not fair? The world’s built on cruelty! No one is saved and the winners are just decided when they’re born and the everyone dies! It’s a sick joke! They never did anything wrong, but my papa and mama still died! *What do you mean ‘accident’; what do you mean ‘slipped on the ice’; what do you mean ‘bad luck’? People without talent can’t even have luck? We can’t even COMPLAIN?*”

Everything was coming out faster and faster until Hakuno could barely hear anything distinct. She opened her mouth, but a hand on her shoulder stopped her.

Gilgamesh shook his head. He looked bored, but nodded towards Gatou. The meaning was clear. Wait for the SG and let him handle it.

“I won’t do this anymore. I won’t take this neglect game anymore,” Jinako said, her voice dead again. “It doesn’t matter if I’m alive. There’s no equality other than what’s on the Internet. But that’s a waste of time too, but it doesn’t matter. As long as I get along, maintain my distance and have my companionship, I’m fine. All I have to do is wait to die. So I won’t escape. I don’t want anything. And I don’t want to hear the ‘truth’ either. No one’s ever watched over us and you know it.”

There was nothing Hakuno could say to that rush of feelings. Because…she didn’t have anything but what was on the Moon Cell. For someone who didn’t even know if she had parents or anyone waiting for it…what could she say? Don’t give up? Why? What did Jinako have not to give up on…?

But…that didn’t change the fact that she was wrong. And that in her despair, she was forcing others to suffer.

And…how could she say that? In reality…Hakuno and Jinako were completely opposed. A girl who had no past who ran to the future, even if that brought only death, and a girl who thought she had no future, looking back to the past which only contained death.

But if she couldn’t help Jinako…maybe Gatou could.

He smiled sadly, not even noticing the decay creeping on his face.

“You’ve given up then?” he said softly. “But that’s the wrong answer. Even the anger you think I...
should feel is meaningless. I’ve traveled everywhere, and seen many, many gods. Gods of commerce, indigenous gods, invading gods, gods of work, fearful cursed gods, a sensual goddess I rather liked, a moe goddess I never really understood, all eight million of them. But there was always something they had in common: you already know it, deep down. There is no god that will grant happiness. Because those gods I met…all of them had been giving form by humanity. And humanity, creatures that steal, kill devour, and then forget those things…they are the ultimate NEET!”

“…what?” Hakuno looked up, thought it was more of a hiccup.

Her brain stopped.

“It’s utterly deplorable. We’ve always been NEET. And there is nothing wrong with that at all.”

“So, he has learned the truth,” Gilgamesh said softly.

Hakuno started at him as Jinako almost choked.

“Wh-“

“Of course you locked yourself away. You had everything in abundance and in their core, humans are lazy creatures, and as such cannot deny that they are wrong, and so seek to punish themselves. But…how can we truly punish other humans? We need something above us! So we needed gods! The gods don’t save people. The gods which are given personality according to the human imagination, treat human beings as evil, just as humanity desires. Thus, gods are humanity’s ultimate punishment. Having traveled the earth and studied all its religions, this is the theory I have formed.

The darkness of the decay was already all around him now, and Hakuno knew from Shinji, and from Alice and from Gatou himself that he was in pain. Likely pain beyond words, but he was still speaking. He stood, grinning, and giving sermon with more passion than ever.

Maybe…this was something he’d been waiting a long time for…

She couldn’t say anything, or stop this… she hated this helpless feeling. It was worse than before. At least the first time…she hadn’t known Gatou. Now…

Hakuno sobbed.

“It was a truly terrifying theory, and I was angry. Once, I sought a primordial deity. One far removed from human evil, but enough of my follies of youth.”

“Praise what gods you found that you did not,” Gilgamesh said softly.

He looked down at his hands, or maybe where his hands had been. They were completely black now…but…Maybe he couldn’t even see that anymore…now that the corruption was one his face…

“But know this, Jinako. Don’t lament gods. You were never abandoned at all. Those gods do not protect anyone.”

“Then why am I the only one suffering? Why can I go anywhere?”

With that final scream, a flash of light exploded from behind the wall, and Hakuno was able to see the SG glowing in his hand, even as her own arm started to hurt in response.

“Gatou, take it and come back!” Hakuno screamed.
But Gatou wasn’t looking at her. He looked down at his hand, either because of the warmth of the blazing light that managed to be clear even to Hakuno from the other side of the wall.

“Why? Why are you suffering when you did nothing wrong? …that’s no one’s fault. It just didn’t work out.”

“Wh- What kind of an answer is that?!”

“The only one. Your own choices, the environment, the things that happened, that modest hope of a future…none of it fit together at the right time. That’s all your life was.”

But…while the words by anyone else would have been unspeakably cruel, the gentle smile on Gatou’s face…made it feel different. Like somehow, in that stupid statement, there was some wisdom. And if that’s all life was…and no one was there to make it better or worse, didn’t that mean that in the end, there was nothing to do but keep going?

“If…that that’s all life is, how can you stand to be human!?”

“Jinako…it is your fault. But it’s the fault of your world. It’s everyone’s fault. It’s no one’s fault. With that, isn’t it stupid to be so pessimistic?”

“No! You’re the stupid one!”

But with every scream, and every cry of defiance, her life grew brighter and brighter until Gatou was able to back up.

“Oh, that sorrow is just that. You can find happiness again, Jinako, and maybe even that modest life you wanted. Life is a battle between meaning and meaninglessness. Just tell yourself it didn’t work out, and you can start to put it away and move on. Say it to yourself. You were deceived. You were wronged. You were wrong. And let go. It will make you feel better!”

He laughed, even though his face was almost entirely black. Even though his mouth was almost gone, he still could laugh through a pain that Hakuno couldn’t even imagine.

Then he turned to face her, and through her own tears, she saw just how close death was.

His mouth was gone, dissolved in that final laugh and those final words of comfort but he beckoned her forwards.

Hakuno froze, gaping once in horror and sorrow and pain.

“Answer him. This was earned through his clowning, and should be respected as the highest ‘satori’ of his lifetime.”

Gilgamesh’s voice, surprisingly soft for once, ripped her from her thoughts, and she ran forwards, trying to catch him before he was gone forever. Her hand grabbed his, and the warmth of the SG passed from his hand to hers.

For one second, or maybe less than one, the hand gripping hers squeezed her so hard he hurt, like a weathered rock, warmed by the sun, and then…

He was gone, dissolving into dust and darkness and Hakuno clutched the glowing orb to herself, ignoring the tears trailing down her face.

He’d comforted her. After all this. When he’d given up everything, he’d comforted her. He’d
comforted the reason he’d died and passed with no regrets.

“N-no… I… I didn’t want that…” Jinako whispered, and Hakuno looked up to see her backing up, eyes wide. “Why did that old man…”

As she watched a familiar emotion came to her: resentment.

“What did you think was going to happen? That we’d just back up and stay in that building that you condemned us to forever?!” Hakuno yelled.

“I… I just wanted to show you… that everyone dies….”

“DON’T YOU THINK WE ALREADY KNEW THAT!?” Hakuno screamed, but it was choked by sobs. “we’ve made it to the fifth round of this DEATH GAME! People have already DIED! People we cared about! You think I somehow didn’t comprehend that death was a THING?”

She held up her left fist, showing the obviously faded command seals that marked her for death the second that she stepped on to the near side.

“Don’t you think I already know that I’m going to die?” she hissed.

That was the price she paid for her trump card. She didn’t resent it, not really. It was what it was, and she’d made the choice and would make it all over again. It didn’t really matter, but Jinako had set this whole trap up to ‘show them that people died’ and now Gatou was dead and…

“No… no no no no… I-I didn’t want to kill — I never wanted anyone to die! So why did he go and decide to die! Why didn’t he just stop and stay safe and realize and- so… everyone knew- You can’t tell me you knew and And now I- That, that’s — That’s not fair, to me! You’re the worst, old man, the absolute worst! Why did you die? Why’d you have to act cool and actually admirable and change people’s views of life! And then why’d you go against all of that and die!? How could I go and carelessly live with myself knowing you sacrificed yourself for it — Now I really I have nowhere left to go! I can’t, I can’t…! I’m so pathetic — it’s a disgrace for me to live…! Don’t come — nobody come near me! Someone like me should just be shut away alone forever!”

With a final scream of pain and sorrow and fear, the copy shattered. And Hakuno learned forwards, closing her eyes trying to stop the sobs and the rage and the shaking…

He’d failed. Gatou had failed. He’d died and he… He’d been right. His answer had been right, and maybe the only one that she could have understood. And Jinako hadn’t been able to take it.

There was a crackle of static.

“The removal of the countdown mechanism has been confirmed. Hakuno Kishinami’s abnormal status has cleared. The twelfth floor of the Labyrinth has lost its SG, and is being temporarily maintained in a stable state,” Rani’s voice was cold and detached as it sounded through the connection.

“Rani. It’s rather too soon for your “system voice.” It would be more appropriate to keep silent for now. … no. I’m bothered that this is the only way I can talk either, I suppose. As requested — Hakuno, please return here for now. What comes next will be the battle within her heart. And we… I think we need to time to put our own hearts in order,” Leo voice was softer than usual, and Hakuno her could hear a quiet sobbing on the line that she knew was Rin.

“I can…” Hakuno muttered, stepping forwards, but a hand stopped her.
Gilgamesh had stepped up behind her, frowning.

“I have no interest in watching you tear your own heart apart out of grief and rage, Mongrel. If you do this, I will not come with you,” he that in a tone that bore no arguments. “Return to the School, sleep, and return.”

She couldn’t take her on now. That’s what he was saying. She was too hurt, and if she did…

“Fine, but I’m facing her in the morning. For Gatou.”

“Good.” Gilgamesh said, looking towards where Gatou had been. “Monji Gatou, he was called? It is because there are occasionally those that reach that level in religion that one cannot make light of religion, regardless of the gods themselves. He was still far from enlightenment, but what he reached was enough to qualify him as a model monk. In the sense of a guide who explains and teaches the path to his disciples. If he got rid of that personality of his, that is. The moment that man accepted his own death, he divested himself of the vows he had made to himself before, such as to find that primordial deity. Once he gave up that obstinate egoism, all that remained were his long cultivated, accumulated virtues.”

He was silent for a moment, looking at the relief.

“Human beings are ineffective creatures,” he said, closing his eyes as a smile came across his face. “If they lose their egoism, they will never aim high enough, and if they keep their egoism, they can never reach enlightenment. All of this is the work of those who cannot escape the status of “messiah,” as he might yet reach for that girl. I suppose that is why…there are and will always be things worth seeing in the footprints of humanity. Now, come, Mongrel. I will have you rest.”

It was a eulogy, Hakuno realized. He hadn’t just decided to talk this time. It was…an act of respect and recognition that Gatou had never had before, even when he’d died the first time and his ‘goddess’ had vanished.

It didn’t make it better, but…she was glad that Gilgamesh had said his name and recognized his worth.

Chapter End Notes

Geez this was a depressing chapter, still I felt like I sort of owed it, particularly given how this is probably one of the heavier parts of the game.

So, as a question, I could either write out the Karma fight or go full speed ahead to the BBad End. I’m not sure which at the moment, so I’d love to hear everyone’s thoughts.

Also, 100 Kudos! Thanks so much for sticking with me for this!
The First Time Gilgamesh was Jealous

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh must face the Hero of Charity, though his own feelings are beginning to conflict.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh felt jealous was after Gatou’s death. The monk’s passing had, as should be expected, deeply affect the Student Council. Their tentative alliance had had the side effect of drawing them closer to one another. Even that puppy and Rin Tohsaka, who appeared to be political enemies, had slowly been developing the working relationship that was natural to humanity when facing shared adversity.

Now, they had been given a stark reminding of what was at stake, as well as the looming threat of the Near Side. However, the greatest response had been grief for the monk.

Hakuno in particular had taken his death as a heavy blow. It appeared that their prior fight, mixed with the her own inability to spare him, affected her more greatly than he had originally assumed. On entering the room, she had turned with her face to the wall and her back to him.

Normally he would have done something to discourage such disrespect, but he was well aware of why she was doing it. Despite her attempts to hide it, Gilgamesh could hear her soft weeping until, finally, her breathing slowed and sleep finally took her.

He watched her for a moment, reflecting on what he had seen. While he somewhat regretted not butchering the sow when he had the chance, he supposed allowing Gatou to have his redemption had done nothing but stave off the unavoidable as well as give the man something he wanted.

There was no way for Gatou to return unless he had wished to die again.

Much as Hakuno herself had nothing but death waiting for her.

Gilgamesh frowned, glancing at her left hand and the faded marks of the used Command Seals.

That had been her choice, and he knew that her words to Jinako had not been a complaint against him, but rather a statement of fact. She had been the one to offer up those Command Seals, and her life was his. They were both aware that the moment that Hakuno set foot on the Near Side, the Moon Side would recognize her as a Master who had used her Command Seals and dealt with accordingly, and he would not suffer even a single command to be held over him.

Yet, somehow, he’d found that counter of her head with the knowledge of her own impending death offensive.

He scowled at her form, but finally closed his eyes. While rest and recovery were not necessary for him, it would at least afford him some growth in power, and there was little to do when his contractor self but dream.
Though again, he found himself in Hakuno’s memories.

Hakuno walked down the hall, head down. Gatou was gone. His “goddess” had vanished too. While it hadn’t felt like the knife to the gut that Alice’s death had, or even the shock that Shinji’s had, this…this was just a dull sort of ache that made her wonder why she kept going.

Because she had to. Even as the halls slowly emptied of people. Once things had been bustling now things were just more and more quiet. Even some of the people who had been friendly with her were gone now…like that poor couple that had been forced to kill one another...

But she couldn’t stop.

Because she’d die otherwise, and because Rin and Rani were almost recovered, and if she died then...

A familiar warm presence at the back of her mind reminded her that she wasn’t alone, even if she didn’t even know their name, or anything else about them...She smiled a little.

“Thanks,” she said. “I still feel bad just calling you-”

She stopped in front the billboard. It was getting familiar now, as was the white sheet of paper. This time though, she didn’t need to even finish the step before she knew who she was going to be facing. The ice cold dread of killing intent suddenly radiated in the air and Hakuno turned to face Julius.

His cold, dark eyes gave no expression as he watched her, but Hakuno could practically see the fact that he’d been moved from ‘threat’ to ‘prey’. So far, he was the only Master who had ever really and truly scared her.

“You’re doing better. You’re not flinching,” Julius said, his voice monotone.

“I guess I’m getting use to death threats,” Hakuno muttered.

“It’s what makes Mages special, I suppose. How ever the weakest Mage I’ve ever seen managed to improve in such a short time.

He stepped forwards, the movement echoing in the empty hall, and Hakuno’s entire body screamed at her to run, to hide, to find-

“That ends now though,” Julius said, stopping when he was shoulder to shoulder with her, or as close as that could be, even how much taller he was than her. He leaned closer, and Hakuno almost shivered when his breath was almost in her ear.

“This world—the Holy Grail—will be Leo’s and no one else’s. There will be no deviation from this course of history.”

It was all that Hakuno could do to just stand there, keeping her face as calm as she could make it, as she felt his presence fade. It was only then that she turned around, trying to see where he had gone.

Rin had told her that he was an assassin. Rani had told her that he didn’t have any concept of the value of human life. Looking at that vacant…hollow look that he always had when he’d looked at her, she believed it.

A warm, familiar presence at her back made Hakuno lean back into it.

“Facing Julius…we’d better not make any mistakes, or I might as well slit my own throat and save
“him the trouble,” Hakuno muttered.

“…won….before…” the garbled disjoined voice said.

They had as many victories as he did now. But Julius was one of the Haraway’s top assassins, according to Rin, and Rin honestly knew those kinds of things given her background.

“We’ll do what we can,” she said smiling as she turned to face-

Gilgamesh opened his eyes frowning. That memory had several things to consider within it. First and foremost, the appearance of the ghost. Gilgamesh had dismissed that one as one who had died and still desired much while lacking any true malice towards his contractor.

Had he miscalculated?

His judgments regarding his contractor had already been off, perhaps those who had tied themselves to her should be reevaluated as well.

The other issue…that of her Servant…

Why were they hidden from him? And why had her connection to any Servant been severed?

He frowned, but dismissed it yet again. Regardless of the interest it was garnering in him, Hakuno’s past was not his concern. It was only her present and the future that he had set himself to observe that mattered.

With the evening light still streaming though, it was not possible to tell the time of day; however, it was becoming clear that the Hakuno was sleeping more heavily than before while the Council waited. If he wanted longer, they would come. Also, it was incredibly dull to sit there listening to her breathing without even the prosaic face she made in sleep facing him.

For a moment, he watched his contractor, debating with himself on how to wake her.

While calling out to her was far more expedient, he found some part of him…tempted…to reach out and grasp her shoulder to wake her. She had touched him the previous day, and he had ever right to do the same in return after all, and wishes to make that point known, but somehow…

“Mongrel!” Gilgamesh called out, scowling at his own thoughts.

Hakuno started sitting up quickly and looking around, before turning and looking at him, blinking a few times.

“Do you plan to sleep throughout the entire day and leave me bored?” he said.

Hakuno blinked sleep from her face, as her usual bland expression returned, though the fire in her eyes, which had dimmed the previous day, seemed to have been rekindled.

“No,” she said. “We need to get going. I want to talk to Jinako,” she said.

Gilgamesh nodded, waiting for her to leave before returning to his astral form.

He remained unseen as she walked to the Student Council’s room, noting that, again, the ghost was missing.

The puppy seemed unruffled from the events prior as Hakuno took her seat, but rather gave his usual smile and push of Charsima as he spoke.
“Excellent. We’re all here. Before we finish things with Jinako, I wanted to conform a few things. Sakura, you’ve mentioned that the Labyrinth doesn’t extend beyond the twelfth level.”

“That’s right,” the Ai agreed.

“…So we’ve already gotten to through the Labyrinth,” Hakuno said, her voice soft, and…maybe a note of sadness in it. “I guess I didn’t even notice.”

The puppy smiled in a congratulatory manner.

“Exactly, and congratulations in getting thus far. We haven’t seen any sign of the last Ego who was supposed to be a Sentinel since she first appeared. Maybe it’s intentional, or maybe BB just hasn’t been able to move fast enough, the case remains that the Labyrinth is only extending twelve floors.”

“I’ve been using what’s essentially radar,” Sakura said, smiling a little. “So far, there hasn’t been a single ‘ping’ from any lower floor.”

Rin and Rani exchange a subtle gesture under the table of slapping their palms together.

“So, while we have this chance, as the General Affairs manager, there’s something that you’ll need to do extra, Hakuno. I know that going into a heart is tiring, but once you’ve finished, you’ll need to go directly to the next level. If it’s just you, then as soon as you arrive there, then Rin, Rani and Sakura should be able to transfer you to the Near Side, and as long as one of us goes there then the Moon Cell will be made aware of the irregularity, and BB will be erased. Even if BB comes, she’ll be out of pawns, so she’ll have to face us directly.”

It was a decent plan, but it was relying on a great many suppositions. The first and foremost being that BB was not, as she had been before, waiting for them to appear or that she did not have another Servant that she had been waiting to use.

“What about the other Ego?” Rin asked.

“I’m not sure it matters,” Hakuno said, frowning. “BB’s running out of time too.”

Ah, so she was aware.

“I mean…BB’s a rogue AI, but eventually she’s going to realize that her biggest threat isn’t me, or you or any human. It’s the Moon Cell itself.”

The puppy beamed at his contractor in a way that made him want to materialize and carve the amiable mood of the place in two.

“Exactly,” he said. “She’ll eventually switch to attempting to eliminate the Moon Cell.”

That was what she was already doing. Had they not heard her statement of what she would do when she reached the bottom?

Hakuno was looking down, and appeared troubled by something. If the little fool was feeling pity for the plight of a machine that attempted to kill her…

Rin frowned at Hakuno. “Also, I’m going to only say this once. I know you, Hakuno. You’re not someone to give up on something once you’ve decided to go through with it, but when worst comes to worst, you feel guilty for living. Don’t. No matter what.”

“That is my final issue I wish to consider. The state of Jinako’s conscience,” the puppy said.
The sake of flesh had nothing of the sort, and if she did, it was long overshadowed by self-pity.

“There’s a difference between us and her. Everyone here has sacrificed others for their own goals. Everyone other than Jinako. She came assuming it was a game and looking for some cash prize. I honestly think that that is why Gatou did not hesitate to save her. He saw her hesitation as a sign of something good within her. It’s truly unfortunately that she’s become a danger to everyone here.”

He sighed, and glanced towards the side of the window.

“It’s truly unfortunate. I…am glad I came here though. Otherwise…I don’t think I would have really understood Gatou’s…or any of your…humanity.”

He shook himself out of that reverie and looked serious again glancing out at the small group.

“Alright. This is our last mission as the Student Council! Good luck Miss Hakuno, we’re all rooting for you!”

Clearly dismissing them, the child stood up and walked to the window, looking out at the Sakura tree with the expression of a spoiled child who had just realized that his own desires affected others.

Rani stood, walking quickly to Hakuno, her face in its usual expressionless façade, but something glinting behind her eyes.

“Hakuno, I wished to tell you something. Like Rin, I worry for you. But…remember this: if you are forced to make…the worst of choices…choose to live without any hesitation. That is my wish for you: you must survive. Rin and I both agree on this. Regardless of what you learn, or what happens, may you be guided by phosphorous, the morning star…”

For a moment, her eyes flicked to Hakuno’s left hand, but she turned away.

“…I…Thank you,” Hakuno said, but she stood straighter, that fire burning brighter, “But…I won’t have to make that choice. We’re all going to make it!”

Empty words from a life that would soon vanish from his sight, attempting to encourage another, yet, watching her, burning and yet never consumed by that desire…

Rani nodded, smiling briefly but then walked towards Rin. Those two seemed to be slowly gaining a friendship or at least an understanding of one another. One that was starting to intrigue Gilgamesh. They were both aware of something. Had Hakuno had longer…

Hakuno took a breath, stepping towards where Leo was standing, and Gilgamesh followed. He was interested, while being so near the Knight of the Sun was distasteful.

“Gawain…do you think it’ll clear up tomorrow?” The child was not speaking of the ever clear sky.

“Yes,” the knight said with a smile. “The dark clouds of night that have hung over us will be ended. Soon we will see the dull red of the dawn change to a blue sky as if shattered to pieces, and the wind as it stirs the manes of our horses, wrapped in blanket of sunlight through the leaves. We will see the castle gates we have missed so long open to welcome us, quench the thirst we have known so long, and together, with our sworn friends, rejoice at the celebrations for the king’s return…”

“Our sworn friends…” the puppy said softly. “I’ve found a way, Gawain. I think we really will.”

So that was why he had been doing with himself. While still utterly useless as one who claimed to be king, it had some value to it at least.
“Leo…” Hakuno said softly. “I…know that there isn’t another way, but BB might be waiting with more than we know.”

“Don’t worry Hakuno,” the boy said, smiling. “I won’t abandon you.”

The depraved nun was waiting for them as they arrived at the relief. Gilgamesh stepped in front at his contractor as the woman stood, watching the statue that showed where the sack of flesh’s true self was hidden.

“This is much different than the others,” she said. “while the other girls were much more rational, and the Ego’s was nothing more than half formed hopes and dreams, this…well…I suppose you’re not interested, are you, dear?”

The nun’s eyes lingered on his contractor again, and that same hungry expression was back again. It was not desire as the Ego or the puppy showed it. This was something more animalistic.

“I’m ready to go,” Hakuno said, ignoring the woman’s face. “We’re prepared and…”

She clenched her fists. This gesture was starting to become more and more simple for Gilgamesh to read. She was worried, but reminding herself of what was at stake,

“Very well,” the nun said, and closing her eyes assumed her pose that would take them into the heart of a truly worthless life.

The atmosphere was different. While Rin, Rani and even Passionlip’s hearts had been filled with the dissatisfaction with the world and hopes of their own ideals, this was a heart slowly being consumed with decay, as her own complaints spewed out.

It was much the same as her other rants. Self pity and self justification. Stagnation and decay. Assuming that because death existed, it made life worthless rather than making it’s value utterly without measure. Assuming that struggle was pointless because the end was the same. And then behaving in shock that in the end she found nothing waiting for her.

“Why, at some point, did I end up alone?” her heart screamed. “Lovers, employment, success, marriage! What’s all that about, why’re you so happy clearing some events! Wasn’t it a lot of trouble? Wasn’t it painful? Sweating, crying, laughing! Taking a game like this seriously, are you an idiot! Oh, got it. All of you are idiots, right. I can’t really be friends with idiots, can I. I’m not an idiot, myself, so, you know how it is. I’ll pass on mingling with you guys. Friendship and cooperation and competition and all, I’ll pass. …I’ve already forgotten all of that. I mean, I’m gonna be in my thirties soon. I just can’t go out at this point. Going outside would just be painful! Why do all of you look happy? Why do you sparkle like that? …why am I not happy!? Ah… — just kidding, that was I lie. The great Jinako has lied. The best at cheats, banzai easy mode, love skipping events. It’s really fun I’m really happy just end soon no don’t end you moron. It’s a lie. A lie a lie lies. Lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies lies 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unable to do anything, I should just disappear quietly like this…!”

If she wanted to die, she should have done so already and spared his contractor the trouble of confronting her. If she wanted to live then she should have struggled. That pain was no different than that which was experienced by any human. She had merely assumed that only she knew of it because the others had flailed around and struggled as humans should.

Gilgamesh glanced at his contractor, his face, as usual with such things was pinched in pity and worry.

“I am aware that telling you to not show this waste mercy would ask too much of your soft heart, but remember what she has done.”

“…I know,” Hakuno said softly. “I’m so mad at her I could spit, and in the end, she’s caused more pain than even Lip did… I want to understand her, but there’s something so different in us that I’m not sure I’ll be able to reach her.”

“Then struggle to the best of your abilities until you are satisfied,” Gilgamesh said.

And then he would finish it.

“…it’s been...strange, fighting with you,” Hakuno said after a moment.

“Save your farewells for when we have reached the Near Side. You may curse me as you wish then.”

Strange indeed...

They landed; however while in the past they had been met by the hearts owner, now it was only the Hero of Charity, watching and waiting for them. Good. Gilgamesh, while having no interest in the waste of flesh, did wish for that one’s possessions.

The hero glanced towards his contractor behind him, but then faced Gilgamesh.

“So, you have come at last, King of Heroes. I did not wish this myself, but appears to be the place where we part.”

Gilgamesh stepped forwards a smile on his face.

“I have come to collect your head, Hero of Charity. The time has come to collect on that promise you made to me some time ago.”

When he had been deterred in ending the waste of fleshes life some time ago.

“Or will you make a plea for your life? Very well. I am generous, and I have a special affection for those things which have the value of gold. Your head, your armor, or your spear. Those were the items of which I commanded you to set one of before me. Those conditions are no different.”

The Hero of Charity kept a steady gaze.

“What an inexhaustible greed. You take and take and give nothing back. Even with so much wealth, you still desire new treasures? Though…I suppose I can understand. But it does not matter. My head is not worth a single penny. My armor…even if you obtained it, it could never be enough, and… you’ll need to give up on that…it’s already been pledged. My spear…that is necessary to fulfill this promise.”
“Then your head it will be,” Gilgamesh said.

“You may take it, provided that you can,” Karna said.

The hero held himself well, for one who would soon die, but his eyes flickered towards his contractor. Some new light that Gilgamesh did not light reaching them.

“Jinako has accepted that she cannot continue hiding anymore,” he told her. “I thank you for that.”

His eyes flicked back to Gilgamesh. “Your mistress has truly become strong in a very short time. Not in the matter of just physical strength, but in her state of mind. I sometimes wonder if Jinako sees that infinite, unrivaled persistence that carries her through this place as a threat to herself. No. I know that she does. It is my mistress’s antithesis. I might have liked it, to have been contracted to you.”

Something cold, hot and familiar raced through Gilgamesh’s veins as he held himself back from summoning the gates that instant on a thief who intended to steal what was his. Before his contractor could even open her mouth, Gilgamesh had stepped further.

He laughed in rage but kept his eyes firmly on the Hero of Charity.

“Oh, so that is your aim in being here alone? Did you think to offer her a contract the moment you could? While I certainly understand your desire to split with such a worthless thing as the sack of flesh you are obligated to protect, give up. This woman’s life is mine, and I will not give her over to you, thief, or to anyone. There are other women in that Student Council that I deemed unworthy of a contract. Select one of them as a replacement, but speak of my contractor again and I will take more than your head from you. I will have all three and leave you with nothing!”

“Gilgamesh…” the mongrel’s voice was surprised, but he ignored it, staring hard at the Hero of Charity.

His contractor had accepted the price for their contract, and she had maintained it against the likes of BB. If he ended her life or decided to extend it by returning her Command Seals, this man had no business so much as looking at one who had Gilgamesh had deemed as his own!

The Hero of Charity laughed, a surprisingly light sound and a weight seemed to leave his body.

“Such overwhelming greed… You truly desire all things, King of Heroes, even if you do not understand them. Be at peace. I will not abandon Jinako when she needs me most. I meant say that your mistress is much like you, matching your greed for treasure with hers for life.”

Gilgamesh stood down a hair, but continued to watch the hero suspiciously.

“Jinako lacks that, and now she is over with a cold flame that is devouring her heart slowly…”

“Guilt,” Hakuno said softly.

Of course, she of all people would know that. She likely felt guilty for facing the ghost in battle.

The Hero of Charity nodded, but made no other move for Gilgamesh to take for an attack.

“Stabbing feelings of self-condemnation, forsaken repentance… As she is unable to hate Monji Gatou, these bind Jinako,” he smiled slightly. “I’m grateful to Gatou. That man just managed to hold my mistress from the edge of madness. And I am grateful to you, who has come so far for someone else.”
Gilgamesh planned on finishing this farce now when a scream of rage was audible and the sack of flesh came running out of hiding.

“That’s enough! This is a public execution! Can’t you just hurry up and do what you’re supposed to do! You’re supposed to fight and kill, you useless Servant!”

She was pounding the stomach of her Servant like the long overgrown child throwing a tantrum that she was. She turned to face Hakuno and himself, her face contorted in a kind of rage best reserved for a whipped cornered dog, attempting to snap but far too afraid to.

“Just end it already. End everything. Even if we lose — even if we win! If that’ll end this, why not? There’s nothing else to do, is there!? Even you have to think I’m hopeless, don’t you, Hakuno!? And that’s right, I am hopeless! You should just kill me! I’m not scared, everyone dies in the end!”

Gilgamesh turned to see his contractor.

Her face was cold, but a brilliant rage was burning in her eyes as she watched the final tantrum of the woman.

“I’m not here to help you destroy yourself, Jinako,” Hakuno said, her voice steady. “I’m here because I want you to thank Gatou.”

The flesh bag jerked back as if his contractor had struck her.

“T-thank…”

“Ah, yes, that had slipped my mind as well,” Gilgamesh said thoughtfully. “Indeed. A deed of merit deserves thanks from those who are the benefited. Or are you simply incapable of recognizing what was valuable about that man without my contractor to tell you?”

The flesh bag screamed in rage and pain and guilt.

“That’s enough!” she cried. “I won’t! I won’t thank him! He didn’t do anything! He just died! Everyone dies! It’s not my fault! No matter what-no matter what no one will ever be saved! I won’t! I’m going to stay like this forever! Karna! Throw them out! Erase them so that they never come back there again!”

Finally.

“…If that’s your order, I will obey. By the tyranny of my spear, Hakuno Kishinami will be burnt away to nothing. If you declare that the dark flame within you will not vanish until it burns you up with it, Jinako, then I will be the shroud that guards you from the wind and rain…”

He held out a hand, where the crimson spear appeared before him in a flash of flame, and Gilgamesh found a familiar desire course through him. A weapon that could never be used…yet was incredibly powerful. That was what he would take from this man for his insolence.

“Let’s being, King of Heroes. It’s premature but know that this will be the place of your death.”

Gilgamesh laughed, standing before his contractor.

“Code cast: Cheat Attack!” The waste of flesh called, reaching into her bag for something and beginning to glow.

“Code Cast: OVERRIDE!” Hakuno’s voice snapped, as she made a cutting motion. “I’ll keep her
from doing anything!"

That was well, the Hero of Charity was already moving, rushing forwards to attack with a speed that far belied his wasted frame.

“Chain of Heaven!” Gilgamesh called as his gates opened.

The chains bound him quickly, forcing the demigod to his knees. However, Gilgamesh would have to move quickly. The chains were a consistent drain on Hakuno’s sparse resources, so he rushed forwards, summoning his axe to swing down on the man.

One of the things Gilgamesh disliked about this digital world was that an axe to the stomach did not have the effect that it should, and rather than killing him, only harmed him greatly.

Recalling them, Gilgamesh prepared another attack. Summoning his drill and sending a flurry of attacks towards the man.

“Come on Karna! You're losing to a guy in a leopard print!”

Gilgamesh smirked.

“Jealousy will avail you nothing,” he said.

Though how could they not be envious of his form?

“…arg…you…You…KARNA USE YOU’RE NOBEL PHANTISM!”

The little fool.

For a moment, the Servant looked like he might refuse, but finally nodded.

“If that is your command.”

A glow starting to appear along him and power gathering. Gilgamesh rushed forwards, but the Hero of Charity shot into the sky before he could be stopped, the spear from before shining like the sun. Almost so bright that Gilgamesh didn’t notice the other glow behind him.

An anti-divine attack. Gilgamesh braced himself, fully prepared to block the assault.

“Kishur: Right of the King,” Gilgamesh muttered, but it might be too late...

"Know the mercy of the King of Gods. With this single strike, I shall inflict extinction. Indra, observe me. Be reduced to cinders, Vasavi Shakti!"

The spear shot towards him with a force that caused the entire floor to shake under their feet, and pain, still unfamiliar to him even after their time in the Labyrinth, shot up his arms. Flame and power erupted around him, and a scream of pain from above told Gilgamesh that Lancer had paid dearly for that attack, yet...

That power should have killed him, even with his skills. His own blood rebelled against him, yet he still stood, a pain revealed a dangerously low health present, but no more.

A sharp gasp of breath caused Gilgamesh to jump back glancing towards Hakuno, who had doubled over, clutching both her arms and shutting her eyes.

“I’m…fine…” she wheezed, correctly assuming the lull in battle meant that he had looked to her. “…
Clear the storm.”

A powerful attack, and one that she could only barely support. Gilgamesh smirked towards Karna who had fallen from his height, the armor that seemed to be engrained into his body breaking to pieces only to slowly begin to reform.

“That will not be necessary,” he said, rushing forwards and aiming a blow for the other’s chest.

Karna went flying backwards, skidding against the floor to rest in front of his Master.

It should have been a fatal blow. The man was stunned, his armor gone, and his power fled. Yet, he managed to scramble to his feet, breathing hard and watching him with a blank, exhausted look.

“I was inevitable, I suppose…” he sighed.

“You are much like a zombie. You are no hero who refuses to die, but a fool who refuse to die until the time is right. Very well. With this spectacle, I no longer desire your head. That armor remains desirable, but difficult to retrieve. …You may die in the way that your heart desires. I will grant you that.”

He glanced towards the Master, cornered, alone, her faithful dog unable to raise again to defend her. It might have been a pitiful sight, but it brought a rush of savage pleasure to him as he watched her.

“You are a fool who knows nothing about your Servant’s power,” Gilgamesh said. “I wonder if you so much as even attempted to learn, or was that effort to great for you?”

Had she waited or attempted to wear him down first, she might have won, but this was a woman who understood nothing but short cuts and no strategy but to flail blindly.

Soft footsteps required him to step back and allow his contractor to approach her target. She was still moving slowly, exhaustion marring her already average features, but she pressed on.

“Ha…Hakuno…” the woman whispered. “I…I…”

“It’s time for you to face up,” Hakuno said softly. “You’re going to thank Gatou if it’s the last thing I do.”

And standing straight beyond her exhaustion, Hakuno vanished, leaving Gilgamesh and Karna alone.

“She saved you,” Karna said.

“I am aware. Though in truth, she saved herself. This is her battle. I am merely here to observe the human called Hakuno Kishinami. She has faced more deadly foes than you.”

“You still call yourself ‘observer’?”

“Of course, this is not a battle I hold any stake in. That will not change regardless of what awaits her after this.”

And something did await them. His vision was yet unclear, but it was not a pleasant event. Perhaps the ghost would take off his mask. It did not matter. They would complete this, and her life would vanish from him.

Somehow…this thought…annoyed him.
He glanced to the other, noticing him watching were Hakuno and the waste of flesh still battled. Perhaps he was worried for his Mistress, but perhaps…

“I will warn you again, Hero of Charity, do not think to contract with that mongrel,” Gilgamesh warned, looking at him out of the corner of his eye. “What becomes of her is none of your concern.”

“…No…” the hero said, smiling a little. “I suppose it isn’t something for me to concern myself with.”

Somehow, that smile coupled with Gilgamesh’s own proclamation that the hero could die as he wished annoyed him more.

Chapter End Notes

So another mix of actual stuff and some added stuff. Apparently, Hakuno can override others in Extra Encore, so I decided to use that, as well as increase defense. Though that one almost brought Hakuno down too...

This would have been better named "Karna uses Discernment of the Poor on Gilgamesh".

Next Chapter:

BBad End.
The First Time Hakuno was Separated From Gilgamesh

Chapter Summary

**Bad End**

Chapter Notes

**BB ruins everything...**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time that Hakuno was separated from Gilgamesh was after Jinako’s Punishment. She’d been furious going in, and even more so with Jinako’s casual mention that BB hadn’t done anything to her, so she’d just decided to go along with this of her own free will.

She’d compared it to being a boss character, and Hakuno had just lost her temper, shoving ever SG in her face.

Finally, the punishment was over and Jinako was crying in her own heart.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “But I...I can’t be happy and cheerful like you...”

“You don’t have to be,” Hakuno sighed in frustration. “Just because you’re not happy...the world needs people like that. Who see problems as much as who see the good things in life. There’s nothing wrong with that. I’m mad at you because you’re hurting other people, not that you’re hurt or that you don’t know what to do. You don’t have to just ‘not be sad’. Maybe you’ll always be sad. I can’t even imagine what it feels like to lose something that important. I’m mad at you because you set yourself in the Labyrinth, have tried to hurt people, and you refuse to thank Gatou!”

There was a moment of silence as it felt like Jinako processed that information.

"You don’t care do you? That I'm not...happy, or sparkling. ...I’m sorry, Hakuno...” Jinako finally said. “You pushed yourself down here for me...and you...thank you. I...if you really think that... then I guess I can try just a little... And thank Gatou when we come back...”

The relief shattered, and Hakuno sighed as she was back in the, well, normal world. Karna had vanished but Kiara was waiting. She checked over Jinako, who was sitting in a daze, looking at the ground.

“She’s about to lose consciousness.” Kiara said. “I’ll take her back. You have a job to do, don’t you, Hakuno?”

Something about the way she said her name brought a shiver down her spine. Maybe if she was a guy...or liked girls...but while Kiara was pretty and seemed to want Hakuno to open up to her, she’d really rather have more ‘chat time’ with the King of Heroes. Gilgamesh might be insulting sometimes and hard to understand what he wanted, but at least he didn’t make her feel uncomfortable
like that.

There was a crackle of static and Rani’s voice became clear.

“So far, we have detected no changes to the Labyrinth, please proceed as planned,” Rani’s clear, cold voice called out. “BB might be present, but as an AI with no capabilities, she shouldn’t be able to stand against the team that took out us, Lancer, and Karna.”

Hakuno hoped not. Or at least hoped that she wasn’t so tired that she made a stupid mistake.

“We’re in the last plays of this game,” Rin said. “So, no mistakes on either side, right?”

“Right,” Hakuno said.

She glanced at Jinako again, but her eyes found the crimson set they were boring into hers. Gilgamesh stood, arms crossed with no clear expression on his face, but that air of expecting something immediately was back. This time though, she knew what he wanted.

After all, it was time for her to face the music, right?

“Alright,” she said. “Let’s go see if we can reach the Near Side from here.”

She wasn’t afraid to die, but…she was sorry for it.

Hakuno set off at a run, refusing to even think about what might be waiting for her, as she lead the way down the stairs and into the darkness that showed that there were no more floors for her to think about.

The floor was the same as when she’d managed to reach it the first time. Just an flat space that might have gone on forever, and might have ended after only a few meters the darkness around them seemed to enclose around the small space with only the pillars of code and what looked like a beam, or maybe a drill, coming from the floor.

But this time, they weren’t alone at all.

BB was standing with her back to them, watching the beam of light as if deep in thought.

This had to be her chance. If they could run past her or…

BB turned around to look at them.

“Oh, you’re here already?” she asked, frowning a little. “Welp, Jinako and Karna were gutless. I guess I should have seen that coming…”

She looked confident, but if Hakuno managed to get past her now… The others would be able to get through to their Holy Grail War! It didn’t matter if she died! The others would get out.

Gilgamesh was grinning, bloodlust and a proud kind of hatred clear on his face.

“It is rare for someone such as yourself to expose your true substance. It might be a dull resolution, but I will cut you down here!”

He rushed forward without Hakuno’s direction, moving faster than she could even track, but a second later, he’d jumped back, blocking…something…

“Tch, I forgot just how fast your response was,” a familiar but somewhat annoyed voice said as
Robin Hood made himself visible. “I was really hoping that I’d be able to take you down while you were focusing on BB.”

Gilgamesh scowled at the man.

“Rat, your skills could only affect the unaware no one else,” still, he didn’t attack again, but was watching the man.

Hakuno swore under her breath.

She’d forgotten about Robin. He’d been hard enough to deal with when she was dealing with Dan. And then, the soldier had done his best to keep Robin from using his assassination techniques to a minimum. Now…

This would take time, and the Labyrinth was going to expand while they were fighting!

BB seemed to guess what Hakuno was thinking, and she giggled.

“‘An AI can’t pursue unnecessary actions’. That’s what that President said, right? Well, he was right about that. The reason I expand my memory and the reason I expand the Labyrinth are totally different! If you didn’t push me to expand the Labyrinth, I wouldn’t. I’d just let you hang around that stupid school! But…” she stopped with a singsong voice. “That hasn’t helped you much, has it, Senpai? While you’ve been playing with Karna, your cute little BB-chan was briskly digging away and-“

A wall of fire surrounded her with such force and suddenness that Hakuno jumped back as well as BB.

“Wha- what’s this… That kind of damage output…”

A clank of armor that Hakuno remembered from the real Holy Grail War made her turn around to see Gawain, standing in front of Leo, sword out and face in a serious expression while Leo stood behind him, giving Hakuno a carefree smile.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Hakuno. I told you though, I wasn’t going to abandon you. I’d like to thank you for all of your work as the general affairs manager for the Student Council. It’s really been a pleasure to work with you, and…inspiring in ways you’d never know.”

The smile faded as he faced BB, and a look she remembered well came back.

This was the boy who everyone claimed would win the Grail War. Leo Harway. The strongest of the Masters, who’d claimed that he would be the one who would save the world.

By wishing for the right to rule it completely.

“I’ll take over from here and repay your hard work and achievements with my full power. Once we get back to the Near Side, I can tell you my other plans.”

“Leo! Gawain! I didn’t think-”

“He suspected a final trap.” Gilgamesh said, watching him with a speculative look. “Let us see if this child is truly as powerful as he claims.”

Hakuno wasn’t entirely sure why he cared. After all, it wasn’t as if they were ever going to fight.

The flames around BB looked like they were blocking a transfer, since while she backed up, it didn’t
look like she could do anything to get away.

“This kind of power… I’d thought that since he was at Karna’s level you couldn’t do anything either, but I guess this is just the different between the level of Master, and how well they know their Servant’s power…”

Leo smiled, but the look was the same as in the Holy Grail War: polite but cold with no real compassion or emotion behind it.

“Your praise is very kind. However, I cannot stop to chat. I have something I need to accomplish. Besides, Sword of Camelot: The Brilliant Castle Where Holy Swords Assemble is something that even I can maintain for a short time. However…in that short time, we’re going to defeat you, BB.

“Archer!”

“No can do,” Robin said with a shrug and making no move towards it or towards Gilgamesh. “Sorry but that wall’s not coming down. You’ll have to bear with it for a while.”

With that, he was gone, vanishing completely from the space.

“…” BB’s eyes flickered towards her and then towards Leo. “Fine. You’re so useless!”

“Gawain… it’s not necessary to hold back against this AI. Thank you for baring with me so far. Now, let the calendar cycle around and the sun rise on that fortunate day we’ve dreamed of! This is your moment!”

“At your will, my liege. By the Holy Sword of the Sun, I will burn away the moon’s impurity!”

BB sighed.

“Fine. I give up. You knew I was ready. I guess I’m in a pinch now…” she looked up at the blank sky, and just for a moment, glanced at Hakuno. “It’s fine. I’m ready. The end always comes too fast, doesn’t it?”

But then she’d looked down to face him, a smile on her face that made Hakuno feel…nervous as she giggled softly.

“Do what you want, however you desire.”

“Leo…”

BB turned her head to face Hakuno completely.

“That pleasant reality ends here. I will show you the truth: this reality has already been swallowed by nightmares.”

“Code cast: bomb!” Leo called, glowing briefly as he cast a code that would have nearly killed Hakuno to try as BB cringed back in pain.

Gawain rushed forwards, his sword encased in flames around him, as he swung down, landing a nearly direct hit.

BB gasped in pain, eyes clouding and turning that unsettling red, and pointing the little metal pointer she had as sort of defense.

He was going to win! This was going to be over! BB was already on the defensive! Leo seemed to
know it too, because he was starting to smile.

“Gawain! Finish it!”

“Before this brilliance that sets aside the night!” Gawain cried, throwing his sword into the air as markings like the sun appeared under his feet. He caught the blade, now glowing with a comforting, golden light. “Pay your ostentation to the Holy Sword of the Stars! Excalibur Galatine!”

The sword was absolutely blazing as he swung, and flames burst around BB as if they would consume her instantly.

But the cry of victory died in Hakuno’s throat as darkness rose around BB, consuming every last flame until there was nothing left.

“Wha-”

With her face completely blank, BB reached into her own chest. With a little gasp of pain, she pulled out…a cup.

It was gold, embossed with so many carvings and jewels that it was hard to tell if it could even hold something real. If the Holy Grail was supposed to be a humble drinking vessel that contained the power to grant your heart’s desires…this was the opposite.

“Domina Cronam Viminalis,” BB sang out, pouring something pink and foul looking on the ground with a bright smile.

The explosion that caused made Gawain’s attack look like nothing.

Gawain suddenly gasped out in pain, struggling to stay on his feet and then…falling to his knees and with a sharp gasp of pain Leo followed, black already starting to edge along his arms and legs.

It was over before Hakuno could even register it.

BB giggled, sounding for all the world like some schoolgirl who had just won a game of cards that she’d been underestimated at.

“That really was too fast. So this is the highest spec team from the Near Side…”

“How…you’re an AI…” Leo gasped out.

“Oh that stupid setting. Right, while Senpai was playing with Lip. I had it removed! You realize why I sent out the alter ego, the offshoot of myself out first?”

“…The founding order of self-preservation!” Rani didn’t sound calm anymore. She could hear the fear in her voice. “When exposed to danger, an AI can make a self-defense action! It’s something that only AI’s can do!”

“Yes!” BB said brightly, smiling at Leo and Hakuno. “Which means…” her face went dead. “No one can stop me.”

She stepped towards where Leo and Gawain were, the smile back on her face.

“Weep, all this moving around and exercise has made me so hungry! I guess I’ll just eat all of Gawain’s data now! Thanks for the meal!”

A light started to appear around Gawain, and Hakuno watched, horrified as data began to detach
itself from him and vanish.

“No!” Leo shouted. “Gawain, as the barer of your Command Seal, I command you! The contract you made with Leo B Harway is null and void! It has been retroactively been revoked back in the preliminaries of the Holy Grail War!”

“What are you saying! If you do that I’ll be—

“Exactly,” Leo smiled at him. “With these three Command Seals together, I make this edict! Gawain… if I ever had any king’s authority in me…then once more…”

There was a flash of red light from his hand, and Hakuno knew…

“Leo…”

And then Gawain was gone, vanishing like he’d been transported away. Back in the prelims…so he’d been planning for an escape for Gawain even back then…

“How dare you,” BB said, rage clear on her face. “I feel like a feast just got taken away right in front of me… You know, I might have returned you to the Near Side with your little friends, but I don’t want to do that anymore!”

“You never would have done that, BB,” Leo said calmly. “Not while that person is still here.”

BB stiffed almost as if Leo has managed to land a hit.

“I’ve had enough! Vanish in the Sea of Nothing!”

She attack, lashing out blow on blow as Leo stiffened under her power.

“Leo!” Hakuno ran forward.

She didn’t care that there wasn’t anything she could do. She didn’t care that this was probably going to mean her death too. She didn’t care that Gilgamesh was still there, behind her and doing nothing. All she cared about was that she couldn’t just stand there while Leo was being murdered right in front of her.

“Wait!” Leo almost screamed, holding out one hand towards her. “If you touch me the corruption will spread. She’s a cancer!”

“I can’t just!”

“No! Please retreat to the School Building immediately to form a counter attack with the others. Julius is still there, and so are Rin and Rani!

“No! You said you weren’t going to abandon me. I’m not going to abandon you either!”

Leo laughed, softly and sadly.

“Always so concerned…even for your greatest enemy… I guess that’s why… You’re not abandoning Hakuno. I’m leaving the rest to do. I have complete faith in your abilities… Miss Kishinami… For always accepting my orders without doubting me… you have my sincere
gratitude.”

His whole body shaking, and clearly in incredible pain, Leo made it to his feet, still smiling at her.

“Thank you. I wanted… Well, that doesn’t matter anymore. This is just me. I’m entrusting the next period of our student council’s presidency to you…”

“LEO!”

Hakuno screamed running forwards again as he started to vanish into black dust. Her outreached hand met nothing in the end, but…even then he was still smiling at her. That stupid, carefree look as if everything was still fine and he was just telling her to go down and deal with the Tohsaka Money is Power System…

And now he was gone.

Forever. Like Gatou.

Hakuno wanted to scream as the person who would have always been her greatest enemy was swallowed by darkness.

“…So that’s what he did. Quite an achievement really,” BB said softly. “When you think about it, Leo was really a special human. Wasn’t he?”

She looked up, and the air froze.

“But there are only two Servants here now, aren’t there? Jinako’s Servant, but she always hides herself away, and yours…who’s an irregularity who was buried here from the start…”

Gilgamesh suddenly walked forward, his face calm as he took his place in front of her.

“…You’re actually going to try to save her? I know normally you’d never bother to go so far, but on this obnoxious whim of yours…you’re really putting yourself in my way… I honestly just can’t stand to see you anymore. You stole Senpai’s precious Command Seals, leaving her with nothing but death, and now you’re just living in the school without a care! And you…Senpai. How dare you just brush aside my deal and stay contracted with this man?”

“Your jealousy exposes you, cancer,” Gilgamesh sneered.

But BB wasn’t even looking at him, her eyes were firmly on Hakuno.

“You know what’s going to happen to you, right? You’re not just stupid?”

“Of course I know,” Hakuno said. “It doesn’t matter. I accepted this myself!”

Gilgamesh was constantly telling her, reminding her, warning her that when she reached the Near Side, she was going to die.

But she didn’t want to just escape the Moon Cell herself. There were other people who needed that.

Her feet wouldn’t move. Her body wasn’t responding to her commands to stay and fight, and that it was only her and Gilgamesh left without Leo, and she wasn’t going to let his faith in her down.

“Are you actually going to try to fight me? Sorry, no can do. If some low level Master like you went against me, it would be far too easy. Though…”
Her body froze. Gilgamesh as well.

“Like this, I guess there’s no point! This is the difference in power between us, Senpai,” BB was smiling.

It was all she could do just to breathe. Like everything in her body was slowly being shut down, by the sheer force of the power that was against her. She was aware, but that was it. She tried to move her eyes, to look at her Servant, but even that wasn’t working. She was completely frozen, useless, and…

“You thought I was some weakling who couldn’t fight? Oh, Senpai… things are going to be just too easy…”

She stopped in front of Gilgamesh.

“Even you, Goldie, didn’t you ever think ‘she’s letting us get away’ or was it that you just couldn’t care less? Really, I was just leaving things up to Sentinels and Egos and stuff. After all… if I did it myself, it wouldn’t be a game, would it?

BB stepped up to Hakuno, running one hand down her face, and her body felt like it was heating up. She wanted to scream in pain, but nothing came up. She might as well have been a doll sitting there. So his was the power of the Moon Cell…and someone who, like some corrosive mud… was taking it over.

“It’s called Domina Cronam: the Ten Royal Crowns. With it, I control everything in the Moon Cell. You’ve been my toy this whole time, Senpai. My favorite little doll…”

There was an intake of breath from somewhere in front of her.

“The Ten Crowns… the power of the original goddess? Hakuno… this is… If that is true… At this current level, not even I… I assumed that she was at the level of some Phoenician goddess… it appears I was conceited…”

He was at his limit just to talk.

This wasn’t even a battle skill, this was… this was that skill used to kill Leo…

Hakuno took a breath straining to open her mouth.

She wasn’t going to give up. Not now. Not here. Not when Leo had disappeared with that stupid smile on his face as if everything was still ok. She had to find a way. She had to do something, and she wasn’t alone. The others were still fighting. Maybe…

“Oh, wooow, you’re still willing to fight…” BB said, her voice dripping with false surprise. “Human ability for false courage is really something you know. Too bad it’s just that. False. It’s also really, really getting in the way of your ability to live. So… Julius. You can do it now.”

“Wha-“ Rin screamed from the connection. “Rani, why did you-“

There was a scream on the connection turned off for a second, and when it did, it was a voice that made Hakuno’s heart feel like it was going to rip into pieces.

“BB, I’ve finished disposing of the humans in the building. I’ll dispose of their corpses in the sea of numbers.”
Julius cut off abruptly, leaving only silence. A silence that seemed to stretch on and on for eternity while Hakuno's thoughts went dead.

He spoke the way she did when he was an assassin, and she knew, somewhere, his eyes had the same dullness as well... The man who she'd drank tea with... laughed with... It was all a lie, wasn't it?

She really was stupid.

Something hot and wet was sliding down her face, but she couldn't do anything about it. Rani, Rin and Leo were dead. Gawain was gone. Julius had betrayed them. Sakura... who knew what was going to happen to her...

"Another shackle around senpai's heart is gone! With more like this, I'll be able to empty her all out, won't I?"

Empty...

Yes... that was how she felt. She wasn't even sad. It was a dull, painful ache that she didn't even think had a name. Everything had been for nothing. Everyone was gone...

"It's hard for you, with your heart held back by so much. Welp, all that stops today! As your prize for getting so far with all that dead weight, I'm going to reveal my super special secret plan! You know I'm an AI set take care of all of you, right? Welp, that's what I'm going to do! When I reach the end, I'm going to make the world, so easy for humanity."

She walked away, but then spun to face Hakuno and Gilgamesh both with a flourish.

"Lady and... well I suppose I'll call you gentleman even if you're not, I'm here to announce to you the affirmation of all human desire."

Hakuno didn't need Gilgamesh's intake of breath to know just how bad that sounded.

"That's right! No restraint! No law! No adjudicator! You can express all of your darkest desires! Loving and stealing and killing and letting live and protecting and invading... all if it!"

She giggled as the canned audience applauded.

In the emptiness of her heart, one emotion sprang up, and she gripped it with everything she had: rage.

The thing she wanted... it was a nightmare given form. Without restraints, laws, or anything to hold people back, they'd create something that a billion Holy Grail Wars could never do. The people who wouldn't fight would be taken down before they could organize, any attempt to stop would fall apart...

Would what came out even be called human anymore?

"I see that look, Senpai. You really don't see how wonderful this world is going to be, do you? I guess I'll just have to show you then."

Images played in her head. Of Masters being consumed by dark mud, of that same mud pour out from the moon to cover the earth, of people collapsing as their spirits were transported to some world without 'pretense', of bus crashes and plane crashes and fires and toxic gas. It was horribly, terribly familiar to her.
There was a name. A name that someone had once told her.

This was hell. A hell created by human hands, but hell all the same.

BB beamed at her, as if expecting some form of affirmation, and, for the first time, Hakuno realized just how insane she really was. She was a computer. Something that he no real concept of humanity. So therefore, ‘affirming all desires’ meant nothing to her from a normal standpoint. Same as the Grail War itself…

But people were never supposed to have all of their wishes granted. Maybe they were never supposed to have their wishes granted...

“You…really just don’t understand me, do you?” BB said, sorrow suddenly showing on her face. “No matter how much I show up, you’re going to keep giving me that look. Even with everything gone, you still do this… Well, I planned for this as well. Please fall into the Sea of Nothing along with this space. Your time of doing what you please is over. That’s not the end though. Oh no. That Servant. I’m getting rid of him. I don’t care how powerful he is, he’s too disgusting to eat. Not to mention that he might just eat me right back if I’m not careful…”

A darkness started to surround Gilgamesh, but then, suddenly a light started to appear from around him. It pushed against the darkness beating it back for a moment, then being beat, and Hakuno noticed as a bead of sweat was starting to form at his temple.


The light was beat back.

“So even I cannot beat back this which would bring me back to my point of origin,” Gilgamesh breathed out. “But know this, when I awaken next, this indignity will cost you greatly, women.”

And…just for a second, he turned his head a fraction, so that he could see her. At first, Hakuno thought that that last bit was for her. He had every right to blame her, …but…there was another emotion in his eyes. It wasn’t anger. It wasn’t sorrow either. It was something else, something that Hakuno didn’t even know…

This was her fault.

She’d brought him all this way. Lead the way into a fight that she never had a chance of winning in the first place.

She gave up.

Those embers that had held her out for so long…

Her hopes for the others… it was all gone.

Even though her face was frozen, the tears were still trailing down her face, but her mouth was still half open.

It didn’t matter anymore…

“I’m…sor…ry…” she gasped out.
Hakuno had enough time to see his eyes widen and dilate…and then he was gone.

BB clapped her hands in joy, and turned to look at Hakuno with a bright smile on her face.

“Welp, that’s that!” she said. “To the bottom of the sea you go! This is the last time we’ll ever meet, so make the most out of the rest of your life down there!”

She laughed brightly, and Hakuno was falling backwards, deep into a darkness that enclosed around her, shutting off the last spark of light and leaving her without even the faintest hint as she fell backwards. It might as well have been the underworld itself.

That’s right. She was dead.

Shinji…

...maybe it would have been better if I’d just thrown the match to you back then...

Dan...

I guess my legend was a pretty pathetic one...

Alice…

I wish I could have played with you more...

Gatou...

Everything you passed to me...I couldn't do it...

Leo...

I guess I couldn't even start...

Rin…Rani...

I couldn’t help you... I just gave you false hope...

Sakura...

I guess we're not going to have tea again...

Gilgamesh...

I'm so sorry...

I guess….this is the point where...

There is nothing left.

Chapter End Notes

Welp that was depressing. Gil finally got to see Hakuno lose hope! I don't think he liked it much though...
Next Chapter:

The Sea of the Sleeping King
The First Time Hakuno Realized She wanted Gilgamesh as her Servant

Chapter Summary

Hakuno faces trial on trial in a darkness beyond words and in the Sea of the Sleeping King.

Chapter Notes

You're welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first time Hakuno knew that she wanted Gilgamesh to be her Servant was after she fell into darkness.

She wasn’t sure what this place was.

Maybe she was dead. Maybe it was really just the bottom of the Sea of Nothing.

Either way, there was only silence as she made her slow way through the darkness, crawling on her hands and knees since she just…couldn’t make it to her feet.

She had no idea how long she’d been crawling for. A minute? A day? A week? Eternity? It honestly was hard to even remember anything but this sometimes. Just the darkness that surrounded her completely, the velvet floor, the soft whispers around her, and the pressure that forced her to her knees. She wasn’t hungry or thirsty, but maybe in this place, that didn’t matter either.

She was probably dead. This seemed like hell. At least a personal one. A long, open space with no destination and no goals. Maybe it was right. This was her fault.

Someone had once mentioned that there was a method of torture…one where you forced the victim to crawl on their hands and knees for a month. Apparently, that was all it took for someone’s spirit to die within them, and then they’d do what they were told, with all dignity or reason forgotten.

Hakuno wished that this was something like that. Something that would end in a month. Or something that was being done for a reason. This…this was just…pointless.

She wanted to scream, but…no sound would come out…

She was going to be down there forever…

Gilgamesh was gone. She couldn’t even feel his presence around her anymore. BB was still there though. Sometimes laughing at her, sometimes telling her to sleep.

Hell had to have BB in it.

Everything was over.
Everyone was dead.

There was nothing to fight for anymore. She didn’t even have anything to fight with.

She wanted to sleep.

She wanted to give up and curl up and sleep like her body screamed for her to and the voices asked her to.

She was done.

She’d failed.

There was nothing left.

But she kept going. She didn’t have destination, or a hope, or anything other than that, but she just kept going.

“Aren’t you tired now?” BB’s voice drifted through that space. “You can just rest. You’ve been through so much…no one will laugh at you if you give up now…”

It was probably a hallucination.

Hakuno kept going. The pressure of the area keeping her from responding. There was nothing much to say anyways. She wanted to stop. It was so dark now that she couldn’t even see her hands. Maybe her eyes had given out…

But that didn’t matter.

For a second, Hakuno stopped, blinking even though it changed nothing. The darkness just kept going on and on. But…that was right.

There was no end, and no one was coming to save her.

But that wasn’t all that special. No one was going to save her from the first. Even Gilgamesh, for all that he’d allowed her to use his overwhelming power had made sure she understood that they weren’t allies. That had always been her own fight.

It was impossible. There was no end.

She didn’t care.

She kept going, feeling her way through the darkness around her, moving ahead.

“Stop it!” BB’s voice screamed out, and Hakuno realized…she wasn’t hallucinating. “What are you doing? How can you still fight? You have nothing left to fight with. Why are you still going? Are you insane? This can’t be normal!”

Nothing left to fight with…

No.

That was wrong.

She’d been wrong.
“There is nothing left” that’s what she’d said in her heart…

Those embers were gone. Everything was gone…but…

She paused again, clutching into the fabric

Even if that was completely true, and she had lost, and this was her hell… then she would clutch the ashes of those embers to fight in whatever way she could. She’d never had strength. She’d never fought BB alone, and if it was all she could do, then she’d hold the dreams and wishes of the others by this small defiance. Even if that meant crawling like this forever.

She couldn’t give up. Not now. Not ever. Because…that was all she’d ever been able to do…

“…what a stubborn person…” BB’s voice muttered. “I guess this managed to be too easy on you. Fine. I guess…I’ll just force you to sleep again. But don’t worry, Senpai. It won’t be that preliminary again. I’m not going to leave in a fraction of your memory. You’ll be just like a baby! Then at least you’ll stop resisting me!”

The ground started to shake. And suddenly…there was something here.

Hakuno had seen a lot of monsters, but this was…huge. It loomed above her, glowing purple and red, four glowing points of light that must have functioned like eyes bared down on her and a mass of tentacles and motion flowed all around her. Hakuno scrambled back as one of those tentacles rushed towards her, rolling so that it didn’t manage to hit her.

She couldn’t fight! She didn’t even have any damaging code casts! And Gilgamesh…was gone forever…and there was no way she was going to outrun that thing…

No! Just when…

“Made it!” a soft voice said. “…You struggle as magnificently as ever, Kishinami. Even when you thought there was no reason to try…”

That voice…it couldn’t be…

Light flooded the world.

Julius Harway stood in front of her, forming a shield between her and the thing that was looming over them.

“…Jul…ius…” Hakuno croaked.

The pressure of this place was still bad, but somehow…the light made it so that she could talk, even a little, but her throat felt dry.

“Julius,” BB’s voice sounded genuinely confused, and then, almost panicked. “W-what are you doing there? How did you get into the BB Special Space?”

Julius laughed softly.

“It’s thanks to you,” he said, his voice calm but with a hard note that Hakuno had never heard before. “I’ve waited a while, but finally I was able to use that program you just used as a beacon. This is a space were nothing exists. Somewhere that only its creator can look into, and with no basis to define it, no one could enter. But once there was something there, someone who knew what they were looking for could chart coordinates… In order words, the moment you lost your temper
because Kishinami outlasted you, I could take this chance to revive the dead.”

“Julius…but…you…Rani and Rin…You…”

Julius turned to face her, a strange warmth in his eyes that reminded her of tea in the infirmary and easy chats between dives into the Labyrinth.

“I was a traitor. To BB,” he said. “As long as she’s careful, she’s far stronger than Leo, and I knew that if I didn’t listen to her, she’d never trust me.” He turned back. “Tohsaka and Rani are both safe. I had to knock them out, or the show wouldn’t have worked, but they’re fine. Sakura’s probably looking over them. Though…I’m sorry, but I did have to bring Jinako to BB. I couldn’t find anything else to do, but that’s no excuse.”

“You…are actually betraying me?” BB said, her voice surprisingly…hurt. “You ungrateful… I saved you! Who’s the one who salvaged you from nothing so you could have your revenge even as a ghost?”

A ghost. …That was what Gilgamesh had always called him.

So…she’d won. That was the big thing that she couldn’t remember… Hakuno had managed through some fluke…to overcome Julius…

And she remembered.

She remembered him screaming out some chant she never understood behind the firewall, madness glinting in his eyes as he refused to disappear, to lose to some two-bit nobody like her. She remembered him exploding into darkness. She remembered…

“Save me? You did nothing. I became a ghost out of my hatred for Hakuno Kishinami, but after that, another regret kept me in this world by will alone, and I would not rest until I was able to satisfy it. You were the one who assumed that I was a vengeful spirit when you brought me back.”

“After that’…you were eliminated in the Fifth Round. There is no ‘after that’!”

“BB…you limited yourself to the arena. That was a mistake. Maybe you were too busy trying to prepare to add Kishinami to everything at last. Either way, it’s nothing you could know. There was once a stupid man who didn’t know when to give up and ended up dying twice. That’s all the story is.”

He turned away from the monster, completely facing her and looking down, that same…warmth on his face.

“You need to hurry. Go through the door. It’ll take you do the place you need to be. Once you’re done, you’ll have to go back to the school where Tohsaka and the others are waiting. BB isn’t complete yet. You can still beat her. All the territory on the Far Side is already assimilated, but that’s it. The Core is still safe. It’s supposed to be a place only the victor of the Grail War can go. That’s why she’s made the Labyrinth. She needs an arena. She’s adding floors to get to the center, so before that-”

“Julius! NO! Kill him and close that gate!” BB screamed.

The tentacles rushed forwards, but Julius turned, arms outstretched.

“Julius!” Hakuno screamed. “You don’t have Assassin!”
He couldn’t defend himself any more than she could!

She watched as he staggered from the blows, breathing hard.

“I guess I can’t say more…” he muttered.

“Why…” Hakuno whispered as the words starting finally coming to her and tears she didn’t think she had the strength to shed anymore coming to her eyes. “Why are you… I killed you, Julius!”

Julius laughed softly, turning to face her arms still outstretched. He was smiling. A real, true smile that she’d never actually seen on his face before.

“Heh, that’s a foolish question… I don’t need a reason to save my friend.”

His…friend…

“Didn’t you know?” he asked, still smiling. “Hakuno Kishinami, you are my only friend. The final light I saw when I had nothing… that made everything else worth it…”

All those times in the Infirmary… That had been real…

Everything had been real…

The thing attacked again, lashing out with so many tentacles that it looked like a black blur, and Julius’s whole body was vanishing. Hakuno wanted to stand, to run to him and do something, but all she could do was just stand there and watch in horror as a man who called her ‘friend’ was killed in front of her…

But Julius stayed standing. He stepped forwards, dragging himself slowly towards her as the thing prepared to attack again.

He reached out, picking her up and setting to her to feet.

“You’re crying for me again,” he said, reaching out one crumbling hand and pressing it against her, wiping away the tears that were forming. “…I did it this time…”

Then, in one moment, briefly, he embraced her before pushing her, hard though the door.

Hakuno started to fall.

“Julius! Get away! Stop-“

“Don’t weep for me, Kishinami… You already saved me, and it would be worth everything that happened being repeated…just for this brief time,” he said, as he grew further away “Hurry! AIs don’t just randomly get corrupted. Something did it, so find out quick why this one went rogue!”

The last time Hakuno ever saw Julius, the man who called her his only friend, who had always done his best to help her, he was when he turned to face the monster one last time, blocking its pursuit as the gate closed and she fell through light.
Hakuno woke up, laying on her back and looking up at the deep blue sea. It was quiet, but not like the oppressive dark of…that space. Where Julius now rested.

Julius.

Hakuno held back a sob. Another friend. Gone. He’d saved her, brought her out of the darkness and back into the real world. She’d tell Rin and Rani what happened. She had to…one she found her way back…

Slowly…she got to her feet. The pressure was different here, and the usual weird things like buildings and skeletons weren’t floating around in the background. This was just…here. Peaceful, orderly…quiet. With nothing other than the endless blue that stretched out all around her. Somehow, she wasn’t even in pain after her long crawl.

Maybe Julius had healed her…

She couldn’t think about that.

Not yet.

He’d said this was the place she needed to be.

Hakuno stepped forwards, and broke into a run. This wasn’t a Labyrinth. The blue floor stretched on without branching off, only leading forward to where…she could see something looming in the distance, even as a platform appeared in front of her, where someone was standing.

It couldn’t…

But no one else would have warn that leopard print!

Gilgamesh stood, back to her, looking towards whatever that thing was in the distance, taking no notice of her. But he was alive! He wasn’t dead either! Whatever BB had tried to do…he’d survived! She didn’t even care how stupidly glad she was to see her temperamental, arrogant Servant! She rushed forwards but stopped as he turned to face her.

Hakuno was expecting at least one weird reprimand for leaving him waiting but the cold indifference on his face made her stop in her tracks.

“Do no approach me, and bow your head before your king. I do not know who you are, but do not enter my sight without permission. Under normal circumstances, you will be skewered for your conceit, but…” he paused, frowning. “at present, I do not wish to. I have no time either. Be grateful for your good fortune.”

He…didn’t know her?

He was acting like he did when they first met in that starry sky. Claiming that she had no right to see him, to ask him questions or to even speak with him…

Had he…just…forgotten her the second she was out of his sight? Was she really…just that unimportant? That meeting in the starry sky…her sacrifice of her command seals…how they’d fought together even if he was just an observer…

The hope that had stared to bloom in her chest withered. No! She would not accept this! Even if he killed her, at least she’d tried, and it wasn’t like she was any help to anyone like this!
“My name is Hakuno Kishinami,” she said, clenching her fists.

Gilgamesh frowned, looking down and…the confusion clear on his face.

“Hakuno Kishinami…I have never heard that name, but…it is actually… No. Such a thing is impossible. I was born with a body incapable of such lapses in memory.”

A perfect, golden king, Gilgamesh had told her, meant to stand as a warning of the power of the gods…

“Yet…your voice is…familiar to me…”

“That’s because you formed a contract with me!” Hakuno pushed.

So far, he hadn’t attacked her. That had to count for something. Maybe if she kept pushing…

“A Master? You actually claim…” he burst out laughing, it was a familiar sound, not really mocking her but also not quiet not either, when he stopped laughing, he was still smiling. It was familiar expression, and somehow…less cruel than usual. “How very amusing. I should have made a contract with you for such mirth, Mongrel! Your speech, manner and even reactions all speak of familiarity with the king. I acknowledge. You do indeed know me, or believe you do. However, I do not know you, but in deference to your pleasing eyes and voice, I will ignore your rude approach.”

Pleasing…eyes…and voice?

What?

And…he…he really didn’t remember her, did he?

Her chest hurt, as something like a scream wanted to burst out. She couldn’t even breathe to do that though as white clawed at the edges of her vision.

And…why…was she even reacting like this? Why the thought that he had so completely forgotten her feel like someone had just punched so hard she wanted to fall to her knees. Was it just everything that happened? The joy of finding him again being turned against her? Why was she so hurt by this… He had just decided to one-sidedly offer help, but she had to force him though her Command Seals to even talk to him without his killing her. He’d never treated her like an equal and wouldn’t even acknowledge her as Master. They weren’t allies, he’d told her

So…why did this hurt?

She glared at Gilgamesh, so…really…this whole thing…she…was really just that worthless to him.

But the one she was the most angry with was herself.

After all, if she was this hurt, than that meant that regardless of his warnings, Anderson’s warnings, and what everyone else had said…including him…she’d actually come to trust him.

She’d really, really wanted to understand him and now…

Her eyes hurt…

“Those who have glared at me with hatred in their eyes are without number,” Gilgamesh said impassively, still watching her. “But a mongrel to look at me with such fire…though wet and clouded by pain and sorrow…that is a rare thing. Fine. In respect for that loveliness and rarity, I will hear your tale. You claim to have had a contract with me that I have forgotten… Perhaps there is
some merit to it. There seems to be some time…that I cannot recall…”

He turned away form her, facing the object in the distance.

“Perhaps that thing is the cause. Mongrel, do you see that wall?”

Hakuno walked a little closer to the edge, and then a cold thrill pulsed through her veins.

“That’s a Labyrinth Core-“ she said.

It was the same as all of them. A stone wall with a rose relief in the center, but…there…being slowly drained, even though he was wearing his armor… head down and eyes closed…

It was Gilgamesh.

“A Labyrinth Core, you call it?” Gilgamesh said. “You have wisdom in this then. As to why it is here, or what it means, I do not know, but that thing is me. There is but one form so dazzlingly bright in all of heaven and earth. However, I am right here. It may be that that thing is some part of myself. The ‘forgotten piece’ you seem to think exists. I would reclaim it quickly but I cannot seem to move freely. You can, however, I take it?”

“Yeah,” Hakuno said, turning to face him. “I think I can.”

“Then, as you have been granted the honor of a personal conversation with the king, You will assist me, Mongrel, and clear the way before me. I will, of course, offer my protection for that length of time.”

That was the closest thing to a request for help that anyone would ever get out of him, and…if what he was saying was true…she wanted to. She honestly, really wanted to.

“Alright,” Hakuno said.

A smug smile appeared on his face.

“I do like a well-trained mongrel,” he said.

Maybe she should rethink this and go back and see if Karna wanted to form a temporary contract…

No. No. she’d come too far to let her arrogant Servant stop her.

She took off at a run going at full speed as the path stretched out before her. While normally, Gilgamesh tended to have some comment or other about the place, now he was completely silent. It was…eerie. She couldn’t think about it thought! Not now.

As she ran, Hakuno suddenly felt a rush of power go up her legs and she stopped quickly.

“Wait, Hakuno!” Gilgamesh’s voice was sharp. “That’s a trap meant to deter grave robbers. It is not something that someone like you can-“ he stopped abruptly. “Why am I…becoming agitated..? How wounded are you?”

“I’m fine,” Hakuno said.

He…really had sounded upset. More so than Gilgamesh ever had for when something happened. Even now, he was glancing her over for any signs of pain.

“Really. It just felt like a tingle…”
But...there hadn’t been a trap…

A familiar giggle made Hakuno jump

“That was the feeling of a living being rejecting the spiritrons from another living organism. Sort of like white blood cells in humans. Gilgamesh sees you as a foreign substance.”

BB!

Hakuno’s eyes widened at the transparent form, and she stepped back, barely even noticing as Gilgamesh put himself in front of her.

BB had already found her.

“So, demons are appearing here now,” Gilgamesh said, his voice strangely amused. “But the form you have taken is far less of a woman than the one that is here with me now. You seem to be projecting your consciousness from another territory, but even so, you disgust me. What do you want?”

BB ignored him, as usual.

“That’s right. I’m not actually here. This is a Servant’s spiritron core. Inside of Gilgamesh’s heart. A pretty cold, desolate place, don’t you think, Senpai?”

“You have no right to talk about anyone’s heart being cold,” Hakuno hissed.

“Seriously though, even expanded as I am, I can’t read this kind of format. So talking and seeing you are all you get for now.”

But she didn’t care about getting anything from BB. Hakuno cared about what she’d just said.

“That is the real Gilgamesh,” Hakuno muttered to herself. Like with Rin, Rani, Jinako…

So, this Gilgamesh was just a part…and naturally he didn’t know her… She was a foreign substance here…

“Yes, when he fell into the Sea of Nothing, he put on his armor and it looks like his self-defense functions put him in hibernation…and then to prevent just breaking up stopped his own time like he did before. Sooo he’s totally froze to protect himself from destruction. I really wish he hadn’t been so clever, but tough luck, Senpai. You don’t get him back! That guy over there is just some instinct, created to protect the whole. You know, his initial state.”

*Memory provides rationality* Gilgamesh had once said.

“No wonder the anger I feel is so meager, yet…” Hakuno noticed his head move towards her, but then snap back. “So, should I reach that, I will recall any contract that I formed on a whim with this mongrel?”

“If you can,” BB shrugged casually. “Do you really want to?”

“Hmph, if that thing is my memories, then I have no need to confirm their contents. I will permit it to sleep. To lend my strength to mongrel such as this…attractive eyes and attitude aside… Even my capriciousness must have some limits…”

BB beamed at him.
“Great! After all you’re instinct! That’s reason. If reason awakens instinct get consumed right? Better to let it rest then! You just wait for your next summoner!”

Welp, he wasn’t going to help. Weird compliments or not.

But that meant…Gilgamesh…the real one… he was like her now. When she’d been dreaming of the preliminaries over and over again. But…he wasn’t going to find a way out…

She stepped forwards.

“Boy you’re dense, Senpai. Let me spell this out for you. That is a core. All invaders get attacked. You. Will. Die. And you don’t have a stupid little Student Council or the aid of that stupidly overpowered Servant to help you. You’re alone. You can’t do anything. Gilgamesh doesn’t know you as anything more than a virus. That’s why that guy doesn’t care about you either. I’m only doing this because…well…it’s a waste of resources, and I want to make you an example… So don’t die like an idiot, ok? If you go back, I’ll let you go back to the old school building. I’ll even set up the coordinates.”

So she could go back with nothing.

So she could sit and decay and let Julius and Leo’s wishes for her be for nothing.

BB vanished a second later. Well, she was foreign too, she guessed…

“Hmph, that was a short journey. At any rate, all that awaits you there is a pitiful death drenched in flame. I will return. As a reward for your willingness to lead, I will accompany you—“

Hakuno walked forwards.

“Are you going to forge on ahead? I suppose if you wish to make me remember, there is no other way is there?”

He was smirking at her, and that harsh, sarcastic condescension made her want to scream.

“Of course, I’m going. I’m not going to let BB win without a real fight,” Hakuno whispered. “I honestly don’t care if you come or not. But I’m going!”

“I will not stop you,” Gilgamesh, or at least his instinct said.

Hakuno didn’t bother to talk more, she just took off running. Her footsteps echoed as she did her best to make as much distance as she could as she neared the relief. It was pretty far, but if she managed to make a good distance before the rest of his defenses killed in-

The second shock hurt. The first had been a warning (because Gilgamesh usually warned once) this was an attack. Her whole body seized up, and she hissed air through her teeth in pain. Something… something in her broke down. She could feel it.

Maybe this was how Gatou had felt.

She couldn’t give up. It wasn’t that far...if she managed to just reach it...then…

She took off running again, pushing herself as hard as she could to the relief where Gilgamesh slept.

The next shock stopped her in her tracks as well, and stars danced in front of her eyes. She clutched her knees breathing hard. Black was starting to edge along her hands.
So…this was what it felt like…this was what all of them had felt…

This was how Leo had felt.

“Mongrel,” the instinct of Gilgamesh called out. “You can see how this ends. Come away. You will never make it to that thing.”

She ignored him and got to her feet. Hakuno couldn’t run. She just…couldn’t. She could walk though. Even if it was slow and painful, but she could feel that relief coming up. It was closer. With every step she took, it was closer. She just needed to hold out a little bit longer.

Red flashed through her vision as the world darkened in pain and…something else fell apart and the black noise spread further over her body.

She couldn’t feel her feet.

For a moment, Hakuno wanted to look down, but shook her head. She didn’t want to see. And she could still move her legs. That was what mattered.

…and as long as she could move…she’d be fine…

Maybe this was how Julius had felt.

But…it hurt…it hurt so bad. And after his telling her that nothing was going to work, Gilgamesh had stopped talking. Maybe he just didn’t care. Maybe he’d gone back and found something more interesting to do with himself…

She didn’t bother to look back.

Why was she doing this…for someone like that?

She couldn’t even answer that for herself.

But she picked herself up, clutching her right arm, which felt like it might disappear if she wasn’t careful, and trudged on. Everything hurt. Everything hurt so bad.

The landscape now was dark, but she could still see the path stretching, and Gilgamesh’s stupid sleeping face starting to get clearer… Just a little longer. She just needed to hold out a little longer…

The next shock made it feel like half the room went dark. She gasped in pain, but clenched her teeth. No more tears. No more screams. Even if her limbs felt so…heavy…

At this rate, it was going to be hard to see even Gilgamesh and his stupid relief…

Thirty percent. She’d made it two thirds of the way. She could still go… thirty percent…heh…that was about how human Gilgamesh even was, wasn’t it? She shook her head, trying to clear it of the random thoughts that were starting to show up. She needed to focus! She could do this! She’d reach it…

Probably with nothing more than her head left to her…

Every step felt so slow and painful, but every step got her just another step closer and…

The next shock made more of the world go dark…but…her felt lighter…

…her stomach was completely gone, wasn’t it? Well, she wouldn’t get fat now, would she,
Gilgamesh?

King of Jerks.

Her sense of pain seemed to be dying now. Honestly…she felt gross. Like she was becoming some kind of walking skeleton monster…

But…if her stomach was gone…she was lighter…so she should move faster…

Hakuno kept going. It was strange, but now that the lights were all purple and blue…she’d could see more even with less light. She’d thought this was just empty, but now, in the strange light, she could see glowing swirls and whirlpools of code that were…honestly beautiful…

And the instinct of Gilgamesh still wasn’t saying anything. It really annoyed her, and she didn’t even know why. She knew he didn’t care. He’d just said that he’d rather leave himself to sleep, but… honestly…it just made her mad.

But…

Maybe…

She’d figured out…even a little…why she was pushing herself so far for him still.

She trudged forwards, making sure to keep her weight balanced and her body from coming apart, and keeping her eyes ahead. She wasn’t going to stop. She wasn’t going to look back at the faint figure of Gilgamesh just watching her…

She could see…the path was ending. There was a slope! She was…

She was almost there!

She just need to keep walking.

If she could do that…

Pain like a thousand knifes rushed through her, but Hakuno couldn’t even muster the energy to scream. It was closer to a muffled whimper. But…she could still see him. The relief where the Gilgamesh who had fallen with her into the Sea of Nothing and frozen himself…

If…if she could just reach it and free him…

If was funny…she knew…she knew why she was doing this.

Honestly…she’d have loved to replace him. He was dangerous…unpredictable…and she knew that he only saw her as entertainment and nothing more.

She might be stupid, but she wasn’t that stupid.

But…

That wasn’t really true anymore… Not really.

She was starting to trust him, even if she never even said so to herself. He was dangerous, and he was volatile, but…honestly, there had even been times when she’d respected him.

There’d even been some times she’d admired him.
When she’d thought that maybe, that lurking anger towards humanity had some justification if things were as bad as Rin and Rani and Leo had said.

That was why.

He’d made a contract with her, and she wasn’t going to let him just slip out of it. She wasn’t going to let such a powerful Servant slip through her fingers because of BB or even himself.

Besides…

Regardless of how inexperienced she was…how weak she really was…he’d never abandoned her. Not once. He’d even acted on his own to defend her, and…well…she’d kind of thought it was funny how absolutely happy he’d been when she’d given him that suit that his instinct was wearing...

If Hakuno was going to have a partner…he was honestly the best choice.

She wanted him.

So, she’s just need to take those steps…even as the entire path seemed to glow white in her ruined vision…she could see him. She just needed a few more…

She made it to the ramp. And…she saw something that almost seemed familiar. Stained glass trees…a stone mosaic floor with strange raised parts that maybe were the Servants came from… That was like the room at the end of the preliminaries where she’d summoned her Servant…the first one…

Maybe all Servants had this. Maybe this was how they came when they were summoned…

She’d nearly died here once…

She had to keep going…

She could only hear her own footsteps, echoing around her as the watery code glowed and spiraled around the center of the core. She was hunched on herself, feeling her body slowly disintegrating, but…she was going to make it…

Just a few more steps…

“That’s as far as you go, Senpai.”

The voice sounded strangely far away, but she knew it was close. Hakuno turned around, slowly, painfully, to face what BB had waiting for her. She couldn’t even stand straight, but just sort of sagged, breathing hard as BB’s transparent form descended.

“That’s the last firewall ahead of you. There’s no way I’m going to allow you to go any further.”

There was a spark of light and another monster…enemy program…appeared. This one green and black with a row of eyes along its head. It looked strong.

“I will not permit you to release this Servant when I took such pains to reseal him. I suppose that means that I’ll eliminate you here.”

The thing rushed forwards, aiming a blow at her…

She couldn’t take it. She couldn’t even dodge this time… It had been all she could do to keep herself from crumbing away.
I'm sorry, Gilgamesh. I hope that your dreams are good ones.

She closed her eyes, but the blow never came. There was a sound of something wet meeting something else but then…nothing.

Hakuno opened her eyes, not sure what this thing was about to do to her, but…BB wasn’t looking at her anymore. Her eyes were wide and worried and she’d gritted her teeth as…

Gilgamesh landed in front of her. His arms were crossed. Just like he had when he had fought beside her.

“Tch…Wha-what are you doing!?” BB cried. “Don’t you know that letting that person do what she wants is suicidal for you? You should be helping me not—”

“Precisely,” The instinct said proudly, smirking at the AI. “If Reason exists than Instinct must vanish. You and this mongrel had no comprehension of that statement. There are limits to capriciousness and thoughtlessness. Limits which even I will refrain from abusing.”

He was here. He was…he was protecting her. Hakuno could barely think through the pain that seared through her body, but that thought managed to come through. He was helping. Even though this version of him didn’t even know her, and didn’t even care…he was protecting her…

“You believe her saying how you’re contracted to her!”

“My present ‘self’ cannot believe this mongrel’s words. I have no reason to answer to any mage. In this era, my work will amount to nothing.”

BB stomped her foot in the air, almost screaming in clear frustration.

“Then why?” she cried.

Gilgamesh laughed.

It was the same that she remembered. Harsh, yet joyful, like when she’d told him the reasons why she’d refused to break the contract she’d made.

“Is that not the most obvious thing, demon? How could I allow this woman, who risked her life for me, to go unaided any longer? Desiring me for her own sake, she showed her own legitimacy without hesitation. Were I not contracted with her, I might take her as mine for this sight alone,” he held his head up, and Hakuno knew he was wearing that fierce smile he got sometimes, with a kind of joy that she didn’t fully understand lighting his eyes. “It is my duty to love such shameless desire and such a brazen purity of heart! Abandoned by the gods and beset by a demon, if I do not save such a wretched and outstanding human as this, who will?”

More…strange compliments…

BB hissed in anger, but narrowed her eyes, clearly ready for a battle.

“Mongrel,” the voice was soft, and Hakuno shook herself from her almost stupor. “I will take this one. I will ask one last thing of you: what is your name?”

Hakuno almost laughed.

He seriously hadn’t bothered to remember after she told him. Somehow, she’d known it. This was Gilgamesh after all…
“Hakuno. Hakuno Kishinami,” she said, feeling her mouth…crumbling and her tongue barely able to form the words.

“I see. You may go and fulfill your goal then, Hakuno Kishinami. Your savage valor has been magnificent to behold. I believe that you will be one who can truly entertain me. …Ah…I recall…This contract was to fight together, was it not? Well then, in respect for this, and your struggle, I will reclaim my sword!”

With that, he was gone, and Hakuno summoned the last of her strength and ran the last few steps, a final burst of pain making the world go dark, but she kept going, reaching out with hands that didn’t even exist anymore through the empty space until she finally, finally felt the stone relief under those vanished fingers.

Pain shot up her hands. It was warm.

No.

It was hot.

The others…they hadn’t felt like this…

But…

There were sounds coming from behind her. Gilgamesh, or his instincts were fighting off BB for her. Just to give her this one chance. She couldn’t waste it…

But…what did she do? She couldn’t summon him with a Command Seal. That was impossible. She couldn’t use the Five Meditations and dive in. Not without Kiara. But…

Oh.

Hakuno smiled.

There was one thing she could do. One thing that she’d always had to since she’d made him her Servant.

She’d have to rely on him not to abandon her.

“Come to me, Gilgamesh!”

The world exploded into light and shattered stone.

Chapter End Notes

This was a long chapter, but honestly I had a ball writing it. As well as some tears. Honestly, Instinct Gil was weird to write, since he just sort of randomly sprinkles compliments around and confuses Hakuno.

Next Chapter:

The Instinct of Gilgamesh reflects on a flower in the desert, and Gilgamesh dreams and faces a realization of his own.
The First Time Gilgamesh Acknowledged Hakuno as his Master

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh dreams, reflects, and makes a stance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time Gilgamesh acknowledged Hakuno as his Master was after she drew him out of his own desperate act of freezing himself until someone else summoned him.

*The celebration had gone long into the night. The common people still danced and sang, drinking from the beer pot and praising their good fortune. The Bull of Heaven’s attack had been a complete failure, Uruk was safe, and all was well.*

*There were many things to celebrate from them. The victory over Humbaba, the revocation of Prima Noctra… that their king had finally found a companion who was in equal in all respects.*

*From his raised place, lounging on a divan, Gilgamesh watched as the mongrels danced and drank with a pleased smile, turning to his friend. They were smiling as well, looking down at the small group of sacred prostitutes, likely thinking of their own Shamhat. She would come later, Gilgamesh knew.*

“You seem quiet, my friend,” Gilgamesh said.

“After the battle, who wouldn’t be?” his companion smiled back. “I’m just glad that I can continue to watch this.”

“After Ishtar’s failed curse? Of course she wouldn’t be able to touch you. Her insult was my responsibility alone. Even if they resent that, there are things that even the gods must respect.”

*In the flickering torchlight, Gilgamesh watched a group of young women talking. Perhaps he would find some entertainment for the night as well.*

*A flash of motion caught his attention, and he turned to the edge of the circle where a young women with cedar colored hair and a pinched face stood in shadow. Her eyes, painful, empty of some light or spark that should have been there there gazed at him in desolation.*

*Then, when dancers flashed past her, she was gone, vanished as if she had never been.*

*Were those the eyes that he had wanted to see so badly?*
Gilgamesh, King of Heroes, observed as the mongrel girl began her descent towards the relief that represented his reason.

She was a source of confusion, but a pleasing one. While her hair was dull and lacked any shine of gold, the fire in her eyes, even dimmed by pain, was exquisite and the sound of her voice was a pleasant one. Even her rude approach with such…relief on her face…had been pleasing enough to stay his hand.

However, her presence was the precursor to other questions.

There had been questions already of course. For instance, while the garment he now wore was magnificent, and he had no inclination to return to the armor that his reason wore, he could not recall where it had come from, only that it was…an item of immense value, given to him wholeheartedly with nothing asked for in return.

It was the garment that made him even pause to listen to this woman’s tale. That and the simple fact that he wished to listen, and he wished for her presence as they made their way to the relief. He did not know her, but he worried for her the moment that the defenses against grave robbers had sprung up against her. That alone gave him pause to consider.

Yet, even now that the demon had appeared, he still was not entirely convinced that this was not simply some mistake of delusion of hers. It was not a deception, that much he was sure. This mongrel’s idea of deception was likely something so innocent it was laughable. Yet, surely, her high qualities aside, she was not worthy of the position of his Master. None were, and he had no reason to accept such a thing a sit was.

Still, as he had told the demon, there were limits to his caprice.

And it was his nature to judge the worth of treasures.

The woman stopped short, and his superior ears caught the sound of pain, yet, a second later, she had resume running, ignoring the black marks that were marring her skin. While he doubted her tale, she certainly seemed to believe it enough to risk pain to seek him out for her own sake.

She did nothing for him. That he knew, and that made it all the more of a spectacle to behold.

*The appearance and disappearance of the woman unsettled him somehow.*

*He glanced to his friend, but they were not looking. Had no one else seen her?*

*Somehow, the song from before and all else seemed far away now, and when he drank his beer and ate his roasted calf, the beer was bitter and the meat foul. He frowned down at it, but tried to shake it off. He would not be distracted from his mood by such a thing. There were several women to turn his attention to. Including a lovely one with golden hair and green eyes who stood nearby.*

*“It is strange to remember how not long ago, I ran in the grass like a beast,” he friend remarked, taking a drink of his own beer. “Now I sit here, clothed as a man, sitting on the right hand of the king of mankind.”*
“That is because you are human, my friend.” Gilgamesh smirked turning back to them and forgetting strange women and even stranger feelings.

They doubted that sometimes, calling themselves a weapon and nothing more, but Gilgamesh always insisted the opposite. They were his friend, his only friend, and the only one who was worthy of standing at his right hand. The only one who would and could speak against him before his words became unalterable decrees, or convince him that a decree was no longer needed. They tempered him, balanced him, and Gilgamesh of all people knew that he needed it.

“Come. While Shamhat tarries, at least dance!” Gilgamesh said, standing up and moving to step from his raised platform.

As he stepped down to join in the celebrations, another flash of motion caught his attention, and he saw a familiar figure, gazing at him from behind a pair of smiling matrons.

The same pinched face woman with the painful eyes gazed at him in sorrow. And he could almost hear the words she would speak to him. Words utterly inappropriate for her to utter given her circumstances.

“I’m sorry.”

Was this the end that he had wanted?

At the third strike, the girl was unable to run anymore.

“Mongrel! You see how this will end. Come away! You will never make it to that thing!” The words were out before he even realized it, but the girl ignored his call, and started to walk. It was clear, even from his distance, that her steps were painful.

And yet she persisted.

It was…an utterly wretched struggle. With every step she took, retreat become more and more impossible, and the defenses around the relief, the ones that the demon claimed would rip her to pieces, seemed to be doing there job.

And yet she pressed on, even in her weakness.

She was not a proper Master. There were no spells or tricks being used to escape from her fate, and the pain that she was In seemed truly genuine. Any Master worthy of him would have been able to circumvent those defenses.

But watching her press through, even in her weaknesses to reach her goal…

It made him want to aid her.

Gilgamesh, or maybe his instincts, held himself back.

The next attack made her gasp out in pain, but still, no scream was uttered. She paused, but then
stepped again balancing her weight until the next attack caused her to halt, and then proceed, clutching one arm and hanging her hand.

It was…

Truly magnificent. If she could continue…

It was like watching a flower blooming in the desert.

Often such things were not considered beautiful in and of themselves. They were usually common on first glance. Even to be considered weeds. Things that high class ladies would have spurned any lover for carrying them.

However, in truth, they were more valuable than a thousand of the cultivated and coveted ones displayed for lovers. That single, common bloom had managed to take root in a place never meant to accept life, survive amid the blazing sun, freezing cold, hungry beasts and all other trials, only to produce a single flower. A statement of defiance against all the god’s designs and a wish of hope.

It proved its worth and legitimacy without hesitating.

Now, he bore witness to another such bloom, as the spark that he had seen in this woman kindled into a flame.

The woman was gone again in a flash of light and motion, but Gilgamesh started to the place where she had been. The emotion she invoked was not anger or even curiosity. It was…something he was not entirely certain of. He wanted…something to be taken back.

A light feminine giggle made him turn, but somehow, he knew that it did not belong to the woman he sought. She would not make such a noise, even if true joy did, for once in her pitiful life, manage to reach her.

A young woman stood dressed in a long dark colored kaunake and a white cloth that none the less gave an impression of her figure. Her dark hair hung down, held back only by a single ribbon. Yet, while attractive enough, he supposed, there was something hollow in her eyes which displeased him.

Yet, when she offered her hand to join the dancing, he found that he accepted.

The music quickened as the king joined the dance, and the world seemed to spin around him, while his friend sat and watched with an uncharacteristically worried expression, and the sounds of music and song and laughter surrounded him with…a single voice weeping in the distance.

Gilgamesh looked away, towards the outskirts of the flames, to where that woman had appeared before.

She was there again, watching him with that expression, one of someone who had struggled with everything that they’d known, and still ended with nothing.

One that he knew. One that he’d felt when-
When-

When?

Something was wrong.

He broke the grip on his arm struggling forwards towards the woman, keeping her in his sight as he rushed towards her, even though someone was holding him back, and the crowd pressed against him, and the music reached a fever pitch.

He had to reach her.

He did not wish to see this.

He did not wish to see that face, with no anger, no rebuke, but only sorrow, desolation and… worry for him.

He would not permit it!

Gilgamesh reached forwards, and the world went dark.

The woman was all but crawling, but somehow, she had reached the ramp that led to the relief. Even when, finally the pain led to a small scream, she continued. Holding herself together by will alone, walking steadily and unshakingly towards her goal.

Even with all the full might of his own defenses, she never faulted, never wavered, but pressed on through all trials.

So this was the one who would be his Master.

His reverie was broken at the sight of the demon descending from above, her haughty voice declaring this to be as far as this mongrel would go.

“I will not permit you to release this Servant when I took such pains to reseal him. I suppose that means that I’ll eliminate you here.”

How dare she!

How dare this little demon interrupt this woman’s moment of glory!

No. No, this woman had earned his protection, and while he would not, could not, interrupt before, there was no way that he would permit her death now! Perhaps he should thank the demon, for giving him reason to defend her.

He rushed forwards, blocking the creature that the demon had brought from attacking and landing before the flower in the desert, crossing his arms and smirking. He could see the confused rage on her face, which turned his smirk into a true smile.

“Tch… Wha-what are you doing!?” the demon screamed. “Don’t you know that letting that person
do what she wants is suicidal for you? You should be helping me not-“

“Precisely,” Gilgamesh said proudly, “If Reason exists than Instinct must vanish. You and this mongrel had no comprehension of that statement. There are limits to capriciousness and thoughtlessness. Limits which even I will refrain from abusing.”

It was capriciousness to refuse the contract of a Mongrel who had shown her worth to him, and his own reason like knew the answer to why it was that he wished for this demon’s death so badly.

“You believe her saying how you’re contracted to her!”

Gilgamesh shook his head.

“My present ‘self’ cannot believe this mongrel’s words. I have no reason to answer to any mage. In this era, my work will amount to nothing,” he said. It was the truth. His work, his self-appointed task to protect and see humanity’s rise would come to nothing in this place. It had been why he had doubted this woman’s words.

But it was no matter now.

The demon, showing the emotional maturity of a school girl, stomped her foot in the air.

“Well then?” she cried.

Gilgamesh laughed.

“Is that not the most obvious thing, demon? How could I allow this woman, who risked her life for me, to go unaided any longer? Desiring me for her own sake, she showed her own legitimacy without hesitation. Were I not contracted with her, I might take her as mine for this sight alone,” he smiled in the joy of finding a treasure of value, and of depriving one unworthy of such a thing from ever touching it again. “It is my duty to love such shameless desire and such a brazen purity of heart! Abandoned by the gods and beset by a demon, if I do not save such a wretched and outstanding human as this, who will?”

As the demon hissed her anger, Gilgamesh took one step back. He would vanish, he knew, finding his place in the whole of his own self, but that was as it should be. Still, there was something that he wanted to take with him.

“Mongrel,” the voice was soft, and Hakuno shook herself from her almost stupor. “I will take this one. I will ask one last thing of you: what is your name?”

There was a pause, and he glanced back to see the woman, glorious in her struggle, smile faintly though her form was nearly ruined.

“Hakuno. Hakuno Kishinami.”

Hakuno Kishinami. He would hold that name until the end of time, even should he be summoned again, that name, and this memory would never fade.

“I see. You may go and fulfill your goal then, Hakuno Kishinami. Your savage valor has been magnificent to behold. I believe that you will be one who can truly entertain me.”

As he spoke, something came to him. A contract in a starry sky, with a mongrel girl, who started at him in defiance, even as fear, as was right, struck her silent. “…Ah…I recall… This contract was to fight together, was it not? Well then, in respect for this, and your struggle, I will reclaim my sword!”
He rushed forwards to meet the creature. He would fade soon enough, but that was no matter. It was his instinct and nature to guard and protect treasures after all.

The flames went out, but Gilgamesh could now see that beyond the place where the light had been, there was nothing, just the emptiness of space, and the outline of Uruk, his city, crumbling under the weight of four thousand years.

This was all wrong. None of it had ever happened like he had wanted.

There had never been a celebration for their victory over the Bull of Heaven.

His friend had taken ill, suffering from a curse of death from a jealous goddess who could not accept that her favor was unwanted, and he had learned the true meaning of what it meant to be human.

Slowly, Gilgamesh turned around.

The festival was still there, yet changed. Those from before stood still, facing him, eyes and faces blank and empty, with that dark haired woman from before in the lead. His friend was gone from their place. Ruined instruments were scattered along where the musicians had stood and the tables were piled high with spoiled fruits and rotten meat.

A feast fit for the underworld.

The dark haired woman frowned.

“You’re almost as bad as she is, you know,” she growled. “No matter how nice a dream you make for yourself, you just can’t let go of that whim. Fine. Then I’ll bury you so deep in your mind that you’ll sleep until you completely fall apart!”

She rushed forwards, but before he could even summon the gates, another barriage of weaponry made her stop in her tracks.

“Gilgamesh!” he friend called landing beside him. “I can keep her at bay for a while, but you have to wake up!”

Wake up…

That was right. He was dreaming. He had fallen through the Sea of Nothing and to preserve himself, he had taken a moment of time, selected a dream and fallen into it. But it appeared that he had not moved quickly enough if this cancer was here.

It was not truly his friend, he knew, but…his heart ached to leave them again, but there was no time.

“Now!” his friend called, rushing forwards, but looking back one time. “Go back to the place where you belong!”

Another voice cut through the darkness. One that he knew well but had never heard this tone from, and he would not hear that despair from that voice again.
“Come to me, Gilgamesh!”

He jumped into darkness, and the world shattered into light and broken stone.

Gilgamesh felt the relief break around him, and he shot forwards, landing on a platform within the space of his own heart. It was a point of summoning, where he could observe and choose his Master. Should he have ever been permitted on the Near Side.

This was where BB and Hakuno Kishinami stood. Her shout had fully woken him from his dreaming, but…that drama had been unnecessary.

“There is need to shout so loudly. I hear you perfectly well. You are…how to put it…you might be a low class woman, but your voice carries well.”

He turned to face her, and…some emotion that only one third of him would ever have been able to know struck him at her appearance.

“But what has happened to you?”

Memories assaulted him.

He saw her, rushing to meet ‘him’ with a terrible hope in her eyes, and that same desolation when ‘he’ had not known her. ‘He’ had demanded that she accompany him but then had watched and judged her journey to his relief. ‘He’ had watched her run, then walk and then nearly crawl as his own heart rejected her persistent approach again and again, and yet, she had pushed herself to awaken him.

And ‘he’ had said a great many ridiculous things.

Now she stood before him, her body in tatters, blackness covering her body, her hands and feet completely vanished, and smiling at him with a ruined mouth and closed eyes that had been darkened almost completely. He doubted that she could speak again, and even a simple touch could cause her to crumble to nothing.

She was dying, smiling at him in some last, pitiful relief, with something black and wet that might have once been tears falling down her face.

Just like another had as well, a very long time ago.

He would not have it!

“You are plain at the best of times,” he said, scowling at a few memories of his. “But now…it would pain me to call you ‘Master’ in such a state. Very well. I suppose that improving an inadequate Master is part of my work.”

Master. Yes. If she was to survive this place than that would be necessary.

He would accept that part of his treasure's worth.

“In this lifetime alone, you will be permitted the use of my treasury,” he said, smiling at BB as he crossed his arms. He was wearing his armor, he noted. He would need to change later. “You, and no other, may use the true power of the King of Heroes as you see fit!”

The world shifted as his heart accommodated her. Light shown around her, and Gilgamesh permitted his own power to meld with hers for the first time and her own form was healed and supported.
Prior to that, he had always rejected her mana, even to examine briefly. While she so willingly pushed what little she had to him, he had always kept his power, and his treasury separate. That might cause more strain on her already weak mana reserves, but he had not particularly cared. Now, though…

He blinked.

Hakuno Kishinami was not a strong mage. That much he knew. Her reserves were light, her attack power only slightly greater than a common human, but…this mana was different. It flowed to him, linking itself to his own, and giving him the strength he needed and wanted.

A support type.

Well, well, well… a mage whose entire power rested in her ability to bring out the power of her Servant or familiar. How…utterly appropriate.

BB, who had watched in horror as he had stood, was shaking her head.

“N-no…this…this can’t be,” she whispered. “Did you just unseal your Noble Phantasm?”

“I have done a great deal more than that, Moon Insect,” Gilgamesh smiled.

Hakuno took a breath, and walked up beside him, eyes fixed on BB, that fire that had gone out in that instant from before, shining all the brighter.

Good.

“Senpai shouldn’t be able to get that much stronger!” BB hissed.

“Oh? Is that an unexpected development, Cancer?” he asked, raising one hand in proclamation. “Then allow me to add one more earth-shattering development on top of that. From his moment on, I am no longer an observer. BB, whatever your true intentions might be, you have become my enemy from this day forward.”

BB hissed out a curse, but the sound of surprise that most pleased him was from his Master.

“Gilgamesh…does this mean..?” She was cautious, unsure how to ask this question.

He permitted that unsurety.

“Hakuno Kishinami, I told you in the past that this was your battle, and that I was not your ally. That changes now. Forget those words. Your enemy is my enemy. I will assist you, my nameless Master. From this moment on, I will become your sword as you pierce through the Far Side!”

He stepped forwards, eyes fixed on BB and the thing that she had used to defile this place.

“Now, Hakuno, behold the true power of the one who you have contracted with.”

He would wipe that expression of desolation from her face so thoroughly that no memory of that fear would be left. While BB and this thing were hardly worthy of so much as the name of his greatest weapon, the woman who had lost him, fought managed or fight her way to his heart itself and walked risked her own destruction for him was.

“KILL HIM!” BB screamed, “KILL HIM NOW!”

But was far, far too late.
A single golden gate appeared before him, and the Key of the King’s Law was dropped into his hand. Crimson veins reached up, branching to eternity before vanishing to reveal Ea. Though it appeared as such, the red bladed weapon was not a sword, but rather the three spinning cones that showed the Star of Creation that had once created all.

“Stand back, Hakuno.”

As the creature rushed forwards, he thrust Ea into the ground, causing end energy to crackle out from it. A wave of power rushed out, and the creature was blown backwards was BB flinched.

“I speak of the beginning.” Gilgamesh said calmly, reaching both hands out. “Oh, elements, amalgamate, coalesce,” he hold one hand in a fist before him, “and bring forth the stars that weave all of creation!”

The platform before him shattered, causing the beast to fall before him, as the true power of Ea was revealed. The three galaxies which wove creation glowed, in their smaller form, as Gilgamesh, laughing, stood above it.

“Make yourself worthy through your death! Enuma Elish!”

He pointed Ea at the thing, and, just for a moment, the stars of creation moved towards, and then away, as it was erased from all existence.

The thing might have been a powerful attack program, but nothing could withstand being brought back to the primordial chaos from which all things came, and, quickly, tentacles flailing in pain, it collapsed in on itself as Gilgamesh permitted Ea to return to sleep.

He glanced at Hakuno, who was looking at her newly reformed hands, and then at him in shock.

“I…I felt that…but…” she laughed slightly in disbelief. “I supported that.”

Gilgamesh smiled slightly at her joy in being able to provide the power to fuel such a thing, and the awe from his power.

“I will give you candy later.”

And then he turned to BB, slightly smile growing into a full one as he laughed.

“I am prepared to fall asleep, that was so easy, Cancer. If you wish to oppose me, such low grade minions will be of no use. But there is no need for you to put yourself out. Wait alone in whatever pit of hell you have found and hang your head, Moon Insect.”

BB was incensed.

“Don’t get so cocky!” she yelled, stomping her foot line a child denied her way. “I’ve defeated strong Servants! When that Berserker came for me, I tore him up so much that there’s no trace of him left! I’ll-“

“I tire of your empty threats. Be gone!”

“Tch…this projection…”

The little cancer seemed to have just comprehended that she was in his heart. A place where he was more than capable of expelling things he did not want, and this women, now his enemy, was certainly that.
“You’ll regret that you didn’t stay asleep, Gilgamesh!”

And then she was gone, fading back into whatever pit that she had come from.

Gilgamesh turned to his contractor, now Master. While he had taken care of the worst of the damage, there was no way for him to tell how extensive that had been, or what she had given up simply to come here.

She was smiling at him, eyes wet from relief, sorrow, joy, and mere exhaustion.

“You’re back…” she said, her voice more of a breath than usual. “You’re ok…”

Gilgamesh scowled.

“Why are you making such an uninteresting face, so completely slack. Has some thread of tension been cut, or are you merely insensible?” he asked, crossing his arms.

“You said we’d fight together,” she said, that expression still on her face. “I can’t imagine any Master who wouldn’t be happy to hear that…”

A rush of…something, made him nearly step back, but he thrust out one arm abruptly, as if to push that aside.

“Fool!” he said loudly and with a speed that…didn’t matter. “Do not be conceited. I decided, as the king who governs this earth that I would not permit BB’s rampage. Nothing more. The fact that our goals coincide in that matter is nothing more than mere coincidence.”

But even as he spoke, the words from before, that he would be her sword, returned to him. Clearly he had been too influenced by those memories of her actions in his heart.

Flower blooming in the desert indeed.

He crossed his arms, scowling and closing his eyes.

“It is impossible for you to rise above me or anything of that nature, Mongrel.”

Hakuno laughed a little with a hysterical edge that made him stop when before he would have been enraged.

“I know,” she said. “I don’t want to, just…we’ve never really had anything like ‘trust’ or a ‘reason’ for us to fight, and even that…it makes me glad…”

Happy just that they had something to unite them in battle. Once he would have doubted such words, but she had pursued him thus far, with no goal in mind other than to break him from his dreams.

And he found…he preferred that hope in her face.

“Hmph, very well, smile all you like,” he said. “I have awakened, but now what will you do? Your friends and reasons to fight are dead, are they not? If you choose to stay in this place, I will not stop you.”

Hakuno shook her head.

“No, they’re fine,” she said. “Julius…he…” pain and sorrow and despair flashed through her face again. “He saved them. And me. That’s how I got here. We have to get back…”
The ghost? Gilgamesh frowned, that was not something he had expected. From her dreams, he had expected retaliation, but…

He would think on it later.

Gilgamesh stepped towards her, stopping when he was in front of her.

“Alright. Then empty your mind and thoughts. I will take us from his place back into the outside world,”

She nodded, closing her eyes obediently. Despite her being safe, exhaustion was clear on her face, and the pinched look she often had seemed now far worse. What had she been doing?

For a moment, he meant to dismiss that thought, but then thought better of it. If he was going to better understand BB, he would need to know. He would ask her later than.

Gripping her arm, he summoned his strength. While he could not necessarily leave himself, with a Master in tow, it was an easy journey to make into the one bubble of existence within the Far Side other than the Labyrinth.

The world shifted into the bright sunset of the schoolhouse, where the only humans left, besides the depraved nun, waited. Rin and Rani both seemed worried as did the seaweed haired child who sometimes pretended to be an adult. The waste of human flesh sat slumped in the field, eyes downcast yet a spark of energy showed the Hero of Charity was present and would not likely tolerate his striking the flesh bag down.

Rin and Rani both rushed forwards as Hakuno appeared, embracing her and laughing in relief, and even the child stepped forwards, grinning but then looked away.

“You’re alright!” Rin cried.

“I had measured your chances of survival at 0.0001%,” Rani said, relief clear in her face.

“You’re alright too,” Hakuno sighed. “What happened?”

“I’ll tell you what happened,” Rin scowled. “We were in quiet the situation. Julius showed himself to be one of BB’s minions, and attacked us while Rani, Sakura and I were in the Council Room. He knocked us both out, and apparently Shinji, and since Sakura was out, the defenses around the building went down too! We nearly died! Then enemy programs appeared and started to take out the NPCs… Even though Julius was an enemy…it was a great blitzkrieg tactic. It guess, given that he commanded an anti-terrorism squad, he knew what he was doing.”

Obviously. The fact that they were alive to tell the tale showed that the ghost had not been, in any way serious.

“Julius…he wasn’t really a traitor,” Hakuno said, glancing from Rin to Rani. “When BB…separated Gilgamesh and me, she dumped me in some…special space she called it. It was…dark. And really hard to breathe…I couldn’t even walk. I just…crawled.”

Her face seemed hollow again, and for a moment, he found himself wanting to reappear and usher her away. They could continue this conversation later, but he restrained himself.

“Julius…he saved me. He came for me… BB finally lost her temper and brought a monster to kill me, but…he saved me. He told me…BB hasn’t completely taken over yet, but she’s trying to reach the Grail itself. The Core of the Moon Cell. It’s why this place is set up like a tournament. He also
said…something *made* her go rogue…and…”

Through the newly forge connection that Gilgamesh had created with her, Gilgamesh received flashes of memories. Julius, arms stretched out protectively as he was attacked. Calling Hakuno his only friend, and his embracing and then pushing her into the gate to his own heart.

“He died,” Hakuno said softly.

“…I see,” Rani said. “So that was what happened…”

“I guess that makes sense,” Rin muttered. “There’s no way we should have been alive… And why none of the NPCs were killed…”

So that ghost had not been a vengeful spirit, but one of the loving dead. Those who returned to protect a friend or loved one in their hour of need. Refusing to permit even death from deterring them from coming to their aid.

...Julius Harway, was it?

“That’s too bad about Leo and Julius…” Rin said, but other than mild sadness, there was little grief for one who was clearly her enemy. She showed more common sense than his clearly distraught Master.

“BB…she gave her plan too,” Hakuno said. “You didn’t hear it…It…she’s planning on using the Moon Cell to…essentially create a world without rules…were everyone’s ‘desire’ is verified.

Ah yes. That. The little Cancer meant to undo his work completely and drag humanity back to the days when there lives had been as worthless as dirt under his feet. A computer had no concept of the Law of Earth that he had formed or of Cosmic Law. Something only had value when it was defined as such, when there was a punishment in place for harming it. No one cared for the death of an insect, for there was no consequence to that death. Children could murder as many as they liked with no regret. But a human life’s loss had consequence, and thus had value. That was the system that he had placed in stone, and that was the thing that the Moon Cancer sought to undo.

“I thought she’d be aiming for the Core eventually,” Rin muttered.

“The other part, human desire…that that worries me,” Rani muttered.

As it should.

“No…I never thought that was her ultimate goal…that…that’s horrifying…” Rin frowned.

“This is my fault,” the muffled voice of the sack of human flesh said from her place. “I was the one who gave her the time to do this…I…it’s because of me that Leo and Julius are dead…and…”

Hakuno stepped forwards, anger on her face.

“No! It’s not,” she said, looking at the prone figure. “If it hadn’t been you, she would have found someone else. You can’t blame yourself for this, Jinako. You didn’t know what she wanted anymore than anyone else. You wouldn’t have helped her if you’d known right?”

“…No…” the other whispered. “No that’s…that’s too much I…”

“See…It’s not your fault than,” Hakuno said, she tried to smile, but then seemed to stagger.

Gilgamesh took on physical form and gripped her arm, steadying her.
“Mongrel, this is enough. Continue with this pointless chatter later.”

The others jumped as he appeared, but Rin nodded.

“He’s right, Hakuno…you’re internal structure…it's in tatters. I don’t know what she did, but you… you need to recover. It’s amazing you’re even thinking straight. If you are.”

“Yes. We can continue plans for our new operations once you have fully recovered yourself.”

“Alright…” the girl mumbled.

“I will gather our remaining resources. Rest well,” Rani said, taking off into the building.

Gilgamesh steadied Hakuno as they walked into the building. It seemed that his Master’s strength had finally reached it's limit as she staggered up the stairs with his support.

There were no NPCs nearby, and even the false priest seemed to have abandoned his post. Excellent. He did now want this one indiscretion to be remembered.

He opened the door, but as they stepped in, Hakuno’s legs gave out from underneath her, and she collapsed to her knees.

“So, Rin’s exhortation was that correct… Your exterior appears healed but internally…”

He leaned down, picking her up completely, with one hand at her back and the other under her knees. She was light, and in the rays from the setting sun looked all the more sickly. Worse, as her hair moved, Gilgamesh was able to perceive a few remaining remnants of the black noise, clinging to the back of her neck. She was in no condition to plan, or speak. And this was the one who all the others had placed their hopes on, even while undervaluing her...

Gilgamesh summoned the Gates, calling a small bed out from their depths. It was styled much like his throne, cast in gold and carved well, yet it was small enough to fit in this cramped space.

“Sleep now, free of thought and worry,” he said, laying her on the bed an putting the covers over her.

She had long since earned the right to a bad, and he found himself thinking that he should have done this already, but dismissed that thought. He had chosen his good time to reward her.

She did not move from the position he gave her, but her breath did not change to easy sleep. Her eyes opened, clearly struggling for to remain awake.

“BB…” she muttered. “She just crushed all of us. Leo…Julius…they were the strongest on the Near Side. We thought that we were fighting a system with rules, but…but she’s about to be a perfect system… are we fighting against a god? We…we can’t win…can we?”

At least her coherence had returned, but…Gilgamesh had an uncomfortable flash of her standing there, hollow eyed and despairing, and even her pitiful joy at his return…it was familiar. Too familiar to one whose presence and whose reminder still pained him.

“That is not the case. Gods are not so omnipotent as you think them to be,” Gilgamesh said, sitting down on his throne, but keeping his eyes on her. “In the first place, there is no being who can truly be called perfect in this universe…aside from myself that is. But…well…one need not go so far. Nor does the difference between perfection and omnipotence need to be explained. Particularly now.”
He spoke softly, watching as slowly her fight against sleep was lost.

“Even if that cancer were to become the ‘god’ of the Moon Cell, flaws and deficiencies would appear within her. What you must do than is to discover those flaws.”

He closed his own eyes, remembering how foolish apology to him.

“And abandon that sense of responsibility for the actions of others. Mongrels should simply founder about in their clumsy way. Then, in the end, you will see how it is that you can win. There is nothing else you can do. Fight until you are satisfied. Fail until you are satisfied. That is enough.”

Hakuno laughed weakly.

“‘Do your best, huh?’ she asked. “It’s funny…BB said your heart was a cold and desolate space…”

He recalled.

“But…it’s weird that…once my vision started going weird…It was like I could see it better. It was…really pretty.”

She was clearly insensible with exhaustion and strain to be talking so.

“You have no idea what you speak of, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said.

He had done terrible things. Things that would make her kind little heart quail with the knowledge. And he would not and did not repent of them. For that would insult those in Uruk who had suffered their absent and tyrant king.

Yet with those words, sleep had finally won, and her eyes closed. She likely had had no concept of what she was even giving voice to.

Gilgamesh settled into the throne, gazing out at the Sakura tree in the yard, listening as the girl's labored breaths became more regular.

There were always two kinds of beings before him. Those who would die now, and those who would die later. Hakuno had managed to keep herself always in the category of dying later, with a specific date in mind.

He was becoming dissatisfied with that.

Something old, something that Gilgamesh had nearly forgotten about pained him. Visions and dreams that he had had that had made him return to Uruk flashed through his mind as well as the memories of his Instinct.

He could not deny his own assessment.

Hakuno Kishinami was a treasure. One that he had ignored until this point, and he was not in the habit of denying his instincts when it came to treasure. However…ridiculous those thoughts aside from that had been.

“Well, you have my attention, though I suppose it remains to be seen if that is your undoing,” Gilgamesh said softly. “…but you must never forget… I may have acknowledged you, but this contract only holds on the Far Side of the Moon. When you return, that means our contract is void.”

He knew she couldn’t hear him. This was…for himself. To remind himself that she was a life that would vanish from before his eyes, were he to will it or not.
This…dissatisfied him… All he saw when he looked down that path was those eyes and that sorrow. There would be no blame, no anger, just sorrow…

No. He would not think of it.

Yet…

There were always two kinds of lives in front of him: that which would now, and that which would end later.

Hakuno Kishinami was moving dangerously close to that third category. The one that had only ever had one other enshrined within it. One that he would not name, even as he glanced back at her sleeping form.

“To go back to the Near Side, or to remain on the Far Side…” he mused. “That is your choice alone. Remember that, and keep it in your mind…”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was the most painful, beautiful thing to write, and I hope you enjoyed reading as much as I did writing!

Not: a kaunake is a Sumerian skirt. The length varied on importance. Gilgamesh would have had a long one where a servant's would have been quite short.

Next Chapter:

Aftermath. Hakuno and Gilgamesh struggle to find new footing as well as to deal the loss of their allies.
The First Time Gilgamesh Gave Hakuno Candy

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath, Hakuno finds herself dealing with her changing relationship with her Servant.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh gave Hakuno candy was right after the plunge into his heart.

Hakuno woke up to her body both aching and being...strangely comfortable.

For a moment, she wasn’t sure where she was, or if this was some new trick, but everything was coming back to her. Gawain and Leo’s deaths, her plunge into darkness, Julius’ sacrifice, making it to Gilgamesh’s heart, and waking him up.

He’d unsealed his Noble Phantasm for her and acknowledged her as his Master for the first time since she’d ever met him.

‘Behold the power of the one who you have contracted.’ That was what he’d said.

Every other time, she'd been his contractor, a life that belonged to him, or, more commonly, 'Mongrel'.

Hakuno only knew so much about Noble Phantasms. They were, at some level, a sign of the true nature of a Servant, and their identity. For someone like Gilgamesh, who proudly showed his name and claimed that he wasn’t restrained by any class, that had actually been more of a mystery to her than anything else. She's assumed that it would be impressive though.

What she hadn’t realized was just how impressive.

She’d known Gilgamesh was strong, but she’d never imagined that he could wield a power that literally reduced his enemies to nothing in one hit. Every boast he'd ever made about his own power was actually justified, she realized.

She also never thought that she could even stand after his using it. He’d done something, when he’d…accepted her. She’d felt something…deep in her body, something to do with her mana. Maybe that was why suddenly, she could support him. And, she’d been able to feel, somewhere in those circuits through some connection that she hadn't really even known existed, Gilgamesh's savage joy at showing BB just how weak she still was.

But...what had happened after that?

Hakuno didn’t really remember much after entering the school building. Everything was bit of a blur of motion and words and worried faces. She remembered falling to the ground, but...she was somewhere soft now, with something warm covering her.

Hakuno opened her eyes to realize that she was in a bed. The whole thing was made of intricately
carved gold, with crimson and white sheets that looked like they were some expensive material she’d never seen before. The mattress was softer than the one from the Near Side, and she was covered in a warm, very soft blanket.

She was…in a bed.

Gilgamesh had summoned a bed.

He also wasn’t there. For just a second, blind panic shot through her that somehow, BB had managed to get through Sakura’s defenses again, but she shook her head, closing her eyes. That was ridiculous. What was she thinking?

While she knew Gilgamesh could, and probably did, wander around when she slept, this was probably the first time he hadn’t been there when she woke up, and somehow, it was strange to her.

A voice from the small door made her sit up.

“Oh, um…Mr. Gilgamesh… I thought Miss Hakuno might want something to eat when she wakes up,” Sakura’s voice sounded hesitant. “She’s really been pushing herself, so sometimes, even on the Moon Cell a little extra nutrition can help…”

“That is permissible. However, I will not permit you to wake her while she is in this state. You made leave the food, examine what you can of her data and then leave,” Gilgamesh’s voice managed to filter through as well.

Oh, so he wasn’t gone. He’d just… Hakuno sighed again, she was seriously losing her mind if she was worried about this.

Hakuno sat up a little more as the door opened, showing Sakura who was holding something that smelled pretty good. She stopped when she saw Hakuno awake and gave a relieved smile.

“You’re awake,” she said, though it was more of a sigh. “You had everyone a little scared. Particularly since Mr. Gilgamesh wasn’t letting anyone else in this room.”

Gilgamesh appeared on his throne in a flash of golden light, watching her, but saying anything in return to Sakura’s remark as she set down the tray, which looked like it had tea and something like maybe soup. He was wearing his leopard print again, Hakuno noticed.

“How long was I out?” Hakuno asked.

“About six hours. It’s less than a person would need to sleep on Earth, but more than necessary on the SE.ARP.H,” Sakura said, she glanced at Gilgamesh. “Do you mind if I take a look at your structure? We can stay right here while we do it.”

“Alright,” Hakuno said. “I honestly feel better. Just a little sore in some places.”

Like everywhere.

Sakura leaned Hakuno up, as she summoned a screen to look at her though.

"What do you remember about yesterday, Mongrel?” Gilgamesh asked.

So much for Master.

"Er...after we reached the school? Not much. I know we got here, and I remember getting to the room, but...honestly after that everything gets blurry..." Hakuno trailed off, and noticed with some
surprise that Gilgamesh seemed to have relaxed into his chair a little more. "Did something happen?"

"Nothing of any interest," Gilgamesh said. "You mumbled some nonsense about BB and finally fell asleep."

Vaguely, she remembered that. Something about her being worried after...after Leo and Julius, and Gilgamesh telling her, in his ever arrogant way, to just do her best. Maybe he was annoyed with himself for making her feel better?

"Looks like your spiritron structure is intact, but I can see some internal damage. It's currently healing at a good rate but I would not recommend any strenuous activities for a few days," Sakura's voice interrupted her thoughts.

Hakuno frowned.

“What about the Labyrinth?"

“It will remain as it is, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said. “Do you not recall what the Moon Cancer said concerning how she forms the Labyrinth? She will make no new levels if they are not challenged. It is not in her nature to even create them in reserve.”

Hakuno blinked once at Gilgamesh. He was clearly telling her to rest, but…while he might usually tell her something about her killing herself wasn’t his concern, this was…positively direct coming from him.

Hakuno remembered his proclamation. He wasn’t an observer anymore. But…

“But this is the last thing that she’ll expect!” Hakuno said.

“I…think that Mr. Gilgamesh is right,” Sakura said, dismissing the screen and then picking up the tray. “You should rest. BB knows that you’ll try to challenge the Labyrinth again, and soon. You have to be ready for that. No matter what Rin and Rani want…”

She trailed off, looking away as Hakuno took the tray and opened the lid. It looked like soup. Maybe chicken or something. She’d never had it, but it smelled nice, particularly with the tea.

“I know I should be trying to encourage you to go down there to help the others, but…I think maybe something’s wrong with my processing,” Sakura mumbled. “I’m an infirmary AI, so I should be putting the needs of everyone at an equal level, but…I keep thinking that you’re my friend, and…I don’t want you to hurt yourself. Even when everyone was hurt, and I was taking care of them…I kept being sad that I wasn’t going to be able to have tea anymore with you and Julius, and wondering if you were safe. And now…you are safe, and I’m so relieved, but Julius…. You and Julius always came to talk to me, and were the only ones who did…. …I…know that I should be focusing on everyone’s recovering, but… I keep thinking…hoping that maybe he’ll come back, and I have to make sure to be in top form for him if he does…and I know that it’s not true. And I don’t want you to go down like this, because I keep thinking that you’re my friend, and I don’t want to lose you too… Is that wrong?”

Tears were starting to fall down her face as she stared at the tea. For a moment Hakuno didn’t know what to say. She could barely even think about Julius without wanting to cry or scream or so many things, but for now…

“No, it’s…” Hakuno almost wanted to say human, but maybe that wasn’t right. “You’re my friend too. Of course you’re worried about me. And you liked Julius, so of course you’re upset and keep wishing that somehow he’d come back. You’re not wrong, or malfunctioning. This is normal. I’d be
upset if something happened to you after all. You're doing your job and caring for people, but it's natural to worry for your friends. People do that…"

“People do that…” Sakura repeated, not looking at her, one hand gripping the fabric of her dress tightly. “Thank you…Hakuno. I…I think I needed that. I’ve been…really worried about you. I know everyone has, but…it’s a bit of a new feeling for me…”

She was blushing a little as if this was some kind of confession, and maybe, for the AI, this statement of friendship was.

“Thank you, and thanks for the tea. It always helps…” Hakuno said. “If you need to go back, that’s ok.”

“I probably do. Tell me if you like the soup, it’s the first time I’ve made it!”

And then she was one, hurrying out the door quickly, but shutting it gently behind her, and leaving her with Gilgamesh. For a moment, Hakuno looked away, but kept feeling his eyes on her as she ate her soup (which was a little salty, but not too bad). She wasn’t quite sure how to even talk to him right now. Not after everything that had happened. What did she even say? He was not making this easier either by just staring at her like he was expecting her to do something. While they’d never had anything that was even close to a good relationship, right now, she was just…not sure what to even say to his statement that they were allies now. Or at close as they could be to that.

Should they just keep going like they had before? Maybe they should...

“That AI…” Gilgamesh finally said thoughtfully. “It is strange, is it not, that she was dragged down into this place as well as defeated Masters and a few NPCs?”

“…I thought that BB just sort of…took the whole school with her..” Hakuno said.

Gilgamesh shook his head.

“If that was the case, there would be more Masters present, and those Masters who were dead would not be here. Those selected are here for reason. Watch her, Mongrel, while your kindness to her might have merit, she may yet be the tool of someone else.”

Hakuno blinked at him a few times.

Gilgamesh never warned her like this. Not out of the blue. She honestly wasn’t sure how to ever respond to that. So, she did the only thing that she could to.

She retreated.

“I’m going to talk to Rin and everyone,” she said, sitting up and putting the soup down. “I can at least walk around.”

“I will accompany you in physical form.”

That was said in that absolute tone that he got sometimes. The one that told her that there was no argument that was going to be accepted.

He’d taken physical form before, back when they’d first met, but that was more of a power play, this…this felt different. Less like he was going to force himself to walk in front of her and more…well…something else that she didn’t really understand.
Shinji was loitering outside the hall when she stepped out. That was a surprise. NPCs and people generally didn’t come into this hallway. Even though it was close to the Student Council room, and there weren’t that many places to go, it seemed that people didn’t necessary like listening to the booming laugh that often seemed to go through the halls.

He started as she walked out, and blinked again at the sight of Gilgamesh.

“Oh, so he’s letting you out now. That Servant is a pain. I swear every time anyone tried to get anywhere near that door he’d just appear and glare at them,” Shinji said, crossing his arms. “Not that I came there, obviously. I just heard it from Rin and Rani.”

Hakuno glanced at Gilgamesh, who was looking at Shinji with a weirdly amused smirk. Somehow…she had trouble believing that Gilgamesh had cared.

Though if he was sharing her mana more…maybe he was nervous about that for some reason?

A weirdly smug smile came on to Shinji’s face as he came closer.

“So, what are you going to do now? You and Tohsaka and Rani sound like you’re going to keep playing Student Council, but Leo and Julius both got done in,” he said, crossing his arms and ignoring Hakuno suddenly stiffening. “I mean with only you and Tohsaka and Rani, you’ve really got no choice but to do what BB says, right? You should do a surrender plan. I mean, whoever the Master of the next Labyrinth is will totally leave you alone if you do that!”

“We don’t need a surrender plan,” Hakuno said, crossing her arms, and trying to keep her voice calm. “Leo left things to me, so I guess I need to figure something new out.”

She couldn’t think about this. She really couldn’t think about just how far BB had pushed them. She couldn’t think about Leo and Julius’s deaths. Not now, not when they had sacrificed so much, and she wasn’t going to let that happen for no reason, just so that she could stay here do nothing.

Not when she’d finally just gotten Gilgamesh to work with her.

Even she wasn’t sure if even that was enough...

“Come on, Hakuno, you’ve had a good run, but–”

Gilgamesh had shifted, moving a step so that he was in front of Shinji, arms crossed. The amused look was gone, replaced with something similar to a look that he’d warn when he’d first seen her: something like arrogance mixed with boredom. The implication was clear without even saying anything. The conversation was over.

Shinji took a stop back.

“Oh, geez, I forgot how intimidating this guy is up close,” he muttered. “Even in that stupid jacket. Just think about it alright! It was just a fluke that you beat me! So…beating BB will be impossible!”

And he took off down the hall.
“He’s up to something,” Hakuno sighed.

“Obviously,” Gilgamesh responded. “Though he cannot cause any tremendous damage. He is a petty imp that lacks even the mildest sense of taste as well as a Servant.”

She wasn’t so sure Shinji couldn’t do anything... She remembered Shinji better now. They’d been friends in the preliminaries, or at least that had been their assigned roles, with his lording it over her, and while he didn’t really have any malice towards anyone, his ego could hurt people, and he might still resent the fact that she’d taken him out in the first round...

…He’d been the first person she’d seen die, though not the first body.

“Come, Mongrel, there is no use in fretting over actions not taken yet.”

That made Hakuno shake herself out of her thoughts.

At some level, she didn’t mind his being out in the open. His actually talking when it wasn’t either in their room or in the Labyrinth was different, but...not bad. Still, she wasn’t sure what to do or say. Particularly when she felt like she should be saying something.

It was strange though, seeing that look on his face. He hadn’t looked at her like that in a long time, now that she thought about it. Now it was different, more direct or maybe just more amused. While he’d called her his Master when fighting BB, Hakuno wasn’t really sure what that even meant to him.

She'd just act normal, she decided.

“Ok, um, before we head in, I want stop by the shop and see if there’s anything new worth picking up before anyone else gets there.”

She usually stopped there early. It was habit. Back in the Grail War, going to the shop late tended to mean getting terrible things. Maybe she was procrastinating, but she wasn’t sure she wanted to face Rin and Rani and tell them that they needed to wait…

“How you waste your meager funds are none of my concern, even if I am no longer an observer. However, avoid that false priest as much as you are able,” Gilgamesh said, his eyes were narrowed, but the expression wasn’t really directed at her.

It was almost a thoughtful expression.

“He’s the only shopkeeper we’ve got,” Hakuno pointed out.

“Yes, and if he was not, I would forbid you from stepping near him. He has a foul look.”

That wasn’t concern, Hakuno knew. Gilgamesh just didn’t like him. She’d learned people seemed to fall into three categories with him: people he didn’t like, people he wanted to fight, and people he was indifferent to.

Or at least…Hakuno had always thought so. Right now…she wasn’t sure.

Gilgamesh was acting strangely…interested in what was going on with her.

He also was in a different position than usual, she realized. Normally, Gilgamesh stood at some distance behind her, or would stride on ahead of her. He was either just watching or clearly not really connected to her. Now, he stood neither before or behind her, but right next to her as they walked.
Should she say something?

She felt some eyes on her, but when she glanced at the reminding NPCs, they seemed to glance away, though Taiga grinned at her and gave her a thumbs up.

“Well, you two are looking friendly. Maybe you can use some of that stuff I’ve given you in return for your errands to spruce up that room of yours!” she called as they passed.

Gilgamesh glanced at her, and Hakuno looked away, crossing her arms. Right. He didn’t know. Gilgamesh sometimes just didn’t seem interested in following her when she talked to people, and Taiga was one of them. So he wouldn’t have known about the fetch quests.

“…Sometimes, Taiga asks me for stuff that we find in the Labyrinth. Most of it isn’t stuff we’re looking for anyways, but she says it helps her... She’s given me some stuff for the room but…”

It never felt like a good idea to bring it up. While Gilgamesh had remarked that he found that room ‘shabby’, decorations had just felt too…normal. Maybe too friendly, and besides, they probably would have been rejected as sub-par anyways. Yet, now he gave her a speculative look.

He turned away, frowning a little, but after a few moments of silence, glanced at her again.

“…You will show me these decorations,” he said. “While they are no doubt lacking, that room is so meager that any décor will improve it.”

This whole situation just felt…bizarre. It wasn’t…amiable, but…it felt like some barrier that had always been there was gone, and now she was struggling to tell where she even stood.

Kotomine was behind his stall as they headed down the stairs, and while Hakuno stepped forwards, Gilgamesh held back, that same almost thoughtful look directed towards her, and a look of pure disapproval towards the priest.

“Oh, so you have survived as well,” Kotomine said, smiling that unsettling smile and watching her with those empty eyes of his. “You are very fortunate, or maybe unfortunate.”

Hakuno shifted a little.

“It wasn’t that impressive,” she muttered. “Julius and Gilgamesh were the ones who saved me. Anyways, how did you all survive? Julius mentioned something about the NPCs I think…”

Kotomine’s face developed some life to it as he smiled at Julius’s name.

“I have not told you? I practice Bajiquan. Only as a hobby of course, and it is only an amateur imitation of the real thing. Unfortunately, Julius never fought me when we met. Perhaps he knew my skill, or perhaps he truly never had any intention of harming anyone…now that he had found his purpose in life. It was slightly disappointing. There were some techniques I would have found interesting to try with him.”

Hakuno had an uncomfortable mental image of the two just staring at one another for a while until Julius passed by. It was probably more accurate than she wanted to know, and she...almost wanted to laugh, if the thought of what Julius had had to do for her and for them didn't make her chest tighten.

She couldn’t think about it.

At some level, Kirei Kotomine knowing self defense mad some sense. After all, what if some very
stupid person, decided that they’d attack the proctor of the Grail War? But somehow, the clear disappointment of not getting a battle was unnerving.

“Um, I was wondering if anything new was in stock?” It was supposed to be a statement, but it came out as a question.

“Currently, I am running inventory to be certain that nothing was stolen, so you can purchase nothing. That is a shame, as I was about to stock some new candies that you might have enjoyed. Feel free to show your disappointment.”

“Ah…I think I’ll wait then,” Hakuno muttered, taking a step back.

He really just wanted her to look unhappy because apparently that was how the guy got enjoyment in life.

“It is unlikely that I will have them when you return.”

On purpose. If he had them to begin with.

“That is no matter, false priest,” Gilgamesh was suddenly behind her, looking at the store with distaste. “I doubt anything that you could see here would have much value. I would cease considering her taste in sweets when purchasing to tempt souls to despair anyways.”

He reached out one hand behind him, and Hakuno saw the golden ripple that meant he was opening one of his Gates. It was smaller than most of them, and Hakuno noticed a small golden box fall into his hand.

Then, almost carelessly, he dropped it in front of him for Hakuno to catch.

It was surprisingly heavy, with a red silk ribbon around it and no clear name. For a few seconds, Hakuno just stared at it, and then looked up at Gilgamesh, who was watching her with surprising intensity that almost made her drop the stupid thing.

“Has my generosity so shocked you that you have no words?” Gilgamesh asked, looking amused.

“No! I just- What is this for?” The words fell out quickly.

Sure, Gilgamesh seemed like he was in a better mood towards her (and only her) suddenly, and he’d been acting strange, and he’d called her his Master for the first time, but…this wasn’t something she’d thought would happen. Gilgamesh didn’t give people things.

“I promised you candy after our time last in the Labyrinth. You have mentioned before that you have a preference for sweet things, and I myself have observed your purchase for wasting your sparse treasure on that false priest’s mediocre offerings. I have decided that you shall be rewarded with it.” Somehow, he’d managed to insult herself, Kotomine, and her savings in one sentence.

Also, who gave candy as a reward for good fighting?

Hakuno glanced at the priest, but he didn’t seem to have heard Gilgamesh’s words, rather, he was watching the whole scene with undisguised interest.

“As such, rejoice. I will now allow your meager earnings to accumulate in adding to my treasury, provided that you preform to my expectations,” he continued, smiling as if he was giving her some great gift. “You will find the pleasures I offer bear little resemblance to what small sweets you have
gained from that false priest.”

He fell silent again, watching her with that strange intensity with a smile almost, almost, pulling at his face.

He was expecting her to ooh and ah, wasn’t he?

It was amazing how fast he could move from being completely intimidating to…something almost normal.

Slowly, part of her sure that somehow this was either a prank or a dream or maybe even that water that Gilgamesh had promised to douse her with so long ago, she undid the ribbon and opened the box.

It was a large truffle, nestled in a little ring of candy pearls. Hakuno had seen truffles before. They were on the Near Side, and they had been stupidly expensive and hadn’t had any positive effects, so as much as she’d really wanted to try one, she never had.

She could actually smell it. A rich smell with vanilla and something else that she couldn’t name, as well as sugar and the cocoa.

This was…for her?

But she could still feel the eyes on her, so…carefully, gently, she lifted the chocolate and took a bite.

It was so good it made her toes curl, but before she could keep her expression blank, she heard the laugh.

“I shall take that surprised wonder on your face as an extra payment for that trifle,” Gilgamesh said, smirking.

“I-It just that I’ve never had something like this before…” she said, looking away.

And… she honestly hadn’t thought that he’d meant it.

“Hmph, well, continue to perform well as my Master, and you will have more,” Gilgamesh said, and something in him seemed to relax.

He was rewarding her, he said, but…

Things had changed between them, hadn’t they? Her mana was opened to him, just like his Noble Phantasm was open to her. He’d called her his Master, and she’d nearly died to bring him back.

…Could they really go back to what they’d been before this?

He’d just made sure no one came into her room when she was recovering, insisted that she rest… and gave her a reward like a king to some vassal he was pleased with because something had changed, and both of them, at some level, were looking to find out where they stood now.

*Improving an inadequate Master is part of my work.*

This was his acknowledgement.

“Now, as that false priest has nothing to offer you, let us go to the Council Room so that you may pass the news of your requiring delay to those women.”
Kotomine was still watching them with that clear interest, and his eyes stayed on Hakuno’s back as she turned away, and tried to push him out of her mind.

Gilgamesh would likely insist after talking to Rin and Rani that she was done and probably to go back to the room, but she’d try to push him to go with her and make sure everyone else had made it alright afterwards. And…maybe he would.

She still wasn’t sure how much things had changed…or even their real nature. They weren’t friends, Hakuno knew that, but they weren’t want they had been before the dive into Gilgamesh’s heart either. Gilgamesh wouldn’t accept her as his equal, but he was accepting her in his way, and…she was willing to try.

She took another bite of her truffle, enjoying the flavor and…

Wait.

Hakuno paused, glancing at her Servant and then back down at the truffle.

Should she...

Well, he’d mentioned before wanting ‘chat time’, and she’d always been a little afraid to ask about her Servant…

She might as well take the plunge, and try to reach out to him like he was trying to reach out to her.

“Er…Gilgamesh?” she asked. “How long was that truffle in the Gates? I mean…it’s great, but…I just…”

Oh, please let him not decide to take offense because she either ‘insulted’ his gift or asked about something she had no business asking…

Gilgamesh laughed.

“My Gates transcend such things as time, Mongrel,” he said, still smirking. “Any food preserved within them is as fresh as its conception.”

That was just the launching point for a long, complicated explanation of just how the Gates worked as they walked, for the first time, side by side.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, this was a pretty short chapter, but I thought we needed a breather. It’s also pretty much just original content, so that was fun. Hope you all enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Next Chapter:

"Do you remember your friend's name?"
The First Time Gilgamesh Mentioned His Friend

Chapter Summary

A confrontation with Kiara has Hakuno asking questions, and Gilgamesh dreams of his life.

Chapter Notes

I might suggest some tissues.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first time Gilgamesh defended Hakuno outside of battle was after the Council Meeting.

It had been hacked by BB, as per usual, and somehow, her cheerful greeting and everything…felt so hollow. She’d tried to kill Rin and Rani, killed Leo and Julius, nearly sealed her and Gilgamesh away forever and tried to kill her in Gilgamesh’s heart.

And now BB was going to do a badly done cooking show to introduce Elizabeth as the new Sentinel. As if things were all fun and games and nothing had changed.

But maybe, for the AI, nothing had. If a life was nothing more than a program, what did it matter when they were deleted? You could just make a replacement, or upgrade or re download or…so many things. So why not make jokes and cheesy cooking shows? It wasn’t as if anyone cared, was it? Still, she was glad when everything was over.

They had a new sentinel, but Hakuno couldn’t head into the Labyrinth until her entire structure recovered.

“It’s a pain, but if what Sakura says is true, there’s nothing we can do,” Rin sighed.

“I’ll start working on a method to create a simulation of what will happen if BB manages to implement her plan,” Rani said. “Oh, Hakuno, Leo left this here. I suppose he thought that he would no longer need it.”

She held out the armband for the Student Council President. It was Formal Wear, like on the Near Side.

A good mage would have been able to alter her appearance, but Hakuno relied on what he could find. Just like Sakura or Gilgamesh. The armband looked…weird on her uniform, and somehow, out of place. Like she was just filling in the shoes for Leo until someone better came, or he managed to come back.

“You look like a class representative,” Rin said, smiling a little.

“I feel stupid,” Hakuno said. “But…I guess we might as well keep doing this. It makes the others feel better at any rate.”
Rin nodded.

“You head back and get some rest; Rani and I still need to run some stuff and make sure that there’s nothing left over from BB’s attack. Also, Elizabeth is a Servant. That must mean that there’s a Master somewhere, right?”

“That is correct, we will have to analyze and check for who this person could possible be. BB cannot be a Master, so it must be a human.”

Hakuno frowned.

“Continue to theorize,” Gilgamesh suddenly cut in. “However, as it is, there is nothing to be done but to challenge the Labyrinth once my Master has recovered enough to sustain me. As it is, let us depart, Mongrel. There is nothing to be gained from baseless theory.”

He’d been mostly quiet up until then, looming in the background and watching the proceedings with a good deal more attention than he had up until then. Maybe it was the fact that Gawain was… gone…but somehow, Rin and Rani seemed a little relieved at the reminder that there was a Servant there still.

“Good luck,” Rin said, looking at Gilgamesh for a moment. “At least you two seem to be getting along better.”

They…really were actually.

He wasn’t all that much more friendly towards them, but a feeling of antagonism was gone.

“I might also want to look for Bathory’s history in the Library. If she’s going to be our next Sentinel, then I guess we need to know more about her,” Hakuno said as they walked out, shutting the door.

She almost didn’t hear Rin’s sigh and the whisper from Rani.

“She’s recovering. We—”

“That is acceptable,” Gilgamesh said. “I presume that this is library does not permit the actual lending of books?”

“It didn’t on the Near Side,” Hakuno said. “Though…well…people broke that rule a lot with their Servants.”

“Hmph, that truly shows their own weakness, as well as just how petty the intrigue of that War truly is.”

Hakuno didn’t want to know just what a real Grail War would have been like.

When they entered the Library, Hakuno noticed with surprise that Kiara and Anderson were both there, rather than in the hall outside. Gilgamesh glanced towards the books, and seemed uninterested in any kind of chat with Kiara or Anderson, but Hakuno walked up to them quickly, a smile forming. Though, while she was certainly glad that they weren’t both dead…some part of her was still a little nervous.

“You survived too,” she said, looking between Kiara and Anderson.

“I’m very happy to see you, Hakuno,” Kiara said, a demure smile on her face that somehow always made her feel uncomfortable.
“Could you keep your intentions a little less obvious, witch? Try to seduce her when she’s not exhausted.” Anderson snapped, but he glanced at Hakuno. “People are discussing how you managed to survive BB on tenacity alone.”

“Anderson and I were fortunate…” Kiara said, smiling, though she was looking down. “We were knocked out and thrown into the Sea of Nothing, and it was only luck that we managed to come back. Anderson…”

“Was useless, just like I’ve warned you,” Anderson said.

They were…thrown into the Sea of Nothing?

Why did Julius do that?

“I’m glad you’ve managed to survive,” she said, smiling a little. “We’re doing some research for the council at the moment…”

“You’re getting closer to the finale you mean,” Anderson said, glancing at her. “Are you prepared for the ending of this drivel? I’m not, even if I’m not even involved, I hate to see a story turn out so poorly.”

“Cease your worries, Caster,” Gilgamesh called from where he had taken a book from the self, something about modern history. “Your fears will come to nothing. You should just continue to scribble away on whatever notes you have made of these events. After all this incident has become a masterpiece. I will be taking the lead from here on out.”

Anderson stared at him.

“…So…we’re doing a comedy now…” he muttered under his breath as he turned away. “This carefree egotism is the man who became mankind’s first story. I guess it doesn’t matter. Tragi-comedy isn’t something I’ve done much of, I suppose…”

“Oh, um, I managed to find the Little Match Girl in here,” Hakuno said, opting for a change of subject.

“Oh, really? You must have nothing better to do than read that piece of over emotional cliptrap,” Anderson said, smiling.

“I’d like to ask you about it later, if you don’t mind,” she said.

“Why not? It’s only me and this hag down here normally anyways,” Anderson shrugged.

Kiara gave Anderson a dark look, but smiled towards Hakuno with that demure smile, but a shiver ran up Hakuno’s spine. Kiara stepped closer until she was almost on top of Hakuno, and just for a second, she was uncomfortably reminded of their first meeting as well as the…skill transfer. As Hakuno froze, Kiara reached forwards with a kind of agonizing slowness that still made her feel as paralyzed as BB had left her. Hakuno leaned back, but somehow, her feet felt like they were glued to the floor, even as she reached forwards to touch Hakuno’s face.

“I’ll look forwards to talking to you too,” she giggled. “I’m so glad-”

The hand that was reaching out was snatched so quickly that Hakuno jumped. She’d been so focused on that that she hadn’t even noticed the approach of Gilgamesh until he was right next to her, gripping Kiara’s wrist and bending her hand back.
A flash of discomfort crossed Kiara’s face, but she turned to look at Gilgamesh.

He was standing with an unreadable look on his face as his crimson eyes met hers. The slit pupil was as narrow as Hakuno had ever seen it, and even though he hadn’t said anything, there was a clear threat in that grip.

“Please…please unhand me…” she whispered, her voice weirdly...breathy.

Gilgamesh laughed shortly, and mockingly.

“Do you actually presume that that tactic could possibly work on me, ostentatious woman? That your overripe body could possibly hold any temptation for me? Get out of my sight and quell your hunger, or allow it to consume you. The day when it is satisfied will never come.”

He let go, and Kiara took a step back in surprise.

“Gilgames…” Hakuno said, starting in shock.

That made his rejection of her look kind, and again, it was out of nowhere.

Anderson’s laugh, sharp and strangely surprised…cut through.

“So, that’s how it is,” he said, and just for a second a spark of…something flashed in his eyes. “Well, hag, looks like this girl isn’t going to be going down any of your boring paths. This man is greed incarnate. He won’t give you anything he’s claimed for himself.”

Kiara blinked again, looking once at Gilgamesh and at Hakuno, and, just for a second, she saw a frustrated confusion on her face, as if something she was so used to being effective had just failed her, and she had no idea what to do after that point.

“I am sure you misunderstand, King of Heroes,” she finally said. “It is good for girls to have the chance to be touched and get used to expressions of affection. Surely you know that.”

Gilgamesh’s expression did not change as he watched her, but something about his presence seemed darker than usual.

“I see you are unmoved,” Kiara sighed, looking away. “You must have made the women in your life quite sad.”

A smile, that one that always reminded Hakuno of gold and blood, appeared on his face.

“More than you would ever imagine, woman. Now, be gone.”

With another sigh, she turned around, but for a moment, Anderson stayed, watching the pair.

Gilgamesh, looking more annoyed than anything else, returned to his books as if that nothing had happened.

“Good luck,” Anderson said. “I think your troubles have just increased more than you’d know.”

And then he was gone, leaving Hakuno and Gilgamesh alone again. For a moment Hakuno opened her mouth, not sure what to say, but then finally.

“…Thank you, Gilgamesh…” she said. “For…”

For making Kiara stop. She was surprised by the relief that she felt in her chest. Maybe it was just
what had happened with BB, but the moment that Kiara had reached out, her whole body had frozen, but her skin had crawled at the thought of it... and that kiss and that fall and everything.

Gilgamesh glowered at her but turned away.

“I dislike that which I have claimed being touched by anyone with less value,” he said, glaring down at the shelves. “That was for myself, nothing more. You are not permitted close to that woman for anything aside from business. If you speak to that Caster, I will be near.”

“I honestly don’t care,” Hakuno said. “After BB...I just really didn’t want it, and even if it was for yourself, I benefited so...”

Even if it was nothing but his hating ‘his’ Master getting touched by anyone, she was honestly glad of it.

Gilgamesh glared at her with a weird, almost strained look.

“Do not speak of that thing,” he said. “And cease worrying.”

Kiara wouldn’t touch her again.

Still...as grateful as she was...Hakuno didn’t really understand it. He was involved now. He’d said so himself, so...was this something that he’d wanted to do for a while, but now he had the excuse for it... There were limits to possessiveness, and this...had been more protective.

Why? Why was he suddenly acting like this...

Hakuno shook her head and went back to the Servant section of the shelves. She needed to find out more with Bathory...but another title caught her eyes.

_The Epic of Gilgamesh._

She’d gotten about a third of the way, which had mostly just been talking about Gilgamesh’s accomplishments, and his tyranny, before BB’s code managed to block her reading, with more about how she needed to use more MP for Gilgamesh to ‘guzzle’.

Maybe she’d given enough? Particularly after that Nobel Phantasm.

She took the book off the shelf and started to read.

The first time Gilgamesh spoke of his friend to Hakuno was brief, and mostly brought on by mistake. After the confrontation with the depraved nun, and Hakuno’s misplaced words of gratitude, he was determined to resume his study of the Grail Wars of the past, but annoyance still plagued him.

It was not anything that the nun had said.

Perhaps it was simply too familiar too him.

Made the women in his life sad indeed. So much that they had begged the gods themselves for relief and even received an answer. One that was able to force their tyrant king who had no concept of human suffering to soften his oppression. Until, of course, a goddess had looked on him and found
him desirable…

He focused on the issue of the text in front of him.

It was likely the actions of the previous day that had him reflecting on such things. It had been a long time since he had even considered it.

The history of the Grail Wars on Earth however…that was something to consider. While he had always had the knowledge of what an original would have been, the description here, of seven Servants and Masters pitted against one another for the sake of a single wish seemed…no more interesting than the one here.

At the same time, a weak Master, such as his own, would have managed to survive though her intelligence and work with her Servant. In this war, where battles were carefully regulated, and the only thing that mattered to the Moon Cell was to monitor and observe humanity under stress, such a thing could never be.

However, in one way, there was something far inferior. The old War, while claiming to offer both Master and Servant a wish, only offered the Master. Seven Servants were needed to complete the ritual, all seven Servants. This, in the end, made any and all alliances subject to inevitable betrayal. In the Grail War on the Moon Cell, Servants, as representatives of the Moon Cell were offered no wishes but aided those whose wishes they approved.

He glanced at his Master, reading some old text with a thoughtful expression, but looked away. His thoughts were irrelevant.

After some time of familiarizing himself with the troubles of this era, some of which the Moon Cell seemed unwilling to reveal the true nature of, Hakuno finally made her way too him. Her face was troubled, but exhaustion was starting to reach her eyes.

“I guess we’d better head back,” she said. “I didn’t find much about Elizabeth… Unless you want to keep going..?”

“You make a good show of it, but your vital signs are dropping,” he remarked. “Let us take a rest. It will not bother me to leave this work.”

There was little left for him to study in this text anyways, and she still needed to recover for the next run in the Labyrinth against that dragon child.

He would not fret over her so once she had recovered, he told himself. Regardless of her value, he was dangerously close to foolishness.

The bedroom was not far, though Gilgamesh noted that Hakuno all but collapsed on the bed. Whatever plans she might have had of tracking down those few in the building that she had not spoken to already were cut short as her breathing become regular.

She was far better than she had been the night before, but little else. Settling into his throne, Gilgamesh prepared himself to drink and plan out his own future moves, but an unexpected weariness came over him.

He supposed he could close his eyes while he planned…

It was a bright afternoon. Most of the people of Uruk had taken cover in the shade and left their work until the sun was more bearable. Gilgamesh himself watched from his place. All seemed well. With Humbaba gone, the starvation that would have befalling his people, and all of humanity, had
been averted, and it had been a glorious battle with his friend.

They were wandering at the moment, enjoying some time with their lover while also observing the workings of his city alone. It was something that they still enjoyed, and often refused his company for.

“You have a kingdom to rule, Gil,” they often said. “The people need to know that their king is one who rules, not someone who wastes their harvests on his own pleasure.”

His friend was a fool sometimes, but Gilgamesh did permit it.

Still, despite the peace of the moment, he sensed something. It was not a sight or sound, but rather some foul scent in the wind. One of burning hair and decay. What was it? Perhaps Ishtar had returned to beg for him again, this time in the form of an old woman to show him her earnestness. That would surely be amusing.

But a dark shape against the clear blue sky caused him to cease his thoughts. It moved quickly. Too quickly to be a bird, and far too large.

“Your Majesty,” a voice behind him said, a nervous quiver as was right when speaking to the king clear.

“You,” Gilgamesh said, for a moment, wondering what the man’s name was, or if he had one. “Do you not see that shape in the distance? Tell me what it reminds you of?”

The stepped forwards, a nervous look on his face, but did as he was told.

“It…it appears to be some great animal, my king,” he said. “I…”

Gilgamesh looked harder, using his own powers.

A great rampaging bull with horns of lapis lazuli, and hoofs of sharp obsidian raced towards them, the eyes, glowing like red flames were fixed on the city, and its hide, covered in spines which each at the appearance of a spear bristled. Clouds formed as it passed, all of them with promise of flood and famine following after.

Gilgamesh’s eyes widened, and the vision struck him.

His city, burning and ruined, his people dead, and this thing rampaging around the countryside turning all to ash and death.

This was Ishtar’s answer for his rejection. She had run crying to her father, and in return for not getting what she wanted, she would kill him, and reduce the world to ashes.

He would not permit it!

The beast landed outside the city, and Gilgamesh rushed forward, jumping from his place and ignoring the sounds from those behind him. He would not allow it to reach the city. This thought kept repeating as he dashed through the streets, ignoring the crowds that had rushed back towards his palace, as if the building would protect them from this trial.

He ignored them and their cries to him as he passed, but rushed forwards, keeping his eye as a stream of clay weapons was beginning to appear.

His friend was already there when Gilgamesh arrived, his green hair already tangled, and some of
their clay missing.

“Gil!” his friend said, relief on their face. “I wasn’t sure if I alone could hold this off.”

“We will do it together!” Gilgamesh said, raising one hand as the Gates of his treasury opened itself.

This was the trick he had learned from his friend, as well as to learn to use the things which he acquired.

The first barrage did not even phase the monster as it moved closer to them, but his friend’s rush gave it pause.

“The back appears invulnerable!” his friend called.

“Then aim for the head alone!” Gilgamesh said.

Such a thing was unworthy of Ea, and he would not permit Ishtar the chance to so much as see such a thing being used on her behalf, but he would have to pull out some of the better weapons that he had been collecting. A large, powerful spear that he had just obtained and was large enough for ten men to hold comfortably was perfect for this task, but first…

“Draw it to me!” Gilgamesh called, summoning the thing.

It was nearly partway out as his friend glanced and nodded, rushing forwards and forming a new arsenal with one hand, before stepping in front of the beast and throwing a quick barrage of clay weapons into the thing’s face. They jumped, as the thing shook its head in confusion, and grasped the creature’s horns, as fire emerged from its mouth, aimed around in a stream that was meant to bring the city down in flames.

His friend gripped hard, steadying the monster’s head, as much as it tried to dislodge them.

Gilgamesh rushed forwards, and using all his might, threw the spear directly into the creature’s face, even as his friend jumped to safely, landing beside him, and Gilgamesh, just to be sure, opened the Gates fully, throwing more and more weapons at the thing.

Finally, the Bull of Heaven staggered, heaving a labored breath and crashed to the earth with a rumble that caused the nearby buildings to tremble. It was only then that Gilgamesh let out a breath, and a laugh bubbled up.

They had done it! They had defeated one of the gods’ sacred beasts, and they had done so quick and without even the buildings of Uruk damaged.

He grinned at his friend, who smiled back, a quiet laugh of their own, more in relief than joy was starting to make itself known.

“Truly, there is no power that can stand against us combined!” he crowed. “We will feast tonight! I will open the storerooms and declare holiday! We will carve this creature and salt its meat. All of this city will celebrate this moment, as I hang the horns of the Bull of Heaven in the palace for all to see our power!”

But even in his laugh, another voice was heard, one of a woman screaming in rage.

Gilgamesh turned to view Ishtar’s vessel.
The patron deity of his city could never manifest herself physically. Rather she possessed the statue that had been painstakingly made for her, long hair of polished onyx contrasted harshly with her gold body, and lapis lazuli eyes glittered. It was made to be beautiful, and to hint of the desire that the goddess of love and war could invoke, but he found her hideous at that moment.


Gilgamesh opened his mouth to say that the moment that the thing had landed in his city, it was his to kill as he saw fit, but his friend moved faster.

Smile never fading, his friend ripped the rump of the monster from its body, throwing it directly into Ishtars face where it hit with a wet plop, that had Gilgamesh but collapsing in laughter.

But his friend was not amused.

“How dare you!” His friend snapped back in anger. “How can you, who call yourself the patron of this city, condemn everyone in it to death for no better reason than that you were refused! How dare you count the life of this animal above the lives of every man, woman and child in this place, many of whom your faithful worshipers. You have proven every word Gilgamesh spoke about you to be true! Capricious, spiteful, hateful, worth less than the thousands of those who live and die and struggle in this place!”

But those words were met with nothing but coldness.

“I do not speak to weapons that presume to rise above their place,” she sneered. “But if you love these slaves so, then you will join their fate! Maybe then this man will learn that he cannot escape the duty that we gave him!”

And with that, she was gone, and her statue toppled over, crashing to the floor and breaking to pieces as the clouds that had gathered started to lift.

Gilgamesh was still laughing as he walked to stand beside his friend, paying no mind to the woman’s tantrum.

“That was a well aimed throw,” he said. “One to be preserved in songs.”

His friend laughed a little, and took a step, but then staggered as suddenly clay became to drop from their body, and it was all that Gilgamesh could do to catch them as their nearly collapsed to the ground.

“What-” he started.

What was happening? How…

“I…I think I must be…tired,” his friend mumbled. “Perhaps…I used too much…”

No, no that wasn’t what was happening, and they both knew it. Gilgamesh looked around, trying to think of something some way to stop this, but nothing came to him.

He was powerless, for the first time in his life, to do anything as his friend was rushed into the palace, and all his plans of celebration and joy were forgotten.

Gilgamesh snapped awake, raising one hand to rub his eyes with his fingers.

“Were you sleeping?”
He looked up to see Hakuno sitting up in the bed, looking at him with a strange expression.

“…Something of that nature,” he muttered, looking down and frowning. “It seems I was a bit tired as well… I dreamt of something from long ago. Nothing important.”

Merely the first time he had come to comprehend just what death was to humans.

His voice was soft, and, for a moment, he didn’t have the heart to rebuff this question.

Hakuno gazed at him for a moment, her own eyes strangely worried and pensive. Had this been a shared dream? Now that he had accepted the connection between her mana and his? No. Else she would be asking question on question about the way that the world had been, rather than just giving him that look.

“Gilgamesh…” she said softly, those dark eyes strangely troubled. “Do you…remember your friend’s name?”

That pain like a phantom limb ran through his body again, as something in his blood felt hot and cold at the same time and something…something he could not name in his throat made it tighten.

No! He would not respond in this way!

Gilgamesh looked away, not permitting her to see the emotion on his face.

“My friend…” he said sharply. “I do not know what you are trying to say! You must have dreamed nonsense. I dreamt of my battle with the Bull of Heaven. Not of…any friend.”

It was a lie, but the truth around it made him feel more able to speak.

“Anyways, do I recklessly take on things like friends?” he said, the words coming out faster and faster until they almost pained him coming out. “Even if I had one, I would forget their name! Because…I cannot speak it anymore…”

He refused to accept eye contact with this women. Not now. Not when her eyes had that same expression that theirs had so long ago when asking about why he had killed Humbaba.

No. He would not think of it.

He was fine.

“Because…I cannot speak it anymore…”

There was no anger in those words, even as he glared and looked away, and somehow, Hakuno’s heart twisted.

She didn’t need to know anymore. That was all the answer that she was going to need for if he still remembered his friend’s name. It was there, as it always would be, preserved with its value unchanged for all eternity, buried under four thousand years of grief.
“You have value!” His voice, desperate and painful and choked with tears still sounded in her head. “Value no one else has! I declare it hear and now! In all the world, I have only one friend. So...so that value will never change, for all eternity!”

And he’d kept that promise. No matter what, or who was before him, he pushed them away, remained an observer, refused to care, and continued his path to whatever future he’d seen, completely alone.

But now he knew that weight, Hakuno realized.

Gilgamesh was a third human. So some part of him craved companionship, but he was also too inhuman to accept it. And that would stay the way it was...forever.

There was something so sad about it that it made her have to look away.

“And let me inform you, if you did indeed dream of my past, than that was nothing more than your own impression. It is far from the truth of me. Bear that in mind.”

But it wasn’t.

Because it wasn’t his memory.

It had been someone else. Someone who had pleaded with her to ask those questions. So that, wherever they were, even if their story was over, they could know...how their friend was doing.

“No, I wish to continue my reading,” Gilgamesh said. “You may stay here and use those decorations that that teacher presented you or accompany me. That is up to you.”

And then he was gone, all but rushing out the door, and as he left, something bright shot to her. Hakuno instinctively reached out and caught it. There, shining in her hand was an SG, hot and shining like the sun.

“That value will never be lost, for all eternity!”

Words from a lonely king to a dying friend. The Chain of Heaven. A sentient noble phantasm that had once eased Gilgamesh’s loneliness, inspiring him to soften his tyranny, but whose death had been something that he bore...even so much later...

Chain of Heaven...

For a moment, Hakuno looked to where Gilgamesh had gone and shook her head. While he’d let her come...maybe he needed that time.

SGs were supposed to help you understand someone better. The first had her more confused than anything else, but now...she might not completely understand him, or why he did what he did, but...she could understand some things now, as well as how rare it was that he was getting involved now.

Hakuno watched as the SG faded into her hands, and she stood up to start using the things that Taiga had given her.

“I’m sorry,” she said to the room. “I don’t think you can stop worrying yet...but I’ll ask those other questions too...I promise.”

It was ok if they weren’t friends, or they were never friends, but she was going to learn as much as she could about this man who had suddenly decided that they fought side by side, and now stood up
for her.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter should seriously be called "Gilgamesh, your coping mechanisms are showing, and they are not pretty".

Also, Kiara learns that the guy who rejected a goddess is not impressed with how sexy she is and Anderson isn't sure what's happening, but he's very interested.

Next Chapter:

"Do you...actually love humanity?"
Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh starts to look into an issue that bothered him for a long time, and Hakuno asks Gilgamesh a question he wasn't ready for.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time Gilgamesh noticed something wrong with everyone’s memories of Hakuno’s first Servant was when he left after his dream.

He did in fact go to the library; however, it had taken…some time…to find something to focus on. Even then, it was difficult to concentrate on the workings of the Harway family and their grasping for further dominance when he both genuinely found their behavior so pathetic it managed to become boring, and…

Gilgamesh closed his eyes. No, he would not think of it.

He was fine.

Hakuno’s question had come as a surprise, but if she had indeed dreamt his memories, it was an understandable question, and he could not fault her for wondering of things shown to her.

But he would not think of it any longer. However, he desired a suitable diversion.

As Hakuno recovered from the incident in his heart, the Labyrinth was beyond her, and Gilgamesh had little interest in visiting that place alone. His presence might alert some trap as well.

A rustle of moment caught his attention as Rin and Rani both stepped into the library, talking together. Gilgamesh assumed astral form and lingered nearby listening as the two young women continued talking as they headed towards the back of the cramped little room this place called a library.

“-we’re right that’s…” Rin shook her head. “We’ll need to talk about this once she’s better. She’s going to need to run to keep up with this.”

“We should not begrudge this too much,” Rani said. “The damage was extensive. She still has not given why however. I ran a test of what this ‘special space’ BB created would be, and it would not have caused any damage to her structure. BB seemed more…to want to preserve her, away from us.”

“I want to ask her, but that Goldie keeps blocking me off,” Rin grumbled.

Gilgamesh restrained himself from taking from before her, just to make sure that she never used such an offensive name again. He was already in a foul temper, and only his respect for this woman was keeping him from venting it upon her.

“The King of Heroes has been very cautious,” Rani said. “My current hypothesis is that she has impressed him.”
“Maybe he remembered their time in the Grail War?” Rin mused.

Gilgamesh paused, drawing closer.

What was she talking about? During this farce of a War, he had been dreaming, and even had he not been, the Moon Cell had banned his presence from to War for fear that he would simply decide, on a whim, to give some Master victory.

“Perhaps. It was surprising that such a thing would affect a Servant so deeply. Particularly as they seemed to get along well enough,” Rani frowned. “I wish I could have studied it. Unfortunately, my memory is still vague.”

Affect him? Hardly. Such things were impossible, yet something must be affecting them.

Rin nodded once.

“At any rate, let’s pick up what we need. I think we’ve already got everything on Bathory from the previous levels, but we need to be sure.”

The two women wandered off behind the shelves, leaving Gilgamesh alone with his own questions. Neither was a stupid woman, all other flaws aside. There was no mistaking his form for another, and no mistaking his power for anyone but himself.

So why did both seem so convinced that it had been him that had fought alongside Hakuno on the Near Side? What of her original Servant?

Gilgamesh had occasionally considered the nature of his Master’s former Servant, but there was little to know. She had had a Servant, obviously, but they had vanished. She had had every one of her Command Seals on their first meeting, which implied some level of cooperation between them. However, she had been abandoned, her link severed as if it had never been, fully able to form a contract with him as she has reached blindly through the dark and he had drawn near to see what that light might be. Her memories in dreams tended to dissipate and distort the moment that that Servant appeared in memory, even as others returned.

While before, Gilgamesh had always dismissed these things as things in which he had no reason to be interested. Now however, he was no longer observing.

While recovering Hakuno’s Servant for her was not something Gilgamesh would do, this sudden assertion that Gilgamesh had been her Servant most certainly had his interest.

Maintaining his astral form, he moved past the hall where the nun skulked alone with no one save the disgruntled children’s author for company, past a cluster of NPCs and towards the infirmary.

He had had few direct dealings with the AI who ran the infirmary and supported the defenses of the school, but it was time to rectify that. Materializing in the small space, he noted with amusement as the woman jumped and squeaked in his presence.

“Mr. Gilgamesh!” she said, turning and gaping for a moment but then looking away. “Is there something wrong with Miss Hakuno?”

“My Master is progressing as to be expected,” Gilgamesh said. “If you desire to see her, I will permit it though she will likely begin roaming the halls.”

Sakura smiled. It was an almost human expression of relief and worry mixed into one. Perhaps that was why he was more lenient towards her than her other versions.
“She’ll probably stop here then. I’m glad,” the AI said. “Then…was there something you wanted to ask me?”

“You are an administrative AI as well as an infirmary one?” Gilgamesh asked.

The AI nodded.

“Yes. A lot of us get used for lots of different reasons. Sort of like how, in different scenarios and Grail Wars, the NPCs are put into different roles. I was even Shinji’s little sister for a while. Apparently, he…really wanted one, and that was the best way to keep him in the dream…”

While the burgeoning psychological warfare of the Moon Cell being practiced on a child was something to consider, Gilgamesh brushed it aside.

“I wish for information on one of the Masters of the War,” Gilgamesh said.

The AI hesitated.

“Er…I really shouldn’t be…”

It appeared her programming to prevent cheating was still in place. How utterly ridiculous that, in a completely different sector of the Moon Cell, that of all things was in place. Still, he did not take offense at the implication that he would look at information pertaining towards another Master, as if he would be worried for such a thing.

“The information is about my own Master, AI. I wish to see what Servant she was registered to on the Near Side. That information still is preserved, is it not?”

Sakura blinked, frowning.

“It should be, but…” she hesitated, but then nodded. “Ok.”

She pulled up a screen in front of her, and scrolled down a list of names, most of which were marked in red to show that, by the end of the fifth round, the vast majority of Masters were long dead and their Servants devoured.

“Here we are…Hakuno Kishinami…” the AI trailed off, suddenly frowning. “That… It doesn’t say anything. It says…an Archer, Saber, Caster or Berserker? I… I don’t understand…”

She started typing frantically, looking through what might have been videos of the battles where Gilgamesh could see Hakuno standing behind…a blurred form that was so distorted that it was impossible to tell what it had been.

“…I…” Sakura looked up at him, eyes wide. “This is all I have. Everything else just looks completely blurred.”

She started going through other videos, clearly looking for some other form of the corruption, but Gilgamesh doubted that she would find anything.

“What of your own memories?” Gilgamesh asked, watching the screen thoughtfully.

“That’s the strange thing,” the AI said. “I… How do I say this? I almost want to say I remember you with her, but I know that that can’t be the case. You’re banned from the Near Side, and every time I try to visualize it, that ban comes up in my mind. But… there’s no other image. It’s almost like… a hole in the data. There’s just nothing there.”
So, even Sakura, an AI designed to aid in the Grail War was being affected? Gilgamesh frowned thoughtfully. Hakuno was registered as having either an Archer, a Saber, a Caster or a Berserker. Those must have been the classes that she was the most suitable for.

A Berserker.

That had significance.

BB had said, in her rage that she had torn apart ‘that Berserker’ so much that there was no trace of it.

Was this her meaning?

“I need to look into this,” Sakura said. “And why I keep thinking that you were in the Grail War.”

“Do so,” Gilgamesh ordered. “Inform me of any changes that you note or any speculation that you might have. I suspect BB is involved”

A hardness came into Sakura’s face, and her hands clenched into fists.

“Somehow… I know it,” she said softly.

The first time Hakuno flustered Gilgamesh was after his dream. While he’d claimed that he was just going to go read, Hakuno was pretty sure whatever he was doing was something that needed to be left be, so that meant no Labyrinths, even if she was starting to feel like herself.

She glanced in a corner of the room, noting the little box that she tended to keep in a corner. She’d never used any of it, mostly because she never really wanted to. Somehow, she remembered decorations on the Near Side with her Servant, and how it had felt more like a home when she was there.

This place hadn’t been a home.

It had been a place to sleep at the beginning. Somewhere to curl up and collapse and to avoid everything that was rushing down on her, and somewhere to dance around her temperamental Servant’s threats. But… somewhere, things had changed.

Hakuno opened the box, taking out a red and gold curtain that was huge enough to cover the entire far wall floor to ceiling and two large dreamcatchers. So far, this was it, but… well, it would change the feel of this room.

Hakuno raised one hand, allowing a screen to show. She might be a cruddy mage, but she could at least change the room with materials that she already had. Altering the format, the curtain and dreamcatchers dissolved and the reappeared hanging over the window and scatting golden light everywhere.

Now that it was hanging, Hakuno could see the design on the curtain. It was an animal that she didn’t know, maybe a horse, that shimmered with golden thread and managed to make the room seem somehow brighter and warmer than before. It wasn’t strictly Mesopotamian, but maybe that was a good thing. It wasn’t nostalgic at the very least, and honestly… she liked it.

There was no one moment that changed things for her. There had been no point that, looking back
she could say that that was were things had completely changed. Even what had happened in Gilgamesh’s heart more felt like it was a culmination of other things that had happened.

Maybe there was never any one event that changed things with people. Maybe it didn’t matter. At any rate, she was glad for the decorations.

Even if this was just temporary, it felt a little more like a home. A little warmer, a little more…happy.

Hakuno glanced at the door.

She wasn’t sure where Gilgamesh had gone, other than the library, but at the moment, she didn’t think looking for him was the best idea. He didn’t even know that he’d given her another SG, and maybe she should just leave that alone too.

Besides, she had a few more people she wanted to talk to.

One in particular.

Hakuno headed out, down the hall and the stairs towards the janitor’s closet. As usual, it was closed, and Hakuno could hear the music from some game or other that was filtering through. Jinako seemed to have retreated into old habits, but at least Karna wasn’t standing outside the door, blocking her from coming in.

Carefully, Hakuno raised one hand and knocked.

“Jinako?” Hakuno called.

The music stopped.

“Jinako I know you’re in there!” Hakuno called. “I just heard the game.”

A muttered curse and some sounds of motion caught her attention, but the door didn’t budge.

“Jinako I swear to you that I will ask Gilgamesh to break down this door again,” Hakuno said, her voice going dead.

And he’d enjoy it, and both of them knew it.

“Ack! That’s not necessary!” The door opened quickly and Jinako appeared, frowning a little, but averting her eyes. “I don’t know why you keep coming after me, Hakuno.”

But she stepped back and let Hakuno enter. It was still small and cramped, but there were less snacks lying around than before, and it looked like Jinako had started to clear up some of the things that had been lying around so that it seemed more like a small bedroom than a closet with a futon in it.

“…I thanked Gatou, if that’s what you wanted to know,” Jinako said, motioning towards the window where the Sakura tree was visible. “There’s a little stone there now, to the people who’ve died. It’s not much but we all thought that some kind of…memento for everyone.”

“I’m glad. I’ll go there before my next run,” Hakuno said.

“…I heard everything with Rin and Rani, you know. In the Student Council Room. About BB’s complete plans and the ‘cooking’ thing…” Jinako said. “Those plans…sounds like something from another dimension or something. But I guess that’s the Grail… but…I’m staying here.”

She looked down and for a second a fraction of what she had seen in her SG showed on her face.
“Someone like me is going to just get in your way, I can’t fight. I can’t be like Gatou…you saw how bad I was…”

“Jinako, you weren’t bad. You just…weren’t used to fighting…”

“That’s nice, but you know the truth. You and Gatou…you both tried to lift me up, and…I’m glad of it, I really am, but…sometimes, I snail really is a snail. What can I do other than just…hide in my shell and not hurt anyone else?”

“Well…even if you’re a snail…you can get slime on BB?” Hakuno said, trying to smile.

Jinako glanced at her in the corner of her eye and shook her head.

“That’s what you’d do,” she said. It was said harshly but there was a ghost of a smile on her face.

“Me…I’d be more afraid she’d covered herself with salt. But…” she hesitated. “Hakuno…once Karna’s better…if you want, you can make a contract with him.”

For a second, Hakuno was frozen. What was she…

“You’d new Command Seals, right? And a new contract. I’m useless, I’m not going to win, and my dream was stupid anyways, and I heard Karna… I’m pretty sure if I asked him…”

And she was going to die on the Near Side.

Hakuno glanced at her hand, and the faded seals. She hadn’t much thought of them since everything, but it sounded like Jinako had. She smiled a little. Unlike BB’s offer, this really was something meant with all good intention.

It was funny. Not long ago, she would have jumped at the chance for Karna. He was powerful and very kind, but…

“I can’t,” she said. “Karna’s your partner, and he really cares a lot about you, you know. Even if he can’t fight right now, he really did his best to help you, probably more than me or Gatou did. He’d object and you know it.”

Besides, Gilgamesh would kill him.

He’d made that perfectly clear.

And…somehow…

She didn’t want to cut the contract. It wasn’t just the power, or the fact that she was used to him. She’d made her decision in his heart. She wanted him. No matter what the consequences. She knew it was dangerous, and more than ever than she and Gilgamesh would not, could not, ever have anything that was called friendship between them, but…

Somehow, when she thought about that memory…

Hakuno wanted to keep going.

She still had things she’d promised to ask him, and after all the work she’d put into reclaiming him from BB, she wasn’t going to let him go.

“Heh, I didn’t think you’d take me on that offer, but I wanted to make it anyways,” Jinako said, smiling a little, but the look faded. “I mean it though. There’s nothing I can do against this. BB’s not going to be interested in manga references or gaming. I’m not a great mage or even a particularly
“Maybe not, but even having another person there to talk to comment when you feel like it, or just to watch…it helps,” Hakuno said. “I’m not saying you have to do anything great, or even anything at all in the end, but…keep me on the monitor at least. Maybe you’ll see something no one else does, like with Rani.”

Jinako looked away.

“You never give up, do you?” she asked. “…you’re like some…Shonen manga protagonist. Going to just power through things on will alone…”

“I…think that’s a compliment?”

“You don’t know about Shonen manga! Where have you been all your life? Under a rock!?”

Hakuno crossed her arms, and looked away. She hated explaining to people that she literally couldn’t remember anything from before the Preliminaries. Maybe she’d liked manga once, but honestly, she had no idea what the differences between the different types actually were.

Thinking about that always made her feel sort of sick and empty. Hakuno Kishinami had had likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, a reason to fight in the Grail War… And now…she didn’t know what those had been…

There was a flash of golden light at the entrance to the closet, and Gilgamesh appeared. A second later, Karna also materialized. He looked more worn down than ever, but also like he was determined to fight if needs be. However, Gilgamesh ignored the other and glared over at Hakuno as he crossed his arms.

She knew that look.

That was the look he gave when he was expecting immediate results without his having to say anything. It wasn’t hard to guess what he was demanding. At least he wasn’t threatening her anymore.

“Come, Mongrel, I have no interest in this place,” Gilgamesh said.

Hakuno sighed.

"I'd better get going," Hakuno said.

He’d just stand and glare at her until she did.

Jinako watched Gilgamesh, but nodded.

“Ok. And…think about my offer.”

"I won’t," Hakuno smiled a little. "But...remember what I said."

She turned to head towards Gilgamesh, who resumed his place before. Hakuno felt Jinako’s curious eyes on her as they walked and heard a soft sigh of relief from Karna that made her feel a little bad for the poor guy. At least nothing bad happened.

“I see you have resumed attempting to convert that waste of flesh into something useful in your usual foolish kindheartedness,” Gilgamesh remarked.
Hakuno was glad he didn’t say that when Jinako could hear them.

“She’s not that bad,” Hakuno said. “I think…honestly she’s getting a little better.”

Gilgamesh gave her an unimpressed look that showed her that as far as he was concerned, Jinako was lucky that she’s managed to survive her SG or that he hadn’t gone after her.

"She attempted to kill you, Mongrel. Do not forget that in your haste to forgive."

It was probably a good idea to change the subject before he asked just what that offer was.

“Did you learn anything?” Hakuno asked quickly.

She wasn’t sure what he’d been looking for to begin with, but at least it wasn’t bringing up…that dream.

Gilgamesh glanced at her, but seemed to accept the unspoken agreement to never speak of ‘friends’ again and to leave the conversation around Jinako alone.

“Nothing more than human folly,” Gilgamesh said. “Have you any knowledge of the events that take place in this world?”

“…not really,” Hakuno shrugged. “Or if I did before…I don’t remember anymore.”

Hakuno looked away at the memory of that feeling.

“Hmph, there is hardly anything worth recalling,” Gilgamesh scoffed as the stopped at their door.

Somehow, that complete dismissal of the importance of these things, even if it was driven by Gilgamesh’s usual arrogance…managed to make her feel better. As if her remembering didn’t matter because the events didn’t matter.

Even if they really did.

She opened the door (because of course Gilgamesh wouldn’t do that, and stepped in to sit on the bed. She still wasn’t used to this…

But when she turned to the throne, Gilgamesh hadn’t moved from the door, where he was observing the new decorations. She didn't recognize the expression in his eyes as he watched. While wasn't surprise, not realize, there was no other word she knew to describe the kind of pleased look that he had while looking at everything. It wasn't happiness. Maybe it was a kind of surprised contentment as the place started to look like somewhere she’d want to be, and maybe that he would too.

“…I see you have been busy,” he said, walking up to the dream catchers and examining them with interest before glancing at the tapestry. “The gold is false, and the fabric is subpar, but…this pleases me. We will keep it. I am curious to see what else this Quest Giver has to offer.”

Because his opinion was the only one that mattered, naturally. Still, she was getting used to that. Maybe it was the only why he could be.

Gilgamesh sat on his throne, looking very pleased to be surrounded with more luxury, and Hakuno vaguely noted that the color of the tapestry matched his eyes.

“I wasn’t sure about the dream-catchers. They’re not very…Mesopotamian.”

Gilgamesh snorted.
“It is an object of some value, is it not? The place of origin does not matter, as it is mine to begin with, as are all treasures. Humans are quite good for the things that they create.”

That remark was made with his usual harshness and carelessness. A focus on treasure over just about everything else, but Hakuno suddenly found herself reminded of her dream.

“I was born to protect humanity, and building the future is the king’s duty.”

“There are different kinds of protection. Just guarding something from harm is not protection. There are times when even the North Wind is necessary.”

“Gilgamesh…do you…actually love humanity?”

The words were out of her mouth before she could even fully think about the question, but they were out and the damage was done.

Gilgamesh’s entire body stiffened. His face tightened into such an expression of confused, angry guilt that Hakuno was surprised he didn’t just explode on the spot with conflicting emotions as his pupils became slits and his entire body stayed frozen.

Maybe it was supposed to be forbidding, but in reality, it just looked like he’d been stunned into silence and had nothing to say.

“…What are you expecting me to say?” Gilgamesh said, crossing his arms and glaring at the wall a good distance away from her. “Do I love people?”

He said that mockingly, but the effect was lost as Hakuno noticed a glimmer around his forehead. Was he sweating? Yes, he was! He was so flustered by the question that he was actually sweating.

“What have you been watching me do this entire time?” he snapped, still not looking at her. “You should already know perfectly well how I view humanity from how I’ve treated you! Do not ask me things that I have already made clear!”

There was almost a desperation in his shout and…fear?

The King of Heroes sat, arms crossed, glaring at the wall and…sulking. Like a spoiled child who’d just managed to be caught in some lie that he’d been telling for a long time but felt no guilt other than the fact that he had been caught. And would tell the same lie again and again and again, demanding that she believe it.

And his words…

“From how I’ve treated you…”

Hakuno would never say he’d been kind. He’d stolen her Command Seals, made her sleep on the floor, threatened her, lorded himself over her, teased her, and made it clear on no uncertain terms before this that he was not involved in this fight.

But…

He’d also never abandoned her, he protected her, given her the ability to fight for herself, forced her to accomplish everything through her own strength, rather than through relying on him, rewarded her and…eventually acknowledged her.

When she took him at his words in the most literal sense… Then maybe she did understand
Gilgamesh’s feelings towards humanity.

It was why he was alone and persevered in carving out that future that still hadn’t arrived yet. Only becoming involved when he decided that it wasn’t a threat that they could face.

Like Humbaba.

Like the Bull of Heaven.

Like BB.

Because he did love humanity, in his way.

“I think I understand, somewhat,” Hakuno said softly, earning herself a glare.

“Good, then ask no more foolish questions. You must still be suffering from the effects of the Labyrinth to ask such things at any rate. So sleep, as mediocre as your skills are, you will need all the rest you can before your challenge the maze in the morning.”

With that, like before when he suddenly seemed to want to drop out of a conversation, he closed his eyes and for all appearances fell asleep. Hakuno was pretty sure he wasn’t, but…maybe he was right and she needed it.

Because more and more as she did slowly start to understand pieces of the man she was contracted to…the more she wanted something else. Something she couldn’t even name.

Maybe this was what that friend had felt, all those years ago.

Chapter End Notes

And so ends our break. We're back to the Labyrinth! Gil is now officially a Tsundere for all of humanity.

Honestly, now that Gil's calmed down a bit, his and Hakuno's interactions are way easier to write.

Next Chapter:

"Why is it me? Why is it always me?!"
The First Time Hakuno Vented

Chapter Summary

The insanity of Elizabeth’s first SG is both the first time Hakuno ever truly laughs and a time of building frustration.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno really was frustrated enough to vent about her feelings was when they went to Elizabeth’s Labyrinth. It was also the first time Hakuno truly laughed.

At some level, it felt good to be back down there, challenging things, facing down BB. One the other hand, things were…bad. Rin and Rani had shown her the model for how things might be going if BB finished things.

Already, a tenth of the world would be dead.

That was enough for her entire body to want to shiver when she thought about that. If she’d been on Earth that would entire towns, people she knew, and possibly everyone she knew. And it was only going to spread.

Gilgamesh seemed unruffled by this as they headed into the Labyrinth. She’d been assuming that he’d resume his old position of being behind her or something, but he took his place by her side again.

“This is…better than I thought it was going to look,” Hakuno admitted, looking around at the sight in front of her. Roses, stonework…no creepy skeletons.

“Hmph, at least it is not a repetition of the waste of flesh’s Labyrinth,” Gilgamesh said. “Yet there is a…sensation in the air.”

Like they were deeper than the bottom of the sea. It was almost hard to breathe if she wasn’t careful. This must mean that they were getting closer to the core itself.

There was a crackle of static and Hakuno heard Rani’s voice.

“What matters not,” Gilgamesh said. “This effect can do nothing but reject, and only just that. Crushing it underfoot should be enjoyable.”

Well, he was in a good mood.

Maybe he was glad to be out as well. If only so she wouldn’t ask anymore sudden personal
questions. Gilgamesh hadn’t mentioned anything about ‘loving humanity’ or anything else like that, but sometimes he glanced at her from time to time with an unreadable expression.

They went forwards, headed down towards what looked like a large platform with ivy covered pillars where flowers were blooming.

And they were assaulted by a new voice ‘singing’.

“Skeweered and coooovered in bloooood!”

Hakuno stopped, as well as Gilgamesh.

“I had completely forgotten…this,” he muttered.

“I forgot just how bad it sounded,” Hakuno muttered. “I feel like my brain is having nails scrapped against it…”

The mix of a singing voice that should have been peerless and complete and utter tone deafness was something that should be a new form of torture. It was still potential proof that there was no such thing as a merciful god, but after listening to Gilgamesh, it might be proof that some god had gotten bored and thought that this might be funny.

The singing stopped and the Servant posed dramatically from her place on top of a pillar.

“That’s right! The Idol of Fresh Blood has returned from the gate hell itself! It’s Elizabeth Bathory: Encore! I’m here to reach the top by slaughtering everyone!”

She posed again, clearly expecting applause. Hakuno just stared at her and Gilgamesh watched impassively, but he had moved in front of her before she’d really noticed.

“You realize of course that there will be no actual performers left?” Gilgamesh asked.

“Of course! Everyone before me was just the start before the real show! …I mean all idols have their dark periods, right? And anyways, no competition!”

She vanished in a spark of green light before reappearing before them.

“Anyways, things are totally different than before. I’m the star now! Not dependent on any Master!”

That wasn’t true. BB had mentioned that there was already a Master. And besides, whatever Hakuno might not remember about the real world, she remembered this about the digital one. Servants needed a Master. Even if Elizabeth was the sentinel, she’d have to have a Master so that she’d be able to even use her powers.

“Elizabeth, you have a Master. Who is it?” Hakuno sighed.

Elizabeth crossed her arms and looked for all the world like a spoiled teenager who wasn’t getting her way.

“You’re really a bad reporter if you think that you can sniff out my secrets and report to your gossip column like that! You have to ask better questions! I’ll only accept the best! Like…what I’m doing in the future…or how ill spend the new year…or some steamy scandal.

That was obvious what she wanted to talk about. Hakuno suppressed a sigh. She honestly couldn’t care less about whatever scandal that Elizabeth wanted to pretend she had, but she supposed that this was something that she needed to think about eventually. Maybe it would at least lead her to an SG.
“Alright, what kind of scandals are you hiding?” Hakuno asked, but she couldn’t really muster any enthusiasm for it.

If she’d ever cared about idols in Earth, she certainly didn’t now.

“Yes!” Elizabeth clapped her hands “That question is perfect for an idol! Romance is the greatest of taboos, so naturally it intrigues you. Now, badger me with your dirty questions! And then bow down before my perfect ignoring skill as I hold my secrets tight! Then you need to show up tact and ad-lib a little. Let’s see, for example, aim for something shocking…like, ‘is it true you’re passionately in love with a little squirrel?’”

What.
Oh no.
Oh nonononononono.

Hakuno took a step back as Gilgamesh gave her a somewhat annoyed look.

“Really? You move with speed, Hakuno, and with no fidelity. Such a thing is an accomplishment, even for the King of Heroes…”

“No, I don’t!” Hakuno almost screamed.

But Elizabeth started giggling.

“Idiots, it was obviously just an example. I said I was going for something shocking, didn’t I? Such a plain, simple-minded maid who obeys any order she’s given and does nothing but make other people look good would never…huh? Could it be that the little squirrel and I are better suited to one another than it appears…? What if we’re really compatible…?”

She was looking at Hakuno with wide eyes, and Hakuno took another step back even as her arm started to hurt.

Why..?

“But I’m obviously not compatible with livestock,” Elizabeth rambled on, completely ignoring her. “Well, forget this. This isn’t as fun as I thought it would be. Any more questions?”

“Who’s your master?” Hakuno asked weakly.

Elizabeth scowled at her. “Really? My Master? I’m..just… I’m not inclined to talk about that, ok? I guess though…if I don’t introduce him, he’ll be annoying about it later. Fine, fine, I’ll tell you. Come on, Master!”

Gilgamesh took another step back almost as if he was prepared to move with her if needs be, but that was before the Master made his appearance.

A new, and again completely familiar voice rang out above them, laughing in a loud and obnoxious way.

“Finally, my turn has come! The magnificent Master S makes his appearance!”

Was that really..?

It was.
There was another spark of light, and there, standing in a pose that he probably thought made him look impressive was Shinji Matou. He brushed one bit of hair away from his face and resumed his pose.

Hakuno just stared at him, not even sure what to say.

Gilgamesh started laughing besides her. It wasn’t his usual laughter. That tended to boom and echo around almost as much of an act of intimidation as it was an act of amusement. This was different. More…genuine.

Hakuno just hid her face with one hand and shook her head. And Rin and Rani both vented their anger on the traitor.

Honestly, though…it was…hard to take him seriously.

Particularly when Gilgamesh was still laughing softly beside her the whole time.

There was another spark of light and Shinji appeared beside Elizabeth.

“Yeah, BB came crying to me and I decided to help her. Come on, surrender Kishinami! As the number one gaming-"

“So, yeah, I miss Rin and Rani,” Elizabeth huffed, crossing her arms and looking away. “At least they looked better.”

“Hey! Are you going to just interrupt me to complain!??” Shinji yelled. “You’re a noble! You should have manners!”

“I wanted to say it! I don’t need manners to deal with a servant! Why does my Master have to be a seaweed head!”

“Haven’t you paid attention to what’s happened?” Shinji shot back. “You’ve lost every match with Kishinami! That’s why you were scored by a genius like me!”

“Genius?” Elizabeth lifted one hand over her mouth like she was trying to imitate a noblewoman and cackled. “BB found you trembling in fear in some corner of the Labyrinth that you were stupid enough to run into! Some genius!”

Shinji stopped one food.

“W-well you were in a corner of the Sea of Nothing so-”

Elizabeth covered her ears with her hands.

“Lalala I can’t hear you! I don’t listen to barnyard animals, stupid!”

“Who are you calling stupid, you stupid idiot!” Shinji yelled back.

“No! You’re the stupid one, stupid stupid stupid!”

At that point, Hakuno was just staring at the two as they screamed ‘stupid’ at one another at the top of their lungs. It didn’t help that Gilgamesh was still smirking.

This was terrible in so many ways.

“Mongrel, when clowns perform well, it is customary to laugh,” Gilgamesh said looking at her and
then back at...both of them.

“This is just...too sad to laugh at...” Hakuno said, shaking her head. “Even worse sense they seem suited to one another...”

Besides, she was pretty sure that it would be harder to get the SG if she was laughing at Elizabeth.

There was another flash of light and BB appeared, watching the two with an annoyed look and finally sending a ‘hammer of justice’ towards Shinji.

Shinji yelped and jumped back as the lightening from nowhere came at him, and Elizabeth started laughing at him.

“What are you doing, BB, this is obviously her fault!” he pointed to Elizabeth, who stuck out her tongue.

“Ah...welp oppsie. My hand must have slipped! After all, he’d never attack you, Shinji. I mean, you’re so amazing! You even surpassed Leo B Harway!”

What.

Shinji struck a pose.

“You don’t have to tell me things I already know. Besides, that’s why I’m cooperating with you. I’ve got a better servant than that stupid pirate now, so I’ll total win the Grail War! She was so weak that she got knocked out by these two on the first round!”

“Of course Shinji!” BB cooed. “When I reach the core, I’ll hand over the Near Side for you to be king of! Honest!”

She actually crossed her fingers behind her back, giggling.

“Haha! That’s right! Hear that, Kishinami! I’m going to be the chosen one, and the last surviving victor, so...you just go back to that school and surrender!”

Ah.

He was laughing, his face in his usual proud expression that she vaguely remembered. In the Preliminaries, they’d been friends, or rather, she’d been one of the people that he’d tended to sit with. She didn’t clearly remember her own thoughts from then, other than that she was used to him being there, but the expression was different. Then, it had been proud and sure.

Now...

There was something trapped in his eyes, and something terrible in his laugh, and when he looked at her...all she could see was his face when he’d begged her for help as he’d vanished in front of her. This wasn’t pride or surety. This was fear.

“Mongrel, why are you nervous?” Gilgamesh asked, watching the group with an easier smirk. In spirit, skill, power, body and every other possible field, you could not find two more easily defeated opponents than the two that stand before us now.”

“I’m not worried about that...” Hakuno muttered.

Gilgamesh’s voice had obviously carried, since Shinji’s smile froze a little as he glanced at Gilgamesh and then at her.
BB though, giggled.

“Welp, I leave things to you, little king,” she said sweetly. “Try not to let Eli-chan’s secrets get stolen, would you?”

The threat hanging behind those words was obvious.

BB vanished and Elizabeth harrumphed lightly.

“I don’t need to the help of a rat. Anyways. Interviews are over. It’s time for the dead live show!”

Random enemy programs appeared all around them as Shinji laughed.

“Haha! You’ll be defeated in seconds if you attack you know! I designed all of these myself! If you won’t concede, then I guess it’s game on… When you lose, go back and tell the others how you can’t beat me!”

“I’m going to be the winner this time!” Elizabeth said, “You’ll see!”

And when they were gone, and the enemies just started milling around aimlessly, but there were so many of them…

“Detecting multiple enemy presences,” Rani said. “All of them are functioning at high defense and low attack.”

“Oh. How scary.” Hakuno sighed.

“The child wishes to impress you and BB, but he holds no particular malice towards you,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “This is likely his attempt to wear you down.”

“This is going to probably take a while, but at least it’s just Shinji, right?” Rin sighed.

“A dull scenario, but I suppose necessary to finish this,” Gilgamesh agreed.

Besides, it wasn’t as if they had any choice at this point. Hakuno wanted to know why Shinji had decided that this was a good idea, and they needed to track down Elizabeth.

It did in fact take a while. Mostly because Shinji kept throwing out more and more attack programs with stupidly high defenses while claiming that he TOTALLY was just messing with Hakuno and getting more nervous anyways. And the sitting a trap with infinitely spawning monsters that still managed to only stop her for a little bit.

Thankfully Rin and Rani were there running support. They both were really amazing when it came to their skills with this. Sometimes, it made her a little jealous, but she tried not to think about that too hard.

She might be impressed by Shinji’s work too if she wasn’t so annoyed. It wasn’t that anything he’d done was hard, or even that most of the programs even were trying to attack her, they were just… annoying. They kept coming back had had high defenses. While at this point, she knew that she
could ask Gilgamesh to use his Nobel Phantasm on them, she…honestly didn’t think he’d appreciate that.

He seemed to really value it highly, so at least she could save it for enemies that really needed it.

There was also the issue that Elizabeth had vanished. While before, she’d been just as talkative as Shinji, now it was pretty quiet from her end. She would have thought that Shinji would keep her close so that Hakuno never got the chance to interact with her, but that didn’t seem to be what was going on.

“Yeah, I’m…I’m still not taking you seriously, you know!” Shinji wired in. “Getting a bunch of small fry together won’t stop you, but…well…if you weren’t this strong…I’d be worried.”

“Of course, you would,” Hakuno sighed.

“Anyways, to make this whole thing fair, I’m just going to come up with tactics on the spot. It makes it more fun, and…maybe you have a teeny tiny chance of winning!” Shinji said, signing off and leaving then again to the Labyrinth.

“Mongrel, you fought with this child before. Do you notice any change in him from your challenge to him on the Near Side?” Gilgamesh asked.

“Not really,” Hakuno sighed. “These were pretty close to his old tactics, so my guess would be that he’s going to come up with more of the same. I’m guessing that he’s going to be trying to hide Elizabeth.”

Shinji cut back into the feed.

“Oh, of course I’m hiding her from you. I’ve got a handle on you Kishinami. If you chat with her, you’ll find something out, and then I might lose. So that’s not happening. You hear that Elizabeth-hey…where’s you go…”

Gilgamesh started snickering.

“While his floor is dull, their actions are providing suitable entertainment for atone for even attempting to attack me,” he said, as Shinji started yelling for Elizabeth to come out

“What’s with this ditto character with his tongue out anyways! I have no idea what you’re getting at!”

“I suppose this means that the dragon-child is wandering,” Gilgamesh said. “She will likely find you then, as she appears to already be smitten.”

Hakuno cringed. The whole idea sort of made her skin crawl. While there was something weirdly innocent in Elizabeth, she couldn’t get that image of the NPCs slowly having their blood drained from them during Rin’s Labyrinth.

They kept going breaking down another one of Shinji’s very large defense enemies before they were at another large platform, this one surrounded by several ivy and rose covered pillars that made it hard to see much beyond them.

“Wait!” Sakura called out. “Miss Kishinami! Behind the big pillar to the left! Do you see her!”

At the shout, Hakuno turned to see Elizabeth pacing around on a platform just above them, mumbling to herself.
“What am I doing? Why am I even… I just wanted to make sure that I’m misjudging things, but I’m so, so nervous all of a sudden…” at that her face was being cupped by her hands and she was swaying back and forth in a very excited way. “but she wants to see me! She said she’s looking for me and that rat is hiding me from her! She doesn’t know her place as livestock at all! This…this is just too direct! Too bold. At least she needed to send me a letter and arrange things and…”

That last bit was said as a squeal.

…why?

“And then…and then just sort of casually meet at a ball right?!”

Why this?

“Oh, come on, Elizabeth, this…this just won’t happen! I’m an idol! I can’t just reply! I have a brand now! B…but I’m an idol! I’m an idol and a Sentinel! So…I need to welcome her with the best stage there is!”

Why her?

She looked at Gilgamesh, but he was watching Elizabeth with a faintly bored look on his face. Maybe she should just…get this over with?

But the moment she decided to take a step, Elizabeth was gone, mumbling something about doing her nails.

“So…I’m starting to get a sense of what her SG is…” Rin logged in.

“Really? As if yet, there seems to be no reaction,” Rani said.

“True, but…just from how she’s just…making stuff up… I mean, unless you’re making eyes at her or something, Hakuno…”

“I’m not!” Hakuno shouted back. “I have nothing to do with this! She’s coming up with everything on her own!”

“Alright then, I might think about that. I mean, she’s…she’s jumping to so stupid conclusions then. Daydreamer…delusional…”

“It matters not of yet,” Gilgamesh cut in. “You two keep considering the SGs nature. We still must ferret it out prior to that being needed. Continue to give your support while my Master contributes her endurance and we kick around whatever that child has left for us.”

Hakuno sighed and nodded. Once again heading down with a sigh, she started heading close to where the locked portion of the maze was. Occasionally some of Shinji’s enemies appeared, by they were starting to back off as Shinji started hinting about some ‘new brilliant plan’ that he had.

Finally, they reached another platform where both Shinji and Elizabeth were standing and waiting for them. With a very large, strangely colored golemish attack program was waiting behind them.

“Welcome, little squirrel!” Elizabeth said, pointing dramatically at her. “Are you ready for my special live show?!”

Was she going to sing? Or was it connected to that golem? It didn’t look any different than the other ones, but everything about how still it was made her feel nervous.
"Take care," Rani's voice managed to come through. "That one appears to have been modified by one Shinji Matou."

Hakuno prepared herself for battle, crouching a little and making sure her stance was good.

"Wha-what special live show!" Shinji suddenly turned around to face Elizabeth. "You didn’t say anything about that! The point was that I’d attack with this and you’d get away! That was the plan! You can’t just change the plan and not tell me! Why are you out here anyways?! Do you have a dragon brain or a bird brain?! Stupid!"

"Ah, we’re going to have a repeat comedy act than?" Gilgamesh said, leaning back onto one leg and watching to two. "Attempt to make your performance more interesting. It so far is inspiring little more than pity in my Master and lacks new material for me."

Both stopped, and Shinji whirled around to face her Servant.

"This isn’t a comedy act! This is serious! And if you knew better, you’d be scared!"

"You’re the stupid one, Shinji! And the one making the Gorgeous class Servant think that we’re a comedy act! This is my Labyrinth, and it would be rude not to greet my guests! That’s why I’m an aristocrat and you’re not!"

"Oh, now you have manners!"

"Besides! Victory isn’t just beating them! It’s making them bow before you and then crushing them body and soul!"

"You can’t do that to Kishinami! I mean…not without beating her!"

Elizabeth crossed her arms and looked away.

"You’re just a rat, and don’t understand these things. So I guess I’ll forgive you. Just this once. But you have to make amends! That golem has flashy beams, right? So, I’ll use it for my opening act! It’s got to be loud and fast paced too! So get to it!"

"Arg. Fine. I see why everyone wanted to stop being your manager…" Shinji grumbled. "I’ll go first, but don’t complain if everything’s all over… GO SHINJI TANK!"

The golem did nothing.

For a moment, both Hakuno and Gilgamesh stared at it.

"GO SHINJI TANK!" Shinji yelled again. "Oh come on… stop embarrassing me you hunk of garbage! Wait…why are there… WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

He whirled on Elizabeth

"I put more lasers on it, obviously!" Elizabeth said proudly.

Gilgamesh was laughing again, leaning back and clearly not taking this even slightly seriously anymore.

Hakuno just hid her face with her hand but something bubbled up. Maybe it was the fact that Gilgamesh’s laugh was somewhat infectious when he wasn’t all but shouting. Maybe it was really the situation. This was so stupid. So ridiculous. Somehow, those two played to every one of the others worst qualities with their classing egos that she couldn’t help it.
She started laughing. It was a strange sound to her, but one that felt…good…coming up. Even if she felt like she shouldn’t do it after Leo and Julius and…

“So, my Master can laugh?” Gilgamesh said, glancing over at her as Shinji started kicking the golem. “I had wondered if you were capable of nothing more than moving forward.”

But before Gilgamesh could say anything more, there was a sudden rush of steam, and the golem clattered forwards to a cheer from Shinji.

Gilgamesh gave it an unimpressed look and raised one hand, as the Gates opened.

“Gate of Babylon,” Gilgamesh said.

Now, Hakuno had seen the Gate of Babylon. She’d seen it a lot as Gilgamesh had taken weapons from it, switching between them at a staggering speed, but this was different. This time, several gates from behind him opened at one time, sending a barrage of weapons shooting forwards, directly at the golem where several exploded on impact, while others just simply tore through the entire structure before vanishing again into gold.

The golem collapsed again.

“Right…that strength…” Elizabeth mumbled.

“No! No way! Kishinami can’t be that strong yet! Come on! Work!” Shinji ran up, landing a solid kick into the golem.

Which started to vibrate strangely.

Gilgamesh moved in front of her, but Elizabeth, with a sniff walked out.

“Fine. You’re done! Make sure it shoots lasers for me now!”

Steam was coming from the joints of the golem, but the dragon girl was completely ignoring it as she opened her mouth and prepared to sing.

Hakuno knew why she did it. If Elizabeth died, the SG would be lost, and they’d be trapped. Maybe she felt a little bad for Elizabeth just dying like this, but that wasn’t the real reason, and she couldn’t lie to herself that it was. At the same time, maybe it didn’t matter, since in the end, it ended up being the same thing.

“What are you doing?!” she ignored Gilgamesh’s shout.

Hakuno rushed forwards, with a cry of ‘no!’ and forced the Servant to the ground just as, with an earth shaking boom, the golem exploded. Hakuno covered her head, closing her eyes and her ears ringing. For just a second everything seemed light and dark and strange, but she shook her head, and opened a call to Sakura. She didn’t hurt, but somewhere, information came to her that she might not feel anything.

“Hey…am I…in one piece…?”

“Er…just a few cuts and bruises… No real damage ascertained but…”

But? Something about that answer sounded…bad.

Hakuno opened her eyes and looked down.
Elizabeth was underneath her, starting at her with wide eyes and a shocked expression, crimson spreading across her face.

“What…I…why are you..?”

Oh.

Oh no.

Hakuno could practically see the stars that were starting to shine in her eyes as the Servant looked at her.

“Er…”

Suddenly…the blooming roses and the ivy and the pillars everything was starting to come together.

Oh.

“…good morning, darling…” Elizabeth said, face still red. “You know…I just had the strangest dream…promise you won’t laugh… I… I dreamt that we were enemies, and I had you cornered… but some giant rat exploded and…and then…you took my hand and you said…” Explosions do not suit you! Simply for you to be sprayed with oil would be a crime! By the way, those horns are adorable!”

“I said nothing of the sort!” Hakuno almost screamed.

Elizabeth wasn’t listening, she just kept talking, so obviously completely out of it that it was scary.

“It was so attractive…so bold…I just wanted to sink my teeth into you right there.”

Maybe someone would have found that attractive, but that wasn’t her!

Hakuno scrambled back as quick as she could as everyone else was completely silent. Finally someone said something.

“That’s…about half right?” Sakura ventured, but seemed more confused than anything else.

…Maybe she should just accept death now. Telling Gilgamesh ‘there was nothing else’ seemed attractive.

“We are your enemies!” Hakuno said sharply. “I just…had to save the SG!”

“You and I are…enemies…” Elizabeth muttered. “So does that mean…a forbidden love?”

Hakuno’s face went dead.

Forbidden love.

Her arm hurt.

Oh crap.

“Er…I…er…” she couldn’t make it come out. “No…”

But Elizabeth was too busy swooning to even notice as Hakuno backed up further, she glanced at Gilgamish, who was watching her with obvious annoyance.
“Are you perhaps some pick up queen who specializes exclusively in dangerous women?” he asked.

“No, I’m not!” Hakuno shot back. “I wanted to save the SG! She’s doing everything else herself!”

“That’s our flag builder,” Rin said, sounding annoyed. “Isn’t it time for you to die?”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!”

“You know…your Harem Protagonist Ex skill is through the roof,” a familiar voice sounded.

“JINAKO, I DON’T WANT A HAREM!”

“Everyone…this is clearly a misunderstanding…but…”

“Not, you too, Sakura!”

But…everything else aside…she was getting signs of an SG… Maybe she should just…take it?

Elizabeth suddenly shook her head violently and was on her feet as quickly as Hakuno scrambled to hers.

“What you doing, you livestock!? Don’t touch me!” She shrieked, and was quickly rearranging her hair and clothing. “How dare you! Saved by a squirrel! I’ve never been more humiliated! See how red my cheeks are! That’s because I’m angry!”

“You’re totally blushing!” Shinji yelled from some location where he was fixing his golem.

“How dare you!” Elizabeth screamed. “That’s why my heart is racing! It’s rage!”

Gilgamesh glanced at Hakuno, who sighed.

“Elizabeth, it’s over. I know the SG,” she said.

Elizabeth started back.

“You…you’re lying! Rin and Rani were fooled with that, but I’m not! There’s no way someone like you could understand my heart!”

“It…actually isn’t that hard to understand,” Hakuno sighed. “You’re a romantic. You’re so romantic that a bunch of random and insignificant actions are suddenly some destined romance. Regardless of the truth.”

Maybe she was emphasizing things a little, but she was getting so tired of this, and maybe if she made it clear…

“N-no way…I…”

She started glowing as the SG unlocked and Hakuno rushed towards her, grabbing forward and jumping to capture the glowing pink orb.

“SG captured successfully! Shields are coming down!” Sakura called out.

Now if only she’d realize…

But Elizabeth was steadying herself, blinking a little.

“Oh…oh so that’s what it feels like…” she muttered. “You really like seeing an idol’s dirty secrets
exposed, don’t you…? But…it’s true…I’ve always longed for a picture book love… I understand myself better…this…wonderful new me… I mean…if it’s just one thing…then love will be a new dream, and I’ll become even more beautiful! Love is the food of beauty and beauty is the food of love! It’s perfect!”

No, it wasn’t!

Elizabeth walked forwards until her fading body was standing face to face with Hakuno.

“I’m not sure why I was so excited over livestock, but whatever. I went a little insane for a moment. But I’ll give you a new honor, you ugly thing.” Hakuno moved to step back, but Elizabeth followed her, the look in her eyes…completely that of the dragon that she was supposedly descended from. “I’m going to reserve your soul. When I attain my ultimate beauty, you’ll be the closest to sing my praises.”

She reached one hand towards Hakuno’s face, but as Hakuno leaned back, she, and the hand vanished.

"WARN ME, ELIZABETH!" Shinji yelled from...where ever he was...and then he seemed to vanish as well.

For a moment, Hakuno just stared blankly in front of her, registering what just happened.

“And that is how it appears to be,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “I suppose you will-”

“WHY IS IT ME?” Hakuno almost screamed, whirling around to face her Servant. “What is it always me?! You know about gods! Did I do something in another life? Did someone curse me? Can I stop it? Why does every single new person in this Labyrinth fall for me? Am I doing something? I don’t even like girls like that! Why does Kiara keep flirting with me!? And why does everyone keep thinking that I’m enjoying this??”

She was breathing hard at the end of that and then it registered that she’d interrupted him. Even if he was…more or less better disposed to her…shed didn’t think he’d appreciate that.

But Gilgamesh didn’t seem to notice. He was watching her with a strange expression. It wasn’t anger, or at least not anger towards her, but there was anger in it. There was also something thoughtful as he looked at her.

And when he spoke, his voice was…surprisingly not harsh.

“They perceive value,” he told her. “And thus they wish to possess it. There is nothing more and nothing you have done to encourage it. It is natural for something lesser to reach for a treasure that they cannot obtain, is it not? You need not fret for that dragon-child’s threats. For all that she claims that she has reserved your soul, your life is mine, and I will not hand you over to her for any reason, nor permit, or any like her to touch you. Dragons might comprehend value, as such, and are drawn to it, but she has not yet learned when something is beyond her.”

Somehow…that statement of possession…almost felt comforting.

“However, I have heard your complaint,” Gilgamesh continued. “While, in light of the amusement they brought us, death may not be appropriate, I will not permit mercy towards this girl. Act in this manner, and I will forgive your prior interruption. The child is another matter entirely. Retrieve him and discipline him.”

“I wasn’t much planning on mercy anyways. At least, not towards Elizabeth.” Hakuno muttered. “I
remember what she did to those NPCs. Shinji... He's different.”

“Your heart tends to cause you to forget the things others have done,” Gilgamesh said, pressing slightly. “I will not permit it in the case of that dragon girl. Now, let us return. And forget the words of those children. I am aware of your displeasure. That is enough.”

It was another insanely arrogant statement, that no one’s opinion mattered other than his, but she thought she understood what he was trying to tell her. It didn’t matter if other people thought that she liked the attention she got. He knew better, and he’d help her.

And maybe…with one person on her side…maybe it did feel a little better.

Chapter End Notes

Woo this took longer than I thought. I...started really enjoying writing Elizabeth and Shinji...

I noticed that Hakuno has, in twenty chapters, only laughed once, and that was hysterically. So, I felt the need the change that, also, at least she doesn't have EVERYONE thinking she's building a harem now... Gil was annoyed with her at first, but now he's getting annoyed with everyone else.

Next Chapter:

"What will it be, Hakuno. Will I give you heaven, or will you experience hell?"

Meltlilith makes her appearance.
Chapter Summary

The first encounter with Meltlilith has Gilgamesh reflecting on Hakuno's words, and Hakuno accidentally crosses a barrier she hadn't known existed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time Gilgamesh was truly worried for victory was after Hakuno’s angry speech to him.

In on honestly, Gilgamesh had found the floor entertaining. He had had low expectations upon first entering the floor, but the little monster had surprised him, though that had mostly been due to her Master.

The child was, while clever in his own way, clearly just that, regardless of the age of his avatar. He held no malice towards Hakuno, and the things he had made were designed to be bothersome but not deadly. If anything, Gilgamesh found himself reminded of several children of nobles that he had seen, who straddled the line between spoiled and neglected, as he demanded attention from a would-be friend.

His antics had caused even his usually pinched faced Master to start laughing.

He had been honestly surprised by the sound, and, with some satisfaction, he was pleased to note that, as he had assumed, she did not giggle in some affected attempt to be both attractive and amused. No, it had been genuine, though shaking, as if it was the first time she had experienced any pleasure beyond the simplest things in her life.

He would see that again.

Of course, that had been a short-lived joy, as the dragon-child in her delusions of love and blood fixated on Hakuno, and she, as it would seem, finally had enough.

As before, she managed to surprise him. He had assumed, at some level, she enjoyed the attentions thrown her way. But it seemed that in reality, completely innocent actions she had performed, such as preventing the SG from being lost, would be reinterpreted in the lens of romance. With all assuming that she either instigated or at least appreciated this.

Perhaps some goddess had, out of spite and boredom, cursed the girl. Perhaps, and more likely from his readings, the world was in such a state that even the most simple act of kindness was one that stood out so greatly that it become momentous.

Regardless, it did not change the reality. Hakuno was a treasure of unknown value which he would not permit those who were unworthy of her to handle, and one who had been grasped for far too many times by others. Her own frustration made it clear.

Still, he ignored the anger that bubbled up in him for some reason and walked beside her to the exit.

While the desire to protect and keep a treasure was only natural to him, the anger…
It was likely the disrespect. That that dragon-child would honestly think that he would permit something such as herself to take his Master without either her or his acceptance. It was not anger on her behalf, but rather on his own.

“At least that’s over,” Hakuno sighed, as they made their way towards the exit, where a large false moon hung low in some attempt to garner a romantic mood.

Flowers, ivy covered pillars and moonlight. So that had been why she had manifested as one so young, regardless of her true age when she had died.

Yet… there was something now to this place, once it was desolate that made him feel…on edge. It was not a tension in the air, but rather a certain heaviness of a presence that he could not name.

Hakuno stopped in front of the exit point, raising one hand to input the coordinates to the school, and the sensation returned with far more force, as did something else.

Gilgamesh whipped around, blocking the attack the shot towards them before his Master could so much as finish turning. The force of the blow was enough for even him to admit was impressive, as was the directness. Had he moved a moment slower, Hakuno would have been impaled.

The attacker was a woman bearing the face of the AI and BB, only with this one’s eyes a deep blue and her mouth set in a smirk. Her long hair flowed behind her like the other, but while the abomination known as Passionlip had been nothing but flesh and softness concealing metal, this one was nothing but edges and knives.

“You strike like a shooting star,” Gilgamesh grinned. “For that I will praise you. You are the other Alter Ego, I take it?”

He had wondered what had become of this one, and the malice that it had extruded.

The creature giggled, a similar sound to BB, though lighter and filled with far more malice than false innocence.

“I’ll revise my opinion of you, Servant. I guess you’re not all talk.”

The Ego flipped back, giving Gilgamesh a view of the fact that while the other had had metal for hands, this one had little more than swords for legs. She moved to get behind Hakuno, but Gilgamesh was faster. With one step she was already behind him, her body stiffened and ready for the coming battle.

The Ego landed in a crouch, eyes looking past him to his Master.

“Greets, tiny Master, and your tragically excess Servant,” the creature said, her voice filled with a body confidence that boasted of one who thought herself already the victor.

Gilgamesh grinned.

He always enjoyed a proud opponent. The look on their faces when the tide of battle turned against them was always the most amusing.

“I am the Alter Ego, Meltlilith. I might have come from BB, but I have nothing to do with her. Hakuno, I am the only one who truly understands you.”

He heard the intake of breath, something that could either have been frustration or fear, both given her outburst just now. He felt, again, a twinge of rage that he set aside.
Rather, he smiled.

“Do you hear that, Master? This monster claims that she understands you better than myself or any other, yet…I cannot recall your ever meeting with her. So, I wonder what claim that she could have to that distinction.”

But rather than Hakuno having the chance of adding her clear denial that this creature had any claim on her whatsoever, the abomination decided to speak up again, still giving that sure smile as she straightened.

“That much is just obvious. Hakuno Kishinami, I know all there is to know about you,” the smile turned to something almost besotted. “And you will soon know all there is to know about me too. The two of us will be one. You will be unable to live without me.”

It was a straightforward desire; Gilgamesh would give her that. So, that was the game BB had been playing. These two were opposite sides of the same twisted affection. Where one was coy this one was direct. But in the end, the emotion was the same: an infatuation with nothing truly like love behind it.

“Honestly,” the creature continued, the same expression on her face. “I wanted to come to greet you earlier, but this area is under that other girl’s jurisdiction, and it wasn’t easy to sneak past BB to come here.”

So, she had an independent will. Thus, she was likely far more developed in nature than the first.

“To ‘meet’ me?” Hakuno asked, and under that worry Gilgamesh noted the wavy note of skepticism in her voice.

The girl laughed.

“Right. Now that I’ve gone through the trouble of meeting you, I’d like to make you mine now, but I’ll give you a little extension. Some freedom, I suppose. Just enough time to answer my questions and finish this conversation. BB’s role is over. She’s not going to be making you her top priority.” For a second, something flickered on her face. “As things continue, she’ll probably erase you eventually. But don’t worry. I’m here. I’ll protect you from BB. So…” the smile was back. “Do you want to offer everything willingly to me? Whatever you say, the result is the same, but I’m willing to listen.”

Gilgamesh snorted. This creature was hardly listening to anything but the sound of her own voice. It was much like listening to Ishtar’s “proposal” had been. Filled with what she wanted under the clear misunderstanding that the desires of the other party were not relevant.

And somehow, in all of this, Gilgamesh considered the echoes of Hakuno’s angry cries to him.

The Ego’s eyes flicked to him, but other than a small sense of her killing intent that came to nothing.

“Yes or no? Pleasure or submission? Heaven or Hell? Tell me now! Depending on how you reply to me, I’ll decide on how to treat you.”

The answer was obvious, but still, Gilgamesh glanced at Hakuno, not to see conflict, but to see the defiance on his mongrel’s face as she glared at the Ego.

“I think I’d rather choose hell,” she said.

Gilgamesh had hoped to see anger on the Ego’s face, but the smirk was back.
“That’s a fun answer too,” she said, giggling somewhat “You’re definitely one for my submission pile. Just like Alice.”

“Alice?” Hakuno snapped. “What did you do to Alice!?”

The thing smiled.

“Would you like me to show you? Maybe if you change you mind…”

Hakuno stiffened, her tender heart brought into conflict with her defiance.

Gilgamesh had had enough. He had tested this once and no more, and he was growing weary of these beings which claimed to have his Master’s best interests in mind using her good nature against her. Now though, it appeared that BB and this other would learn what it meant when he claimed to no longer be observing.

“Do not be fooled by her, Hakuno,” he said, watching the creature. “This Ego does not care about your opinion, or any but her own. She already decided on her answer and will not show you that ghost until she decides to and no sooner or later, no matter what you do. Do not give her the reaction she desires.”

The Ego jerked her head to him, eyes like two flints.

“You’re annoying, Servant,” she said “Why are you still here? I said you were extraneous. Didn’t you hear me? What can you do for her? What can you give her? I can fulfil her every desire, be a cradle of every happiness.”

Hakuno had frozen again.

“And, yet, Ego, it is me who she stands willingly behind, while you can only make idle threats,” Gilgamesh snapped back.

With a sound of anger, the creature positioned herself to attack.

“I will take responsibility for Hakuno. You’re just a hindrance!”

“And you and what spare pleasure you offer are completely unwanted,” Gilgamesh returned. “The one who is unnecessary, Ego, is yourself.”

“Enough! You fall here!”

She rushed forwards, and Gilgamesh blocked the blow again, opening that Gates and sending a barrage of weapons towards her. It was impossible to dodge, even with the speed and power that she seemed to possess, but the cry of pain that he expected never came. Rather, with every hit, the damage was only a single word:

Invalid.

What?

“I…She’s got the same skill as BB! Gil-“

Gil?!

But the name was uncompleted as the Ego sent another kick towards him, forcing him a step back. He righted his stance quickly, but he was wasting his time. Nothing he used, including Ea itself,
would touch her as she was.

“You’re right, Hakuno,” the Ego said, holding her head in pride. “I am immortal. I am invincible! You could even call me an iron wall. There is nothing in the Moon Cell that could possibly hurt me!”

Everything in the Moon Cell, including himself, had to abide by some rules, and one of those was the coding itself. If something in her coding had…

“Do you regret challenging me now, Servant?”

Gilgamesh ignored the taunt.

“There’s got to be something…” Hakuno muttered. “BB…she couldn’t have…”

But she could and she would, and they both knew it. As they were, Gilgamesh noted, Hakuno might not win. Regardless of his full participation.

It was an ugly feeling.

The Ego was glaring at the both of them now.

“Why are you still resisting me? Aren’t I obviously better than that Servant? Didn’t I say I would take you to paradise and protect you from BB? I don’t understand why you’re opposed.”

Why was it that gods always failed to comprehend the notion of refusal? And the fact that she conceived herself ‘better’ because BB had used the corpse of a long dead goddess to gain power was ridiculous.

“You are amusing,” Gilgamesh said, laughing, but keeping his eyes on the creature. “You claim to be separate from your creator, but once your true nature shows you are no different. You claim paradise, but all you offer is nothing more than a cage. Your pleasure is hollow, your heaven is in and of itself a hell for any who have any desires of their own. All you offer is a slow decay, a lasting death from which any would flee.”

“He’s right,” Hakuno finally found her voice, and straightened. “I don’t need paradise. I can’t live peacefully like this. Particularly not now. Not when everyone on Earth is in danger.”

Was she attempting to appeal to the Ego’s morality?

The creature, as to be expected, was unaffected by such things.

“That’s a good answer, Hakuno. It makes things more fun this way. You know, Lip was a masochist. Me? The idea of taking someone who hates it, and kicking them into submission…I don’t think I’ll be able to get enough of that…”

He saw the pulse of light that came from the Ego’s form, and Hakuno gasped in sudden pain, gripping her arm.

Ah, yes, this peculiarity. While most beings covered and hid the weak points of their hearts, Alter Egos, as newly born hearts, relatively, were ones that were easily exposed. It appeared that this creature’s disposition, like the former, was to be seen as an SG.

“Oh? You’re impatient, aren’t you? I don’t even have a floor yet, and you’re demanding my secrets. Well…alright. As a token of our closeness, I’ll give it to you.”

She pointed towards Hakuno, and the glowing orb rushed towards her so quickly that his Master
almost missed it. She winced a little as it was absorbed, but that was missed by the Ego, who was still smiling in that vaguely besotted way.

“So, this is what it feels like to share secrets with someone…it’s so stimulating… It’s like you’re tearing feathers from a small bird…the more one-sided the better…”

“What a vulgar reaction,” Gilgamesh cut in on the creature’s grotesque revelries. “I suppose your intoxicated reaction comes from your imaginations of turning this feeling on Hakuno. As well as making this something that is requited.”

Rather than her forcing herself and her secrets on another.

His words had the desired effect, no longer was she giving his Master that disgusting look, but was focused on him with something far more preferable: hate. Though even that was a pitiful excuse for the emotion.

 “…You really are a noisy peanut gallery,” the Ego said. “I suppose I really will just have to kill him. Just so you now, irregularity, I am not Lip. I will not play with you and then run off to eat someone for fear of making Hakuno sad. I’ll finish you once and for all.”

She meant it. And while he had certainly gained strength now that he was fed by his Master’s mana, fallen as he still was, he could not match her. She would kill him and then Hakuno would be at her mercy, but Gilgamesh stood his ground, bracing for that.

This was suicide to face her.

But he had given his word, and he would stand by it. He had declared to BB that he was no longer an observer. And…he had told Hakuno that he had heard her frustration. He would not shame himself by even showing hesitation.

“Come then, if you can,” Gilgamesh said.

She was starting to build up power.

“Rani!” Rin’s voice cried through the channel that they used to communicate. “You’ve got to force transfer them right now! She’s only getting stronger, and even if they run, they won’t make the check point!”

“Reevaluating and transferring all processes from the Student Council Room input. Check. Forcible Transfer in 60 seconds.”

“I don’t need that long,” the Ego smirked. “My honey dissolves everything, including Servants. I’ll bring this annoying man who dares to stand between me and Hakuno in one strike!”

Gilgamesh opened the Gates, but another presence suddenly appeared. It was a good distance away, but familiar…

Well, well, it appeared that the Labyrinth had not rid itself of the rat problem, but from the location…

“I will be the one who evaluates your boast, offshoot,” Gilgamesh said.

“We can’t win,” Hakuno hissed. “She’ll nullify your attack!”

“Behind you! Step back, Little Lady.”

Gilgamesh did not wait, he took his Master’s arm, pulling her towards him as he jumped to the side,
leaving Robin Hood with a clear path of attack.

“What-“

“Gil-”

Gilgamesh froze and started at her for a second almost missing the attack.

The crossbow bolt moved at a trajectory that would be unreadable by any save him, and while the attack against was registered as invalid, the effect was not.

Green smoke suddenly filled the area, and Gilgamesh reached into his Gates, drawing out an amethyst cup with a small amount of liquid in it. Taking a quick sip, he pressed it into his Master’s hands.

“Drink, now!” he commanded. “It is protection from poison. As humiliating as it might be, we must wait for the transfer.”

She obeyed, giving him back the cup, which dissolved back into his Gates.

“There you are!” The Alter Ego cried triumphantly, but even as Gilgamesh braced himself for the blow, the sound of battle came from another location, and the grunt of pain from another source.

The man was going to pay dearly for his giving Hakuno aid. So that reluctance to attack his Master had been true. They had met on the Near Side, Gilgamesh knew, as enemies, but he was certain that Hakuno, being herself, had wept so for him and his master, that it had been difficult for even a thief like him to be unmoved.

“Verification complete!” Rani called out. “Chance of failure at .0000001%. Executed forced transfer.”

“No!” he heard the Alter Ego screaming, as the transfer began.

“Return to your hole, Ego,” Gilgamesh called out. “You will never make good your claim on my Master.”

And when they met next, he would be sure to have something prepared for her little trick.

The last thing he heard was the creature’s wail. That of a beast that had been denied her kill as the Labyrinth faded around him.

He would decide what to do with that name later, and if he would permit her to call him something only his friend had ever dared name him before.

The first time Hakuno called Gilgamesh by a nickname had been mostly by accident, and she hadn’t even noticed until he brought it up after their first encounter with Meltlilith.

The transfer happened so fast, that Hakuno didn’t have time to even register it. One second, she was in the Labyrinth, the next she was standing outside the Sakura tree, safe from Meltlilith. With Sakura
waiting for them

“Miss Hakuno! Mister Gilgamesh!” Sakura cried the second that they were back, rushing up to them. “Let me check you both! Senpai, are you alright? Did that poison effect you again?”

For just a second, Hakuno wasn’t proud of the thrill of fear that pulsed through her body at the sight of Meltlilith’s face, but Hakuno closed her eyes. That was wrong. Meltlilith had Sakura’s face, and they looked different. Sakura’s eyes were another color, and while Meltlilith’s face had always been proud in one way or another, Sakura was someone who she’d drank tea with, talked with, given a uniform to.

If there was anyone in that series of AI that had any business calling her ‘Senpai’ it was Sakura, even though honestly, it was wrong. Sakura had been there longer than her.

What was worse was that from the way that Sakura wasn’t meeting her eye, she was probably thinking about just how similar they were, given that they’d nearly been killed by what was essentially a version of herself.

“No, I’m fine,” Hakuno said, forcing a smile. “Gilgamesh…he gave me something for poison.”

Sakura sighed.

“I’m so glad. The last time Robin Hood used that and poisoned you…”

Gilgamesh made an interested noise as Sakura moved to examine him.

“What about you?’ she asked. “You were the one to face her, did you notice any wounds acting strangely?”

“No, I was able to recover as expected,” Gilgamesh said, watching her return to Hakuno.

“You both look fine,” she said, relief on her face. “No abnormal conditions or strange statuses…The worst is some exhaustion. I was worried that she’d done something, with all that talk of melting and…”

“Yes, I wish to know about that as well as her invincibility,” Gilgamesh said loudly.

“Right,” Rin muttered from the channel. “You two rest. We’ll start analysis of Meltlilith while you do. There’s got to be something from the visuals we’ve got. Rani, did you get any other data?”

“ Apart from her SG, I’ve managed to gather matrix data based on her fight with Gilgamesh. That should be a sufficient beginning. However, I cannot currently analyze the reason for her Invincibility. I apologize and hope that we will be able to gain sufficient information later.”

“So, we’ll have to do our best. For now, I suppose we need to work on jamming her, if nothing else,” Rin said.

Sakura’s eyes lit up. “So that Meltlilith won’t be able to tell their position, right? I think that might work.”

“Yes, current, from Tohsaka’s idea, we’re using about 4% of the processing power on that. I propose to lift that to 10%.

“Oh…” Sakura said, frowning. “I thought that it was because of her staying in the school…I guess I was wrong.”
“It is likely that that works within the School Building itself,” Gilgamesh said. “Rin, Rani. You will use more cameras in the Labyrinth to observe, even when myself and my Master are not present. The Ego will no doubt continue searching, as she likely is aware of your efforts. That might afford you the chance to observe her invincibility.”

While he was dishing out orders like before, Hakuno couldn’t deny that that might work. It was a long shot, but so far, everything was going to be a long shot with Meltlilith, and if they faced her with that invincibility…

They’d die.

“Thanks, Rin, Rani,” Hakuno said, looking up at the window where they were. “I probably don’t know how many times that saved us.”

“W-well it’s just normal guerrilla tactics!” Rin said. “Common sense for if you’ve been fighting long enough!”

“I believe that is Tohsaka’s way of saying ‘your welcome’.” Rani said, a smug smile clear in her voice. “As stated, we will begin analysis while you rest. Please proceed to your room.”

“Er…what about that Elizabeth girl?” Sakura asked. “I mean… she did claim that she was going to reserve your soul…”

“That dragon girl’s claims are of no matter,” Gilgamesh said. “There is nothing she can do as she is. Focus on the clear threat but reserve some watch for her. We will challenge her in the morning.”

So, basically, he didn’t see this as a problem, but they should be careful.

“Alright, I’ll head up now. When I’m done…I’ll come see you in the infirmary,” Hakuno said.

“Wonderful, I’ll have tea ready.”

They headed back, and Hakuno ignored the watchful eyes of Kotomine as they headed up the stairs and into their room. Honestly, it was a lot more pleasant now that the curtain was up, and things seemed…lived in.

Sitting on the bed, Hakuno flopped on her back.

“We got lucky,” she said, for once opening up the conversation, and looking to Gilgamesh, who had taken his usual position and already had some wine out.

“That was not luck,” Gilgamesh said. “Tell me of that Archer. Who was he?”

“Robin…” Hakuno sat up a little. “He…he was the Servant of a man called Dan. He was my second opponent in the War. Right after I defeated Shinji. Dan was a retired general, and, I guess he was really famous on Earth. I’m not sure why they were paired up, but they didn’t really get along. Archer kept trying to kill me outside of the arena. He hit me with one of those arrows. It only grazed me since…my Servant…they saved me…”

She frowned as she tried to come up with a picture, but…nothing seemed to. But she knew they’d saved her. Or at least tried. Drawing her knees up, she wrapping her arms around them at the memory of his last words.

“Dan banned Robin from doing that, and things were a little more normal. I beat him, but…Dan didn’t seem to mind. I remember…he wanted me not to be crippled by my doubt, and to find a
reason to fight. He told me…it was my responsibly, when I survived, to have that answer. I think…in
the end, he was happy. He’d been fighting to bring back his wife, but…I think he was glad that
he’d been part of my story too…I just wish…I had answer other than to survive.”

Particularly since she wasn’t going to have those answers, and she wasn’t going to see the end.

Gilgamesh, for his part, was drinking his wine, listening to her with a strange expression on his face.

“Hm…and now he sacrificed himself to save you. Perhaps out of loyalty to that old soldier. I
suppose that is what he meant by ‘the little chick is starting to fly’. When looked at with a level head,
your pull on others is truly astounding,” Gilgamesh admitted. “Though in regards to those women,
you should not fret over either. They are nothing more than obstacles in our path. You should kick
those sorts of enemies about, regardless of what they claim to hold in their hearts.”

“That somehow sounds wrong,” Hakuno muttered.

Gilgamesh smirked at her.

“It is their own doing,” He said. “That dragon’s ‘cry’ is all very well. That one is a woman who
never matured, dreaming of something impossible and holding herself in the form she lived in when
such things were not yet completely out of reach. It is insanity, but one best faced up front. The
other…”

Gilgamesh took another drink of wine, scowling into it. He looked up at her again, with something
almost like concern glinting in his eyes.

“That is something untouchable. Even a shield against it would be corroded as it persists with no
comprehension of refusal. Do you understand me? You desired to show mercy to the first, but this
creature is a monster with which no human could form an understanding. Perhaps you can see it as
the more honest version of the first.”

“I noticed,” Hakuno sighed. “But…how can we even face someone who is invincible?”

“That remains to be seen if that is permanent,” Gilgamesh said. “For now, focus on the first. Also…”

Gilgamesh set down the wine and glanced at her.

For a moment, Hakuno was reminded of what he’d been like when they’d first contracted, even
though the feeling of danger wasn’t there, there was a look on his face that seemed like he was
debating with himself if he desired retribution or not.

“I do not tolerate disrespect to myself,” he said.

Hakuno nodded slowly. What exactly was he interrupting as disrespectful?

“Nor do I tolerate mongrels acting too familiarly with me.”

Hakuno nodded again.

For a moment, they just stared at one another, and then it clicked.

Gil

Oh.

She’d called him ‘Gil’. Even because her voice had been cut off, he’d of course decided that it was
disrespectful.

So much for “I will be your sword.”

“I will permit you, and you alone, to refer to me with that name, and no one else. That includes the AI and the women in the Student Council. Should they do so, I will not forgive the offense without retribution.”

Wait.

He’d just…given her permission to give him a nickname?

Hakuno blinked.

“Ah…alright?” Hakuno said, but it sounded more like a question.

Gilgamesh, however, seemed pleased, since he leaned back and took another drink of his wine.

“Good. Now, sleep. You have already captured two SGs today,” he said.

They had, and she was exhausted, but, as she lay back, allowing her own tiredness to overtake her, she turned to Gilgamesh again.

“By the way,” Hakuno said. “Thank you,”

Gilgamesh stiffened for just a second, turning quickly to look at her.

“For…listening to my rant and…joking about Meltlith,” she said.

Gilgamesh scowled at her.

“Do not consider such foolish things,” he said. “I cannot stand by while that creature insults me. Nothing more. Do not misunderstand me. I did not stand against her for your sake. Had I, who have claimed myself BB’s enemy retreated before absolutely necessary, it would have been a disgrace. Doubly so had I permitted her to act as she pleased on one who I am acknowledged as my Master.”

He continued to glare at her, clearly willing her to agree with him, and to say that it had all been for his own sake and for no one else’s. Because Gilgamesh cared about no one and nothing other than himself, and that was the image he had decided to give to everyone. Which was why he’d protected her, given her that potion and never let Melt get her way with her feelings.

Hakuno sighed, leaning back.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said softly. “It still ended up meaning that Melt didn’t get to pretend that I liked her back without your mocking her, and even if it wasn’t for me, thank you. And thank you for the potion too. Robin’s poison took me nearly two days to feel better from last time…”

Gilgamesh made an annoyed sound.

“Mongrel, your exhaustion is making you speak nonsense again. Go to sleep.”

This time she listened, wrapping herself up in the covers of her now bed and closing her eyes, but…

Well…

Maybe to test it.
“Goodnight, Gil,” Hakuno said, not opening her eyes.

For a moment, there was complete silence and then.

“Goodnight, Mongrel.”

It was only the next day that Hakuno realized that that was the first time they’d wished one another goodnight.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, Melt's introduced, and there’s a lot more conflict between her and Gilgamesh.

Also, Gil has to bring literally every single barrier crossed to attention. And then let it pass.

If your curious, the cup Gil pulled out of the Gates is the Cup of Herakles, which was said to ward against poison.

Next Chapter:

Hell Dinner.
The First Time Gilgamesh Comforted Hakuno

Chapter Summary

Hakuno faces her greatest challenge. Gilgamesh faces a challenge of another kind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno joked with Gilgamesh was the event known ever after as the Hell Dinner.

A good night’s (or whatever this could be called) rest had helped a lot, and so did the bed. While the hard stint on the floor in her sad little corner hadn’t been worth it, she could really appreciate a soft bed and a warm blanket now more than ever.

Gilgamesh was there when she woke up, looking through what looked like a book. He glanced up as she started to move, placing it on the side of the bed.

“Someone has been loitering by the door,” he said by means of a good morning.

Well, she’d gotten a goodnight, she didn’t suppose she’d get much more. While Gilgamesh, on proclaiming himself a participant, was certainly more invested in what was going on, he was…still Gilgamesh, and allowing her to call him ‘Gil’ seemed to be about as much as he was going to take for now.

“It’s probably Rin or Rani,” Hakuno muttered. “Maybe they found something.”

Getting up and heading outside, Hakuno almost stepped on the object on the floor as Gilgamesh stepped behind her.

It was a letter. Even without looking at it, she could tell be the file size that it was…probably normal. The paper looked worn heavy, and a large wax seal was placed on the front. It was a shield with three claws…or maybe teeth painted on it. A dragon perched on top, snarling at her.

Slowly, carefully, Hakuno picked it up, looking at the very neat handwriting on the front that said Squirrel.

“…Oh, please no…” Hakuno muttered.

“Read it, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said, a strange eagerness on his face.

He really, really didn’t like anything sealed from him, did he?

“To a beloved sacrificial squirrel,” she started, cringing a little. “I do not know why you saved me in my hour of need yesterday. However as minimal thanks for this, I thought I would like to hold a dinner party, and make sure to invite you. Please do not bring your Servant and come alone to the fourteenth floor of the Labyrinth. From the poisoning idol, Elizabeth.”

Gilgamesh started laughing. Hard. It was his usual laugh, cold, hard, and, while amused, with a note of a threat in it.
“How sweet,” he said as his laughter died but his smile remained, wide and toothy. “And handwritten as well. Is it not just delightfully old fashioned? Why, it is so sweet that poison seems to ooze from every written word and the paper itself. Wash your hands of it. Some dragons produce toxins.”

She was pretty sure he wasn’t being metaphorical about that.

“I’m going to have to do this, aren’t I?” Hakuno sighed, looking at the letter.

“It is a pitiful attempt,” Gilgamesh said. “In life, that woman is not one who ever worried for subterfuge, so now she does not even think of it. However, you will have to rise to whatever trap she has set.”

Some trap. It sounded like Elizabeth wasn’t sure if she wanted to eat her or take her out to eat.

“I...am not going to go down there alone,” Hakuno said.

“Of course not. You will go to rise to her challenge, not to accept her demands. You should come, but not to partake in anything she offers or accept even one of her demands. Should you do so, she will see it as a form of surrender.”

And the last thing she wanted to do was surrender anything to Elizabeth.

“Let’s get some items then,” Hakuno sighed.

Gilgamesh grunted in clear displeasure at the idea of being close to Kotomine, but did come with her as they walked.

They headed down the stairs to where he was standing there with…bare shelves.

He watched Hakuno approach with a neutral expression as Gilgamesh hung back, probably crossing his arms and glaring.

“I apologize, but currently, we are out of stock,” he said, his eyes as blank as usual, but at least he didn’t seem amused by it.

“Is the…shipment late?” Hakuno asked.

She didn’t believe a word of his boasts about how he got his wares, but his being out was…strange.

“No,” Kotomine said. “Shinji Matou came by this morning and bought all of our stock. He claimed to have cooking to do, and as no protocol was in place for his actions against the Masters in this building, as a shopkeeper, I was obliged to sell to him.”

She wasn’t sure if that was a rebuke, a statement of fact of an opportunity for Kirei to watch her kick herself and enjoy it.

Wait…Shinji bought…everything?

“Who eats mystic codes?” Hakuno muttered.

The priest just stared at her, and for some reason, she started to feel a chill creeping up her spine.

“...I think I need to warn Rin and Rani about this…and make sure they set protocols,” Hakuno said.
Rin, Rani and Sakura were all there as Hakuno and Gilgamesh stepped in.

The Student Council room was...still weirdly empty to her as she took her old place at the end of the table, where she used to face down Leo and Gawain and Julius for missions. Now they were looking to her. It felt...wrong.

“Morning, everyone,” Hakuno said.

“Good morning, Miss Hakuno,” Sakura said, smiling. “I brought some tea over here, since I thought you’d come by here first.”

She looked a little drawn as she stood there. Could AI’s get overworked?

“Thank you so much,” Hakuno said, giving her a grateful look. “I’ve just gotten done talking to Kotomine. He said that Shinji just bought everything and claimed to be cooking something, and well…”

She took the invitation out of her inventory and placed it on the table.

Rin sighed.

“Well, that explains things. We’ve got...news...” she muttered.

Hakuno said down in her usual spot, ignoring where Leo used to be... It just...didn’t feel right.

“We placed the cameras on the next floors as Gilgamesh suggested,” Rani said, nodding to the Servant. “…It appears that we have some answers now, and...I will pray for the success of Hakuno…”

That sounded...bad.

“Rani, please explain faster,” Rin said. “Or I will.”

Rani shot Rin a dirty look and pointed to the screen that looked like a blackboard.

“Please observe.”

The blackboard fizzled to life, showing an shot of Elizabeth and Shinji standing...next to a table.

“So, just listen to my orders!” Shinji said. “You can’t take care of this floor like this!”

“No! Your strategies’ too ratty. Besides, you handled the last one! I’m self-producing this time! The ratings will be huge! They’ll sour like a dragon!

Shinji just shook his head.

“And this is your big strategy? To feed Hakuno dinner? Maybe if you’re nice to her she’ll go and stay topside and forget about the Near Side? How dumb are you?”

“No! When you think idols, you think challenge shows! And cooking! I’ll charm that squirrel with my homemade cooking, and that’ll make her submit to me!”
“That’s stupid! And what does that have to do with challenge shows!?”

Elizabeth wasn’t listening.

“The thought of that squirrel choking back her tears as she is overwhelmed with exquisite flavor…so impressed that she kneels at my feet, begging for more…”

Hakuno shivered.

“Hakuno’s face never changes expression!” Shinji yelled back, stamping one foot. “This is stupid!”

“I’ll be an idol on stage and an idol in the kitchen!”

“I bet you never were in a kitchen before this!”

“Fine. I’ll prove how amazing it was! You just use that spoon and test it! You’ll be sorry!”

“No way am I using that! You used it first!”

“Why does that matter?”

“Geez, you’re naïve for a noble! Drinking someone else’s glass or eating from their stuff…that’s like an indirect kiss!”

Drinking from someone else’s glass…

Hakuno tried stared straight ahead, keeping her face blank, but her eyes trailed towards Gilgamesh. He was staring at the screen as well, body completely stiff, pupils barely even visible they were so constricted. No. No that hadn’t been anything…

He clearly hadn’t meant anything.

Well, at least he wasn’t claiming that she was trying to flirt with him…

Maybe if she just…didn’t bring it up? Ever?

“Oh, fine,” Elizabeth rolled her eyes and her voice made Hakuno refocus. “You baby. You can use the other spoon. I’ll just get a new one.”

Shinji stepped to the table, where the camera focused on him and the violently red…something…that was sitting there. Hakuno watched as he carefully, cautiously took a very red chuck of what might have been meat and put it in his mouth.

The screen cut out to the genetic blue with the school logo and ‘please wait a moment’ written on it. And a gagging sound was heard as well as a screen from Elizabeth.

Rani turned to them, smiling a little nervously.

“It got a little unpleasant there. So, let’s just listen to the audio on its own.”

She really, really hoped Shinji was ok…

Shinji’s coughing, choking sound didn’t help. Finally, he seemed to get his voice.

“This…this is chicken sauté, right? So…why are their thorns in the meat! WHY DID IT EXPLODE? And why did it scream when I bit it?”
“Wait…peasants don’t eat thorns? But..but they’re so lovely when the rub together…”

“No one eats thorns! They’re gross, they’ll k…. THEY DON’T HAVE ANY NUTRITIONAL VALUE! APPOLOGIZE TO EVERYONE IN BUDDAPEST! You can’t let it explode either! Honestly…you’re going to destroy Kishinami’s stomach if you’re not careful…”

“It doesn’t matter! This plan goes off! But…show me how…not to make the food explode… Now, go get some ingredients!”

“WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

As the screen went blank, Hakuno sat, staring ahead to where the scene had been, ignoring the pitying looks of Rin and Rani and the outright worry from Sakura.

She was going to die.

“…I don’t want to die of food poisoning…” Hakuno finally managed out.

“I mean…” Rin said. “It would be best if you didn’t, but…I’m a little worried that you might not be able to get around it. Particularly since it sounds like they’ve cleaned out the only shop we have…”

“As both of you neglected to secure the building against an enemy Master,” Gilgamesh cut in, looking at the two women. He either wasn’t going to talk about food poisoning, or had been waiting for this time to rebuke the two of them. “The AI is unable to secure against a Master. This should have been something you considered as that child is in no way connected to the Labyrinth. While the dragon would have no doubt found the means to secure ingredients regardless, your neglect has permitted her to move faster.”

Rin sighed, and nodded. She looked a little annoyed at his words, but…well…he wasn’t wrong.

“You’re right. We assumed Shinji was tied to the Labyrinth as well. But right now, all we can do is give support.”

“I’ve had some time to make something in advance,” Sakura said before Gilgamesh could respond, holding out a small vial with a Sakura blossom on the fount. “I’ve never had to worry about this kind of affect before, so it might not be much, but I really help that it helps you.”

Hakuno took the vial and smiled a little at the stomach medicine.

“Thanks Sakura. This really, really helps. At least this time, there no Alter Egos. How are you feeling by the way? You’ve been looking a little tired.”

“I’m fine, Miss Kishinami… My processing’s a little overheated but…”

“Then, Rani, you will take over for the AI as she rests. You already know her functions as a primary defense, I am correct?” Gilgamesh cut in. “She requires some rest, as a human would. You and Rin, if necessary, will work in shifts to provide support as well as protection. It is unlikely that there will be an attack at this time, as both BB and the Ego will be forced on the Labyrinth, so that should take a lower priority. Take advantage of that. AI, you will return to your infirmary and rest for a time. Once you feel prepared, you may resume your duties.”

For a second, Rin and Rani glanced at one another, like they wanted to object, but honestly, Hakuno agreed. Sakura needed to rest, and if this was a good time, they should use it. Besides, so far at least with Gilgamesh’s ideas, they’d been able to get a preview of her coming torture.
“I think Gil’s right. My being in the Labyrinth means that everyone will focus on me, not the building, including attack programs. At least for a while. BB’s not going to just attack out of nowhere, and Meltlilith probably won’t either, so a low-level defense should be enough, right?”

“Yes. BB has as a low likelihood of aggression and with you out it is more likely that Meltlilith will be roaming the Labyrinth…” Rani said. “As long as we have enough to push the random enemy program that might appear out, we should be fine.”

“And, Sakura, you can call me by my first name, we are friends, right?” Hakuno added in.

Sakura looked down, blushing a little.

“Alright…Miss Hakuno…” Sakura said, smiling.

“Then…” Hakuno glanced at the screen as she stood up. “I guess it’s time…”

As they left Hakuno could have sworn she heard Rin hiss “Gil?” to Rani.

Hakuno was planning on headed straight to the Labyrinth, but she stopped when she saw Anderson, standing alone by the stairs. He was writing in the little book he usually kept with him. It was only when they were close that he closed up, looking between the two as they approached.

“Caster, where is that ostentatious woman? Have you finally cancelled your contract?” Gilgamesh asked.

“It would be a load off my mind, but no. She’s…otherwise occupied…” a strange look came onto her face. “Apparently, she is at the library where she said she would be if any of the NPCs required counseling after the events of BB’s attack or their time here.”

“Really?” Hakuno asked.

She hadn’t seen anyone look like they were heading that way. Rather, from what she could see, most NPCs were either in the hall around the classrooms or on the ground floor around Taiga.

“Well, I guess this is a good time. I did want to talk about the Little Match Girl,” Hakuno said, turning back to him.

Anderson shook his head, a slight smile on his usually stern face.

“I’ve really put people out if they’re still reading that moldy thing. But I’ve got nothing to say about it. The conclusion is just as it was written, and the contents are the same. Still, you’ve gone through most of my better stories. While I might hate people, I value my readers, so I guess I’ll give you information on my Nobel Phantasm instead. It’s utterly useless, but you might find it interesting.”

He handed the matrix over without a single moment of hesitation.

It was…complete…

“A Story for You?” Hakuno muttered as she looked at it.

The power to turn a person into their ideal self, but that seemed to rely on if Anderson himself was inspired by the person…

“That doesn’t sound useless to me. What about you, Gil?” Hakuno asked, holding it out for him to see.
She was going to use that nickname, and she was going to get used to it!

Anderson stiffened for a moment as Gilgamesh looked over her shoulder, but he shook himself out of it, and continued talking.

“It’s completely useless. Utterly unfit for battle. I have no ability to fight on my own whatsoever. All I do is sit alone in a room writing a story. Besides, this world is already a hell of degeneracy and mediocrity. There aren’t many people worth writing about, so it’s even more useless. Which is why since becoming a Servant I’ve had to work on a small story to earn some pocket change. Really those who can’t improvise are like — Ouch!”

The blow came from nowhere, and Hakuno whipped around to see Kiara. She’d left the library and apparently managed to throw something that far away as she came looking for her Servant.

She glanced at Hakuno and Gilgamesh, but as Gilgamesh’s crimson eyes met hers, she looked down.

“Oh, you’re back, hag?” Anderson asked rubbing his forehead. “I don’t see what you’re complaining about. You’re a pacifist after all, or are you just that angry that there was no one for you to force your habits on?”

“Don’t say anything more, Andersen. Please keep your vulgar activities to yourself. It will make people doubt in my dignity as your Master. And, Hakuno, it is…nice to see you, but could you please stop here as well? I may be a pacifist, but a Noble Phantasm is a Master’s trump card…may I beg you not to tell others about this, please?”

“Er…alright?” Hakuno said, taking a step back. “It was nice talking to you, Anderson.”

Anderson nodded, but his eyes flickered to her and Gilgamesh.

As Hakuno moved down the stairs, she glanced at the matrix again. Why did he do that? No one just…gave their information on their Noble Phantasm…

“That Caster…his Noble Phantasm would be quite deadly with the right recipient,” Gilgamesh said as they passed Kotomine, and headed towards the entrance to the Labyrinth.

“Like…making someone a better mage or more able to be level headed in battle...?” Hakuno asked.

Gilgamesh gave her an amused look.

“Humans have far more impossible ideals than what meager things you wish for of yourself, Mongrel. Someone with a powerful enough wish could use that power to great effect, though most, as the Caster says, would be unable to understand it.”

“…I guess,” Hakuno paused looking back. “I don’t see why he gave it to me.”

“He expects something from you,” Gilgamesh said, shrugging. “We will learn in time.”

It was amazing how completely unconcerned he could be about things like this, as if he completely and fully expected answers to fall into his lap if he waited long enough.

Shaking her head, Hakuno descended into the Labyrinth.

It was the same as before. All ivy, moonlight, roses and pillars. Now that she knew what it was, the romance element was obvious. What was weird was the clear lack of enemies. And the table that was waiting there. But…they were alone?
There was a flash of light and Elizabeth and Shinji appeared. Shinji had the good graces to be looking down and ashamed of himself while Elizabeth stood with a proud expression on her face.

“Hello, my cute little squirrel!” she chirped. “I’m so glad you’ve accepted my invitation, so as thanks for you completely and totally unnecessary actions, there’s going to be no torture for you! Just a nice full, *three course meal!*

Shinji cringed.

“I made sure there isn’t anything weird in it!” he shouted, but looked away.

Elizabeth glanced at Gilgamesh with a frown.

“This wasn’t really meant for more than one person…didn’t you read the invitation.”

“I come as I please, Dragon,” Gilgamesh said. “Or would you, a minor lord, attempt to shut a king out?”

Elizabeth sighed and shrugged.

“Alright, but there’s no food for you. Anyways, follow me to the breakfast table.”

This was for the SG, Hakuno reminded herself.

There was a crackle of static.

“So, things are going well on our end. Looks like Sakura, even resting, can keep up a lot of security. Anyways, while this floor looks…bad…we’re working on support.”

“We have been preparing some countermeasures against this…but…I pray for your success,” Rani said.

This wasn’t really helping.

Hakuno set off, Gilgamesh beside her, down a narrow path that led to a platform with the table on it, and a very familiar door.

“Welcome to breakfast!” Elizabeth called. “This is just a light course, to start. After all, I don’t want you to die from ecstasy! Please take a seat.”

Up close, the tablecloth was so white that it actually managed to hurt her eyes, particularly with that violently red dish that sat on it like a drop of blood. There was something…unnatural about that color…

She really, really didn’t want to eat it.

“It’s an ostrich Bolognese!” Elizabeth called. “Completely fresh too! I killed it myself!”

“So…this is what nobility eats…” Hakuno said, walking close to it and looking at it.

“No, it’s not!” Shinji yelled.

“Mongrel do not base any of your assumptions on a dragon’s fare,” Gilgamesh said, crossing his arms and clearly annoyed at the idea of being compared to anything that Elizabeth would eat. “She has overdone the spices, no one of any palette would suffer this. Yet…it appears to be a rare dish at least. So…will you allow yourself to be obediently eaten, or will you spit this back into her face?
Choose which you prefer.”

It was clear from the smile on his face what he would have chosen, and…he was right. Now that she was here, she didn’t have to eat it. Particularly when it was so obviously poison.

“Elizabeth, give up, this is already exposed,” she sighed.

Elizabeth took a step back, eyes wide, as Shinji sort of sighed in the background.

“W-but I… I did everything right! How did you know!”

“This is so obviously poison that it gave itself away,” Hakuno said.

“W-well…you can’t refuse! Not when I have these!” Elizabeth pointed to the large metal doors behind her.

Very very familiar metal doors.

“Oh no,” Hakuno muttered. “You’re…not going to try to make be strip again?”

A blush started to show on Shinji’s face.

“Of course not!” he called. “I’ve modified it. You…that was weird, and you just have to eat Elizabeth’s food and the door will open. It’s just triggered by the plate being clean.”

He laughed nervously, but Hakuno glared at him.

“So, guess what? Get to it! I’ve put so many amazing things in that dish, and you don’t get any other choices! I didn’t even add poison to this one! Eat up, honey!”

While this was better than stripping, it wasn’t by much.

Gilgamesh stepped in front of Hakuno.

“Wait. Your condition is for the plate to be clean, then it does not matter if I eat it instead,” Gilgamesh said, a smile that wouldn’t have looked out of place on a shark was on his face. “I have a poison testing Noble Phantasm that will work perfectly for this occasion.”

Hakuno had never been more grateful for Gilgamesh as her Servant than then. When Gilgamesh said that she could use his treasury, he’d really meant it…

Elizabeth blinked and bit her lip.

“Er..but…”

Shinji started to laugh. It was a clear and bad imitation of Gilgamesh, that faltered only slightly with the real one looking at him.

“Ha! Wrong! I took that into account too! The only person who can delete that data is Hakuno Kishinami! No one else can!”

His smile faltered at the look that Gilgamesh gave him. While Hakuno couldn’t see it, she was pretty sure she knew it.

“You impudent, seaweed headed child…” Gilgamesh growled. “It seems you can only act sensible in the worst of matters…”
“Yes!” Elizabeth cheered. “You’re a rotten attendant, but this was good! Now, hurry up and eat little squirrel! An experience like heaven awaits you.”

For a moment, Hakuno didn’t move. She just stared at Shinji.

“I’ll get you for this, Shinji,” she said, keeping her eyes on him as she sat down. “If it’s the last thing I do.”

And it might well be.

She noticed his eyes flicker away and a red starting to from at the back of his neck, but she ignored it.

She looked down at the dish. It…didn’t smell terrible. It was just…very very red. She wanted to pretend that maybe Shinji just had rotten taste, but nothing should have been that color. Gilgamesh stood to her right, looking down at the food with a frown.

Slowly, Hakuno took a spoonful, and starting at it again, rammed it into her mouth and chocked it down.

Her vision went blue.

“Ether goes off as soon as it enters the mouth! Not even Vimana’s propellant has such capabilities… Is this…mankind’s newest lethal bombing by cooking!?” Even Gilgamesh’s shout seemed far away…

Hakuno coughed, trying to keep herself awake, as she felt her HP drop as if she’d just taken a direct hit. This wasn’t poison…this… This was like going to heaven, alright. Or rather, it was like dying. It was chaos as a flavor. Her stomach was doing flip flops as her whole body tried to reject what she was giving it. She gagged and had grip the arms of the chair to keep from heaving.

She couldn’t give in.

She took another bite, feeling her entire body shudder.

If she gave up now, everything would fail, and they’d never get out.

This…this couldn’t be worse than everything else…right?

She picked up the bowl, gritted her teeth and chugged it down in one shot, even as tears came to her eyes and bile rose at the same time, and, slamming the dish down. Getting to her feet, she took a staggering step forwards…

And sunk to her knees, as the entire dish wanted to come back out.

“So…what do you think..?” Elizabeth’s voice cut through her thoughts and Hakuno looked up to see her looking at Hakuno with apprehension on her voice. “Those were tears of joy, right? Right?”

Anderson, don’t fail her now.

“…That was…terrible,” Hakuno said. “I’ll be completely honest…that… I’m not even judging the flavor…I don’t think it’s possible to judge that… That was not food. That was an act of war.”

How could she even describe it?

“It would be like if I put candy in my mouth, only it was really turpentine…times one hundred…and
that’s still not enough…”

She looked around.

Shinji was looking away while Elizabeth was staring with her mouth open. Gilgamesh however, was staring at her with something strange on his face.

“…To finish such a dish…all while keeping that same dead expression on your face is…truly praiseworthy…” He closed his eyes. “Hakuno, I will tell you this once, and only once. You have proven to me that you are one who possesses the human strength worthy of to be called my Master. Now, open the door, Dragon! This is only the beginning of the banquet, is it not?”

Only the beginning.

Hakuno had three more of those to get through. Even the fact that Gilgamesh was complimenting her didn’t change that.

Elizabeth was looking away.

“Drat…I guess soup really would have worked better. I guess I didn’t get enough research in…” she muttered as the door opened, and when she looked up, she looked almost close to tears. “W-well, this is just the start. The next dish…that’ll be up to your expectations, I know it!”

And she dashed off and vanished.

“Hey, wait!” Shinji yelled, but paused turning back. He wasn’t quite looking at Hakuno.

“What do you want, Shinji?” Hakuno grumbled, trying to get herself to her feet.

“Nothing! Just…that was…really amazing…and…er…”

He was gone, running after Elizabeth.

“…Are you alright?” Rin’s voice cut in. “You…look like you’ve lost a lot of HP, but…can you keep going?”

“I’m fine,” Hakuno said, finally managing. “My stomach didn’t explode.”

Now that it was down, she felt better.

At least it looked like that charm wasn’t going to work.

Gilgamesh nodded.

“Good. Do not quail from this now. You are a mongrel who can accomplish trails of endurance with effort. If you have endured this once, you will be able to twice more.”

That was downright encouraging coming from him.

She didn’t run this time, at least not at first, but it didn’t take too long to find the next level. Where Shinji and Elizabeth stood with an identical table, this one showing a bright red stew.

“Behold, the lunch course!” Elizabeth said brightly.

Without a word, she sat down, staring at the thing.
“Wait!” Rin’s voice cut in. “Hakuno, I’ve got something! It’s perfect, and I’m sending it over now!”

“Meal Eating Unarmed Shinji-kun downloaded. It’s freeware, of course,” Rani said.

A small dummy that with in a school uniform with a familiar looking seaweed head appeared beside her.

“Hey, wait!” Shinji yelled. “You guys modded it!”

“Nope, it does the same job. We just made it look more like a garbage can!” Rin said.

“This is for food processing and nothing more, so feel free to pour that destruction meal into it. As it’s not a Nobel Phantasm and just a program under your name and with specs synced to yours, that should get around that problem.”

“You guys are amazing, you know that?” Hakuno sighed.

Hakuno moved to pour the entire thing into the food processor, while potentially staring at Shinji, but her eyes met Elizabeth’s. The girl was clutching the hem of her skirt, looking like she was about to cry.

“If you give my hard-made cooking to that shoddy looking doll…I’ll never forgive you,” she said, but the threat was more pitiful than anything else. “You’re livestock! You should just…eat what’s in front of you, and not leave a single drop.”

She winced, clutching her head.

“NO! I’ll never open this door! Never! Not if you do this!”

Hakuno looked at the stew. It looked vile. And it probably was vile, but…she had made it by hand, hadn’t she? No matter what else she was, she clearly had tried, and…she couldn’t imagine how she’d feel if something she’d worked hard to make was thrown out in the trash right in front of her…

Also, how could she get an SG if she just left everything to ‘shinji-kun’?

With a sigh, she grabbed the spoon.

“You might die with that dish, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh cautioned her.

“Little squirrel?” Elizabeth’s voice was very small.

Just a bite. She just had to take a bite. One bite wouldn’t kill her.

Probably.

It was for everyone. For Rin. For Rani. For everyone in the School. She had to get this SG.

She crammed the spoon into her mouth and swallowed.

It was actually worse than the breakfast. So bad that if Elizabeth was really an alien from Venus, she couldn’t have made something worse. Also…she suddenly really hoped that the meat was cooked. The texture was…really weird.

“So…how was it?” Elizabeth asked, her voice quivering.

For the SG!
“It was…not as bad as I thought it would be?” she choked out.

“Ah!” Elizabeth beamed, “Right! Ha! I was worried for a moment, but of course you’d love it! You’ll never eat at a noble’s table again, so you’d better enjoy it! I’m going to prepare the next table!”

She vanished, running off happily into the Labyrinth, leaving her, Shinji and Gilgamesh together.

“….Good luck, Shinji-kun,” Shinji muttered, vanishing a second later.

Hakuno, with a single motion, grabbed the doll and poured the rest of the stew down its mouth. She dropped it as smoke started to come out from the body, and the program started to break down.

“It’s an attack,” Hakuno muttered. “That’s got to be the answer. She’s got an attack skill in cooking.”

“If such a thing exists, she would possess it,” Gilgamesh agreed.

“I think there’s got to be a connection between this and the SG,” she said. “Every other floor has the main thing the Sentinel is doing be connected. So, this…need for me to like her cooking should be as well.”

“If that is true, then you know what you must do.”

Hakuno nodded, but her stomach sank as they set off down the finally revealed pathway to the final door. It didn’t take them long until she found the thing that was waiting for her. Elizabath and Shinji stood a large table in front of them. It was fully to bursting with dishes. At least twenty dishes. All violently red with a few, like the poor turtle that was gutted on its back, had some black in them.

Even if it had been a normal meal, this would have been impossible to eat. As it was…

“Welcome to the Dracul’s dinner!” Elizabeth called out. “As you’re livestock, don’t worry about etiquette. Just dig in and start eating whatever you like better!”

Slowly, taking a breath, Hakuno stepped forwards, with Gilgamesh beside her.

“Y…you’re not seriously going to … You’re going to step up to that bright red hell?! Geez, Kishinami, just surrender and go home!”

Hakuno took out Sakura’s stomach medicine and took the whole thing.

She was going to need it.

“I’m not going to surrender,” Hakuno said.

Maybe if they focused on what she was saying, they wouldn’t notice that her hands were trembling.

“…Hakuno…” Gilgamesh said, her voice softer than usual, and a strangely, hesitant expression on his face. “There is no spice in my treasury that can make this…meal…taste anything other than what it does. However, if you would like a magic herb to prepare you, I have something available. However, should you use it, you will lose your sense of taste forever. Do you ask of it?”

He was concerned.

That was concern…

And he wanted to help…
And…somehow…it made her stop shaking to know that he was worried for her.

“I…No,” she said. “I refuse to never taste candy again because of this. I’m going to face this…with my own mouth, I guess. But…” she smiled a little. “if I live though the war, will you come back to my village and marry me?”

It was a joke. A bad joke, and one that the moment it was out of her mouth she regretted, given that ‘indirect kiss’, but she didn’t really want him to worry for her. And even if he was busy rejecting her, it would be better than that.

…Maybe it was the weak smile, or the ‘village’ thing, but Gilgamesh started to smile back, it wasn’t his usual toothy grin that promised nothing but pain, but something warmer…

“Well, it seems if you are able to joke, you are well prepared,” Gilgamesh said. “No, show me how you will rise above this fate! If you succeed, you will dine on sweets for a week!”

Somehow…she felt better.

Hakuno took the fork and took a chunk of what might have been meatloaf and might not have been, closed her eyes, and bit in.

The world went red.

“Mongrel, your soul just went off color… are you certain…”

“I’m fine,” Hakuno choked out. “It’s fine. The first bite…”

Oh, the first bite.

The second was no better. Or the third. If she ate fast, it would be done faster. With that in mind, she started shoveling the food into her mouth, ignoring the sweat that was starting to break out along her body, and trying to focus on something, anything but what was she shoving into her mouth.

“Ah…Miss Hakuno’s face…it’s worse than torture!”

Sakura was up apparently. Hakuno hope that she was feeling better after everything…

“Would you put some green in there! Why is everything red! Even I know that!”

Hakuno wondered what Rin’s cooking was like. It might not be good, but…

“So, this is the determination of the one who is supposed to stand above others…the position of President is truly arduous,” Rani said.

Not really. This was…this was just life wasn’t it? She had to get that SG. If they didn’t they’d be stuck. She’d have done this regardless of being president…

Elizabeth was rattling off about the dishes. About the turtle that was being constructed from the Moon Cell. About the octopus that kept fighting her even as she stabbed it (poor thing), and about how hard things were to roast.

“You like octopus, right? I did what I could to make it…I…thought that would make you happy…”

Her hand was starting to hurt!

If she could just keep going, keep ignoring the flavors that made her body want to turn inside out…
Also, she didn’t like octopus. At all.

She didn’t know if she liked a lot of things, but she had tried octopus.

Leo had mentioned trying new foods once, back when…

Back before BB’s attack. When they had talked about building a dinning hall. How they were all going to take turns on meal duty and all eat together. Leo had been weirdly excited about the idea. It had sounded fun, really. It was too bad it never happened.

Leo had been talking a lot about a curry that Julius made. Hakuno had never had curry before.

She wondered what it would have tasted like…and where Julius had learned to make it…

Hakuno’s vision was starting to go white.

“Would you like to try some?” Leo asked.

She would have liked it, but her stomach was full of nothing but chaos.

“That’s fine,” Julius said. “My curry is unique after all…”

Maybe it was a fever dream brought on by the food, but in the light, Julius and Leo stood, smiling a holding a steaming bowl of curry for her. Nice, brown curry. Unconsciously, she found herself reaching out for it, and them…

“Mongrel!” Gilgamesh’s sharp voice broke into her mind. “Direct your energy to your center! Reel your soul back in!”

The light cleared, and Hakuno blinked, gasping a little…

“I…think I started hallucinating…” Hakuno muttered, looking around.

She was…done…other than a single scoop of red ice cream… it was…

“That was a meal that will be spoken of in epics, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said. “Had you lived in my time, you would have attained fame for this feat.”

One last bite. Hakuno closed her eyes, and even though her mouth was already numb, the terrible flavor managed to cut though.

Mint.

Red Mint.

Like from the Underworld.

She set down her spoon, and started at Elizabeth.

“Thanks for the meal,” she managed out.

“You…you ate it all! I have no complaints! So…um…how did it taste?”

The SG pulsed, but…she couldn’t even pretend she liked it.

“…it was the worst thing I’ve ever had,” Hakuno said. “But…at the same time…you worked hard to make it. So it deserved to be tried at least. So…thank you…even if tasted…bad.”
The SG activated, causing Elizabeth’s body to be outlined in light, as Hakuno rushed forwards to take it

“This wasn’t my fault!” Shinji yelled, vanishing as Elizabeth started to as well.

“There is no finishing blow required. Your victory here was complete,” Gilgamesh said.

“That’s good…” Hakuno muttered. “I…don’t think I could… Let’s just get out and-“

“Hey, squirrel,” Elizabeth’s fading body called. “What magic did you use? Those impressions…they made be happy. Before…all the nobles and livestock adored me. I strangled anyone who didn’t. But that burned up, and it was boring after that… I was so bored my head hurt…but…this…”

She vanished.

“Ignore her, Mongrel. And let us return. You have earned your rest,” Hakuon took a step, but dizziness took her, and it was only because her Servant took her arm that she didn’t collapse.

She had seen hell, and Hakuno knew, if she was a bad person in life, she would come back here, to where Elizabeth would be standing with an infinite course meal waiting for her…

“Fool,” Gilgamesh muttered shaking his head. “To push yourself to such a point…Then, as one of your rewards for this victory, I will aid you….”

He helped steady her the way back.

The first time Gilgamesh comforted Hakuno was after her valiant victory in the dinner. After assurances from the Student Council and that the somewhat improved Sakura would be working to create another stomach tonic, Hakuno as able to at least hold herself as she entered their room.

Gilgamesh kept a close eye on her, ignoring both the priest and the nun as they passed his watchful gaze and her hungry one. Those two were unimportant at the moment.

On entering the room, Hakuno slowly lay down on the bed on her back, where she lay staring at the ceiling.

“We did that…pretty easily…” she muttered.

Sleep was clearly warring with her.

“Wait. If you sleep like that, you will vomit. Go to the washroom and vomit first. Then you may lie down. Do not dirty my sleeping chamber.”

“…no…”

“What was that, Mongrel?” Gilgamesh leaned forward.

Clearly she had gotten too sure of herself if she would refuse to obey him outright. Yet while the anger that appeared was present…it was not as strong as it should have been. Maybe it was because of the sight in front of him. While Gilgamesh was not moved to pity, there was something…he wished to end about that look on her face.
“I don’t want to vomit,” she muttered. “If I vomit…I’ll taste it again…”

Ah…so that was what spurred her outright defiance… however, she would vomit. Be it his will or her own body’s.

He did not wish to watch this all night. While her feat had truly been impressive, she was clearly unwell, and he did not wish to watch her convalesce. So, summoning the Gates, he withdrew a single crystal cup with a clear liquid in it.

*Indirect kiss…*

Gilgamesh shoved the child’s words aside. He would be disciplined already for his aiding in this.

“Drink. It will hold your food in then.”

“Alright…”

Gilgamesh sat down on the bed, holding her head in one hand and holding the cup to her lips as she drank and then placed it in the Gates.

“It’s sweet,” she mumbled.

“Did I not tell you that you would dine on sweets?” he asked him. “This will mask any flavor and settle you until the AI comes.”

After she was done, she rolled on her side wrapping herself in the blanket and facing him, but…he did not move.

After all, if necessary, he would need to wake her and lift her up to the washroom. It was not for her comfort in having someone near her as she suffered.

“It’s weird…this SG… It sort of made Elizabeth seem almost normal. I mean…I don’t mean that everything else happened, but…”

“Do not be mistaken, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said. “All creatures, when connected to humans, have their merits and faults. That is all you observed. Functionally, spiritually, in quality of life and culture. An evil being will interweave that with good. That is what humans are. Most are not either completely bad or completely good. In this circumstance, however, you are looking at something different. The human woman Elizabeth is not evil. However, half of her is a dragon. Dragons devour humans. That is their nature.”

“So, one half of her nature wants to cook for someone she loves, but the other half wants to eat me…it must be hard…having two natures.”

There were times when it was trying.

“That girl has embraced the worst part of her nature. I have not. It is as simple as that. That woman was always given the chance to change her mind. It is her own choice to listen to the demands of that part of her, particularly when the other would push against it. Now, close your eyes and rest. If your mind refuses to allow that, I will speak of something lighter in nature.”

“Gil…” she still spoke the name as if she was tasting it, with a hesitancy that either belied her reverence of him or, more likely, spoken that she was not sure if he would just change his mind and rescind that. “It that what it’s like for you? Not the eating people part, but…it just sounds rough…”
“You speak nonsense,” Gilgamesh said. “First, a god and a dragon have nothing in common, and second… It is…difficult to describe to one who does not share it. Think of it as a pull. One part of you desires one thing, and the other desires its opposite. The choice is of which side you will listen. Which is the one which you believe is right. On occasion one side will ring true, and then another, yet it is not always clear which is which. That dragon girl does not consider her actions, but just rushes ahead, and thus of course she is ruled but her most base of needs…”

“I think I understand…a little,” Hakumo mumbled. “I think you do a good job.”

Gilgamesh ignored her sleepy mumblings.

“Gil…I saw Julius and Leo…” she continued, still struggling with sleep as she had struggled with that meal. “I know I was just hallucinating, but…they were there…and…I wish we could have had that meal hall…I…”

“Enough, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said.

He reached out, placing his hand on the back of her head. It was something his mother had done, a very, very long time ago, when he was a child, troubled by dreams that he had not yet understood. She had not had the opportunity to mourn. He knew that. Her time had been recovery and battle, but he would not permit this exhausted stream of emotions. Not in her victory.

…Perhaps there would come a time when he would permit it…

No, he reminded himself. She would vanish from his sight, and soon, but…

Even then…

Her hair was soft, and far more fine than he had presumed, and, absently, keeping his touch light enough for her to pull away from (given the amount of people reaching for her, he would forgive it) he ran his hand down it, not digging his fingers into it as he desired, but there. Present. He was pleased when she neither froze nor pulled away, but rather, sighed slightly.

“They would not wish to see you fret so, not when you have achieved such a perfect victory. Rest, and let your thoughts wander in your dreams. …I will speak to you of Uruk. Let the grandeur of the greatest of cities ease your thoughts.”

And so he did. He spoke to her of his city, if its size, of how in the morning, when the sun had rising over it, the buildings had shown like so much gold. Of the river and the farms. Of summer and winter. Of the storms that had come through. Of the palace that he had lived in. Describing it in detail as he remembered it, as slowly, finally, she allowed herself to be drawn into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Welp that was long.

This was a FUN chapter. Even though Gil was hard to do at the end. He was really impressed by that dinner.

Next chapter:

Something is wrong with the next floor, and Gilgamesh receives something.
The First Time Gilgamesh and Hakuno had a Treasure Hunt

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh and Hakuno chat with Sakura and have a small treasure hunt. Gilgamesh wrestles with dreams of the past and a possible future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh was worried about his own emotions was after Hakuno had finally slept. After the AI had come with medicine, Gilgamesh had left his vigil at Hakuno’s side to return to his throne. The experience had not left him weary, but rather annoyed.

What was he doing?

As valuable as this treasure might be, Hakuno Kishinami was still a life that would vanish from in front of him. His actions were starting to seem…disgustingly attached to the woman. While she had certainly proven her worth to him, this time more than before, the reality did not change.

Even if that answer continued to displease him more and more.

He opened the Gates and removed some wine, but somehow, the flavor was not what he wanted.

But he ignored it, along with his thoughts. He did not need to consider his Master. The end was already written, regardless of his feelings.

Yet…

Speaking of Uruk really had set his mind to foolishness.

He glared out the window at the entrance to the Labyrinth where the one who was the cause of this trouble resided. He could tell what she wanted, if not why, but the other one, the Ego, that was a mystery to him. Her goals, other than those pertaining to his Master were those of a machine and while he was his instinct and nature to judge and to collect and preserve, that thing was something untouchable, as was her affection.

He sat for a time, watching as the sakura blossoms fell, considering the nature of what must be done. For now, the school building had been a haven, yet how much longer would that last? The AI was growing exhausted and BB was growing stronger.

Again, they had only so much time.

Gilgamesh closed his eyes, allowing himself to dream.

*The seaweed child was glaring at the Alter Ego, but his anger could do nothing to hide his fear. They stood in the Labyrinth, with the dragon girl nearby, watching nervously.*

“Do you actually believe that? That you’re the only one who can defeat Hakuno?” The Ego asked,
her voice a mocking sweetness.

The child’s eyes darted away, but he rallied himself quickly.

“Shut up! BB acknowledged me! The only reason we failed is because of this stupid dragon doing her own thing! My plan would have been perfect! I’ll beat her alright! I’m not disappearing, and neither is she! If that means that… Then yeah, I’ll go alone with BB’s sweet talk, and I’ll kill some of those guys in the School Building. I’ll survive…”

“Yes, and?” the Ego asked, her smile proud. “You have no future, worm. Hakuno is different. She doesn’t know what’s waiting for her. You’re actually planning on getting back to the Near Side, while knowing your fate full well. Hey…Shinji Matou, can you tell me in your own words just what the most worthless thing on this side of the Moon is?”

The child stiffened fear showing in his eyes before anger.

“Shut up! You’re just a part of BB! You’re not even a real thing! In the end, the second BB’s done with you, you’re going to disappear anyways.”

The glint in the Ego’s eyes was deadly.

“You’re right. I’m BB’s Pawn. Just a backup dancer on that stage. As long as she’s here, I’ll never be anything more. But…well…it doesn’t matter does it? In the end, I’m an existence greater than any human could ever be. I’m a high quality doll. You’re just some pebble. You’re so sad it’s actually managed to be funny to watch you try to survive when you’re already dead. You really are a king though. King of Worms, king of tragedy. A kind of mass-appeal genus that you only notice when everyone points them out.”

“You don’t need to tell me any of that!” the child screamed. “I know it! I know that genius or not…I can’t really do this, but…I’m still a Master! And as long as there’s a chance, I’ll still work for it! Kishinami can stay here, and I can get the Grail!”

“My my you have some pride, don’t you?” the ego smirked. “But a worm is still a worm in the end.”

She moved faster than eyes could track. One moment she was standing five feet from the child and the next she had impaled him with the spike embedded into he knee.

“Wha- Huh…” The child didn’t even have time to scream in pain.

Tears were in his eyes, but every breath was now a short gasp of pain

“Thanks for admitting that you weren’t up for this. Now in respect to that, I can get rid of your inadequacy,” the smile faded into an ugly look. “Now, you can fall somewhere more suitable.”

She withdrew her knee, and the child staggered back, a strange, purple substance starting to drip from his body, even where she had never touched him.

“W..why, m…my body is…” he screamed, as his melted to nothing

But the dream shifted, and then it wasn’t the child fading into darkness. It was Hakuno, and rather than screaming, she was watching him with sorrow as she stood on the point between the Far and Near sides.

“I…I guess this is it,” she said.
Gilgamesh said nothing.

“...Thank you,” she choked the words out, even though her throat was constricting. “I’m...glad that I could get the others out...I...I wish... but that doesn’t matter does it?”

She turned away.

“...I...could you...no. You won’t, and it’s not fair to ask, but...if you can... can you remember me... just a little?”

“I will not forget you, Mongrel. No matter who may summon me,” he heard his own voice.

She smiled at him, even as tears started to fall. Even then, as her hands trembled in fear and desperate tears fell, that fire burnt brightly.

“I’m glad. I think...maybe...I can face it now... Goodbye...Gilgamesh. I...hope you have good dreams.”

He wanted to see curses. To see fury or even the resentment that so often lurked behind her eyes, and while it did linger in a silent accusation that this was wrong, it was covered up in one thing: the sorrow of a woman who had always been denied even the slightest chance to live.

Gilgamesh snapped awake with a snarl. That had not been what he had wanted to see. He knew that end. He had already seen flashes of it. As the future always changed, so did that vision. Once it had been a more satisfying one of hate and anger, but now...

And why was he considering what could not be changed?

The other vision though...the one concerning the child...that needed to be verified. If it was true, than there were several things to consider. The first was the increased activeness of that Ego. The second was her statement of Hakuno’s fate.

She was not dead. Not like the child or the Gatou had been. If that had been so she could not have had Command Seals. So, why those statements?

He supposed it did not matter, after all....

Motion out of the corner of his vision caused him to glanced up to where Hakuno was moving around. His Master sat up, looking to where he was.

For a moment that seemed to last an eternity, the two watched one another, waiting for the other to broach the subject of the night before.

“I’m feeling better,” Hakuno finally said. “I guess...I should at least thank Elizabeth for a nutritious meal if nothing else, but...I want to check on Sakura before going to the Labyrinth again, no matter what happens. She looked...weird yesterday, and I...didn’t really think of checking on her last night.”

Not when her entire stomach was revolting against her.

Gilgamesh nodded.

“Then let us depart,” he said. “That council will be contacting you soon once they are aware you are awake.”

Hakuno nodded.
Gilgamesh would not think on this any longer.

Honestly, Hakuno felt pretty good. While she was a little hungry, it felt like she’d had a good meal, and…while she didn’t think saying it to Gilgamesh was a good idea, she’d had good dreams. The city that he described had made its way into them, and even if she didn’t not the truth, she could see why Gilgamesh so clearly loved it. She was starting to see why he’d liked the decorations, from what he’d talked about with his place. All he needed was a lion or two and this wouldn’t be all that different…

The fact that he’d had a pair of lions by his throne in life was a little hard to imagine.

It was quiet that morning, with only a few NPCs, like Ms. Taiga that were nearby. She waved to Hakuno as she walked over.

“Good morning, Hakuno. And you, Gilgamesh.”

Gilgamesh didn’t acknowledge the greeting, but also didn’t seem offended.

“I just wanted to ask you…could you please maybe find something that I lost in the Labyrinth…? I promise I’ll give you two something really good for your room if you do!”

“Really?” Gilgamesh said, something sparking in his eyes.

“Oh, sure. What is it? And where?” Hakuno asked.

“My shinai…” Taiga scratched the back of her head in an embossed kind of way. I guess I got a little carried away with practice… It’s in some temple or other…”

“I’ll keep my eyes out!” Hakuno promised before setting out again.

The hall to the infirmary with strangely empty, only Kiara and Anderson were close by, and they seemed like they weren’t talking to one another. While she did glance over at them, Hakuno noticed her stop when she looked over at Gilgamesh. He really intimidated her now, didn’t he?

Sakura was on one of the beds in the infirmary, but once the door was open, she was up and looking at them with surprise.

“Miss Hakuno, Mr. Gilgamesh,” she said, looking between them. “You're looking at lot better.”

“Thanks, I’m pretty sure I have your stomach medicine to thank for that, and for the fact that I got through it,” Hakuno said, sitting down as Sakura moved to the small part of the room where the tea set was.

It looked like she’d been hoping for the company.

It was strange being there, where before she’d been with Julius and Sakura, now it was Gilgamesh there. He took a seat, leaning back and placing one arm on the table as he watched everything with an unreadable expression.

Despite the night before, he honestly seemed more…distant now.
“I’ve been working on something new to help give a little more energy,” Sakura said, smiling at her. “I’m…a little excited to try it out. While I can’t do much for you as an infirmary AI…I sort of enjoy making this and my bentos…”

“If you’re feeling up to it,” Hakuno said. “I actually wanted to check on you. I didn’t know it was early.”

“It…it’s not,” Sakura glanced away. “I was…tired. I suppose. I’m not sure about the others. No one much likes to be in this corner of the school anymore.”

“…Why?”

“The nun, I suppose,” Gilgamesh cut in. “She was lingering not too far off.”

“You…might be right,” she said softly. “She’s offered counselling, but there are some…rumors going around about her.”

Anderson had mentioned something too. Was there really that much trouble going on? While she wasn’t…sad…about it, it was just…strange.

Speaking of strange.

“By the way, Sakura,” Hakuno said, “Your hair’s…lightening…”

“Oh, this…” she touched the long strands, which were now a light violet rather than a dark purple. “It’s nothing to worry about. I didn’t understand it myself, but it’s just my processing power having a little trouble.”

“Could resting help?” Hakuno asked. “I’m sure I can squeeze a little more time from Rin and Rani.”

“It’s fine…” She said. “Rin and Rani are keeping me updated.”

She took a tray with three cups in hand, setting them down. Gilgamesh took his immediately, and looking at Hakuno, opened the Gates, pulling out what looked like a crystal bowl piled with cooked peaches that were soaking in cream.

Hakuno started at the meal for a moment. It looked amazing, and judging by that truffle, it was going to taste amazing too. And, even better, there was nothing red in it. While she would eat strawberries again…the idea of red food was gross at the moment.

“Thank you,” she said. “I wasn’t sure I even wanted to eat but…this looks amazing.”

She quickly took a bite. It was sweet and tart and almost made her forget that she’d never had that Hell Dinner in her mouth. Her stomach didn’t agree, it also wasn’t that hard on it.

“I see your tastes have not disintegrated from that meal,” Gilgamesh remarked.

He looked pleased, or…was that relieved that her sense of taste hadn’t been completely warped?

“Thanks, Gil,” Hakuno said. “For…everything.”

Gilgamesh scowled and looked away, clearly thinking of the night before.

“I did nothing for you, Mongrel. I had no desire to smell that foul concoction in my sleeping chamber. This is the reward you have earned for yourself, and my generosity, nothing more.”
Hakuno really wished he’d make up his mind if he wanted to be thanked or not. King of Caprice.

A sudden shattering of glass caused Gilgamesh and Hakuno to look towards the her before anymore could be said. She had been listening to them, but now she was sitting looking at her shaking hands and then the remains of the tea cup with a horrified look.

“I—I’m sorry I…”

Hakuno was on her feet in a second, rushing to take some towels to help.

“I knew you weren’t yourself,” she said. “What’s really wrong?”

Sakura looked away.

“I…well…”

“This has to do with your being separated from the Moon Cell’s main functioning, has it not?” Gilgmaesh asked.

“…yes,” the AI’s voice was small. “I…didn’t want you to worry about me, Miss Hakuno, but…the longer I am away from the Moon Cell’s mainframe, the more I…start falling apart. It’s a precaution, maybe. So that even if someone hacks an AI, it can’t cause much damage since the Moon Cell can cut it off…but…”

“You’re running out of energy, aren’t you?” Hakuno asked.

That must have been why BB had eaten those Servants. It wasn’t just power, it was the energy to stay functioning.

“…yes…”

His Master frowned, listening in and thinking.

“What about Sakura Money?” she asked. “That’s basically energy, right?”

“Miss Hakuno…you can’t. That’s for you!”

Yes, yes it was. And because it was hers, she could do what she wanted with it. Hakuno glanced at Gilgamesh, half expecting to see him get mad that she was going to spend ‘his’ precious treasury for someone else, but surprisingly he didn’t move.

“I told you,” Hakuno said, holding out her and dumping good chuck of her money into her hand. “You’re my friend. Friends help one another.”

Hakuno transferred it over, and there was a sudden glow from Sakura.

Her hair was the right color again, and some color came back into her face, but she was giving her a worried look.

“Miss Hakuno…you need that! What happens if you need to buy something to heal yourself with in the Labyrinth!”

“I told you,” Hakuno said. “Friends help one other. You’ve been exhausting yourself for me, right? Well, I help you. I’ll figure something out…”

Sakura looked down, smiling a little.
“…Miss Hakuno…thank you…you’re a good friend,” she said. “It’s funny…I’ve never had a friend before. In all my time as an AI. All the other Masters…they came for their daily bento and health, but…you always just chatted with me and…I always really looked forwards to it.”

“It was nice,” Hakuno nodded. “Kind of a break from the War, and…everything.”

There was a familiar chime, and Hakuno signed. “Looks like we’re back…”

“Good luck,” Sakura said, smiling.

With a nod, she headed out.

“Alright, what’s going on?” Hakuno asked.

“For now, nothing,” Rin said. “We’ve changed permissions so Shinji can’t do anything, but even those cameras haven’t found much. Well…There’s a weird purple stain right in front of the lock, but so far no sign of Shinji or Elizabeth.

That was either good or back.

“Let is see what new hole our those two have found,” Gilgamesh said.

“Alright, I’ll get going…”

There was another sliding sound, and two NPCs rushed out, followed by Kiara. They didn’t stop to stay hello to Hakuno but rushed down the hall. Kiara watched after them, with a faintly sad expression on her face.

“Oh…hello, Hakuno,” she said, glancing at Gilgamesh, who was looming beside her with a dark look. “Rin and Rani attempted to ask for my help. They told me a little about BB’s plans, but…that makes little sense, giving BB’s plan was always…” but she trialed off, giggling a little and putting a figure to her lips. “Sorry, that would be telling. You’re just so cute sometimes, it’s hard not to…”

“Woman, make your point and leave,” Gilgamesh said.

“Tsk, tsk, you still make women very unhappy,” she said.

Gilgamesh’s eyes narrowed.

“But that aside, Hakuno…should humanity have their desires realized…is that really so bad? How could our desires really hurt us so?”

Maybe she would have thought that herself, if she hadn’t seen BB’s show, but…the problem was even then…

“If all you have are inanities to mutter, be gone,” Gilgamesh said. “You truly know nothing of true human desire if you can think such things.”

“With all do respect, my school believes whole heartedly in desire. To reach the truth of nirvana through earthly desire and attain enlightenment…if you deny desire you cannot reach truth, and that release is a form of truth. How can I deny it?”

Gilgamesh did not answer, but he was giving her that look of bored impatience again.

She smiled a little at Hakuno.
“If you wish to stop that though, I still accept you, those feelings are good and natural, but once all I thought was good turned to ruin, so I cannot open my heart so again. That is why I have refused Rin and Rani’s attempt for me to join your council. You must understand.”

Oh, so that’s what this was. No one had mentioned trying to re-recruit Kiara, and honestly…she was a little glad that she wasn’t going to be joining.

“I understand,” Hakuno said. “Erm…good luck with your counseling?”

Kiara smiling demurely, looking down, but before she could continue, Gilgamesh was involved again.

“Come, Master, I grow tried of this woman and her failed philosophies. Let us return to the Labyrinth.”

Hakuno nodded, stepping quickly to catch up with him as he walked away.

Failed philosophies. This was coming from someone who seemed to think that the fact that people had desires put them above the gods, but Gilgamesh wasn’t saying anything as he walked. Sometimes, she swore she felt like she could almost understand this man, but sometimes…she felt like she had when they began.

The fifteenth floor of the Labyrinth was tiny. Only what looked like some kind of temple and nothing else. There was a crackle of static as the Council came through.

“Checking for enemies,” Rani said. “Wait…this is…strange. There’s nothing here?”

“And this floor is tiny. There should be something!” Rin said. “There seems to be very little danger on this floor.”

Hakuno raised a hand to her chin thoughtfully.

Why? This should be the final floor. She could see the shield that blocked the way there so…

“Do you think this is a trap?” Hakuno asked.

“Maybe. You’d better be careful,” Rin said.

It took no time at all to get through the floor. It was only the entrance, the building, and then…well…nothing. The final platform was just the shield, more ivy and roses and some weird purple goo that she didn’t want to get anywhere near

“This…can’t be it…” Hakuno said.

“Sensors indicate nothing more. It is possible that Shinji Matou is concealing her somehow, but even then it is not within his personality profile to not appear.”

“Gil, what do you think?” Hakuno asked.
Gilgamesh had been pretty quiet all floor, honestly not really talking sense the business with Kiara. While he didn’t seem distracted it was more…he seemed withdrawn. At the moment, he was looking at the goo with an unreadable expression.

“We will not find either here,” Gilgamesh said. “We would do best to go back and reconsider our options.”

“That’s my thoughts,” Rin said. “We’ve got something else we’re working on, but there might be something there you missed. Take your time coming up.”

“Ok,” Hakuno said.

She turned to face the large building and stopped. She turned to Gilgamesh who was still looking like he was thinking of something. She was pretty sure she knew what…and maybe treasure hunting would work with…this.

Hakuno was starting to be able to guess with Gilgamesh. When she was sick, he’d reached to far, gotten…too involved, and now…

And…did talking about Uruk make him homesick? It was a strange thought, but he seemed to always like things that sort of reminded him of the city, and they way that he’d talked about it last night, even when he refused to mention it now. Maybe it wasn’t just the fact that he’d comforted her that was bothering him…

It was better to pretend the night before hadn’t happened, she supposed, or to pretend that she believed that he did nothing for anyone but himself.

And maybe to do something that would make him think of something other than his city.

“Do you think that…this was the temple that Taiga mentioned?” Hakuno asked.

Gilgamesh’s head snapped up, and he turned to face it. That light from before was back in his eyes, and that was something Hakuno knew well: greed. He’d been promised a treasure. Stepping forwards, they headed into the temple, but while Taiga’s things were usually somewhere on the ground in the open, this time, there was no sign of it. Maybe she was wrong?

“I guess it was on another floor,” she said. “I mean, she said it was in the temple right? Taiga’s stuff is usually pretty easy to find.”

Even though, this was the only building that she’d ever seen down there that could so much as even be called that.

Gilgamesh though had backed up, looking to the front of the building, towards the ruined pillars. He was giving it a thoughtful look.

“She can’t have gotten it all the way up there!” Hakuno called.

“She claims that she got ‘carried away’ with practicing.” Gilgamesh shrugged. “You can consider this a treasure hunter’s instinct. That woman appears overenthusiastic enough. I will check regardless.”

He jumped in a single, fluid motion that no human could have reached, landing on one of the slabs of stone that made up the ruined roof, and laughed aloud.

“It appears that this woman is truly passionate in her devotion!” Gilgamesh called.
He jumped down, holding the shinai in hand, and tossed it to her, where it vanished into her inventory. There was a triumph on his face that she didn’t usually see, at least not in battles. That was usually won, but Gilgamesh seemed to see that as just natural. This was a thrill of some kind.

“Let us return to see just what that woman has prepared for us!” Gilgamesh said, his previous mood seemed gone now that he’d been able to focus on treasure.

“I think this is going to be one of her last quests too…” Hakuno smiled a little.

She turned towards the entrance, but stopped, looking at Gilgamesh.

“By the way, Gil, I don’t really understand why you called Kiara’s philosophy failed. I mean, you claimed that human desire was why separated us from the gods.”

Gilgamesh scowled at her, shaking his head.

“What that woman speaks is nothing more than vulgar passion. She thinks of nothing but whatever sensation pleases her at the moment, moving from one to the other with no thought beyond that. But that is all desire is reduce to when humanity does nothing to obtain it. Her soul is much as her body, overripe, desiring nothing and wishing for all to desire her. That is her supposed salvation. While she claims to affirm human desire, what she truly means is that she affirms all humans to desire her and cannot conceive of more. She and BB are much the same. Affirming all desire, without conceiving that there are desires that humanity might have for a moment but then push away.”

So, to him, that wasn’t really even desire. Desire was what someone worked for.

“It’s funny… this whole Grail War is about obtaining a wish you can’t grant.”

“That is why the Grail War, by nature is the height of unrivaled incompetence.”

“It is pointless,” Hakuno admitted softly.

That had been something she’d felt since she’d seen Alice die. The kills, the pain, all of it…it just felt pointless. Maybe it was because she didn’t have a wish. Maybe it was because the only thing she wanted was just to live a little longer, to survive a little more, but the more she’d seen of it, the more awful it had felt.

Even if a wish couldn’t be granted normally…didn’t that just mean that it wasn’t something that should be granted because it forced another person to think a certain way, broke the laws or nature or even ignored the truth of something?

Well, it didn’t matter, she guessed.

Still…it might have been fun…to have fought with Gilgamesh in the Grail War…

Hakuno shoved that thought aside as they headed through the exit. She couldn’t think of what was waiting for her. Even though Gilgamesh had stopped mentioning it so much, that fact was still the same.

They appeared outside the school where Taiga was waiting for them. She beamed at them as Hakuno transferred the shinai over.

“Is this it?” she asked.

“Yes!” she said. “That was in a bit of a weird place, so I’m so glad you managed to find it!”
“And what of your reward?” Gilgamesh asked, eyes still glinting at the promise of some new treasure.

“I didn’t forget! Hakuno, take your pick!”

The matrixes being presented to her were…a pretty glass statue that…she honestly liked and a stuffed lion. For a moment she reached out for the statue. It was some woman dancing in the waves with a crescent moon behind her, and honestly, it was probably something a little more delicate for the room, but…

She looked at the lion.

Gilgamesh had mentioned that he’d had two lions in life.

And she was pretty sure talking about Uruk and comforting her bothered him.

Maybe…if he wouldn’t accept thanks, than maybe he’d accept a present.

Hakuno picked up the lion matrix. It appeared in her hands (and was actually pretty big), but she turned to Gilgamesh.

“Here,” she said. “You mentioned that you used to have lions by your throne, right? Well, it’s not real, but…”

Gilgamesh took the lion, starting at it for a moment. For a moment, something flashed on his face that was too quick for her to understand, but then he turned to face her.

“Mongrel, I am aware that you do not understand how one gives gifts, so I will tell you now: chose what you wish for in return for this, and do not tell me again that you desire nothing.”

He glared at her, practically willing her to ask him for something stupid, probably so that he could laugh at her, but Hakuno just sighed.

How did someone claim to understand human nature, but still not understand why someone would give a gift just to make someone else happy?

“I guess then…keep fighting by my side, and…keep it…to remember me by,” Hakuno said, looking away.

It was the first time since BB that that had been mentioned out loud. Why was it that it just kept feeling worse and worse?

Maybe it was just because it was getting closer.

Gilgamesh though, was scowling at her again.

“If you were another, I would assume this was some false humility in an attempt to please me, but from you, I am well aware that you are truly that foolish. I do not need some item to remember you by. Regardless of if I am summoned again, I could never forget one so foolish as yourself. As you have squandered yet another gift, let us return to the Council and see what they have found.”

He glared at her again, crossing his arms even as they walked, but there was no real anger behind it, and Hakuno noticed that he’d quickly placed it in the Gates, where it would be forever, along with those tacky clothes he was still wearing.

Hakuno found herself weirdly happy as they walked though and refused to meet his glare as they
He didn’t need something to remember her by. Somehow, that made her…incredibly happy. That, even as he glared and rebuked and pretended that everything that he did was for himself…she wouldn’t be forgotten, no matter what happened.

Besides, there was no such thing as a squandered gift. She knew she’d see that lion beside his throne that night.

Chapter End Notes

TWO HUNDRED KUDOS! YOU’RE ALL AMAZING!

Another breather, because Gil is an emotional seesaw who has to deal with every little moment that changes his relationship, and is getting more and more unhappy about Hakuno's fate.

Next chapter:

Kiara would never stand in the School again.
The First Time Hakuno Saw the Inside of the Gate of Babylon

Chapter Summary

An attempt to learn the secret to Meltlilith's invincibility goes terribly wrong, and Hakuno and Gilgamesh are forced to seek out Kiara for help.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno saw the inside of the Gate of Babylon was also the last time Kiara would ever walk the halls of the Old School Building.

After giving Gilgamesh the stuffed lion, they headed to the Student Council room where Rin and Rani were waiting with Sakura. In front of them was that large globe, showing how things would have progressed if they BB’s world of uncontrolled desire would pull through.

Hakuno took her usual seat, and Gilgamesh, rather than standing behind her as he had done before, took up one of the chairs sitting on it the way that he usually did his throne. He was still scowling at her every so often, so he was still apparently annoyed that she hadn’t asked him for something in return for that lion.

“You may proceed,” he said, as if this whole thing was made for him and him alone.

“Welcome back,” Rin said coughing once and then shaking her head. “We’ve been scanning things for clues about Meltlilith and BB but…”

“So far, in our work, we have found no hints on how to counter BB but believe that there might be a way to counter the Alter Ego’s invincibility. From what we’ve seen, this is not just some power, but rather a skill that is granting it.

“And you are presuming that should you find the Servant that is the source of such a skill, you will be able to either counter it or isolate it?” Gilgamesh asked. “That is reasonable. I have some Noble Phantasms in my treasury that might prove useful should that be the case.”

It made sense to Hakuno. After all, the Alter Egos were made with goddesses. While Hakuno’s knowledge of history and mythology was not very good, given the amnesia, it seemed natural that at least one goddess would have that kind of a power.

“We’re hoping,” Rin said.

“Yes,” Sakura said, smiling at Hakuno. “I’ve been planning on hacking into and accessing the sixteenth floor. It’s below Elizabeth’s final floor, but it exists. I think that, if I can access it, I should be able to find out something about Meltlilith. After all, at some level, that part of the Labyrinth is her heart.”

“Are you sure that’s safe?” Hakuno asked.

Sakura had barely been able to do much, and she was talking about her power being limited
“Friends help one another, right?” Sakura said. “I’m feeling a lot better since this morning. I’ll be fine. It’s about the same level of effort as it is to help support Rin and Rani during your Labyrinth runs.”

So, this way, Sakura’s usual load of work wasn’t being over tasked. That…made her feel better.

“Rin, Rani, provide more support to the AI than you right now are estimating,” Gilgamesh said. “It is doubtful that the Ego has not had some form of defense prepared.”

Hakuno gave her a worried look, but it didn’t seem like Sakura was going to accept worry. She just smiled a nodded, then closed her eyes.

Her hair lightened a little, but it returned to it’s normal color, and the she opened her eyes again.

“Rin, you’ve got the data right?”

Rin nodded, smiling.

“It helps to have the same model right here. Just took a minute, but…boy I can’t read a word of it.”

“Wait what?” Hakuno blinked.

Rani looked up.

“It’s essentially her DNA. It would take far too long for us to read the thing in its entirety. What we’re going to do is match it up to our library of goddesses that the Moon Cell has recorded and… done. We have 102 matching results.”

Rin raised an eyebrow.

“I know this is probably true of heros too, but there are really as many goddesses as stars in the sky…”

“You are correct,” Gilgamesh said. “And you will find that they are quite the same in nature, if not in ability. Though you will not hear tell of their weaknesses. The gods never permitted any human to know of those, save for their own natures.”

That was actually a good point. Maybe the Moon Cell recorded something, but goddesses had been worshipped and seen as unstoppable. If they were beaten, from what Gilgamesh said, it was through flaws, not weaknesses.

“Hm…that…that’s strange…I don’t see any invincibility attribute…” Rin muttered, “But that would mean…”

“Eh A-“

Sakura’s scream stopped abruptly, and her body suddenly spasmed, and her face froze as her body started to float just slightly upwards, head back. Still, Hakuno had a perfect view of how Sakura’s eyes were staring blankly at the ceiling and her mouth was half opened in a silent scream.

“Sakura!” Hakuno was standing up quickly.

Gilgamesh was already in front of her.

But the voice that managed to come out of Sakura’s mouth wasn’t Sakura’s.
“Hehe…you really shouldn’t be all that surprised. You’re the ones who tried to access my secrets in the first place after all…”

“Meltlilith…” Hakuno hissed.

She wasn’t in the school building…she couldn’t…

“She must have passed through the Student Council line!”

“That’s right,” Meltlilith’s voice was calm. “I was attacked. Isn’t it natural to defend myself?”

There was another gasp and the voice that came out was Sakura’s.

“Please….protect…my ego…boundaries…” she managed to gasp out.

While Rin and Hakuno were frozen, Rani was homunculus enough not to freeze.


The digital wall suddenly came up, freezing Sakura in place, but before Hakuno could say anything, the voice still came from where Sakura was.

“That’s useless. My honey is already injected into her. White Sakura is already past saving. She become part of me. Just like everything in the Moon Cell.”

“So that is your power, is that it, Ego?” Gilgamesh said.

While Lip’s power had been to crush something into a form that she could stuff into…breast valley forever, if Meltlilith was the opposite…

“Hmph, I see you haven’t learned your place from our last meeting, but…yes… My skill is All Drain. The Queen of poisonous honey that steals skill, stats…and personality.”

A chill ran down Hakuno’s spine as she raised her hands to her mouth in horror. Personality. Sakura’s very personality was in danger from this, and somehow…that felt so much worse than dying. While she wasn’t sure what she believed in, somehow, the assurance of the existence of gods made her hope that there was at least…something…past this, but…this…this was as if Sakura had never existed.

And anger was starting to bubble up from her horror.

Honeybee…

“Hehe, and I’ve given White Sakura here a dose of my best honey with a very busy little honeybee! I guess you won’t be moving forward much anymore, will you? Too bad. You’re all just data for me to break down and absorb. But don’t worry, Hakuno. My plans are the same. I’m going to give you a perfect world. I have to adjust a few things first, but just wait there…I’ll make you love it.”

Somehow…that was even more chilling now.

“This…this is bad. This should have suspended all of her functions, but…something’s still moving,” there was a note of fear in Rani’s normally calm voice.

Sakura was going to get consumed…they needed someone who knew… Someone who could help

“Don’t worry,” Rin said, though her voice was tight. “I can keep her going for a while…”
“Hakuno…I dislike asking you this, but you will need to speak to Kiara Sesshosuin,” Rani said. “I have studied her background. In the past, she developed a certain codecast called the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation.”

“That’s the origin of why she was wanted on Earth. That’s considered a crime against the mind. They said…they say it allowed her to get into the heads of the people who allowed her too, and…basically command it.”

Hakuno clenched her hands into fists and glanced at Gilgamesh. He was watching where Sakura was with a strange expression.

“If it’ll help, I’ll get her,” Hakuno said calmly. “I don’t care if she wants a fully make out session with me. Gil…let’s go!”

Gilgamesh had turned to look at her sharply at her words. He nodded, but something ugly was in his eyes.

“I’m pretty good but…hurry, Hakuno,” Rin said.

Hakuno nodded, running for the door and into the hall. She didn’t hear Gilgamesh behind her, so she assumed he’d taking astral form, for the sake of speed. Hakuno didn’t even look as she darted down the hall looking for Kiara.

She didn’t have to look at hard. Kiara wasn’t far off, just a little down the wall, looking out at the Sakura tree while Anderson stood nearby with a frown. It didn’t stop as Hakuno dashed over, not even stopping to catch her breath.

“Kiara, we need to use your Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation on Sakura,” she said, straightening a little as a familiar foreboding presence behind her told her that Gilgamesh was there now.

Kiara looked at her with a faintly surprised look on her face.

“You…want to learn my codecast?” she asked.

She didn’t actually mean that, but that could work too.

“Don’t,” Anderson cut in. “That’s nothing a girl like you should be even trying to learn about. As is normal for this she-cat. That magic’s nothing more than something to fulfill some momentary pleasure for purposes that I hesitate to talk about with you. More garbage made under the believe that if you can be on the extreme end of carnality, you’ll reach the gate of God. Why would you want it anyways?”

Hakuno knew this was dangerous. This was something that shouldn’t even have been tried. But…Sakura needed it. If she didn’t do something Sakura would never be able to have tea, to laugh, to learn and grow or do anything. She’d just be Meltlilith’s puppet and somehow…Hakuno couldn’t think of anything worse.

“It doesn’t matter. Meltlilith…she hacked Sakura and If we don’t use it…”

“Oh…well. That is troubling…” Kiara mumbled, looking down. “But, well…what would this do for me? I would love to help you, but…well…in compensation…”

…but what?

Somehow, the sheer bluntness of that was worse than the words. Hakuno glared at Kiara. She was
aware that Kiara didn’t see Sakura, as an AI as human, but the fact that, even if you didn’t care about Sakura’s suffering, that she was willing to put the whole school at risk, or trap them here because it wasn’t to her ‘benefit’?

“Disgusting, isn’t she? Even though she could kill or save hundreds, she wouldn’t do a thing for someone who doesn’t desire her,” Anderson said. “It’s like a child who refuses to get out of bed unless you peel an apple for her.”

“The only difference is that this might end up killing everyone in this building!” Hakuno burst out.

“Enough.” Gilgamesh cut in, his voice as sharp and cold as any of the weapons that he used. “You need not barter with so ugly a soul. My Master has need of that spell, so either come willingly or I will force it from you.”

Something about his tone told Hakuno just which one he’d prefer.

Kiara just sighed.

“Anderson?” she asked.

Anderson scowled.

“I know, I know. Really, is there no end to your dirtiness?” he asked, pulling out his book and giving Hakuno an apologetic look. “I’m sorry, Little Lady, but I can’t refuse a direct order from my Master. We’re going into the Labyrinth. You can follow us if you want.”

He muttered something under his breath, and they were both gone, vanishing the second that Hakuno rushed to grab her.

Hakuno turned to Gilgamesh, who was looking at where they had been with a frown.

“That was that Caster’s powers? So, the specialties of that children’s book author are vanishing as well as nurturing… Remember that, Hakuno. At any rate, this woman has chosen to have the information taken by force.” Something dark glinted in his eyes, and he smiled. “We should go to the deepest part of the Labyrinth. That ruined temple strikes me as the perfect place for that depraved nun.”

Hakuno nodded.

“Ok. I’ll update Rin and Rani on the way,” she said rushing down the wall, past the watchful gaze of Kotomine and to the tree that lead into the Labyrinth.

The transfer was quick, and they were in the deepest part of the Labyrinth that they could reach in a second, and they were quickly overlooking the remains of that temple.

“They are here,” Gilgamesh said, stepping forwards, his eyes almost glowing in the moonlight. “I sense that Servant. His battle strength is near non-existent, but he would make a good staff member.”

Gilgamesh…seemed to like Anderson weirdly enough. Maybe he really had been just that impressed by the fact that Anderson had criticized him to his face.

“She’s a fool though…there is no place to run from here. Or perhaps that author shows his rebellion in his own ways. It does not matter. We can finish this quickly,” he was smiling in a thoughtful way. Probably deciding on just what he wanted to do to Kiara.
Right now though, she honestly didn’t care. She was still absolutely furious that she was wasting this much time for no reason. She headed to the temple, rushing towards where she could see Kiara standing and clearly waiting for her.

She ran up the stairs two at a time, but refused to give Kiara the satisfaction to see how winded she was by this.

“I’m…going…to….take you back…to Sakura…” Hakuno huffed.

Kiara giggled a little.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Hakuno…” she smiled again in that demure way that Hakuno knew had once charmed the people she had had lead. “You’re all drenched in sweat, like a starving dog…my hard it trembling. It seems to really do desire me greatly!”

No, she desired her stupid codecast.

Kiara was beaming at her, but all that Hakuno felt was faint disgust. Yes, she was pretty, and she was very good at what she did, but…this honestly made her feel gross, but she knew…somehow…what the people under her sway would have felt. Kiara could mix purity with something so unpure that it was either make you sick or make you love her.

“How long are you planning on gloating, woman?” Anderson said, crossing his arms and looking away. “These two did what you wanted. Get this over with.”

Gilgamesh had made a step forwards, a dark smile on his face.

“That’s not necessary, King of Heroes,” Kiara said softly. “This should compensate you and your Master for your trouble. I am so satisfied, Hakuno. You can see the bottom of my habit stirring from your effort and concern.”

“I’m concerned about Sakura,” Hakuno muttered.

Somehow, the fact that she was doing this just to be ‘desired’… Hakuno hadn’t really hated Kiara. She hadn’t liked her, and the woman had kind of scared her, but now…she’d put everyone at risk, and she was acting like it was a game. She couldn’t even really tell if she could trust her.

“I see your look, my dear Hakuno. You do not need to trust me. Good and evil are things determined by the human heart, and nothing more. Those who do not have clear vision cannot really trust anyone, but…I believe that I can trust you.”

“Woman, if you wish to compensate me, do so quickly, lest I grow weary of beholding just how ugly your soul truly is,” Gilgamesh snapped. “Do not speak to me of Good and Evil.”

Kiara sighed, but nodded.

“Very well. This is the Secret Technique of the Tachikawa Eiten school. The Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation. I’ve…looked for one that I thought would be able to use this technique as I did, but perhaps…I should have sought out one who might use it differently… Please accept it. I’m looking forwards to seeing how you use it… You who already causes so many hearts to open to you…”

She held out her hand, where the glowing sphere, rippling with color, was waiting for her. This was the base code. It looked…almost like a crystal. But this was the base for something that had driven so many people insane.
But Sakura needed help.

And so did everyone else in the building.

So, carefully, not sure what was going to happen, Hakuno reached for it, as it glowed and sparked around her.

“You have compensated us for this time,” Gilgamesh said. “Now, compensate me for the sight of you. What is your motive?”

…I suppose…I just grew bored with being astitic. I’m a little jealous of you, Hakuno. So many people love you, and even in the Labyrinth, you are being pursued. I suppose I wished to feel your desire towards me, to be the one chased by you, just once.”

She wrapped her arms around herself, as if the thought excited her so much she couldn’t even contain herself, and a chill worked its way down her spine.

Gilgamesh was glowering at her, but Anderson spoke first.

“This is what I’ve warned you of. She’s a cesspool of a woman, who only looks out for any pleasure she can have.”

“Really now? You, nothing more than a drunkard who hates women, are going to go so far!”

“Of course, women like you are nothing more than burdensome, noisy idle pieces of meat no value other than their size. So, this is my proposal, if a man is going to fall in love, it should only be with sweet young maidens!”

His eyes flicked towards them, with a strange smile on his face.

“Oh, that’s coming from you? You could not never confess to the girl he first loved and carried her letters in his pocket for the rest of his life?”

And the were bickering again.

“I wonder if some people would consider this to be a good Servant, Master relationship…” Hakuno sighed.

Gilgamesh watched, and Hakuno had the uncomfortable feeling that he was looking through the interaction for something that he could be offended by, but, finding nothing just scowled to Hakuno.

“…Fine. Then let us return, Master. The AI requires that code, and we have no time to listen to those two fools bicker like—Caster!”

The warning shout was too late.

While Anderson jumped back, preparing to defend, the attack wasn’t aimed at him. Meltlitth appeared, streaking faster than Hakuno could even track, a solid blow from her knee aimed directly into Kiara’s back.

The woman gasped in pain as something purple and gooey came from her mouth and blood sprayed from her stomach. She hadn’t even noticed that Meltlitth was even there!

Gilgamesh had moved in front of her, shielding her with his back from the sight, but Hakuno looked around him, starting at Kiara, impaled on Meltlitth’s spiked knee and Anderson, who was already starting to show black on his fingers.
“...You...you're really...going to kill me?” Kiara hissed, coughing and choking slightly.

“Oh, you thought that I wouldn’t kill you because I didn’t have a reason to? That’s why humans are such easy targets. ‘I can’t oppose you, so I’ll be obedient.’ I have some of BB’s memories you see. You told her that, and just continued to live in that building. You seriously thought that if you just sat there and wagged your tail prettily, no one would kill you? You’re an idiot! You should know that no one needs a reason to crush bugs. Your face annoys me. And you’re too close to Hakuno.”

She dug her knee in deeper, causing Kiara to gasp in pain. But all that seemed to do was make Meltlilith smile. Kiara’s eyes widened, weakly turning her head to face her attacker.

“M-melt...” she gasped out, but was silenced again in pain.

“I’m not like Lip or BB,” Meltlilith said, but she was looking at Hakuno. “I’m an uncompromising incarnation of pure pleasure, and anyone who sullies this place dies. I don’t need your poison!”

“No!” Kiara screamed. “Listen to me! Melt- Miss Hakuno-“

But it was too late.

The blade was pulled in just a little more, and she seemed to vanish, but not like the other Masters had. She didn’t disappear into black noise. She seemed more...to break apart with a final scream of pain and fear.

Hakuno was frozen as she watched Meltlilith turn to face Anderson, who was, by that time, starting to vanish. She took a step towards him, but Gilgamesh blocked her path. She knew, even without his telling her that he was right. There was absolutely nothing that she could do, but seeing him vanish...was a lot worse than Kiara’s death, no matter how bloody.

“So, this is all a Servant is. You just kill the Master and they melt like snow on a sunny day,” her eyes flicked to Gilgamesh. “I’m looking forwards to seeing more of that. Any last requests?”

“Hmph,” Anderson snarled. “Are you seriously asking me for some woeful last words? Disappearing is fine. Rather, I will leave you a curse, Meltlilith. Pitiful little girl. Unrewarded Prima Donna. The day that your love is reciprocated will never come. Your desired role was taken from you before your birth, and another story is already being written.”

“What...what does a child like you mean by that!”

“An Author’s meaning, you little fool,” Anderson snapped. “The day that your beloved refuses that all affirming love you have, and stays with that one who you hate so much, the curtain will fall. After all, even if someone who loved you could exist, they would never accept or forgive your love. No one who loved you could ever accept your devotion. And making them do this with you would horrify them, you brat. You indulge in your unrequited love on your own bed!”

He turned to Hakuno and Gilgamesh taking out the book from before, only now, she could see the title.

_The Emperor’s New Clothes by Hans Christian Anderson_

He smiled at Hakuno, even though his face was starting to turn black, and even one of his eyes was now covered. Hakuno was too shocked by what had happened to even smile back to him one last time.

“I’m a little regretful now,” he said. “I was starting to get curious about how the tale of a young girl
who fell to the fair side of the Moon and her Tyrant protector would have gone. Little Lady, King of Heroes, this is up to you. As the greedy pair you are, hold on to that small happiness you’ve found with your lives, and *never let me make you one of my normal stories.*”

He held the book out before him, and it started to open as a glow surrounded it, and then them.

“These are magical garments,” he read as the books pages started to turn quickly as if in a high wind. “When fools look at them, they will look like gems, but, to the wise, they will be worthless!”

A rush of power overtook them, and Hakuno flinched away, shutting her eyes against a brilliant flash of light. However, the moment she opened her eyes, she couldn’t see herself. This wasn’t a forced log off like she’d thought…

They were invisible. That was his last gift to them.

With a scream of rage, Meltililith aimed a powerful kick towards Anderson, but he was gone a second later with a regretful smile.

“A persistent man,” Gilgamesh said softly, his voice echoing strangely in the temple. “I had wondered why such a man would be considered a hero, but I question no longer. It was a true display of the dignity of his restless heart. You may leave this tale to us.”

“There!” Meltililith screamed, aiming for the place in front of Hakuno, but two invisible arms grabbed picked her up, and jumped to the roof of the temple.”

“I can still hear your footsteps!” Meltililith cried you. Hakuno my leave, but I’m going to take your life now, Servant!”

Gilgamesh did not say a word. She heard the sound of a single snap from somewhere, and a flash of golden light below her.

“Remain where you are!” Gilgamesh shouted as Hakuno sudden fell down a golden hole that had not been there only a second before.

She dropped sharply for about a fourth of a second, only to find herself lying on the stone floor. She looked up, just in time to see Meltililith jumping to where she had been, and the sound of expensive clothing rustling as Gilgamesh jumped again. And then the golden portal closed, leaving her…

In the Gate of Babylon.

Hakuno started, scrambling to her feet and then wrapping her arms around herself.

Anderson was gone.

It was a painful knowledge, but not one that hurt as bad as Leo or Gatou or Julius. Anderson was in the Throne of Heroes now. It…it was sad that she wouldn’t be able to talk with him, or ask him more about his books, but…at least he wasn’t really gone…

But…where was she?

Hakuno looked up, for the first time, really looking to see everything.

She was standing in an enormous room, lit by flaming torches that brought everything around her into bright lights. On the walls, Hakuno could see pictures of people, men and women, in their lives. Eating, drinking, fighting, playing games, all of them in what looked like robes. As she walked
closer to the walls, she noticed that…the faces were different. All of them looked a little different from one another, like people. But the walls was only the start.

Around her, piled everywhere were treasures. Pots, rolls of cloth, crates of fruits and cups of what looked like a warm brown drink that was nothing like then wine that Gilgamesh usually summoned. Farming tools, statues, what looked like little board games were everywhere. Tablets with strange writing that must have be curariform were in piles. There were even some weapons, but they didn’t look like they were ever used, other than a beautifully carved battle axe that lay in a corner.

Crates and boxes that must have held more loomed in the distance, and small pathways would have allowed her to see more, like the large statue that was not far off.

All of it was…beautiful, and somehow, it looked ancient. But…even then, Hakuno was overcome with a feeling of neglect and the silence felt…not heavy, but…lonely.

This was Uruk. Hakuno realized. This was all that remained of Gilgamesh’s city that he’d told her about the night before. Every item had been stored here, never allowed to decay or vanish, so long as the city’s king survived.

There was something so incredibly lonely about this place. It felt like she was walking on a grave. Somehow, it felt disrespectful to even be there.

There was a path that led to what looked like a doorway that showed a hall lit by torches. And she knew, somehow, that that hall would never end. She could be lost here forever. In the remains of a beloved city, or of some great battle or…so many things….

There was another path that led a little further into the room, but it led to what appeared to be a closed stone door, sealed shut with a large clay design that covered part of the door.

Hakuno took a step towards it, but a sudden light shown under her feet and she was falling again. Hakuno braced herself to feel ground, but two arms caught her and set her down.

Gilgamesh faced her, outside of the Sakura tree, looking none the worse for wear after Meltlilith had chased him.

“You’re alright!” she said.

“Of course. That Ego assumes she is clever, but a single sound in the wrong place and she was distracted,” Gilgamesh said, but he was giving her a hard look. “You appear to be taking the death of that nun and the Caster better than I had presumed.”

That was concern.

“I…I,” Hakuno looked away. “I’m pretty awful, aren’t I? She died and…while I’m a little sad, I’m more sad for Anderson, but I know that he’s safe. I guess…I really only cared about people I liked…”

Gilgamesh snorted.

“Mongrel, that is human,” he said. “It is natural to value a life you know, and a life in front of you more than that of a stranger or an aggressor. That woman has hounded your steps with ill intent since I first saw her. It is good that your soft heart does not extend to such a woman. It gives me hope that I will not see some folly regarding BB or that Ego.”

“No,” Hakuno said. “I’m not going to spare BB or Melt. Not after what they did with Sakura. But…
Gil…you put me in your Treasury with Uruk things?”

“Ah, that is where you landed…interesting,” he said that more to himself. “It was the one place Meltlilith could not touch you and freed me to act as I needed without worry for a Master limited by human capabilities.”

He didn’t seem upset, even over the mention of those things, even though he’d clearly kept them and preserved them for so long, but…he didn’t usually show that. He just…never drank the plentiful drinks from there, and never used any of those items… It was like his friend in some ways. It was safe, preserved, and Hakuno was certain that she would never, could never, see Gilgamesh use a single thing from that place.

She was glad that the lion wasn’t there, somehow.

But she couldn’t think about this. Not now. Not yet.

Not about that room, or the sealed door, or that feeling that…in reality, she’d miss Anderson, but Kiara would never walk the school again, and that…maybe she wasn’t happy about it, but it wasn’t grief. Still…something about Kiara’s last moment’s seemed…wrong.

But there wasn’t time.

“Let’s go save Sakura,” Hakuno said, pushing her thoughts behind her.

Chapter End Notes

I swear I mostly wrote this chapter for two scenes: Anderson and the inside of the Gates. So, for some info, the people on the walls are depictions of the citizens. All of them look completely different because it's them. The ax is the one that CasGil holds. In the Epic Gil mostly used as ax as a weapon, so I'd assume that that was one of his favorites, as well as something he viewed as a sign of his kingship.

Next Chapter:

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the moment you've waited for.
The First Time Hakuno Saw Gilgamesh Naked

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh realizes that Elizabeth's final SG is something Hakuno will never guess. Hakuno sees more of the King of Heroes than she ever dreamed she would.

Chapter Notes

You're welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first time Gilgamesh realized the only thing Hakuno had in common with the dragon was after the death of the nun and Anderson. Gilgamesh was pleased that as soft hearted as his Master tended to be with all manner of things, that woman alone seemed to have made herself so vile that even Hakuno could not weep for her.

It truly spoke for the ugliness that lay in that woman’s soul.

Anderson’s death had been a pity, however. He would have been a decent staff member.

Of course, the run of emotion was likely why he had ended up placing Hakuno in that most closed off portion of his Treasury, rather than some other random place. It was the safest, and in a hurry, he had not thought but just thrown her in, knowing that that was the only place where she could be safe form the Ego’s assault.

The woman seemed to see it as that as well, rather than…some admonition.

She did not ask of it as they walked back to where the AI was waiting.

Rin glanced up, and Gilgamesh noted the relief in her eyes as Hakuno returned.

“Good to see you,” she said. “We’ve got logs of everything that happened. While Kiara’s death is regrettable, at least we’ve got the codecast. We’ve been analyzing it while you were talking. Thankfully, it looks like being in the Gate of Babylon doesn’t kill the connection.”

Rin’s glossed over the death of the nun with little emotion, and Rani did not so much as glance up from her work.

It appeared that she had left a foal taste with everyone.

“The code itself…it’s basically soul hacking. Our avatars are made through using spirit, soul and body, though body can be manipulated, but this…this is completely focused on the nature of the soul. With this, you can take consciousness alone separate it from everything else and make something depending on that. It’s no wonder this was considered a crime by its very existence. You can literally go into someone else’s soul and rearrange things if you want…it’s truly a demonic codecast…”
“It is currently speculated that several members of the original cult founded by Kiara, the Last Prophet, were subjected to this if they showed resistance or the desire to leave. It also possibly explains several possible homicides connected with family members of cult initiates.”

A small shudder passed through Hakuno, and Gilgamesh refrained from extending a hand to steady her.

The Last Prophet. Her conceit truly had risen as high as the moon itself if she were to consider herself such a thing. The very nature of that thing she had created was truly an abomination worthy of the gods themselves, however.

Had she considered using it against Hakuno? The woman clearly desired his Master, and she clearly had no compunction when it came to her one desires... The various scenarios that could have happened, displeased him. Even if she was to vanish from him, that was not something he would permit in any sense.

“Anyways, no reason to speak ill of the dead,” Rin said. “And for our purposes, this is very useful.”

“Right. This is for Sakura,” Hakuno said, giving a worried look to where the AI still stood suspended in her agony.

“I will lay out the important parts beforehand,” Rani said. “There will some danger. Sakura is an AI, so she will have defenses against us, even if she is trying not to use them, we will also likely run into trouble with the Melt Virus, as we’re calling it.”

“There is also the matter of the ‘honeybee’ which the Ego mentioned. I take it that remains elusive?”

“Yes. That is something I worry for as well.”

“For now, we’re ready to support you when you use the technique.”

Hakuno nodded and stepped forwards.

“It’s just like a heart,” Gilgamesh heard her mutter.

It was not, but Gilgamesh determined not to tell her that she was about to experience something that even he had never done before. He would tell her once they had entered.

The transfer, initiated by Hakuno and aided by the Council, was smooth, much as a transfer to the Labyrinth. However, the entire format and feeling was different. This was no Labyrinth that showed the state of the heart, rather this was a reflection of the very nature of the being entered.

The AI’s soul was a bright place, filled with half formed hopes and dreams of a soul that was only beginning to fully take on distinct form form. Code swirled in long strands as new experiences were built, while small cubes that showed new information and experiences and lights like the sunset glowed around him. Yet, there was an order to it, even now. While the AI was only starting to become something almost human in her own right, she was no child.

“Excellent. This conversion works. While the comingling of Master and Servant is nothing new, entering someone’s structure in solid form is rare indeed. I shall enjoy this new experience.”

Hakuno glanced at him with wide eye at the news.

“That’s weird…but, it’s warm,” Hakuno mumbled.
Of course, it was welcoming a friend. There was some small greeting for him as well. It was a gentle
warmth that told him that foreign body or not, he was permitted.

There were no enemies before them, so Rani’s fears had been groundless. Or perhaps those had
already been disabled.

“You’re late, Squirrel,” a familiar childish voice called. “What do you mean to make me wait like
this?”

The dragon girl was standing on the platform and waiting for them. Her arms crossed and an
annoyed look on face. Gilgamesh scowled. The minor noble’s habit of putting on airs about her
exalted station was tiresome without the other child to provide entertainment.

“You will wait for a long as I chose,” Gilgamesh said calmly.

But his Master was more worried about what her presence there meant.

“Elizabeth, why are you here?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Livestock sure are slow,” she shrugged but faulted as she met Gilgamesh’s eyes.

He was growing tired of that as well. Hakuno Kishinami was worth far more than this dragon could
comprehend. After all, he had taken her for his Master.

“A-anyways, I have a new manager now,” she said.

“Meltlilith,” Hakuno sighed.

“Yes, that woman,” the dragon crossed her arms. “She’s the worst, but there’s nothing an idol like
me can do with a bad manager other than make the best of it and preform like usual. I swear, I almost
miss the rat. At least then I wouldn’t have been shrunk down like this to invade some random girl’s
body.”

“Hakuno, if you’ve got the virus source spotted…” Rin started, but stopped at the ugly look on the
dragon girl’s face.

“You’re so noisy. I have a headache already, so shut up. If you hurt my ears, I’ll kill this girl.”

Hakuno stiffened.

“And why have you not done this already, considering your new mistress.”

Elizabeth grinned at him.

“Because, Gorgeous, this body is mine! I could just stab her through the brain and that would be that,
but Meltlilith said that I could have this body! This girl won’t become Meltlilith, but rather Elizabeth
Bathory, beautiful forever! I won’t just be a Servant anymore, but a living being! Free to wander the
world!”

Incarnation! It was an unorthodox method, but, given the youth of the AI’s own awareness and the
power of the virus itself, it was more than possible.

“I mean,” the dragon yammered on. “This body is sort of below my standards, but once the virus is
done, I can overwrite her with my own data.”

“So, this is the honeybee Meltlilith mentioned,” Hakuno muttered.
“It appears as such,” Gilgamesh said.

It was a good plan, he had to admit. Not only to cripple them but to bring a new enemy to the stage. And the dragon, freed of the restrictions of her class might be something of a threat to any other than himself. There was also the issue of the girl’s personality. Gone was any remnant of childishness, beside cruelty. This was likely closer to the woman’s true nature without a Master to temper her, regardless of the fact that she had died well into adulthood.

Heroic Spirits, particularly those who were mad, could, on the Moon Cell, manifest as they were at a time in their lives. This dragon’s nature was so fragmented that this was likely the most stable element.

And yet…there was something else to this change… Her power seemed altered.

“No!” Another voice, one that echoed as strongly as Rin’s earlier rang out. “I won’t let you make me Miss Hakuno’s enemy! Or Mr. Gilgamesh’s! Or Miss Tohsaka or Miss Rani! I’ll fight you! I fight you the whole way! I’ll corrupt every file in my system! You’re still be an AI, even if you take control of me!”

They were brave words, but held no weight behind them, and from the smug look the dragon’s face, she knew it.

“Oh, you’ve still got some consciousness left? Wow. I’m actually kind of impressed. But…”

She slammed her spear into the ground with a force that caused Gilgamesh so move a step forwards, unsure if the fool was going to attack in this place, but only the agonized scream of the AI could be heard.

“Sakura!”

“I can kill you whenever I want,” the dragon chirped. “Anyways, your sense of self is going to dissolve in a bit, why make this harder?”

“Elizabeth!”

His Master’s words were a hiss if fury.

Gilgamesh turned to see Hakuno sanding, fists clenched and a brilliant rage burning in her eyes, as that resentment that always lingered in her eyes kindled.

“Let her go!” she hissed.

“Or what?” the girl said. “You’re going to dissolve too you know, but I guess that’s what you get for interfering!”

She vanished.

Gilgamesh stepped to Hakuno’s side.

“It appears that we do not have our usual freedom to dally. However, that dragon girl is as pressed into a corner as we are. She is still bound by the Sentinel system. Should we defeat her, this will be her end as well.”

Hakuno nodded once.

“And we’re going to defeat her.”
"Hakuno! You need to hurry! This virus is moving faster! I'm doing the best I can but-"

His mongrel paled, but her face remained firm.

"We'll do it. I promise!"

They set off in pursuit, but it was not necessary to go far. Close by, a strange series of gates and switches greeted them, but the moment they stepped closer, gates fell, including behind them, which sounded loudly, blocking off any hope of return.

"A trap inside the body?" he muttered.

But that was senseless. The AI could not have designed this. So that left this to the dragon.

There was a flash as the girl reappeared. She was smiling.

"So, how does my special sugar cage taste? It's sweet and saccharin, right?"

Meaningless words from a madwoman.

Mad. Ah.

"I thought something was amiss in you," Gilgamesh said. "I noticed before. You are no longer of the Lancer class are you?"

Hakuno stiffened, her body tensing for a new battle.

"Oh, you're a sharp one. I keep forgetting. I got bored being a Lancer, so I changed it. I mean it wasn't very idol like, was it?"

There was nothing about this thing that was in anyway close to whatever ideal existed of an 'idol'.

His Master seemed to think the same thing.

"...I...don't think any is close to...idol like..."

"Shows how much you know! This class is perfect. Its entire meaning is to enter a world all of your own so that it's fitting for you!"

"A Berserker," Hakuno’s face took on that blank, dead look that she sometimes acquire when gazing on such stupidity that she had no idea of how to respond.

"At least that’s why Meltlilith said when she changed my class...” the little fool mumbled. “I haven’t put it to use yet.”

"How do you even change classes?" Hakuno mumbled.

"You want to know my class? Well I can’t just tell you! You have to solve this puzzle to go forwards!"

"I already know-"

"Only then will I tell you my true class name!"

"Leave it, Mongrel," Gilgamesh said. “Madness is a trait of that class, is it not? As is the sheer meat-headedness. Berserker is the worst of Servant classes.”
For some reason, he wanted to make that point very clear.

“Anyways, I’m back to hijacking! If you lose, it’s game over, by the way!”

She vanished, and Gilgamesh shook his head. This puzzle was an insult to the name. The gates were arranged by color, with only a small switch to change between. Obviously, as the switches were other colors than the gates nearby them, it would be necessary to change them to match. It appeared that whatever time this girl had lived in had never worried about such things as robbers. Or, more likely, she had had servants for that kind of thing.

“This is truly pointless. The pattern is abundantly clear.”

“I can see it. It’s the colors.”

“Correct. You should finish it in a few steps.”

“Miss Hakuno…please…please find a way around this,” Gilgamesh heart the AI whisper. “She’s building more of those things in my body…too much more and…”

“Don’t worry, we’ll make it in time,” Hakuno said.

It took no time at all for Hakuno to match the colors together, causing each gate to open and then to rush into a new platform where Elizabeth’s voice chimed out from some other location.

“No way, you got it? W-well, that was only the first one!”

She had apparently been learning how to lie from her pervious Master.

“A-anyways, I told you that I’d tell you what I was right? Well, listen and be amazed! I was once the singing, stabbing spear-type idol, but now, now, I’m the singing, dancing Berserker idol from the depths of madness!”

“She’s certainly gone off in the wrong direction,” Gilgamesh said. “Woman, why do you retain your own character? As a Berserker, you should have retained no rational faculties at all.”

That was, after all, the meaning to the class. A vulgar class of screaming lunatics.

“I’m…special! I might have Mad Enhancement, but I’m not letting go of my ego! I mean, I’m already mad, right!”

Gilgamesh had Hakuno were both silent, looking towards where her voice seemed to be coming from until Hakuno cleared her throat.

“She’s not wrong,” Hakuno said.

“I suppose the Madness Enhancement on one is already mad would not have the same effect,” Gilgamesh shrugged.

Thankfully, the little dragon had vanished again, leaving them to deal with the ramp that lead down to another platform and apparent. They headed down, Hakuno forcing herself to continue running. While this was not her body as such, he could see that she was pushing herself, and, for once, Gilgamesh held his tongue.

He would have done the same.

The platform that was coming up where the dragon was waiting for them. She looked confident, but
Gilgamesh noted the hint of worry in her eyes.

“Just so you know, this puzzle is completely impossible to beat! I’ve already gone through it, and I needed to warp though,” she said proudly.

Gilgamesh looked at the puzzle, if such a thing should be called by that name. It was merely a larger version of the thing above them. There was something about this floor though…needlessly complex looking, but also foolishly innocent at the same time…

“Still, since you’re a fan, I’ll talk a little. So, mind you, a noble is talking so you have to answer truthfully. I’ve told you that this body can become me with the virus, right? That’s because she meets the requirements: beauty, such as it is, youth, and chastity!”

Gilgamesh blinked.

Of all the-

But noticed that his Master, who had stiffened at the mention of the body that the dragon planned on stealing, was starting to show a faint pink tint around her face.

“What?” The AI asked, sounding horrified. “What are you- and I’m an AI, so I can’t-“

A smile started to form on Gilgamesh’s face.

“Oh? That is a standard. Would you care to repeat it?”

The stories claimed that Elizabeth Bathory had been with child at the age of fourteen. He had assumed that that been the age she had manifested out due to some unnamed wish to return to somehow avoid the fate that had befallen her, but could it be that those rumors were false?

Could it be that, regardless of the rumors, the husband of this little dragon had never consummated their marriage, but rather remained on campaign indefinitely until he was finally killed?

“Alright, Squirrel, answer me now: “virginity is to be saved until marriage, but up to what age can you keep protecting it?”

Gilgamesh watched as his Master’s normally pallid face flushed a deeper and deeper pink until it was nearly crimson. He noted that she refused to meet his gaze as she kept staring at the dragon, shifting a little from foot to foot.

“I…I guess forever?” she asked, the pink deepening even further.

“Right! I’m so glad you agree! I feel so much better! I’m going to head back and have quick blood bath. See you!”

And then she vanished.

“The Berserker’s Mad Enhancement seems to have increased her honesty. That is a new use. Although, on the other hand, the usual situation is unpleasant to deal with…”

But he had little thought in his words. That honestly had already told him the secret to this SG, and it had shown him something else. Something far, far more amusing about his Master.

Somehow, it was no surprise, yet it was, from his perusal, uncommon for this modern time, as well as for a mage. And somehow, he found himself absurdly pleased at this knowledge.
Of course, that was due to the fact that it proved that BB, the Egos and the nun had, each of them, failed to seduce his Master. Not that he found her innocence endearing.

Yet, it was something that his Master would never be able to use against the dragon.

Two virgin maidens attempting to use that status against one another would fail spectacularly. The dragon would deny, and his Master would be unsure how to so much as broach the topic. As such, this duty fell to himself.

If they wished for the dragon to surrender herself and her secrets, he would permit her to see perfection. As well as to allow his Master a glimpse of the king she had tied herself to.

As Hakuno began again to solve the poor excuse for a puzzle, he followed beside her, a smile starting to form on his face.

The first time Hakuno saw Gilgamesh naked was a shock.

The puzzles that Elizabeth was building weren’t all that hard. They just got more elaborate as they were time consuming. Gilgamesh, as some point of pride seemed to be refusing to help, though he seemed to be watching her with an odd expression.

Hakuno was getting used to reading Gilgamesh’s expressions, but this wasn’t normal. His eyes were strangely sharp as he watched her solve the puzzle, but he didn’t seem to really be focusing on her. Maybe he was just assessing how well she did puzzles for some reason.

Finally, after the second one was done, she moved to the ramp.

“Come, Mongrel, we must hurry on. Spiritron world or not, I will not permit this Servant to receive incarnation,” Gilgamesh urged.

Hakuno nodded. She knew that Gilgamesh wasn’t as worried for Sakura as she was, but she wasn’t surprised by that, but at least he seemed to want to protect her.

They headed down another ramp, but she stopped suddenly when she saw a figure huddled in the corner of one of the platforms between ramps. He was dressed in the school uniform, and his seaweed hair was all too familiar even as he was sitting with his arms wrapped around his knees.

“Shinji?”

“It’s you!”

Shinji looked up at her with wide eyes for a second, but then scrambled to his feet, coughing once and then trying to take on a something like a proud pose, but even then he hung his head, for once looking every inch his real age.

“Meltlilith got me,” he muttered. “She shrunk me down as much as she could and just…tossed me in with the virus. I don’t have any contract with Elizabeth anymore, and I can’t find a way out, either…so I guess it’s a death sentence, isn’t it?”
He crossed his arms and laughed, in that attempt to copy Gilgamesh. It was a big show, but she could see the fear in his eyes. It was obvious just how scared he really was if he was going to say that in a place like this. Shinji never showed he was beaten, even when she’d defeated him in the first round. Only when…when the end had come.

“I’m glad you’re still alive at least,” Hakuno said.

Shinji scowled and looked away.

“If she’d left me alone, I totally would have beaten you,” he muttered.

“Child, when you receive mercy, thank your benefactor. Lest they change their mind and revoke that gift,” Gilgamesh said, but his voice was less of a bark and more of a stern rebuke of a spoiled child.

Shinji mumbled something under his breath.

“What was that?” Gilgamesh asked his smile like as smooth as a coiled snake.

“Thank you!” he yelled. “Alright? Thank you!”

“Rin, Rani?” Hakuno called.

There was a sign from Rin.

“You’re seriously way to nice, Hakuno.” Rin muttered. “He still betrayed us, you know that right?”

“I know, but…well…” she grinned at Shinji. “He reminds me Shinji-kun, who helped me during my greatest trial…”

Gilgamesh laughed at that, and so did Rin.

“That was modeled on me, you know!” Shinji yelled back.

“Then try to be half as useful,” Rin snapped. “There are a lot of things I’ve got to say to you, Shinji, but we’ll wait. Come back to the check point, and I’ll help you back.”

Shinji just nodded.

“Do you need help?”

“Of course not!” Shinji snapped, all his old pride back. “I’m the number one gaming champion in Asia! If I need to get to the exit, I’ll be fine! I don’t need anyone’s help! And being worried like that is pathetic! You don’t know how to read people!”

He glowered at her, but Hakuno noticed that when he turned to walk off, there was a slouch to his shoulders, and he moved slower than usual.

“Leave him, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said as Hakuno took a step towards him. “Kindness to a proud enemy such as himself merely accentuates his defeat. He has made his own punishment.”

“I know I should be madder at him, but…I don’t know, seeing him like that…I guess it reminds me if when I beat him,” she said.

She expected him to mock her a little, but he merely shrugged.

“Regardless, that child must face the situation his actions created. You do him no favors. However,
in light of his situation, I will mitigate the punishment that I had planned for him.”

He was watching her with that same strange look on his face as before, but Hakuno smiled a little at him.

“Thanks, Gil. He probably doesn’t deserve it, but…”

She’d already killed him once. It was hard to resent him for hating her.

“I do nothing for you, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said, looking away. “The child survived and has caused little damage after this. If you are assuming this to be your reward for solving these puzzles unaided…you will receive another…”

Somehow about the smile on his face made a shiver run up her spine. It was too…pleased. She just…had a terrible feeling.

The final puzzle was even bigger than the last, and while Elizabeth called it ‘god tier’ all that had done was make Gilgamesh snicker to himself a little. In the end, the whole thing was always the same. She just had to make sure that she matched everything with the right color the first time, and then activated the trap.

She was more worried about Sakura.

She hadn’t said much other than pleading with her early to hurry. If they managed to stop Elizabeth, would they even be able to save Sakura in time? What if she was in a coma, or…just was a different person who didn’t remember anything?

Like her.

Though…if that was the case, then…Hakuno would help. She knew how that felt at least.

The final gate opened, leading them to a wide open place where Elizabeth was standing there, waiting for them, clearly ready for a battle.

“T-that can’t…are you some kind of genius?” Elizabeth asked, staring between Hakuno and Gilgamesh, wide eyed. “How did you solve those? Why? I even tried to make sure you’d love until the end too! If you’d just stayed in those puzzles…you could have just melted away peacefully and quietly…”

“You know I wasn’t going to do that,” Hakuno said softly. “Now, I guess-”

“You can wait, Master,” Gilgamesh said, stepping forwards. “I turned that puzzle solving to you. As your reward, you may leave with worthless dragon’s disciple to me… I am sure you have already figured it out, but her SG is about to be revealed…”

Wait? What? There hadn’t been any clues. What was there to figure out?

“What…do the puzzles have something to do with it?” Hakuno glanced from Elizabeth and back to Gilgamesh. “The Five Though Stopping Meditations aren’t responding yet and-”

Gilgamesh laughed, shaking his head.

“There is no need to feign ignorance! But I will not allow you to handle this. The lovely voices of miserable girls like herself are nothing but an instrument to be played by the king!”

That ominous feeling was back.
There was a strange light in his eyes as he looked at Elizabeth. It wasn’t the way he’d looked at BB when under that virus, so it wasn’t that he found the girl even slightly attractive. If there was anything that she could compare it too, it would be that look he had when he’d been teasing her on the Panty Floor.

He stepped forwards.

“I too must enjoy myself once in a while. You may stay where you are and pay reverence to the power of your king!”

Something…very bad…was about to happen.

Elizabeth seemed to be catching the feeling as well, since she glanced at him nervously.

“W-what are you talking about, Gorgeous… You know…when I think about it…you’ve been… really well behaved since you’ve got here… But your eyes are as awful as always. Like a snake… those eyes are the embodiment of all men’s coldness and cruelty and indelicacy! I…I just wanted to pick on that Squirrel over there. This has nothing to do with you! If you leave…I’ll let you go!”

Gilgamesh gave her a displeased look. Hakuno could see it from where she was.

“That mongrel is my Master, dragon, and I will not permit you to sully that treasure. Besides, there is no need to attempt to put things unkindly, artless dragon…and…I am sorry.”

…What.

Did Gilgamesh…apologize?

No. No there was no way, that she’d heard that right. Gilgamesh didn’t apologize for anything.

“W-why are you apologizing? You didn’t do any-”

“No, as a representative for all men, including the man who was your husband and left your marriage bed cold, I apologize for the poor judgement that fails to notice the signals women send. Even I, maiden dragon, have ignored you as you made such earnest pleas.” The smile on his face was anything but apologetic. “This is the least I can do, and you would do well to accept it. Now, let us begin! AOU CAST OFF!”

Blinding light suddenly flared so brightly that Hakuno had to shield her eyes. She looked away, but then, as it faded…

What.

What was she…

What was he…

Gilgamesh was naked.

He stood with his arms crossed, wearing a very pleased smile on his face, and giving Hakuno a splendid view of…everything. From the blood red tattoos that stood in a strange pattern against his skin, to the fact that it looked like he was nothing but lean sculped muscle, to…

It was glowing.

Flowers seemed to bloom around him, and his…it…glowed with a golden light.
Hakuno stood, opened mouthed, staring. She should look away. She should really look away because he would never let her hear the end of this, but she just stood and stared.

Had…

Was…

Had he turned into a Berserker on this floor?

“BWAHHHH!” Elizabeth screamed in shock. “Pervert! Pervert! Pervert! What are you doing getting naked in front of people!”

Gilgamesh just laughed.

“It is natural that you are shy! My naked body surpasses even the most perfect diamonds of this world! All the more so unto virgins!”

There was practically smoke coming from Elizabeth’s ears.

A…a virgin…but…

“But I forgive such innocence. Approach, and you may be granted the king’s favor!”

It was still glowing.

“Babababababababababa-”

Maybe Gilgamesh broke her. Hakuno didn’t blame her.

“W-are you an idiot!” Elizabeth screamed. “Like I would be so dumb as to wait for my husband to… to…”

“Then approach me,” Gilgamesh said, raising one hand. “If you are accustomed to such things, you may stare more fervently.”

The naked king posed provocatively.

It was super effective.

The SG activated as Elizabeth’s face turned the same color as her hair.

“Now, Hakuno, take it!” Gilgamesh called, turning to look at her with a smile, and…himself in full view. “Hahaha, this is not the time to be dazzled by me! However, when we are done, you may stare all you like, should you desire it!”

“I AM DOING NOTHING OF THE SORT!” Hakuno all but screamed as she ran past him, closing her eyes and activating the code cast.

I’m sorry, Elizabeth. I’m so, so sorry that I brought this Servant with me.

She grabbed the glowing orb and turned to face Elizabeth, away from…him. She…she had no idea what to even say. What she could say. Just…she wanted to get Elizabeth out of Sakura.

Yes.

Yes, she’d focus on that.
But…the fragment showed no signs of vanishing like the others. Rather she stood there, staring at the man a little behind her with an open mouth. Hakuno wasn’t even sure she’d noticed the SG. Or maybe wishing that she’d vanish like the others.

“You…you…you…GORGEOUS PERVERT!” She suddenly turned tail and ran. “FATHER, HELP ME! The nudists are after meeeee!”

Hakuno stared after her, scared to turn around until the…light…was covered. Once it did…she slowly turned to see Gilgamesh standing, staring after her with his arms still crossed and a displeased look on his face.

“Hmph… That did not go as planned. That was the point where that useless dragon should have been entranced by my glory and surrendered herself. I suppose it cannot be helped. I was simply too beautiful for her. Perhaps it was those ‘effects’ that the AI involved… Still, she is in some sense, one who pursues beautiful and valuable things. Perhaps she was also trembling in fear at the knowledge of that difference between myself and her.”

He turned to her with a smug look on his face. Clearly waiting for…something. Praise maybe?

“I…I…have no comment.” Hakuno said. “I…”

She had no idea what to do with this, and if she said the wrong thing, or even the right thing she had no idea what kind of snake she was poking at.

Gilgamesh laughed at her expression though, something…slightly less intimidating than the laugh he’d given her before.

“It is, of course, natural that you would be speechless before my perfect body! I will take that as your reverence!”

There was a crackle of static, but this time, it was on a private line.

“So…the King of Heroes gets really dumb sometimes, doesn’t he?” Rin whispered.

“They say that the line between genius and idiocy is paper thin,” Rani agreed.

Hakuno was pretty sure that was insanity, but it wasn’t wrong. Or…maybe he was teasing her? Or… using some kind of tactic…

“It has been determined that we will delete the last five minutes of footage from the Student Council’s records. …President Hakuno…let us…return our attention to the removal of that virus…”

Hakuno nodded slowly.

She didn’t need to know why. In fact, it was probably better if she didn’t.

Maybe…

Maybe if she pretended that the whole thing had never happened…

“Now, my mongrel, we must pursue our quarry!” Gilgamesh said.

He was still smiling, and clearly in a good mood for some reason. The smile widened as he looked at her, and her still red face.

King of Nudists.
“R-right,” Hakuno managed out.

Why was it that he looked his most human when he was doing something utterly insane?

She wouldn’t think about this.

Ever. Again.

Chapter End Notes

Now that was a weird chapter. Also, Gilgamesh, you honestly impress me with just how completely your ego can rewrite the situation so that you think you’ve achieved a victory.

Hakuno is also starting to realize that Gil...doesn't understand some social things...

Also, as some backstory on Elizabeth Bathory. She was married at the age she's shown in the game. However, there were rumors that she'd had a child with a peasant before that. There's no evidence of a child, though that doesn't mean much. But she never seems to have had a kid with her husband either. Her husband, another minor noble, was usually off fighting wars, which gave Elizabeth free reign over the area. I'm assuming that it's possible that the man honestly was never interested in Elizabeth which might have helped grow her obsession with youth and beauty. So of course, in her insanity, she'd manifest at the (conceived) perfect age.

Next Chapter:

"No one ever told me I did anything wrong!"
Chapter Summary

Elizabeth's SG comes to a close.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno really saw Gilgamesh sit in judgment of another person was in the fight with Elizabeth.

After…AOU Cast Off.

That would never be mentioned again.

Ever.

Still, Gilgamesh seemed very pleased with himself as they moved forwards to…

A Labyrinth Core.

Elizabeth was frozen in midstride, her body half absorbed by the wall, and looking backwards with shock.

Yet, regardless of the fact that Elizabeth was frozen, the virus didn’t seem to have gotten any better. Actually, she was pretty sure that it was worse. While the entire place was once a bright one, filled with the colors of the sunset that made Hakuno think about the Old School Building, now it was darkening, and the reds were deepening from something warm and bright into something that… looked an awful lot like blood.

“Apparently…she got shocked so bad that she went into her heart,” Rin said. “This…looks like a normal Core. I’m willing to bet that if you remove this you’ll have ended the Labyrinth as well.”

“Urgh… A thing like that is just…sitting in my core. It’s disgusting…” Sakura muttered. “I can feel it overwriting me.”

“But worry,” Hakuno said. “We’ll get in their and defeat Elizabeth in time. You’ll be ok and you’ll be able to fix your programing ok?”

“…Ok,” Sakura whispered. “I trust you.”

But could they use the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation to enter the relief? Kiara had been the real source behind that, and now…

“Alright, so I think you can just enter,” Rin said. “You’ve got the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation, and we’re pretty sure that that’s all that Kiara was using the whole time.”

“Hmph, we should have compelled her to hand over that codecast sooner,” Gilgamesh said softly, though he seem pleased as he looked at the giant statue of Elizabeth. “Now, let us end this stupid
dragon.”

Hakuno nodded, though she really hoped that his primary reason for wanting her gone wasn’t that she didn’t react to…

No. She wasn’t going to think about it.

Hakuno closed her eyes and took a breath. She was ready.

The transfer was smooth. All she needed to do was sort of…activate the codecast and then will it. Maybe it was Rin and Rani helping, maybe it was just that Kiara had never bothered to do her best work, but it felt less like being transferred and more like very suddenly, the floor vanished, and she was falling through empty space, Gilgamesh beside her.

She’d seen a lot of hearts up until this point, but this…this was different.

Something was scratching, like claws on a blackboard, and something was keening, like an animal in pain while a weird buzzing or rustling like thousands of insects in the distance came from both too close and too far away.

“What…”

“That is the sound of a breakdown,” Gilgamesh said. “Torment, tyrant, reproach and regret pressing down. It is the sound of a predator in its death throws, being devoured by that which it thought so much weaker.”

He wasn’t smiling anymore, and that smug look had vanished. If anything, his face was strangely remote as he gazed into the darkness. She’d seen that look before, sometimes, but never during the beginning of a battle.

“So, this is what this woman’s true nature was… a dragon, near death, being devoured by what she saw as ants.”

So…this was pain? It wasn’t like Jinako’s heart. That had been stagnant while still slowly breaking down, this…

“I think…she broke down a long time ago,” Hakuno said softly.

“…loud…it’s so loud…” A pained whisper hissed around her. “Please…please just quiet down already! It hurts…it always aches…even at the best of times…just…don’t churn things around anymore in my head alright!”

She’d mentioned that. Migraines. Hakuno had had them once too. Back in the real preliminaries. When she’d been fighting against the programing that had apparently gone so wrong that it had stolen everything from her but her name. But this was different. This was something far far more sinister.

“…please…please stop… Stop gnawing on me! Pigs and worms and men and women… they’re all taking my body, my castle, my blood…and crunching, grinding, stretching, breaking it!”

That least bit was a scream.

“It hurts…it’s too loud…The sound of my breaking is too loud! Is…is this my headache or your abuse? I can’t tell what’s causing the pain anymore!”
“It is both, of course,” Gilgamesh said, glancing towards Hakuno. “This woman’s human nature forced her to keep listening to the pain of those she considers refuse, so that, even now, she cannot wholly be a monster and cannot wholly be a human.”

“Th...they’ll steal everything!” Elizabeth was ranting now. “Those filthy beasts will steal everything from me! Pigs will take my virtue. Squirrels will take my jewels. Rabbits will steal my beauty. They’ll gnaw on my dragon’s scales and gnaw and gnaw and gnaw and gnaw until there isn’t anything left of me!”

“I’m scared, and everyone says it’ll hurt when I marry Ferenc. Father said this was a woman’s duty...to smile and bear it...but Ferenc didn’t...he did nothing. He left. He left and fought and never came, and gave me other women’s children to claim as my own...”

The voice was almost a whisper but then broke into hysterical laughter.

“But that’s over now! I’m the mistress of this castle! Revenge! This is my revenge! Worms that squirm around with nothing but their own lives! The worms said I was beautiful, so I’ll make you my fertilizer. That’s the best, right? I’ll pick you up and crush you under my claws! I’ll grind you! Impale you! That’s the first time the pain stopped, and the noise stopped!”

She was laughing again.

“I killed lots of subjects. How many? How should I know? But I made sure to come up with a new plan for them every day! Isn’t that just the best show of good faith? Wasn’t I a good countess? After all, I’m the daughter of dragons. Why shouldn’t humans be my prey?”

As Hakuno was starting to feel faintly sick as she listened to this turn further and further to madness, Gilgamesh kept that impassive look on his face.

“It is true that dragons will devour humans, as is their nature, and as such dragons and humans are incompatible, but often, it is humans who have made the first move, in search of what can be gained, be it wealth, reputation, or the rumored qualities of the dragon’s corpse. Yet, this woman came to attack people of her own free will. As a dragon, there could be none lower. No other would count her as a member of their race.”

“So, somehow those two natures made someone who isn’t either...”

“Are you pitying her, Mongrel?” Gilgamesh asked, that strange expression still on his face.

“Not like she is,” Hakuno said. “I...I guess I-“

“Urgh it’s so much louder than normal! There’s some impertinent eyesore of a Servant in here isn’t there?”

The smile that came to Gilgamesh’s face was a crescent of pure malice at her words.

“Oh? You seek to bare your fangs at me, little dragon. Why not speak of your regrets? Perhaps this woman will attempt to convince me to spare you.”

That would be impossible, but...there was something else to his words. Something both far crueler towards Elizabeth and...something else.

“Regret!? I feel no regret! Exploitation is my obligation as a noble! Torture is the proper way to rule! Why shouldn’t I...? What’s wrong with it!? I was protecting the property of the Bathory family! I fulfilled my duties, made those wretched noises stop. All of them, all of them, deserve nothing more
than to be crushed and drained to keep my skin warm. I will be eternally beautiful and young! That alone is the mark of who I was, and that is the place of livestock!”

The end was in sight.

“Do you pity her now?” Gilgamesh asked.

Had he…had he done that so she wouldn’t feel bad about what was going to happen?

“How can I?” Hakuno looked down at the approaching floor.

“Good. Now, prepare your spirit for the fight after this. It is you alone who must finish this battle!”

They landed in the center of Elizabeth’s heart, where the girl herself was waiting, but…she seemed different. Her energy and immaturity had vanished. She merely waited, calmly, almost with something like dignity.

“So, you came,” she said, more like she was talking to herself. “I knew you’d come before I could finish taking his body.”

There was no admiration in her tone, or shock, or really much of anything. She hoped for nothing. Maybe this was the true face of Elizabeth Bathory. Not the uninhibited, childishly cruel girl she had seen.

“Hey. This is the end, so let me ask you…why are you getting in my way?” Elizabeth asked. “When I think about it logically, we really don’t have any reason to fight…”

It didn’t even sound angry just…lost.

“We didn’t have a reason to fight,” Hakuno said. “You’re trying to take over the body of my friend. You’ve forced me to come someplace no one should be trespassing. You’ve been trying to keep us all on the Far Side. And that’s not even starting on BB letting lose all of human desire and ending up killing everyone!”

But Elizabeth didn’t respond. She wasn’t even looking at Hakuno, just keeping her gaze somewhere to the left.

“Really? That was the truth? I thought you were all just…giving lip service. …fighting for such a reason…” Then she turned, a smile blooming on her face and the pure madness that had killed over six hundred women glittered in her eyes. “WHO CARES? The future of the Earth doesn’t matter! All civilization can be wiped out, so long as I’m the most beautiful. That is my absolute law and truth. It’s better that they all die! You get it? You claim humanity needs to be saved, but there’s no need for that effort! You should just save me instead. That’s the same thing! My beauty is the only human thing!”

The sheer insanity of that statement…was actually chilling, and Hakuno had no idea what to say to that. But apparently, Gilgamesh did.

He stepped forwards, that remote look was back.

“To devour all the earth to gain your desires…that is good. That is what it means to be human,” but his expression remained impassive as he raised one hand. “however, that demand is only something that can be allowed for a desire that is truly your own. A false desire is a no shout to the heavens. It is the wail of a child. Daughter of dragons, is this “beauty” of yours even the thing you wish for in truth? Or just a mask over the thing you want most?”
Elizabeth jerked back as if she’d been slapped, but she recovered quickly, focusing on Hakuno.

“I knew your stupid Servant would try to look clever, but what about you, Hakuno? Am I really evil? Are our values really that different?”

Hakuno didn’t need to pause.

“Yes,” Hakuno said. “You treat other people like something to throw away like garbage. You’re trying to kill my friend’s soul. You’ve killed countless NPCs. And that doesn’t even count the women you slaughtered and bathed in when you were alive. There are times…moments…that I can see the person you might have been, but that person doesn’t really exist, does she? I can’t ever agree with someone like you. You don’t even think you’ve done anything wrong, do you?”

“Hmph…I guess I thought you had promise,” Elizabeth smiled widely. “But in the end, you’re just another virgin for me to bathe in!”

She summoned her spear.

“This is the true final stage!”

She rushed towards Hakuno moving with a speed that was she could barely even follow.

But the days when she’d been able to push Gilgamesh and herself around to their limit were over. Gilgamesh was suddenly front of Hakuno, a single hand grabbing the spear and aiming a hard kick that sent Elizabeth staggering back.

But Gilgamesh didn’t let up, rather, he rushed forwards, a large sword in hand, forcing her back further.

Elizabeth feinted, moving to the side and then jumping into the air, trying to reach Hakuno to impale her, but Hakuno jumped back, running to the side and then raising a hand.

“Codecast! Release_mgi(c)!” she called.

It was a weak attack, like most of hers were, but the sudden shock was enough to make Elizabeth pause long enough for Gilgamesh to be in front of her, landing a solid hit with an ax.

Elizabeth thrust the spear forwards, and Gilgamesh blocked, but one attack did manage to get through.

Gold rippled around Gilgamesh in reply, and out of every small Gate to the Treasury of Babylon, some weapon was starting to emerge.

“Gate of Babylon,” he said.

The sudden attack of weapons came from everywhere. Elizabeth manage to dodge but when she struck one of the blades, it exploded, causing her to fly back so far she nearly fell off the platform.

“No…No I won’t… THIS IS MY FRESH BLOOD DEMONESS!”

She slammed the spear down, as a castle, or maybe a stereo, raised up in front of her. Her wings suddenly seemed to grow, large and intimidating, as she flew up and landed on the spear like it was some kind of stage.

She was going to sing. She was going to sing as a high decibel assault weapon! Even Gilgamesh…
“Codecast: add_invalid()!” Hakuno screamed.

She shuddered, dizziness taking her over as Elizabeth suddenly choked, staggering and falling from her perch. Hakuno sank to her knees, breathing hard as suddenly there was someone in front of her. Gilgamesh. He wasn’t usually this close in a battle.

“I have grown weary of this farce,” Gilgamesh said softly as the Gate of Babylon opened before him, “Your persistence is noteworthy, but nothing more.”

He reached into the gates and pulled out a single sword. The hilt was golden, while the blade was a dull brown color. Since Hakuno was close by, she was able to also see…carved into the blade was a image of a dragon, its head cut off.

“W-what’s that?” Elizabeth breathed. She had collected herself from the failed Nobel Phantasm, and was looking at the blade with worry on her face.

“Oh? Is that dragon’s blood of yours reacting?” Gilgamesh asked. “As it should. This is a dragon slaying sword. The prototype to Balmung and Gram. It is quite useless in most cases, unless a dragon is before it.”

He wasn’t even done speaking before he moved, swinging the sword down with a vicious blow.

Elizabeth screamed, but using the spear managed to force herself to her feet.

“No. no. I won’t lose… I won’t accept this!” Her voice was painful.

So, this was a dragon. Even in defeat, she still was trying to stand and fight.

“Do you still not understand?” Gilgamesh asked. “Then, Hakuno, this is your moment. She is bound by a chain called vice. If she cannot move forwards any longer but stays as she is, then strike her down now.

Hakuno nodded, stepping forwards.

“I have to bathe!” Elizabeth cried. “It’s expected for a, aristocratic girl like me to be delicate. I’m a little flower. I’m not some low class workhorse like you who can just fight and fight and get sweaty and disgusting!”

The punishment was going nowhere.

“You really don’t see anything wrong with what you did do you?” Hakuno asked.

It wasn’t hard to get into Elisabeth’s SGs, but she resisted everything said. She claimed she was so much better, by virtue of being an aristocrat, but…that was the problem wasn’t it? Elizabeth could torture and slaughter the girls in her kingdom, and she could sacrifice both NPCs and participants in the Moon Cell Grail War for baths, and she felt no guilt.

Because she was an aristocrat. Those people weren’t really human to her.
“Isn’t it natural for the aristocracy to be the privileged class? We have wealth, beauty, power, and everything else that should be eternal. Why should I feel bad that I tried to keep it? I won’t like anyone take it from me! Not time, or age, or people, or anything! I won’t be like the changing moon but like the sun! Beautiful and shining forever! Of course I need that AI’s body! I deserve it more than her!”

“SHUT UP, YOU FAKE IDOL!”

The scream of rage was out of her mouth before she even realized how angry she was. Nothing else would get through to her. She didn’t see anything as wrong, all she thought about was herself. Then she’d hurt Elizabeth in the only way she could. She couldn’t talk about the murders she’s committed. Even if she wanted to. So, she’d hear the truth in the only way she could understand.

“You’re more hideous than anyone else covered in blood like that!”

Elizabeth screamed, backing up, eyes wide.

“Your eyes…I’ve never seen…but…but…what’s strange about me? What’s wrong with wanting to preserve myself? I didn’t want to marry Ferenc! I didn’t want my body to get swollen and be confined to the castle! But why didn’t he think I was pretty? So, I’m not pretty now, I’ll make myself more pretty, I’ll make myself perfect, unchanging! If I can’t have that, I can’t live!”

“Then you’re dead anyways!” Hakuno snapped. “No living thing is eternal. Everything changes, everything grows. You didn’t want to be anything more than a doll to be petted and carried around and do nothing. You don’t want to live. Living is struggle. Living is being ugly! Living is caring about other people!”

“N-No! I can’t- No! My face…and body..they don’t have a single scar! See? Aren’t I pretty?! Please look at me! Please? Aren’t I lovely? Don’t you just fall in love with me?”

“You’re covered in blood,” Hakuno said softly. “Maybe once you were pretty. It wouldn’t have been hard for you to have been loved and petted people, but now…”

“I have to do that! It makes it stay! Beauty that fades is just degradation! I can’t stand it! Not when they’re coming…coming to watch, and make noise and judge with those eyes. Eyes like yours. Eyes like his!”

She didn’t want to grow up. She was angry that her husband had ignored her. She wanted everyone to love her but never touch her. She was really falling apart wasn’t she? Her two natures conflicting, her own fear of change, her twisted worldview. All of those things alone were terrible. Together, they made a monster.

“That’s stupid,” Hakuno said. “Everyone grows up. Your husband died right? Wouldn’t it have been better for you to just move on and find love then? Rather than covering yourself in blood and thinking that made you beautiful?”

“N-no!” Elizabeth snapped. “I wouldn’t be a maiden anymore and…and…no one would love me… I-I should have used more blood, right? Made myself more beautiful, right? Then-then- that’s why you’re here, right? You want to save me, right? You’ll tell me I’m pretty, and pet me and let me bite you, and I promise even when your old and wrinkly, I’ll be nice. You’re not pretty, so you can just watch me!”

….that was it.

Gilgamesh had mentioned that being beautiful wasn’t really what Elizabeth wanted. He was right.
Elizabeth was a romantic who wanted to be loved, to cook for someone who appreciated her. But she feared giving her purity because someone would have to love her imperfections. She saw nothing wrong in what she did, so of course, she wanted a simple thing for a storybook.

She was the dragon and the maiden in one. She wanted to devour. She wanted to be saved. She wanted to kill. She wanted to be loved.

Because she didn’t want to do the things that would be necessary for her to be saved.

“…I can’t save you, Elizabeth. No one can.”

The words hung in the air. There was no hate behind it. Yes, Hakuno was angry. Yes, Elizabeth had killed so many people. Yes, she was trying to kill her and Sakura and considered herself worth every other life on earth, but somehow, seeing the shock, pain and fear on her face…

For a moment the pain on her face wasn’t the madness of the dragon, and was the person Elizabeth Bathory might have been, if she’d pushed against herself a little more.

“D-don’t…I know that…I know that already…I know I’m a murderer…It was bad…It was wrong. I… I’m sorry. I’m sorry I wanted to be loved, to be beautiful forever. Of course you can’t save me…”

Elizabeth sobbed like a child. “I don’t even know what went wrong! How can I fix something I don’t understand? You got to know me…you ate my food and you talked to me…but…NO ONE CAN SAVE ME! ALL I WANTED WAS FOR SOMEONE TO LOVE ME!”

The relief shattered.

This wasn’t truly Elizabeth, Hakuno knew. This was just another part of her, like the Instinct of Gilgamesh, but…

Hakuno stood, Gilgamesh beside her, as she was suddenly back in Sakura’s soul. It was…better looking. The color was less red and more orange and rosy again. It looked like Rin was able to start helping Sakura fight off the Melt virius…

“We did it…” Hakuno breathed. “So…Sakura…”

“She is not safe yet,” Gilgamesh said. “If you wish to save that AI, you must remove one final object.”

Elizabeth sat a distance away, clutching her hands to her chest wide eyed.

“A-are you going to delete me? Because I’m bad? But what are you saying is so bad about me? I only became this way because it’s what everyone wanted from me! I had to be pretty! An ugly woman is worthless, they said! So why?” Her voice was getting more and more hysterical. “I did what they said. I pursued beauty! Just like everyone wanted! Why are they calling me evil NOW? One day…the nobility came and captured me…they locked me up in a tower on some random charges that didn’t make sense! Why? Why did they imprison me? Why didn’t someone save me!? What’s so bad about treating subjects like pigs? They all did it! So why shun me! Was it because they wanted my land? My father said nothing. My mother wasn’t there. Grandfather, the butler, the servants, the witch, no one said anything! Why was I the bad one when no one ever said anything to me!?"

The last sentence was a scream of pain, of rage, of confusion, and of hopelessness.

She clutched her head, crying and tearing at her hair. An innocent monster. Raised to not know a sin for a sin, she’d become something purely evil without even understanding what it meant.
It was honestly…sad.

Gilgamesh stepped forwards, that remote look on his face as he looked down at the crying girl. For a moment, Hakuno had the impression of two people from two brutal eras facing one another. One who had carved out a harsh law with his own two hands, and one who had been taught she was above the law. There was no part of Gilgamesh that reminded her of the person who used AOU Cast Off.

“You claim not to know evil, because no one told you of it,” he said. “Very well then, I will show you this mercy: I will tell you, so that you might take that knowledge to your final resting place. You were never taught where sin lies or the weight of punishment or duty. However, you refused to judge your own worth or the worth of those around you. Even now, so long after those sins have been committed, you still close your eyes and ask ‘why am I being killed.’” His eyes were suddenly very, very dark. “You have refused, even to your last moment, to look a yourself and your blood drenched actions for what they were. You claim no one told you, but no one should have to. Your own human nature screamed out against you, and you persisted. That is your evil.”

The way he looked at her looked like he was seeing through her.

So, this was why his people had called Gilgamesh ‘He who had seen everything’. This was… different than what she’d expected. Gilgamesh called himself a tyrant. Someone who couldn’t care less about the people he ruled, but…she had the feeling that he found both her actions and her refusal to look at them horrible.

Maybe because…every time he called himself a tyrant…he was acknowledging and accepting his own actions, and giving attention to the pain he’d caused.

“Y-you say you’re a king…” Elizabeth whispered. “What king cares about livestock! You should want to save me!”

“Little dragon,” Gilgamesh said softly. “I am no petty monarch that requires vassals. Only my friend and my Master shall ever receive my aid. A mongrel is a mongrel. Your life means no more or less than the lives of those who you slayed. Perhaps less, as you still wish to be nothing more than a willing doll.

“No…no..” Elizabeth whispered. “I won’t lose… I won’t die…I…I can’t die! So long as Meltlilith is here, I’ll live forever!”

Gilgamesh smiled, and an ice blue barrier rose around Elizabeth.

“W-what is-“

“The punishment visited upon you. I permitted those women, whom you would have used for your baths, to make their choice. For myself to strike you down or for you to face the same sentence as before.”

“Ice well deployed,” Rani’s voice was calm and casual. “Entity locked in. Commencing rejection. There is no escape.”

“We decided we weren’t taking chances. Even if she can’t die, she can still be removed. She’ll be locked in this ice maze forever,” Rin called.

“Elizabeth straightened, looking around. “This is a prison. No. No I can’t go back to prison. I won’t go back into the dark! No one ever comes and sees me or talks to me. You’ll all forget about me! I… I sang my heart out there, but…but no one will ever hear me! No one listened!”
She turned to both of them, fear in her eyes.

“No. Please…Please…if …then at least kill me!” she screamed, falling to her knees. “Hack me up like those pigs!”

“Your judgment has already been placed,” Gilgamesh said, that remote look was terrible, with no mercy or compassion at all. “I see no reason to refuse the judgement of your peers and the women you would slay. As king, I permit it.”

“NO!” Elizabeth screamed as the walls started to close.

Hakuno couldn’t watch.

She turned her face away and closed her eyes. Yes, Elizabeth was a monster. She’d killed, and killed and she’d keep on killing, but…somehow…this was painful to watch…”

“PLEASE SAVE ME!”

The final scream finally ended, and the icy blue glow faded, but Hakuno didn’t open her eyes. It wasn’t until Rin signed. In.

“Those aren’t the eyes of a winner, Hakuno. It was dirty business, but necessary. She wasn’t backing down.” There was a bit of sorrow in her voice as well, but she ignored it quickly. “Anyways, Sakura, how are you?”

“Without Elizabeth, I’m already at 80% restoration!” Sakura’s voice sounded relieved. “I’ll need rest after this, but…there’s nothing left to spread the virus. I’ll be ok. Miss Hakuno, if you can get Shinji and return to the exit, I can…finish my self cleaning."

She sounded a little embarrassed to ask them to leave, but Hakuno nodded.

Right.

This was why she fought. Because Sakura had been about to die, and there hadn’t been another way.

“We’ll be out soon, and no one will get in here again, I promise.” Hakuno said.

But she didn’t run. Maybe she felt a little better, but those screams weren’t easy to get out of her head. Did Elizabeth even understand what Gilgamesh had said? Did it matter? She was an enemy, and Hakuno was glad for Sakura’s sake. It was the reason she fought and the reason she kept going but…

There was a hand on the top of her head. Hakuno jumped at the sudden feeling, realizing she’d been staring at the ground as she walked. She looked up to see Gilgamesh, watching her with an amused expression, all remoteness gone.

“My foolish and softhearted Master,” Gilgamesh smirked. “Your regrets are needless. She entered this battle of her own will, knowing full well that losers perish while the winners remain. So long as that fact remains, you are not at fault. You did nothing more than that which was necessary, knowing full well she felt no remorse for her actions. You are not in the position to lament over an enemy like that’s death. So do not shoulder that grief.”

While there had been insults…that was concern. Or maybe an attempt to comfort her. The feel of his touch wasn’t like BB or Kiara or even Rin when she’d wanted to check if she was an NPC. It felt…less like a statement that he could do what he wanted and more of a way to remind her that she
wasn’t alone. That he’d chosen to stand beside her.

It felt…good.

She still didn’t understand Gilgamesh at some level. There was a point where he wasn’t that different than Elizabeth. He’d been a tyrant, whose oppression had caused his own people to cry out for mercy from the gods. He judged everything by his own standards and refused to listen to others. He showed no compassion to anyone.

Yet…he had allowed Rin and Rani to decide punishment. And…

He’d told Elizabeth, as some strange mercy, what she hadn’t understood.

He worried that she’d take on too much guilt, so he told her, in his own way that she had done nothing wrong, clearly with the idea that if he said it, it was the absolute truth.

And maybe he was right. Even if she still felt sorrow for Elizabeth’s fate…she’d have to just press on.

But…

“I’m still sad for her, but…I can’t feel guilty. I guess…I can do one thing for her. Even if I couldn’t save her. I can remember Elizabeth Bathory. Or at least the girl she could have been and be sad for her. But…it’s not the same as the others in the War. I…I won’t carry that guilt, but…”

“If you wish to ascribe value to that stupid dragon in such a way, I will not rebuke you. However, if you must fret, then devote your time to my rehabilitation and your growth. The true battle is not far away. Now, let us go. I will have you rest, and the AI must repair herself.”

Hakuno lifted her head, took a breath, and nodded.

“You’re right, we’ve got Meltlilith and then…the end.”

Gilgamesh scowled into the pink sky of Sakura’s soul.

“Yes…that must be considered,” he said softly.

Chapter End Notes

Elizabeth is such a mess of problems. Though this was pretty much the pivotal moment for her redemption, so I wanted to write it out.

Next Chapter:

"The price for that story is one you will never be able to repay in your lifetime. Do you still wish to hear it?"

Gilgamesh makes a choice.
The First Time Gilgamesh Permitted Another Companion

Chapter Summary

Hakuno asks Gilgamesh a question that touches the very core of who he is. Gilgamesh makes a decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh permitted any companion but his friend was after his judgement of the dragon. On the whole, it had been a productive trip with the dragon no longer set to be a problem and even his Masters clearly speechless reaction to his perfect form, as well as a complete victory. However, he would have preferred it if Hakuno had not found it necessary to remind both of them of what was coming.

He was already displeased with that outcome.

The return to the School was hindered by the child’s appearance.

He had been waiting for them, and Gilgamesh noted that, despite his assurances, he looked ragged.

“…what happened to her?” the boy asked, looking between the two. “I heard screaming.”

It appeared that, the other half of the comedy act had genuinely cared for his partner, as much as he was capable of that emotion.

His Master looked away. Despite his earlier words the judgement clearly bothered her, if only because she pitied the human that the girl could have been. It was incredibly foolish and lead to nothing more than her own pain, but Gilgamesh said nothing.

“She’s been sealed away,” she said. “It was the only way to save Sakura. I don’t regret it, but…”

“Oh,” the child said, showing for the first time something like compassion for a Servant. “I…guess let’s get going. She’s going to clean things up, right?”

Hakuno nodded but before she could give voice to her thoughts, another, far less welcome sound came from the below them.

“I’m surprised. I didn’t think humans would be able to make it this far.”

The Ego.

Gilgamesh tensed, moving to stand in front of Hakuno. He could sense her fatigue through their bond. Managing to invalidate a Noble Phantasm and the punishment had left her with few reserves. Still, if necessary, then they would face her here.

“That’s not necessary. As much as I’d love to cut you open for that disgusting display of yours earlier, there’s nothing much I can do. I’m just a virus here, and I’ll be cleaned out by White Sakura soon enough. I can’t even report back to the original. If I could she’d break through the boundaries
of this school.”

“Your jealousy is acceptable,” Gilgamesh grinned. “However, it would be better for you to just give up.”

The virus gave him an ugly look.

“Why are you here!?” the child snapped. “Wasn’t it enough for Elizabeth and me to be here? You’re just some terminal. Kishinami, don’t talk to it. Let’s just head back.”

He was trying to stand his ground and put on a brave front, but his fear was clear.

“My, you’re inflexible, aren’t you? Doesn’t much match a worm, you know, Shinji.” The Ego, or rather her virus, spoke with malice, but it was a memory of the real thing.

The child stiffened, but glanced at the two of them and straightened again.

“W-what?” He snapped.

Gilgamesh noted with amusement that the boy was trying to imitate his own way of standing while trying to keep that idle one that he usually adopted.

“It’s true though,” The ego stepped towards them. Gilgamesh noted that the steps were awkward the moment she was not moving quickly. “You might be able to perform, but you’re a defective product with those inferior thought routines.”

An old hate, almost as old as he was surged through his veins, urging him to take out the Chains of Heaven to show this abomination just who in this little gathering happened to be the inferior product, but he did not move. The child was no matter, and he would not waste his Master’s mana on some self-important godling who had just reached the conclusion of all gods and then thought herself clever. Never so much as understanding that it was those defects that made humanity worthwhile. Perfection was unbearably boring.

“You are humanity incarnate,” the creature droned on. “An avatar of the masses. The thing I hate most: a lump of self-deception and self-affirmation. Human beings like you are the real evil. All you do is consume and leave nothing behind. Go gnaw on that and drown yourself in your own self-satisfaction in a corner somewhere.”

“A bold speech,” Gilgamesh said, baring his teeth in a smile. “It would hold more meaning if we were not within the body of the woman who you intended to devour. But that is the nature of the things you have eaten. Punishing others for the their own actions.”

“You’re worse,” she snarled to him. “If you could, you would devour the world.”

But she glanced towards his Master, and the look turned to the besotted one of her original.

“My favorite is here,” she said. “Welcome inside me. At least…that’s what I’d like to tell you, but things didn’t work out that way. I failed to turn White Sakura into me, so now the ‘me’ who would have been her is now going to be killed. Knowing my fate, Hakuno, won’t you pity me? And give me one last talk?”

His Master had stiffened.

“Miss Hakuno!” the AI’s voice was worried. “…I’ll delete her, but….but it’ll take a moment to…”
“Then it looks like we have time to talk,” the ego said, smiling. "It’s not like you can do anything, you little hypocrite. Now, let me propose this again: please stop opposing me. Eventually, I will be everything. Everyone who loves you will melt down and fuse with me. Everyone will love you. The whole world. You and me. Me and you. All will be one. They’ll all be me and dream a sweet, sensual dream of honey. I will dissolve this world. Not BB. I’m the one best suited to look after humanity. So, don’t get on my bad side.”

If the ego had assumed that Hakuno would find this declaration of love, if that was what one wished to call it, charming, than it was likely disappointed. His Master stood, her pallid face paler than ever, but that rage burning in her eyes.

But the creature seemed far too busy in the throws of her own emotions. While Gilgamesh ached to inform her that melting the world and fusing with it did indeed mean she was intent on devouring it in the most classic of senses, he held his tongue. Only a fool interrupted his enemy while she was making a mistake.

“Besides, even if I didn’t destroy BB, she’s going to destroy herself. Her ego’s almost gone as it is. It’s not that surprising, giving what she’s doing, but by the time she’s done, she’ll just be a self-defense mechanism. Nothing but a kill switch to remove the human race, so you see my way’s better. Come to me, Hakuno. The only one who can protect you is me. Not this stupid golden Servant, or BB or-”

“Salvaging spirit forms!” The AI’s voice rang out with a note of triumph, even as she intoned the words of a computer. “Virus isolated! Beginning internal cleaning to remove virus immediately!”

The Ego was not given the chance to continue her rantings, but she gave him some very interesting information.

BB’s actions were slowly killing her, while normally, that would be occasion to grant Hakuno the rest she had long since earned to regain her strength, mourn the dead and enjoy what small pleasures could be fount there, it mean that they would be required to face something far more deadly than that little Moon insect.

The Moon Cell itself, given a body with enough will for it to change from an observation device into something far worse.

The pull was not gentle but was closer to being pulled out of the way of something the AI saw as a threat rather than any impertinence toward himself, so he forgave it.

They reappeared in the Old School Building, where Hakuno stumbled. Instinctively, Gilgamesh steadied her, though moved his hand away quickly.

What was he doing?

Sakura managed to get to her feet as well, smiling though weariness had plagued her, and her hair had lightened to the shade it had been earlier.

“Miss Hakuno, Mister Gilgamesh. Mister Matou, you made it! Your vitals look alright, but…Miss Hakuno…”

“The codecast was likely too much for you.” Rin sent her a worried frown. “You should probably rest. Sakura, I can help you get to the infirmary. Shinji…” Rin smiled brightly at the boy. “We can talk later.”

The child scowled at her.
“If you really wanted to complain, you could have just let me be,” he said. “I know it was stupid. Just…leave me alone, alright?”

He stalked out, keeping his head down. The child was defeated. Whatever he’d been planning would never reach fruition, but there was something else in his motions. It was a determination that no child should have yet. The kind of desperate, hopeless determination that he only knew in one who was mortally wounded but still had breath yet.

He would watch that one.

“Sakura, are you…” Hakuno asked.

“I’m ok,” Sakura smiled. “I just need to rest a little, but…would you visit me? After you’ve slept? I know it’s selfish but…”

“You’ve just nearly had your soul eaten, you can be a little selfish,” Hakuno smiled a little.

The AI gave a relieved sigh at his Master’s permission to continue to follow her aberrant coding. She was developing into something else, and it was interesting to watch as some humanity began to take root in her.

“Come, Mongrel, leave these women to their work,” Gilgamesh said, motioning towards the door.

Sakura walked beside them for a time before continuing to the infirmary while Hakuno and himself returned to the room, now glowing crimson in the light of the ever setting sun.

Hakuno sat down on the bed, hanging her head.

“I guess I should have known that was going to be Melt’s plan. She sort of hinted it,” Hakuno said.

“It said many things,” Gilgamesh shrugged taking his seat. “It changes nothing in the end.”

In truth, he was more interested in the various technologies that allowed a human to enter the soul of another. In some ways, the magic of this time, far surpassed the mages of the past.

Hakuno lay down, closing her eyes.

“By the way…I was thinking, about Elizabeth…” Hakuno said.

Gilgamesh frowned at her

Was she truly still sorrowful over the imprisonment of a foe who would have gladly drained her of blood in the vein hope of achieving beauty?

“You mentioned before, that…her human nature pushed against…what she did, but she didn’t listen. Did you ever have the same thing?”

“Mongrel, I have told you. A dragon and a god bare little resemblance,” Gilgamesh said.

“I know, that’s not my point. Just…did you ever have something like what you described?”

Her eyes looked like his friend’s when they had told him that it was unnecessary to judge them since they weren’t human.

“There were actions I committed when my human nature pushed against me.”
“I guess…what I wanted to say was that…I’m glad you listen to your human side. I don’t know how hard it is to deal with it, but…I’m glad. From what you said that gods sounded…pretty bad. I’m sure your people were glad too.”

Gilgamesh scowled.

The gods were far more than ‘pretty bad’, but that was not the point. The words she said…

The fact that she meant every one of them…

He could not allow this!

And he hadn’t listened.

“Mongrel, I will soon forbid you from speaking when you are exhausted. The foolishness that comes from you then is beyond measure. I listen to no one but what I wish, and should I listen to my human nature, it is not for you or for any other. A king does not live for his people. It is the opposite. Now, as you seem to speak nothing but nonsense when you are tired, I will leave you so that you will speak no more!”

Gilgamesh vanished, taking on astral form and appearing in the hall.

She was glad he listened to his human nature. Glad that when the pull came, he listened for the lesser of the two, which often called for utter foolishness. He could not even claim she was glad of some benefit she received. She had none.

And…

She was going to die in days.

He punched the wall, leaving a satisfying hole that would soon be repaired and made his way to the infirmary. There were matters that needed his attention. He would not think of this.

No one would ever take his friend’s place by his side. He had promised them that. They’re value would never change. In all the world, he had but one friend. He had sworn it, and he would uphold it.

Taking astral form, Gilgamesh made his way to the infirmary, taking a moment to notice the doings of the school. As his current holding, it was best to learn the goings on. The NPCs loitered about, mostly speaking amongst themselves, though sometimes, as Gilgamesh passed, he captured snatches of the conversation.

“Did you hear what happened to that nun?”

“I honestly thought Hakuno WAS the Student Council President the whole time…”

“Kazuki’s missing…”

He manifested within the infirmary again. The AI was resting on one of the many small beds that was always unoccupied. Her hair had returned to its natural coloration, but a palidness about her informed him that she was still recovering from her ordeal. Still, this would not wait. He wished for something to distract his mind, and the question of the Berserker was all that was available at the moment.

She didn’t jump as before at his presence but did look up quickly.
“Mr. Gilgamesh,” she said. “I thought that you were going to stay with Hakuno.”

“She is currently resting,” Gilgamesh said. “Are you able to speak of your findings?”

The AI frowned, sitting on the bed.

“I wasn’t able to find much, but…I did end up recruiting some help. I could ask her, if you would like.”

“Her?”

“Don’t worry, Sakura,” a familiar, and much detested voice, sounded through the speaks, “I was planning on asking you someone just before the Shiny Golden Servant came in.”

He was not in the mood to entertain this sack of flesh.

“Look, I know you don’t like me,” the flesh bag continued. “I don’t really blame you, either. I did some crap with Hakuno, but I’ve found some things that might help. I might not be a good mage, but I’m not a bad hacker. Besides, I helped run that nun out. That’s got to be worth something.”

“What are you speaking of,” Gilgamesh snapped.

“Oh, you didn’t see?” the sack of flesh said. “I guess that makes sense, you probably would have murdered her already. I found a video of how Kiara managed to teach Hakuno those Five Meditations. Apparently, it involved grabbing her and making out with her regardless of how much Hakuno tried to get away. It was kind of nasty. I put it on Kiara’s message board when she said she was willing to help with counseling. So that everyone know what kind of counseling she meant.”

A cold rage coursed through him, How dare she. How dare she do this when he had not been present. While he had only recently taken this fight as his own and only now viewed his Master as having any worth, she had always been in contractor.

Had he known, he would not have waited for him to give him an excuse. She would have been dead already. Now he knew the origin of that light comment that Hakuno had made for how to obtain the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation.

He could not think like this. That was the point of being here. To put things aside.

“Anyways,” the sack of flesh continued. “I’ve been digging through the records of the Moon Cell, and…it’s some occult crap. I’ll show both of you.”

The small screen meant to appear as a blackboard booted up. A familiar scene appeared before him.

Hakuno Kishinami lay on the summoning ground, the doll proxy she had used to fight lay in a heap, and the bodies of the other losers of this round lay scattered like so much refuse around her. Yet, his Master still breathed, still struggled to regain her footing. She collapsed, but then tried again. He had seen this already. Heard that painful plea to live.

A flashed of light appeared nearby, and…he walked into view.

There could be no one else garbed in such splendid armor and with the same baring. Yet, there was something off about the image. While no form could be as bright as his own, the image wavered, sometimes clear as day, but sometimes almost disappearing into static and noise as something else seemed to try to replace it.
“How amusing. Even while your body prepares for death, you still struggle to stand? It is a small, but powerful echo of a great desire. For you to awaken me from my boredom induced slumber you must be a woman who desires much, in spite of your own mediocre power.”

It was what he had said to her when she had first woken him, when she had been fallen through the Sea of Nothing, but her sheer will to survive and not to give up had managed to waken him from his slumber. Yet the voice was, as the image. Sometimes the clear sound of his own glorious voice, and sometimes vanishing into static.

Hakuno struggled to stand again.

“Listen then, oh gods. You have thrown this life away? Then I will take it for myself. Answer me now, mongrel and as thanks for my generosity offer me your wisdom: are you my Master?”

The image of Gilgamesh seemed to dissolve again into static as Hakuno raised her head to behold him.

This was not how the story had gone. He had stolen her Command Seals, refusing to allow this mediocre mage to hold even one absolute command over himself. This was an ideal. Perhaps how he would have responded now, should he have known that this woman had worth from the start.

The Moon Cell was rewriting history, as the memories of the people in this building had been rewritten so that Hakuno alone had always been his Master and no one else’s.

“This whole thing is static after that, but that’s been happening in all records,” the sack of flesh said. “Sakura explained most of the situation to me. That you’re not Hakuno’s original Servant, but Sakura and I both found that there’s…literally no trace of whoever her last Servant was. Even when I go deep into the code, it’s like someone scrubbed it clear. Super occult. But the Moon Cell’s a computer. It can’t just not have any data when there clearly was some. So, it’s doing the only thing it can. It’s using Hakuno’s current data to patch the hole. The problem there is that…geez that thing has a pretty hefty ban on you. I’m surprised you woke up at all given how hard it was trying to delete you. What did you do?”

Gilgamesh just smiled.

“I was deemed too powerful for the Grail War,” he said.

That was not the whole truth, but it was the easiest. When his had been reconstructed to act as a Servant, the Moon Cell had not anticipated the simple fact that he would not tolerate the Moon Cell as having any authority of him. He did not answer to a machine anymore than then he would to man or god.

“Regardless, Jinako’s found that while there’s a conflict between the ban and the fact that your data is on the Far Side. The Moon Cell has a firewall. You know that right? To make sure that you can’t set foot on the Near Side. I…I believe that I could use this data to form a pathway for you and…fool the Moon Cell. That way, you can get to the Near Side.”

Him? Go to the Near Side? The idea of his participating in that farce of a war was actually laughable. Yet…

No! He would not make light of his friend like this. He would never have another.

“I mean, that’s the reason Hakuno’ll die right? She doesn’t have a Servant.”
He had taken Hakuno as a momentary amusement. He had no need or desire for another friend. He had determined to stand alone through all the ages of this world, and in all the world he had but one friend…

Yet the thought of that vision…

Of the gift she had given him.

Of even now, her foolish honesty.

She reached and reached and reached for him in some honest attempt to better understand him. Asking for nothing more. He had told her secrets for his fair in this increasingly interesting situation.

Yet the idea of her leaving his sight…

The AI was watching him, a newly experienced worry clear on her face.

“I will think on it,” Gilgamesh finally said.

What was Hakuno Kishinami to him?

Gilgamesh wandered, but there was little relief from his thoughts. He considered releasing his Command Seals to her, allowing her the freedom to make another contract, but the thought of anyone but himself contracted to her filled him with hot fury that any fool considered themselves worthy of that. But coming to the Near Side…

How could he so much as consider that?

It was with a good idea of frustration that he returned to their room, where Hakuno was still awake, looking over a small book that she put away when he appeared. There was another stack beside her, so Gilgamesh presumed that, in her inability to sleep, she had gone to the School library.

“You’re back,” she said.

But her eyes seemed dimmer than before.

“What is it? Your face is clouded. Is it those useless worries for that dragon again? You needn’t pain yourself. I will hear it.”

He’d rather consider her foolishness than to dwell on his own thoughts.

“I…alright. It…it wouldn’t be right to go into things with Melt and BB when…there’s something I don’t understand. So…why did you give up that elixir of immortality?”

“What?” Had she truly been so concerned over that.

“Or…why did you look for immortality in the first place? The Epic claimed that you were afraid of death but…”

Gilgamesh closed his eyes. Again, she surprised him. Again, he underestimated her. Once, not too long ago, he would have assumed that she was simply too stupid to understand, but now…

It was that she wanted to understand better. Not for gain, or the dream that he would grant her favor,
but because she refused to use him as a Master and nothing more. Or rather, to use him as a mediocre Master.

Because that was who she was to him.

He had an answer.

When faced with her constant attempts to reach out to him, how could he not respond? He knew Masters rarely showed any interest in their Servants save for what they could gain. He had refused to tell Hakuno his story, seeing her as no better, but instead warned her to learn for herself. It appeared that she had.

“I see. So, you’ve finished my epic. I will not ask why you question such a thing then.” He opened his eyes smiling at her sensing something shifting. “However, that question touches on my deepest level. I will answer if you wish to know, but are you truly prepared, Hakuno Kishinami? You are asking me to tell an irritating story, and that will incur a debt that you will never be able to repay even if you were to spend your entire life, and longer, trying. Will you still hear it?”

He spoke with amusement or rebuke. This was merely the one warning that she would have before he made his choice.

To understand a king. To truly ask to know his heart, that was a great request, and one that he would not consider for many. Only his friend had known his heart before this, and if she were to know this, she could never again be mundane.

How could he permit such a life to ever vanish from before him?

Hakuno stared at him with very large eyes, shock clear in them, as was a lack of understanding of that mean.

Was this truly his choice? Was this his answer?

He only had one friend.

And he only had one Master.

He closed his eyes.

“I—"

“Then I will tell you,” he said softly. “Well, it shall be brief. The facts are as the Epic recorded them. Lower the lights, Hakuno. This is a grossly insufficient stage, but we can at least improve the ambience.”

Hakuno watched him for a second, but seemed to nod to herself, stood and drew the curtains, and set some small candles on the table near lightening them so that they cast shadows over the crimson design, and the horse on the tapestry almost seemed to run in place, and the stuffed lion almost seemed to watch them both.

Yes. This was better. Perhaps not perfect, but sufficient for the first story ever told.

In the darkness, Gilgamesh spoke clearly.

“I was born to Lugalbanda, king of a distant era, by the goddess Ninsun, a minor goddess of wisdom. I was designed with the highest class body that a human being could possess, as well as the
wisdom to see and understand the truth of things. These were necessary, as I was born to show humanity the power of the gods and lead all human beings on earth. As a child, I was apparently considered something of a good person, or at least, the people of Uruk loved me and rejoiced that they had been given the greatest of all kings.”

That had been a deception, at some level. As a child, he had favored the gods over humanity, even if he had not given them the reverence they considered their due.

After all, the king of slaves, was nothing more than a slave.

“That’s what Karna called you, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Now, this was prior to the Code of Ur-Nammu’s establishment, and later, one called Hammerabi established some more things. However, the root of those laws were the basis on which people were able to raise complaints against other people. But I was not human, so I based my life on nothing but myself. So I gathered treasure, and laid with women.”

And the people of his city had cried out so loudly for aid, that the gods had heard. Or rather they determined that he was too far beyond their control. The suffering of Uruk meant nothing to them. They created a weapon, a chain, meant to drag him back to his position and break his pride, but that chain had become the thing the bound him, not to heaven, but to the earth. Softening his tyranny and reminding him just why he struggled.

“Later I fought beside my friend, and overthrew all the evils of the world,” Gilgamesh smiled at the memory. Then, when all of that work had finished…a certain life returned to dust… Until then, I had never lamented death nor feared it. I was, in all truth, not even conscious of it. Lives could vanish, but the true meaning of that could not reach me.”

That was what it meant to be more than half divine. It meant to be something both more than and less
than human. To whom death was incomprehensible, and thus so was the value of life.

“Yet before my eyes, someone with power equal to my own had vanished. A life that I had judged as to never end. While I was aware, in the philosophical sense, that death comes to everyone, this was the first time I had never felt that. Of course, it was not that I had never considered immorality before. I aimed to fill my treasury with all the treasures of the earth. I know that even if they had not returned to dust, in time I would have sought for it, but now…I had true reason to.”

Had he never lost his friend, that might have been a frightful thing.

“I hated death, which had stolen that life away from me, and I did fear it. For the first time in my life, I was conscious of and fearful of my own death. The journey that followed after that was, in a single word, laughable. I acted as quite the fool. They said that, in the Underworld, a man lived who had been made immortal, so for a truly humiliating amount of time, I journeyed to find him, wandering the wild lands. Just as the legend says, is it not? Wretched and fearing death with all my heart, I crawled the earth for the same reason that any human does. For in the face of death, even one such as myself was no different than any human being.”

He grinned at her, at the memory of his own humiliation.

“Those, my foolishness was far greater. For humans struggle and continue. I, unsightly as it was, was consumed in my misery. I knew not for what or whom, but I would conquer death. And so I continued to curse the heavens, that I must be immortal and indestructible.”

“Fear doesn’t sound right,”

Gilgamesh stiffened.

“Oh? You claim that I lie?”

“No. I’m not saying that at all, but…I can’t see you abandoning the duty that you gave yourself to rule over humanity. I just…I think it was more than fear. I think it was because you wanted to see it through. You’d decided to be the people’s arbiter. Not to determine their daily lives, but their fate. So…to see that “conclusion” you wanted a body that would persist until the end of the world.”

…and he truly given away enough secrets that she would guess that?

“That was fear, Mongrel, and foolishness. For when I reached the Underworld, I learned that secret. And it was hardly a secret at all. He joined the gods and gained immortality. It was laughable. The man was part vegetable. His wants, his hopes, and desires had dried up so long ago and he merely ‘existed’. That is what it means to join the ranks of the gods.” Gilgamesh scowled. “I wished to be immortal without offering up my human nature. For what could come from living in a body that felt no desire? I left the Underworld, and thought to return to Uruk and complete my collection, having at least some legacy. However,…that sage was faint of heart. Negating his own being, he told me of a certain herb. One that would reverse the flow of time on a body. Of course, I had no desire to be a vegetable, but it was a rare herb. An elixir of immortality would certainly do well in my treasury, so I entered the abyss he told me of, found the herb and returned to the surface. That is everything. I returned to Uruk, ruled the city, completed the fortifications and fell asleep. Indeed as you can see, it is exactly according to the legend. Now that the story is over, I will determine my fee. You may look forwards to it.”

Hakuno straightened from where she had sat in attention eyes wide.

“N-no!” she said. “That’s not all! I wasn’t asking why you were looking for immortality, though, it
was…interesting. I wanted to know why, once you gained the magic herb, you let it go!”

Gilgamesh sighed.

“Hakuno, how many times will you ask me to repeat ‘just as the legend says’?!” the memory was still a sore spot. “I let the snake have it. While I was bathing, conceited wretch that I was, immortality was snatched away from me. I, who approves of desire, had my desire snatched from me by a mere snake that crawls on the plains. By the simple desire of ‘hunger’. The snake gained the ability to shed its skin, for the herb held the power of rejuvenation.”

“But you didn’t go back. You went home. To Uruk. Why would you give up?”

Was that the thing she was so confused by?

Though…

“I suppose that pointless detail is mysterious. The author did not know, so she did not record it. I… cannot fully put into words what I felt that day…” Gilgamesh closed his eyes.

That day came back to him easily. The feel of the water on his skin after so long, the warm sunlight, and that vision. The light of human civilization, reaching, growing, changing, creating, desiring… overcoming the atrocities it created and making something ever growing and expanding… The future had indeed been hideous from a god’s perspective. But that moment…

“I needed no immortality modeled after the gods, as I have said, but in some corner of my heart, I hoped. When I returned to the surface of the earth, I smiled at the accomplishment. With this, I would overcome death. I would clear the shadow of my friend’s death. I imagined the people of Uruk, and their voices. Should I bring to them immortality itself, their praises to me would be greater than any before. In the end… I was a child of men, and made of that same flesh and weakness. They call it youthful indiscretion I believe. But then, vanity showed its face, and for the first time I beheld my shabby appearance, which until then I had paid no mind to. Thinking to cleanse myself before returning to Uruk, I recovered from my exhaustion at a spring. The water was like the wind of heaven, or snow of a sacred mountain. Both warming and cooling, it began to heal me. You might call it peace. It felt as if my body and soul had awoken from a long stagnation.”

He laughed softly, as he recalled that feeling.

“I had never felt as drunk on my own achievements as I did in that moment. I will confess… that was the first time I knew joy. Collecting treasures, ruling, judging, those are my nature, as natural to me as breathing is to you. That is not joy. This time… was different. For the first time, I was truly delighted and thankful to be born in this world. Though I declared to be subjects and my friend that I possessed the perspective of humanity, but until then, I had never been human. It was only then and afterwards that I was truly ‘human’. I was no longer lost, or afraid, and I had no obligations. I trembled at that feeling of omnipotence…. That was the pulse of life, and I could go on wanting it for all eternity. However, all that awaited me, fool that I was, was the snake’s thievery. I lost the magic herb, and the snake gained a new body.”

“I…”

“Yet what coursed through me was not sorrow or rage, but laughter,” Gilgamesh recalled. “I laughed so hard it was painful, perhaps it was insane, but I was unable to stop. This is how the quest for immortality ends. I laughed long and hard at my own foolishness. What had I obtained, had to boast of, but nothing? And truly I gained nothing, did I not? My empty hands were all the reward for the greatest of my journeys. For the fulfillment I had known for the first time, the joy of living, those
were things that could vanish. That was what being human was, and that was their true value. That was what I had yet to grasp until that very moment. As an immortal, what would I ever know of true bliss? In the end, immortality, is nothing more than a mistake of the mediocre. A dream for mongrels who can have nothing unless they live for a long time. I needed no eternal life. My eyes had always seen the future. I had no reason to fear dying. I could observe that conclusion, in my time, as mankind’s oldest story. My duty as a hero would be spoken of for ages to come, and it would be fulfilled. That is the end to the story. I was born as a human being, and finally, as a human being I died after tasting of joy.”

He closed his eyes, seeing that light before him once more.

“I am sorry. I once told you, Hakuno, that I was born perfect. That was not accurate. I was immature once. I spend much of my live maturing. My body did so with my friend, but my spirit reached maturity there. I looked to the sky, and it spread before me forever, and I could see through the months and years. My body might rot, but humanity’s world would still grow, its light unquenched. I even perhaps could and can now see a light of many millions of years to come. And I would return. Recorded in the Throne of Heroes. Reconstructed by the Moon Cell. I would return to see that future come to pass, until the day humanity grew past my garden, and rowed into the sea of stars. Until they reached the end of the sky, to their true conclusion. So, I returned to Uruk, and ruled as a man until my great sleep.”

He knew that their bond was allowing that feeling to pass through to his Master, and he permitted it. He liked the wide-eyed look on her face.

“You gave it up after that?” she asked.

“Well, after Uruk had been completed, I did return and retrieve it. It was a rare treasure if nothing else.”

Hakuno had the gall to give him that dead look that she so often gave others when their stupidity was so great, she could not respond.

“You’ve never been freed of selfishness, have you, King of Heroes?”

“Do not say it as such!” Gilgamesh said, feeling…surprisingly unsure by that reaction. “Gathering treasure is an instinct for me. Just…let it pass without comment! They say that if you are well prepared, you need not worry. I will never have trouble should some situation arise where I must revert to a child…”

“I pray that never happens,” Hakuno shook her head.

And of course, he was not ever freed from selfishness. That was what it meant to be a king.

“When I returned to Uruk,” he said softly, “I found it in ruins…its people had long grown weary of their absent tyrant and looked to other cities. Only one, an innkeeper and priestess of that goddess I hate most remained. Telling me ‘someone should be here to complain’,” he laughed, shaking his head, but somehow, he wanted her to know this. “I do not repent of anything, Hakuno. Such sentiment is an insult to the people of Uruk. I am their tyrant, now and forever. A people must live for it’s king. Regardless of his decrees.”

“What does the king live for?” Hakuno asked.

“That is the most obvious of answers, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh laughed, “A king lives for the thing that gives him joy. His pleasure.”
Yes.

That was right.

“…I understand,” Hakuno said softly, “But...you know...Uruk...the people. They didn’t see you as a tyrant in the end.”

She picked up one of the books that she’d been reading before he’d entered.

“Does that matter?” Gilgamesh smirked.

No. It didn’t.

“I think so. I know you’ve done terrible things,” she said. “I read the whole epic, but...the people of Uruk, really talked well of you. I was confused by their praises of you at the start, but at the end, they seemed to see you as a great king. I can’t say I forgive anything you’ve done, since it’s not for me to forgive anything or not. They forgave you, and they came back in the end. So...yes, you were tyrant, but you suffered for it, and...it sounds like you grew up and learned what it meant to be human. You changed.”

For a moment, Gilgamesh stared at the woman. Some part of him...had assumed she would shy away from him after that story, yet she stood there, that fire ever burning, and smiled at him. Claiming such foolish things...that he was in truth human, and like any human capable of change...

A king lived for his pleasure.

And his pleasure was humanity.

But this was more. Something more specific than simply humanity as a whole.

It was his pleasure to keep this Master, who had offered her life to him, foolishly giving and foolishly compassionate. Who never left him bored, who challenged, balanced and was capable of supporting even his immense power.

It was his nature to take treasures and to protect them. That was nothing more than instinct, and Hakuno was a treasure of great value. But this little Master...was also a pleasure. One that he had not known in a very long time, perhaps...one he had never known.

He had reached the answer.

Hakuno Kishinami was not his friend. That place was taken, and would be forever unchanged, one could not grow up a limb that had been severed or a sibling who had been lost.

Hakuno Kishinami was his Master, not a friend, but a companion.

And a life that he would not permit to vanish from before him at any time, and here, in this digital space, that could be made true.

The first time Hakuno really understood Gilgamesh was after his story.

For so, so long she had wondered, somewhat fearing that the true nature of this Servant was an evil one.
But…she thought she might know.

The story ended. Gilgamesh had both learned the value of human life, and persisted in selfishness, but…that was what he viewed as human, but…she was starting to see something. The thing that had confused her about him for so long.

To Gilgamesh, whether his judgement appeared equal to the truth of the universe, or some misgovernment done in drunken oblivion, if he performed it, it would be the unquestionable ruling of a king. Maybe it was ridged and uncompromising to the point of irrationality at times, but…that was what it meant to be an absolute ruler. Living in a time with no law, and no standards but his own…

That was the true nature of the man who had led her there.

Gilgamesh smiled at her, something…like amusement in his eyes.

“Oh? Are you looking at me with reverence now? Very well, you may look as you wish. If you would prefer a change of clothing, I would not object.”

That sounded dangerously close to what he’d promised her after the…Cast Off…

Seriously, she couldn’t think about that!

“N-No!” Hakuno said, shaking her head violently. She didn’t revere him. Not now, not ever. “It’s just…as a Master… I wanted to understand you, and to work with you… not just as a Servant, but as a person. I’m… I guess I’m just glad to know that the thing that lies in the root of you…it’s not evil…”

She glanced down, but then stiffened.

“I’m not saying you’re a good person or anything!” she said quickly.

Way too quickly.

Gilgamesh laughed, pounding the thrown and all but shouting.

“Ah, you’ve given in then?” he asked, grinning at her, but the smile was, while filled with mischief… wasn’t filled with malice. “Is that not what this is? As with Rin’s SG?”

He was teasing her.

“It is not!” Hakuno crossed her arms and looked away. “I don’t express my emotions in such embarrassing ways!”

Like she was doing right now.

But…there was something different in Gilgamesh, as she leaned on the arm of his throne, watching her. Some tension she’d never noticed until that moment seemed gone. While he still looked at her with that same haughtiness, there was something… different.

“Do not try to hide it so. It only makes your reverence more obvious, and that will embarrass even me,” He closed his eyes, and the smile seemed… softer than normal, and somehow warmer. “But this is a fine place to stop. The old stories can end here. There are new stories to be told. Continuing this one would only lead to self-conceit. Rest. Tomorrow we begin our challenge to the ego.”

“Alright,” Hakuno said.
But before she could lay back, a familiar golden orb formed at where Gilgamesh’s heart was. An SG. For a moment, he stared at it, but then seemed to throw it to her.

“Very well,” he said. “You may have this as well as that story. You may add it to that debt that will never be repaid. Look to when I inform you of the price with anticipation.”

He was grinning at her. As always, there was something cruel that lurked in that smile, but…there was also something else. Something that she couldn’t name, that somehow…he felt like she could rest. Even knowing that he thought she owed him some great debt…because he meant it. Whatever he was planning…was something to anticipated.

And while before she would have dreaded that, now…maybe she trusted him.

Chapter End Notes

Woooo that's the end! And honestly, it was sooo worth it.

Ten thousand comments... I honestly don't know what to say other than that the response and love that this story has gotten honestly blew me away. You're all the best, and I look forwards to your responses every time I write a chapter. I'm looking forwards to continuing with other chapters and other fics. Thank you for the comments, the inspiration and the fun that I've had since I started!

Next Chapter:

"We need bathing suits."
The First Time Hakuno Really Saw Gilgamesh Open Up

Chapter Summary

A special rule forces Hakuno and Gilgamesh to look for swimwear. Hakuno adjusts herself to Gilgamesh's change towards her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time that Hakuno heard about Gilgamesh's water park was opening up was after BB announced the need for a ‘beach’ level.

The BB Channel had activated just about the second that they had walked in, with the news that BB was now standing at the final defensive layer of the Moon Cell, and apparently they were supposed to go through the next layer to do a swimsuit modeling competition. Which Gilgamesh seemed to have decided was all thanks to him and his Cast Off.

If this was a real school… was that something they would have done? Maybe. It…actually could have been fun.

But that wasn’t important.

As they returned to normal, Gilgamesh, who had taken the same seat as before was frowning thoughtfully.

“She was rather frank this time. She seems to be losing power as she comes nearer to the Core. Perhaps…it will not be humanity that self-destructs, but her…”

Hakuno stiffened at that statement, but Rani and Rin were the ones who looked to the board were the current statistics for what would happen if humanity was released from their reason were.

Rin saw where Hakuno was looking and shook her head.

“It’s a sixty percent.” Rin sighed. “In roughly a week, two thirds of people would either have killed themselves or been killed.”

That was…huge.

“However, there is room for error,” Rani said. “And…humans will not go extinct from this…not necessarily.”

That wasn’t all that comforting.

Gilgamesh seemed to agree, as he watched the sign with a dark look.

“While ‘a world that is hard on humans’ is one that I endorse, a mere ‘world where humans are destroyed’ is, by my judgement, worthless. As this will never happen if we defeat that Moon Insect, pay it no more mind. What you have drawn is a future that will never be.”
Before the night before, Hakuno might not have been sure about it. Now, he knew he was reassuring them, in his arrogant way.

But Rani and Rin didn’t look relieved, rather, both were hanging their heads.

“…Hakuno…Gilgamesh…in relationship to that model…”

“Don’t, Rani,” Rin cut in, she looked to Hakuno and Gilgamesh. “We’re speculating on a few things. Nothing concrete so don’t worry about it.”

But the quiet despair on her face was making Hakuno nervous.

“At any rate, Sakura can you give any real idea for how long it would take for BB to get to the Moon Cell?”

Sakura had been standing nearby, looking slightly tired, but better since she’d had the chance to rest.

“Er…well…that’s hard to say. The Moon Cell was meant to be impregnable, and only able to be brought down once a victor appears. But BB has taken over the Far Side, and should have equal processing power to the Moon Cell. So…it could take forever or it could be over in a second.”

“So, if the balance shifts for a moment, than it will be over.” Rani said softly.

“Yes. Currently, the Moon Cell isn’t even 1% damaged. But…”

That could change in a moment.

“Then…we still have a chance,” Rin sighed. “That’s why Melt is involved. We’re in the final stages of this game. Though I guess we’re not…getting through unless we did this swimsuit modeling competition… And there’s a ‘kingly’ swimsuit somewhere in the labyrinth.”

Gilgamesh was smiling, that same light that she’d seen before when she’d mentioned Taiga’s shinai was shining on his face.

“Well then, Hakuno, it is time to enter the Labyrinth. Though I suppose you will have to ask that false priest if he has appropriate garments for you as well.”

“Alright, we’ll be investigating the Ten Crowns and Melt for weaknesses. Sakura will be in charge of monitoring. She’ll be doing that from the infirmary, so she can rest a little while we run more of the maintenance and obstruction. We know Melt’ll be looking for you.”

“The three of us together can only give about a 40% chance of safety, so please be careful, Hakuno,”

“It’s the first time I’ve really wished that Leo was here;” Rin muttered. “Anyways, good luck.”

Hakuno nodded, though she didn’t like the looks that the two were sharing.

As she shut the door behind her, Hakuno paused. Should she confront them?

“Leave them, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said. “And do not borrow worries that are yet still phantoms. For now, we have a floor to conquer.”

Gilgamesh seemed more…relaxed suddenly, as well as a good deal less annoyed about…whatever had been bothering him lately. Maybe telling his story the night before had put him in a good mood. At least his confidence was hard to disbelieve.
She wasn’t sure what the cause of the relaxing was, but he seemed...almost friendlier. It was weird. After all, she wasn’t his friend, and Hakuno knew it.

Heading down, Hakuno stopped at Father Kotomine’s shop, where the priest smiled thinly at her, but there was something almost like excitement on his face.

“Rejoice, young master! We have just received a rare and valuable new stock!”

Was that…glee?

Gilgamesh seemed to notice as well since he was watching from where he had stood some distance away with a dark look.

“Finish your business and be done quickly, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said.

“What…kind of product…”

“Oh, I am certain it will live up to your expectations,” Kotomine said. “But first, you must see it with your own eyes. Then, lightening will strike.”

“Father Kotomine, you realize how ominous that sounds, right?” Hakuno said. “I’m…actually just here to see if you have a swimsuit…”

“Hm, I believe I can secure such a product for you. Now, proceed!”

He really wanted her to try this new product, didn't he?

He was watching Hakuno with so much obvious anticipation on his face that she felt like she had to scroll down and see what he was talking about. Finally, she hit the new item: extremely spicy Mapo Tofu.

She looked at it, and he smiled at her, something…almost human…was glittering in his eyes.

“I-I guess I’ll try some?” it sounded like a question.

The man smiled again, charging her and handing her a steaming plate of...something.

She supposed it was tofu. At least…it should be tofu, but the sauce was so thick that it made plopping noises when it bubbled.

“Wait, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh had stepped closer to her, looking at the plate with a strangely apprehensive expression. “There is one thing I must ask you. That dish you purchased, is that something for you to use for yourself, or is it for me?”

There was something very grave in his eyes.

“It was for a Master’s use,” Hakuno said. “Supposedly, it’ll restore all my mana.”

She was a little doubtful about that.

“Ah, I see. Very well then. I just…sense something sinister about it. Do not eat too much of it. If, by any chance, you grow accustomed to the flavor and decide to make it a staple of your diet, I will cut up my contract with you. Do you understand?”

“Seriously?”
He looked at the plate with that same expression.

"I will not bare such a dish to be a common sight for me..."

“…I’m going to try it,” she muttered. “It can’t be that horrible, right?”

The look on Gilgamesh’s face said otherwise.

And finding a place where she could sit by the stairs, she opened the package, too the little spoon that was included and rammed it into her mouth.

Her tongue felt like it was going to combust, and tears started to fall from her eyes. It wasn’t Elizabeth’s cooking. That had been so bad she’d just wanted to die. This…this was just more like eating a fireball. She managed to swallow it down, coughing and hacking as, somehow, some of the sauce managed to make its way down wind tunnel.

There was a crystal class of what looked like milk in front of her, and Hakuno chugged it down without even realizing where it came from.

Finally, Hakuno took a breath, closing her eyes and glaring at the sound of chuckling from the kiosk. She glanced to see Kotomine watching with those dead eyes and a smile on his face as she managed to stop reacting.

Jerk.

“I stand corrected, it was just that bad,” Hakuno breathed.

But her mana felt like it was through the roof now.

Gilgamesh was giving her a strangely relieved look as he summoned something though the Gates again. It was a plate with a large…sticky looking bun and handing it too her.

“This should aid in removing that taste. It is an excellent Sahara dessert.”

He smirked at her, clearly expecting her to laugh.

King of Terrible Puns.

He’d made those before, sometimes, but this seemed different. He seemed to really expect that to be considered funny or at least want it to be. Maybe puns were high Sumerian humor or something. She wasn’t sure what she had found funny in the past, but it probably wasn’t this.

But why did he care?

If there was one thing she'd never understand about Gilgamesh, it was his sense of humor.

Still, for his sake, she forced a small smile.

“Thanks for the bread,” she muttered.

“Do not ask of more food from that priest. His tastes are as warped as he is.”

“Come back soon, and I will have your swimsuit prepared! As well as more of that product.” Kotomine called. "I believe I might start a food stand for it..."
Elizabeth’s final small floor had been abandoned, the flowering trees and bright romantic moonlight faintly eerie when she considered that they were still connected, somehow, to the heart of someone who was imprisoned forever.

But she couldn’t think about it.

Melt’s floor was different. A jumped of half formed Grecian buildings loomed in the background, with paths that looked like they went nowhere half ruined, with rivers and waterfalls of a thick, glowing, purple ooze flowed and pillars jutted up out of nowhere. Above it all, illuminated everything, was the moon in a glowing crescent, but slowly being dissolved like the data that it was.

There was a beauty and a loneliness to it, but also something so inherently wrong that it made her shiver, and the air was so thick and heavy that it was almost heard to breathe.

So, this was the last floor.

“What is this place?”

“…You could call it an atrocious malice,” Gilgamesh said, looking into the darkness, at the moon with that same distant expression that he’d had when judging Elizabeth. “It is an unwavering self-confidence. An absolute good will that, by its very nature, is an abomination. This Ego is far more divine than the other.”

“Oh this is…this is very heavy,” Sakura’s voice chimed through. “Miss Hakuno, please be careful - oh-“

There was a shattering sound, and the shields vanished.

Right. Melt had already given them her first SG. The sadistic disposition.

“Oh. Well, I guess this will make things easier,” Sakura said, sounding relieved. “So far, there’s no sign of Meltlilith. I’ll make sure that that says that way, and if I start to notice something, we’ll inform you right away when you need to come back!”

“Alright, thanks Sakura!” Hakuno called,

They took off into the Labyrinth, which twisted and turned strangely, with that decaying moon always managing to somehow be in sight. As they continued, Hakuno started to keep her head down, not really wanting to look at it or think about that it probably meant that Melt wanted.

She didn’t like the Moon Cell, but…honestly she was worse.

It was only because she was looking down that she managed to see the switch.

It was a familiar one, with a little flower design on it, clearly meant to trigger the BB Channel. She paused, staring down at it.

“A visible landmine is it? Speaking for myself, I would step on it. As a king.”

He was grinning at her, and clearly had decided to full trigger everything he could just to annoy BB and Melt. But, it was also somewhat different. More relaxed somehow than she’d ever seen him. Or maybe he just had decided that now she that she knew his story and was indebted to him up to her eyeballs for asking him about it, he didn’t need to scare her anymore.
Not that she’d really been all that scared of him for a while.

That was…a strange thing to admit.

“You know what? Fine. Might as well see what she wants, right?” Hakuno sighed.

“Indeed!” Gilgamesh grinned.

She deliberately stepped on the trap.

There was a slight electric shock and suddenly BB was standing before.

“Oh, wow, Senpai, you’re really showed up? You’re…predictable. Even my black heart has to laugh at you.

“Were you…waiting for us this whole time?” Hakuno asked.

“Truly a pitiful antagonist if that is the case,” Gilgamesh said softly.

“This is a pre-recorded message. Just so that you wouldn’t be disappointed at not being able to see me!”

She would never be disappointed about that.

“But as promised like a good game master, the path ahead’s going to be hard! It’s been made out of kindness and annoyance, so you’d better be glad! There’s a shameless swimsuit up ahead fit for a king, though if you don’t take this seriously, you’ll probably never go back to the school building. Then again, using up all of your strength and exhausting yourself…that’ll probably just make you happy huh?”

Not really.

“Welp, this mouse- er Senpai experiment is about to begin! Have fun in the maze, squeak squeak.”

The image cut out, leaving Hakuno and Gilgamesh alone on the platform.

“A bathing suit fit for a king is it?” Gilgamesh was grinning. “She keeps promising that, and it appears we will lose at least eighty percent of our lives if we are not careful… Then, Master, a sea-bath with all of the charms of a wild tiger awaits us!”

He honestly sounded like he was excited to do this with her.

He just really wanted the new clothes, and even though more and more, Hakuno was pretty sure that this wasn’t as important as BB claimed, she could tell Gilgamesh wasn’t going to be deterred when both his vanity and his desire for treasure had been invoked.

Seriously, some part of her more and more wished…this was a real swimsuit modeling thing…it…it really would have been fun to do...with friends.

But she couldn’t think about that.

The path…was dangerous, with enemy programs everywhere, but they moved quickly, Gilgamesh summoning the Gate of Babylon, and his usual favored weapons to handle them quickly. As they dashed through, Hakuno didn’t even notice as they reached the half way point, and found a sign waiting for them, with a small sign waiting for them.
To my oh so motivated Senpai, I just can’t help laughing from my monitor! The way that you do routine work when there’s a prize waiting for you is just like a dog! I’ve been learning a lot about how humans do better when there’s a reward. Fighting for love might be a joke but it’s like that! You can’t underestimate human emotions! It’s got me so enflamed that I can’t hold back anymore! I was going to sit back and let Melt take care of you now, but change of plans! I’m coming to see you!

There was a little heart at the end.

A crackle of static caught Hakuno’s attention as Sakura’s voice managed to come on.

“Miss Hakuno, there’s an unauthorized portal starting to appear! BB’s almost here! You’ve got to hurry. The path back to the entrance is blocked until you find the ‘right’ treasure chest! You need to hurry, get that chest and then go!”

“Very well,” Gilgamesh said. “Come Hakuno, we will be done shortly. Let us test this Moon Cancer.”

He seemed confident. Then again, Gilgamesh usually seemed confident.

As they reached another ramp down, again crawling with monsters, Gilgamesh smiled down on them.

“Gate of Babylon,” he said opening up the golden portals again and raining weapons down on them. As before with Elizabeth and Shinji’s tank.

The enemy programs lacked Elizabeth’s defenses, they started shattering into pieces that resembled the ruined moon close by. More and more these monsters were starting to be easily dispatched. But there was something else in it. Gilgamesh, more and more seemed to be enjoying the fight. Now he was openly grinning as he turned to her though it had an expectant quality to it.

“We may proceed,” he said smugly, but Hakuno couldn’t shake the feeling that he very much expecting her to say something.

“Um…is that the full power of the Gate?” Hakuno asked.

“Hmph, of course not. It is only beginning to touch on anything resembling power,” Gilgamesh crossed his arms. “And I would hardly display my power for something so paltry as these enemies.”

“Well…it’s…pretty amazing that it managed to do that,” Hakuno said carefully.

That was apparently the right thing to say. Gilgamesh gave her a pleased smile.

“You are far too easily impressed, Mongrel,” he said, but Hakuno noticed that the smile didn’t leave.

He just…wanted her to tell him how powerful he was….

Why?

While she’d guessed already that Gilgamesh wasn’t so immune to flattery as he liked to pretend that he was, he’d never seemed to care that much about what she thought. Maybe it was something like the…thing that she was never going to mention again…. Sometimes he just wanted to be praised.

Or…maybe the final SG had something to do with it. He wasn’t demanding anything like the first, and he wasn’t refusing to even mention it like the second. It was just…he seemed different. How he seemed to want to act with her was different.
It was...warmer, she supposed. She couldn't call it friendly, but it was...something.

They headed down to the platform where a fancy looking item storage unit was waiting. This had to be this ‘kingly’ swimwear that BB had mentioned.

And she wasn’t here yet!

If they took it and ran-

“Good work, Senpai!”

Crud.

BB stepped into view. Hakuno froze up.

She hadn’t seen BB in person since...she’d been thrown into that...nothing space. Now seeing her again, and remembering the last time with Leo and how she'd just so completely defeated all of them...

“How was the enemy marathon from hell? Do tell me that I caused you some suffering.”

“You should speak with that NPC Priest, Moon Insect, you might find you have something in common with him. However, weep, for your challenge was hardly worthy of my middle grade weaponry!” Gilgamesh called.

BB frowned.

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” she said. “I’m not going to show any mercy to villains who throw the morality of this school in disarray! I’m just going to have to make sure that both of you understand your crimes so that the other students don’t get slack!”

It clearly wasn’t a hologram, and no matter how much it looked like BB should be focusing on the core, she could be here instantly.

“She was playing with us again,” Hakuno muttered.

My favorite doll.

“Wait, Hakuno.” Gilgamesh said softly. “Something was off about her word choice...could it be that...”

Hakuno shut her mouth, but it appeared that her fear had already gotten BB in a good move.

“Too scared to speak? That’s fine. Then this whole trap worked! For something like this I totally short have installed cameras in the Labyrinth... Then I could have seen Mr. Gilgamesh’s greed and senpai’s foolishness to my heart’s content...”

Wait.

She didn’t have cameras.

Then...she wasn’t watching this part of the Labrynth?

She glanced at Gilgamesh, who nodded. That’s what he’d noticed.

BB noticed them looking at one another but blinked.
"Oh? What’s wrong? Surprised that I left my fight with the Moon Cell to come here? Well, you’ve miscalculated! I’m not that inefficient! AI’s don’t do pointless things-"

There was a crack of…something and BB suddenly twitched. Her entire body spasming as if she was a puppet who’d just been given a rough shake.

When she straightened herself, she blinked once at Hakuno and tilted her head.

“Um…Senpai? …What am I doing here?” she asked. “I need to be running to the end at full speed. So…I need to leave you to Meltlilith and not meet with you…that why I don’t have cameras, so…”

Hakuno blinked.

Somehow, saying she had no idea seemed like a bad idea, but…she wasn’t good at lying to people boldfaced. So…

She glanced at Gilgamesh.

“Why, you ask?” he asked. “Because your sadistic heart has been moved by my and Hakuno’s glorious battles, and do declaring you could no longer control yourself, you came here running, and abandoned your position as boss in order to further debase yourself. While you had the capture of the Moon Cell in your sight, might I add.”

“Er…really? That tone aside…Mr. Gilgamesh does tend to know what he’s talking about, but…when did you two get so friendly? But…anyways, there should be a memo in my Doki Doki Training notebook…hm let’s see…”it hurts” or…”it breaks my heart…” nope nothing written in there like that. The situation is unexpected but as long as I’m in front of my senpai, my game master face won’t fail! Anyways, I have a special Sakura enemy just for you!”

“How disappointing. You have stirred things up so and plan to leave us with nothing more than a minion. Are you out of your usual illegal acts?” Gilgamesh asked.

Hakuno glanced at him.

Why was he providing her?

BB shrugged.

“I mean if there were bugs in my workspace, I’d crash you, but this isn’t my job. It’s Melt’s, but…I guess she’s playing hooky…so I came…yeah, that sounds right. So…yeah, you get a minion.”

She was nodding to herself, clearly not remembering…anything else or why she was here.

It was sort of like what had happened in her message, when she started talking nonsense and forgot it. Gilgamesh had mentioned that she might end up breaking down before she even reached the Moon Cell’s core. But…

Wait. Gamemaster! BB saw herself as a gamemaster and how she was keeping things fair!

“It’s not a fair for a game master to have an invincible character on the board,” Hakuno said. “You should at least give a hint on how to end that stat.”

“Invincibility? Melt? She doesn’t have that…or at least she’s not supposed to…

“When we attack her, everything is registered invalid,” Hakuno said.
“Oh? Really? Huh. Well, I’ve learned some interesting things I wasn’t really planning on. So, I guess as thanks I’ll leave you be! I need to return to the core’s wall! Seizing the Moon Cell is right before my eyes, and I…I guess I don’t have time to play with my stupid senpai anymore…”

There was something listless in her expression as she vanished. Something that…almost, almost made her think of Sakura. Maybe it was just that they were the same model or Hakuno was worried about her but…

No. She couldn’t think like that. Not about BB. Not after what she’d done.

“Well, it appears that ended in a dull conclusion,” Gilgamesh said.

“Well…at least we know that BB didn’t make Meltlilith invincible on purpose. I’ll make sure Rin knows,” Sakura called.

“Now, Hakuno, let us claim our prize!” Gilgamesh was grinning at the treasure chest was blatant greed on his face.

Cautiously, Hakuno tapped the chest, opening it with a single touch, and showing the…white jacket and swim trunks inside.

Gilgamesh looked at the clothing with a quizzical expression.

“Oh, when I heard of ‘kingly’ swimwear, I had envisioned the speedo type, but this is rather casual.”

Hakuno had no idea how he knew what a speedo was, but somehow was glad that this wasn’t that. He’d probably decide to spend the rest of the entire time should involve his wearing a speedo.

“Still, for occasional relation with companions, this sort of lightheartedness is good. Now, let is return! And then you may gaze upon this new side of me to your heart’s content prior to challenging this new level!”

He sounded…strangely excited.

It didn’t take long to return. It had been mostly a straight shot, and honestly, Hakuno was glad to be out of that heavy level with the moon dissolving above them. Gilgamesh was in a clearly good mood as they reappeared at the tree. It didn’t even waver when they were met but a thinly smiling Kotomine.

“Well, my dear costumer, we now have a product inspired by your interest in my special products, I have found something in the depths of the Far Side that might interest you. However, as you only had a small sample, I was not inspired to look harder.

The product was called ‘basic school swimsuit’ but, for once, it wasn’t stupidly overpriced. Nor did it seem to have anything…weird about it.

Maybe she should eat his gross tofu more. When Gilgamesh wasn’t there. For a moment, she looked at the outfit.

“I’ll get changed in the bathroom.” She said.

“If you insist,” Gilgamesh shrugged.

“I insist,” Hakuno sighed.
It didn’t take long to get changed. The bathing suit, the first thing that she’d had that wasn’t a school uniform to her memory wasn’t much to look at. It was just a plain blue one piece with a class number on it. It looked like something anyone would have at a school. Nothing much to model with, really, but…well…it was a little fun.

Had she liked swimming? Maybe. The idea was now mostly just…curiosity. And a wish that they could have all done something together like this. Like that food hall that Leo had once mentioned. But she wasn’t going to think about that.

Gilgamesh was waiting as she stepped in. Thankfully, he’d changed already. The tan swim trunks and white jacket were simple, but honestly, she liked it. It looked like he could either be at the beach or just wander around in the sun. She could also see his tattoos again, standing blood red against his skin like some ancient warning, but the effect was somehow softened now. He was wearing a large necklace of gold that seemed to come from his treasury, but the thing that surprised her the most was his hair.

Gilgamesh always had his hair spiked up both out of his face, and almost adding a few inches of pure intimidation to him. Now, it is golden hair lay flat and tame. It made him look…almost approachable, and younger. Honestly, he could have probably passed for being only a few years older than she was with that.

However, he was frowning.

“That is the outfit that the priest bragged so about?” he asked, a sneer barely hidden.

“Yes it is,” Hakuno muttered. “I like it. It’s the first change of clothes I remember that isn’t a school uniform.”

If he was going to trash he, he was going to have to listen to her praise it.

“Hmph…” Gilgamesh said, glancing away. “I suppose it is better that that Cancer and the Ego view nothing of interest… However, this is extremely unfortunate. While his garment is pleasing, even with the appropriate garment, we cannot begin if we do not have any place to swim. Hakuno, do something about this.”

She gave him an annoyed look

Do something? What exactly was he expecting her to do? Summon a swimming pool… This was supposed to be for that floor not for any actual pools…

Oh.

“I think there’s a pool here. Want to see?” she asked.

Gilgamesh was still scowling.

“I suppose we can observe what that thing has fit the school with,” he sniffed.

The halls were quieter than normal as they came out and passed down the hall past their room. It was the back of the school where most people just didn’t seem to go, but it was peaceful in the evening light. And walking like this to the pool in swimsuits…
It was kind of like being friends.

Even though she knew that wasn’t possible.

The pool was abandoned, but that didn’t surprise her much. Yet...somehow, the evening light streaming through the windows managed to make the place a little lonely. Vaguely, Hakuno wondered why someone had designed this place. Was it just the Moon Cell being accurate, or BB wanting that...romantic comedy life that she’d talked about?

Gilgamesh stepped past her and looked around with a scowl, crossing his arms as Hakuno sat down, dipping her feet in the water and looking down at her reflection. It was...nice. Like she was the first person who had ever been there.

“Hmph, you expect me to tolerate a seedy water tank like this?” Gilgamesh scowled at her, but the look was less annoyed with her than with the situation. “We should not have bothered so much as walking to this place if that is all BB has prepared for us!”

Us?

Slowly, Hakuno slipped into the water, allowing herself to float a little.

It felt good. Way better than she’d thought that it would have. It probably would have been nice outside.

“I guess I wanted to go to a pool,” Hakuno said. “All that talk of beaches and summer... I mean, it’s nowhere near as good, but...”

But it wasn’t as if she’d see those places, or any other place for that matter.

“Sakura once managed to get the key for the pool on the Near Side from Kotomine. We didn’t have swimsuits though, so I never got the chance to go,” Hakuno said, smiling a little. “Now, I think Kotomine let her get it just because he wanted to see the misery of the students to see a pool they couldn’t swim in,” Hakuno continued, almost smiling. “But I wanted to try...before...well...”

Before she was deleted.

Gilgamesh scowled at her. He didn’t like her bringing that up, did he?

“Well, I am not so easily satisfied,” he said.

Or maybe he just really hated school pools.

“If you wish to satisfy me...you would have to prepare a Thrilling Splash Time level facility...yes... that would be good...”

“Thrilling...Splash Time?” Hakuno repeated.

A shine came into Gilgamesh’s crimson eyes that had nothing to do with greed or treasure.

“Oh? You did not have those is your era?”

“I wouldn’t remember,” Hakuno said.’

“Well, it is no matter,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “We did not have them in Uruk either.”

Gilgamesh sat down on the edge of the pool, now completely ignoring that fact that he’d just called
the place a ‘seedy water tank’ and summoned one of his gates.

“Thrilling Splash Time is the paradise of water that I once personally planned out. It is the height of aquatic above water architecture. Of course, it was impossible to supply the location with the water that it needed in the end.”

A large tablet fall into Gilgamesh’s hands as he set it down where she could see it.

The map was…intricately drawn, with cuneiform carefully written on it.

Why was he…

“Of course, the city is based off of Uruk, for there could be no grander place. These are the walls, which would be an improved version of the ones which I built for Uruk, as well as providing a series of pipes that would allow the water to be a part of every element of the park,” Gilgamesh said, pointing out the area around that looked like a small city, complete with a ziggurat in the center.

“Each crossroad contains at least one fountain. And there would be pools, with those…slides you call them, each higher than the last. This building is a front for a underground river that only the bravest could challenge. Here though, here would be the place where we would be!”

He pointed to the ziggurat, eyes shining.

“This is a palace of water, complete with a large pool open to the sun, but several smaller ones within. One of them even heated, as a pathway of water. There it would be possible to relax on a boat and enjoy the splendor of my palace!”

As he continued to talk enthusiastically, Hakuno leaned against the edge of the pool, listening. She’d never heard him this interested in anything like this, as he pointed out different locations, mentioning slides, places for children to play, even a closed off residential area for those so enthralled they wished to stay. He’d been more relaxed, she knew, but…

This was…

No. She knew better. Hakuno wasn’t his friend. She’d seen that dream. But, well…she was his Master. If that counted for anything.

But…this was a side of him that she’d never seen, and probably no one much other than his friend had ever seen. And she’d been thinking so much about how nice things would have been if they’d had a chance to do something…just like this just once.

Maybe it did matter to him. Maybe they couldn't be friends, but they could be friendly.

And she was happy. Actually happy.

Maybe it was ok. To pretend. Just a little.

“I’d like to see the real thing,” Hakuno said looking down.

“Well, it would certainly drive this puddle out of your mind,” Gilgamesh said, looking around the pool with clear distaste. “That Cancer is truly a woman of rotten tastes. At any rate, perhaps you shall see this wonder.”

It was stupid to ask for more. She couldn’t be selfish. If everyone else got out…that would be enough for her, but…
Maybe right now…

She wanted this. She wanted to sit with Gilgamesh and talk about water parks and stand in the pool. She wanted to eat terrible mapo tofu and listen to his awful puns, and pretend that this would keep going. She could worry about Sakura's slow exhaustion, Rin and Rani's worries, Shinji, even BB's strange behavior, Meltlilith and what would happen to her later. For just a little longer, she wanted to be here.

Hakuno settled herself in and prepared for a half-hour of being told exactly how great a place Thrilling Slash Time was by a Gilgamesh who was more enthusiastic about this than anything else she'd ever seen.

She’d face the world tomorrow when it came.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, BB's almost completely broken down.

This chapter was fun. So many things happening, but also Hakuno getting used to Gil making terrible puns and walking to talk about his dreams of a waterpark! This is one of the last light chapters.

The dessert that Gil gave Hakuno is koeksister. A traditional South African sweet bread. Technically, it's not a Sahara dessert, but little things like reality isn't going to stop a ...good...pun.

Things are going to get...interesting from here on out.

Next Chapter:

"Archer!"
The First Time Hakuno Faced Punishment

Chapter Summary

Exploring Melt's Labyrinth leads to many new discoveries and a farewell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time that Gilgamesh actually went through with one of his threats wasn’t what Hakuno expected.

After the time at the pool, Hakuno had ended up falling asleep quickly. She knew she was getting tired, but she couldn’t afford this. They had to be able to keep going, even if she was tired. She could sleep when she was dead.

So, she’d managed to drag herself from the bed (which just seemed more and more comfortable after every day). Gilgamesh had already been awake, looking through something that he’d put away quickly. Probably more plans with Thrilling Splash Time.

Still, he didn’t seem embarrassed about it, or refusing to talk about it. Maybe he just didn’t care if she knew that his personality wasn’t completely that of the unapproachable King of Heroes.

The next morning, with no ‘meeting’, they ended up returning directly to the Labyrinth, in their swimwear. It was a little weird heading down there like they were going for a fun time in the beach, but at the same time, Hakuno had a pretty good idea of just how BB was going to respond to people not following her mostly nonsense rules.

As Hakuno stepped out, she was surprised to see one of the NPCs waiting for her. Usually the NPCs didn’t tend to stay close to her room. Oh, she’d chat with them and they’d be friendly, but they seemed wary of Gilgamesh, or just didn’t like listening to the sound of his laughter.

She was one of the girls that Hakuno vaguely knew from the primaries, with red hair that had been put up, and dark eyes. Her name was Mizaki. They had chatted once or twice, but, like most of the NPCs, she was under the vague impression that this was a normal school. She was shifting around nervously but sighed a little as Hakuno and Gilgamesh stepped out.

“Hakuno,” she said, her eyes flicking once to Gilgamesh but she seemed to steel herself. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you for a bit, but the others didn’t want to bother you since you and Gilgamesh have been doing those runs.”

She hesitated, looking back down the hall as if debating if she should just retreat.

“Speak then,” Gilgamesh said. “What request are you making?”

Mizuki flinched but then nodded.

“Right…I was wondering…of you could keep an eye out for my friends,” she said. “Hiro and Ayumi. They were talking about heading into the Labyrinth before. I think…I think they were hoping to be able to surrender. But they said that they’d send a message. I know that they left and
they were going to surrender to BB, but…I just want to know what happened to them. They’ve been missing for a while, and so have a few others.”

“And you beseech us to spend our time searching for those who already abandoned you?” Gilgamesh asked.

The girl looked away.

“I just…”

“It’s fine,” Hakuno said. “If we see anything, we’ll tell you. Melt’s roaming around, so we can’t go hang around too long, but…”

The girl bowed.

“Thank you so much. I just…I want to know what happened to them.”

Hakuno smiled a little, but as they headed towards the Labyrinth, Gilgamesh was frowned.

“I know, I’m being too nice,” Hakuno sighed

“While that is obvious, I am considering the meaning behind this. While there are always cowards who abandon a city under siege, that action itself requires some human thought. NPCs, to my understanding are incapable of that. It appears that this place, existing in a secluded space where the Moon Cell is unable to rewrite or intervene is affecting more than just the AI,” Gilgamesh seemed almost excited by the prospect. “At any rate, let us continue with this farce of a contest.”

As they headed out, Hakuno ignored the hollow smile of Father Kotomine, to the Sakura tree. It didn’t take too long for them to be at the new level of the Labyrinth, dressed in their swimsuits and looking like they were prepared for some kind of bizarre party.

It didn’t take too steps to spring another trap.

There was a click and a small shock under her feet and Hakuno sighed.

“I thought we were done with these,” she muttered.

“She continually teases us that she will have nothing more to do with us, and continually disappoints. However, if you were to, like me, walk while looking down on the world, you would not step into these traps unknowingly.”

The BB channel took over.

It was mostly the same as ever, BB, chatting about seemingly inconsequential things, while pretending that this was a premade recording that just so happened to be triggered.

“It’s funny, though. I don’t really get you sometimes. You should have guessed right now that you have no chance of winning. You still have no idea when to give up, do you?” she giggled, and a chill ran up Hakuno’s spine. “Then again, you’re still lovely like that, senpai. You’re the big hero of this story, and you couldn’t be a hero if you just gave up. So, I guess I’ll throw you a bone. Bark for it ok?”

Hakuno kept her mouth shut.

“Aw… alright. Anyways, this program was made to play back when someone who hadn’t lost their will to fight stepped on it. Therefore, here’s your hint: there’s someone who betrayed me on this
floor. He’s a bad puppy who stole a ‘certain truth’ from me and decided to run away. If you want to
find and talk to it before Meltlilith comes to claim him, that’s fine.”

“What kind of a truth?” Hakuno asked.

Despite claiming that this was a prerecorded message, BB shrugged.

“That’s obvious isn’t it?” she asked. “The reason for everything. You haven’t guessed yet, and that
smug Golden Servant isn’t going to tell even if he did. Welp, that’s it for now! See you soon, senpai,
or not. I don’t know what I’m doing right now, so maybe you’re already in Melt’s care! Buh-bye
now!”

The station cut off, leaving Hakuno and Gilgamesh in the darkness together.

“…Er…Miss Hakuno, during BB’s broadcast, I started running a check for more life. There seems to
be something nearby. Maybe it’s that traitor that BB mentioned! You should hurry. There’s
something strange about it.”

“Strange how?” Hakuno asked.

“It’s…flickering,” Sakura said. “I’ll ask Rin what it means, but it looks wrong. Just…I think you
need to hurry… there might be something else too…but it’s really weak.”

“What?” Hakuno asked.

“I think that they’re…NPCs.”

Hakuno blinked. Like what Mizuki had mentioned. At least it looked like she was going to tell her
what happened to her friends.

“Ok,” Hakuno said. “I guess we need to hurry then.”

“I’ll warn you if there is any sign of Meltlilith!”

“This is very likely a trap, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh pointed out.

“I can’t just leave them!” Hakuno objected. “Besides, we need to see if we can find that traitor
anyways!”

While she knew that the first statement would mean next to nothing to Gilgamesh, the second might
at least make him pause, but he was still frowning.

“I will not permit those who have rejected the safety of that building and attempted to betray us to
return. However, you may return with news of their fates.”

The way he said that made her worry that if they weren’t doing badly and they didn’t have a really
good excuse, they’d probably die.

He seemed to take their abandoning the school very personally. Then again, she supposed, that was
just another contradiction from Gilgamesh.

She ran down the pathway, feeling the hard, smooth ground under her feet as she ran. It almost felt
like plastic, if it plastic tended to be warm to the touch. As they rushed down the bath to another
platform, Hakuno paused, eyes wide.

The entire platform was covered in puddles of that same purple liquid that she saw in the
background. It oozed everywhere, forming a segment of the floor that was completely covered in it, and some part of her knew that stepping in it would be bad. Very bad.

Two prone figures were laying nearby, looking like they’d crawled out of the purple liquid, but… something was wrong. There were one girl and one guy, but as the guy struggled to his feet to look at her, Hakuno realized that he wasn’t just covered with the ooz from being in it, it looked like it was coming from inside of him.

It was coming out his mouth, and dark streaks were falling from his eyes almost like tears. Hiro. That was Hiro. They hadn’t talked all that much, but he’d usually been in the library.

“…Ha..kuno…” the guy breathed.

Hakuno jumped over the small puddle before her, rushing over to help the guy. Maybe there was something that Sakura could do and-

The torrent of cold water came from nowhere, making her freeze as the guy cringed away from the water.

“No…it…you can’t…” he breathed, but his voice was distorted and broken up. “It took…us. She… absorbing…WE’re becoming the SAME! Just…just…nothing…we’ll all… You have to…”

But whatever she had to do was forgotten, as his body twitched and he screamed in pain as his body started to collapse in on itself.

“No!” Hiro screamed. “No HELP ME! I’m disappearing!” He reached for Hakuno, but the second she tried to move, a firm hand held her back.

“Stop. These ones are well beyond saving.” Gilgamesh said, his voice as cold as the water he had dunked on her.

The scream faded as his body changed to that same purple color, and suddenly, sank to the ground like water. Hakuno took a step back, not even noticing she’d backed into Gilgamesh, her hands over her mouth.

He’d…melted…

Hakuno looked at her feet, where…that purple goo…was oozing away from her, pushed back by the little pool of water that had appeared around her feet. She looked up a second later to see the other two vanish as well.

“That was Melt wasn’t it?” Hakuno said. “This isn’t just BB’s black noise this is worse.”

It was like she’d described, how everything would be one in her.

“Miss Hakuno…I…” Sakura’s voice was solemn. “I can’t find any trace of their code. This isn’t normal. Most of the time, when NPCs die, they’re just…recycled and brought to a new point of origin. Even with BB, I can still find traces of the deference Servants, so if she was defeated everyone could be freed. This is…this is worse. There’s no trace of them. They…”

“Became Melt,” Hakuno whispered.

That was what Melt wanted.

That was the plan to do this to everything.
“If you hadn’t stopped her...that’s what would have happened to me,” Sakura whispered. “I knew you’d saved my life and my...self...but...this...”

“We got there in time,” Hakuno said. “And we’ll find something to help them.”

“...Unless we break down the Sakura Labyrinth itself...”

“Then that is what you must do!” Gilgamesh said shrugging. “Is that not our goal to begin with? The Labrynth is BB’s body. With her dead, the structure will vanish. As such, do not trouble yourself, and press onwards. Fretting for that which cannot be salvaged now will only bring you to faulter. If you wish to save those who this abomination has already taken, then there is only one way to proceed.”

Find a way to kill her. Keep going. There wasn’t any other way. Still...she wanted to be sad. The sight just made her feel sick. Even if they were NPCs and were ignored by most people, they’d been changing. Becoming aware. They weren’t just props to be thrown away or used to gain power.

“You’re right...” Sakura mumbled. “I’m going to collect some of the...honey...as data. Maybe we can find something else. So far, Melt isn’t here, but that other signal is a lot closer.”

“Ok,” Hakuno nodded.

She couldn’t think about this.

Hakuno wrapped her wet arms around herself, and then frowned.

While it didn’t change that heavy feeling in her stomach, she turned to Gilgamesh.

“Why did you...” she said.

He could have just held her back if he was worried about her being absorbed.

“That is your punishment,” Gilgamesh said, his grin wide and feral. “Surely you remember your impertinent claim that we held equal blame for my defeat?”

“...That is not what I said even slightly,” Hakuno said, her voice flat.

He remembered that?

But Gilgamesh wasn’t paying attention.

“I told your that punishment would come eventually. I have seen fit that this would be the time for that punishment. I found it...fitting given the theme that BB has constructed. It is likely that the nature of the trap was to have more skin exposed this...honey...that the Ego is so proud of. Yet water, repels it. It is thus more fitting that her theme be used against her!”

Hakuno shock her hands off, glad to see some water dripping on to his bare chest, but he didn’t notice. He was too proud of his themed punishment for something that hadn’t really even happened like he’d said...

But she didn’t really have the heart to be angry. She just kept thinking about Hiro and the others. But wait...if water repelled it, then...was this some kind of punishment shield in his view? She’d honestly rather think of that then...

“Mongrel, if you keep that morose face, I will dose you further,” Gilgamesh said, scowling at her. “Come, I have already given you the solution. Those two and the others will be freed when you
defeat the Moon Cancer. Now, let us continue. I wish to see this traitor.”

Arrogant and sure of himself as always, but...the sentiment was right. She couldn't mourn. Not when she could do something. She had to believe that. That there was some hope for all of them, or she couldn't continue.

“Allright,” she said, looking back to the where the NPCs were. “Let’s hope they have something to help with either defeating BB or Melt.”

They walked in silence for a time, but then Gilgamesh stopped her, pointing at what looked like a pool of that honey a that was flouting in midair.

“Observe.”

“Are those…footprints?” Hakuno blinked, stepping closer, but stopping a short distance away. They were. Clear footprints of someone walking in and out of the honey were visible, as they walked away from them on the still invisible platform.

“Looks like we weren’t supposed to find this route,” Hakuno muttered.

Gilgamesh laughed softly.

“So, this was what she meant. We should proceed with caution, Master. These appear to be the final struggles of a cornered and fatally wounded rat.”

“Rat…you mean Robin? But...”

“I had wondered on his absence after his intervention on the thirteenth floor. I had assumed him dead, but apparently, he was not so easily caught. We must hurry. A powerful Servant can only hold on so long, but this one…”

Hakuno nodded. Robin was clever and good at traps and sabotage, but offensively he hadn’t been that great. His skill had made up for that...

Maybe they could save him. Maybe they’d make it in time. She had to hope.

They moved forwards, almost running as they passed over the pathway, and eventually to a stone path. Close by, waterfall of honey made her envious, as did the fact that they were edging closer to the center, where Melt might decide to appear.

The stones were surprisingly smooth as they rushed down to the lower regions of the Labyrinth. The path finally led to another platform, also made of stone, where honey oozed almost everywhere, and a single cloaked figure huddled in a corner.

Robin Hood straightened as they came, throwing his green cloak back. His face was haggard looking, and his eyes were bloodshot. Honey and black decay edged along his arms and shirt, and even his hair was dripping with it, even though Hakuno could see there was nothing near by him to cause it, other than the puddle that he was causing as he slowly melted away.

“Hey there,” Robin said, his casual voice showing now sign of pain. “You’ve been keeping me waiting you know. What happened, you get distracted, you disappointments?”

Robin stepped forwards, slowly, but staying steady on his feet, but Gilgamesh stepped forwards to meet him.
“I am under no obligation to fulfill your expectations. However… you howl well for the state which you are in. Therefore, I will ignore your insults, in respect for that mettle at least.”

“Geez… you kings take forever to say the simplest things. No wonder I had to wait…” he sighed. “Doesn’t matter. I’m giving this too you. Before I forget.”

He looked to Hakuno and threw something glowing towards her.

“This is…”

A data matrix. It was incredibly heavy too. It had to be BBs.

“Miss Hakuno! Please send that over as soon as you can!” Sakura said. “Rin just mentioned that something that like could help up with our countermeasures. Or even be able to imitate what she’s doing!”

With trembling fingers, Hakuno transferred the data over.

“Archer… why? You’re BB’s subordinate right? Why would you give this to the person who killed your Master?”

Robin blinked.

“What? Yeah, I’m her subordinate, but… well, what’s wrong with it? BB never made me sign any contract with a clause that said I couldn’t hand out detailed data on my employer. I had some spare time and looked into it. You should give it a read. It’s pretty interesting. Bad habits from life don’t necessarily fade you know? I was nosy in life, and I’m nosy now. But that doesn’t mean it’s free for you.”

Hakuno stiffened.

“Archer…”

“Hey just hear me out. I got it cheap so I’m not going to overcharge you. Hm let’s see… The life of the woman who ruined the Grail War… I think that’s a good price. How about you? And, yeah, you beat Dan and I, but this was our fight, and you won fair and square. Too fair and square honestly. And Dan wanted you to have an answer for him. I’m not letting this woman’s stupid wish get in the way of that.”

So… this was for Dan. This whole thing had been so that Dan’s final wish to her could come true. His last request…

“Your character aside, that man was a respected military leader, was he not?” Gilgamesh asked. “Teaching one with nothing but tricks to boast of to see a righteous path… For a rat, you were given a good Master.”

Robin shook his head.

“You might have liked him, Golden King, but the old man was a nag with nothing but stupid complaints. He was about ready to die from the start for his stupid convictions. Something about wanting to fight as a person and not as a soldier. But… well…” he looked away. “it was the kind of thing you’d think a younger guy would go for. Playing knight didn’t earn him any respect or any money, but he still held true to it, and gave his life for it. I can’t just laugh at that. I guess… he was a bit much for me as a Master, but I’m the only one who would fight with an old man…”
Gilgamesh laughed softly, but his eyes had this distant look that they sometimes got as he looked at Robin.

“Heh, so you are the only one who never understood that, Archer of Sherwood Forest? A cornered rat will attack the more powerful cat. In that case, the ‘rat’ is seen as an ally of the weak, one who fights against oppression. It is nothing more than another word for another idiot knight.” He looked up at the man with a strange smile. Both you and your Master were most whimsical in this light. There is no living thing so fortunate as a man who can be intoxicated by his own beliefs, is there… Archer?”

For a moment, Robin seemed frozen, and something…painful flashed on his face, but then he looked away, sighing.

“Seriously, this little Lady keeps finding the strangest Servants. First it was that weird deer dog thing, nature spirit I guess, and now you.” Robin sighed. “It’s not a bad thing though. Anyways, now that we’ve covered the niceties, guess it’s time to try to kill one another.”


He’d just given them important information on BB, possibly saved their lives and now… She’d been thinking that they could take him back…

“Why are you surprised? I’m still BB’s Servant you know. You’re her enemies,” Robin seemed honestly surprised, but then he gave her a sort of half smile. “Seriously, Lady, it’s what always happens in a war. It doesn’t matter that we don’t hate one another, or that our goals are the same. We’re on opposite sides. That’s war. I’d been hoping you’d gotten out of that bad habit of trying to reach out to your enemies, but then… I guess you wouldn’t be a Lady, would you?”

What as he…

Gilgamesh gave him a pleased look.

“Well, then you do have courage. Looking for a victory on the edge of death? Even greed has limits, Archer. As such, I will tear that avarice apart with my own hands!”

Robin smiled slightly at her Servant.

“Yeah? You do that,” he said. “Geez… this is turning into a habit. Still… Servant on Servant and all that honor… it’s not that bad… I’m glad you made it in time anyways. I’m getting tired, and my hand feels weird… Guess I was getting worried, but now… I’ll at least go out with a bang…”

“Come then, and receive the judgment promised you!”

“Poisonous blood emerge boiling from the deep green! Yew Bow!”

He was already unleashing his Nobel Phantasm!

“codecast gain_con(32)!” Hakuno screamed.

She felt the power coming out immediately, but stayed standing, even though she was breathing harder.

It was a defensive spell, but she wasn’t sure how much it would help against poisons. How had she won against him before? She couldn’t remember. The whole thing was a blank, like most of the battles that she’d fought on the Near Side. She could remember the end, but… but…
The yew tree grew around Gilgamesh, who had taken a defensive posture, sending it’s poison everywhere. The roots and branches were wrapping around his arms and legs, trying to hold him in place, or to grow around him and suffocate him.

“Gate of Babylon,” Gilgamesh hissed out.

Golden lights around Gilgamesh spread out, as noble phantasms short forwards, and Gilgamesh himself, wielding twin swords, cut himself out.

Robin jumped to avoid the flying swords, but staggered as one made his mark.

But Gilgamesh didn’t attack the same way as before.

Rather, he joined the two swords together by their hilts. There was a flash of light an clang of metal as the two blades shifted to a curve and a single string of light appeared, joining tip to tip.

Like a bow.

“I will show you what an Archer is truly capable of,” Gilgamesh smiled.

Robin moved to attack, but from golden portals that appeared around him, chains appeared, binding him fast and forcing him to his knees. Gilgamesh pulled his sword bow back, and a golden light appeared in place of an arrow. The second he let go, the light shot out from the bow like a bullet, straight for Robin’s heart.

He buckled under the chains, breathing hard. Even when they released him, he just fell forwards, more black noise covering him.

“If you had been at full strength, this battle might have lasted longer. Your use of your Noble Phantasm so quickly was a clever move. Regardless judgment has been rendered.”

Robin looked at his dissolving hands, a smile starting to form on his face.

“Looks like you did it in time. I wasn’t looking forwards to turning into Meltlilith…” he looked up still smiling. “Who ever thought there’d be a poison so obnoxious you couldn’t even kill yourself.”

So that was why.

“Archer!” Hakuno stepped forward.

“Don’t you dare make that face, Little Lady,” Robin said, looking at her. “Just listen to that old man’s last request and have an answer. That’s your job.”

Gilgamesh made an assenting sound.

“Have you any last request, hunter of the woodlands? If you wish to leave last words, I will hear them.”

Robin grimaced in pain, closing his eyes.

“I guess…just…I’m counting on you two to finish this and get back to the Near Side. Your Majesty, I beg your leave to make my exit first. Within the scope of your talents, do work that you’ll be satisfied with for me, ok?”

With that, he vanished into darkness.
Hakuno bowed her head, gritting her teeth. She’d mourned for him once, but...it felt wrong to cry for him now. Not when she thought of Hiro’s face. At least...he’d been able to die the same person that he’d been. And now...he was back where all Heroic Spirits went. Safe from Melt.

When she looked up, Gilgamesh hadn’t moved. He had that far away look again as he stared at the place where he had been.

“Gil?” Hakuno asked coming towards him.

“Robin Hood? A man of truly poor taste. Asking a king for work that he would be happy with,” Hakuno had the feeling that he was more talking to himself as much as to her. “The fool might as well have said ‘save everything’.”

Hakuno didn’t know what to say to that. But...he was clearly as unhappy about everything they had seen as she was.

But Gilgamesh shook himself out of his thoughts quickly, but turned to Hakuno with a smirk.

“At any rate, let us return, and you my tell me of what a true bow looks like in comparison to that thing that Robin Hood used. At least now, you have no need to fear my punishment. Merely to look forwards to my fee!”

She now knew without a doubt that he would come to collect, and it would be at a random time and a random reason. But...when she thought back at the moment with Hiro...maybe it wasn’t the same for everyone, but that had saved her life. And even the battle with Robin...had saved his identity. Maybe it hadn’t started out for that reason, but it would have it now. Whatever this fee was...she wasn't scared.

The return to the school didn’t take long. There was no gate guarding the second floor of Melt’s Labyrinth, and no sign of her anywhere either. They appeared again outside in the light.

“I’ll tell Mizuki what happened to her friends,” Hakuno said.

“They likely already know,” Gilgamesh pointed towards the small group of NPCs who were watching Hakuno with worried looks.

“Is it true?” someone asked. “Will Meltlilith...absorb us?”

Hakuno stepped in, shutting the doors behind her.

“Yes,” Hakuno said. “But...we’re safe here. If she could have come in, she would have-”

The doors to the Old School Building were thrown open by a single kick.

Hakuno went sprawling on the ground, covering her head, and screams filled the air and smoke filled the room. She raised her head, coughing and waving a hand in her face, but only managed to scramble to her feet when she saw what was standing there.

Meltlilith stood in the doorway, smirking.

How was she here!? Had something happened to Sakura!?

Hakuno froze, but the Alter Ego moved forwards the second that their eyes met, but she moved more
slowly, as she jumped forwards, and Gilgamesh had appeared in front of her and blocked her off easily.

Melt jumped back, landing in a crouch, clearly ready to keep going.

“How did you get past Sakura’s defenses!” Hakuno called.

Meltlilith didn’t answer, rather she rushed to attack again, but again was pushed back by Gilgamesh. He reached out one hand, and a familiar gold and silver chain snaked around her binding her fast to the ground, and forcing her to her knees

“Answer!” Gilgamesh roared.

“Hakuno!” someone, an NPC named Yuno, screamed. “Behind you!”

Hakuno had enough time to turn her head and see something purple and silver and blue streaking towards her. There wasn’t time for Gilgamesh to change his position. And there were two Meltliths! Hakuno didn’t even have time to scream as the thing came towards her, aiming a kick for her chest.

A black shape intercepted it.

Moving with a speed and power she’d never expect Father Kotomine to possess, he had the identical Meltlilith on the ground, with one arm behind her back in a painful looking position. In his other hand was a clawed weapon that Hakuno had never seen in his life.

The man was grinning. Some unholy joy was glowing in his eyes as he looked at the prone body of the other Meltlilith.

“So, this was the reason,” he muttered softly, that grin on his face as he looked down at the Meltlilith, clearly in pain before him. “This was why he…”

Chains snaked around the other Meltlilith and somehow, Hakuno found herself in a position where Gilgamesh had backed her against the Kiosk, making sure that there were no other…Meltliliths coming at them.

“What…” Hakuno hissed. “How are there two of them!”

“Miss Hakuno!” the sound of feet rushing down the stairs had her looking up to see Sakura rushing down followed by several of the NPCs clutching brooms, mops and any other supplies that could potentially be a weapon.

Taiga crept towards one of the prone figures, nudging it with her shinai. The Ego didn’t move.

“I came as soon as I heard,” Sakura said. “I didn’t even feel anything go through the barriers. I don’t understand…”

Her eyes widened as she stared at the two and her hands went to her mouth, as she shook her head.

“What’s wrong?” Hakuno asked, looking past Gilgamesh, who wasn’t moving at the moment.

“AI, explain what you know,” Gilgamesh said. “How is it that the Ego has both multiplied and bypassed your walls?”

“I…I don’t think those are really Meltlilith,” Sakura hissed. “Neither of them. The data’s wrong. It’s warped somehow. I don’t know a better way to explain it. I think…I think those are Hiro and Ayumi.”
“Perhaps than, the King of Heroes should permit others to observe these two,” Father Kotomine said. He was still smiling faintly, and his eyes were looking at her with a light in them that she’d never seen before. Whatever he meant by observe...wasn't good.

But one of the copies started twitching, raising her head to look around.

“Oh dear, I guess this didn’t work,” one of the copies of Meltlilith said, still smiling. “I guess these were duds. Too bad. I’d been hoping to take Hakuno using these NPCs that weren’t constrained by White Sakura’s barrier, but I guess that was too much to ask. Don’t worry, Hakuno. It’s just a matter of time. Enjoy your last moment of calm. The storm’s getting ready to start.”

As she finished speaking both versions of Meltlilith shuddered, and, as Hakuno watched in horror, their bodies started to melt into a clear liquid that seeped through the floorboards and vanished back into the Labyrinth.

Chapter End Notes

I just noticed that I haven't left you guys with a cliffhanger yet. Welp, now I have.

Seriously, Melt's power is nightmare fuel, and I wanted to expand on it a little bit. Hope you enjoyed!

Next Chapter:

"Alice!"
The First Time Hakuno Sought Comfort

Chapter Summary

Shinji appears to be planning something, and Hakuno finally finds out what happened to Alice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time, Hakuno sought comfort from Gilgamesh was something that she needed.

After the failed attempt of Melt to break into the school, everything was noise and talking and everyone looking around and asking questions.

“Is she going to try again?”

“What happened?”

“Does that mean she can just possess us?”

Rin managed to push through the crowd, heading towards Sakura and Hakuno.

“Sakura, what—”

“Meltlilith’s using NPCs to try to break into the Old School House,” Sakura said. “I’m sorry, Rin, I need to be able to go to the infirmary and better work this data into the shields. I think I should be able to make sure nothing with anomalous data should be able to reinforce the walls. I…Miss Hkauo could you help me? I might need more Sakura Money.”

“Ok,” Hakuno said.

She hadn’t noticed that things were quieting down, and most of the NPCs were looking at her nervously.

“Sakura just said that she’ll be able to use what she saw to reinforce the walls. So, this won’t be able to happen again.”

“What if she finds someone else and does something new?” someone asked in the back.

“I…”

Hakuno had no idea.

“That doesn’t work like that!” Shinji’s voice yelled. ‘You guys are really idiots if you don’t realize that Melt’s only got one trick! Now that Sakura’s got the data, even if she finds someone else, it’ll be the same thing.”

He came into view, glowering, and standing next to Jinako of all people. She was looking a little nervous to see that maybe people and was edging back towards her closet, but she stopped when she noticed Hakuno was looking at her. She waved a little but seemed to be heading back.
“Alright,” Rin said. “We’ll get started on that matrix. If you can help Sakura…”

She looked around the NPCs nervously.

“I will,” Hakuno nodded, she looked around, where several people were still holding weapons and shifting nervously. “We’ll make sure that nothing like this happens again. Thank you, everyone. I’ll tell you when we’ve got the shield up.”

“I will remain here,” Kotomine smiled. “Now that the threat is past, I must return to maintaining the shop, but if Melt attempts another attack, my self preservation programs might be reactivated.”

He seemed happy about that potential.

The others seemed nervous, but nodded at the fact that Sakura and Hakuno were doing something. Honestly, Hakuno had never seen the NPCs this nervous. While they had been more active lately, rather than just milling around aimlessly as usual, they’d been talking and doing more, but she was surprised by how worried they all looked.

“It’ll be fine,” Hakuno smiled. “At least, we know what she can do now, and I’ve only got a little bit more to go before I can unlock her SG.”

“Good luck,” one of them, a guy with brown hair and eyes like hers, Atsushi. Hakuno vaguely remembered, said.

They hurried to the infirmary where Sakura quickly pulled up a screen and started working on it. She was looking tired and her hair was lighter again, but she didn’t seem to notice as she started inputting data as quickly as she could.

“Sakura, are you…”

“I’m ok,” she said. “But…I’m going to need that money. I’m really sorry but…”

Her hands were shaking, but was pretty sure that it wasn’t from fear.

“That’s fine,” Hakuno said, holding out the money.

It glowed for a moment, and Sakura’s hair turned back to its normal color, but her hands were still shaking, even as she put the screen away, breathing hard.

“Oh,” she whispered. “It’s done.”

“Sakura…”

“…Miss Hakuno… I don’t understand this feeling,” Sakura’s voice was hushed as she looked down. “I’ve accomplished the solution, and everyone under my care should be safe… but… I can’t stop thinking about it. She was going to erase me. She erased those two. I understand to a human, AIs and NPCs, aren’t really people, but… but… when I think about it… I feel hot and cold and I want to… do something to her. I don’t just want to stop her. I… I…”

“That is anger, AI,” Gilgamesh said.

He was watching her with an intent expression that Hakuno recognized as his look when someone did something that interested him.

“You are angry that this creature has attacked you and the place you protect so merely reinforcing the defenses are not sufficient to you. It is a human response. You have already suffered from her attacks
and now you have seen what she would have made you, is it not natural that you would feel rage at such a thing?"

“She acts like she’s the only one of us who feels anything! I know that I can’t feel love, because the Moon Cell cannot define it, but I know that I…I…want to be me, and I want you and Miss Hakuno and everyone to live and be happy! And what she’s doing is disgusting! How can she not see that?!
I…”

The emotion behind those words must have surprised her because she stopped sort, her eyes wide, but Gilgamesh just laughed.

“Truly this summoning has shown me new occurrences,” he said. “You claim you do not know love, but your very words speak of anger on behalf of yourself and those you consider yourself friendly towards. Continue your growth, AI, I myself will bear witness to the results.”

Sakura looked away, blushing again.

“I… I didn’t mean…” Sakura stammered

“He’s praising you,” Hakuno smiled a little. “But really, I’m angry…it’s ok to be angry. She tried to possess you, and she’s trying to hurt innocent people. You have every right to be angry.”

Sakura smiled a little.

“Thank you, Miss Hakuno. You’re a good friend. And thank you too, Mr. Gilgamesh. I’m still not quite used to feeling this way…but…it helps…knowing that this is normal.”

Gilgamesh nodded once, but before the conversation could continue there was a noise from the speakers.

“Hey, Hakuno,” Jinako’s voice sounded. “People are asking if the walls are reinforced. I can tell them ‘yeah’ if you want. The NPCs are getting nervous. I think seeing one of their own getting rewritten like that has got all of them scared. Makes sense, I guess. I mean, usually, if they get killed in the crossfire, they just get reformatted for the next game. This is…different.”

Hakuno shivered a little involuntarily.

“It’s done,” Sakura called. “Everyone’s safe. She can’t use that again. Er…Hakuno thanks again for the money. I’ll make sure to pay you back with my best work.”

“It’s fine,” Hakuno said. “What you’re doing is just as important as what I’m doing. I mean… without you, we wouldn’t have a place to rest and no one would have survived this long.”

Sakura smiled a little.

“It’s nice…to be able to help like this. It’s funny. I’ve run the infirmary for a long time, but…doing this…really means more to me for some reason. I know that I’m prioritizing you more than I should, but…well…we’re friends, so that’s ok. Anyways, you both look tire, I’ll make sure there isn’t anything wrong, and if Rin or Rani have any questions, I’ll make sure to speak to them.”

“Alright, good luck, and you get some rest too,” Hakuno said.

“This is sweet and all, but just in case, Karna volunteered to keep an eye on things. He’s still not at full power, but I’ll make sure everyone knows that the other Servant here is doing something too. Also, Hakuno, that priest is scary. Just so you know. He’s still smiling at the door.”
She didn’t want to think about what he was thinking.

She was tired, and she’d noticed that Gilgamesh seemed to be moving a little slower than usual. While by this time, she was well aware that the man would never admit to being tired, Hakuno was starting to catch signs of it. There was a slight droop to his normal posture, and while his arms were crossed as usual, he seemed to be considering leaning against the wall.

They headed back, and Hakuno noticed that there were more clusters of NPCs in different places then normal. While they greeted her, they mostly were worried that everything was going to be alright. Safety was becoming and more and more delicate thing.

Shinji was waiting outside of their door when they came in. He was shifting a little bit side to side, but he rushed over to Hakuno when he saw her.

“You’re going to go right back into that woman’s Labyrinth after this, aren’t you?” he asked.

“What else can I do?” Hakuno said, looking away. “Leo left the job to me, and Rin and Rani…”

Shinji scowled, looking away.

“Look, I don’t care about whatever duty you’re saddling yourself with, but I hate Meltlilith. She made a total fool out of me, treated me like a worm, shrunk me to nano size and…did that to those guys… BB’s a liar.” For a moment, he was quiet, but then he repositioned himself into something that was supposed to be confidence. “So how is it? You fought right? You can show me your battle log then.”

He was acting like he had in the preliminaries. Back when they had been ‘friends’ or rather she’d been a part of a small group that he’d talk to and bragged to. Back then, she hadn’t minded his bragging. She hadn’t minded much of anything, but why… She knew that he hadn’t been there during her fights with Melt, but..

Gilgamesh watched Shinji with a gaging look.

“This will likely come to nothing, however, there does exist some possibility…” Gilgamesh said thoughtfully. “Very well, give him as much data as you have.”

She sighed. Just deciding things on his own, as usual.

Hakuno held out one hand, as a log of her tie fighting Meltlilith appeared.

“This is it. We only fought once, but the thing that really stands out about her is her speed and invincibility. BB mentioned that she shouldn’t have it, but she does. She also has that ‘all drain’ power. She can essentially drain someone’s levels and abilities and add them to herself.”

When spelled out, it was even more clear that, no matter how much raw power even Gilgamesh possessed, it wasn’t going to be enough to win…

She couldn’t think about that.

But Shinji wasn’t listening as he kept going.

“Huh? She’s got invincibility? What the hell? She’s invincible?”

“Well, it’s more that every attack is invalid, but…I’m hoping that that’s just showing that she’s got a stupidly high defense. I’m hoping that…with time, we’ll be strong enough…” Hakuno trailed off
noting the look that Shinji was giving her. “But it does matter. Right now she hasn’t attacked…”

“Wait? She hasn’t even attacked! She’s totally looking down on you then! Like you’re not even worth noticing as an enemy! Where is your pride as a gamer!”

“Shinji, I don’t even know that I was a gamer!”
He scowled, crossing his arms.

“And Tohsaka and Rani haven’t even worked on something to counter that?”

“They’re working on it, but…well…” Hakuno looked away. “Losing Leo…that was blow. And the levels are getting more dangerous…”

Shinji stared at her.

“This is why those NPCs tried to surrender, you know that?” he asked. “You know you can’t win like that? You’re going to die! And…you’re not even scared are you? You’re just going to go down there with that stupid boring face and die! Why? Why resist BB? The Near Side was crap too! It’s noting more than a death match and you know it, even if you do save everyone, they’ll just have to go back to killing one another for the sake of the Moon Cell! You don’t even want anything from the Holy Grail, Kishinami!”

His voice was getting more hysterical as he talked. Normally, Shinji did his best to sound cool and collected, as if nothing could bother him, but now…he just sounded scared and young and like he did when he’d realized just what this game was.

“Oh of course I’m scared,” Hakuno whispered. “I’m terrified, but…we have to stop BB.”

“You mean that ‘destroy the human race’ jazz? That can’t be real. She’s exaggerating!”

“Like the Moon Cell being a death game was exaggerating?”

Shinji looked away, and Hakuno knew she’d hit too close to home.

“Shinji, I’m sorry, but-”

“No. Don’t. It’s just…I’m not involved, but I’ve got a beef with that woman, ok? I just…wanted to know what you were doing about it. And…you’re not…completely useless, but they are, ok? And you shouldn’t go back either, alright? It’ll just make it…harder…for everyone else!” But he seemed to steel himself and looked Hakuno directly in the face, frowning. “I’m serious, Kishinami. You always wanted to live more than any of us. So…if you value your life…stop. You’ve got a good thing here. We don’t have to kill anymore. You’re safe, you’ve got everyone’s respect. Just…stop. There are only four humans left now…if you vanish too…”

And with that he took off at a full run, leaving Hakuno and Gilgamesh to watch him. Gilgamesh had been quiet during the conversation with Shinji, but more because she thought he was gaging the boy.

“…do you think he’s right?” Hakuno asked. “He’s saying the same thing BB said…if…if we’d just done what she said…do you think that Gatou and Julius and Leo would still be alive?”

Maybe….if she’d kept sleeping forever…

There was no answer, and Hakuno looked back to notice that Gilgamesh was gone. Had he…just decided to go in the second Shinji was gone? She hadn’t even noticed…
She sighed, shaking her head. Maybe it was better he hadn’t heard that…

She stepped into the room and sat down on the bed. Gilgamesh had managed, in the space of the few minutes she’d lingered and thought about everything, fall asleep. Though…this didn’t look intentional. His legs were still crossed, and his head was balanced in his hands. He looked like he’d fallen asleep waiting for some ‘chat time’ or something with her.

The King of Heroes got amused by strange things.

He really must have been more tired than he’d acted… She was really running him ragged, wasn’t she?

“…in….got…” Gilgamesh mumbled, moving his head slightly.

What was he dreaming about? Hakuno wondered, but she shook her head and headed to bed herself. Maybe she’d be better in the morning...

The next day brought them news from Rin, Rani, and Sakura.

Hakuno changed back into the normal uniform. While she sort of missed the novelty of the bathing suit, she had to admit, that she liked the feel of wearing tights again. Gilgamesh was awake before her and had changed into his Emperor of the Night get up that he seemed to prefer over his armor.

When they’d gotten to the Council Room, everyone seemed happy.

“We’ve got a decoy working for you,” Rin said, looking very proud. “From what we’ve seen of Melt’s data, she’s really good at telling where people are in her territory, so the goal is make sure that she’s distracted. If she sees you and Gilgamesh, she’ll attack, so…”

“While this is well…are you going to avoid discussing the incident?” Rani asked, giving Rin a hard look.

“What?” Hakuno asked.

“It…its Mister Shinji,” Sakura said. “Last night, when everyone fell asleep, and I was working on some new barriers…just in case…he secretly creeping around the Student Council room. I think he was looking for something, but when I ran to see what it was, he was gone.”

Gilgamesh frowned from his seat, which had now somehow ended up being at the end of the table with Hakuno’s to his left. She might be the ‘president’, but it was clear that in Gilgamesh’s mind, there was only one person who was actually in change.

“He is a persistent one,” he said thoughtfully. “Rather like the grasses that grow over the ocean’s floor. So, what was he taking?”

Rin sighed.

“I don’t know what that idiot is thinking, but the virus sample, the one that drains levels and skills.”

“I ran a small analysis…to see if you or Mr. Gilgamesh could use it, but it apparently only works for Meltlilith. For everyone else, it is a curse-type item.”
“It has a high chance of misuse, for a quick death for example,” Rani said, frowning.

She seemed worried about that.

“No, Shinji wouldn’t have the nerve to kill himself, even if he thought about it. There’s got to be another reason, but we’re not sure what. So, I didn’t want to tell you.”

“Be that as it may, I wish to know of the doings of that one,” Gilgamesh said. “He is planning some action.”

Rin shrugged.

“Alright. Good luck with your run…”

Hakuno nodded and headed down. The kiosk was abandoned, which meant that Kotomine was getting new supplies, but…that was fine. She didn’t need anything at the moment.

The next floor of the labyrinth wasn’t all that different than the first. It was another ruined building, with the dissolving moon hanging over everything and Melt’s honey dripping all around her. It wasn’t that hard to look around the place and feel like the last living human on earth.

There was a crackle of static and Sakura’s voice managed to come through.

“So far there’s nothing Meltlilith is not on this floor. It appears that the decoys are working. B-but I’m getting Servants…lots of them…”

“What?”

Hakuno stepped a little further, but stopped at the sight of…Alice.

Or at least the Servant Alice. Several little white haired girls in black Victorian looking dresses ran aimlessly through the Labyrinth. Their eyes were blank and dead as they moved, and Hakuno had the uncomfortable impression of puppets on stings with their almost jerky movements and listless gaze. They’d always sort of looked like dolls, but now…

“Oh? That is the Caster we saw some time ago. She does not appear to have a Nobel Phantasm that permitted her to duplicate herself, and her Reality Marble is long cracked…I wonder…”

If this was Melt’s heart…why…

“Alright, Miss Hakuno, I’ve asked Rani, and she’s said that these are not true duplicates. They’re nowhere near as strong as she was, but they should be seen as dangerous.”

“That…that’s good,” Hakuno said. “No offense to Caster, but I don’t want to experience that loss of identity that she caused again…”

“It’s a little like a dollhouse…” Sakura mumbled. “Anyways, take care!”

Hakuno didn’t run this time, but walked down the ramp. Almost immediately, she saw something strange looming up in front of them.

It was a garden. Multicolored flowers bloomed and glowed strangely, while fountains filled the air with a gentle tinkling sound. No wind or air disturbed the place, so that it looked more like a painting of a garden than anything else, and there, in the center sat a little girl.

“Alice!” Hakuno cried, running closer.
Alice sat, her hands folded primly in front of her. She was wearing the same dress as before, a pastel blue version of the one her Servant had, but while she seemed fine, her head lulled slightly to one side, and her pink eyes, though open, were blank and unseeing.

“…Alice…?” Hakuno asked, stepping forwards cautiously. “It’s me…Hakuno. I was you opponent in the war, remember? You wanted to play with me, but… I remember you now…I’m sorry I couldn’t before, but…BB stole my memories, so I knew…less than usual and…”

She waved her hand in front of the little girl, but she did nothing, just stared ahead.

No…

Hakuno took a step back, eyes widening somewhat.

“Gilgamesh…is she dead?”

Gilgamesh was looking down at the girl with a dark expression, but he didn’t seem to be seeing her.

“Indeed, she is not living, yet she is not dead either. This is a being for whom life has been revoked. Meltlilith…” he said, and an anger she wasn’t used to was in his voice. “What worthless things you show us…a living stuffed animal…”

Usually, Gilgamesh’s rage was pretty obvious. And he flared up and could end quickly. This was…more calm. And somehow…worse…

“What does-”

But Hakuno stopped as a voice, no more than a whisper, managed to reach her.

“ease…”

“Alice!” Hakuno was next to her leaning down. “Alice, you have to tell us how we can help you. Ok? Just…take your time. I’m listening….”

For a second, Hakuno thought that she’d misheard. Maybe it had been her imagination, but then, slowly, almost as if she was trying to construct the words from nothing, she formed words.

“Ple…ease…” the little girl whispered, her voice little more than a breath. “Sa…ve…. Alice…”

What little light had been in her eyes faded.

Those words had taken the last of her life from her.

She turned, looking to Gilgamesh, who hadn’t taken his eyes from Alice’s form.

Alice…no. She was talking about Caster Alice. Both of them called themselves by the same name. The Alice from the looking glass, who had no form of her own.

“Those dolls…they no doubt are connected to this. Also, behold, on the platform above!” Gilgamesh pointed to a platform that Hakuno could only barely see, where another garden with…something large and black was almost visible. “That is a program, but neither Caster nor BB’s run of the mill minion. Come then, it is likely connected to this vile display perhaps we shall see something should we defeat it!”

Hakuno nodded.
She honestly couldn’t care less about Melt and her SGs. Right now…she just wanted to make sure that Alice’s last wish…that she got it.

They ran to the platform, ignoring the different copies of Caster, until they found…the Jabberwocky. Hakuno remember. It had been near impossible to kill once, but this was smaller, more defined. Maybe Caster had tried to summon it…maybe Melt thought it would be funny.

The creature stepped forwards, his own motions jerky and wrong, like a puppet being controlled by someone who wasn’t used to doing it.

Gilgamesh stepped forwards, frowning.

“Is everything from this floor nothing more than Meltlilith’s display? Very well then, if she wishes to give us toys, than this should be a brief run. Gate of Babylon.”

The monster raised its arms in a defensive posture as Gilgamesh’s weapons crashed towards it, but there was only so much that it could do. It wasn’t moving right, as he shakily ran forwards and Gilgamesh dodged it easily, only to attack it more directly. Yet no matter how much it was hit, as slow and wrong as the moves were, it wasn’t stopping.

The weapons were doing anything to it.

She remembered this.

It would just keep reforming and reforming and coming back unless…

“Gil, I don’t think it can be defeated by anything but the vorpal blade!” Hakuno yelled.

They didn’t have that did they? Rani had helped them before but…without her she and…

And…

Someone…

Had nearly died.

Gilgamesh glanced at her and side stepped another jerky charge. Opening a single gate beside him. His eyes were narrowed in concentration, as he avoided blow after blow, blocking one that was aimed for Hakuno and then the portal began to ripple.

A single crystal sword appeared. The blade looked like it had been formed with from single stone while others formed the hilt and pummel. It almost glittered when Hakuno looked at it. This wasn’t the thing she’d used. Hakuno knew that.

This…this was its prototype.

Gilgamesh rushed forwards, swinging the crystal sword down and the creature seemed to vanish, leaving only a small file folder behind.

Hakuno stepped forwards, picking it up and starting down at…

“How parts?” Hakuno asked.

“It appears so… Come, let us take it back to the child and see what can be done,” Gilgamesh said.

It wasn’t far, just down the walkway to the still silent garden where Alice, or what was left of her still
sat, almost as if she was waiting for someone. There were no more Caster Alices running around. Maybe that was a good thing.

Maybe it wasn’t.

Slowly, Hakuno stepped forwards, stopping in front of the little girl.

“Hi, Alice, we got some things, and…I’m going to try to put this back together, ok? I hope this’ll help…even a little.”

They looked like they’d been brutally ripped apart, but she could see the black fabric, arms, and…a head. It was Alice’s Caster as a doll, but…why? Carefully, not sure if this was what she was supposed to do, but quickly, Hakuno started to put the doll together, locking joins and carefully putting the dress back on.

Some of the parts were scratched and pretty badly messed up, as if someone had been breaking it, but most of those could be hidden under the dress….

It was like Alice…wasn’t it? Already broken, but still there.

“I think…this is done,” Hakuno said softly.

For a moment, she looked at the doll and at the girl. They’d really loved one another, Alice and Caster Alice. Even if neither seemed to really understand what this was, or what they were doing…but…it wasn’t fair that either of them should be without the other.

“Here,” Hakuno said softly, placing the little doll in Alice’s arms, almost like they were embracing. That seemed right.

Like they had been when they’d vanished that time.

It wasn’t until she felt the moisture run down her cheek that she realized she was crying as she took a step back.

For a moment, the two were in the same position, locked in that embrace, but then a soft light seemed to glow from the two forms, and Hakuno could have sworn that she almost, almost saw Alice smile.

Then the light was too bright. Hakuno winced and looked away, but when it cleared, Caster Alice was standing before her, her body almost completely transparent, almost like…

“Good morning, lady,” the girl said in Alice’s voice, and smiled. “You granted Alice’s last wish. Since Alice…cannot thank you anymore, I will.”

The girl bowed, closing her eyes.

“Thank you for saving Alice.”

“That was not for your sake, Caster. It was only to reward the wish of a girl who, even on the edge of death, sacrificed all she had for the sake of her friend,” Gilgamesh said, but his voice was surprisingly gentle. “If you wish to give thanks, then give them to your mistress when you reunite.”

Wait, was there a chance-

“What I desire is the truth of this level,” Gilgamesh continued, a smile forming on his face. “What happened, Caster? Did you, like Archer, spit upon BB?”
“Who knows. How many miles to Babylon? We went on many adventures, but in the end, was it all a dream? Could we get there by candlelight? A hundred league journey, a hundred step walk… it’s all the same. I, Alice, am a defeated Servant. I, Alice, am a wandering specter. No matter what happens to us two Alices, it is always a cricket’s dream and nothing more. We were captured by a wicked witch and made some mean friends…”

“Meltlilith,” Hakuno whispered.

“That girl doesn’t love anything but herself,” Caster said. “She saws she loves you, lady, but that can’t be true. She doesn’t love anything that isn’t hers, so she doesn’t believe in other people’s hearts. I never thought that thinks would get so terrible…but in the end, even Alice’s ability to dream was taken from her…”

“‘Doesn’t believe in other’s hearts’ you say… Then she is a collector,” Gilgamesh said thoughtfully.

“Yes. Meltlilith hates people, but she likes people who don’t move,” Caster Alice nodded, her voice and face were growing more expressionless as time went on. “When Alice caught her attention, I was turned into a doll, and on her whim, I was ripped into pieces, and she became her toy. It was an awful, ugly fall, but… at least now I am as I was. A Servant about to disappear.”

“So, there was no chance to save Alice at all, was there?” Hakuno asked, feeling her throat constrict. A glow started to come from Caster Alice, and her body started to dissolve into sparks of light.

“Don’t make that face, kind lady,” Caster said. “You know Alice and Alice were already dead. A shock woke us up and we continued our adventures for a while…”

Tears started to fall from Caster’s eyes as she tried to smile and laugh a little.

“At least…it looks like this bad dream is done for a while. Farewell, Alice, lonely me. Thank you for playing with Alice all this time…”

It was close to what she’d said… in the end of the third round… Hot tears were starting to run down Hakuno face.

“This isn’t…”

“Alice has been killed three times now,” the Caster said softly. “But the second time was happy. There was someone there to who listened to me. The first time, I was alone in that white hospital, and no one came or cried and cared, but the second time and the third, you were there, and you made that face to see me off…”

A brilliant light shown for a second and a red orb appeared in front of Caster Alice.

“This is a gift. It’s a piece of Meltlilith’s heart that Alice stole away. Neither of us could understand or give it shape, but I believe you will. Soo,” the girl smiled brightly at Hakuno, even though tears were still falling. “Good night, Lady. Thank you for not ignoring Alice’s voice!”

With those words, and that smile, she was gone, vanishing like she was spun from sugar.

“Hurry,” Hakuno heard Gilgamesh say, and she turned to see him looking down, his face unreadable. “If you go now, you will be able to catch up to your mistress. Illusion and ghost curled up together. Speak together, laugh together, take one another’s hand, and so disappear together to wherever you will go.”
The SG drifted to her, and Hakuno took in in her hands, holding it close and closing her eyes.

She needed to keep going. She needed to go to the shield. This should have been enough…

But she couldn’t move.

There was movement close by, and Hakuno knew that Gilgamesh was approaching her. Probably to tell her to keep going…he’d given Caster Alice her send off, and been fine for Archer, but… it wasn’t the same…

“Come, Mongrel…” Gilgamesh’s voice trailed off as she turned.

He was right in front of her.

Maybe Hakuno was going insane.

Maybe she just…needed something.

Slowly, Hakuno leaned forwards, resting her forehead on his chest as she cried, still holding the SG until it was gone, and then her arms hung limply.

“She was just a little girl,” she whispered. “She didn’t really even understand what she was doing here. The Moon Cell just brought her here for no reason... She didn't think that she was hurting anyone. She thought this was a game…And Meltlilith just…”

Ripped her to pieces.

Maybe it would have been better for Alice if Hakuno had lost. At least then they could have been safe, not…not…

"Very well," Gilgamesh said softly. "I will grant this special permission to you. We will continue when you are ready."

Slowly, gently, a hand caressed the back of her head, stroking her hair and drawing her closer to him.

Gilgamesh was warm, and vaguely, her mind registered that he smiled like wine and spices and gold and something else that she didn't even know, but...more importantly, he was there. He was there and he wasn't pushing her away or angry that she'd shown this kind of weakness. Reaching out, Hakuno grabbed his leopard print shirt, closing her eyes as she cried herself out.

Chapter End Notes

Welp I ended up splitting what was going to be one chapter into two. It was just too long and I wasn't going to be able to keep my usual update schedule.

Shinji, you and your plans took too long

Next Chapter:
BB and Melt start to make Gilgamesh dislike both of them in different ways.
The First Time Gilgamesh was Aware of Hakuno's Situation.

Chapter Summary

BB mentions a few things that make Gilgamesh wonder, and Melts second SG is revealed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh learned of Hakuno’s situation was something he heard in passing.

He had meant to urge her that they must press on, but instead, she had turned to him, resting her head against his chest.

No other would have been permitted weep and wail against him like this. This kind of familiarity, to actually touch his person, was an offense worthy of death. However, for Hakuno…no one else was permitted to touch her in her sorrow.

This was a permissible sorrow at any rate. The child’s death had been brutal, and from her words, the Moon Cell had summoned her to the Near Side with no understanding of the nature of this war. He had seen as much from his Master’s memories, but memory and truth were different.

Once, not that long in the past, he had mocked Hakuno for her pained reaction to the dragon’s atrocities. At the time, he had assumed her naïve and her soft heart nothing but a weakness to be exploited for his entertainment. He had long learned to brush aside that horror and that anger.

Now, feeling her sorrow and pain through that bond…caused an old anger to stir within him. Compounded by the sight of the child, who should have been filled with energy and potential and hope, sitting lifeless and pleading, not for herself, but for her friend.

For now, he held his tongue, and held his weeping Master. He had seen comfort given in the past, and understood the value and purpose of it, but doing this now was a strange thing. Slowly, carefully, he lifted one hand and passed it through her hair, as he had done when she had been babbling to him in an exhausted state.

He was not certain how long he stood, not speaking and staring out ahead of them into the darkness of the Labyrinth, while his Master wept for a ghost girl who had never granted a life or a proper death.

Her hair was soft, as before, but he had no great desire to run his hands through it now. Rather, he watched ahead.

He had no reason to do such a thing at any rate.

As they stood, they were interrupted by a sudden crackling of static.

“Something’s coming!” the AI’s voice screamed through the speaker, making his Master jump apart from him with her face an amusingly dark red. “There’s a distortion and-”
But her voice was cut off, and Gilgamesh placed Hakuno behind him as a hole in the very fabric of
the Labyrinth itself opened.

BB’s face showed itself flickering between whatever pit she was currently in and this floor.

Her eyes contained that glow that told him that the Moon Cell was firmly in control.

“Intruders detected,” the machine intoned, “Beginning search for- Target.”

His Master stiffened behind him, recoving from her sorrow and displaying her resilience as he felt
her mana open to him in preparation for this new foe.

“Search is unnecessary,” the Moon Cell continued. “Collation is futile. Analysis is invalid.”

There was nothing of whatever intelligence BB possessed in that mechanical voice. Though it did
cause him to question what did the thing desire from them? The Moon Cell, clearly wished for his
continued slumber, but as they had been rendered impossible, there had to be some other reason.
That thing did nothing without reason. Even its continued tests of humanity had a greater purpose.

Or perhaps this was BB, rather than the Moon Cell’s doing.

“0 articles received,” the machine droned. “Response, reply negative. Not outside range. Deleting
irregular mail. I am awaiting intruders- Greeting- I am pleased- Eliminating- I am sorry-“

A sudden spark of power caused Gilgamesh to raise his hands in cause of an attack, but all that
occurred was that BB appeared before him, blinking and titling her head like a dog being asked to
perform some trick it had not yet learned.

“Um…yes?” the cancer asked, glancing between them in clear confusion. “What are you doing,
Senpai?”

But Gilgamesh would not give Hakuno the chance to respond to the cancer. Not when he had
already ascertained her goal from those words.

“What a strange question,” Gilgamesh said, watching the Moon Cancer with his head raised. “Even
if you are losing your will, there is only one goal is this crass appeal to my mongrel’s feelings. You
came to this floor for Hakuno to delete you, did you not?”

There was no reason otherwise, and, given the deleted words, it was clear that the Cancer was
starting to have second thoughts about her goal.

“Wait…this is…this is Melt’s Labyrinth?” the rogue AI glanced around, with a pained expression.
“So…I came all the way out here now…”

So this was not the first time?

But the creature revived her usual flippant aura as she shrugged.

“A mistake unbecoming of a beautiful peerless kouhai heroine like me. I guess my automatic enemy
search function was on or something. How dumb to respond to lowly creatures scurrying around on
this level, when I’m going to obtain everything soon…”

That remained to be seen. As it was, Gilgamesh was more and more certain that the Moon Cell was
going to claim her.

Hakuno stepped out from behind Gilgamesh, to his displeasure, but her face was set with no sign of
“BB, what are you after?” she asked face set.

“Nothing!” BB said. “Seriously, that wall’s as head as your head though. Actually…that makes me want to break it some more…You really help my wickedness! Anyways, you and your stupid Servant should just head back to the Old School Building and… what is Meltlilith doing?”

BB turned away, apparently going to return to her actions. His Master stiffened, but, for once, did not attack based on her anger. While it would have been satisfying, as it was, there were few powers that could defeat her.

“…What I am doing?” BB mumbled, voice suddenly lighter in tone than he had heard in some times. “I need to build my strength…if I wait… the Holy Grail War will start… I need to augment my functions bit by bit…take in Servants…dominate the Sea of Nothing… If I can increase my functions right…I’ll be able to make a safe zone. Someplace the Moon Cell won’t find her… I can call that person here…away from the war…I can reach the Holy Grail and my wish and…and… I won’t disappear. Who could bear to be deleted? She won’t either… and if the Moon Cell tries to stop me… then I’ll wipe it out…”

She vanished in blue sparks.

“What… was that?” Hakuno muttered.

“The cancer is breaking down,” Gilgamesh said. “That has likely not connection with the present.”

Rather, it was a memory of the past.

Why were they so certain of Hakuno’s demise? While the knowledge that this was connected to Hakuno somehow was not new, there were still parts of this puzzle that Gilgamesh had not seen. BB had built that School to house Hakuno. That much he had already guessed. She had filled it with those Hakuno had met and fought, and likely gotten along with out of some misplaced desire to keep his Master safe.

That much was rational if utterly lacking in any comprehension of humanity. But the other motives, unleashing desire on the world, reaching the Grail. Those things clearly had some reasoning behind it, and BB was proceeding with a logic, but it was something that was of a beast, rather than even a machine.

Hakuno was frowning after the Moon Cancer but it was not in concern, but rather in worry for those words.

“BB’s signal is completely gone,” the AI’s voice sounded relieved through their connection. “I think she’s gone back to her attempt on the Moon Cell’s walls.”

The AI was another mystery. Why was she on the Far Side? Perhaps BB had decided Hakuno required one who could heal her, but it seemed there was more to that. Though, the more human the AI became the less he pondered on her being present for another to use.

Though observing her and the others growths was a more enjoyable one than he had expected. He would see to it that they were also certainly brought to the Near Side. He wished to see if they would spread their newfound humanity to the others. Already that small school house was turning into a city, the chatter more like something humans would say.

It would be something to see, and far more entertaining than any so called battles he would be forced
to undertake in.

“Is strange,” Rin’s voice sounded. “The more I’m looking at her, the more…its’ like if a human had bits of metal inserted into all of the gaps in their skeleton, muscles and nerves…she’s insane, but… more and more I’m wondering if she could possibly be anything but that given these circumstances.”

But that failed to note what had been the cause of that. Gilgamesh frowned, but determined to dismiss it for now. The Moon Cancer’s doings were not his to consider. She had made her choices, and eventually he would come to end her. She was a life that would end as soon as he reached her. It was as simple as that.

“Come then, we must continue. As the child has given us the key to this floor, let us give it shape and be done before that Ego returns,” Gilgamesh said to Hakuno.

She was still pale and drawn looking, but, as was her nature, she was beginning to right herself.

“Right,” she said. “At least…they were able to do something against Melt,” she muttered. “By the way…er…sorry…for…”

Gilgamesh scowled at her, looking away. Annoyed that she felt she need to repent of that.

“Hmph, do not speak of it. However, if you wish to do something for that child, then strike at the Ego that caused it, rather than sink in your own sorrow and guilt,” Gilgamesh said.

Those things, while human, were nothing more than a way to slowly die. Once he would have told her that if she wished to drown in those emotions, that was permissible but no longer.

“That almost sounds like you’re upset about her.”

“Then you misunderstand me,” Gilgamesh said softly.

He was not upset. It was merely that he would not permit this atrocity to stand. Anger had no part of it. Neither did the pain that his Master has clearly felt.

They continued, though now that the duplicates of Caster had vanished, no longer needing to protect their Master in one final attempt to save her, the place was desolate. Only the ruins of some dream or civilization, permeating with the Ego’s unrelenting good will and desire to protect that had created something truly vile.

Finally after wondering the level for a time, and avoiding the honey that more than ever seeped through the floor as some poison, they found the final point of the level. It was blocked by a shield, but he glanced at Hakuno.

“Ok, so I just give it a name here, right?” Hakuno called. “I’ve never done it without someone right there…”

“Rin says that that is likely true,” the AI responded. “While Kiara mentioned that her technique could not name the true nature of a heart, an Ego…”

The heart was so fresh and new that it was a simple task. Things such as their very disposition were counted as keys to the heart.

“There aren’t any ethical problems either since she’s an AI from my series. So…Miss Hakuno, would you mind sending me-“
He sensed her.

“It will not be that easy,” Gilgamesh said, stepping forwards to where he could feel that presence from before, something heavy and warped. “That collector is coming herself. You will have to reveal that truth to her directly, Mongrel.”

The women stiffened, rage passing through her face and then worry as the creature made her appearance.

She dropped down from the floor above easily, landing in a crouch, her eyes solely fixed on his Master.

“So this is where you were, Hakuno,” she said, her voice light and satiated. “Finding you at least in the dead end of my head. It just must be fate.”

The ego giggled.

But Gilgamesh had no interest in her perverse concept of love.

“I had felt this seeping out from when this Labyrinth began, but this is why goddesses are irredeemable. And you, Ego, are first in that number. Complex of hideous goddesses, how many supposed lovers have you now crushed beneath you.”

For a moment, he was looking at her again, with those same self-satisfied eyes and that smile. But this time, it was not aimed at him, but rather towards Hakuno. And…he desired her head.

It was a different feeling than what he felt towards the Cancer. That was anger at one who would undermine his work. She was a threat to humanity, but while he truly disliked her, hate was too strong a word. One did not hate monsters.

This ego though…he wanted to see that flower of her love scattered and crushed, and that pride broken.

But his thoughts did not reach the creature as when her eyes settled on him, they retained that satisfaction.

“I suppose I can say you guessed right. I just came from the first floor after all, Hakuno, there were signs of you. Those fakes did pretty well too. They ran around and screamed and when I was done with the first, a new one appeared on the floor below…at first I was annoyed, but…well…” her voice turned to perverse rapture. “Your screams, your blood…your head on a platter…I think I just fell more in love… Every time I chased you, I couldn’t help but smile. Every time I cut you up, my heart throbbed. Every time I killed you, I sighed out.”

Hakuno took a step backwards, her eyes wide, and Gilgamesh caught a glimpse of that woman’s plans. He had guessed since first looking at the child Alice what this would be, but the brief flash of Hakuno, sitting with the same lifelessness, her eyes dead and her body still as that woman had her way…

No. He would display this woman’s corpse to his Master before that happened.

He would not lose her to this thing.

After all, she was his. There was no other reason.

“I’ve realized something from this. Before I make you mine, I’m going to enjoy you,” she stepped
forwards, those artificial legs of hers making her walk awkwardly. “You should be happy you know. I’m only going to cut you a little… Now then, curl up like a turtle for me until I’m done!”

She rushed forwards, only to be met by Gilgamesh.

“Oh, right, you’re here too. Well, that’s fine. Rin never gave me a version of you to cut!"

“Gil! You have to be careful! Even if she says that she’s not going to kill us-“

Normally such worthless concern would annoy him, but the ugly look on the Ego’s face and… something else…pleased him.

“I will not permit her what she wants,” Gilgamesh said, smirking. “Nor for that disgusting trophy she showed to be repeated.”

The Ego attacked, striking out like a falling star with those sword legs, but Gilgamesh wished to test something at anyrate. As all attacks would be rendered invalid, then he would determine to see if anything at all affected her. He blocked the attack.

“Stun her!” he called.

“What! ..Oh! Codecast_release_mgi(c)!"

The weak shockwave rushed through the field. While normally it might have caused some small damage, now it was labeled invalid, as was the effect.

Gilgamesh narrowed his eyes and blocked another jab aimed or his heart, but the other leg came around, trying to cut him from the back. He shifted to the side, raising a hand to fend off the blow. She currently was not using that honey attack, lest he would have been dead, for while he managed to hold off the worse off it, it felt the pain to show his health had fallen sharply.

He and the Ego jumped back, prepared to engage again.

So, she was immune to status ailments. That was useful, if not worth the price.

But the Ego was smirking.

“That was insane…” Hakuno muttered. “Honestly, even if we break through…"

“As I thought, I am far stronger. This feels completely different from slicing up those fakes. It’s making me so excited…this might just become a habit… So I guess I’ll have to stop here. I’d hate to kill you and stop the fun… So, go back to that school building. I’ll leave it alone now. Could you raise your level a little? Otherwise it might be too boring for me… Sort of like with Alice. That Caster was way to easy to break.”

“Not yet!” Hakuno said, the reminder of the child causing her rage to build again.

The orb that represented the heart of the Ego appeared before them, glowing and brilliant.

“Oh my, that thing, is that my SG?” she asked, looking curious. “How did you gain that? You’re impossible you know. You broke my collection and you’re stealing my secrets…. Just terrible.”

But Gilgamesh had no interest in the creature’s dreams of Hakuno’s actions being for her. If he could not break that disgusting love of hers than he would break her hold of the verbal war.

“You have the spirit of a great weed,” Gilgamesh smiled. “Desiring fruits of battle even wish pushed
to this state… Even as your ally, I am surprised. However, that is why you are my mongrel! Tell her then. Show her that her SG has been granted to you, and she is not necessary even for that!”

“You filthy-“

“You’re a doll enthusiast,” Hakuno spat. “You like people who don’t move. So you turned Alice’s blood to wax. Frankly, it’d be better called a mania.”

Her eyes were cold and filled with a fury that Gilgamesh found he enjoyed.

But the Ego gasped out as if this was some great pleasure to her, and her body started to glow, even as the SG was already stolen, Hakuno still rushed forwards to take the named object back.

But the Ego was not fading. As before, she stood holding herself with that joy on her face.

“It’s so strange…I feel the hole it opened, but…it feels like I really do have a heart too…” she smiled in reprise. “That’s right. I love dolls. No matter how much I love them, they don’t complain. They never show displeasure, they never change. While I consider human consumer culture stupid, I am grateful that it has polished figurine culture.” She shivered in joy and then started to speak again, much faster now that her obsession was being touched on. “It began with the statue of Venus, I think. In Greece-”

“Spare us your raving, woman,” Gilgamesh barked. “Your desire is exposed, no one but yourself requires any more on the subject, least of all my Master.”

The Ego gave him another ugly look.

“I so badly want to cut you to pieces, and show Hakuno your insides. But I suppose I can’t without killing her… Fine. It’s come out already, so I’ll just say it. I like dolls. I love them. From life-sized to miniatures, I appreciate them all equally! But certainly, scale models in particular draw my interest. Being able to run you tongue over them and admire them from 360 degrees gives such a feeling of control, of ownership, it’s the best there is. All there can be for those who can’t appreciate this hobby is total reeducation. After you’re melted, I’ll make you into base materials. Is there any other image so lovely? No, there can’t be. There isn’t, and so I will build it! But most of all, more than anything else. I want a doll named ‘Hakuno’ to love and to keep and to treasure forever…”

Yes. Than that vision was correct.

For a moment, the two locked eyes.

“It’s not really all that different than you, hoarder,” the creature has the audacity to claim. “The only difference is that you take anything rare or that catches your attention and then ignore it, and I take only the best and preserve it.”

Gilgamesh laughed coldly. As she could compare her mania to his own treasury.

“Your little hobby could not begin to compare with me, AI,” he said. “You merely decorate corpses and pretend like a child that they love you.”

He had no such illusions.

For a moment, the creature looked like she might attack again, but she scowled.

“Hmph, well it doesn’t matter,” she said. “I’m in charge of these floors and you’ve only come this far because I’ve let you. I’m full now, having cut up that Servant a little and felt that SG’s being
removed…So I’ll let you go again. We’ll part briefly, but I’ll see you soon. It’s not like there’s another way to face BB. Remember to work on your level. I won’t forgive you if you’re weak. So come to me when you can actually cut me!”

“When I do, it won’t be for you,” Hakuno said, her eyes blazing. “It’ll be for Alice, and Julius, and Leo, and Gatou, and Archer, and Gawain, and everyone else whose fought this hard for us.”

“We’ll see. By the end, you won’t even remember their names, let along that Servant that follows you around!”

And she was gone, vanishing into blue sparks as her progenitor.

Hakuno stood alone, hands balled into fists.

“We have to get stronger somehow,” she muttered. “There’s got to be a way…”

There was something pleasurable in that stance. Of one still weak, rather than despairing, reacting to fight. She would seek victory even in defeat. And it made her that fire in her eyes and how it gave life to her usually expressionless face…

Well, not attractive, but entertaining at any rate.

There was a crackle of static.

“…I’m sorry. We haven’t been able to clarify the nature of her invincibility. But, I think there’s a breakthrough in sight. Anyway, come back. After you’ve rested, we’ll explain things in the student council room,” Rin’s voice called.

Hakuno lay down on the bed the moment that they returned.

“How are we going to beat her?” she muttered.

“Do not consider that for now,” Gilgamesh said. “Our retainers have already claimed to be close to some insight. For now, focus on recovering your strength. I for one am looking forwards to this fight. That Ego…she is truly a monster. She will sacrifice everything for her love, and consequently will destroy even the target of that love. The name of enchantress suits her well. If goddesses had also had such earnestness, they would not have been denounced as fickle and loose.”

It was true. He would have denounced Ishtar as a lunatic.

“That was…generous… You almost sound like you respect her.” Hakuno mumbled. “After what she did to Alice…I just can’t…”

“I am not speaking of liking or respect. As I told you, she is a monster. However, she is progressing rationally for such a creature. If I am to speak on that point, the stubbornness of those feelings is that of a maiden who lives for love. No other beautiful flower is as worth scattering. When we at last come to our battle, how ugly will the moment of her death be — I cannot help thinking I will enjoy it,” Gilgamesh grinned at her.

That pride and that lack of understanding of death and suffering. It was so like a goddess, and something he would enjoy seeing her face.
“You scare me sometimes, Gil,” Hakuno said.

“Is it not the same for you? After all, she brutally killed one who you saw as a friend, and tried to steal the very soul of another.”

“Well, yeah, but…” Hakuno sighed. “I want her to stop, and I want her to know what she did was wrong, and…maybe I want her to hurt a little like she did to the others…but I’m not looking forwards to killing her… Maybe she just looks too much like Sakura or something…”

Gilgamesh sighed.

“You truly are foolishly softhearted. Still, I will permit that sorrow, knowing that it will not stay your hand. She is still a rampaging beast and would have you join Alice as her toy. If you aim for BB or the Near Side, she should be seen as nothing more than a wall for you to overcome. Now, rest, free of thought.”

There would be a time for worries, and for mourning, but net yet.

“You know…I think you really just want to see her crushed because you’re just as angry about what she did to Alice…” she mumbled sleepily.

Gilgamesh scowled at her.

“Do not misunderstand me! I wish for her destruction in for her underestimation of myself and you, who are mine. There is nothing else to it!”

But she was already sleeping.

He left her to sleep, but found that he was not interested in such a thing.

Rather he moved around the school observing the subtle changes that were taking place since the Ego’s assault. The NPC’s chatter was becoming more relevant, and, more interesting, focused on the situation at hand.

“I don’t really know,” one said to another. “I guess those ‘heroic spirits’ just decided that they liked certain people? I never really thought about it before…”

So they were starting to question that…

Gilgamesh materialized in the Infirmary, where the AI was busily inputting data into her tablet as two NPCs left. She looked up at his approach.

“They seem more active than in the past,” he said by means to starting his questions.

“Yes, they’re starting to question things, like you and what is happening, as well as their own feelings. It’s strange…I feel like I’m looking at myself, but not. They don’t know this is a virtual world, you know. NPCs are mostly used in the preliminaries, to make the place feel more real, and sometimes, in different kinds of Grail Wars. Thankfully this one has been pretty organized…”

He had no interest in the plights of things that were not human. It was only now that they were starting to change that they were growing worth looking at and ruling over.

“I’ve been looking for more information on that fire wall,” Sakura said. “I’m not sure, but there seems to be a toll or…maybe something else. I’m not sure. The thing was meant to be something you’d never take down.’
Gilgamesh made a thoughtful noise.

“I will look over your notes in time, however, there is another matter which has come to my attention. BB’s rant sounded as though there was no option but Hakuno’s death. Are you aware of this?”

“I.”

“That’s because BB thinks it doesn’t matter if she wins or not,” a new voice sounded, and Gilgamesh turned to see the seaweed child standing with his arms crossed watching him.

It appeared the child had been listening, or perhaps waiting for him.

“And how are you aware of this?” Gilgamesh asked.

“Because that’s what she said,” the boy shrugged. “she didn’t say why, but…if I had to guess, I…I think that Hakuno’s body died.”

“You mean…” the AI started before Gilgamesh could respond.

“I think during the preliminaries, you took too long to decide that you wanted her as a Master,” the child said, crossing his arms and glaring with all the force of a young boy attempting to be intimidating. “So her body is either dead of comatose. Which is why she can’t remember anything before that. Rin mentioned it to Rani too. So, it’s probably true. I don’t know why BB wants Hakuno alive, but that’s what she said.”

Hakuno’s body was dead? The logic did make a certain sense, but what did that mean for her? It changed nothing about her as a person, but if she was dead…no. That was not likely the case. The Moon Cell would react to that, would it not? But if something had happened to render her comatose...

“Child, why are you informing us of this?” Gilgamesh asked.

Shinji looked away.

“I’ve looked up your stats and stuff with the Moon Cell. You’re supposed to be some…super Servant, and Jinako mentioned that you’re not even supposed to be on the Near Side, but clammed up real quick about everything else. Since you decided to come to the Near Side…I’m guessing that once you beat BB, you’ll win everything.”

Gilgamesh grinned at him. At least the child was not a fool.

“So…just…I wanted you to know that there’s something wrong, and you need to do something about it… Since…she’s not going to stop… I’m not sure how, but…you’ll be able to protect her? Right?”

There was something about that child, and the tone of his voice…something that reminded him of the other. The little girl who had been gutted and turned to nothing, raising one last plea for the life of her friend.

“How Kishinami is my Master, and the only one I will ever acknowledge. None will harm her but by my permission.”

The child smiled a little; it was faint reflection of his true age.
“Ok. Fine. I… I don’t really care, but… if she’s beat me, then… yeah. I mean… It doesn’t matter!”

And he was off, rushing down the hall without a word to the AI.

She sighed.

“Mr. Gilgamesh. I am a little worried about him. I think he’s planning something dangerous. And… and… he was my brother, if only in a dream. He wasn’t very good at it, but… he seemed to honestly like me…. I didn’t really care… about much of anything at the time, but… now…”

So, her change had occurred sometime after the preliminaries. That was interesting.

“Watch him then. The child seems to avoid you, so that might be difficult, but be aware of him…”

Something, a sensation and a slight twinge in the back of his mind caused him to look after the child.

This was likely the last time that he would speak to the boy.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter this time, but it WAS going to be the second part of the last one. Shinji got a brief chat with Gil before things got bad. Also, Gil, if you’re not Tsundere about one thing, you’re Tsundere about something else.

Next Chapter:

"I guess in reality… you were my very first friend..."
The First time Hakuno and Gilgamesh Held Hands

Chapter Summary

Hakuno and Gilgamesh challenge the final floor of the Labyrinth in hopes of revoking Meltilith’s invincibility. Shinji decides to win no matter what.

Chapter Notes

Hello, naughty children, it's time to cry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first time Gilgamesh willingly retreated was when he was most worried for Hakuno’s safety.

The child sat alone in the classroom a small computer before him writing out code on code. He learned backwards, closing his eyes and smiling a little.

“I can’t believe it…I did it. I figured it out before they could!” he said, grinning to himself. “Hehe Maybe they’re just too used to doing things the normal way. Or something like that. Anyways, they didn’t have the guts for this answer…”

But fear came over the boy’s face and he bit his lip.

“Why should I though? I don’t own anyone anything… And all she has to do is just stay put…” he gripped the desk. “I should stop… it’s scary, and… I don’t even know if it’ll work. I can’t even make one of those NPCs do it because if it doesn’t work… No.” he shook his head. “No, this’ll work. It’s my strategy after all. 100% guarantee. That’s not the thing to worry about. She’ll never see it coming either… Besides…sometimes a win is dirty. What’s scary is the pain, so… if I cut that off… yeah. I can do this for sure…”

He went back to his typing, frantically writing the code as if frightened that his own nerve would fail him.

“Ok, I’ve got so much painkiller…geez when did I get this kind of motivation…was I always this dumb?” he laughed a little. “Well… I did refuse to realize this was a kill game til… Ok. I die or the world dies. Ok. Never thought I’d think about which of those scared me more, and I don’t want to… but… if it ends either way… No this is more important. I can’t think like that.”

The boy throw down some final code and the dream shifted.

It wasn’t the Old School Building anymore. And this was no longer a vision but a memory.

The arena was lightly lit, and Hakuno watched with as Shinji staggered, falling to his knees and breathing hard.

“What… what the hell?” he muttered. “H… how did my servant lose? That’s wrong! No matter how you look at it, I’m the best! I’m Asia’s top gamer! I can’t lose in the first round to some nobody!”
The Servant, a buxom woman with long pink hair and a scar that marred her face shook her head.

“You’re going to try to flog a waterlogged sailor than? It’s no use, Master. It’s not going to change the outcome.”

“If you can still talk back to my, why are you fighting! I can’t lose! Not like this!”

“That’s not happening,” the woman said, smirking as she held up one hand, with was starting to fade. “That thing got me throw the heart. I’m disappearing.”

“What? You can’t just run! I lost thanks to you!” the boy yelled.

“My fault?” The pirate asked. “Maybe. Or maybe it was carelessness, lack of ability, luck, or plenty of reasons. It doesn’t matter. Fortune is fickle and fate is what you make it. We lost for a reason. We’re strong, but we didn’t have what it took.”

The boy stood, stamping one foot on the ground.

“Why are you making this sound like someone else’s problem? I did what I was supposed to do! I’m the best! I-it’s not my fault! You ruined everything by becoming my Servant! Yeah! I can’t believe I lost! This game sucks!”

Hakuno watched, her face impassive. And something behind her nudged her hand.

“…back…” a garbled voice said.

“Right…” Hakuno muttered.

The whole thing still felt surreal, but at least nothing bad had happened. She didn’t know what that Rin girl had been saying about a death game… Now that this was done…maybe she could try to figure out more and more what was wrong with her and why she couldn’t remember anything.

She made a movement to turn around, but the boy’s voice stopped her.

“Wait!” he said, a desperate hope gleaming in his eyes. “I have an idea! Switch places with me! Say that I won!”

“I think the priest is watching this…”

“It doesn’t matter. Just say that I won! You know you just won because of an accident! That creepy thing just got a lucky shot in. There’s no way you could actually beat me!”

Actually, her Servant had dominated this match, moving and acting with a ferocity that had actually scared her a little. They were always like that though…

“You’re totally going to lose the second round,” the child said, pushing his hair back. “But I’ll win for sure. I mean, think about it. Wouldn’t it be better for one of us just to keep winning than for one of us to lose? I don’t really care about the Grail or the money. My family’s rich enough. I just want the title. So if you let me take your place, I’ll share the Grail with you! I’ll contact you when you log off and-”

The redhaired woman sighed, shaking her head.

“Oh, cut it out, Shinji. You lost. You can’t change that, and you’re starting to embarrass me…”

“Shut up!” The boy shouted. “This is your fault anyways! You can’t boss me around!”
“Shinji…” Hakuno said. “Your hand…”

“Wha-?” The boy looked down at his hands, holding them up to where black noise was starting to creep up his fingers. “My body’s…disappearing…I…haven’t logged out like this before I…”

With all the force of a trap snapping shut, a red firewall slid between the losing and winning teams. The redhead Servant looked at her own disappearing hands and sighed.

“Losers die in the Holy Grail War, Shinji, as a Master, you should have known that before you started.”

“What...DIE. As in...No. That’s impossible! The Avatar gets erased yeah, but...you can’t DIE in a virtual world!” he looked between his Servant and then to Hakuno. “You tell her!”

He sounded frantic, but his Servant just shook her head. For once, she looked almost sorrowful as blackness began to obscure her features.

“You lose you die. That’s why it’s the Holy Grail ‘War’ not Holy Grail ‘Game’. People die in wars. That’s the point of them really. Pretty much everyone who joined this war is going to end up dead. Only the sole survivor goes home.”

A chill ran up Hakuno’s spine. Was she... Yes, Rin and Rani had...but...

“No way!” the boy screamed. “This...this isn’t funny! This is just a tournament! A game! And and... then...DO SOMETHING! Aren’t you supposed to help your Master?! Aren’t you ashamed you lost!?”

The woman stood, tall, drawing two guns, and even with her body faded and covered in darkness, there was a pride to her, even as the child winced in pain and began to sink to the ground.

“Ashamed? I’m so disgusted with this loss I could puke, but I warned you when I contracted with you, little boy. I told you to be prepared. A villain’s final moments are always laughably pitiful,” she turned to where Hakuno was watching, eyes wide and heart in her throat, some part of her hoping, wishing more, that this was not real. “You, with the blank face, laugh a little. When clowns go out without a laugh or two is just sad. I hope the rest of your journey goes well. End up stronger than me, would you? In my life, I fought the military, so I hate fighting weaker foes. Let me know I fought against someone better.”

And with a rueful smile, Francis Drake faded into darkness, leaving Shinji alone, sobbing.

“No...I...I can’t...Hakuno...you can help me right?” he whispered. “I...if it wasn’t for you...I wouldn’t be dying so...you have to help me!”

Hakuno ran to the wall, pressing her hands against it.

“Shinji, I can’t get through!”

The boy looked at her, fear and anger and pain intermingling as he clutched himself, trying to pull himself back together.

“No!” he screamed. “I...I’m really disappearing. It...it feels like I’m going to disappear in the real world too! HELP ME! WHY AREN’T YOU HELPING MY I’M ONLY EIGHT YEARS OLD!”

“I...I don’t want to die yet-“
Those last words were a whisper as his vanished into black noise.

Gilgamesh opened his eyes with a frown. The light of the false sunset was streaming through the window, setting the golden dreamcatchers and the crimson wallcovering aglow. So, those had been the boy’s final moments. From an adult it would have been laughably pitiful, but knowing his age… Gilgamesh tended to be lenient towards children.

Hakuno lay in the bed still, showing no sign of awakening. A third of him wished to allow her to continue to wander in her dreams, but the greater part of him knew that this was not possible. His Master and himself needed to persist. This floor coming was the last, and BB was running out of sentinels and the desire to make them.

When they defeated the Cancer and they arrived on the Near Side, Hakuno would rest for as long as she desired.

“Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said, noting that she resisted his call. “Do you intend to leave me bored?”

“I want to-“ the women grumbled, but then sighed. “Yeah…you’re right. I’ve rested enough…we’ve got the last Labyrinth…”

“And our retainers have requested our presence for a meeting prior to that floor.”

If they had not found what they were looking for, eventually they would be running into danger. Still, Gilgamesh supposed that, should the Ego’s invincibility still be in effect, then there was one final measure he could propose, but that was not one which he would offer lightly.

His mongrel nodded, sliding from the bed, and making to prepare herself or the day.

It took little time for her to be prepared, but there was a tension in the air as they made their way to the Student Council room. It seemed that all were beginning to become nervous with the end approaching and no sign of the end of the Ego’s power.

Within the Council, Rin, Rani and the AI were, all of them, nervous as they looked up from some conversation.

“Good morning,” the AI said, smiling a little. “Miss Hakuno, you seem mentally and physically as normal as you could be.”

“That’s good,” Hakuno said. “I’m a little tired, but I’m ready to go again.”

Gilgamesh took the seat that he had reserved for himself at the head while Hakuno took her place at his side.

“Glad to hear it,” Rin said. “We’ve got things at about fifty-fifty here. We’ve got good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?”

“That’s an inefficient question, you know, Tohsaka,” Rani said, looking up from her work.
“Regardless, the information is the same.”

Rin glowered at her.

“…You know if you just give your conclusions, the man of your dreams won’t fall for you.”

“…Really?” the AI asked blinking.

Gilgamesh drummed his fingers on the table loudly in warning. They could discuss such frivolity
when time was available.

Rani cleared her through.

“This conversation can continue later. As it is, let us be efficient. It has taken time, but we have uncovered the truth of what Meltlilith has done.”

“…I’m so glad,” his Master sighed. “You two are the best…”

Rin gave a smile, but it seemed more pained than pleased.

“I’m glad you’re glad, but…you might want to wait a bit..” she said. “Rani, could you finish?”

“Yes,” the homunculus continued. “We’ve found that Meltlilith has not falsified herself, but rather, she’s done something to the system. She’s hacked SE.RA.PH’s Administrative system and has overwritten the first item of the basic rules. The first rule is now: Meltlilith cannot be injured. This is a completely illegal mod.”

“…She modded the world?” Hakuno asked softly.

It was a clever move. Most of the mongrels would never even consider it.

“It’s makeshift, but clever,” Rin said.

“I see,” the AI said thoughtfully. “…That must be why when I investigated her, there wasn’t any sign of anything illegal… But if I manage to go through the system and debug it, Meltlilith should be able to go back to normal, right? …Oh…with BB in control of the Far Side of the Moon…I can’t do anything like that…”

“Yes. That’s the problem. To lift that Hakuno is going to have to go into the administrative system.”

The core? That was not an easy place to come to. As a place vulnerable to hacking, the core was heavily protected.

“And how to you plan on my Master achieving that?” Gilgamesh asked.

“We’re hoping that, with mobilization of the Student Council Room’s calculating functions, it will be possible to bring down any shields. But…that can only be done once. And after that, the building would be suspended. Time would be needed to revive the connection. During that time, while the building and everyone in it would be safe, our connection to President Kishinami would be cut off, leaving her along in a deadly situation… You would both be required to work your way out on your own…”

“That’s the bad news I mentioned,” Rin said. “You’ll both have to reach the end of the Labrynth without catching her attention. I’m going to be using those decoys again. She…seemed to like killing them at least…. Once you make it to the wall, we’ll be out of contact with you and Gilgamesh. You’ll both have the access the core and remove the rule before Meltlilith finds out.”

“No pressure;” Hakuno mumbled.

“It’s an awful plan,” the AI said, looking away. “I can’t believe that a plan with only a ten percent success rate is the best chance that you’ve got…”

“Please don’t tell me the odds, Sakura,” Hakuno said softly. “The less I know, about that the better. Still…I’m willing to do it. How about you, Gil?”
“It is difficult, but should we succeed, the only thing for us will be to defeat her in battle,” Gilgamesh said.

He would look forward to her face at the end of that fight.

“Alright then,” Rin said. “We need to prepare for this.”

“Yes,” the AI said. “Once we reach the shields, the power will go off, but I’ll be in the infirmary, I can provide some power reserves. So you can leave it to me. But…Rin…what was that rule before it was altered?”

Rani shrugged.

“It was something about a loss of a sense of time. There are different laws between the physical and imaginary spaces, so time isn’t really experienced here. Meltlilith used that ‘lose’ and made it mean ‘loss of her own collision detection’. Ironically, that was a real boon. If we hadn’t been able to conceive of time, we might still be on the second level…”

“I wonder if BB knows about this…” the AI mumbled.

“That is doubtful,” Gilgamesh said. “The Cancer was unaware of the Ego being invulnerable, and seemed unhappy of the notion. However, both the Cancer and the Ego are driven purely by emotion. Have the duplicates on the higher levels and be prepared to lose power. Be certain that the others are within the walls.”

“Alright,” Rin said. “Good luck.”

Gilgamesh walked with his mongrel through the building. He noted that the child was nowhere in sight. Often he was loitering around a classroom, in view of them as they left, now he was nowhere to be found. Now only NPCs watched, with a few calling out their good lucks and promises to ‘hold down the fort’ while they were away.

If they were worried, they hid it well.

Hakuno herself stared ahead, her face set, with only a few words for the others. As they stepped out into the courtyard of the school, she paused, looking back at the building. Gilgamesh found himself noting that in the false sunlight, her hair showed more coloration than merely cedar, but dismissed that.

“Does the prospect of the core truly worry you, Mongrel?” he asked.

“Yes… I mean…it’s the core. It’s just…I don’t know. I guess…” she looked away. “If I could have changed the rules earlier, I would have made it so that no one died, and they just woke up, but… that’s not enough for me anymore…”

She looked at the tree.

“I guess I’ll decide what to do when we get there. At least Melt’s meddling made it so that we didn’t lose time.”

That was an unexpected boon, but odd as well. The Ego had not existed for some time, but if they had no true sense of time, then what did that mean?

He kept those thoughts to himself as they continued down to the final layer.
They transferred into the final layer, a vile amalgamation of ruins and paths. It was twisted and broken, less of a reflection of the state of her heart and much more a vision of what she intended to do to everything. A good will so pure it was itself hideous, covered in the honey that was the Ego’s dream of all melting together until the world was made up of herself and her ‘doll’. It was the kind of love of a goddess, ageless and unchanging, and thus hardly worth even a breath.

As they stepped forwards, a sound that Gilgamesh had heard in the dream sounded, and he wiped around to see the firewall from the Near Side slide into place as a familiar sensation came into the air. They were cut off.

Yet…

“This chill,” he said, maneuvering himself so that he was before his Master. “So you’ve come this early, Alter Ego. It appears we have no choice but to throw ourselves into the fire, Hakuno.”

“Don’t say her name so familiarly.”

The Ego appeared, jumping down from above them, and landing in a crouch before straightening, her eyes were fixed on Hakuno, who stood behind him, watching with her hands to her chest.

He had noticed that about her. While her face tended to lack expression, she would react with her body.

“Welcome to the deepest part of me, Hakuno. You’re like a moth to a flame you know…”

There was another presence on this floor.

Gilgamesh could feel it, vaguely, like small animal of some sort creeping along. He had not originally sensed it, but…

Was he using Julius’s pathways?

The Student Council was silent, likely cut off already. As much as he despised the thing, he would grant her the distinction of being clever. For now, though it was necessary to prevent her attack. Still, the thing was smirking, with victory clearly before her. So, she would be a fool in her boasting. Very well.

“You really came down here with no plan at all after I warned you to get stronger? I heard that it was only bugs that flew into flames, but I guess humans do the same thing, don’t they? Well, that’s fine. Things end here. First you.” The things eyes flashed to him, and a moderately impressive killing intent came his way. “Have your exit. BB wouldn’t eat you, but I will. Then, Hakuno, you become my doll. Don’t worry though. I’m not going to hurt you. This is a honey I made just for you. My highest love…”

He felt the thrill of fear from their bond and scowled.

The presence was moving swiftly, and while he could not sense the actions that the child was taking, it was something, and this Ego needed to continue speaking in order for whatever trap to be completed.

Very well, an opponent in her victory was not difficult to coax into bravado.

“Ego, there is one truth in your worlds. Although many would call you ‘evil’ I will not. You are a goddess in every form, and you show your love in that manner. Yet, what is love? Is it a constant? Is
it relative? Does it continue or end or change? The answer that many avoid you have determined from the start, even if it is an immoral thing.” Gilgamesh grinned at her. “You are the very incarnation of a young woman who cannot stand even the slightest impurity in the world around you and loathes all discord. And that is why you are utterly incompatible with Hakuno.”

The Ego stiffened, eyes narrowing.

“What did you just say?” she growled.

“This woman is rootless and seeks no absolutes, pushing past all barriers. She exists as a perfect example of the ever changing ‘human being’. Your affection is that of a goddess, eternal and changeless, that kind of love can never reach a human.”

Because humans changed, and as they changed, so did the love shared between them as they grew and changed with their world. It was why relations with the mortal and the divine could never stand, and why he had rejected her. This child’s love was much the same as hers. It was merely a way to claim ownership. That was mostly how gods understood such things as love.

And one reason why humanity was far more entertaining to observe.

“Humanity has no eternity, you little fool, and the moment you reached for it, there was no other fate but for that love to be broken.”

The girl scowled, eyes firmly on him. Good. She was so busy focusing on the discussion of her ‘love’ that she could see nothing else. Gods and goddesses were much the same across all realms. Sort sighted and sure of their own perfection.

The Ego laughed mockingly, so sure of her victory, and so sure he had walked into her own verbal victory.

“I’m shocked,” the creature laughed, “truly shocked. You claim that I do not treat Hakuno like a human being? Haven’t I been saying as much the entire time?”

“Hm…now that you mention it, you have indeed said so,”

Keep talking, fool.

“I don’t need anything human. Feelings are repulsive, and dolls are easier to love don’t you think?”

Not particularly. A doll or statue, like the ones used for the gods in Uruk was pleasing to look at for a time, but it was very dull in the end.

“I get it,” Hakuno suddenly said.

She had been silent through most of their forced conversation, but now she entered in. While Gilgamesh doubted that she sensed the child’s presence, moving quickly deeper into the Labyrinth, he welcomed her input.

“I see what the big difference is between you and Passionlip. Lip wanted to be loved. She didn’t care about anyone else, and anything that was in the way of someone loving her needed to be gotten rid of. You…you just want to love. You never cared if your feelings were reciprocated at all.”

Gilgamesh glanced at his Master. There was worry in her posture, but she glared at the woman

“You are growing well accustomed to seeing the ugly secrets of hearts,” he remarked, but he could
not keep his eyes off of a foe for too long.

The creature smiled.

“Oh, good. You understand now. I can take you in without a fuss, right?”

She was coming.

“Run, Hakuno!” Gilgamesh shouted, “As annoying as it is, we must retreat!”

His Master turn to run as the Ego shot forwards. No. This was not enough. If this continued-

He opened one of his gates, throwing a single sword at her to make the Ego flinch away, and, with that moment of bought time, they dashed down the ramp, deeper into the Labyrinth, and closer to that child’s trap.

However, he told himself, if all was lost, then he would not permit that Ego to ever touch Hakuno. He would draw Ea and bring that Labyrinth crashing down. If the choice should come that he should choose between her life, and the Labyrinth remaining open, he would shut the door with his own hands.

The first time that Hakuno held Gilgamesh’s hand was one of the worst days of Hakuno’s life.

Her feet pounded on the ground as they ran deeper into the Labyrinth. She was pushing herself as hard as she could, but she knew that Gilgamesh would have been able to move faster without her, and Melt was behind them. Sometimes, Gilgamesh would turn, throwing something at her to slow her down, but as much as it might slow her down…she was going to catch up.

“We can still reach the core!” Hakuno breathed. “We have to!”

Gilgamesh didn’t respond.

Up ahead was a large platform, half submerged in honey. Around them, ruined buildings flouted, but there was no clearer sign of the shield. The two paths that Hakuno could see that split off both went into darkness. If she made one wrong choice…

Hakuno stopped for a split second, looking between them. Which way-

Melt landed.

“This is really no use. You’re just a human. You can’t possibly outrun me…”

“We must play for time for now, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said softly beside her, but spoke to Melt in a louder voice. “Before we fight this last battle, I will ask you one final question. You claim you hate humans, but this one here is human. Does your love hold true, given this?”

“Of course it does!” The ego smiled. “I love the ‘non-human’ that is Hakuno. Or should I say that being human is her one flaw? I will cut out that human part of her and make her fully a two-dimensional character.”
Gilgamesh’s eyes narrowed and the pupils were so thin Hakuno could barely see it. Somehow, he’d moved so that it was hard to see Meltlilith, but she could feel the fury radiating from him.

“How revolting. To speak of such a thing is to speak of taking a glowing flame and to replace it with one of those…light things…that humans, turn off and on at will designed to mimic it. Giving off a poor light and no beauty or worth. You are a fool who would throw away a treasure for trash!”

“You don’t know what a treasure is, hoarder!” Melt snapped. “All you think of is your whims! You don’t care about Hakuno, or anyone but yourself and your pleasure! You know nothing of love or anything lasting! I don’t think you’ve ever felt anything for anyone! Now, Hakuno, it’s time to make you mine!”

The Ego crouched, and Gilgamesh stood, holding out his hand.

That wasn’t a motion to open the Gates.

He was…

He was going to use his Nobel Phantasm… No…he was going to bring down the whole place around them!

“Gilgamesh!” Hakuno started.

But there was a sudden crackle of noise and static as a blue screen appeared in front of them, and BB’s face came into view.

“Stop right there, Meltlilith!” BB’s voice sounded more normal than it had the last time she’d seen her. “You have acted far too autonomously.”

“Eah-ah What?!” Melt’s voice almost sounded choked.

It was the first time that Hakuno had ever heard her sound anything less than completely assured in the situation.

With a startled cry, she started glowing, as…her SG activated? The crimson orb suddenly rose from her and shot towards Hakuno. She caught it more on reflex than anything and stared at it, and then at Gilgamesh.

He shrugged.

“You…in one instant you took my rule and now-!” Meltlilith gasped at, eyes narrowed. “Why are you helping them, BB?”

“I am not taking her side. I’m hindering you,” BB said, her voice cold and angry. “I don’t allow system alterations. This is a monotheistic system, and the only one allowed invincibility is me. You were granted as much power as you needed. Fight with that. Your purpose is to guard my back. Stick to your job unless you want me to just hand sempai victory on a platter.”

She vanished in a spark, and Meltlilith turned to her, breathing hard.

“Oh, playing innocent are you?” she said angrily, the words coming out much faster than Hakuno had heard her speak. “This is why the original is just- I’ll never understand your motivations!”

She turned to the pair of them with a very ugly look on her face.

“So, one of our problems has been resolved with no effort on my or my mongrel’s part. You are not
blessed in your luck or your parentage, are you, Ego?”

He was smiling, and his tone was a more poisonously sweet than the honey that Melt was planning one using.

Meltlilith hissed in her fury.

“Fine,” she muttered. “fine. I’ll show you how different we are even like this!”

She launched herself towards them, and even with Gilgamesh blocked the attack, Hakuno could heal the hiss of pain.

“Code Cast: add_revive (32)” she hissed, but the spell wasn’t necessary.

While Gilgamesh was no longer standing with his arms crossed in surety, he hadn’t fallen, but she could tell from his face, that it was a near miss. There was sweat on his brow.

“So, indeed we are still in the worse position,” he muttered. “Tell me, Alter Ego, how many levels have you sucked up from others?”

Melt laughed, a high, cold sound that sent a shiver up Hakuno’s spine.

“Do you think about all the calories you consume?” she asked. “Well, I know you don’t care, but it’s the same thing. Still…listen and despair, Servant: my level is 999. If I wasn’t bound by a level cap, I’d be more powerful than BB.”

999.

That shouldn’t even be possible. There had to be some kind of limit to cheating! She’d stolen so much experience from Servants and any NPC she could find that she’d reached the end of the counter.

They couldn’t win…

All this time, she’d been thinking if they could just get past that buffer…

“I promise you, Hakuno. Once BB falls, the first thing I do is remove that from myself. Then, as long as there’s food, I’ll grow constantly, and I’ll never be able to be deleted…This is my real power. So don’t get notions in your head that you can beat me just because I’m not invincible anymore. That was just there to get me to this point.”

There had to be something she was missing-

“Well then, let’s continue this little scene of pleasure. First a leg. Then your arms….I’ll break you down and consume all of you…”

A crackle of static sounded in her heres.

“Finally! It’s connected! Miss Hakuno, are you ok?” Sakura’s voice sounded frantic. “Oh…Oh no! Miss Hakuno, we don’t have the stairs up yet! You have to run! The path to the right!”

Hakuno’s body reacted before she could even think, sprinting down the path as fast she could. For a while, her feet pounded against the floor, and all she could hear was that, but then she started to realize she was slowing, even in the virtual world, she was getting tired-

A hand took hers, pulling her with him as Gilgamesh took the lead, moving at a speed that was
decidedly not human and half pulling half carrying her as he ran, not even looking back as weapons shot out from behind him.

“You can’t run forever!” Melt called, horribly close.

They kept going, Gilgamesh holding her hand with a grip that was almost painful as he pulled her along, and she was starting to get the feeling that he would pick her up before too long.

They rushed down a stone ramp and over a river of honey that Gilgamesh jerked Hakuno over so hard she was off of her feet. When they reached a small platform where everything widened out, Hakuno heard another sound: metal on stone.

“She’s coming!” Hakuno screamed.

Melt laughed an-

Something clicked

With a strange, wet pop…something green and slimy shot up from behind her, and Hakuno turned around to see…a wall of…seaweed?

“W-what is this…dirty, ugly, poorly made wall! I don’t remember it being here…”

“At last,” Gilgamesh growled.

“Rin…Rani…did you manage to get this in here?” Hakuno called.

“…We’ve been busy trying to get a line in,” Rin’s voice sounded. “Maybe BB…”

No, that was wrong. BB wasn’t behind this.

“It doesn’t matter,” Meltlilith said, smirking. “I can take down this level of firewall easily…”

She kicked at it, but through the waving leaves, Hakuno could see Meltlilith’s leg get tangled in the soft, squishy wall.

Melt screamed in anger.

“What is this! This is disgusting! It’s slimy! It’s like rotten seaweed! Who planted something like this in my Labyrinth!”

Gilgamesh, apparently, wasn’t in the mood to wait. She hadn’t realized she was still clutching his hand until he started running again, tugging her forwards with him. As Meltlilith screamed her fury, and she could hear the sounds of something cutting from a distance, they dashed forwards, over another pathway, towards what looked like the way out.

There was a cry of triumph just as they passed over another platform, and another wall of seaweed grew up behind them as they passed.

“It seems it was right to buy him time,” Gilgamesh remarked as they ran towards a gap that had to be the way out.

He was forcing them over another series of paths, and even though there was a growing stitch in her side from running…

They’d made it…
“Gil, who-“

A familiar laugh sounded through the Labyrinth.

Hakuno turned to see Melt, standing at the second platform, the seaweed wall gone, but there was someone in front of her. Even from a distance, Hakuno could see Shinji Matou standing, arms crossed, rather like Gilgamesh, and she knew the proud look that he was wearing.

What was he…

“Haha! You look like a total idiot, Melt! Kishinami escaped you with only a stupid firewall to keep you from her!”

“Shinji-” Melt’s voice sounded honestly shocked. “This was you! So…this was revenge, wasn’t it?”

“Revenge?” Shinji asked. “Not Reeeeeeally. I don’t really resent you… I’m just here to laugh in your face!”

Why was he…

A dark chuckle echoed through the Labyrinth.

“Oh?” Melt’s voice was dangerously low. “Go on then, Shinji, at least this sounds amusing. I’ll listen. What exactly are you here to laugh at?”

“Shinji!” Hakuno screamed. “Shinji get out of there!”

But Shinji didn’t answer. He just laughed.

“Obvious isn’t it? You’re sloppy. You were so busy with being creepy towards Kishinami and bragging to her Servant about how cool you were that you didn’t even notice me sneaking past you. I swear, you just wouldn’t shut up even when they Servant was asking obvious questions! Even before that. When you were alone here, you just kept humming Swan Lake to yourself while I was literally three platforms away planting this wall. And then you stood there and bragged about your level, even though BB, your support, basically told you to go die. I’ll tell you what, that level of incompetence? It was great. It was like watching a noob with some expensive mod that they just bought.”

“Hakuno!” Sakura shouted. “I’m not sure what he’s doing, but he’s right there with Meltlilith! You have to save him!”

“This is really bad!” Rin said. “It looks like he was hiding and operating the walls from some other platform, but he can’t hide anymore. There’s no way out of that area!”

“We have to save him!” Hakuno said, turning to Gilgamesh. “I know he was an enemy but-”

“If that Ego draws to close…” Gilgamesh let the sentence hang.

“Alright,” Hakuno said.

She vaguely noticed that he was still holding her hand as they took off again down the pathway.

“You’re really annoying.” Meltlilith said. “You’re nothing more than a worm, but your ability to annoy is mature at least. Then again…since you’ve appeared before me…you’re ready for the consequences, right? Or are you going to plead for your life? If you break down in tears and beg, I might spare you, but I’m going to turn you into a nanovirus the size of a mite.”
They were almost there! Hakuno could see them better now. Shinji was still standing confidently, even though Melt was baring down on him, clear fury in her face.

“No way,” he said, laughing a little. “You know, you’re really boring. You act like you’re really cool and like you’re this totally sophisticated girl who likes dolls and ballet and crap, but really, you’re kind of unrefined and slow on the uptake. No wonder Kishinami likes her Servant better and avoids you all the time. I mean, at least he’s actually cool. Not just showing off stuff she got from other people. I’m almost embarrassed for you!”

Shinji…

“I mean, she’s literally running away from you after you’re chasing her and practically begging her to love you. Personally, I’d kill myself if I were you.”

“What.” Meltlilith’s voice was soft and deadly.

“Shinji, what you are doing!”

Hakuno didn’t care how hard her side was aching now. She was going to get there, and then she was going to hit him for running his mouth at her when she was right there! Did he still think this was a game!? Didn’t he realize…

…No.

No…no it couldn’t be…

They reached the platform just as a wall of seaweed erupted all around the two. Locking Shinji and Meltlilith inside together. She ran up to the wall, trying to move the seaweed with her hands, but they just wrapped around her arms until she pulled back.

It was easy to back out of, but impossible to get through…

And through the weeds, Hakuno could hear her.

“Oh, really? Kill yourself? I’ll guess in that case, I’ll grant that wish for you, Shinji!”

Hakuno pushed into the wall, but the seaweed tangled around her, making it impossible to get through. She had to get through! There was still time! She reached, trying to tear the seaweed up from the roots, but they held firm. She couldn’t even hack her away out of this!

She couldn’t let him die! Not like this! Not again!

A cry and horrible wet sound came from behind the wall, and the wall vanished.

“Shinji!” Hakuno screamed.

Shinji was bent over, gasping, a metal spike protruding from his chest as his uniform was quickly darkening with blood. The spike was sparking with a kind of blue energy, that was…absorbing something from him as Shinji gasped out in pain.

Black noise quickly spread over Shinji’s body, starting at his hands and feet and quickly running up his sleeves as Meltlilith held him with one arm, keeping him firmly impaled against the spike on her knee.

Hakuno stood, completely frozen in horror as she watched.
“See this, Shinji? This is the difference between us. Which of us was sloppy again? A Master without a Servant is nothing more than free experience points for me. This is how annoying you are. I’m not going to just kill you. I’m going to absorb you down to the like byte. But be happy. All of that mediocre talent you were so proud of is going to belong to a real winner—“

Meltlilith suddenly jerked back from Shinji as if she had been shocked with a scream of pain. She landed, clutching herself with both hands, and shaking her head.

“Wha-what is…What is this? This… What’s happening!?"

Shinji started to laugh.

At first it was soft, and then it grew into and outright laugh, even as he staggered to his feet and blackness continued to creep up his body.

“Hehehe…Tohsaka and Rani were soft and dumb. Just thinking ‘ooh we need to do something about that invincibility’. You hear that, Kishinami! They’re second rate gamers!” He was still laughing, even as, with a flicker of static, the black noise has spread so that it was covering part of his face. “I wasn’t that dumb. I knew you’d been absorbing levels, and I knew Hakuno had tipped BB off and she was going to do something, so…what to do with the level difference between you and Kishinami…once the invincibility was done…that was the perfect strategy…from the perfect gamer!”

The last bit was almost gasped out.

The hole left by Melt was getting wider as Melt’s poison started to get away at his insides. He was still smiling though even as he coughed up blood.

Her feet wouldn’t move. She wanted to run to him. To try to support him. To get him back to the infirmary. To do something, but her feet wouldn’t move…

A hand on her arm made her stop.

“Suffer this, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh’s voice was soft. “Permit him to stand against that Ego alone. He has earned this dignity with his valor.”

“What have you done!” Melt screamed. “Why is my level…it’s dropping all the way down to 1!”

“Oh…” Shinji looked up, and from where she stood, she could see the grin on his face. “I didn’t mention that, did I? Eh whoops! You see, I was thirsty last night, and I knew the girls hog all the good stuff, so I snuck into the Student Council room, and got something for myself. But it was dark, and turns out…I drank a virus!” He coughed, but kept laughing, a hysterical edge to it, as blood started to drip down his mouth. “I didn’t notice and kept drinking, and before I knew it, the counter had stopped…at negative 999…”

“…You…you made me inherit…a 999 level debt?” Meltlilith hissed. “You meant to tell me that you used your own body as a lure…you laid a trap for me…”

“Yes,” Shinji grinned at her.

He’d straightened, and even though his body was mostly black, somehow was still grinning despite the pain.

“There’s no way…someone as childish and selfish as you, who couldn’t possibly love anyone…there’s no way that you could do…”
“Hehe,” Shinji laughed. “You’re right. I’m a selfish kid who doesn’t really care about other people, but, see, as a gamer, I couldn’t stand you, you cheater! I love picking on weaker players. It’s a blast. But you do that with your own power. When you use some powerup someone bought you, or hack the system, you’re just an idiot and you get spoiled! Cheating sickens me! It’s so gross, you stupid idiot! Also, you’re stupid!”

“SHINJI!”

“Ha! You finally realized it! Don’t underestimate Asia’s number one gaming champion! Stupid!”

Meltlilith shot forwards, but the blow was caught in a flash of gold. Gilgamesh stood, gripping her extended leg, a cold smile on his face as he threw her back. She skidded, hard, and whipped around, only to see the Gate of Babylon open as Hakuno rushed forwards to put Shinji’s arm around her shoulders.

While he was pushing away feebly, and some of that poison was getting on her clothing, in the end Shinji couldn’t fight her, but leaned on her to keep standing.

Hakuno thought she had seen the Gates open completely. She’d been wrong. A golden wall of gates opened in front of her, each with a weapon starting to emerge through it, and all of them aimed at Meltlilith.

She was at level one now.

“Stand down, Ego,” Gilgamesh said, there was a note in his voice that promised what would happen if she did not. “Shinji decided that he had to win, and so he gamboled everything he had, even so far as his own life, and he won. I will not permit any further injury to the victor. Your next battle will be with us. You will leave him to those his allies and retreat.”

The weapons aimed further.

“Unless you would prefer to die here,” Hakuno could hear the bloodlust in his voice.

“Heh, you’re either looking for a challenging battle…or you want that idiot to have the chance to die with Hakuno holding him. Fine. I guess that in the end, I too must resort to shutting myself in my own heart. I will withdraw. Do what you want with this floor. But this isn’t over. I’ll find a way to absorb more levels… When I have recovered, I will come to you. Until then, you just keep playing at comradeship, Servant!”

And then she was gone, jumping over them and fleeing into the Labyrinth, but Hakuno didn’t care. She carefully learned down, helping Shinji to lay down while Gilgamesh stood close by, his arms folded staring at the place Melt had gone…

Standing guard so that Shinji could die in peace.

He had closed his eyes. His body was starting to vanish, black pieces breaking away and floating to the ruined moon. It was like glass that had been shattered…and was now disintegrating under pressure.

“Heh…you…saw right?” Shiniji asked weakly, opening his eyes to look at her. “That’s called…a first class gamer co-op. I didn’t do them much…but…we did really well…”

“We…don’t worry, we’ll get you to Sakura…she’ll…” Hakuno trailed off.

What could she say? She’ll fix him right up? The damage on his body was beyond anything that
could be repaired. It wasn’t dying though.

Because he was already dead.

“No going to happen,” Shinji muttered. “I’m too wrecked I don’t think I can walk a step…you don’t have to lie and make me feel better… You know…being able to talk until…all your body’s spiritrons are gone…that’s pretty nice. One thing better about the SE.AR.PH than the real world. I already cut off my sense of pain, so…so it doesn’t hurt you know. It’s not like…like the last time… but…heh… your body disappearing in the real world would just be gross…like you were gonna throw up or something…but…that can’t happen to me anymore…can it?”

Hakuno opened her mouth, but no words came. Her throat felt like it was closing up, and she couldn’t find the words. ‘Thank you’ was wrong. He hadn’t done this for that. He was t proud.

It felt like there was a knife in her chest.

“Why?” Hakuno choked out. “Why did you do this, Shinji…after…I…I…”

After she’d killed him.

“What’s with that face?” Shinji mumbled, glowering at her. “You’re depressing sometimes, you know that? Even in the prelims, I swear you never changed expression…

“You’re as insulting as ever,” Hakuno muttered, but…she couldn’t be angry.

“You’re feeling guilty about this or something, right?” Shinji asked, smirking in a vaguely triumphant way at the ceiling. “I swear, I don’t know how you’ve won so much. I’d have thought a softie like you would have thrown a match… I remembered everything back then, you know? It’s annoying… I lost to you. First round at that.”

“Exactly,” Hakuno said. “I know you hate me…and you have every right to…so why?”

“I’m still mad about it you know, and when I think about it… I hated you…but…you cried, didn’t you? In the second…or was it the third round…you remembered me…and you cried. I know.”

“That’s—”

Yes. That had happened. She’d thought about all the Masters she’d killed after Alice. Shinji…Dan…Gatou…Alice…and she’d stood in the empty classroom and cried for the people who and died so that she, someone who no memory and no wish, could live.

And tears were coming now.

“…For that kind of reason?” she choked out.

“That’s right. I was happy with that,” Shinji said, his eyes on her, for a moment dead serious. “I wanted to leave a record behind…as the Victor of the Holy Grail War, but…I left behind that much at least. You get sentimental when you die. And dumb…”

And he smiled at her. Really and truly. It was that confident look that looked like he’d practiced it in front of a mirror for an hour before he was ready… It was younger, and less cool. More like the eight-year-old boy he was.

“it’s sorta like that. I was kinda happy. You know, I checked on my family… no one cried. My parents just decided to use the genetic material they’d bought for me and make another one. The
net…yeah… so… if you disappeared… there wouldn’t be anyone left who was gonna cry for me, was there? So… there wasn’t any helping it. Not when you were gonna be dumb and bang your head against the Labyrinth until you got to the other side… So, there was no helping it! Though…”

The noise was starting to reach his eyes. Shinji’s hand fumbled around until he it found hers, even thought it was mostly gone and crumbled, he clutched her hand, as if maybe by holding on he’d be around just a little longer.

“…really….I’m scared… I didn’t want to, but…when I thought about it…you were my first…real friend… I…I don’t want to die, but…everyone’s like that, right?”

“Yeah…no one wants to die,” Hakuno said softly.

“Right…and didn’t matter though. Not for me. Because…even if I go back to the Near Side…I’m gonna die. I knew that. With Liz. I’m not dumb. But…but…I wanted… I guess I wanted everything to stay the way it was… But…it was always zero. But you could go back, and…it’s not an amazing record, but if there’s someone left who cried for me, then… I… I wasn’t worthless. I was here. I mattered even if it was just to you…”

“Shinji, don’t say that…” She gasped out.

Tears were falling on his face, but Shinji didn’t seem to feel them, or see her.

“It’s true…and you know it…,” he said the darkness had almost entirely covered him, and his hand was crumbling. “Rin and Rani… they hate me. Sakura wasn’t… wasn’t real, and Jinako… yeah… it’s really only you who… even when you were mad… so… even if you can be boring… to remember someone… I have… to leave… so… so…”

He smiled at her, one last time.

“So for you… you have to remain…”

And with that smile still on his face, he vanished, his hand crumbling away to nothing, and the remaining darkness scattering.

For a moment, Hakuno sat, holding the hand that had been touching his, tears falling down her face. She felt sick, like something was in her chest, burning to come out, but her throat was closed, until finally, finally, a noise, to pitiful to be a scream and to much to be a whimper finally came from her as she buried her head in her heads, sobbing.

“For that kind of reason…” she gasped out.

And she wasn’t going to make it to the Near Side…

At that thought, she couldn’t stop crying. Doubling over as she tried to control herself, but the tears just kept coming.

In an age where genius could be bought and created Hakuno knew he was nothing special, and after dying in the Grail War, he left no great record behind, but he left because Hakuno, a friend of no real importance, who cried for him then, and who cried for him now.

“…No…” Sakura’s voice was soft. “Shinji… his… his vital signs are… No… I didn’t get to tell him… or to say anything… He can’t…”

“…you were cool, Shinji,” Rin said softly. “I mocked him… you know when he died, since he
thought the whole thing was a game, but…I can’t scorn him…”

Hakuno nodded dumbly. They were cold, but…well, Rin was probably more used to losing people.

For her…it still felt like her chest was being ripped open, and she still felt the ghost of Shinji’s hand holding hers. A single thought kept coming back to her, even as she tried not to think about it.

If she’d just have stayed in the building…if she’d never have woken up…Shinji…Julius…Leo…Gatou…they all would have been alive.

_It was her fault._

“You need to head back, Hakuno. The Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation can’t be done in your state, and we need to prepare something. Fast.”

“…yeah…” Hakuno said softly, not looking up or even straightening. “We can’t miss the chance that…Shinji gave us. I can’t rest. Not yet…”

Not while Meltlilith was weak. Yes…they needed to get her. For the humans and NPCs she’d killed and drained. For Alice. For Shinji. Meltlilith had to be defeated. That was right.

But…her legs wouldn’t move.

Footsteps came near her, and two arms picked her up, setting her to her feet. Hakuno didn’t resist as she felt Gilgamesh set her right, but his hand didn’t leave hers. There were no words of wisdom or mockery, just…a silent promise that they stood together and that they would win.

Finally, Hakuno looked up, Gilgamesh was looking towards were the relief had to be, his eyes and expression filled with bloodlust.

“We’ll win,” Hakuno said softly.

No matter what her doubts were about herself. That was one thing that she’d do for Shinji.

“…Gil…do you remember the people whose names you decide to remember? I mean…when you….”

“Yes,” Gilgaemsh said. “I will remember Shinji, regardless of what the future will bring. His loyalty to his friend was magnificent.”

“I’m glad,” Hakuno said. “I just… he mattered. Even if no one but me ever cried for him, I…I’m glad he’ll be remembered…”

“Do not worry for such things yet, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said. “We have an amalgamation of goddesses to slay. Weep for Shinji when his killer is dead.”

Gilgamesh released her hand, but remained close as they walked the last segments of the Labyrinth, and left another friend behind.

Chapter End Notes

Welp...that happened.
Shinji, you are the best Shinji and deserve to be remembered as the only Shinji worth anything. Also, this is canonically the first chapter where Gil and Hakuno hold hands, and it NEVER actually says when Gil and Hakuno let go of one another.

Next Chapter:

Meltlilith finally is fought, and something is wrong.
Chapter Summary

Hakuno fights against Meltlilith, and emotions are laid bare.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first time Hakuno realized Gilgamesh’s weakness was in the fight with Melt.

Hakuno felt numb as the walked down the path. Meltlilith wasn’t so hard to beat anymore, but Shinji had died for her. So that they could face her.

She couldn’t think about it.

She’d think about it that night. Gilgamesh was right. She could cry once Melt was defeated.

The relief wasn’t far off as the path straightened and Hakuno was able to see just what position that Melt had decided to put herself in.

It was…

Exposed.

Hakuno blinked at it in a sort of embarrassed way before finally looked away and scowled. She didn’t even want to think about what that meant, or about what it felt like it was trying to get her to do.

Gilgamesh, being Gilgamesh, looked at it with an impassive expression.

“For what it is, it Is making as much of an appeal as it can,” he said dismissively. “Quite praiseworthy.”

Somehow, ‘praiseworthy’ probably meant something more like ‘so pathetic that I’m amused even if I want to kill her’.

The bloodlust on his face was clear, and even Hakuno wanted to plunge right in, but take needed to make sure they had items and that they were ready. But if they were slow about it, Melt would have more time to get more levels.

They transferred back to the school, where things were surprisingly quiet. While news of Shinji’s death hadn’t seemed to reach everyone, it seemed that the NPCs were working on something in the building. Hakuno didn’t want to admit it, but she was a little glad to not have to smile or seem strong for them.

Even inside, other than the ever watchful gaze of Father Kotomine, things were pretty quiet, but as they went up the stairs, Hakuno found Sakura waiting for her.

She was crying.
“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I need to go back but…”

“No,” Hakuno shook her head. “I know how you feel… at least a little….”

“I…want to tell him…to tell him that I’d liked being someone’s family. Now that I understand that feeling. I thought that I could say it went he came back, but…but…he won’t… How…how can humans stand this feeling? I can’t say anything anymore…why…”

“It’s not about standing, but…I guess…what else can we do?” Hakuno asked. “But…we can remember Shinji, and be sad… it’s why we can’t wait to say things at least…”

“That is what is means to be human, AI,” Gilgamesh said softly. “You who are so new to human emotion, will you endure it? Or will you erase that pain?”

He was giving her a strangely hard look, and for a second something seemed to pass between them that Hakuno didn’t understand.

“I can’t do that,” Sakura muttered. “I just…I never realized. I’m so stupid. I saw so many people die. I saw so many friends forced to kill one another, or to miss someone who they had come with… The things I’d tell them… ‘oh at least you’ve survived’, ‘you need to press on’…those were really cruel, weren’t they? Really…I never thought about it…but…the Grail War is cruel…”

“Sakura…”

“It’s ok,” she said smiling. “I’m not used to feeling this…but…I’m glad I do. Shinji deserved one other person to cry for him. I’ll be ok…I just…I’ll come in in a minute ok?”

“Yeah, if you’re not feeling up to it…I’m pretty sure you can rest.”

“No. You’re going to face Meltlilith. I want to be there.”

Hakuno opened her mouth to object but Gilgamesh had already walked ahead, and honestly, she understood.

Inside, things were feeling tense. Rin and Rani were both typing furiously as they glowered at their screens. As if the moment that they looked up, they’d think about what they’d seen, and they’d break down. Gilgamesh resumed his seat at the head and motioned for Hakuno to sit beside him.

Rani looked up, a small smile on her face.

“Welcome back Hakuno, are you ok?”

She was trying to both comfort her, and show that they had to keep going. Hakuno knew that. She really did. That didn’t make it easier to take a breath and nod.

“I’m fine,” Hakuno said. “I’ll be better when this is over.”

“Alright, just to remind you, once you’re done with Meltlilith, you’ll have to press on. BB is down there, and we need to either stop her or ignore her,” Rin said. “Personally, I’d go for ignore her.”

“Our goal is, again, to reach the core. On further analysis, it’s likely that the Moon Cell will detect Hakuno and Gilgamesh’s presence, seeing it as an error and return them to the Near Side,” Rani said, not looking up from her computer.

Return…Gilgamesh…to the Near Side?
What were they talking about? Gilgamesh had never set foot on the Near Side. Maybe that would be a problem?

"Are you sure that the Moon Cell won’t just delete us for hacking?” Hakuno asked.

“It’s unlikely,” Rin said. “Since you didn’t come from the Near Side, it will probably just see you at out of place data. And once you’re discovered, BB’s actions will also be discovered and deleted.”

Would the fact that Gilgamesh wasn’t supposed to be there change that? Or would it delete him as well?

She glanced at Gilgamesh, but he shook his head slightly.

Well, she supposed she’d have to cross that bridge when they came to it. Which was very soon. Besides, she was going to die regardless, so…maybe it didn’t matter.

First…Meltlilith.

The door opened and Sakura came in. She looked worn, and her hair was light again, but she was clearly listening.

“Yes. This should work. Once BB actually begins her attack, she’ll be busy in conflict with the Moon Cell, so it shouldn’t be too hard to get past her. If her attention falters even a little, it means she’ll be killed. That means that even if BB is aware that Hakuno is coming, there’s nothing she can do. In a way, this is the only time we could have maybe gotten past her.”

“So,” Rin said, “We’ll get everything prepared to support your use of the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation, but…Hakuno…be careful. Ok?”

“Alright,” Hakuno said, trying to smile a little.

She turned to go, but Sakura stopped her.

“Um…Miss Hakuno……” She asked, looking away and then back to her. “There’s been something that I’ve been meaning to ask…about Meltlilith… She’s a part of the Sakura series now. And… well…she’s killed Alice, and…Shinji…and said those terrible things to you… Do you…do you think about her…when you look at me? And…see her as part of my series?”

“Sakura…” Hakuno said.

She couldn’t lie that for a moment, after they’d first meet Melt, Hakuno had thought about it. But there was something else that bothered Hakuno.

“Sakura, what Meltlilith did…it’s not you. You aren’t responsible. The only one who did something wrong is Meltlilith. Even if she is a part of your series, you and her are completely different. Just because you have the same model doesn’t mean you’re the same person. People have twins, right? They have the same genetics and everything, but they’re different people. You’re Sakura. And no one else.”

“No one else…” Sakura said softly, but she smiled a little, it was weak, and tired, but also like a weight was coming off of her.

“You’re right. Just because we look like one another…it’s the same as twins. We’re…siblings. That doesn’t mean we’re the same…” she seemed to be testing out the thought, but then smiled a little more. “Thank you. Miss Hakuno. I…I know it’s selfish…but I’m a little glad that we got this chance.
That I got this chance…”

She looked down, smiling a little.

“Good luck,” she said.

Gilgamesh stood from his spot.

“Very well, AI, prepare what is necessary. Rin, Rani, continue your evaluation of the Ten Crowns. You claim that we need not face BB, yet some precautions are necessary. We will update you when we have finished disposing of the Ego.”

Rin and Rani nodded. They seemed to be getting used to the fact that Gil had decided that he was in charge of all of them.

“Alright, we’ll contact you when you’re ready,” Rin said. “And…Hakuno…don’t…blame yourself for…Shinji. There was nothing you could do.”

Other than not have gone down there at all because she couldn’t stand to be in this school forever.

They headed out, down the stairs and back into the Labyrinth. While she knew she should stop again at the Kiosk, she couldn’t take whatever Father Kotomine was going to say. While he’d been altogether easier to deal with since what happened, she just…didn’t want to talk.

It didn’t take long to return, and for a second, Hakuno stared at the relief, trying not to think of just how exposed Meltlilith looked.

“I guess…we’re at the end,” Hakuno said. “I mean…after this is BB…I have to stop her…no matter what.”

And if they failed humanity faced a slow horrible death. And everyone’s sacrifices would be for nothing. She had to win. She couldn’t break or fail or…

“Fool,” Gilgamesh said, scowling at her. “Why are you gathering yourself together like that? Set some limits to your fretting, and your shouldering the weight of the world. That arrogance is reserved for me alone. If you cannot find even a petty answer to your worries than with whom have you come thus far with? You have allies, Mongrel, remember them. To do otherwise is to be rude to those who have fought beside you.”

Hakuno blinked at him, and for a moment, she realized again just how different things had become for them. He was actually inviting her to share her worries with him. He’d done it before, sort of, but this was more clear than she’d seen him.

Maybe it was Shinji’s death. Maybe it was just the fact that she was reaching the end, but…she was glad of this.

“Thank you, Gil,” Hakuno said. “I’m glad I can talk to you.”

“As well as those others. Humans require those around them. You’ve said so yourself,” Gilgamesh scowled and turned away. “I say this for myself, you are aware. It would be troublesome for you to collapse as this point from your own self imposed burdens.”

She knew that it was for himself. And that all of this was some strange whim of his, but…it made her happy. More so than she probably should be, right now.
There was a crackle of static, and Sakura’s voice sounded.

“I’m ready!” she said. “I’ll be sure that you don’t get absorbed!”

“This is the last SG. I’ve got some really high class products I’m using too, and they’d be worth a fortune on Earth, so you’d better be grateful, Hakuno!”

“Indeed, I will be giving my all as well. It is an illogical feeling…wanting to put out more than 100% of my power, but…I’m glad of it. May the fortunes of war go your way, until we return.”

Hakuno wanted to smile. Particularly when she thought of the Grail War. Back then…it had been everyone for themselves. The only person she could trust had been…her Servant. Now, they were all working together, thought…that made her think of what Shinji had said.

When she did go back…they’d all go back to killing one another.

Who was she really saving?

Them?

Or herself?

“I think this better than the Grail War,” Hakuno said softly. “If there was anything I could have from this, it would be our working together like this…”

Some part of her hadn’t really thought of the ending, as if everything would be like this forever. But that couldn’t be. And if even one of them, Rin or Rani managed to live…

“Alright,” Hakuno said. “Let’s go!”

She took a breath, closed her eyes, and activated the CodeCast.

A bright light took her, and she was falling with Gilgamesh beside her.

The first thing she noticed was that she could hear the sound of water rushing around them, as bubbles spiraled everywhere. Hakuno didn’t remember if she’d ever heard the ocean before, but maybe that was the sound, or maybe it was a stream. But it was probably the ocean.

And this was a whirlpool.

“I was born from the sea of pleasure,” Hakuno heard Meltlilith’s voice whisper. “From a sea of milk where the self melts. Where even the one it protects melts. I could see no form. There were no shapes. My heart was empty. I was the Ego that melts, steals, and changes all it touches into me. I have dissolved many things. I have consumed many lives. I have absorbed much power. All living things are just nourishment for me. Just capsules rolling around on the palm of my hand. The world was nothing more than a boring dinner table. It’s just a sandcastle that was built on the shore and will eventually be washed into me. But… but then I saw you. I discovered love. I learned what that meant. I fell completely. I wasn’t just an ego with no form or pleasure with no purpose. And I knew…I knew what you would endure. So…to protect you, my precious person. I’ll give all I am.”

“So, it was born from a desire to control, but became a desire to protect, and is prepared to become seafoam and vanish. It is rather like that man’s children’s story, is it not?”

“If the Little Mermaid had murdered a bunch of people…” Hakuno sighed.

She was so glad he wasn’t making fun of this.
But it was strange. Meltlilith sounded...completely different.

“I saw you struggle. I saw you hurt. So, I’ll change that. For me there will be only you. For you there will be only me. That’s how I will remake this world. That is happiness. All that hates you will disappear. All that hurts you will disappear. You will be a boat of bamboo leaves, living on the sea that I will be. But don’t be afraid. There will never be storms on this sea. And there will never be waves to confuse you or set you off balance. It will always be a quiet, tranquil ocean. It will be world without any end, allowing you to rest in love forever. So...please. You can rest now. You’re safe and loved. Drown in my sweet nectar. Melt. Forget your name and all your troubles. You’ve been worthless until now. You’ll be ice in water, or sugar in honey. They’ll be nothing left to distinguish us from one another. What greater joy could there be than this? Those people. That man. All they want is to take and take and take, but I will give you this.”

Gilgamesh laughed in score, his voice hard and cold, cutting into the soft whisper like a knife.

“All things within herself is it? Only a goddess could love so unilaterally.”

But Meltlilith continued clearly not hearing Gilgamesh’s voice.

“I’ve discovered love. I learned your name. So...tell me all about you. The mixing of sighs and bodily fluids...the meeting of skin on skin...these are just external pleasure...I’ve learned this from consuming things. So...I’ll give you more. I’ll melt you down, and you will be mixed with me, and then, all I am will be given to you. My body feels no pain, so you will never feel pain again. No sorrow. No fears. All those things will be made part of me. So close your eyes, seal your lips and sleep. Sugar is something that melts into nectar, and you are something that melts into love...”

These were Meltlilith’s true feelings. They were completely different than her words, but...not at the same time. She’d said things like this before, but here the feelings were bare. While it was utterly steeped in a madness that chilled Hakuno’s very core, Meltlilith really and truly, only wished for Hakuno’s happiness.

But it didn’t matter. Gilgamesh had been right. They were utterly incompatible. Melt had killed Alice. She’d killed Shinji. And she’d kill all of them, all in the name of this love that she felt. Honestly, Hakuno had never been more scared of the emotion than she was now, falling through Meltlilith’s heart.

“Hakuno, we’re nearly at the end. Brace yourself,” Gilgamesh said, he was grinning. “Let us put an end to this creature’s vulgar cries!”

Hakuno nodded. For all of them. No matter what happened in the future...They’d all agreed that they couldn’t stay here, and she had to believe in that.

They reached the core where Meltlilith was waiting for them. It was strange, both warm and cold at the same time, and the only sound was Meltlilith’s breathing. It felt...eerie. It was still, peaceful, and utterly wrong. Just like the girl standing bathed in poison honey before them.

“Welcome inside of me, Hakuon,” Meltlilith said, smiling slightly. “Finally, the time has come. You’ll become part of me, my love.”

Even now. Even when she’d been pushed this far, without any of her powers and without any cheats, she was poised and confident that she was going to win. As if the idea that she might fail just...couldn’t come to her. In some ways, it reminded her of Gilgamesh, if much worse.

“Ah, so even as you lose everything your pride is unwavering? Good,” Gilgamesh said. “You are an
enemy worth playing with. I will enjoy crushing that pride.”

“It seems to me that you’re the one who is stupidly proud, Servant,” Meltlilith shot back, her eyes growing hard. “As long as we fight here, my level can be at its default state. That little worm’s tricks can’t help you.”

Hakuno felt cold.

“Moreover…” her voice was as sweet as poison honey. “I have another poison I can use. I do wonder what’s going on outside. Why don’t I show you?”

“Wait a second…” Rin’s voice was starting to panic. “The controls are starting to melt… Rani! Virus check! We need to find where it’s coming from and…”

“It’s me,” Sakura’s voice was choked in something like pain. “We’re part of the same series… Meltlilith is… going through that… I… Am I… going to be assimilated? No!”

She was screaming.

“You’re a fool, White Sakura. I’m a liquid. I sink into everything. I’m going to change that heart of yours into my own.

“I can’t cut the connection!” Rani called.

“I… I won’t…”

“How does it feel, Original?” Meltlilith asked. “Like going numb as you become honey? I’m the only sovereign that the Moon Cell needs, and I’m going to melt BB too.

“Why are you going after her!?” Hakuno snapped.

“To hurt BB. No one born from BB can hurt White Sakura. After all, she’s got to protect her ‘cradle’. I guess. But I’m different. I might have come from BB, but I’m not her. That’s why I hurt her, and that’s why I’ll make you mine, Hakuno! My love, my desire, my everything. I am not some ego cut off from BB. This is my own heart! No one will deny it, you least of all. And if you would, then kill me. You’ll be consumed by me, Hakuno! You’ll be in an unending dream in my arms!”

Gilgamesh stepped forwards, raising one hand and grinning.

“You make the same mistake, Ego. Your foolish longing for eternity… I will perform its final rites by my own hand!”

There was no more to say.

Before Hakuno could even trace her, Meltlilith had launched forwards, aiming a kick for Gilgamesh, who had come to meet her. He bent backwards summoning a sword to meet her blow and stabbed out with his other hand, forcing her back.

Then they were at one another again. There was no space for the Gates to be summoned, no special attacks, and it felt like a single wrong move would end the fight.

This wasn’t like the other fights she’d seen with Gil. Even against enemies like Lip or Elizabeth, Gil had been calm, grinning, and clearly not really taking things all that seriously. This time, while he still claimed to be playing with her, his every move was more careful. His eyes were different as well, they were cold and sharp, and he wasn’t grinning.
When she thrust he’d dodge, either by jumping back, flipping or even bending like he had before.

Meltlilith jumped back, unnaturally graceful for what those legs were made of, and shot forwards again, causing Gilgamesh to block and then jump back, using the sleeve of his jacket to block her like it was the bracer from his armor.

His armor.

Which he wasn’t wearing.

While Gilgamesh often claimed that they were at play, and seemed to truly prefer the leopard print, it had to be a weakness. Particularly against an enemy like Meltlilith. She’d been too busy thinking about everything and Shinji to realize…

Again, they’d jumped to fight, sword clanging against the metal of Meltlilith’s legs and sparks flying as Gilgamesh’s golden ax managed to slide up it. But neither seemed able to land a direct hit on the other.

But there wasn’t time for Gil to use the Gates, and while he was going through his weapons as a dizzying pace, it seemed that he couldn’t summon his biggest attack, or even the Chains.

Meltlilith seemed to be realizing that as well. A smirk was starting to grow on her face.

“Codecast: gain_con(32),” Hakuno cast.

It was the only thing she could do, and she hated it.

Meltlilith blocked one of Gilgamesh’s attacks, jumping back and then landing in a crouch.

“You’re annoying,” Meltlilith snapped. “Hakuno doesn’t need you. You should never have woken up. You’re just a hoarder and a nuisance. I’m going to end this. And you.

Water, or something else started to seep through the platform of Meltlilith’s heart, and some kind of pressure seemed to increase. This wasn’t like Elizabeth. Her Noble Phantasm had been strong, but not at this level of pressure.

She couldn’t block it.

And even as Gilgamesh whispered a spell for protection and braced himself, Hakuno knew that neither that or her own code was going to be enough. He didn’t have enough defense, and while he probably was moving faster without his armor, he was still exposed.

The water was pooling around him rapidly, as Meltlilith started to all but skate around him, making the water, if it was water, move into a whirlpool.

And he wasn’t going to back down or ask her for help, even if he’d accept it.

“Codecast: revive!” Hakuno screamed.

That was a spell that only worked if it was used right before the fight. But it depended on her power. If she could support it. Otherwise…

Well, they were both dead anyways.

Meltlilith jumped into the air like a shot, and for a second, Hakuno could see her smile.
“Now, get swallowed!” she screamed. “Sarasawi Meltout.”

She rushed down, and Hakuno couldn’t see anything through the splash, but she could hear the cry of triumph, and the grunt of pain.

As she jumped back, the water cleared, giving Hakuno a good look at Gilgamesh. He hadn’t fallen, but his knees were buckling, and it seemed he was being kept on his feet out of sheer pride. But he couldn't hold out. He...

She’d never seen him pushed to this limit…

But she started to glow green as revive activated, and her own power started to flow into Gilgamesh, restoring his health past the breaking point. He straightened, but her own knees were starting to shake now, and her breath was coming in gasps, but she wasn’t done. He was ok. She’d done it…

She supported him.

Gilgamesh was powerful, but he was proud. He’d never worry about protecting himself because he refused to accept that anything could happen to him. He couldn’t see that he even could have a weakness at all...

He’d told her that he was the only one allowed to be arrogant enough to put everything on himself, and…maybe this was where she came in.

Because even he couldn’t do that.

“Codecast: heal(128)!” Hakuno called.

She thrust her hands in front of her, and light swirled around Gilgamesh. The platform was starting to spin round her slightly, and she was pretty sure she was going to collapse if she wasn’t sure, but Hakuno didn’t care. She’d eat some mapo tofu or something when the fight was over.


“Have not understood yet, Ego?” Gilgamesh said, grinning. “Are you truly surprised that my Master would support me in battle, or were you so blind in your affections to believe that they were even slightly reciprocated?”

“It doesn’t matter how she feels! I am the stronger! I am the better! Have I not shown my power over you time and time ago! I will protect her from everything! She will never suffer again! So why?”

“Because you killed Alice and Shinji,” Hakuno said, face set.

“What does that matter?” Meltlilith scoffed. “Two weak children like they? They were already dead!”

Gilgamesh stepped forward and held out one hand, and the a familiar strange, keylike item fell into his outstretched palm.

“You have interested me. Stand back, Master, and I will show you, Ego, what the true difference between our abilities is. You who have refused to abide by my Law of Earth, I will show you the Law of Heaven.”

Red veins of light erupted from the key, just like before, when he’d crushed that monster of BB’s so much that he was reduced to nothing. Gilgamesh hadn’t used his Noble Phantasm since, but it
looked like Melt had made him mad enough.

He thrust the weapon, Hakuno couldn’t call it a sword, it was more like three cylinders, into the platform, where it started to crack.

“I will speak of the Beginning,” Gilgamesh said.

Light erupted from around him.

“No!” Meltlilith screamed, rushing forwards but the sheer power of the light threw her back. “No! I won’t let it end here! I won’t!”

Gilgamesh wasn’t listening, he’d spread his arms out as the thing floated before him.

“Oh, elements, amalgamate, coalesce, and bring forth the stars that weave all of creation!”

The world shifted.

Gilgamesh stood, as before, on top of three small spiraling galaxies, laughing down at the form of Meltlilith, while Hakuno found herself at a distance. Yet, regardless of distance or time, Gilgamesh’s voice carried.

“You claim you are worthy of my Master? Then prove your worth! This is my answer to you: Enuma Elish!”

Gilgamesh slowly swung the sword, and as he moved, the galaxies moved with it, angling upwards and then, as he brought it down, rocketing towards Meltlilith.

There was no way to dodge. She could do nothing more than watch in horror, scrambling back, as that power came hurdling towards her.

For just a second, Hakuno almost felt bad. There was Master to help her. No one to support her. Meltlilith had prided herself on standing alone, and now she paid the price.

She was…a little like Gilgamesh when she looked at it like that.

Melt’s scream came so fast, that Hakuno didn’t even have time to look away. It didn’t matter anyways. The light was so bright, she couldn’t even see.

When it cleared, Meltlilith was crouched, breathing hard, and darkness quickly crept over her body.

But her eyes were still fixed on Hakuno.

“Ah, you are still standing, Ego? You have finally managed to truly impress me. Now, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said. “Finish it. Render your judgement. Regardless, there is no saving her.”

Hakuno stared, holding her hands to her chest.

Shinji.

Alice.

Those NPCs.

Sakura.
She didn’t really want to do this, but for them…

Shinji and Alice deserved to be remembered, and their deaths to be recognized. Meltlilith had to understand what she’d done. For their sake. It didn’t matter how strong, or pure, Meltlilith’s affection was.

And she could still save Sakura.

Silently, Hakuno worked forwards, and darkness took everything else, including Gilgamesh.

Besides, she’d never let them go otherwise. She didn’t want to this but…

“That pained face really is lovely,” Meltlilith said, smirking up at her. “It was always worth crushing underfoot. I wonder if that’s kindness. Well, it doesn’t matter. You’re a cruel person, Hakuno. Will you really take the last of my pride?” she asked. “You want to torture me. Break me. Make it so I cannot speak of love to you? Go ahead. My love is complete, I do not need your involvement.”

“That’s not love then,” Hakuno said. “That’s your sadistic disposition, but there’s nothing about love in it. I might not know much about it, but I know love involves a relationship of equals.”

“Equals?” the girl laughed. “What strange things you say. Who on Earth could be my equal? Love that only accepts other love. My affection is far stronger than that kind of selfish thing you’re talking about. You’ve been talking to your Servant too long. Sacrificing everything in order to control… please understand that that kind of love exists as well. I dissolve everything and make everything into myself, so whatever my lover does or doesn’t do, my love will not change.”

“…That kind of love…” Hakuno shook her head. “People change, Meltlilith. I don’t even know who I was, but I know I’m different than I was when I first started. Everyone’s changed after being on the Far Side. Rin and Rani don’t hate one another. Even Shinji changed…”

“That worm?” Meltlilith scowled. “Don’t compare me to that selfish brat. He was your enemy!”

“That doesn’t matter!” Hakuno snapped out. “He was a person! He was a child who had to die twice because of you! What you feel…you couldn’t care less for anything about me! You claim that you knew all about me, but you couldn’t possibly. All you love is that doll you made up. A puppet for your one girl show. You project your own feelings on me. Talk to me about your love. But this means nothing. This ‘unchanging love’ of yours. Maybe eternal love exists. I don’t know, but no love could never stay the same. Because people change, and grow and want to be loved was they change and grow! No would could STAND being loved the same way forever! And it sounds like you’ve already given up that anyone could ever possibly love you.”

Meltlilith cried out like she’d been struck.

“…given up on getting anyone to love them, is it… I commend you, it’s significant. Those are words that bore into my heart. But, what’s wrong with that? Even if my lover is a doll, for my lover’s sake I will become the world itself. You would be hard pressed to find any replacement for the relief one would feel, being loved by all the world. Don’t look down on the happiness I offer. You will be my poor, sweet little doll. The one and only in my collection. Even now, it’s not too late. Will you become mine now?”

Hakuno stared at her.

“Never. I’d rather suffer every other pain that the world has to offer and still be me.”

“Why? I don’t understand. You want to feel pleasure. Everyone does! Why reject me!”
She really didn’t understand. Even as she lay there, slowly breaking to pieces, she didn’t understand why Hakuno couldn’t and wouldn’t ever accept the love that she’d deemed best. She just went around and around in circles in her affection.

Anderson was right. She was a prima donna who demanded to stand alone on the stage.

“Because you kill people,” Hakuno said coldly. “You claim you’re different from BB and Lip, but you’re just the same. Like Lip saw crushing everything between her and me was love, so see absorbing me is love. You’re just like her.”

“What? I’m nothing like her! I have my own heart!”

“So did she! So did Shinji! So did Alice! SO DO I!” Hakuno snapped.

And she understood. She understood Meltlilith and her obsession with dolls and her kills…

“Alice claimed that you don’t believe in anyone’s heart but your own, but in reality, it’s that you can’t imagine that anyone could love you.”

“But if I can’t make billions of people into me, and I can melt that Servant and White Sakura…”

“It doesn’t change anything,” Hakuno said coldly. “Because no matter what, you can’t force me to accept your feelings. Even if you absorb me, even if you leave nothing of me, even the memory of my real feelings is there! And even then, you’re completely alone. Unloved.”

It was silent, for a moment. Meltlilith didn’t look like she’d been hurt by that less SG, but finally something like pain was showing on her proud face.

“…stop…” Meltlilith whispered. “Please… just… stop. It’s fine like that. I’m fine. I hate humans. I don’t need them. I will make everyone me. There isn’t… can’t be value in that love you talk about. Besides, you’ll never be lonely. Not ever.”

Lonely.

So that was it.

It was like looking at a mirror of Passionlip. It was the same motive, and a different execute.

“So why love me at all?” Hakuno asked. “Even now, you’re reaching out, trying to convince me you’re right. Because you can’t bare to be alone. That’s why you killed Alice, isn’t you? You hated how close they were. You hated Shinji for trying to help me. You hate Gilgamesh for being close to me. Because you wanted all of those things. You’re nothing but a lonely girl.”

Something broke.

“No! I’m more! I’m no girl. I’m an AI. I’m better than Lip. Better than BB. Better… so… of course… I’d be alone…”

For a moment, she heard an echo of the dream she’d have of Gilgamesh. The one told to her by the friend who he still couldn’t name. About a king, designed by the gods to rule humanity, separated from everyone, without equal in power and utterly alone.

Maybe it should have come to the surprise of no one that he’d become a tyrant.

But that similarity was only so far. Meltlilith was different. Gilgamesh had been a tyrant, but he had determined that he would safeguard humanity’s ultimate fate, killing everything that would come to
threaten them and forcing the Age of Gods to end.

Meltlilith…

“People in my way should just disappear…I should make everyone the same as me! If I mourn the lack of other people…then I should take them in!”

So that then she wouldn’t be alone.

“But it’s still just you,” Hakuno said. “No matter how many people you take. That never changes. And you know that.”

“It doesn’t matter!” Meltlilith almost sounded desperate. “It’s data I need. And if… If I’m still lonely…if I have a doll to hold, I’ll be fine. I can’t feel anything anyways so…”

It was a girl unable to live without other people, holding on to a dream that she could live alone and needed nothing and no one. And a love that was so entirely warped that no human would ever be able to stand it.

“So clearly, the reason I don’t need anyone else is that I’m complete. Not like you. Not like BB. Not like Lip. Not like that Servant who uses some whim as an excuse to cling to humanity and to you. I. Am. Superior. But I want to be one with you…” her voice softened. “Because I love you. That’s why words aren’t necessary…”

“No,” Hakuno said. “You’re afraid of opening up. Because you could be rejected. Or maybe, if you’d been different. If you hadn’t killed, if you’d helped me instant of hunted me. Maybe I might not have loved you, but I would have wanted to be your friend, but you would have had to risk that.”

“…so that’s it,” Meltlilith whispered. “The author was right. My role was taken from me before I was born. My love will never be rewarded will it? I want to hear it from you.”

Yes. Anderson was right. Her personality was sadistic while her love was masochistic. Even now, when she was slowly being devoured by Gilgamesh’s Noble Phantasm, she was almost waiting for that blow.

And Hakuno wasn’t going to give that satisfaction. Meltlilith had to understand.

“How could I?” Hakuno asked. “You’ve hurt my friends. I won’t give you want you want. I won’t give you anything that you want. But ask yourself, how could I reward your love? How could I want to have what’s human in me cut out? How could I want you after you killed my friends? How could I want you after you’ve tried to kill Sakura? Answer me that, Meltlilith. Tell me how anyone could give you the answer that you wanted.”

“…Others?” Meltlilith breathed. “This is all because of those others?”

“WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS ABOUT?” Hakuno almost screamed. “THIS ISN’T ABOUT LOVE! I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT KIND OF PERSON THAT I’D LOVE! But I know this: HOW CAN I EVEN LIKE SOMEONE WHO NEVER TALKED TO ME AND JUST KEEPS CHASING ME AROUND AND THREATENING TO KILL ME AND KILLING MY FRIENDS!? THIS IS ALL BECAUSE YOU HURT THEM! DON’T EVEN TALK TO ME ABOUT LOVE!”

She was breathing hard at that, and somehow…the darkness of the SG punishment was fading. And they were back in the core, where Gilgamesh stood, clearly listening in.
But Meltlilith was staring at her a sort of incomprehension on her face.

“They don’t love you,” she said softly. “They change. They can betray you. They can forget you. Even this man will abandon you…”

“And I’ll deal with that. Humanity needs change. And you can’t just cut out that part of me. Ever.”

“…I don’t understand,” Meltlilith said. “This doesn’t make sense. It’s human to avoid pain. And I am pleasure, yet you clutch onto that pain, even those people who can betray you with their changing hearts… But accounting to you… I’m confused to… It’s true… I wanted to love a human, but I wanted to love as an AI… And… I defeated myself…”

She looked at her hands, still covered in her overlong shirt.

“I can’t feel anything, you know, Hakuno,” she said. “Even now, while my body is breaking, it doesn’t hurt. I wanted to shield you in my body, where there could be no pain. Not ever… Maybe… maybe that’s why… You say don’t talk about love, but that’s what I am, even if it just… even if my love just… But that’s fine.”

She looked up with a smile.

Hakuno took a step back, and Gilgamesh took a step forward.

“You’re right. There’s where I was wrong. I want you to love me,” her eyes were suddenly very light. “I see. I see what I did wrong. Then I’ll-“

Meltlilith froze, her eyes widening.

“What…” she whispered. “No… this can’t… but you… No! Not when I see how to make her love me… I WON’T LET YOU HAVE HER!”

That was shouted at the sky, and suddenly, Meltlilith whirled on Hakuno and Gilgamesh thrusting out her hand as the platform around her started to shake.

“I wish it had been your hand that gave the final blow, but I’m glad I saw how to win you in the end,” she smiled, and straightened, even blacked, like the prima donna she’d made herself into. “What out, Servant. One day, I will return to claim her. Now, get out!”

She threw her hands out again, and Hakuno felt herself being jerked backwards as if on a string.

The last thing she heard was Meltlilith’s laugh.

“I hope you realize that even if you melt me down, my code will always be there!”

The world went white.

Hakuno found herself on the ground, Gilgamesh standing above her, watching as Meltlilith’s relief vanished.

Whatever had happened… it was gone.

“Rin! Rani! Sakura!” Hakuno shouted, but there was no answer.

“It appears we are still cut off from our retainers,” Gilgamesh said. “However, with the parent body assimilating her gone, it is reasonable to presume that the AI is recovering and that corrosion would stop. Moreover…”
His glanced again at the trail in front of them.

Like roots of a tree.

The final floor. They had to keep going.

And have faith that Sakura was fine.

“What about whatever happened to Melt?” Hakuno asked.

Gilgamesh frowned.

“Something is there, perhaps BB,” he said softly. “Perhaps her own heart broke to the point of insanity. But I sense no one here now, and time is short. Besides. Praise your fortune. That woman was gathering herself up. Your punishment had been ineffective. As to be expected from a goddess, such a thing could never change. Come, Hakuno. The end of this Labyrinth awaits.”

And so did the end of their contract.

Hakuno took a breath, and looked behind at the way back.

There were things Hakuno wanted to ask: what had happened to Meltlilith, what she’d meant about Sakura being BB’s ‘cradle’, but maybe she’d have the chance to ask later.

As it was, there was no choice other than to move forwards.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I almost feel sorry for Meltlilith. She never did learn.

And this chapter took forever mostly thanks to work. I’m back to my normal schedule now, thank goodness.

Next chapter:

"Do you hear me, I will not permit it!"

Everything comes falling down.
The First Time Hakuno Faced a God

Chapter Summary

The truth of BB's power is revealed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno faced a god was a horror.

It was also the first time Hakuno realized just how close she had gotten to Gilgamesh.

They passed the point where Meltlilith’s relief had been and down a flight of stairs that suddenly seemed to change as the end of the Labyrinth came into sight.

This wasn’t like the last times. Then suddenly they’d been in darkness. This was something completely and totally different.

Bits and pieces of unused or maybe unusable code floated around them, and before them, trunk twisting and blossoms reaching out, a single enormous Sakura tree grew, branches reaching out so that they were burrowing into a darkening moon. Most of the top was covered in darkness and seemed to be developing deep. It was also upside down.

Or maybe they were upside down. There was really no way to know…

But this was the entrance to the core. The end of the Far Side of the Moon and their journey.

The branches creaked and moved with a steady rhythm that was almost like a heartbeat,

It might have been beautiful, if it hadn’t been so wrong.

This was a manifestation of BB’s burrowing into the Moon Cell…

“This place appears to lie in the space between death and birth. It reminds me of Kigal.”

“Kigal?” Hakuno asked.

“A place you wish to never see,” Gilgamesh said, but continued. “This will be my first time setting foot in the core as well. There does not seem to be danger, but this place has the feel of a cloth weaved of fraying thread. It cannot hold for long. We have no time to tarry here. Come, Mongrel, while we still have a pathway!”

They rushed forwards.

For a while Hakuno wasn’t even sure that they were really moving, or if they were just sort of running in place but then, finally, a sort of arch appeared, leading them to a single, small platform.

Hakuno looked around, blinking a little. Only a little bit away, there was another arch, but other than that, it was nothing more than a small expanse between the two.
Was this... the final floor?

Hakuno took a step, and a sudden glow erupted from around her, making her shield her eyes before Gilgamesh was suddenly in front of her.

“What is this!?” he said sharply and seemed ready for a battle.

But when the light cleared there was nothing there other than an absolutely enormous relief.

It was BB. Her body relaxed as if in a bath even as it drained her energy to reach the core. But... it was so huge! Even Gilgamesh’s hadn’t been that size when she’d seen it!

There was a crack of static.

“Finally!” Rin’s voice sounded. “We’re in! Sakura’s ok, Hakuno. We’ve got her sitting and recovering right now, but- Wait. What... what is that!? Sakura, didn’t you say that there were no more Sentinels!?”

“That’s...” Sakura’s voice sounded exhausted as she trailed off.

“Wait... so that’s... that’s got to be BB right? I mean, her heart, so... doesn’t that mean... this is all... BB’s heart? You’ve been descending down BB’s heart?” Rin’s voice was almost frantic.

“That’s seems appropriate, but I have no indication of BB behind that wall,” Rani said. “That is not really a relief. Just a shell. We can’t go inside of it.”

“So... it’s just there blocking the way?” Hakuno grumbled.

How did they get rid of it...

“I’m analyzing the interior right now... this thing... it’s strong. Stupidly so. The drivers we have probably won’t work. Actually, they might make the thing reinforce itself... this might end up being worse than the Core wall...”

“That wall... it’s...”

“To think she’d have this ace of her sleeve...” Rin muttered.

“No one could bring that down but the owner,” Rani said. “I’ve confirmed it. “Hakuno, we cannot destroy that. You have to find another route.”

“There is not other route,” Hakuno said. “It just went straight down here. I’m not even sure the path has held up behind us.”

Hakuno turned back, noting that they now seemed to be floating in nothing, with only cubes of data for company.

This was bad.

“I’ll see if there’s something about it we can figure out.”

Hakuno stepped forwards, Gilgamesh beside her, and placed on hand on the statue. Normally, reliefs were warm to the touch, as if some part of the living body was really there, but this one felt... empty. It was cold, lifeless. Just like real stone would be.

Or a fossil.
The sudden heavy pressure from behind her had Hakuno whipping around to face the way that she’d come.

“Far Side of the Moon,” a familiar, but strangely toneless voice called. “Notifying all sapients working in the spiritron fabricated trap zone: Core Control has been achieve by a high-level AI.”

Oh no.

“Hereafter, the Moon Cell Automation will be switching over from a humanity observation apparatus to a humanity regulation and administration apparatus.”

Gilgamesh stiffened.

“Repeating-“

They’d failed. But...there hadn’t been any sign of that! The Core had been right there! Even if the wall was there! Shouldn’t there be something...some...sign?

Had this...had everyone’s deaths...really been for nothing?

“This achievement occurred, according to SE.RA.PH internal time, .0001 seconds ago; however at the request of myself, BB, the event selection has been made completed 5,961,600 seconds ago in real time.”

...Was she talking about the start of the Grail War?

So it was BB...but...how could she just force history to have happened differently, was...was this the power of the Moon Cell too?

Also... One day, that had 86,400 seconds. She remembered that from...somewhere. So divided...

69.

*Something was here*

A presence so heavy that her body started trembling was coming. Hakuno didn’t know what was wrong, but her breath was suddenly short, and her heart was in her throat. She couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t think. She wanted to scream, to run, to do *something* other than stand there, but her legs wouldn’t move, wouldn’t listen.

*She couldn’t breathe.*

Fear.

Some part of her mind registered. This was fear.

*No matter what they did it was too late.*

“RUN, HAKUNO!” Rin screamed. “There isn’t...no there was never a way to oppose BB. This was determined from the start, so RUN! You can’t fight your way out from this!”

“Correct,” BB’s dead sounding voice was coming closer. “You were too late from the beginning. This was predetermined. The game began after I reached the core. Under my ownership, no traces of intruders in this zone have been permitted. In order to eliminate inconsistencies, bugs will be erased. Searching for foreign bodies within Sakura Veil Grande.”
It was all Hakuno could do to keep from fainting. Running was impossible.

“Individual name: Hakuno Kishinami. Servant, Gilgamesh. You will now be eliminated.”

“So she’s releasing Utnapishtim’s waters…” Gilgamesh muttered, somehow, his voice sounded calm and far away, as if he wasn’t there, or maybe just wasn’t affected.

He moved away.

She couldn’t move. She couldn’t breathe.

“We must retreat, Master, this space will be erased…” He paused looking back, and for a moment, something Hakuno didn’t understand in his eyes. “Are you eaten with fear now, you fool!”

I’m scared. I’m scared. I’m scared. I’m scared.

It hurt. It felt like her body was heating and cooling and breaking apart at the same time.

Why?

Because this was the divine.

Once, somewhere, she remembered reading when researching…someone…that divine didn’t just mean beautiful. It was something between awe inspiring and madness inducing. That, if a mortal were to come face to face with a god, it would kill them.

It was impossible to confront a god as a human being.

And a god had just told Hakuno she was being deleted.

No

That wasn’t right.

This…this wasn’t just fear.

This was…disgust.

Because this wasn’t BB. This was the Moon Cell. And the Moon Cell should never been able to speak like a human. It was something so unnatural and so warped that her very body was screaming out against it.

A machine that had devoured something capable of emotion.

“No! BB! You can’t delete her! NO!” Sakura’s scream cut through her own looping thoughts.

“KARNA!” Another voice, sharper screamed. “DO SOMETHING!”

Something surged in power.

“We have to go now!” someone was yelling. “It will take her a moment to identify me!”

Two arms picked her up and held her tightly, and something red flashed through her confused thoughts. There were shouts and screams, but somehow, Hakuno’s mind wasn’t registering anything, and all she knew was that someone was holding her, and it was warm, and she spelled spices and wine.
Hakuno had the impression of gold and fire and spices and warm and someone was calling her name and…

Hakuno fell into darkness.

When Hakuno came to, she was lying on something hard, but her body wasn’t responding. For a moment, all she could do was focus on her breathing, and the fact that everything seemed intact.

She survived.

But she felt hazy and wrong, like she was there and floating at the same time.

Maybe she should just go back to sleep…

“Maintain consciousness!” someone called. No…not someone. She knew that voice, but she’d never heard it sounding…so desperate and so grave…. “Do not fall into sleep! If it is to end here, then it can only be by me, choking the life out of you with my own hands! Do you hear me, Mongrel? I will not permit you to die!”

He was threatening her. Telling her that he’d kill her if she died.

No, no that wrong.

‘I will not permit it.’

What he’d said to his friend.

That wasn’t a threat. This was…this was the closest the Gilgamesh would ever come to begging her to stay conscious. Not to die.

She didn’t have much strength, but she summoned what she had to raise it, not sure why for what.

“You don’t get to choke me yet,” she said, her voice weak. “I’m not going to die…”

Her vision started to clear as she was able to see that Gilgamesh was kneeling by her side. He was frowning and his pupils were narrow.

She’d never seen him kneel before.

“So, you are awake,” Gilgamesh said, a faint sound coming from his nose, almost like a sigh. “The outer shell of your spirit form appears to be numb, but it is not serious. To feel fear in the face of that was only human. Rest your breath and your thoughts for a short time. You came face to face with the unmistakable divine. It will take some time for your instinctual response to recover from that.”

His tone was surprisingly soft.

He’d been…worried.

“I’m glad she’s still alive,” another voice said.

“Do not be a fool, Hero of Charity. This one is my Master. She would not die from such a thing!”

He sounded a whole lot less confident about that when he was asking (or maybe the closest he could come to begging) her not to die.
“Still, I’m glad,” Karna said. “I was worried that I wouldn’t get there in time. Or that Jinako would freeze. This isn’t much since it was just my appearing to confuse her, but consider it my gratitude for sparing Jinako.”

“Hmph, that is acceptable.” Gilgamesh said.

There were other voices too, but those were a distance away, and from where she was, she couldn’t see them.

Hakuno closed her eyes, trying to calm herself. Normally, just being back, knowing that they’d survived was enough, but…that wasn’t really true this time, was it? They hadn’t done anything.

There was nothing left she could do.

BB had won.

Even if the safety of the school…it didn’t matter.

Everyone had died for nothing.

Finally, after a while with her depressing thoughts, Hakuno managed to get to her feet. She was stiff, and everything hurt, but that wasn’t too bad…

She’d been worse.

Karna had vanished, but the source of the other voices was clear. The NPCs in the building were close by, watching nervously but not coming closer. Gilgamesh had gotten to his feet and was standing over her as if daring anyone else to come near.

“You must let someone look at her, King of Heroes,” Father Kotomine’s voice sounded as the priest stepped forwards. “She likely requires more than just rest or what they AI can give."

“I’m ok,” Hakuno said weakly, raising her head. “It’s getting better. What happened to Karna?”

“He has returned to the sack of flesh,” Gilgamesh said. “She ordered him to ‘do something’ to save you, in what might have been her only act of value. He attacked and caused some confusion. Also by his presence, the Moon Cell was confused, and was required to scan again for another intruder. That provided us the time to escape with you. You had already becoming insensible by that time, so I am not surprised by your confusion.”

“Is BB going to come here?” Someone asked.

Mizuki.

“I don’t think so,” Hakuno said, slowly steadying herself. “She hasn’t come already, has she?"

“Yeah…” a boy in the back said softly. “I guess we’re safe for now, but…”

What happened, Hakuno?” Taiga asked. “We thought you were going to make the run to the Core at least, and then…”

Hakuno slowly stood up, her whole body feeling weirdly heavy. Even as she tried to shake it off, somehow, she just felt tired. Like she’d been running around pointlessly for no reason. Maybe because she had been.

“BB reached the Core and merged with the Moon Cell. It’s now a…regulation and administration
device…and changed everything…sixty-nine days ago…”

Everything that they’d done had been for nothing. Everyone who had sacrificed themselves had done so for nothing. Unconsciously, Hakuno glanced at the little headstone that had been placed at the bottom of the Sakura tree. Someone had placed some flowers nearby it.

…she couldn’t think about it…

Not yet.

“So…you’re going to plan what to do next?” Mizuki asked.

For a moment, Hakuno looked at the NPC’s. There faces were worried, but there was still hope on their faces. Maybe because they weren’t fully human, they didn’t realize what this meant. Maybe Hakuno didn’t know what this meant, but her eyes fell on Father Kotomine, and for a moment, something almost human was showing on his face. It wasn’t fear, but it was something worse: acceptance.

“I will provide you with a small restorative,” the priest said. “I will add it to your tab. Please be sure to return quickly. I will no doubt have some new products that you might find useful. We will be switching to more health and daily life products. Please look forwards to it.”

Hakuno nodded, but felt something sinking further in her stomach. So he was already planning on things going bad.

“I’ll go talk to Rin and Rani,” Hakuno said. “Maybe…”

She couldn’t finish that.

The NPCs cleared out in front of her as she and Gilgamesh walked towards the building and inside, and she barely noticed the small can of tea (which was an unnerving orange color) that Kotomine gave her.

Gilgamesh wasn’t speaking. Maybe he was embarrassed at his actions, but his suit was now scuffed and dirty from kneeling over her. She wanted to thank him, but she wasn’t sure what she should even say. At least, what to say in a way that would keep his pride.

When he had come the closest he could to begging her not to die.

She was so lost in her own thoughts, she didn’t noticed when they’d reached the door, but slowly, softly, she pushed it open.

The room was quiet, and Rin and Rani had their backs to her, while Sakura watched with wide eyes.

They were facing the board where the simulation of what would happen on Earth if BB got her way was uploaded. Only now, the entire board was red, with an ‘x’ over the whole planet.

_All Dead_ the text under it said.

Those two words made any kind of unreality vanish.

“The simulation is over,” Rani’s toneless voice managed to carry all of the despair that the girl was feeling. “BB has achieved her goal, becoming the administrative software merging with the Moon Cell. The final death count is ninety percent of the population. It would be fair to consider human civilization ended.”
“I’m sorry that we didn’t come out to check on you, Hakuno,” Rin said. “The simulation changed so fast…”

Ninety percent.

And it would keep going.

Gilgamesh stepped in silently, taking his place and looking at the board.

“But…there’s still seven days left, right?” Hakuno asked, her voice painful. “There’s got to be time or…something that we could do…If we can defeat BB…”

“Miss Hakuno…that’s already…” Sakura whispered.

“Impossible?” Hakuno whispered.

Right. It was impossible to beat BB. She knew that. But…

“We can’t just…stay here and let the Earth be destroyed while we watch. We can’t let Gatou, Leo, Gawain, Julius or Shinji’s deaths be for nothing. Not to mention Archer’s last request or…

“No. That’s not it,” Rani said softly as Rin turned away, tears in her eyes. “We don’t have seven days left. It’s over. The Earth is already destroyed. From the time we were shut away here…the Earth was already a dead planet. We thought that we were looking to the future, but really, we were looking at the time we’re in now. It was already determined.”

“That lose of time rule that the Ego overwrote,” Gilgamesh said softly.

“Yes,” Rin said softly, turning around. “And this was already determined the moment the Moon Cell reached the conclusion that BB would reach the Core. There hasn’t been any passage of time at all. Not since we reached the Moon Cell. We thought there was one, but there was a complete loss of time here. It’s not even a loop. Then we might have hope. This is just…BB became the Moon Cell, and in the Moon Cell, time doesn’t exist in our concept. So…she is and was and will be the Moon Cell. No matter what…we can’t fight anymore…she’s the Holy Grail now.”

“So, that subpair wishing device has wished for the end of humanity,” Gilgamesh muttered. “It truly is the Flood of Utnapishtim…”

“It doesn’t matter if we reach the Near Side or not now,” Rani continued. “The Far side is the recorded universe, the trash bin, so we can still reside here, but…on the Near Side…we would either be ghosts or just die all together…”

“It’s taunting us too,” Rin said. “Shortly after BB’s announcement a way to the Near Side appeared. We can return at anytime, but…it’s already hell. It’s over. Everyone is either dead or driven insane by desire. So…

Hakuno looked down, something hard in her throat.

They’d failed.

Completely and totally.

They’d never even had a change.

Everyone had died for nothing and no reason.
If she hadn’t woken up, they would have all been alive.

“No…” Sakura said softly, and stood up, straightening. “There is a place for you! This place! If you stay where...this is trapped in an eternal moment. You’d all be safe! Everyone here would be safe! We can build a life here! You won’t die! Not ever! So…”

Hakuno looked away, and so did Rin and Rani.

“What…?”

“What meaning could there be to such an existence?” Rani whispered. “We aren’t even living anymore.”

That was it. They’d been spared death, but had nothing left to live for. This was the end.

They’d been dead from the start.

They just hadn’t noticed.

Darkness was encroaching on Hakuno’s vision.

“Enough,” Gilgamesh’s sharp voice cut through the room. “Your despair bores me. Should you have nothing of value to say, I will return my Mongrel to our room. If what you say is true that she will have time to rest as she needs.”

The others looked away, even Sakura.

What was he talking about...?

But somehow, he’d stood up, gripping her and steering her out of the room. Hakuno didn’t fight him. She didn’t even know what to say, and the others didn’t move either.

What was the point anyways?

They’d wasted time. She’d wasted lives.

And even now everyone was hoping that somehow...she’d find something.

She’d failed them all. She’d done worse than BB. Because she’d given people false hope. Leo had died hoping to reach the end. Gatou and Shinji and Julius and...

She was sitting on the bed. Had they gotten to the room already? She looked up to see Gilgamesh in his throne. He’d summoned more wine, and was looking out the window as he drank.

“I wasted your time,” Hakuno said softly.

“What are you speaking of?” Gilgamesh turned to her.

“I wasted your time,” she repeated. “Everything here...everything you did...all the work...it was for nothing. Now you’re trapped here too...I just...just...everything I did...I just...ended up hurting everyone more...if I...”

She bent into herself, feeling hot tears starting to fall.

It was her fault.
She’d just giving everyone false hope. Everyone was still hoping that somehow…someway…she’d have an answer. And she couldn’t break. She couldn’t.

But she was.

And now she’d condemned Gilgamesh to that same fate of being trapped there with them forever and ever and ever and ever and…

Unless she…

“I’m going to face BB…one last time,” Hakuno whispered. “I’m going to try to get into the core. Alone. Maybe if I can use Julius’s paths…If I can just reach the Core, maybe I can override something. I’m a crap mage, but anyone should be able to do that.”

“Mongrel…”

Hakuno ignored the growl.

“But…no matter what, I don’t want you to be trapped here like this. Not when you don’t have to be. And it’s not fair to ask you to fight a battle I can’t win if things go wrong. So…if you’ll give me a little leeway on time… There is nothing—“

Gilgamesh lunged across the room and covered her mouth so quickly, for a second she wondered if he was going to attack.

And if everything had been a lie. But his grip was surprisingly gentle, even has he covered her mouth, and fury blazed on his face.

“How dare you!” Gilgamesh hissed. “How dare you attempt to cut the contract now!”

His eyes were so close to hers that she could see that they actually glowed faintly with power as the pupils retracted to slits.

Why was he angry?

But she remembered him, kneeling on the ground, begging her not to die…but…

This was just some whim of his…

“What else can I do!?“ Hakuno yelled back. “Do you want to be stuck here forever with us? You decided to help me because you were bored! This will be nothing but watching our slow decay into nothing because I’m so much of a cowered to cut the contract! Even though…even though this is all my fault!

“Your fault, Mongrel?” Gilgamesh laughed, mocking her again. “Do you honestly seek to take the blame for BB’s actions?

“If I’d never woken up at all, everyone would still be alive!” The words were out of her before she could even hold them back.

It was the thing that she’d been feeling since Shinji…maybe even earlier. Something that had been searing her heart.

That maybe it would have been better if she’d slept, repeating that perfect world over and over again. At least then, they all would have stayed, safe in this box where they were neither living nor dead. Even Gilgamesh would have stayed in whatever dreams he’d been enjoying so much…
Everyone had put their hopes on her, and she’d failed all of them…

“If I never woke up…”

Two arms embraced her, and Hakuno found herself against his chest, somehow cut off from the world.

“My foolish Master, even now, you attempt to defy BB one last time. I told you once that I would give you the right to break our contract, but I will not accept this attempted kindness. Nor will I accept your stupid insistence on shouldering this blame.”

He was warm, Hakuno noticed. And somehow…she was glad of this darkness.

But it didn’t change anything.

“Then tell me,” Hakuno whispered. “Tell me one thing good that came from my waking up.”

“I was summoned,” Gilgamesh said instantly. “I was able to bear witness to your struggle. I was able to watch as those machines slowly obtained human mannerisms and even now, the AI begins to comprehend what it means. I was able to see a spark in the darkness, and that light has been worth every moment. If you refuse to accept any other good, than accept that I have been pleased. Now, tell me, Hakuno, do you truly believe that all is lost? Even when I stand beside you, and you still draw breath? Can you, with your whole heart, tell me there is nothing left?”

Hakuno opened her mouth to say yes, but the word wouldn’t come. That somehow, some ridiculous hope was still there.

As well as something warm…Something…happy.

He saw being summoned as a good thing. He was…glad… He didn’t regret this. Even now, when everything should be lost.

But how could she still want something? When all she’d done was hurt everyone around her? How could she be that selfish? How could some part of her still think that they had a chance against BB?

Somehow, her silence seemed to be what Gilgamesh wanted. He chuckled softly.

“You still desire much, even after all of this. Regardless of your own power, you continue to reach” he said.

“It’s not desire!” Hakuno mumbled.

“Do not deny it. I am praising you. I would accept nothing less of one who would be my Master. Know this, My Mongrel, I am still here, and as long as I remain, so does hope of victory.”

How could he be so sure? She wanted to say that he didn’t know. That he’d already claimed his power was less than BBs, but that confidence…that hope…

“Everyone died for nothing,” she whispered.

“No. That is false. They died in order to get you to this point. The only way victory could be possible. Had they not given of themselves, then you could not have reached this point, and all would truly have been lost.”

“What are you talking about?” Hakuno mumbled.
Somehow, exhaustion was starting to take hold. The fight with Meltlilith, the death of Shinji, everything…she was so tired…But she couldn’t just sleep.

She had to…do something…

“You and those women despair all to easily,” Gilgamesh laughed. “I told you, so long as I am here, and I choose to fight with you, your victory is assured. After all, what other outcome could there be, with the strongest Servant giving you support? You should remember that and pay more reverence to me.”

Hakuno looked up at the smugly smiling King of Heroes.

King of Pride.

So sure that because it was him, nothing bad could happen.

But so much bad had happened.

And that thought opened a floodgate.

“I miss them,” Hakuno whispered, bowing her head. “I miss them so much. I miss Leo and how calm and carefree he was about the whole thing. I miss Gatou yelling weird things. I miss Shinji, even though he was a jerk sometimes. I miss Julius. I even miss Gawain! We were going to make curry. I was hoping things would be better on the Near Side. At least for them. If they were here…why me? Why did I live? Why did everyone else have to lose to me? They all wanted the best for me, and now…now…I don’t know…”

She was sobbing again, and it wasn’t just over BB, or what had happened.

Her emotions were a wreck.

But Gilgamesh stayed where he was.

“Speak of them, Mongrel,” he said. “Speak of all of them. That Cancer’s foolishness has finally brought you the time you needed. I will permit your grief this one night.”

So she did.

Hakuno told Gilgamesh, through hickuping sobs about everything. About Shinji in the preliminaries, and how she’d finally clawed her way into awareness. She talked about how he’d tried to cheat his way to victory. And his final end, and how she’d wanted to help but, but there’d been nothing…

She talked about Dan. About how he’d wanted to fight as a man one time, sticking to his beliefs, and how he’d seemed almost happy to have left a new story in her.

She talked about Alice. About the ‘games’ they’d played. About the reality marble, and losing more of her memories, and the girl’s final death.

About Gatou and his Berserker goddess, who’d left the second she could, even as he begged her to show him something.

About Leo. About how she’d been unnerved by him from the first, but how he’d slowly gotten better while he was there, and how she thought that deep down…he’d wanted to just have this chance to be normal.

About Julius. How much he’d scared her, and how much she’d wanted to understand him, until he’d
finally vanished, only to appear here, as a friend. To save her at the cost of his own life.

By the time she was done, her voice hurt, as did her eyes from crying. Somehow, she way laying down now, with one of Gilgamesh’s hands on the back of her hair like before, but Gilgamesh hadn’t said anything, but listened without speaking, just drinking his wine.

“I miss them all,” Hakuno muttered again. “I keep thinking…if I’d never woken up…would they have lived?”

“No,” Gilgamesh’s certain word made her blink. “In time, had you continued in that dream BB locked you in, eventually, they would have ventured out. They would have planned without you, and it is likely that they would have perished. Do not regret their choices. As I told you, they have led you to the only outcome where victory was possible. Now, sleep. Do not worry for time, or interruptions. No one will disturb you.”

“Don’t leave tonight,” Hakuno muttered, exhausting bringing half thought fears to the surface. “I know you sometimes go out and look around but…I don’t want to wake up and think BB took you too…”

“…Oh?”

Hakuno opened one exhausted eye, to see his amused look.

“Very well,” he said.

He didn’t move as she closed her eyes and the bed seemed to be getting softer and deeper as she fell into darkness she knew and understood…

“You ask ridiculous things,” she heard Gilgamesh’s voice from far away. “You have already become the second person I kneeled for, and you ask me not to leave you? Close your eyes and rest, my Hakuno. Neither BB, nor any other, will ever harm you.”

He meant it, she realized. Somehow…he meant it. It was true, that Gilgamesh had never abandoned Hakuno, but even now…now on her darkest moment, he was so sure. So confident. And he wouldn’t leave her.

And he wouldn’t let her break the contract.

They’d find a way.

They had to find a way.

With her hope shaken…she’d believe in him then. At last as long as the contract still stood.

Chapter End Notes

300 KUDOS You are all amazing! Thank you so much!

So, I changed a little of how Hakuno and Gil were saved. Mostly because I wanted Karna to be able to do a little more.

Hakuno's finally had the breakdown she was threatening to have for a while, but
honestly, I think she needed this moment. As well as the assurance that Gil actually is on her side.

Next Chapter:

Dreams. Intruders. Hope.
The First Time Gilgamesh Admitted He Had Changed

Chapter Summary

Hakuno dreams and finds the words she needed. Gilgamesh enjoys himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh admitted he’d changed started with a dream.

_Hakuno was floating in light. She wasn’t sure where she was or what was happening, but she was warm. There were no walls or ceiling, but just a never ending light._

_She had to go back…_

_“Hey, you look like you’re facing some trouble over there.”_

_It was a man’s voice. Hakuno frowned. Had she…heard it before? It wasn’t a pleasant voice, but something …_

_It reminded her of dreams of a burning city._

_“We’re reaching the finale at last. You know we can’t start without you.”_

_The Finale?_

_The finale was over. They were at the end. At least, that’s what Rin and Rani were saying… that they were never getting out. That they needed to give in…_

_“Give in? Is that what you’re being told to do? From the start humans give in. Because we’re not all powerful. We are creatures who could only live while giving in. Now is when you realize this? I noticed that there was something strange happening over there. I don’t know what it is, but you have to break out of that stagnation with your own hands, if you’re going to meet me at the Angelica Cage.”_

_The Angelica Cage…_

_Stagnation?_

_This wasn’t really stagnation, this was forever. They wouldn’t die, and they wouldn’t live. Hakuno didn’t like it, but in the right mindset, this could even be called perfect. A small school, a little haven for them while the world burned._

_The thought of it made her stomach clench._

_“That is aiming for completion,” the voice said. “That’s the goal of human life. We aim to end things. That’s why those others who think of wish to end. No matter what kind of existence, what kind of civilization, one day, it will end. We aim for that ending. Now and long ago. But-”_

_“No.”_
Hakuno’s voice sounded for the first time. It was weak at first, like she was talking through water, but has lofty as he was making this…this voice had something so fundamentally wrong that Hakuno had to speak.

“I don’t remember much. I don’t remember Earth, but I know, from the people I’ve met, and the things I’ve done…no one want the end. Because no matter what, the end is dying. And no one, and no civilization wants to die. They want to live.”

Hakuno remembered the council’s determination to come back to the war, even if that meant danger, she remembered the fears of Jinako and was wrapped up in a rejection of the fate of humanity, and even of Uruk, preserved for all eternity in Gilgamesh’s treasury.

“We all want to live. We want to live in memory… or in stories, or in any way we can. We aren’t rushing towards our end. We all are reaching for something else. Even Rin and Rani and everyone. They’re hurt, and angry, but they don’t want this end. No one else. This place is wrong. Staying like this is wrong. But…”

Shinji wanted her to cry for him. Leo wanted her to live for them. Gatou, Julius, Robin, even Alice and Gawain. Someone had to be there. But...

She didn’t know how…or if...

“That-“

“Stop it, False Messiah!” a new voice sounded, one that Hakuno couldn’t tell was male or female. “Stay in that disgusting place and wait for the end!”

There was a sharp jerk and a surprised gasp from the voice, and Hakuno was suddenly falling through darkness. Or maybe just descending like through water. When she landed, she was laying on her back in a familiar courtyard, looking up at the moon surrounded by stars of data.

Hakuno stood up, looking around. She was standing by a fountain, surrounded by a concrete walkway with some small benches nearby. On the other side of the walkway, flowers were blooming, swaying in a nonexistent breeze, glowing a little in the light of an artificial moon that hung down as bits of code were made and deleted. A large white church was nearby, doors closed. But she knew this place.

“What is-”

This was the Near Side.

Or a dream of it.

“This is the only place in your memory that I can be,” the voice from before, surprisingly gentle, said.

She’d heard that voice before…even before speaking to that man...

She looked around for the source of the voice, but she stopped when she saw the figure nearby.

They were standing in one of the flowerbeds, looking down at the rendered plants. With an almost sad expression. They wore a large, white baggy shirt that fell past their knees and white pants. Their long hair was the color of new spring leaves, and as were their eyes. Their face was…beautiful. Though in the way that a work of art was beautiful. There was something…too perfect to be human about them. It was almost off putting, if there wasn’t something so…sad about them.
And them was the right word. Hakuno had no idea if the person in front of her was male or female.

The person looked up and smiling as they saw her looking at them.

“Hello, Hakuno,” they said. “I’ve wanted to see you... in truth... for a long time. It’s good to finally meet you face to face.”

Wait... that voice...

“You’re... Enkidu...” Hakuno breathed. “You’re... Gilgamesh’s... only friend.”

Enkidu nodded, smile still in place, raising a hand to beckon her forwards to stand with them in the garden.

They were looking out at the flowers, but they turned to look at her. Their smile was still in place, but there was something somewhat sad in their eyes. It was strange. Even knowing that they were made from clay rather than flesh, she couldn’t see a clear difference between them and her.

“You’ve been having a hard time,” they said, breaking the silence between. “That AI has been doing terrible things.”

“...yeah,” Hakuno admitted. “...I don’t know what to do anymore. We’re stuck. Rin and Rani say that there’s nothing left that we can do, and that everything’s already destroyed, and the world is already dead. Gil still thinks we can fight, but... I don’t see a way,” Hakuno admitted. “But... that man was wrong. I can’t think that anyone is ok with this end.”

Enkidu laughed, a gentle sound, but something else was behind it. There was something about them, even relaxed that seemed to her like a forest. Peaceful and tranquil when you first looked at it but hiding a ferocity that would shock her.

“That’s something that separates you from the rest of nature. Once most animals are defeated, they accept it. Humans are different. It was one of the things I always liked out you. You keep looking for ways around that kind of fate. Maybe that man’s taken on the worst of that Servant’s ideology... but then again, humans sometimes still confuse me...”

Hakuno looked away. There was something lost in that tone. No matter how hard they had tried to be human, they’d never really seen themselves as that. At least from the story they’d told her.

She didn’t know what to say so she just plunged on.

“...I’m still holding out hope,” she admitted. “It’s dumb... but... I want to fight. I want to make everyone’s sacrifices worth it. Even if my heart is broken, I guess I still have a sword,” Hakuno said. “I want to make that count. This place is wrong, and... I still want to fight.”

“That’s because you’re human,” they said. “But the Moon Cell isn’t. Neither is that AI who... well, that’s not important...”

Hakuno glanced at them but the being continued.

“Look around at this place,” they said. “While it’s a memory, there was always something wrong with it. These flowers aren’t supposed to be alive right now. At least not all together. They come in the summer, but those others come in the spring. Those over there only come in the fall.”

Hakuno frowned, looking around the different colored flowers. While her knowledge of that, and botany in general was not very good, she had the feeling that she was missing something very, very
important. Why would all of those thing be together.

She looked at Enkidu.

The smile was still there, but there was more amusement in it than before. Enkidu seemed to always smile. Maybe they just liked the expression, or maybe they wanted to seem happier than they were. But what did they mean. What did flowers from different times and seasons...

Wait…

“So…than if all of these things are here…even when the season is wrong…than…time is wrong. Even on the Near Side.”

Enkidu grinned at her.

“You’ve got it!” they said. “The Moon Cell exists outside of time. That’s how that Grail works. People call it a wish, but since its outside of time, what is really does is select the future that most matches what you want, no matter how unlikely it might be. The Moon Cell wished for humanity’s destruction. And they’re rewriting the past and future to get that.”

“But that can be done again,” Hakuno muttered. “Because time doesn’t exist, right?

That was good, but…there was an other problem. One that made her whole body feel like it wanted to twist inside out the second she thought about it.

The sheer power of the Moon Cell.

“But…how can we defeat something that powerful? Even Gil said…”

For the first time, Enkidu wasn’t really smiling, but they turned back to look at the flower field.

"I’m not saying it will be easy. Survival isn’t ever easy for living things... but…”

They paused, looking up at the moon as a shudder seemed to pass through the world.

“It looks like I’m running out of time,” the said softly. “I wish this could have lasted longer…I was… glad…to be able to see you again, but I think my friend sensed that false messiah’s presence in your dreams…he’s as possessive as ever once he comes to grow fond of someone…”

Their voice sounded nostalgic, and…a little sad.

Even after all this time…

“I guess…he’ll be glad when I tell him-” Hakuno started, trying to make them feel better.

“Don’t!” Enkidu said, turning to her, eyes wide. “He doesn’t believe I still exist. He’ll just think that his memories are bleeding over to you, and that will only cause him pain…. I’m sorry, but could you allow me to be selfish?”

They sounded scared.

“O-ok,” Hakuno managed out, unsure of what to say to a request like that.

The flowers were fading away, so that only she and Enkidu were clearly there, standing suspended in a sea of blackness with only the moon hanging over their heads.
“By the way,” Hakuno said. “I’m sorry…I haven’t asked that last question… I asked about you, and humanity, but I wasn’t sure…”

Enkidu shook their head.

“You did. Maybe not in words, but you have, and he’s answered. Thanks to you, he’s starting to put away the mistakes of that time, and I’m glad of it. Can I ask you for just one more selfish request?”

“Sure,” Hakuno said. “What is it?”

Enkidu smiled.

“That proud, stubborn man still needs someone to end his arrogance.”

Arrogance.

Because calling it ‘loneliness’ was too much for his pride to bear. Even now, after all this time, Enkidu was clearly worried for their friend’s wellbeing. And…she understood why now. After all of this time, she was starting to see. Gilgamesh was proud, so he’d never reach out, but that didn’t stop perfectly normal human feelings.

Hakuno smiled a little.

“I’ll do what I can, for as long as I can. I wish the contract would last longer, but…it’s not fair to be mad. It’s not like Gilgamesh can even come to the Near Side.”

Enkidu placed his hand on her head, and for a moment, Hakuno found something…familiar about it…and the scent. It was a rich…earthy one that made her think that this was what ground after a rainfall must have been like.

“Don’t worry too much,” they said. “Focus on the Moon Cell. And remember…my friend tends to grow kinder when he has company. You need to ask him about-”

Hakuno opened her eyes to see the ceiling of their room, and the evening sun reflected on the dreamcatchers in the window.

As well as Gilgamesh sitting in the bed beside her and looking at her with a scowl.

In the bed.

Hakuno reacted instantly with a startled noise and nearly falling out of the bed in surprise, but while some amusement did flash in Gilgamesh’s eyes, the scowl remained.

“It appears that that man decided to show his face,” Gilgamesh said, clear disapproval in his voice.

“‘That man’?” Hakuno could only repeat as her brain rebooted.

For a moment, she couldn’t think of anything, but then the dream came back. Starting with that voice and then…Enkidu.

Who she couldn’t tell Gilgamesh about.

“The Near Side’s Enlightened One,” there was a sneer in Gilgamesh’s voice. “He obtained the Servant of Salvation, one who many call messiah, and now sits and waits for another to fulfill his dream. To come to the one who will becoming his greatest enemy…”
What had been what he’d been trying to do?

But that wasn’t important!

“W-what are you doing in the bed!?” Hakuno said.

Gilgamesh blinked at her, almost in confusion.

“You requested that I not leave you and proceeded to fall asleep in my arms,” he shrugged. “I determined it best to allow you your weakness.”

By apparently sleeping next to her. Because moving was inconvenient she supposed.

Hakuno covered her face with one hand, trying not to show just how red she could feel it was right then. She’d fallen asleep on him. She’d actually fallen asleep on him. She’d been so emotionally frazzled that she’d…

They’d shared a bed!

“How do you feel?” Gilgamesh’s voice cut through her thoughts.

He had stood up and was giving her an appraising look.

She wanted to say like she’d just woken up and realized that she’d shared a bed, but Gilgamesh continued.

“It seems some of the cloudiness in your eyes is gone. You are still slow, but you seem to have recovered for the most part from your encounter with the divine as well as recent events. You are a sturdy woman.”

And he was just going ahead like nothing happened…

Hakuno sighed, shaking her head. Maybe it was better if she…just pretended nothing had happened to? It wasn’t as if anything was going to happen again…

Yes. She’d…focus on this. This was more important. Even with what Enkidu had told her, they were still…hopelessly outmatched.

“I’m not sturdy. I just…”

She wanted to think that there was something they were missing. Even now. Even when BB could crush them.

“The women in the council room have already despaired,” Gilgamesh said. “But it seems you will not join them, though a shadow is still on your face.”

Hakuno looked away. Her mind was still reeling from…everything from Gilgamesh spending the night next to her, to the voice to…Enkidu..

Especially Enkidu.

For a moment, she wanted to tell him, but…they’d practically begged her not to tell because all it would do was open that wound that never quite seemed to have closed with Gilgamesh. And he’d never believe that it was really them…

No…
She couldn’t do that to him. Not when he’d comforted her. And...maybe he’d assume that being close to him had triggered that... And she didn't want him to pull away.

Even now.

“Let’s go to the infirmary before we talk to Rin and Rani,” Hakuno finally said. “I’m not sure...what to say to those two yet...”

She wasn’t really even show how to best put into words how she felt. Not in a way that would reach anyone.

“Very well,” Gilgamesh agreed. “She has been by and loitered around our door for some time. I did not permit her or any other to come.”

“Wait...” Hakuno frowned. “How long was I asleep?”

“Time has no meaning here, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “You slept as long as necessary for your body to recover.”

Right next to him.

At least she now knew just why she felt so well rested. There was no reason to worry about time.

They left, and Hakuno could see the change. While before the school had had a mood like something was happening. Now, things were quiet. The NPCs were loitering around, much as the had at the start of things, but conversation was hushed. Once Hakuno was noticed though, Taiga had stepped in, smiling in a relieved way.

“Oh, good you’re awake,” she said. “We’ve been a little worried. Mr Gilgamesh has been pretty insistent that you needed to sleep...but Rin and Rani haven’t left the council room, and Sakura...”

She probably wasn’t doing well either.

“She’s talking about sealing the Labyrinth!” a boy with dark hair, Rai, called. “She’s going to ask you for power to do it.”

Seal the Labyrinth!?

“But that would mean...”

“BB can’t get us, but...we can’t get you,” Taiga said. “She asked Father Kotomine for a loan, but he...basically told her to suffer though asking you to do it...I’m...not sure if he was leaving the decision for you or just wants to think about her having to tell you that she wants to give up.”

“...I’ll talk to her,” Hakuno said.

“Even if you don’t deal the Labyrinth though...” Rai started, glanced around at the others, and hung his head. “Do you... Can we even think we have a chance?”

Hakuno clenched her fists.

That was the problem. She couldn't promise them that. She didn't know what to say...

“I don’t care. We need to have that open,” she said finally, ignoring the worried looks.

“Hakuno...” Mizaki said, looking at her and frowning. “If things don’t work...you know we’re fine,
right? This…it isn’t so bad…”

The others nodded, but Hakuno had the distinct feeling that they were trying to make her feel better, rather than thinking that. They were all also scared and not sure what was going to happen, but also maybe...trying to accept that this was life now.

And it was just that bad.

But she didn't know what to say.

Hakuno looked away, but then nodded.

"I'll remember that," she said. "But...I guess I need to talk to Sakura and..."

"Good luck..."

She started towards the infirmary, even faster now, Gilgamesh moving beside her. Frowning as he looked at her.

Was that man right? Had they really reached the end? Even with what Enkidu had told her, she still couldn't face BB. Not like she was now, and even Gilgamesh wasn't enough for her to worry about. Next time, she might not even be able to reach him...

And why. Why fight? They were safe...

But that answer felt too wrong to even think about.

Sakura was standing and facing the small part of her desk where she tended to make tea. She turned around when the door opened and a relieved smile came on to her face.

“Miss Hakuno! Mr Gilgamesh! I’m so glad that you’re feeling up to walking around! I’m just making tea, would you like some.”

“Sure,” Hakuno said, glancing at Gilgamesh.

He’d already taken his seat at the head of the table.

“I’ve added some hibiscus to it,” she said. “It’s supposed to help with stress, though I suppose we don’t need to worry about that anymore…”

“Thanks,” Hakuno said, smiling a little and taking a cup with both hands. She needed to de-stress. She’d literally cried herself to sleep in Gilgamesh’s arms...

She wasn’t going to think about that!

“AI, the others are claiming that you wish to seal the Labyrinth,” Gilgamesh said.

“Oh...er...yes,” she said. “I...I guess... Seeing what happened...and Rin and Rani so down, and Miss Hakuno having to stay strong for everyone else’s sake...And those battles... everything was lost from the start...That place...it was just a side show to make you all suffer. She was never worried about you. I should have sealed it already, but...I guess...”

Hakuno looked down at her tea. She hadn’t forgotten what BB had called her. Or the world.

Her doll.
The world was her toy, and Hakuno was her doll.

“Please though... don’t give into despair. You’re safe here. It’s not much, but...”

“AI, you still lack understanding of humanity, if you would make that argument,” Gilgamesh said. “Did you not hear the despair of the homunculus? No human being could remain here forever. While the body might survive, the spirit will wither.”

“That’s better than dying though, isn’t it?” she asked. “At least here...”

That was wrong. Not that someone might feel that way, but...

That was not the only option.

“No...” Hakuno said softly. “It’s not better, and... besides... I still haven’t given up yet.”

“What?” Sakura asked. “But... everything...”

It was what she’d said to Enkidu. Maybe it was Gilgamesh and his absolutely surety that they could still win, or that this was the only way to win. Maybe it was something else. Maybe she just... didn’t know when to quit.

But...

“It doesn’t matter,” Hakuno said. “Leo trusted me. Julius asked me to find out what happened. Shinji died for me. Gatou sacrificed himself so I could keep going. All of those people, and all of the NPCs... there are or were hoping that somehow I’d find a way. And if I want to remember them, and to be able to look back on them... I can’t put this down, no matter how much it hurts. Even if my heart is broken... even if this hope dies... even if the fire that brought me this far goes out. I still can move. I have ashes... memories... and I have a sword, even if my heart breaks again and again...”

Yes. That was how she felt.

How she’d felt the whole time.

That man claimed that people were always reaching for their ending, but that wasn’t true. She wasn’t. And no one else there was either. Not now. Not ever. She’d persist. They just... needed a reason to think victory was even possible... Maybe it was stupid, but she couldn’t. And if Enkidu was right...

“The only thing I’m worried about is how to beat BB.”

“That... you can’t do that!” Sakura said, her voice suddenly very sharp. “I can’t let you do this anymore! If you rebel against her now, when she’s the Moon Cell, you’ll really get deleted! I want to protect everyone! To protect you and Mr. Gilgamesh, and Rin and Rani and everyone where, but I can’t fight BB. All I can do for you is give you a comfortable life here. I don’t understand. This is the last safe place in the world. You’ll be safe if you stay here. How still fight? You can’t save the world, Hakuno... It’s already the end, because of how time works here...”

“If time isn’t linear, than maybe we can figure out something, but... I’ll be honest... I’m not trying to save the world,” Hakuno said softly. “I’m... not that good of a person.”

“What? Then who-”

Maybe even the people I care about on Earth. And certainly the people Rin and Rani cared about.”

Hakuno stopped looking at her tea. Maybe that was why some part of her had rebelled so completely against that ‘messiah’. Maybe that was why she couldn’t really get along with Kiara.

“I’m a selfish person,” Hakuno said softly. “I don’t have any memories. None at all, and maybe I’ll never remember who I was. But…I think there are some things I know. I can’t fight for something like saving the Moon or the Earth. I’m too selfish. I’m fighting for people I know. People who still have dreams. I have no memories of living, of whatever good things happened to me, but I’m memorizing things I treasure now. Hakuno Kishinami was someone who treasured herself and the things she loved. But the things I want to protect are only those I see before me. …That’s the sort of shallow, greedy person Hakuno Kishinami was….and is.”

She wasn’t a messiah. She couldn’t be one. Because someone like that would have to think about the good of all things.

But she could help the people around her, treasure the people around her and fight for the people around her.

Sakura was staring at her, wide eyed.

“But…”

“Oh?” Gilgamesh said, and she turned to see him…

Grinning at her, and looking like he was trying not to laugh.

“You are quite mercenary, are you not?” he said, the grin still growing. “When it seems as if your vitality will not return, you require nothing more than to weep for the dead, sleep in the embrace of a man and drink tea. The three desires are a powerful thing, are they not? Now that you’ve slept and fulfilled those other wants to your heart’s content, all that requires is for you to satisfy your tongue. Shall we buy those health items the false priest discussed? I do not mind treating.”

What-

“That was your idea! We didn’t even do anything!” Hakuno sputtered out. “I-“

But Gilgamesh just was laughing.

“I know. It is an AOU joke!” he grinned at her. “Your mood has improved swiftly…or maybe you have merely found the words you needed. AI, I will not permit you to seal the Labyrinth. Come, Hakuno, that time has come to share some of your vitality with those women.”

King of Terrible Jokes.

He was out the door before Hakuno could stop him.

“What did he mean by…‘arms of a man’?” Sakura said.

“Nothing!” Hakuno said very quickly, but frowned. “Sakura…I mean it. I haven’t given up yet. We’ll find a way. Maybe it’ll be hard, but…that’s what being human is, isn’t it? Struggling? Refusing to accept our fates? I know that you wanted to help us, and that you thought that you were, but…let’s see if there’s a final way to win. If not…and I don’t come back…then seal it…”

“Miss Hakuno…”
“Just Hakuno,” Hakuno smiled. “Trust me, ok? One last time, and thanks for the tea…”

“…Ok,” she had barely whispered it, but Hakuno smiled a little. "But...I...I need to tell you something. After your done with Rin and Rani...could you come back?"

"Sure," Hakuno said.

She stepped out to see Gilgamesh starting out the window to fake background of a forest that no one could reach.

“Gil…”

Gilgamesh didn’t seem like he had heard her. For a moment, he kept looking out, but then he spoke.

“By nature, I was on the side that would have been brought down by humans like you,” he said. “I wonder in how many timelines I have been betrayed by a face like yours. I suppose it may be some karma, that I now look closely on you as I do now. I makes me wish to speak of the irony. For in truth, you have not changed from the moment we met in that starry sky. But it appears that I have… I whose very nature is the unyielding judge…”

He turned to her, a strange smile on his face.

Hakuno was used to his smiles. Most were cold, though some, lately, had had a warmth that Hakuno didn’t understand in them. This…was different.

It was pride.

He was proud of her.

Hakuno knew that it was just a whim of his that he’d come so far with him, but…that emotion was real.

“My friend tends to grow kinder when he has company.”

“It seems you awakened fully in that room, Mongrel. I am not speaking of your exhaustion, though I am pleased to see that no longer lingering, but rather the state of your soul. That shadow has fled to the netherworld as you plan to face a goddess? What audacity! What base vulgarity!” The words were harsh, but he was still smiling at her. "What…a human face you have shown me, and full of worthiness. Let us call those women. This situation has roused my interest, and we must take arms in earnest.”

He had changed.

It hadn’t been a moment. But just steps to bring them to this point. Maybe, once, he would have been the final obstacle she had to defeat, but…somehow…that hadn’t been what happened.

“Let’s find a way to beat BB,” Hakuno said, taking her place at his side.

End his arrogance, Enkidu had asked her. And she would, until the end of their contract.

Chapter End Notes
Wow Twice, I forgot you have bad philosophy.

I'm still a little shaky with Enkidu, but I'm starting to get a feel for them! Hakuno is ready to go and finally sorted out a lot of her feelings. And...Gil might have been joking, but he was right. She needed a good cry, sleep, and tea.

Next Chapter:

The plan to get the power to defeat BB is revealed, and Hakuno realizes just what it means to have A+ Charisma.
The First Time Gilgamesh Used his Charisma

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh gives a speech. Hakuno learns what 'Charisma' means.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh truly took his position of King of the Old School House was after his Master’s recovery. Gilgamesh would not admit to the girl that some part of him had feared she would not recover, either from trespassing into the realm of the divine or the false impression of the entire school that they had lost. However, her temperament remained that of a reed, bending to pressure and then reasserting itself at the first opportunity.

This time had merely taken his own involvement and the suitable time to rest.

His friend would have certainly laughed at his actions. How he had, despite claiming to Hakuno that he had accepted her contract to stave off of boredom and watch her falter and drown in his despair, he had been the one who had not permitted that in the end.

It was for himself, of course. He desired her continued presence. And…that form of death, under a weight, not of her own inadequate strength, but of sorrow for others did not please him.

Though, if he were to truly admit it, she had the same effect on him as his friend, softening his tyranny.

Truly someone had to oppose him, or rather, balance him.

Hakuno Kishinami was in truth a treasure of untold worth, and one that he would not permit to taken from him, either by the Cancer who presumed herself a goddess, or any other.

The appearance of the Contractor of the Servant of Salvation had displeased him. Gilgamesh was aware of him. He and the Moon Cell seemed one and the same now, planning out Grail War on Grail War. Yet it seemed that he had taken an interest in his Master.

He was growing weary of that.

There were far too many who showed their unwanted attentions to his Master. He would be pleased to leave this place behind. Though first, it would be necessary to come to the point of battle.

While his Master had after time and rest, regained her vitality, and shown her human nature splendidly (he had no interest whatsoever in contracting with a fool who could wish to save ‘humanity’. Only he was worthy of that conceit), the others remained dull. The NPCs were shaken, their fragile grasp on humanity beginning to falter, and the AI was relying on her programing to be sure that Masters ‘survived’, even if that meant that it was necessary for the to cease living. Rin and Rani both appeared to have given up in their entirety.

Gilgamesh scowled.
While he expected inferiority from those he was not contracted with, their willingness to despair when he was present annoyed him. Hakuno was exempted as her despair had been both a final defiance and had been brought about by grief for her fallen friends.

As he and his Master walked through the halls, he noticed the NPCs loitering again. While before they had been finding small tasks to accomplish, now they merely watched, waiting for some sign that all was not lost.

He wished to end this foolish despair. Though the means were…somehow displeasing.

It was not, of course that he disliked that final power that he intended on using. It was his due.

It was not even that he did not wish to see his Master’s face flushed with his power, eyes alight with the adoration all felt when he permitted it.

It merely…did not please him. Any more than it had pleased him to consider that occurring in his friend. Not that it had. His friend had been unique, designed to counter him, and thus immune to that power. There was no other who held that ability.

He had once told Hakuno that he had been designed to rule humanity, given the perfect form, power and mind to do all, but the gods had bestowed on him one last gift, one that permitted him the ability to control all of humanity as they so desired it.

Until, of course, they were able to see just what his rule would lead to.

He grinned to himself at the memory as they reached the kiosk.

Hakuno moved forwards, but Gilgamesh held her back, dropping bar of gold on the counter.

““We will take your healing items.””

“Gil-“

“I informed you that I would treat,” he said, shrugging away her protests.

She deserved reward for her words.

“But-”

The false priest stared at him with the same hollow eyes as ever, but there was a faint air of amusement about the man now.

“So, you’ve made your choice to continue to struggle in vain?” the man said his eyes on Hakuno. “That is fine. You’ll find that I have obtained some rather interesting items to help you. Please be sure to describe to me the agony of your enemies in return.”

The man seemed to have found some balance between his naturel proclivity to enjoy others in agony and a newfound desire to aid his Mongrel.

“Should all go as I see it, you will hear of it,” Gilgamesh said. “In the meantime, you and the other mongrel with the wooden sword will collect the others and assemble.”

The false priest remained impassive, but there was something flickering in his eyes.

“This will be interesting,” he said. “I have added some of my special product to your order, free of charge.”
His Master’s eyes flickered over to him in worry, but he did nothing. The man was not worth the pleasure he would obtain from a reaction to that cursed dish. Particularly one that, according to his Mongrel actually had some benefit to her.

Of course, the priest would find some manage of forcing others to his torture.

The priest’s eyes flickered to Hakuno.

“I will pray for your success,” he said.

“We might need it,” Hakuno sighed, glancing up the stairs towards the council room. “Rin and Rani didn’t take…what’s happened…well.”

“I hope to hear of the results of this,” he said, some small light entering into his empty eyes at last. “I will inform Taiga of your request. The others should come shortly.”

He was a warped man, and Gilgamesh did not approve of the light that appeared when the false priest saw his Master. It had grown after the man had managed to save her, yet it appeared he had decided, for now, to be of use.

Gilgamesh would permit that at least.

“Come, Mongrel, we must speak to those women,” Gilgamesh called.

Leaving the priest to watch after them, Gilgamesh headed up the stairs towards the room where those women had walled themselves in.

“I’m not sure what talking to them is going to do,” Hakuno said, taking her place at his left side. “They seemed…pretty sure that there was nothing that could be done.”

“We shall see,” Gilgamesh said. “I will speak to them.”

They stepped in, and Gilgamesh noted the difference in the location immediately. Prior to this, there had been motion and activity with both women at least working hard on whatever knew hack they had planned or attempting to understand some mystery. Now all computers waited idle, and the women did nothing. The only sign of the prior labor was the screen, still showing the Earth devoid of life and civilization, as humanity was torn apart by its desires.

Rin stood, looking out the window of the Sakura tree while Rani sat, desolation in her eyes, at the table.

It was a tiresome sight.

Rin turned around.

“Hakuno…what are you here for?” the woman asked.

“I want your support so that Gil and I can go into the Labyrinth. I want to see how things are going, and keep getting stronger. We’re going to have to if we face BB,” his Mongrel said, though there was clear worry in her tone to those which.

He found himself displeased for some reason but dismissed it.

For a moment, the woman stared at her in bare incomprehension.

“Are you serious?” Rin asked. “Haven’t you been listening? It’s pointless. No matter what we do,
“She’s right, Hakuno,” Rani’s voice cut though, dead and dull. “The Moon Cell is still functioning as a database, so for you and Miss Tohsaka to exist as samples of humanity is meaningful…that’s it. That’s the only purpose to our existence.”

“That sample is missing one half of a sample,” His Master said, her face and voice devoid of expression. “And what about you, Rani? Are you saying that you don’t matter?”

“Yes,” Rani said. “I don’t matter anymore. I don’t expect you to understand. My goal…my hope…I have nothing else to fight for, Hakuno, but I can help keep you preserved. That’s something.”

“Stop, Hakuno,” Rin shook her head. “I know you mean well, but stop. You can’t stop her. No one can. Just…I guess we’ll get used to it…we have forever now…”

Gilgamesh scowled.

BB’s victory was not the cause of this foolish despair, rather this nothing but base self-pity. They had lost their personal reasons to fight, for the moment, yet refused to look and consider the situation. They were so focused on that Wishing Device, as if it’s capabilities were anything of note. What was more, the answer was so clear before them, but they were so busy drowning in their own misery that they never bothered to look for it.

A faint knock sounded a the door, and the teacher NPC, stepped into the room, a slight smile on her face.

“We were told you had an announcement?” the teacher said.

“What? No-”

“Because I got everyone in the announcement hall in the back,” the woman continued, smiling.

“Good. I was growing weary of this. All of you, come,” Gilgamesh said, motioning, to them to follow.

“He will likely persist until we comply,” Rani muttered in a tone that indicated her presumption that he could not hear.

“Arg, fine,” Rin muttered. “Maybe then they’ll give up.”

“Silence. You will hear in time,” Gilgamesh called back.

“Gil…” Hakuno whispered to him. “I know you’re annoyed but…”

“I have held off punishment for their conceit,” Gilgamesh informed her, “but their wet eyes and dark faces are a grievance.”

His magnanimity would only be pushed so far.

The auditorium was only a short distance from the council room. It was down the stairs, and past a small door behind them. Clearly the Ego had known that schools had such rooms but had never intended on their use.

However, now every NPC had assembled and was seated and waiting for their arrival.

In truth, they were few when gathered together. There were not enough even to adequately populate
the room. It was a small kingdom, really, yet this was supposedly the last remnants of humanity and those who sought to be human. Gilgamesh even noticed that the AI was now standing in a corner, watching them with worried eyes.

He strode forwards, motioning Hakuno to stand with him at the stage. It was only a small step above the others, rather than a decent podium, but he moved to the small stage, where he could survey the smaller crowd. The NPCs held a defeated air to them, one that was shared by the two women, which continued to annoy him.

Their presumption was great, to think that he would remain if hope were lost. If he had truly felt that there was no hope, he would have found a way to force himself and his Master from this place. If he had been a coward, he would have already taken his Master’s offer and left them to their fate.

It was time for these fools to learn who ruled them it seemed.

To rouse these fools…

This place and everyone in it was his, and he had told Hakuno that he meant to take up arms in earnest. Even if there was no reason for this foolishness, and they were not yet ones who he saw as truly his subjects, this was his for now, and as such he would not permit such despair in his presence.

That was reason enough he supposed. He would not see such things.

Nor would he permit his Master to see them when she had, through her own power come to grasp at victory with that same honest greed that she had shown him so many times.

“All of you, will you not look up! I tire of seeing your clouded faces. Rin, Rani, are you the brave women who stood before me as a miser and a demon overseer, or are you nothing more than a pair of fools revealing in your unparalleled incompetence?”

Both women made a startled sound, but he looked around at the faces of those who had heeded his summons.

They were fixed on him now, anxious, and waiting for direction, and Gilgamesh permitted himself to smile.

“Indeed, the Moon Cell’s Core has fallen, or rather BB and the Moon Cell are now one. The future which the Student Council prevents this was never in their reach. That is natural for a deity. She called you here with the understanding and premise that her victory was sealed. Thus far all has been according to that plan, and the council has done naught but dance on the palm of her hand. However—”

The faces becoming downcast jerked to him again.

“Why is it that none of you have yet seen the many things that are out of order? BB’s plans end here. The curtain was meant to fall on her victory and our failure, all according to her desired future. Yet the Moon Cell’s strength is also its greatest weakness. The Moon Cell exists outside of the reach of time, so now it may alter the past and present to achieve the desired future. And it may do that innumerable times, not merely once as BB seems to have mislead you to believe.”

Every eye was on him now, and a spark of hope was starting to show.

“Indeed, that fate cannot by changed. That alone is a request impossible even for me, therefore… This was a battle that had first to be lost if victory was ever possible.”
He paused, waiting for his words to sink in before continuing.

“Now that this has passed, all that awaits us is blank pages. BB’s plans have ended, and she has conceived of nothing beyond this point. Your battle has only begun. We have been gifted, in this Cancer’s unending incompetence, with the one resource which was never given to start: time. To ‘change the future’ is an incredible conceit. The present is constantly changing and shifting, and the future is a cloth that extends in all directions!”

“What is more, there are those here who have the strength to fight. A fool, you might say, who has refused to vanish even when erased and has continued even after defeat. And I remain with you! I, the eternal, indestructible King of Heroes! Humanity’s first and most absolute of rulers!”

As he grinned at the crowd, he could feel their eyes on him, their bodies relaxing, hope dawning on their faces.

“I have at last been granted a body that will persist until the end of time! So long as I have chosen to remain here alongside this Master, nothing has ended, and nothing will ever end! If this future is one of destruction, then I and my Master will alter it! In the past, god slaying was the duty of the king. As this cancer is one who would ascend the Throne of Gods to drag humanity back to that cursed age, there is no time in which I would not have come to fight! The key to this battle is that time has no meaning, but that also means that we are able, in this place alone, to change that truth which that Cancer has put in place. By placing us here, there is no better advantage that we could have had. We need only to defeat that Cancer and edit the future of humanity to one more suited to us! Now, will you sink in despair over a perceived defeat, or will you persist and fight, to take advantage of the flaws of that Cancer’s own conceit!”

Someone cheered. The teacher NPC jabbing her shinai in the air, and the others NPCs began to join in.

Gilgamesh grinned at the sound. It had been far too long since he heard his due praises sung.

“I…I see,” Rani spoke from her place in the back of the stage, her back straightening, her eyes growing bright as that final power he had been granted overtook her. “How could I not have seen it…the present can be changed…it’s so simple. This is the now which only we can change!”

Rin too stared with wide eyes.

“I see. What was I doing?” she said. her eyes brightening as well. “It’s true that there’s no time where we defeat BB, but if we make that time, here where we’re still outside of time, that creates to possibilities! The future can change direction! Even if the act isn’t huge…”

“Errors will arise!”

Both were chatting excitedly to one another now, as the NPCs did the same, faces bright with hope, and adoration which was his right and purpose. …Even if it had been compelled from them.

Yet it was time for that moment which displeased him.

Gilgamesh scowled, turning to Hakuno and preparing to see the same.

For some reason…this alone displeased him.

This made no sense as he did desire her reverence, and this power was his as well. While it was something that overtook those under him, making his own words as being incapable of being anything less than perfect and utter truth, it was also natural that humans, even those with unhuman
birth, would fall to it.

And kneel to the one created to rule them for all eternity.

He did not use it often...because he felt it unnecessary. If he could not earn reverence through his own power, and was forced to rely on a cheap trick of the gods to accomplish his goals, than he had not right to proclaim himself as humanity’s one and only true king with all others as pale imitations.

It had nothing to do with being displeased with the power.

Hakuno’s eyes were fixed on him, but they were not shining with hope or excitement. No adoration could be seen reflected back. Rather, that same spark in her eyes that had first woke him still burned as brightly as before with no alteration.

As she stepped forwards, Gilgamesh could neither see nor feel any change in her. Her emotions, her regained defiance...those were all hers, and when she smiled slightly at his look, that softening that always overtook her wane features was hers as well.

She was...not affected.

It appeared that again, Hakuno, his final companion, the only Master who he would ever acknowledge, had managed to defy his expectations, even to the point of being immune to a Charisma that would cause all the armies of the world to kneel in service at his feet.

The first time Hakuno actually understood what it meant to have A+ Charisma was in his speech. Hakuno had, of course, looked at Gilgamesh’s stats and skills. He’d had a lot of them, more than some vague memories told her that he should have. Things like Golden Rule, which also warned her that if she used it, she’d start getting blinded by money (because of course his very skills were selfish), but he also had things like Territory Creation, which was actually very strong and too bad she wasn’t going to be able to use it, and something called ‘A+ Charisma’.

The stats called it a power or maybe a curse of its own at this point. The power to control all the armies of the world.

She had seen absolutely no sign of that.

While Leo had had a way of drawing people to himself, something that Hakuno had honestly always found creepy beyond all reason, even after she started get to know him, Gilgamesh had never done anything like that. He had always been curt and standoffish to anyone who wasn’t her. If anything, she’d more felt like the was deliberately pushing people away. Even as he started to open up more to her and take interest in the School, that hadn’t changed.

Until he stood and started talking.

And then she knew.

She knew just what that Charisma was.

As he spoke, a smile on his face, and confidence in his words, she could feel the draw, making her want to listen, to smile, to believe every word that Gilgamesh said, but not like before because he was her Servant who after painstaking time and effort, she’d finally started to have a glimmer of understanding of, and who had never abandoned her, even at her weakest. Not even because his
ideas actually sounded good.

But because he said so.

It was everything Leo thought that he was, multiplied and compounded by a confidence and surety that he was completely right and could not fail. Incredibly powerful and incredibly experienced, now with the immortality that he’d sought in life.

He’d never used this before. He’d always pushed people away, his smiles dark and his words harsh. Because he couldn’t be any other way.

If he was even neutral, if she’d been anything but what he was, this would happen. They would have adored him. They would have believed and done everything he said without even thinking about it.

And they never would have done anything on their own.

Gilgamesh had once told Hakuno that he had been meant to rule over humanity, but for the first time, she really understood what that meant. The gods had made him perfect for that role. And of course, he’d been gifted with a Charisma so strong that no one could resist it.

All to make sure that humanity stayed in their place.

And just another ridiculous power that did nothing but set Gilgamesh apart from everyone and everything.

Because if everyone who he was even neutral towards adored him…what did they even really feel? What had those wives really even felt?

Had Enkidu…been the only living being before this to resist that power?

The NPCs cheered Gilgamesh’s speech, but somehow, Hakuno wasn’t affected. It was the contract probably. After all, it wouldn’t be good for the Moon Cell if Gilgamesh could charm his Master into doing anything for him.

When he turned to glance at her, Hakuno assumed he wanted her to say something. Still she smiled a little at him before stepping forwards, and clenched her hands into fists.

She was Gilgamesh’s Master. She had to be able to help.

And she wanted…somehow…to end that arrogance.

“The issue here is in defeating BB, but like, Gilgamesh says, we have time. And I want to ask everyone’s help. We’ve been trying to research as much as we could, but with only Rin and Rani, there hasn’t been much progress while we were in the Labyrinth. BB has absorbed goddesses. A lot of goddesses. If we’re going to defeat her, we need to know as much as we can about the oldest one of all, as well as the major ones. Just because a goddess doesn’t have a clear weakness doesn’t mean that she didn’t have one! I need to ask all of you to help us in research. We need to know as much as we can. If possible, a few others need to always keep an eye on the Sakura. While BB hasn’t made a move to come after us, we don’t know if she’ll change her mind, and even a second more time means we can prepare. BB. Can we have five volunteers to work in shifts?”

The NPCs started talked quietly, but three boys and one girl, along with Taiga raised their hands. She couldn’t see any of them but Taiga well, but she was pretty sure one of the boys was Rai.
“We’ll make sure you get a warning if anything changes,” Taiga said.

“Thank you,” Hakuno smiled.

“Everyone else, you heard her!” Taiga called. “Let’s get a move on!”

The others, now moving quickly and with hope on their faces started walking.

Hakuno sighed, looking towards Rin and Rani, who were talking quickly and then to Gilgamesh, who had crossed his arms and was scowling past her at the last of the returning forms.

“Hmph to have made an appeal to rouse these fools, what a stupid act,” Gilgamesh grumbled. “You may consider that your responsibility, Mongrel.”

As much as he had changed, he was still the same old Gilgamesh. Or maybe it was just that he really, really didn’t like that power and refused to say anything about it. Still, he seemed to be examining her closely, more than he usually did.

Was he checking to see if she was affected or not by the Charisma?

Somehow, bringing it up directly seemed like a bad idea.

“Yes. She’d thought that. Not because he’d said anything, because he hadn’t. He’d just told them to believe in him and given them the strength they needed with a power that he clearly didn’t like much.”

His eyes widened, and his pupils contracted in surprise, and just for a moment, Gilgamesh was silent, that gaging look that he sometimes got on his face was back, but then he closed his eyes, a faint smile appearing.

Something in him relaxed.

“You may praise me as you see fit after this,” Gilgamesh said. “Now, let us continue with the plans necessary to end that Cancer.”

Rin turned to face them.

“Sorry you both had to see us like that,” she said. “It’s not really restoring my honor, but I’ll be giving my all.”

“I agree. As an operator…and mage of the Atlas Institute, I will be putting out my maximum output.”

She’d been hoping to at least get them to try one more time. Gilgamesh had gotten them to fight again with renewed hope. It was an amazing power, but also a terrifying one.

But somehow…she wasn’t scared of it. Maybe it was just because it hadn’t worked on her. Really, thought, it was because he hadn’t used it until they had needed it most and then complained.

“Let’s head back,” Hakuno said, to Gilgamesh and Rin and Rani. “I think we need to plan out what we’re going to do now.”

They headed back first, leaving Hakuno and Gilgamesh alone for a moment.
“Come,” Gilgamesh said. “Do not linger here. Those two women will falter if they are left with nothing. We still have much to plan. The Labyrinth is useless for meeting that woman in battle, but there is a way. I will explain it to you and those two.”

“Alright,” Hakuno said. “And thanks again.”

“Hmph, those NPCs are becoming human. Therefore they are mine as much as everything else in this place is. I have acted only for myself.”

“I know, but it helped them, and it helped Rin and Rani to really feel better. Besides…we’re both selfish, remember?”

A smile started to form on Gilgamesh’s face as he looked at her. And somehow…it was different from the ones she’d seen from him before. Nothing cruel lurked in that look. It was warm. Really and truly…warm.

“I was made to protect humanity after all”

He had said that to his friend a long time ago, when he’d admitted his reasons for fighting and the truth of his motives. Maybe he given that smile then too.

“Then let us go,” Gilgamesh said. “There is much to plan. You should prepare yourself.”

And the smile was replaced by his usual amused look.

“You’re making me nervous, Gil.”

“I am merely giving you your due warning, is that not what a Servant does?”

He was teasing her. Just when she’d been thinking nice things about him.

“I’m pretty sure that they don’t do it with that grin.”

Gilgamesh didn’t answer, but strode forwards making her have to catch up. Still…even with that, it felt like some thing she didn’t even understand had been pushed past. Some ancient barrier and worry that no one, aside from one very special person, that ever been on the other side of before.

But…

Was this really a good thing?

What would happen to Gilgamesh…when she reached the Near Side?

Chapter End Notes

Just a bit late. Unfortunately, but hopefully it makes up for this.

Gil, you hate your Charisma and you hate using it. If you’d at least admit it to YOURSELF, you’d be a lot happier.

Next Chapter:

"You must lay hands on my Origin."
The First Time Gilgamesh Trusted Hakuno

Chapter Summary

The only way to defeat BB is revealed, and Hakuno begins to realize just how much things have changed between her and her Servant.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time that Gilgamesh trusted Hakuno after his speech.

Hakuno’s mind was a little reeling from the whole thing, but as they headed back to the Student Council room, the worst of that power seemed to have warn off. It seemed that unless Gilgamesh used it as a constant pressure, while the strength and the points he’d given seemed to have remained.

Rin and Rani were waiting for them, faces grave.

“We’ve been talking,” Rin said. “And I think we’ve got two main problems. The first is that stupidly big core for BB and the second is the BB Moon Cell cross.”

“The largest problem with that is that as it is empty, we cannot use our normal means to go around it,” Rani said. “It would be best called our final wall.”

“…I think I can help you,” Sakura’s soft voice came from the door way.

She was lingering, her head down, shuffling her feet.

“What’s wrong, Sakura?”

“I…I think I…need to tell you all something…” Sakura said, her head still down. “I…didn’t really used to think much about it, but now…”

She took a breath, closing her eyes.

“That wall… it’s not completely BB’s. Because…BB is my backup.”

What.

“So that is why that Ego called you BB’s ‘cradle’,” Gilgamesh said.

He had taken his usual seat and seemed, of all things pleased with that revelation, but Hakuno could only just stare at her, eyes wide.

Somehow, it did make a horrible sort of sense. Why Sakura had been there to start with, why BB had wanted Sakura safe, and even why she’d been so worried about how Hakuno even saw BB or Melt or Lip. Because there was some connection between them and her.

Sakura looked down, her face flushed.

“Yes,” she said. “During the Preliminaries…something happened. I’m not sure what, and it…
released a restriction on me. Something to keep me impartial during the war. I think that someone wanted me to favor them or to help them, but…things didn’t turn out like that. I…”

What had happened?

She took a breath.

“I couldn’t take the emotions. It all happened so fast, and I didn’t understand it, and…I wanted to stop. I was hurting people. Even in the preliminaries when no one remembered it. The Moon Cell doesn’t let AI’s self-destruct, so instead, I…made a backup. And I put my memories into her. So I could act as an infirmary AI in the Grail War and be normal. But I think that that created that wall. I’m sorry, everyone, …Hakuno… I wanted to tell you when I saw that, but…”

For a moment they were quiet.

“…you,” Rin said. “Do you understand the level of trauma necessary to make something that big?”

“I believe that walls are secrets, not trauma, Rin,” Rani said. “And this is a large secret. At any rate, I assume that this means you can bring it down?”

“…Yes,” Sakura said, “I was going to mention it before but…”

“There was no help for it,” Rani said, a smile on her face. “Miss Tohsaka’s mental status was abnormal at the time…”

“My mental status?” Rin scowled. “I wasn’t the one nearly missing all the code so that we couldn’t do a forcible transfer!”

Both girls scowled at one another, but then Rin shook her head.

“But you’re right. I wasn’t exactly listening.”

“…I will admit to being less than prepared myself,” Rani admitted. “Sakura, please remove the core with no reservations.”

“…I’m sorry but…no,” Sakura said.

She was standing with her hands clenched into fists, and her face set, clearly ready for some kind of repercussion for her words, but her face was flushed with her very first refusal of a direct order.

“What I mean is…I want to set a condition,” she said. “I’m an Infirmary AI. My primary job is to oversee your health and safety until the time comes that you have to battle. While…I might not always have done the best job, I want to make sure that I fulfill that role. So, I can’t let you go when you have no hope of winning against BB. Once you have countermeasures against the Ten Crowns…then I’ll help you. I’ll come down with Hakuno, and I’ll disable the wall. Will you…will you accept that condition?”

“I will,” Hakuno said. “I think…that makes sense.”

She looked at the others.

Gilgamesh was giving Sakura a hard look, one of those that he had when it almost seemed like he was looking through her.

“That is acceptable. Once the means for defeating the Cancer have been procured, you will abolish that wall, AI.”
“Yes,” Sakura said.

“That’s the final problem,” Rin said, sitting down in her chair. “We’ve got that data from Robin, and we managed to decode it, but…it’s complete and total BS. It should basically be called ‘BB can do whatever she wants and there’s nothing anyone else can do about it’.”

“We haven’t found anything that can block or counter it at this point,” Rani sighed. “It was why we had hoped so much that you’d be able to slip past. Gawain was our heaviest hitter and even he didn’t stand a chance.”

Gilgamesh made a derisive noise.

“The Knight of the Sun would never have the ability to stand against the Ten Crowns,” he said. “That power is truly unrestrained divinity. In order to counter it, it would be necessary to have one whose power could potentially match it. One who was already connected to the divine but had in his lifetime acted against the divine.”

Gilgamesh’s smile was a not a pleasant sight, and his eyes were tightly contracted.

Slit pupils…

That showed his divine heritage.

Gilgamesh…who was two thirds divine. Made to stand as a warning of their power, but overwhelmingly favor them.

Gilgamesh, who had favored humanity over them to the point that he had brought the Age of Gods crashing down.

“Ah, I see my Mongrel has understood. In order to face against this Cancer, who has absorbed the power of a primordial goddess, you must lay hands on my Origin. That is my original power, which the Moon Cell locked away in fear of what I would inflict for the indignity of its even imagining to force me to act on its behalf.”

And he’d still been thrown to the Far Side in hopes that he would vanish.

That was why he’d been so sure. It wasn’t just the fact that he’d realized that time had no meaning.

It was that he’d known that there was a way.

But he’d never mentioned it before…

“…That might be possible,” Rani said as Rin brought up a screen and began typing furiously.

“Yes…you could access the virtual mind-body to access the core that the Moon Cell created directly. With that…you could use the part of him that the Moon Cell sealed away. It…it seems to be called ‘legendary Mystic Code’…”

“You mean like…with the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation?”

But that…

If she did something wrong…she was playing with Gilgamesh’s very soul. Sakura had been one thing. Sakura had been being devoured from the inside out but…

“This is an unprecedented situation,” Gilgamesh said. His eyes were on Hakuno, but he turned to face the two. “Regardless of my acceptance, there will be dangers. I will be in slumber and will not
necessarily know ally from enemy. My Mongrel will be without my protection. Therefore, I will not consent until you find a suitable temporary substitute.”

“It might be possible to send a doll in as a quasi-Servant…” Rani said.

“Those things stats are too low, even hacked. Maybe a custom familiar?” Rin suggested.

“That isn’t realistic,” Rani shook her head. “Sakura’s memory is already at the limit.”

“…we could ask Jinako,” Hakuno suggested, mentally wincing a little at the looks from the others. “Karna’s supposed to be powerful, right?”

“…that might be possible,” Rani said thoughtfully. “If Jinako could be worked with to cooperate outside of a similar life threatening situation… We wouldn’t have to worry about attack strength.”

“Hm…” Gilgamesh closed his eyes thoughtfully. “…that man… He is sufficiently qualified. In both his character and strength, I find nothing to criticize besides his dogged determination to hold to that Master…” His eyes opened into a glare that Hakuno had not seen directed at her for a long time. “Do not contract with him, Hakuno. I will accept nothing further than a trail pending on a temporary contract. Nothing more will be tolerated. Make sure to inform him of that as much as necessary.”

The force of that glare wasn’t even directed at her and she felt the shiver.

“I’m not going to try to contract with him,” Hakuno sighed. “And Karna isn’t going to leave Jinako.”

Was he still mad about that comment that Karna had made about sort of half wishing he’d contracted with her?

Possibly.

“There’s nothing else we can do,” Rin said. “Please bear with it. Hakuno…good luck. If not… well…she might go for it…”

She was muttering to herself, but Hakuno decided to ignore it.

“Anyways, go talk to Jinako. She won’t talk to much of anyone but you. We tried to talk to her during Melt…but yeah…”

“…right,” Hakuno said.

She’d had no real time to talk to Jinako after Shinji’s death. After all, it had just been keep going to Melt and then to the Core and then…

“She might want someone to talk to anyways,” Hakuno said. “And I wanted to thank her for sending Karna down.”

That split second might have saved Gilgamesh and her.

Gilgamesh had already stood up, and they headed out without a word.

Outside, there was a lot more activity than before. Gilgamesh’s speech and Hakuno’s idea seemed to have inspired the NPCs, and they were talking quickly and quickly, as well as moving with books and items from the library, or using the classrooms to look things up.

Hakuno could even see a few who hadn’t volunteered sitting outside with Taiga.
The door to the Janitor’s closet was, for once, unlocked, but Jinako’s position was no different than usual. She was laying in front of her many different screens.

As Hakuno stepped in with Gilgamesh, Karna appeared as well. It was more of a token show, and Hakuno noticed that, while his appearance was always pale and wane, he looked more tired than usual.

“Hey,” she said without looking up. “Welcome to the land of procrastination. I don’t really feel like bringing out the seating cushions so sit where you want.”

Her voice sounded upbeat. Maybe a little too upbeat.

“Since you’re here, wanna play a fighting game? I found this crazy jump kick thing. Its amazing. There are just two options. Jump and punch, and there are only two characters you can use. They have the exact same abilities, and the only difference is the clothes color…you can’t get more sterile than this. You just repeat the same thing over and over and over, and you kind of just go into this zone…you just forget you’re playing. …it’s pretty much how I’m feeling right now, you know? So…what are you after?”

“I wanted to thank you first of all,” Hakuno said. “Karna…really saved me.”

Jinako looked away.

“I didn’t do that much. Karna was raring to go and…I did say I’d try a little. That was my ‘little’,” she mumbled, still playing the game without even looking at it.

“It still saved me. Also…”

She needed to ask about Shinji…

“I heard everything you know,” Jinako said suddenly. “About that ‘Origin’ thingy, and needing another Servant. And everything else.”

“I see you are still the same worthless existence that I first saw,” Gilgamesh said coldly.

“You could have said something,” Hakuno sighed.

Jinako stood up, stuffing her hands into her pockets and looking at the floor.

“I told you, Hakuno. I’m not really helping. I didn’t want you to die, but…I mean…I’m like Shinji. I died. I died in the first round because I freaked out at the thought of dying and refused to leave the janitor’s closest. You and Rin and Rani…you get to go back and fight over your wishes. Me…I’m just a dead thing. Really…I want to stay here forever. It’s crap, but at least I’m alive.”

She looked at Hakuno, very much not looking at Gilgamesh.

“What happens to this place if you win? After all BB made this place. And I just go back to being a corpse. I…I’m like Gatou…or Shinji. I don’t have Gatou’s kindness or Shinji’s pride. I won’t be saved no matter what, but…”

She was crying again, her own words breaking out. In some ways, for Jinako, this was the best option. This was the only option as well, and now Hakuno was getting ready to take that away from her.

It was hard to blame her. But still…
Gilgamesh, however, was completely unmoved. He was waiting Jinako with a cold disinterest that had only softened slightly from the murderous intent that he’d shown in the Labyrinth.

“Have I not told you, Hakuno, that words cannot reach this woman? Someone such as her, who has given in so totally to despair can only be taught by force.”

Maybe he was right, but…Hakuno couldn’t fight Jinako. Not when she was standing there, fighting back tears, trying to bear the deaths she’d faced and her own fear of dying.

But somehow, those words made Jinako’s shaking shoulders stiffen, and she sniffed once.

“You don’t change do you?’ she asked Gilgamesh. Or at least not towards anyone but Hakuno. That was embarrassing…but…that actually made me feel better…” she smiled weakly at Hakuno. “Don’t worry Hakuno. I know you don’t want to fight about this, but you don’t have to. I might not help, but I’m not going to stop you either. You can use Karna.”

Hakuno blinked and even Gilgamesh was silent.

“…I wanted you to understand,” Jinako muttered. “Besides, I told you before, if you wanted him, I’d let you take him. Besides, I’m sick and tired of him anyways.”

It was a bad lie. Jinako wasn’t even looking at Karna.

“But…in exchange…I’m not leaving. I’m just…going to stay here…with my eyes and ears covered…waiting for the storm to blow over…forever and ever… I don’t know what’s going to happen. If you’ll be blown away or if the school building will be. I guess…I’ll leave it to God, you know?”

She gave Hakuno a half smile, but one that Hakuno knew was taking everything Jinako was to make. She might not have had Gatou’s faith, but she was trying. And she was willing to die along, without even Karna, and disappear before she knew it.

In reality, it wasn’t all that different from the end of the Holy Grail War, was it? She’d hidden and hidden until everything was erased, but…

But she…

No.

“I–“

“This is a meaningless conversation,” Karna said. “I’m sorry, Hakuno, but I cannot cooperate with you. I will not sever my contract with Jianko. You should return and work on that backup plan that Rin seems to have. No matter what Jinako says, I will not and cannot help you.”

Somehow…Hakuno felt relieved.

Jinako turned to Karna with wide eyes.

“Wait-but- You like Hakuno, right? She’s a better Master than me! Besides, this is an order! Can’t I just use a Command Spell?”

It didn’t work like that.

“Do what you like. With your level of magical power, the effects of the Command Seal will be like tripping over a rock. It can’t annul our contract, or compel me to do anything unless I agree.”
Hakuno blinked, and glanced at Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh…wasn’t looking at her.

Wait…

He’d…stolen her Command Spells…but…had she even had the power to command him to start with? Or was it just the presence of something that was supposed to be there to control him. She’d wondered about that. Vague or long lasting Commands were supposed to be useless, but he’d agreed to let her look, speak and question him…

This wasn’t important!

“I am not fated to vanish here, and I have no desire to die in a place like this. Let those who want to eradicate BB be the one to do so.”

Gilgamesh laughed harshly, but there was no humor in it.

“Hmph, that’s all very well than,” he said. “I said in the past that I would have your head, but you may forget that completely. From the beginning, you had already given up the dignity of falling by my hand.”

Karna looked away.

“Say what you like, King of Heroes. Even I am one who knows fear. In life, you proudly spat upon the gods without reservation, but I keep my distance from reckless strategies. To gain the Legendary Mystic Code, the original power of the Heroic Spirit, it would mean fighting you again, Gilgamesh. As well as you at your most divine. The results of that battle have already been decided, and my wounds have not healed. We both know what would happen if I faced you now.”

Gilgamesh made a thoughtful sound.

“Wha-“ Jinako started, and stared at Karna with very wide eyes.

“What are you doing? Go! Why do you want to stay here? It’s…easier for a waste of a person like me to hide like a snail, not to…”

“You should apologize do snails. They do the best with what they have. Only humans can waste their lives, Jinako.”

Jinako turned to Hakuno.

“Aw… Karna’s preachy mode has been flipped. Do something, Hakuno! It’s like the well to do little brother preaching at his washed up older sister…”

“…I guess…this is another example of a good Master/Servant relationship?” Hakuno asked.

“…I can think of no other who could tolerate such a waste,” Gilgamesh said. “Come, Hakuno, let us return. There will be no more for us here.”

Hakuno sighed.

“Alright, thanks anyways, Jinako.”

“Thank you for understanding, Hakuno. While Jinako calls you part of a ‘clueless couple’ you are
very understanding.”

Clueless…couple…

“Wha-“

Gilgamesh had turned around as well.

“I haven’t called you that! Nope! Karna doesn’t know what he’s talking about! I’ve never said anything at all! Good luck!”

And she’d rushed forwards and slammed the door of the Janitor’s closet.

Gilgamesh moved to break the door down again, probably to demand they tell just what they’d said, but Hakuno raised a hand.

“Jinako’s weird sometimes…” she said. “She claimed I was stalking her once, remember? She’s just…being her…”

Gilgamesh gave a final glare at the wall.

“Ridiculous indeed. To infringe on my magnanimity…” he was still muttering darkly as Hakuno did her best to coax him away from the door.

The best option at this point was distraction. Besides, there was something she wanted to ask him.

“Gil…I’m going to be using the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation. That…” she took a breath. “Are you really ok with that?”

Gilgamesh scowled at her.

“Had I had objections I would not have informed you of the means to defeat that Cancer, but merely continued as things were. There was a potential that you would give me enough power that it would be possible to defeat her prior to this, while she was unconnected to the Moon Cell. As it is, this is the only possible means of defeating her.”

“But… That skill… What if… What if I do something wrong?”

What if she accidentally changed something about him? She still had no idea how to use it, but she’d heard as much as he had about what Kiara had done. Sakura had been a special case. After all, if it hadn’t been for that, she would have become Melt, but…could she really just traipse around someone’s soul like this?

Gilgamesh laughed.

“Is that what you have concerned yourself over? Well, cease fretting. I am perfectly well aware that, even had you have that skill at the beginning of our contract, you would not have used it, soft hearted as you are. And you should be aware that my soul is not so easily changed as those fools that woman tricked. You could not use that skill to affect me by accident, and you lack the will to do so on purpose. The only obstacle is that the path to my Origin will not be an easy one. Both the Moon Cells and my own barriers will seek to obstruct you.”

What did that mean?

And of course he wasn’t worried because he thought she was too weak to do anything, but…
But they’d reached the door to the Student Council. Hakuno took a breath, closed her eyes, and pushed the door open. They’d have to come up with something.

Everyone was still there when she stepped in, only Rani was looking at a screen while Rin was typing something.

“We were observing,” Rani said as a greeting. “I’m honestly surprised. For Jinako Karigiri to consent to BB’s eradication, even while fearing death… She is a braver person than I had assumed…”

“Welp, I predicted that we’d be refused in the end hehehehe.”

“That laugh is making me nervous,” Hakuno said, her voice flat.

“I’m allowed to laugh! It means my trump card and all the work I put in aren’t going to waste anymore! I’ve got a familiar prepared!”

“Really?” Hakuno asked.

“Don’t give me that doubtful look, it’s great. It’ll…totally win…”

That didn’t sound convincing.

“It shouldn’t be too bad, right?” Sakura said nervously. “I mean…you used it on me, and you were fine, and you’re much more powerful…”

“AI, do not compare us,” Gilgamesh said, watching the proceedings from a open spot in the room that he seemed to have chosen to be a good place to go dormant. “Your soul is currently only a few months old.”

That’s right. Gilgamesh was around four thousand years old.

…this might be different than anything she’d seen before.

“Are you ready?” Rani asked.

Hakuno looked at Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh nodded.

He trusted her, Hakuno realized, thinking back on what he’d said in the hall. It wasn’t just that he didn’t think she could do anything. He knew that she wouldn’t.

Gilgmaesh…trusted her. He trusted her enough that he was going to let her use a codecast meant to change someone’s soul…

She had to do this.

“Allright. I’m ready,” she said, clenching her fists.

“Ok, Gilgamesh, would you mind coming over here. We’re gong to put you into a dormancy. This should mostly be a dream for you, so…”

“I am aware,” Gilgamesh said, moving slightly, but mostly staying where he’d decided he wanted to be.
“Hakuno, take this,” Rin handed Hakuno a small black box of an item folder that was probably shady.

“Er…”

“Hakuno, after the infiltration, proceed to Gilgamesh’s core. That was locked by the Moon Cell during the reconstruction of his soul, so it will be your mission to destroy that. We aren’t sure what is there waiting for you, but…be prepared for just about anything. No one’s infiltrated a Servant before. Let alone one as old as Gilgamesh.”

“You may begin,” Gilgamesh said.

As he stood as a circle of light surrounded him. For a moment, their eyes met, and then his closed, almost lazily, and his body relaxed, breathing becoming regular.

He was trusting her, and allowing her to do something…well…that she didn’t think anyone else would be able to do. Once, Gilgamesh had mentioned that he had his secrets, and that his heart was guarded. Once she’d thought that to catch those would be like catching a falling star.

Now…he was allowing to set foot in his very soul just so that they could have the power to beat BB.

She was going to make good on that trust.

A light started to glow from his heart, and Hakuno reached forwards. Vaguely, behind her, she heard someone, maybe Sakura, maybe Rin muttering.

“Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation start!”

“Let’s just hope that that Goldie was telling the truth…”

And then Hakuno was falling into darkness.

It wasn’t like the others.

Then she’d fallen through water. This was falling into something else, something more dense yet more accepting.

There was no voice, but there were images that flashed before his eyes.

A man smiled at her through a full beard, a golden chain around his neck.

A city of milling people was lit by the rising sun.

A feeling of affectionate possessiveness that was so strong it took her breath away.

“What beautiful creatures….”

Hakuno was standing in darkness. For a moment she wasn’t sure if she’d opened her eyes or not, but the darkness was the same. She had a sense of being in a large area, but the darkness just stretched on and on without any kind of light or even grey area.

“Gilgamesh?” Hakuno called, but there was no answer as her voice echoed strangely. “Rin?”

There wasn’t even a sound from whatever familiar Rin had been talking about.

This was Gilgamesh’s soul? It was darker than the pit that BB that thrown her into. At least then
there had been pinpricks of light, ways to at least reach something new…

BB would have a field day, but…it seemed so sad… Well, even if it was nothing more than darkness…she’d have to find a way. And the atmosphere wasn’t bad. It smelled nice, like some kind of spice she didn’t know…

He was trusting her.

Hakuno took a step.

The second she stepped forwards, light erupted from that place, spreading out around her as the darkness was suddenly broken up and dissolved. Instinctively, Hakuno raised her arms over her eyes, until the blinding power was gone, and then, slowly she lowered her arms.

She was standing in a courtyard. Beside her, there was a shallow pool that looked like it had been manmade with small plants poking up and…small fish darted around. There were small trees around her, and flowers that she didn’t know that had been planted in small clusters. And that was just the center where she was.

The walls around her were intricately carved and painted with pictures of animals and people, with large pillars with strange designs around her. Above her, Hakuno could see a patch of sky more blue than anything she’d seen before.

There were no numbers…

She’d never seen a sky with no scraps of data…

Hakuno looked down again, to see a set of large, imposing doors that had were shut, a large seal placed over them.

Where…

“Hakuno!”

Something ran into her, and Hakuno nearly jumped as she looked down to see…a child?

A boy seemed to have come out of nowhere and was embracing her around the middle. He was wearing a white shirt that was open at the chest, white pants, (both trimmed in gold) and a gold belt with a white sash. His golden hair shone in the sun as much as the gold on his clothes, but what made her heart stop in her chest was when he looked up.

He couldn't be more than eight, but she knew him.

Crimson eyes shown back at her with slit pupils that were more open to the light than she’d ever seen them.

“I missed you!” Gilgamesh said, smiling at her, brightly and without reservation.

Chapter End Notes

Are you ready for Kid!Gil? Because I'm ready for Kid!Gil! Yeah, I'm pretty much scrapping most of what happened in the game for this section. As well as the
explanation for why it worked. I'm SO pumped for this next section!

And yes, Karna called Hakuno and Gil the clueless couple to their faces. They're lucky that Gil is deeply in denial at this point.

Next Chapter:

Gilgamesh Labyrinth
Gilgamesh’s mind and soul are nothing like what Hakuno expects, and she finds she has to figure out quickly just what she needs to do.

The first time Hakuno knew what the Lynch-pin of Heaven meant was in Gilgamesh’s heart.

She wasn’t sure what to even do with the situation. She’d just been getting her bearings and now she’d instinctively reached out and caught the small figure hugging her. Hakuno stared down at... Gilgamesh. It had to be Gilgamesh. But...

How was he...

“Gil?” Hakuno managed to get out.

The boy just grinned at her, not letting go of her waist.

It had to be him, but... why was he a child? In all the time that she’d seen him, she’d never seen Gilgamesh smile like that either. There was not hint of darkness, or cruelty, and it wasn’t even warmth. It was joy, and even kindness.

“I was looking for you!” the child version of Gilgamesh said. “I want to show you something!”

He let go of her waist only to take her hand, pulling her towards the pool, or rather a small clump of flowers that were growing near it. Like most of the plants in this place, the small cluster of white flowers were completely unfamiliar to her.

They weren’t very impressive really. The few flowers had long, spindly petals, and she couldn’t tell if it had much smell. Also, it looked like they’d pushed up from between two stones, unlike the others around them.

“I just found them,” Gilgamesh said, learning over but still holding her hand. “No one else has seen them yet, but I like them.”

“Why’s that?” Hakuno asked.

She was starting to get her bearings, but this was still incredibly confusing. Particularly with a very young, very expressive Gilgamesh talking to her about flowers.

“Because it struggled to be here,” Gilgamesh said. “It fought against all the odds, and now it’s here, and alive. Even if it’s not as big as some of the others here, it deserves to be here. It reminds me of you.”

And they were back to weird compliments...
For some reason, she found herself reminded of her dive into Gilgamesh’s heart, but…

That didn’t make sense. Gilgamesh’s instincts hadn’t known her, but this child version certainly seemed to…

Also… He really had thought like that? Even as a kid?

Was he really a kid right now? While he certainly talked differently, honestly, Hakuno wasn’t entirely sure. She wasn’t even entirely sure what this was. This couldn’t be the Origin. From what Rin and Rani had said, she’d been expecting a fight. This was…

“Anyways,” Gilgamesh smiled at her. “What do you want to do today?”

Maybe it was better to play along for now? Maybe if she did, she’d start to understand what she needed to do all in all. This couldn’t be the Origin, but…

“I’m not sure,” Hakuno said, looking around her. “Are we only supposed to be…here?”

Gilgamesh laughed; it was an easy, light sound. Nothing like his laughter in the future. It didn't have that mocking edge, rather it was an easy laugh like a spring breeze.

“How about you,” he said. “It’s my palace…we can go wherever we like! The courtyards the best though. But…hm…you haven’t been here before…”

Wait, so he knew that?

She wasn’t entirely sure what it was that this version of Gilgamesh did and didn’t know. Maybe she should just ask-

“I know!” Gilgamesh said. “Let’s play hide and seek! I’ll hide somewhere in the outer palace and you can find me! That way, you can get used to the layout while we play! Besides…I’ve seen the children in the city play it, but…I’ve never done it before…”

It was weirdly…thoughtful.

She was starting to see what Gilgamesh had meant when he’d said that he’d had a completely different nature as a child. She had trouble seeing the person before her as the adult who would be called a tyrant. But…how had he never played with other children before?

“Really?” Hakuno asked, honestly surprised. “Well…I can’t remember ever playing at all, either, so it can be a first time for both of us…”

Gilgamesh beamed at her, and for a second, she felt that same pull that she’d felt when he’d given his speech in the auditorium. A+ Charisma. It was the same push, but this was more just…to smile back to let him have his way… Thankfully, whatever had kept her head clear the first time still protected it, but…he didn’t seem to know that he was doing it.

“Ok!” he said, letting go of her completely since he’d shown up. “I’ll only need a minute! Then you can come find me!”

He darted off past one of the pillars where Hakuno could see a small doorway into a darkened room, seeming all the more so when she was standing in warm bright sunlight in…Gilgamesh’s soul?

She needed to think.

At least she had a minute.
Probably exactly one minute.

Hakuno looked up at the blue sky again, noting something white floating at the end. A cloud? That was what a cloud looked like, right?

This…she had to be in something constructed by Gilgamesh’s memories. This was supposed to be a dive into his mind and soul. So that would make sense. Then…in theory, this wouldn’t be all that different than a Labyrinth. But…that didn’t quite make sense. Hakuno had all three of Gilgamesh’s SGs. So, by that logic, she should be able to walk through.

Gilgamesh had mentioned that he would be dreaming, but the seal on the large doors made her think of a Labyrinth.

Maybe it was one. One that had slightly different rules. That would mean that Gilgamesh, or his child self was the Sentinel, but he certainly hadn’t been hostile. He’d honestly been more friendly than she’d ever seen Gilgamesh be.

She’d have to figure it out.

There was a lock, and it had to be connected to Gilgamesh and his SGs somehow. She’d just need to find out how. Besides, it was Gilgamesh. Why would she think that he’d play by BB’s rules?

It had probably been about a minute, so she walked into the darkness of the palace.

Hakuno’s eyes adjusted to the light fairly quickly. The doorway lead into a hall that was lit by small torches, allowing her to see the carvings on the walls of animals and people, monsters and gods, all living and working. They were like the ones that Hakuno had seen in the Gate of Babylon. Those had all had faces of individuals. These were more what she’d expect. Yet, even now, in the light of the torches….the animals almost seemed to move.

Her footsteps echoed at she walked, turning a few corners and then realizing that this was the Labyrinth. There shouldn’t be monsters, right? Gilgamesh had mentioned that he might not know ally from enemy, but that child version of him had been friendly.

As she walked, Hakuno’s footsteps echoed slightly, and the entire place gave her a feeling that no one was there, and no one had been there for a long, long time.

Hakuno turned into what looked like a small room and stopped, glancing in.

She stopped, blinking a little at the sight of…toys.

So many toys.

Board games, toy chariots, carved animals, and brightly colored things she couldn’t even name were littered everywhere. Hakuno stepped in, looking around, nearly tripping over a toy bow and arrow that had fallen to the ground.

Most of the things there…they looked like they should have been played with a group. Or at least one more person.

This had to be Gilgamesh’s.

At least his as a child.

Yet, why was it all here? And…why did it look so abandoned? Or rather barely used? Labyrinths
usually held clues at some level about the heart that they were reflecting, or maybe in this case the soul, but this didn’t seem to mean much.

Then again, this was always the SG she had trouble understanding.

It had been the first time Gilgamesh opened up to her, told her about himself, but somehow, she’d felt like she’d understood him no better than before. While now there were parts that she was starting to be able to put together, it felt like this was more than just ‘loneliness’.

A sound from a little ways down the hall, had Hakuno freeze and then run out. An enemy?

But…there was nothing, just…another doorway? The hall was still completely empty, but she ignored the creeping eeriness of the place and rushed forwards to see the next room.

It wasn’t that different than the first, just mostly toys and brightly colored stones and things that a child would pick up and collect. Most of them, she noticed were in pairs. Hakuno stepped towards a small collection of brightly colored stones.

And nearly jumped out of her skin as the tiny child version of Gilgamesh jumped out from beneath the table to hug her around the middle again.

“You found me!” he said, and Hakuno noticed that he sounded…far too excited about losing. “You found my treasury too!”

“This is your treasury?”

Well, it was stupid to think that he’d always had his own pocket dimension where he put everything.

“Yes,” Gilgamesh said. “They’re pretty. One day, I want to have other things…treasures and food and everything that Uruk could ever need. Father said that a good king always has a full treasury. That way, no matter what, you’re prepared. I’m king now, so I need to make sure to start. That way, the people who are mine always have what they need.”

That was right. Gilgamesh’s father, Lugalbanda, must have died pretty early in Gilgamesh’s life for him to be king so young. Also, there was someone to blame other than the fact that Gilgamesh claimed it was his nature to collect treasures.

“What kind of treasure would you want?” Hakuno asked.

“…I’m not sure,” Gilgamesh admitted. “But it’ll be special. You can use it too. You just need to ask. Anyways, let’s go back out. We can play twenty squares. I’ll let you choose the board. I…have plenty.”

Twenty squares?

She had no idea what he was talking about.

Gilgamesh had taken her hand again and was pulling her towards the hall, and what should probably be the way out. For an eight-year-old he was surprisingly strong.

She supposed that made sense. He was a demigod.

“Gil, shouldn’t there be people here?” Hakuno asked, as he started pulling her into the hall again, away from all the toys that still had a very unused feel.

Gilgamesh paused for a moment, his small head down.
“I think they’re at a funeral. One of the priestesses for Ishtar died, and the temple is having a ceremony. I guess a lot of people liked her. So I let them go. It’s good for humans to mourn.”

He said that last bit like he was reciting a lesson, and Hakuno frowned. There was something…wrong…with that response. While she didn’t expect tears or anything, there wasn’t any real emotion at all.

“What about you? Did you like her?”

“…I guess. But…human’s die don’t they? That’s the lot that the gods put out for them. After they’ve served their purposes…I don’t like it, but I don’t really understand why they’re sad…”

And no one had asked or made him come? While maybe it wasn’t something that you did back in this age…this felt wrong on so many levels.

It was quiet, but for a moment, Hakuno saw it. Up until that point, it had been hard to believe that she was talking to Gilgamesh, or that this boy would grow into the man she’d started to understand, but now…

*I had never lamented death nor feared it. I was, in all truth, not even conscious of it. Lives could vanish, but the true meaning of that could not reach me.*

So that was the connection.

Or maybe that was the reason.

But quickly, the smile was back, and he was tugging her back towards the square of light that was the courtyard.

Though…it was later than it should have been.

The sky was the color of sunset that she was so used to now. The courtyard was almost completely in shadow now and she moved a little closer to the sky. While she knew it was a memory, seeing it like this…without any coding at all…maybe it was something that other people took for granted but…

A sudden sound made Hakuno jump. It was something high pitched and gentle, but utterly unfamiliar to her. Gilgamesh jumped as well, whipping around until he realized what Hakuno was reacting to.

“That’s a lark,” Gilgamesh said, pointing towards a small brown…bird…that Hakuno hadn’t seen. “There are two of them that live in the courtyard.”

Right. Because in the real world, there were animals. Not just some of the pictures that she’d seen in the library, but real ones. Even in Gilgamesh’s memories…

“…I’ve never seen one before,” Hakuno said.

It was a little disconcerting…how little she’d seen of anything before. The world was full of animals though. Birds, mammals, things people kept as pets. Had she had something she liked? She must have once. Maybe she’d liked birds. They sounded nice…

“You’ll see lots of them now!” Gilgamesh assured her. “And you’ll see the ducks when they come, and the herons, and you’ll see lions and all kinds of things. There’ll always be new things, and we can play all the time!”
“Gil…”

They couldn’t.

“And we can be two!”

“That makes no sense.”

The eight-year-old version of a man would grow to claim that he owned everything in the entire world looked down, his face flushing, and then out at the small pool. He pointed to where a pair of turtles were sitting and sunning themselves in the fading light.

“Everything’s always in twos,” he said, and…for a moment, his voice sounded very young and very lost. “Or more. But it’s always more than one. Except for me. Humans are the same. There are lots of them. And they all have families and friends and bonds… Mother says that the gods never made anyone like me before, and the others say that I am supposed to rule over all of humanity forever, so that Heaven and Earth stay connected, but…I don’t understand why I don’t get a sibling or a companion. I asked Mother, when Father was still alive, but she said that that wasn’t allowed… because I was supposed to be alone.”

Hakuno sat down at the edge of the pool, and Gilgamesh sat beside her, while his face was glum, she noticed, more and more how he never seemed to let her go.

“That’s why you haven’t played hide and seek…”

And why, when she took too long looking for him, he made sure to draw her to him.

He talked about the gods so neutrally. Normally, the adult Gilgamesh had a note of scorn in his voice whenever he so much as mentioned them, but apparently, when he was younger…he’d obeyed them. Even if there was no reverence in his voice, he still listened and accepted their words.

Gilgamesh nodded.

“I can’t play with my subjects. Not like that. I can lead them in sports or wrestling…but…it’s not the same. That’s leading. I’m still one. And I can’t do it with my retainer since I have to rule… But I waited for a companion! And now you’re there!”

The smile was back, and he was resting against her, looking out at the small pool as the real sun set. He seemed happy and content, and like a thoughtful, good leader, but even now, when he was thoughtful and tried to care for his subjects, the seeds of the man who she knew had been planted.

He had rooms of toys and board games meant for two people that never were used. Collected enough treasures for two children to play with when it was just him…

An existence set apart from everyone else, told that he was unique and that he had to be alone… And that had never changed.

She knew the true name of the Lynch-pin of Heaven.

“Gil…” Hakuno said softly. “I really, really was happy to meet you like this, but…I know can’t stay, and neither can you. Not like this.”

Gilgamesh jerked back, eyes wide and the pupil at contracted so that he looked more normal, but the emotion on her his face wasn’t anger like she’d thought that it was going to be as she made it clear that she wasn’t going to let him keep her there. It was fear.
“No!” he cried, shaking his head. “You can’t go! You only just got here, and….you can’t face that thing! It’ll kill you or keep you locked up forever! You should stay here with me. I promise that if you stay here, you’ll be safe and happy and I’ll never be mean to you and make you sad like I did when I was older, so…so….don’t leave me here alone.”

The last sentence was a sob.

Tears were starting to fall down his cheeks, as the boy pleaded with her not to leave him. Grabbing the shirt of her uniform and staring up at her.

Hakuno didn’t even think.

She’d embraced him, wrapping her arms tightly around him and pulling him into a hug. The night before, in the real world, or at least the one she knew, Gilgamesh had held her as she broke down, in her darkest hour. And she could do the same for this child version of him, who was expected to shoulder everything completely alone.

“You’re not so bad when you grow up,” Hakuno said. “Even at your worst, you never once abandoned me when I needed you. And you won’t be alone forever. You’ll meet someone amazing. Someone who completely understands you, and who, even at your worst, can stand up to you and help you. They’ll be your precious friend. And you’ll have your kingdom, who do care about you. There are people who need us though. I can’t stay. No matter how nice it is.”

“What about you?” the boy sniffed.

“I’ll make it. That’s what I do, right? I’ll make it to the Origin and back, and we’ll be together as long as we can be. And while sometimes, I don’t always understand you, I’ll never stop trying to, as long as we’re together. Ok?”

Gilgamesh sighed.

“…what’s the true name of the Lynch-pin of Heaven?” the child asked, his voice very soft. “…and why is it so important?”

“The true name…is Isolation.” Hakuno said softly. “You were born separate, kept separate, and told that no one was allowed to ever be near you or like you. You liked people, but couldn’t understand them. Just like they liked you, but kept you on a pedestal as their perfect king. Others were allowed to have partners and siblings and people they loved, but you were expected to keep the gods’ plans alone. Your power, your Charisma, your wisdom were all designed to help you rule, but also always kept you apart from everyone. All so that you would side with the gods who saw you as separate from them as well. It’s important because…despite all of them, you still sided with humanity, but you had to be separate to make that future you saw work. And this was the age where that started. Maybe that’s why it’s a seal. Because you rejected the Origin, the plan that had been laid out for you, but that just meant more isolation. You chose it, but you hate it. Because you’re still human enough to need and want someone else.”

It was more than loneliness.

It was a solitude that would have driven most people to madness, but Gilgamesh and stubbornly sat on his throne and sunk.

“…I wish you’d been wrong,” the child whispered. “I really wanted you do stay and not see… You only get one guess you know…but you’re not…”

Hakuno released him, to look at the child. He was smiling, even as he started to fade.
“The real me is dreaming, so he probably won’t remember much of this…but…I’m glad I met you. And he is too. Even if he doesn’t know how to say it anymore. We’ve been alone for a long time, and I think I’ve forgotten something important. No matter how hard I can be to understand…don’t give up on me.”

And with that final smile, the child Gilgamesh vanished, fading like a shadow in the courtyard and leaving Hakuno alone again as a small breeze managed to make its way through.

There was a faint click ahead, and the seal that had been on the double doors cracked in half in front of her and fell to the ground.

So that was the end.

It didn’t really feel like a victory, but also…not really like something sad.

Not if she didn’t think about the end.

It was more like…she’d finally understood something she hadn’t before. While this was all things she’d learned, putting them together…it gave her a clearer picture.

That was why he’d looked surprised for a moment when she hadn’t been affected by his Charisma. Because it really had meant something, hadn’t it?

And maybe she was a little nervous about what was waiting for her. Still, if this was what she thought, then there were two more SGs to work through, and to understand before she was able to reach the Origin.

She wasn’t sure why this was all necessary, or even what it all really meant, but…it seemed somehow right to her that if she was going to reach some part, deep in Gilgamesh’s core, she’d need to understand him to get there.

Besides, Hakuno was good and not giving up. On anyone or anything.

So, standing up, Hakuno took a breath, and walked to the double doors, pushing them open.

A blast of cold wind met her and for a second…something...flashed in front of her eyes.

A darkened temple that smelled like spices was before her. And thousands of voices laughed mockingly.

"Know your place!"

"King of slaves!"

A cry went out around her, and voices seemed to plead for something to stop.

Something at the back of her mind pulled at her, making her feel wrong, but she ignored it.

A city stood in the darkness lit by torches, and that same possessiveness coursed through her, but it was edged with something else. Something more desperate and awful.

She felt something crumbling in her hands, and screamed in rage and something else as what felt like all the swords of the world pierced her heart.

"All of this was my own selfishness."
And then it was gone, and Hakuno was standing in a dark hallway, the door shut behind her.

The hall in front of her was long and narrow, and lit by torches, with more little rooms that branched off around her, but it was just as empty as the last part of this Labyrinth that she’d seen. Maybe there would be monsters here. She wasn’t sure, but there had to be a version of Gilgamesh here as a sentinel too, and there was no saying that he’d be as friendly towards her as his child version was.

That version…had more just been a manifestation of incredible loneliness. She had no idea what this would be. What did the Chain of Heaven signify other than…

There was a flash of green in the corner of her eye, and Hakuno whipped around only to find it gone. Maybe she’d imagined it?

They couldn’t be there, right?

There was light coming from a corner! That had to mean something right?

Hakuno turned the corner, half expecting to see Enkidu standing and waiting for her, but they weren’t there.

Rather, Hakuno had turned into a large, open area. A low table was set out, covered in dishes of food that she’d never seen before. All of them steaming and hot with a smell that made her wonder how she’d never noticed it up until then.

Sitting at the head of the table, was Gilgamesh. He looked up as she turned the corner and stood up with a grin.

Only…

While certainly wasn’t a child this wasn’t the Gilgamesh she was used to. He was younger, probably about her age, maybe a little older, and his hair, while spiked up, had a bit that was falling down in that more tame style. He was wearing golden armor that somehow managed to look more flashy than what he’d worn when she first met him.

Large golden pauldrons sat over a golden cloth with decorative chains that made a faint jangling as he moved. Like his child form, they were open at the front while the armor protected his stomach and legs. A large golden belt hung over the armor with an intricately patterned red and gold cloth that was weighed down with more gold.

Not for the first time, Hakuno wondered just how Gil moved let alone fought. It looked…heavy.

But she didn’t have time to think too much about this armor because Gilgamesh had already met her, and taken her hand with a more familiar smile, one that was arrogant, and amused, but…his chin was just a little too high, and when he spoke, his voice was just a little too sure.

“I’ve been waiting for you, my treasure!”

Chapter End Notes

I was sort of expecting to cover more, but KidGil ended up taking a while. I'm not sure if I'm going to have each part take up a chapter, but we'll see. The Lynchpin of Heaven was fairly easy for Hakuno to figure out, but this next one…is a little harder.
Also, expect a few flashes of our favorite clay.

Note: Twenty Squares is a Sumerian board game, probably the first. It seems like it was a little like checkers, but we know literally nothing about how it was played.

Next Chapter:

Hakuno has to deal with Gilgamesh as she's never had to deal with him before.
Chapter Summary

Hakuno has an awkward dinner with Gilgamesh's teenage self.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno understood the true meaning of the Chain of Heaven was after Gilgamesh’s first real SG had been found and she found herself faced with a teenage Gilgamesh leading her to dinner with a smug look on his face.

“Come, the feast is already prepared,” he said. “I see you appreciate the gift I have given you to wear.”

Well, at least the way he talked was familiar. It was weird to think that she was used to that, but his formal way to talking laced with arrogance was something that she just was familiar with.

Wait. Gift?

Hakuno reached out to her neck and for the first time noticed the cord. What she could see of it when she looked down…it was red, and made from some fabric that Hakuno didn’t know. She had no idea where it had come from though or what it was doing there.

Maybe…it was a sign she’d found the real name of one SG? Isolation. Hakuno had once told Passionlip that humans needed companionship, and how her trying to push Hakuno away from anyone and everyone was awful for that reason, the idea that Gilgamesh grew up like that was….horrible.

Maybe that was why she let him lead her to the table.

Table was the wrong word.

Originally, Hakuno had thought that it was a wooden board that had been covered with a rich sheet, but up close, she could see that it was just the sheet, with the dishes and bread on top of it. A pillow had been placed like the head of the table where Gilgamesh had been siting, with another one waiting at his left side, clearly for her.

There was nothing else, despite the feast in front of them. It was more food than any ten people could have eaten, but it was clearly meant for only the two of them. Two golden goblets were waiting for her, already filled with a light amber colored drink that Hakuno vaguely recognized.

This was that drink from the Gates.

Hakuno sat down slowly, noticing the empty plate in front of her. Gilgamesh had already sat down and had taken some bread.

“Eat,” he said, giving her that same look that was almost like his older self, but seemed like it was trying just a little too hard. “You will find it nothing like that farce you endured before.”
Was he talking about the Hell Dinner?

Hakuno took the plate and looked at the meal. Most of it was bread and stews, and things that she didn’t even know, and while it smelled amazing, there was something that was gnawing on her.

There was motion just to Gilgamesh’s back and right, and when she looked up, a familiar figure stood. They wore the same long white shirt and pants as before, but their eyes were on Gilgamesh. They weren’t smiling, and something…painful…was on their face. They looked up to her, and smiled saidly, shaking their head and pointing at the food.

“Hakuno?” Gilgamesh’s voice broke her from her thought looked at him.

“Sorry, I was just….looking around. This place is just a hallway right? There are a lot of carvings.”

There were, but in the faint light, Hakuno couldn’t see much.

Gilgamesh nodded, but he didn’t look at the walls, around them, or point out anything he was doing.

“It is natural to be struck by the wonder of my palace, even its hallways, this being the most meager are great. Soon, I will show you the throne room, as well as all the other wonders of my city. As my treasure, you may go and do as you please, and all will give you what you ask! Now, let us begin!”

He was eating, and Hakuno looked at the food.

Even without Enkidu’s warning, this felt weird.

If they were in Gilgamesh’s soul…what was this? If she ate bits of Gilgamesh’s soul, what would happen to him. What would happen to her for that matter?

The whole thing just felt like a bad idea, but Gilgamesh, or rather his teenage form, was sitting there grinning at her, so she had to at least look the part. So she put some bread on her plate and decided to go for the best way she’d ever learned to deal with Gilgamesh: distraction.

“Your armor is different,” she said.

Talking worked when he was older, so this should work now, right? Also, she needed to figure out the Chain of Heaven.

Gilgamesh raised his head proudly.

“This is the ceremonial armor of the king! It and its other were enchanted to ward off magical assault, and it’s very appearance shows my glory. …I wished for you to be able to see that glory for yourself.”

His voice seemed different on saying that, and for a moment he didn’t meet her eyes.

What...was he doing?

“I…think it looks nice…” Hakuno said, not entirely sure what she was supposed to say to all of this.

Gilgamesh seemed to immediately straighten, that arrogant smile on his face.

“Of course! No other could compare with myself, and as such no other but you is permitted to remain by my side!”

His laugh sounded strangely forced.
“Just me?”

Was Gilgamesh like this even really old enough to remember Enkidu? What Gilgamesh like this did and didn’t remember was still fuzzy to her.

“Who else could there be?” he sniffed. “Drink, Hakuno! This is a special vintage to celebrate my treasure’s arrival!”

Ok, so he probably didn’t remember Enkidu. And he was worse with the compliments than his younger self. But much more…she wasn’t sure about the word.

Instinctively, Hakuno grabbed for the goblet, but didn’t drink. She still had no idea what this was and what would happen if she did. Drinking part of Gilgamesh’s soul was…somehow just too weird for words.

She needed to figure out the SG.

Without knowing what to do, Hakuno raised the glass, looking around. While the ‘Labyrinth’ was one room, there had to be something that might give her a hint. Her eyes found a place in the corner where it looked like something had been before. A square block of stone was in against the wall, and the stone there was blank and somehow discolored.

Gilgamesh must have seen where she was looking because he spoke.

“The hall is superior without Ishtar’s statue is it not?” he asked smirking at her.

Right. Ishtar. She was there. While Gilgamesh hadn’t talked about her at all, the Epic had mentioned her. She’d been the patron goddess of Uruk. The goddess of fertility and war, who had wanted Gilgamesh to be her husband. Gilgamesh, being Gilgamesh, had had none of it.

“Is that…a good idea?” she asked. “I mean…Ishtar is the patron of Uruk.”

“It is my will!” Gilgamesh said sharply, looking down at his goblet but he stopped, looking away as Hakuno stiffened, and he continued more gently. “I…do not wish to speak so to you… You did not mean to cause offense…”

Had Gilgamesh just…apologized?

He had!

“Still…I have no need of them here, nor do you or anyone in this city.”

So, by this time, he’d already started pushing against the gods. Somehow, she’d thought that he’d be older when that started, but then, he’d have had to have some time…

“What happened?” Hakuno asked.

“Nothing.” Gilgamesh insisted. “They are unworthy of me. I will do as I please from this point on. Even if I uphold their decrees….it is my will and mine along. And if I anger them…”

He looked down at the spread a smile started to form on his face. That one that he sometimes had that could only be called a crescent of pure malice.

“They have nothing they can take from me, if they wish for me to ever take that role they set out for me. And if my people hate me…than that emotion at least is true…” he trailed off, something Hakuno didn’t recognized flickering on his face. “Regardless, let us enjoy this night! Speak of the
things you wish to see in my city! I will grant what you ask for, as you have given me a most worthy
gift!"

What was he talking about? She hadn’t giving him anything, but there was something else that was
bothering her.

Hate was at least true? He was continuing, talking about different places with that enthusiasm that
he’d had before when talking about Thrilling Slash Time.

What she’d seen was gone, and this Gilgamesh was back to a young man who seemed to be trying
his hardest to prove…something to her.

But she’d seen it. Hakuno knew that Gil liked to push others away, and she’d guessed that this
Charisma had something to do with it, and before, like in the argument with Gawain, she’d guessed
that Gilgamesh almost seemed to want others to hate him. But he’d started now? When he was only
a little older than she was?

There was also something to it, that sharpness, the statements that things were just *unworthy* of him.
Something was tugging at the back of her mind, and she wasn’t sure what she was really seeing.
Something flashed out of the corner of her eye and she turned.

Enkidu stood behind Gil while he was distracted with sitting and drinking his beer with troubled look
on his face. They smiled a little bit, but almost sadly, but before Hakuno could open her mouth, they
pointed at the walls nearby.

What…

Hakuno had had an idea that the walls were carved, but other than a vague feeling that there was
something…she hadn’t really looked all that hard. Now she looked and blinked.

It was a record.

The carvings were deep, as if someone he used their whole strength etched them deeply into the
wall. Men and woman, kneeling in supplication, looking up at the sky, man running what looked like
some contest or other, while it looked like people were lying down and exhausted, a couple who
were clearly being married separated, the man watching while the walked away head down, towards
the large carved palace where a familiar figure in armor sat.

Cuneiform was jaggedly cut into the wall, almost as some someone had used their nails to do it, and
while she couldn’t read it, was pretty sure what this was. Names.

This was the record of Gilgamesh’s atrocities.

No.

That was wrong, or maybe…that wasn’t all.

One the other side, a single large scene was taking place, a woman pointed out one hand towards a
familiar figure, as the carved Enkidu seemed to stumble as another familiar figure watched,
powerless. That figure wandered while his city fell to ruin and ransacking armies.

*You destroy and cannot promise a good harvest.*

That was what Anderson had said to him once. And that is what he’d done.
And in the center, Gilgamesh sat, drinking and refusing to look at the record that his decisions were going to leave.

There was something she was missing. Something wasn’t fitting right.

“I don’t really know very much about what you have,” Hakuno admitted. “I’ve…never even really seen a place like this before… Just…”

Just the school, the Near Side and the Labyrinth.

But Gilgamesh seemed pleased by that answer.

“Than you shall see all of my city. It is the grandest place in all the world, and you will be by my side as we do it! Of course, we do need to find a new wardrobe for you…something to accent your beauty…”

Hakuno stared at him, feeling her face going blank. Was he drunk? Gilgamesh had made it very clear that she wasn’t his type.

“Excuse me?”

But Gilgamesh was nodding to himself.

“Your eyes and hair should be properly accented, not left to fade where only those who knew value can see them…”

Oh. Right. Instinct Gilgamesh had liked her eyes. For some reason. So they were back to that. Rin had said that was the only expressive part of her once, so that made sense, she guessed.

His eyes glittered slightly.

“Besides, now that you’ve partaken of my feast, you can enjoy these things forever, as my treasure!”

Wait what.

“What do you mean?” Hakuno asked, a chill going up her spine.

The teenage boy grinned.

“You belong here now,” he said. “By partaking of this feast, you’ve taken your place. I do not respect the gods, but they ae right in that one can do things if the result is suitable.”

So that was it. By eating part of his soul, she’d become part of this place. Every Gilgamesh was, while not being openly hostile, trying to keep her there. His child form had tried to convince her to say, his older self had tried to trick her into it.

And this was starting to made her mad.

It was one thing when his child self did it. He didn’t even seem to understand to some extent what was happening. But this one…

He looked so pleased with himself, but Hakuno scowled, standing up and clenching her fists.

“It doesn’t work like that, and you know it,” she said. “You can’t just decide that you’ll do something terrible because it’ll get you a good result. If you know it’s wrong…”
“It is not wrong!” Gilgamesh insisted. “I know it! And…”

But he trailed off for second, before the defiant look came on his face.

“That thing will kill you, Hakuno! Or hold you forever, and then you will be lost and out of my reach. As…as I somehow feel…someone else is… As the gods would make humanity crawl on the ground like beasts in order to satisfy whatever whim they feel. You cannot face that thing. It is beyond both reason and instinct, and the closer you come to it, the more it is becoming aware of you! But that does not matter. You are safe. This place can be what we desire it to be, and I am not yet…”

He sounded as desperate as his child self was, trying to hold back something that was inevitable. And while she was still annoyed that he’d tried to keep her there…

“Gil, if you care about your people, why don’t you care if they hate you?”

“I do not care,” Gilgamesh said. “I was created by the gods to rule over humanity. Therefore, it is my right to rule over humanity as I please, even if that means separating from the gods and bringing there death throws to their final conclusion! Humanity was meant to be their slaves, and I the king of slaves, but I will not permit this!”

He was contradicting himself. Caring and not caring. Wanting to protect his city and not caring what happened to them. Wanting to protect her, but not caring about her feelings on that issue.

But that was Gilgamesh at this age.

Contradiction.

Torn between the child he was and the man he would become, unsure and prideful.

“Besides, it no longer matters. You are here, and that is all that matters. I am better company than that child, and you no longer have to see…”

The person whose records were all gorged into the wall around him.

“Sit down, Hakuno,” he said.

“I didn’t eat anything,” Hakuno said. “You weren’t watching.”

He was too busy giving her weird compliments and focusing on the statue. She’d never eaten or drunk anything there.

Gilgamesh froze, his eyes wide, an expression that would never have appeared on his face as an adult, but also too unsure and guarded for when he was a child.

“…It appears I underestimated you again,” he said softly. “How did you guess?”

“…I didn’t,” Hakuno said. “I just…thought it was weird since I’d be eating bits of your soul…”

Gilgamesh started at her, and then his shoulders started shaking until laughter started erupting from him.

It was different than the sound he’d made as a child, but not the harsh mocking laughter he’d had as an adult, and there was an edge to it, of…something painful.

“For such a reason…” he said. “Though I suppose taking in my soul would be an unpleasant experience…”
That was said almost as a whisper.

While Hakuno was still annoyed with his attempt to keep her there, she supposed she shouldn’t be surprised. There was no way out of his soul without the Origin. She knew that. So…if these Sentinels were trying to hold her back, they’d be trying to keep here there.

And…there was something…ugly in his words…

Something that reminded her of the walls around this hall that Gilgamesh refused to look at.

“That’s not true,” Hakuno said, sitting down next to him and looking at the feast that he’d created for her, his attempt maybe, to persuade her to stay with him. Not the earnest plea of a child, but an indirect, confused and contradictory attempt of someone who stood between.

And who, while hating the gods, still held on to their viewpoint.

“It doesn’t matter what you did, or why you did it. Your soul is yours, and you shouldn’t break it up just so you can do the thing that you set out to do. Doesn’t that just hurt you? I know that I’m not very strong, but I’ve made it this far, right? I’ve got to be doing something right.”

“Can you truly say that, Hakuno, looking at the legacy written on the walls of my very soul? That the choice I made now, to stand against the gods for no reason save for my self does not repulse you?”

His eyes were on her now, hard and cold like two pieces of red glass, but there was something else in them. It wasn’t repentance.

She knew the answer.

He had been made for a purpose. And as much as he later claimed that he was king by choice, some part of that original directive was likely there, always pushing him. Something he’d fought against.

And he’d failed.

He’d held on to their views, kept their rules before making his own, been a tyrant so terrible his people had begged the gods for relief.

And when he was no longer alone, when he finally had a friend, his rejection of a goddess had made his friend suffer.

And his misery had made his people suffer.

“All of this was because of my own selfishness.”

“My mother was a goddess, is it not natural that I would be inhuman?”

“Gil…the Chain of Heaven’s true name…is Regret,” Hakuno said. “It’s not completely guilt.. You were alone, and you rebelled, but could couldn’t do it. Because you weren’t human enough to rule as a man, so you ruled as a storm. Your people were compelled to love you, so you made them hate you. You hated the gods, but kept their mindset, and when you finally were given that person who helped you, you feel you caused their death, and then the suffering of your people again. And your friend made you human enough to feel it. But…it’s not bad to feel regret. To be sorry for what you did.”

“I am not sorry,” Gilgamesh said.
He was sulking, looking away like a spoiled child.

“I repent of nothing. I shed neither blood nor tears. I was created to stand as a warning to humanity of the power of the gods, and left that purpose for my own pleasure. Repentance is nothing but a ploy for sympathy, and I desire none. I was created to protect humanity, and I did against all the evils of the world, but… All of this was my own selfishness.”

“That’s why it’s not repentance,” Hakuno pressed. “You didn’t want forgiveness, and you didn’t want sympathy. But you regret. It’s why it’s carved on your soul. You regret, and I don’t think that gods are capable of that. Your mother might be a goddess, but your father was human. That’s not a bad thing, no matter how confused those feelings are. And that regret…doesn’t it mean that you can improve, and not stagnate?”

The Chain of Heaven wasn’t just Enkidu. It was Enkidu's effect on Gil. Softening his tyranny had also made him grasp his human nature, or begin to.

Somehow, that last bit seemed to strike something, because the young man just sighed, hiding his face with one hand.

“I wasn’t able to eat anything there…but I wanted to try some… And…thank you.” She smiled a little, “I’m glad that you wanted me to have a nice dinner with you. I…really wish we could have done that. I…it would have been fun.”

She smiled a little.

“I guess I’m regretting things too, aren’t I?” she asked. “So…maybe when I come back to the real world, with the Origin, maybe we can try this again, in the real world. Before…”

“…My real self…regrets some actions with you,” Gilgamesh said, looking at his hands dully as they started to fade. “Stealing your command seals was unnecessary.”

“You didn’t know me,” Hakuno said softly. “I remember the Grail Wars better now. Some Masters are…pretty terrible. Besides I’ve thought about it for a while now. Leo had Gawain, and Jinako has Karna. Rin and Rani…that’s different, but everyone else who didn’t have a Servant was…dead. So…if I was thrown into the Far Side…something must have happened to them… So…I guess no matter what…the same thing would have happened, and I’m not going to blame you.”

Even if she wished it had been different.

The fading boy leaned forwards, gently pressing his lips to her forehead.

“Oh, my treasure…” he said softly. “If only you have been here… The story might have been better… My real self as another regret with you, but I will not tell that one. Even I do not really know it yet. Perhaps this regret… I will look forward to our banquet.”

And he was gone, the meal fading with him until she was in an empty hall, looking at the carvings.

The things he’d done.

Maybe one day, her face would be here too…

She couldn’t stop though. She had to get out for everyone.

There was noise down the hall, and Hakuno assumed that was something unlocking, and she ran forwards, her footsteps echoing down the hall as she turned a corner to see…Enkidu.
They were looking at a large set of double doors, an almost wistful expression on their face. A single seal had fallen to the ground.

They couldn’t go in though…

“Enkidu…how are you here?” Hakuno asked.

“…I wanted to help,” they said. “Moving through dreams was always a talent of mine… And I am probably his greatest regret. This coming SG is not as easy as you think. But…well…I think that you already know it. Good luck, Hakuno. The thing at the end of this road is terrible and powerful, but I think…once you know what it is, you’ll be ready to fight it with the knowledge you’ve gained…”

“Thank you,” Hakuno said. “…and Enkidu…you’re a good friend.”

They smiled at her and faded into shadow.

“You won’t become another regret, Hakuno,” the said before they were completely gone. “I believe that with my whole heart.”

And they were gone, leaving Hakuno with the double doors.

Curse of Death.

That was the last SG.

What was she going to find?

She didn’t know…but she wasn’t going to hesitate now. She’d already managed two. She’d find a way to reach Gilgamesh’s Origin and solve this final puzzle. Besides…she could honestly say…she understood Gilgamesh better now, even if some things still alluded her.

So, reaching out, she pushed the doors open and closing her eyes, waiting for the wind to push her back.

“He is not here, Gilgamesh. Return to the realm of the living and leave me to my grief.”

An old man shrugged, sighing and looking at him with blue eyes and a slitted pupil, and Hakuno felt hot rage pulsing through her like she’d never known it before.

Cool water washed over her, driving away an exhaustion she hadn’t realized she felt.

Lights in the sky, brighter and more numerous than a hundred stays with something faint, something wonderful in the distance.

“I understand.”

Hakuno stood in a large room. While the halls had been dark, this room was lit but huge windows that brought in light and opened to the code free blue sky. The walls were painted with a bright blue glaze, and golden animals were positioned. Two statues of winged lions stood on either side of a sealed door, richly inlaid with gold.

But something was wrong.

There were cracks in the plaster, and dust hung over everything. Even as she walked, she could see tracks. When she looked out one of the large open windows, she could see buildings…but they seemed quiet.
A single person was standing in front of her. He stood looking at the ruined room, he wore nothing but lion skins that had been belted to cover…what needed to be covered, but even without his usual funerary, she’d know that golden hair anywhere.

“Gilgamesh,” Hakuno said.

Gilgamesh turned to face her. He looked like his real self, so this must be him in his physical prime, and he smirked at her in that familiar haughty way of his.

“Welcome to my home, Mongrel. I hope you are prepared for what is waiting for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Proto, you're hard to write! I revised this thing three times. But seriously Gil's SGs are depressing.

We're getting to the end! The next chapter should probably be Archer/Caster, so it might be a little longer. I'll see.
The First Time Hakuno Understood The Poison of Death

Chapter Summary

Hakuno meets with two versions of her servant, and finally finds out what Rin gave her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno understood the meaning of the Poison of Death was something that she both felt she should have known immediately and couldn’t have understood the value of without the others.

Gilgamesh’s words had Hakuno hesitating a little, completely unsure of just what was going to happen with this. Gilgamesh in his younger forms had been workable, but just when was this? Gilgamesh hadn’t stopped behind hostile to her until…really she’d refused to break the contract with BB, and even than, he’d been distant and standoffish. It was only after that dive into his heart that they had anything that could be possibly called a good relationship.

Was she going to have to deal with that same hostility now?

But Gilgamesh motioned her forwards with one hand.

“Come, Mongrel, and gaze upon the greatest of all cities,” there was a strange irony in his words, but Hakuno stepped forwards as Gilgamesh was moving towards one of the windows.

The city spread out around them. Hakuno could see that it was mostly built from white stone that was glowing so brightly in the light of the sun it hurt her eyes. Roads had been placed in a small grid with the largest of them clearly leading to the palace with only a large ziggurat that must have been the temple to Ishtar to rival it. Beyond the buildings the Euphrates river shown brightly and and nearly endless expanse was before her.

Yet, for all that it was impressive…the roads were overgrown with plants she could see from here, no one walked the streets, some of the buildings were nothing more than rubble, and she could see the remains of what might have been a fire.

Now that she was next to Gilgamesh, she could see he looked more tired than she had seen him, and while he still looked fit and ready for a battle, the skins he wore seemed dirty and like they had seen too many battles. His hair was short, but jagged, as if he had recently taken one of his many weapons and used that to cut his hair before coming there. The only familiar thing was that gold necklace that he tended to like to wear.

“This is the fate of humanity,” he said impassively. “No one is left in the city, but the foundation of this city, and the treasury under my palace still stand. I will rebuild, and those who decide to return will live and fade from my sight. That is why followers have always been unnecessary.”

It was a lie, but it was so wrapped in truth that Hakuno didn’t know how to untangle it.

The image was gone in an instant, replaced by the city itself.
“Still, it seems amusing to take this ruined city and make it great, does it not?” Gilgamesh was grinning. “There is much for us to do.”

Us.

But Gilgamesh had already turned from the window and was walking towards center of the room, and Hakuno could only follow him. She supposed that at least he was less hostile, and seemed more like…well…how she’d been getting used to him being towards her, but there was no real clue as to the true meaning of the Poison of Death.

So, maybe she needed to get him to talk.

“What is this room?” Hakuno asked, looking around. “Is this the throne room?”

“The throne room lies beyond those doors,” Gilgamesh said, nodding towards the two sealed double doors that she needed to get past. “This is the Inner Courtyard. Unlike the place my younger self favored, this is where commoners once gave their petitions to the king. There should be scribes here, but they are either dead or gone. There is a record room there, however, and we will need it if we are to rebuild.

“You mean, rebuild it yourself?”

“For the present,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “Some of the palace is in the best condition and should far well until more come. At that point, we will have others who will relay our orders to workers. That is power, Mongrel, you would do well to accustom yourself to it while you live here. They will grow used to your presence as well. That necklace you wear will show your importance.”

Necklace? Hakuno reached up again, feeling for the cord, but it wasn’t just a string anymore, now it had some small, smooth red stones, almost like a smaller version of Gilgamesh’s own necklace, but made from something other than gold.

She could see the shining red stones that had somehow been threaded through the cords, but it seemed like something was missing. Was she going to get more from this? What did it even mean?

Also…

While that was distracting, and strange that he seemed to think that she needed something to show others how important she was…there was an assumption that she was going to be there.

Hakuno sighed.

“Gilgamesh…”

He was still standing between the tyrant he had been, and the one who was said to surpass all other kings before and after. Selfish and heartless, without blood or tears, but also having been giving an vision of the end that had changed him.

But…had that really been all that this SG represented?

…Maybe she didn’t understand that SG as well as she thought, even with Gilgamesh’s explanation.

Or maybe the answer was so obvious that it managed to go without speaking, which is why Enkidu had warned her…

But she had to be sure.
And there was something she wanted to understand.

“Why did you decide to come back and rebuild?” she asked.

Gilgamesh shrugged.

“…I realized that I had neglected a treasure that I had been given,” Gilgamesh said with a shrug. “It is no more than whim, but there is no reason not to indulge in it. Besides… I was created to reign over humanity, is it not natural that I would seek to rule?”

He grinned at her and motioned her to follow him, leading the way to a small door that lead away from the Courtyard. The small room beyond was lit only by a few torches, that showed shelves of stone tablets. Hakuno took one from the shelf, blowing off the dust to see it better. While they were covered in dirt and who knew what else, Hakuno could see cuneiform that had been written on one near her in neat little rows.

"What..."

“It is a list of materials being used to bolster the city’s defenses while I was absent,” Gilgamesh said, leaning over his shoulder to look at it. “Much of the material should still be here, as there was no record of use. That will prove useful.”

Hakuno tried to envision Gilgamesh, personally, in his golden armor putting up walls and fixing the crumbling plaster and very much couldn’t.

It was almost funny to imagine, but also strangely sad as he tried to the thing he’d neglected back together again.

Even more so for another, very obvious reason.

“Gil, you know I can’t stay forever,” Hakuno finally said.

Even if she didn’t know the meaning, she couldn’t just sit there while he made plans involving her.

“…Of course you cannot. Such a thing is impossible. You too will eventually vanish from my sight. Is that what you are attempting to remind me of?”

“No, that’s not—”

“That is the reason I will have subjects, Mongrel, but nothing more. Treasures and weapons are things that last forever, but humans, including myself, are only things that vanish. I finally learned that, which all others knew so well, after great struggle. Is that not amusing? That something you knew from the moment you were born was ‘enlightenment’ to me?”

No, it wasn’t amusing.

It was cruel.

When looking back at everything else that she’d seen in Gilgamesh’s soul, that seemed to be one of the things that had made Gilgamesh fundamentally inhuman. Maybe, with that understanding, even with his stupidly high Charisma, his power, his origins, he would have found some way to connect to his people, but that absolute fundamental had been lacking.

Even without her memories, from the very first, she’d understood her own mortality.

But this wasn’t the entire SG.
There was something else. Something deeper and something more connected that was on the tip of her tongue.

“Why have me then?” Hakuno asked. “You don’t need me in this time.”

Gilgamesh scowled at her.

“Of course I do not need you, Mongrel! I never needed you.” he said, glowering at her still. “You are another life that will vanish from before me, are you not? I merely…find you entertaining in your struggle.”

“I’m not struggling here,” Hakuno pointed out, pressing harder. “If you really want to watch me fight, like you did when we started, why not let me go so you can keep watching, if that’s the only thing you care about.”

“Tread carefully, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said softly. “I am not so tolerant as my younger selves.”

His eyes promised danger, but the aura was wrong.

Hakuno had been threatened by Gilgamesh on and off for weeks. She knew when he was really serious and when he wasn’t. He was trying to scare her, to make her stop asking and to accept this without a fight. But all three Gilgamesh’s were trying to keep her from the Origin.

To protect her.

As a child, he’d played with her, tried to keep her happy and begged her.

As a teenager, he’d tried to trick her.

As an adult, he was trying to force the issue and frighten her until she didn’t ask.

All because they somehow fear that fight, and what would happen to her. They all feared her death...

Wait.

…The two SGs linked together into the final one.

It was something necessary to understand everything else about him, yet a secret that Gilgamesh guarded closely. Holding it up with dark looks, harsh words, and denial, but without that one secret, none of the others made any sense.

“Gilgamesh… I think… The final SG’s name is Humanity,” Hakuno said. “Both in your nature and your liking for us.”

Gilgamesh stiffened, as his head whipped around to face her, eyes very wide as his pupils as slits. There was that same surprised guilt as before when she’d asked him that question so long ago.

“Do not be a fool, Mongrel,” Gilgamesh said quickly. “What have you been paying attention to? However…”

And ill-natured smile appeared on his face.

“It appears you have wasted your one guess…”

What?!
For a second, fear coursed through her. Was she wrong? Had she really guessed wrong now!? When they’d almost reached the end!

But...

No.

There was something tense in the way he was holding himself, and the way that his eyes were boring into her, demanding that she accept this, that she be afraid and bow her head and not press this anymore. Like he had when he’d told Gawain that he didn’t care about anyone or anything, and how no one understood his path since it was separate.

King of Liars.

“I’ve been paying attention to how you’ve treated me,” Hakuno said, clenching her fists and taking a breath.

Here went everything.

“I’ve been paying attention to the fact that nothing else makes any sense without that factor. You feel isolation because you were made separate from humanity. You feel regret because of what you did to people. Your friend was so important not just because they were your equal and the only person who ever really understood you but because they gave you a link to people.”

“Don’t be a fool, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said. “humanity is made up of nothing but mongrels who do not know their place. They are lives that can never last.”

A life that will end now.

A life that will end later.

All lives that eventually vanished from his sight.

But...

“But doesn’t that make them all the more important?” Hakuno asked. “You mentioned before that you only knew joy because it was fleeting. That something immortal could never understand joy. You know...when I think about it...people are the only thing you really enjoy, aren’t they? King of Pleasure?”

Pleasure.

It was said that Gilgamesh had mastered all the pleasures of the world, but maybe... Gilgamesh had one pleasure. And that single pleasure linked to his idea of what that meant.

One that had made him recognized the value of human life.

One that had made him regret his choices.

One that he isolated himself from and been isolated from.

One that had made him listen to the last desperate cry of a girl falling through the sea of nothing.

She had guessed that he loved humanity, but she hadn’t realized just what that meant, or how that simple fact that mattered. As had his human nature.
“You were made to be more divine than human, but every chance you got, you learned and cultivated your humanity. You told me that after you returned from your journey you truly became human, and you were proud of that fact, but you always hid it from everyone around you.”

Maybe some part of him still felt wrong for rebelling against his purpose. Maybe some part of him still felt some pull to reign over humanity to bring them into line of the gods, or maybe Gilgamesh was too proud at admit, even to himself fully, that the King of Heroes, the Oldest King, the Demon Tempest, the Tyrant of Uruk truly loved humans and strove to be human.

“Humanity, both your love for it and your own nature, that is the SG closest to your throne, or your heart. Understanding mortality meant you understood the value of human life. That, yes, the people around you will fade away from you. But that is what makes them worth something.”

For a moment it was quiet, and Hakuno held her breath, worried that she really had answered wrong, but Gilgamesh just sighed.

“It seems that I have given away too many secrets to you, Mongrel. You have guessed rightly. However, I will offer you one more change to stay. …you are…precious to me…” his voice was soft, little more than a whisper. “And the thing before you is not me, in any capacity. It will not be reasoned with, but it holds all of my power.”

“…I guess I must be fun to watch,” Hakuno said, smiling weakly. It was one thing when his younger form was calling her ‘treasure’, but… "After all, I'm your entertainment too."

Well, he’d said she was a rare pleasure before. That must be what this was.

“I know that you’re worried for me. Every version of you has been. And thank you. I'm...glad. But, the real you needs to wake up, and I need to reach the Origin. But…if I had lost, I’m sure this would have been fun, rebuilding Uruk with you.”

Gilgamesh laughed, crossing his arms and looking proud even as he faded.

“Of course! There could be no greater city, once completed, the walls will shine like copper in the sun. However, you are one who desires much, and will not permit yourself to be restrained to any peaceful dream. I should not have expected anything else from the only Master I will ever acknowledge.”

He looked like he was going to say more, but he had vanished, leaving Hakuno alone, in the tablet room, where Gilgamesh had once planned out and personally started rebuilding his city by hand, after he had finally, after so long, become a man.

She stepped out into the sunlight of the Inner Court as the seal fell from the double doors. They were open.

She’d done it.

She’d managed to find the real meaning behind the SGs, something that…changed everything and nothing at the same time. She wasn’t sure she even knew anymore about her Servant than when she’d started. It was more than she’d managed to put them together.

It didn’t really feel like a victory.

She walked forwards, pushing the doors open and then stepping into the darkness before her.

There was no sudden rush of visions like before, but then she supposed it was over. She’d reached
the Origin…

Torches lit up around her.

Slowly at first, but then faster and faster, leading down a hall, and lighting a large open room four carved pillars held up the ceiling, which led to a small set of stairs with two rows of flowering plants on either side that managed to frame and bring some life to the carvings.

At the top of the stairs, sitting on a long bench with a single section in the middle that held a very high back, with two white linen sheets on either side of him sat a familiar figure in front of a large window that showed a city brightly lit with torches and a dark outline of a wall.

He was cross legged, much as he was when he sat on the throne in her room. But his clothing was different. Rather than armor or something else, he wore red pants that looked like they had been slit down the front of each leg, and blue shirt with a high color that was (of course) open at the front. His hair was down, and he was wearing what looked like a turban with two horns made of some kind of stone that framed it.

Maybe horns from some monster he’d killed?

He was resting his head against one fist, and his eyes were closed, like he was asleep and as Hakuno came near, wincing as her footsteps echoed, she could see he looked different. His face was a little thinner, and when he opened his eyes and looked at her, there were lines beside his eyes that weren’t there when he was younger. But that expression, like he was almost looking through her was something she knew.

This was Gilgamesh as he’d been during his height as king. Maybe not in his physical prime, but at the time when he’d been praised. He was older and wiser from his journey, and likely, this was the most human that he had been in life.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Hakuno,” he said.

“Are you…the Origin?” Hakuno asked, even though that sounded wrong.

Gilgamesh shook his head. “No. Nor am I a Sentinel for some secret SG. You have completed that challenge and used the secrets I offered you to fair effect. I merely wish for you to be aware of what is waiting for you.”

“What?”

“I will ask you three questions, Hakuno.” The Wise King said, “and will permit three of your own. However, think carefully before you ask me. Once the questions are asked, I will permit you to pass me. My conscious mind will remember nothing of this point, so do not fear your answers.”

“Ok,” Hakuno said.

Well…she supposed it was a return of that ‘chat time’ Gilgamesh had mentioned, though they had been getting more familiar with one another…

“I will begin. Do you know what is waiting for you beyond me, Hakuno?”

That was probably the most important question.

“Not really. I know that that it has something to do with your divine nature and it sounded like you sealed it as much as the Moon Cell,” Hakuno paused for a moment, but nodded to herself. “What is
“…What lies ahead is a man who lived wild, not yet knowing death,” Gilgamesh said. “But it is more than that, My Mongrel. That this is a mess of emotions, plans, ideals and emotions I long cast aside. You could consider it the closest to what the gods wanted from me.”

The look in his eyes seemed removed, but there was also a clear warning in it.

That sounded…ominous.

So this wasn’t really Gilgamesh at all. No wonder every version of him had called it a thing.

“You next question, Hakuno: What will you do with that necklace you are wearing?”

“Necklace…”

Hakuno reached up, fingering the stones and realizing…one being completed, there were more stones, including a large one in the center. They were all the same color, and seemed to be the same kind of polished stone.

“I’m not sure what this is,” she said.

“You must ask then, but I will still expect an answer,” Gilgamesh said.

So…two questions down then. At this rate…

“Alright. What is this?”

“That necklace is a binding, proof that you have entered and gained the answers you sought. It is likely that it will, in the Old School Building, be considered something similar to a Noble Phantasm. The effects however, are not something you will know until you challenge the Origin.”

“Then…I guess if it’s a Noble Phantasm than I’ll give it to you,” Hakuno said, resting her hand on it.

“Besides, if I got it here…doesn’t that mean it’s sort of a…treasure from inside of you?”

If that made sense.

Gilgamesh was silent for a moment, and then, softly at first, and then louder, Gilgamesh started to laugh.

It was a different sound from what she’d heard before. It wasn’t the light, easy sound of his childhood, or the more conflicted sound of his teenage self. It wasn’t even the loud, mocking sound of his adult self. This was softer, controlled, but then, almost as if realizing something, the sound became more free and genuine, yet, with a tentative feeling, as if he hadn’t laughed for a long time.

“Treasures from inside of me, and for no other reason,” he laughed. “Always giving great things and asking for nothing in return… These eyes of mine have seen the far ends of human knowledge, and the edge of the wilderness that was beyond human knowledge. Yet, you alone continue to defy my expectations. Very well, I will leave it as is.”

He had closed his eyes, a surprisingly soft smile on his face. “Very well, then Mongrel, I will ask you one final question. Tell me this in truth: Do you regret forming a contract with me?”

He’d asked her that question, time and time again, but…for the first time, it didn’t sound like he was mocking her.
Gilgamesh looked at her, and in the light of the torches, his eyes seemed to glow crimson. Maybe some people might have found it terrifying, or at least unsettling. She had thought the same once, seeing it as a reminder that he wasn’t human. That was true. It wasn’t human, but Gilgamesh…was someone who was never supposed to care about people, but had managed to do just that.

And there was something…admirable about that.

“I did,” Hakuno said, looking at him. “When we started, I really did. You forced me on the floor, mocked me when I saw Elizabeth’s torture, threatened me, took offense at just about anything, you were going to kill me or get me killed when I reached the Near Side, and I just…didn’t understand you, even if I knew there was a logic to you.”

Gilgamesh didn’t flinch, but something that Hakuno couldn’t quite catch flickered in his eyes.

“But you also fight beside me, and you let that be my choice. Even thought I am the weakest Master in the Grail War, you never once abandoned me. You kept Kiara from touching me when I didn’t want her to. And…things changed. Bit by bit…it changed between us. I told you once, that it had been strange, knowing you, but…it’s also been good. If it hadn’t been for you, particularly…last night…I wouldn’t have been able to stand here now. Maybe things were hard at first, but…honestly, if I had to, knowing everything, knowing about the Near Side…I’d do it again. I just…” Hakuno looked away.

It was a wish. A stupid wish, and one that could never be.

It was selfish, she knew that, but…she understood now. Leo’s fixation with having a student council. Julius’s wanting to just be able to sit and talk with her and Sakura. It was funny…how you only really understood when death was looking at her in the face. Maybe no one understood that better than the man who was sitting in front of her.

“I guess I wish that this could have kept going. I don’t regret anything, but I wish we’d had more time. But…I guess this is the last fight and…we’ll be ok. And I’ll enjoy what time we have left. So, no. I don’t regret this contract. I’m glad I met you. I’m glad all this happened. If I had to fall to the Far Side, then I’m glad that, somehow, my voice reached you.”

Gilgamesh sat, watching her for a moment, and a smile came on his face. Like before when she had seen it in the auditorium. There was no cruelty in the look, it was something subdued, but there was joy in it, warmth and almost…

Was that relief?

No, it couldn’t be.

“I will say one thing: do not be a fool, Hakuno. There is more than one kind of strength. The Moon Cell, unserviceable rock that it is, can only understand strength in terms of attack and the ability to stand hits. In that regard you truly are the weakest of all Masters. However, I would not call any truly weak human being my Master. Your strength is not to be found in power, but in your ability to aid, support and defend. It is not an ability that will breed fear in your enemies or respect in your allies. Rather, you permit your enemies to die in peace and inspire your allies. Do not dishonor yourself by focusing only on offensive power.”

Hakuno blinked.

What?

But Gilgamesh hadn’t stopped.
“Ask me your final question, Hakuno.”

Right…but…she’d think about that. Hakuno paused, not sure what to ask him. There was nothing in this dream to ask about, and she didn’t want to ask about anything that was related to BB or the Origin or anything like that…

“Will you remember what happened here, other than this room?” Hakuon asked. “I mean…I’m not sure if anything really worth while was said but…”

Gilgamesh smiled.

“Are you worried for my waking self? Do not be. There are events that I will recall, as one recalls any dream. You should ask my waking self, I am sure you will find the results entertaining.”

Gilgamesh gave her a familiar smile, one laced with something dark aimed towards…himself, but he sat up.

“I am pleased,” he said. “You have learned the true meaning behind those SGs, something that only one before you could ever dare to say, and you have asked and answered well, and true to your own self. I will permit you to pass. I have nothing to say to or of the bare divinity you must face. Crush it if you can, if not, find another way to cause it to falter, and return to my waking self. I am sure the power that new Noble Phantasm produces will be an interesting one.”

Already he was beginning to fade away, true to his word. He had only come for his answers.

“…I will,” Hakuno said. “And…I meant what I said. I don’t regret this, and I’ll stay with you…I guess until…we can’t go together anymore…”

Gilgamesh laughed again. His voice was starting to fade, but it rang out loud and clear.

“Is that truly the thing you have not yet learned, Mongrel? Very will. I will permit it. Be sure to-”

But whatever she needed to be sure to do wasn’t ever finished. Gilgamesh and the throne room vanished.

She was standing in a stone tunnel. Cut stone, worn with age was all around her, along with long faded cuneiform and pictures of someone, a hero, doing great things that seemed to be going in progression down the tunnel, which seemed to branch off even more.

Maybe it was a tomb?

Hakuno turned around, but there was only darkness both behind her and in front of her. Even the vestiges of the palace were completely gone.

So, now way back.

Turning back, Hakuno held both of her hands to her chest and took a breath. She just had to go a little further. Then she’d meet the Origin.

Whatever that meant.

Hakuno took a step and a sound, echoed down the walls. Some kind of eerie scream that had never been human mad her jump.

Monsters. She’d been wondering where they were. It looked like she didn’t have to wonder anymore, but…she was alone. Gilgamesh wasn’t here, in any form, Rin and Rani couldn’t contract
her and the thing Rin gave her-

Suddenly, Hakuno’s item folder shocked her, and a single pink light emerged from the folder as the black box floated up, spinning quickly.

Another scream met the firsts.

Something just as inhuman, but more powerful, and clearly feminine, and rather than a scream of some animal, it sounded like a cry of triumph.

Or a musical note sung by a voice of a woman with no concept of music.

But the scream, or note changed into laughter. High, joyful, feminine laughter with an edge of madness echoed around her.

“Hehehehe hahahahaha! Now I have a question for you, little squirrel! You’re in a lot of trouble right now, aren’t you?”

Chapter End Notes

Caster Gilgamesh is surprisingly fun to right. I hope I got him right. Archer (ish) Gil was a little harder since I had to balance him out more, but we're not at the climax of the Origin Arc!

Next Chapter:

Hakuno faces the Origin of Gilgamesh, which does not seem as interested in killing her as she thought he would be.
The First Time Hakuno Saw the Origin

Chapter Summary

Hakuno finally reaches the core of Gilgamesh, but the fight doesn’t go as planned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno saw Gilgamesh’s divine nature was also the last time.

Hakuno stared at the small cube spinning in her hand. She knew that voice. The last time she’d heard it though…it had hardly been this cheerful.

Hakuno could only stare as the cube started to spin faster and faster, that pink light glowing more and more brightly.

“Yes! As I thought! You’re in so much trouble that you’re just desperately trying to put on a brave face! Even though you’re really so forlorn that you want to cry! This is the best!”

Somehow, Hakuno had a very bad feeling about this.

“Next question!” the voice chirped. “Haven’t you always longed for a cute, reliable, strong, and most importantly cute idol Servant?”

Not really.

Hakuno had no idea what kind of Servant that she’d wanted at the start of this, if she’d even known anything about Servants, but she was pretty sure that Elizabeth wouldn’t have been one of her first choices. Granted, Gilgamesh wouldn’t have either, but there had been no illusions of that.

“Elizabeth…”

“Yes! So helpless! That whimpering is just like a little squirrel soaked by the rain! This is giving me such a thrill!”

A familiar shiver when down Hakuno’s spine, but she kept herself from dropping the cube. It looked like she hadn’t change a bit.

“Wait!” Elizabeth said sharply. “N-no! I can’t. I didn’t imagine that at all! You’re a sly Master, aren’t you?”

“Elizabeth…”

“Ok. Fine. Final Question. Don’t mess this up or a won’t help you! Who is the gorgeous and smart super idol who was imprisoned in the deepest darkness for her beauty, the Lancer with the never really leaves, even once she ended her career? Speaking of the peerless diva, Elizabeth Bathory, who could it be?!”

What was she even trying to get her to say?
“I’m sorry, Elizabeth, but I’m not—“

“Eh…oh…er…if you apologize, I feel like I need to say sorry myself…okay. I was sort of in the wrong too…I mean, rather…there wasn’t any good… B-but I really have reflected on it, ok? And what that gorgeous pervert said… It’s natural that no one will forgive me, but… But I want to lend you my strength for a little while. So, please don’t be scared! Even if you’re in a dark place like this, I’ll sing with all I have! I won’t even spill that much blood since you don’t like it! Ok?”

Hakuno looked down at the cube, wondering if she really meant that.

“Ok,” she said softly. “I guess I’ll be in your care for a while.”

The cube flashed once in in a bright pink light. Hakuno shielded her eyes on instinct. When the light vanished, Elizabeth Bathory was standing in front of her with a smile.

“I ask of you, are you my Manager?” she asked, but before Hakuno could even answer, she started giggling. “Just kidding! I just wanted to ask that once…”

She struck up an impressive pose, grinning at her.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, my livestock! Elizabeth Bathory, the Witch of Fresh Blood, has come to aid you in your hour of need! You can applaud me now!”

Unsure what else to do, Hakuno slowly started clapping her hands together, hoping that maybe if she did, Elizabeth would stop playing around.

The sound echoed eerily down the hall, where another scream, this one closer than the last, tore through the room.

“Ok! The contract’s established!” Elizabeth chirped. “I’m going to be your guardian for now! That means about…20% of your soul belongs to me!”

Another shriek sounded from close by, and Elizabeth winced.

“That’s the sign to go, I guess,” she said. “The public awaits! Take a torch, would you? This man’s soul is sure a dark place…”

“This isn’t the whole thing,” Hakuno said, taking a torch that had appeared. “I’m not sure what this is…it looks like a tomb… Anyways, before we do this…why? Why are you helping me?”

Hakuno didn’t see any reason for Elizabeth to have anything but hard feelings for her. After all, Hakuno had been the one to beat her, imprison her, keep her in the place where there was no hope that she was going to be able to get out…so..

Elizabeth stopped, her face flushed in the light of the torch.

“…This is just business!” Elizabeth said. “Rin said I’d have a chance to help and I jumped at it. Even if it’s just an hour, you need a Servant since that Gorgeous can’t do anything right now. So, I’ll fight for you.” She paused, looking away, and some of the expressing draining away from her face. “I really don’t have anything better to do anyways. I wanted to let loose one more time.”

Business?

Did that mean that this was a condition for Elizabeth being freed? Hakuno wasn’t sure if that was the best idea, even if she felt sorry for the girl.
“Elizabeth, if this is about the seal…”

“It’s not,” Elizabeth said. “Nothing changes. When I’m done, I’m sealed away again. No one can reduce my sentence. It was life imprisonment from the first. …It’s the same now.”

“Then why?” Hakuno asked, “You’re not getting anything from this, Elizabeth. Why help me?”

Elizabeth’s face was that calm expressionless look that she’d had when they’d faced her in her own heart.

“You don’t need to know,” she said. “We don’t have time to dawdle. Escort me, Hakuno Kishinami. Those monsters are already coming for you.”

It didn’t take much more than a walk down the hall for the thing to make its way towards her. For a second Hakuno didn’t know what it was. It was just a sudden impression of pallid flesh and scales as the thing crawled towards her. The thing was half human, and half snake, but long stringy hair covered much of her back and breasts.

It raised its head, for Hakuno got an impression dark eyes that seemed to go on forever and then it rushed, not towards her but towards Elizabeth, screaming out again.

Elizabeth rushed forwards, jabbing the monster with her spear as quickly as she could. The monster slither-crawled towards Elizabeth but two more were coming, one joined the first in attacking Elizabeth while the third was circling Hakuno, getting behind her and then creeping forwards slowly.

She took a step backwards, away from the thing and further into the tunnel. The thing moved closer again, but didn’t make a move to attack her.

It was just pushing her backwards.

Away from Elizabeth, and further down towards…whatever was waiting for them…

A familiar cry caught Hakuno’s attention and Elizabeth had jumped down from on top of the monster, wings unfurled, twisting the lance in a way that sounded painful.

The creature gave a final scream of pain before vanishing into darkness.

“Ha!’ Elizabeth cried, grinning a little. “Well, you can keep escorting me. Those small fry are gone. Your mana is great by the way. If I’d known about you, I’d have tried for you ages ago.”

Hakuno gave her a skeptical look and kept going.

There were no more monsters up ahead, but another scream was echoing down the hall.

Why did Gilgamesh even have monsters anyways, and what had those thing been? While he’d mentioned something about their being there to protect his body, there hadn’t been anything until that point.

Maybe this was just one more attempt to keep her away from the Origin. The final Gilgamesh, the one who looked like him at his height as a king, had told her that it was a man who had lived wild, not yet understanding death, but more than that, it was where all his emotions went.

That might be bad for her, when she thought about it. She had no idea how he was going to respond to her with it was just his unconscious emotions. Maybe he’d be even more brutal to her. Hakuno already knew that he hated the idea of anyone having power over him. Did that mean that
emotion would be there, now that Gilgamesh had shoved it down?

The footsteps continued to echo down the hallway as well, but the empty rooms and strange writing wasn’t changing much. Every so often, Hakuno could hear one of those monster’s screams. They echoed strangely, but they sounded far off, and somehow not quite normal.

Elizabeth herself was quiet. She hummed a little, so it wasn’t unhappiness, but there was something new in how she was walking.

Some kind of new purpose or strength.

Until she abruptly stopped.

“Let’s rest a little. Those enemies were annoying, and they’re more coming up. The scenery is monotonous, and it’s no fun at all. I thought that when we were going into his soul, it would be something like where he lived in life, but this is just his tomb…”

It was hard to tell, but maybe even that brief fight and the walk was a lot for her. No matter how much she pretended that Hakuno’s mana was good, Hakuno was a weak mage, and most of her mana was already supplying Gilgamesh with what he needed, and Gilgamesh took a lot of power. BB hadn’t been wrong when she’d called him a mana guzzler.

“Allright,” Hakuno said. “Er…sorry I can’t provide more…”

“It’s not your fault,” Elizabeth shrugged. “I sort of miss Rin and Rani and that kid though…they were high grade. And Rin and Rani…well…they pampered me properly… I guess I shouldn’t complain though. I betrayed my first Master, so I guess dealing with Melt and BB was just reaping what I sewed, but…I have a question, little squirrel. …Why are you trying to leave? BB’s the Moon Cell, so the world is ending already, and there isn’t much chance of winning right, even with the Origin? That building is probably the only safe place left. Why leave?”

Her voice was surprisingly calm, lacking the usual high handedness that she seemed to like to pretend she had. It made Hakuno think that really, deep down, she was probably a girl like this. Though maybe that rationality was something that only now was starting to be able to come out.

“…It’s really hard to explain,” Hakuno said. “I’d like to say that it’s for the sake of humanity, and it sounds good, but it’s not really that. Not completely. It’s not even for me. I guess it’s…more that…I don’t want to be trapped her. Even if the world outside is hard, and we’re going to have to face all kinds of trials when we reach the outside, even if it ends up being that the world has already ended, and the world is a crater…I don’t want to be trapped. And I think everyone agrees with that.”

Elizabeth blinked at her.

“Isn’t that fine though? If you’d told me that from the start…”

“What?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. We can keep going. I’m ready.” She stood up, this time taking a place in front of Hakuno, back to her. “You know…when I was alive, the sun only hit the floor in my room one month a year. The rest of the time, I’d watch it creep up and then down…and I’d long to feel the sun…”

She paused, her voice trailing a little, but the continued.

“I hate prisons. I didn’t really think about it like this, but really, you and everyone else in that
building are just being walled off aren’t you? And it’s worse since none of you even did anything. What I mean to say is that if this is because you don’t like being locked up, I don’t mind being your lance in earnest for a while.”

She started ahead, walking quickly and making Hakuno run a little to catch up to her. The tunnels were starting to weave strangely, as it started to turn corners quickly. It didn’t take too long for Hakuno to feel completely lost.

They turned another corner, leading to a fork in the path. For a moment, the two of them hesitated.

“It’s the right!” Elizabeth said, she smiled confidently, and Hakuno just blinked.

“How do you know?” Hakuno asked, blinking a few times.

“…I mean it’s just obvious!” Elizabeth said.

She was totally guessing.

But then again, there was no real sign of anything else. Right now, things were so quiet that even the monsters were silent now. They’d been pretty far without hearing anything from them, and Hakuno was starting to hope that maybe they’d managed to get lost in this place as well…

Elizabeth started forwards, with Hakuno bringing up the rear.

She’d only taken a few steps when two ice cold hand wrapped around her, something covering her mouth so that the startled scream was something closer to a muffled gasp, and then dragging her backwards.

Something hissed in her ear.

“Squirrel!” Elizabeth whirled around with a cry, reaching out to her, to try to tear her away from the monster.

But the thing was faster, it was grabbing her, dragging her back, to the left trail. For a second, all Hakuno’s mind could register was that the hand grabbing her was as pale as death with long fingers that all ended in very sharp looking nails. Several more snake people came crawling down forming a wall between Hakuno and where Elizabeth had been.

They’d planned this. She’d realized. They’d stopped crying because they’d been setting up this trap. They’d waited, sat in the dark, until they passed by and Hakuno was vulnerable.

Hakuno heard the sounds of the fight fading, but the screams of the monsters stayed with her as they dragged Hakuno to…

A doorway.

The creatures let go of her, hissing among themselves but forming a wall of teeth and scales.

She looked into the doorway.

It pulsed once with a light that set her very much on edge, but other than that, it looked like a black hole. And slowly, very slowly, the creatures were moving closer, forcing Hakuno backwards and herding her towards the door.

She wasn’t sure what was going to be in that room, but she’d have to find out.
There was no way out.

And she'd rather walk in than be herded in like an animal.

Hakuno slowly edged through the door and into the room.

Which could not be called that at all.

The place was a wide expanse. Around her, everywhere was a vest, starry sky, like that one that she'd fallen through so long ago, when somehow, Gilgamesh had heard her voice and investigated the cause. At her feet, what looked like water rippled as she walked but she didn't fall through and when she leaned to touch it, it felt like a smooth, glass surface.

Standing in the center was a form wrapped in shadow, but one that she knew all too well.

This was the Origin. The body was nothing but darkness, but from the chest, a point of a cold white blue light pulsed, growing fainter and brighter. It was almost like a heartbeat, maybe even one for the world itself.

Her body froze.

Hakuno could feel the pressure of just being close to it. It was like the Moon Cell…No. Maybe this was worse.

The Moon Cell had felt wrong. It wasn’t supposed to be divine.

This was. This was what the gods had planned. This was the thing that had been created to stand as a warning of their power.

Two points of light, almost like eyes, ignited, boring into her as Hakuno struggled to breathe under the pressure on her.

A single word managed to break through her thoughts, one that was less spoken and more an impression.

Mine.

No voice could have shown the feeling behind that idea.

Hakuno held her breath and-

“Arg! What *are* those things?” a familiar haughty voice complained. “They keep coming out of nowhere, and they’re as mean as sin! Why does he even have those things! I should just jab my spear down and save us the trouble!”

Elizabeth more or less tumbled into view, appearing in a flash of light, as there was no door behind her anymore. While she didn’t look any the worse for wear, her hair was a little messier, and she looked angry.

“How could you leave your cute-“ she stopped, facing the Origin.

It raised a single hand, like Gilgamesh did when making some proclamation.

Mine.

“Oh,” Elizabeth said softly, looking at the figure in front of her. “I was wondering if it would be
ugly, but…that’s not bad. That’s the form of a true Heroic Spirit, not like an Anti-Heroic Spirit like me… I suppose that’s what I should expect from your Servant.”

A smile started to appear on her face. Not the look of pure madness like before, but something far more painful. Mixing a joy and excitement, with a sorrow and longing that Hakuno didn’t know. Maybe, she was looking at something strong, but also a light that she’d never reach.

A sword appeared in the thing’s hand, like him, it was made of shadow, and something else was wrapped around his left arm.

“So, if you defeat that thing, the limit on Gilgamesh is gone, and he’ll be as powerful, if not more, as he was in life. I wonder what kind of strain that’ll put him under…but he’s decided to go along with it. What matters to me is that I can settle this debt with my own hands…”

She stepped forwards, eyes on the thing in front of her.

“I have a new dream, Hakuno. Something that came to me in the darkness of that prison. Someone I want so much that I can’t stand it,” she said, her voice and face calm as she faced the divine. “It’s a horrible, shameless, unforgivable wish. “If only I’d been normal.”

So that was it. That was why there was something different about her.

In the darkness of that prison, she’d been able to finally see something. Maybe it had been Gilgamesh’s words to her. Maybe it had been the dive into her own heart. Maybe it had been some combination of the two. But somehow, after hundreds of years, Elizabeth Bathory had finally understood.

And now, like Gilgamesh, she had to bare the weight of her sins. This fight would never wipe away the blood or the pain that she’d caused in life, but she couldn’t close her eyes and pretend anymore.

“This is a perfect stage for my last act,” she said, smiling. “Here is where I’m going to stop playing idol. This is my genuine last number. It’s against my nature, but this is the first since I was born that I will sing for another person.”

Mine!

The response beat in time with the world around them, and Elizabeth set her lance down and charged.

The Origin raised one hand, and glowing, red light appeared around Hakuno, and ice blue chains wrapped around her so tightly that Hakuno wasn’t sure if she’d ever be able to get them off. Before she could so much as try, it had dragged her through the red portal. When she came out, she was… behind the Origin, staring into Elizabeth’s shocked eyes as the thing rushed forwards to meet her, two swords in hand.

Mine!

Elizabeth jumped onto her spear.

“Night flight of extreme cruelty: Estet Repules!”

Sitting what was essentially side saddle, she came rushing towards the thing, who moved to block the blow. It hit, forcing him back a pace, but he had managed to catch most of it, and then jumped back to stand in front of Hakuno, who was still bound tightly, the chains emerging from different portals.
Why was it doing this?

Elizabeth, to her credit, wasn’t going to let up. She was already on her feet, rushing forwards and spinning her lance as she charged forwards. The blow was met again, but this time, both were moving quickly, Elizabeth using her lance to keep some distance from the Origin, but it was trying to press closer and closer to her, forcing her back until, with a final spin, she’d planted her lance in the ground.

“This is my Fresh Blood Demoness!” Elizabeth screamed, her wings unfurling.

This time, Hakuno wasn’t going to block it, she was too busy trying to get free of the chains, which were binding her more and more tightly as she struggled.

Bursting from the ground behind her, Hakuno saw the castle starting to rise along with enormous speakers that had been inserted into the walls as pink light burst from the spear, forcing the Origin back and unable to attack.

With a flap of her wings, Elizabeth had landed on top of the spear in an almost graceful motion, and, taking a deep breath, she opened her mouth and sang.

The chains around her suddenly loosened, forming ball around her and the Origin, trying to even somewhat muffle the sound of Elizabeth. But her voice was powerful, and could have been lovely, if she’d had any concept of key.

It cut through the chain, making Hakuno lean over and cover her ears, even as the Origin had firmly planted itself in front of her, as if to take the brunt…

Hakuno’s head jerked up as the chains retracted.

The thing was standing, arms in a relaxed pose, but then crossed its arms again to face Elizabeth, who was breathing hard, and sitting on the floor, clearly exhausted from using her Noble Phantasm and with no Master who would be able to supply her more energy.

She looked up at the coming blow.

“Oh come on…” she mumbled.

*MINE!*

It rushed forwards, and a familiar shadow was starting to form in its hands. A large, strange object that, when in its hand, became the center for strange thin veins that were reaching out to the starry sky to create a familiar object. One that looked like three spinning cones that had been attached to a hilt.

Hakuno didn’t know what made her do what she did next. All she knew was that she didn’t have a choice. The chains were gone, and she could move, and this thing was going to kill Elizabeth with that!

There was no way that Elizabeth was going to be able to beat this thing.

This was what Gilgamesh in every form had been warning her about. This was his divine nature. Something utterly relentless, beyond both reason and instinct, and nothing more than the suppressed feelings and nature of the real one.

And it seemed that he’d been restraining a desire to kill Elizabeth.
She got to her feet, rushing forwards where the Origin was preparing to swing the shadow version of Ea, down. She skidded on the smooth floor, managing to stop in front of it, arms reaching out protectively. She closed her eyes, and turned her head away.

“Stop!” she said.

Hakuno opened her eyes to see Ea pausing only a few feet away from her.

Mine.

It wasn’t attacking. She had to try this!

“That’s right. I’m your Master,” Hakuno said. “Elizabeth was there to help me get to you, and to your conscious self.”

Mine.

She had no idea what it even meant.

“Hakuno, get back—”

“No. This isn’t working,” Hakuno said. “You’ve done great, but…”

Gilgamesh was made to be unstoppable, but he wasn’t a monster.

The Origin took a threatening step towards Elizabeth, but Hakuno moved to block him.

“Stop. We have to break the seal and get your real self to full power. That’s why she’s here and has a temporary contract with me. Nothing more. Stop attacking her for doing what we asked her to do.”

Mine.

Origin Gilgamesh wasn’t much for conversation. Reason and instinct were beyond him but maybe…

There was something there. Gilgamesh wasn’t a monster. In any version of him, he wasn’t a monster. She'd been wrong.

And so had Gilgamesh. This was a part of him.

And this wasn't hatred, or resentment, or anything else.

Those monsters had dragged her to him, and then he’d forced her away from Elizabeth to her place behind him. But so far…he hadn’t attacked her.

He’d been trying to protect her.

Hakuno didn't really understand it. Gilgamesh, or his one self, had said that the Origin was nothing but surprised emotion and divinity, but it seemed it was more than that. Gilgamesh was protective of their contract, and she knew it. Was it just that these were the most extreme emotions? The things that he suppressed in himself. Was the reason that every Gilgamesh had warned her...wasn't just because it wasn't really Gilgamesh, but because they were afraid that it would bind her and keep her? She wouldn't have believed it...but...

Every version of Gilgamesh had wanted to keep her there, but also wanted her safe and happy.
The Origin was still part of Gilgamesh.

“You can protect me best at full power, right? When you're stronger than you are now?”

The thing paused eyes boring into her. The mention of protecting her seemed to have his full attention.

That’s why we’re here. So that you can be stronger,” Hakuno kept going, moving to keep in the Origin’s line of vision as Elizabeth made some sound behind her. "Because BB would kill me if we fought, but I can't stay here. I've made promises to you. And I want to keep them. I want eat with you, talk with you...and stay until the end."

Mine.

“I won’t make any more contacts,” Hakuno said. “But we have to break the seal.”

The thing paused almost as if considering, and, reached out, grabbed her necklace. Under the shadowy hand, it was starting to glow strangely, red licking at the edges of the crimson stones.

Mine.

She had no idea if this was a good thing or not, so she kept going.

“I promise you. I will keep this contract as long as it can hold,” she said. “I’m your Master, and you’re my Servant. Until the end of the contract. Ok? But you have to let the seal go, so we can do this, and face down BB. I can’t stay here. If you don’t, I’ll keep fighting. Even if you win and you capture me, I’ll keep fighting. I want Rin and Rani and the NPCs and everyone else to get out. Even if I never do. Even if I’m running to my death. But I want to fight beside you, and to stay with you as long as I can.”

And she’d never stop. She’d promised. She’d promised every version of Gilgamesh that she come back, and she wasn’t going to break that.

Mine.

But that was less demand and more an affirmation.

The thing let go of the necklace, which continued glowing a bright, deep crimson as if embers had been ignited. It stepped back, watching Elizabeth.

It nodded once.

Before Hakuno could register what was happening. Elizabeth had rushed past her, jabbing it into the glowing center of the chest.

There was no cry, or even a whisper. The thing didn’t even move or stagger as the lance embedded itself deeper and deeper into its chest. Rather, the face remained on hers, eyes boring into her as it started to scatter in golden sparks.

Mine.

There was no pain or anything. Just an absolute statement. Gilgamesh had long ago claimed that he owned Hakuno's life. She might not understand why things she was familiar with were here...but this was special, and she wanted to make sure he knew...

“Yes,” Hakuno said softly. "I'm your Master. You're my Servant. And I'll see your real self soon."
Thank you for helping us."

And then, it was gone, scattering into glittering dust.

As that thing vanished, undoing the seal on Gilgamesh or...something seemed to release, and the oppressive feeling from the air finally started to go down.

“…We did it…” Hakuno said softly.

Elizabeth turned to Hakuno a bright smile on her face.

“So, how was I?” There was an irony in her voice. “Even though in the end, I think you didn’t need me much...did I strike a gallant figure?”

“Yes,” Hakuno said, “Frighteningly so.”

She smiled turning away.

“That means I’m done,” she said. “The contract is over. And that man would kill me if this lasted, given what you agreed to… Congratulations by the way…”

“What?”

Elizabeth didn’t answer.

“I’m tired and sweaty, and my spirit’s worn out from that Noble Phantasm. It’s time I headed home, took a bath and went to sleep.”

A bath.

Right.

She stepped a little in front of Hakuno.

“Oh, just so you know—I’ve stopped taking blood baths,” Elizabeth’s voice was falsely casual. "Not just because there's nothing in that place."

She was starting to glow with a white light, vanishing slowly into nothing as Elizabeth still refused to look at Hakuno. And before Hakuno could ask her anything, Elizabeth had kneeled down, setting her lance on the ground. She stayed here for a moment, resting her hand on it.

“I’m graduating from my idol act now,” she said, slowly getting to her feet. “The next time I see you, I want to be the real thing. Look forward to it, Little Squirrel. I meant what I said. I want to see you in the front row. Humanity wasn’t ready for my music yet, so I’ll go make a name for myself somewhere else first. Maybe Venus. And I’ll be a goddess level diva. The galaxy is the future, you know! The whole galaxy!”

Her voice was very excited, but as she trailed off, it returned to that calmer tone.

“But, before that... There’s no cure for idiocy but death. I said that myself to my servants. If I want to become an idol, I need to be born all over again. That’s my real motive for helping. I’ll leave it to you, Squirrel. A star can’t shine without a stage. Bring down the curtain on that woman, so that... one day...I can flourish and be loved for reals. Ok?”

“Ok,” Hakuno said. “Maybe then I can enjoy your singing.”
With a final nod, Elizabeth walked away, faded away into darkness, head held high and back straight, looking just that once like someone who could have been called aristocracy. Maybe she was holding back tears, but she didn’t cry, and she didn’t show it.

This would be the last time Hakuno saw her.

Hakuno sighed and closed her eyes, but opened them again as she looked around this sky. It was like the one she’d seen that time when the contract had been formed.

So this was Gilgamesh’s core.

While she’d accepted, and been glad, that the heart of him…hadn’t been evil…even the Origin, the thing that had been more divine than human, had acted to protect her, and allowed itself to be stabbed for her.

It wasn’t dead. She could feel that pulse. It would continue as long as Gilgamesh himself existed.

But the seal was gone, and she couldn’t stay here.

She had promises to keep after all.

She’d promised every version of Gilgamesh that she’d stay with him as long as she could, and Hakuno wasn’t going to break that.

So she closed her eyes, took a breath, placed her hands on her chest, and activated the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation, allowing herself to fall backwards into light.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, this took forever. It wasn't an easy battle to sketch out, so I hope you enjoyed.

In other news: 400 KUDOS I honestly more and more can't believe the love this story has gotten and the fun that I've had writing and talking to everyone. We're on the hope stretch now, but let's make this and everything after this amazing.

Next Chapter:

Gilgamesh recovers, reflects and tells Hakuno a story.
The First Time Hakuno Asked Gilgamesh for Something

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh wakes up and has to deal with many things. Hakuno keeps a promise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Hakuno asked Gilgamesh for anything was something trivial.

Gilgamesh dreamt.

He was a child, lost and lonely, barely understanding the weight of the role set upon him, but he had not cared, for finally, finally he had been given a companion. He just needed to convince her to stay with him.

She embraced him, holding him closely to her.

“You’re not so bad when you grow up,” she said. “Even at your worst, you never once abandoned me when I needed you. And you won’t be alone forever. You’ll meet someone amazing. Someone who completely understands you, and who, even at your worst, can stand up to you and help you. They’ll be your precious friend. And you’ll have your kingdom, who do care about you. There are people who need us though. I can’t stay. No matter how nice it is.”

“…don’t give up on me.”

The world changed.

He was a youth. Foolish, brash and headstrong. Having never known defeat or an equal, and he had prepared a banquet to welcome and keep a treasure he had never thought existed. Wishing he could hold back the thing he knew was coming.

She refused his meal, but did not flinch from the atrocities he did and would and had committed.

“Your mother might be a goddess, but your father was human. That’s not a bad thing, no matter how confused those feelings are. And that regret…doesn’t it mean that you can improve, and not stagnate? I wasn’t able to eat anything there…but I wanted to try some… And…thank you.” She smiled a little, “I’m glad that you wanted me to have a nice dinner with you. I…it would have been fun.”

He kissed her forehead, a gesture of respect and something, too fragile and too tentative to even bring to words.

“…Oh, my treasure,” he said. “If only you had been here, the story might have been better.”

The world changed again.

He was a man, truly for the first time. Able to fully refer to himself as a human being, rather than a creation of the gods that had taken that side. Was it not amusing that the thing that his companion
had known from the moment she was born was counted as enlightenment to him?

Yet, she was there, and they would rebuild what he had not understood the value of.

Even if it was necessary to deceive her to prevent her from meeting that thing he had cast away and sealed.

But she would not.

“...Understanding mortality meant you understood the value of human life. That, yes, the people around you will fade away from you. But that is what makes them worth something. I know that you’re worried for me. Every version of you has been. And thank you. I'm...glad. But, the real you needs to wake up, and I need to reach the Origin. But...if I had lost, I’m sure this would have been fun, rebuilding Uruk with you.”

“...you are one who desires much, and will not permit yourself to be restrained to any peaceful dream. I should not have expected anything else from the only Master I will ever acknowledge.”

And the world changed again.

Shadows, torches, and a familiar voice.

“I guess I wish that this could have kept going. I don’t regret anything, but I wish we’d had more time. But...I guess this is the last fight and...we’ll be ok. And I’ll enjoy what time we have left. So, no. I don’t regret this contract. I’m glad I met you. I’m glad all this happened. If I had to fall to the Far Side, then I’m glad that, somehow, my voice reached you.”

He smiled.

“Is that truly the thing you have not yet learned, Mongrel?”

“Now lifting Servant’s Dormant Status. Thank you, Gilgamesh, the plan has been completed successfully.”

Gilgamesh opened his eyes to observe the faces of Rin and Rani and, of course, Hakuno. The sense of the seal being broken came to him almost instantly. Power, familiar and new at the same time, rushed to him, as something the Moon Cell and he himself and placed on his powers was broken.

For a moment, it was enough to make him feel lightheaded but also with a pressure on this artificial body of his, as visions began to crash on him as well.

Himself as a child, as a youth, as an adult, and...flashes of something else.

As well as ‘his’ interactions with Hakuno. Brazenly clinging to her as a child and humiliating himself by going so far as to beg for her to stay with him. Worst of all, though, was his memories of himself as a youth.

Gilgamesh repented of nothing, but he dearly wished to destroy that version of himself before he had made such a spectacle. Ripping his own soul to keep her, taking every liberty with her, and...going so far as to kiss her.

Had things continued this young idiot version of himself would have been caressing his Master and whispering sweet nothings.

It made it...difficult...to meet her eyes for a time when considering ‘his’ thoughts and feelings.
Which where utterly ridiculous. Of course he wished to protect what was his, and Hakuno was his Master and his final companion. There was no more. This was for no one but himself. He most certainly did not harbor…such foolish emotions for this woman.

He was aware that his younger selves would have nothing to compare to the relationship between Master and Servant, but it seemed that their interpretations had nothing but abject foolishness. At least that dream of his older self had been more acceptable.

He ignored his feelings.

“It does not seem that that seal or what have you was so monumental,” he said, grinning at the women. “However, it would seem that the lynchpin of my origin has been unsealed. You have done well, Mongrel.”

The power was his own, his true strength, mixed with a divinity he had long since rejected. Still, it would prove useful in ending the pride of that Cancer.

Hakuno smiled at him, relief clear in her eyes.

“I’m glad it’s not too much,” she said. “Elizabeth mentioned…”

Elizabeth?

“The dragon?” Gilgamesh frowned.

What had that woman been doing within his soul? What was more…he saw no trace of her. Had she been there, he likely would have killed her.

“She was that familiar that Rin mentioned,” Hakuno said. “She’s gone now… and she didn’t see much.”

“Hmph, that is well. You are the only one I have permitted to see the unpainted face of the king. What is more…Hakuno…what are you wearing?”

Hakuno blinked and looked down at herself.

While he had noticed it in his dreams, it was no present in truth. The necklace was small, simple even, made from a ring of polished red stones that gleamed in the light of the setting sun, and from it, Gil sensed something that made a familiar part of him desire to reach out to take it.

Power.

That was a noble phantasm.

“I’m… not sure,” Hakuno said, taking it off and looking at it.

“At any rate,” Rin said. “The seal’s been removed, and the legendary mystic code has been granted. Though it says here that only Gilgamesh will know what it is though, so I can’t help you much on the power of it…”

“I can confirm the existence of a black box at the core of Gilgamesh’s mind-slash-body that was not there before this. It should now be possible to raise in spirtron rank according to Gilgamesh’s will.”

“Er…Mister Gilgamesh?” the AI said, stepping to him. “Please don’t use it here! I can sense that power and have the records of the Moon Cell. Your original power is in different classification entirely. It would cause the whole school to go down. I’m not even sure if your Servant Frame is
even capable of withstanding the power output of a Legendary Mystic Code. Please...please limit yourself to one use..."

She spoke as if he was to start unsealing Ea then and now. That was foolishness. It was necessary for his body to grow accustomed to this power. At present, he was uncertain as to what stain he would place on Hakuno as well as his own form.

The AI’s worry for him was amusing though, so he decided to give her some assurance.

“Of course,” he said. “But do not be foolish. My body will not collapse under the level of power that is both mine by right and suitable to my legend. However, the king’s true strength is not something to be shown lightly. I will set aside my pride only in the final battle, until then, as before, I will accompany you in earnest while on my pleasure trip.”

However, there was one last thing to consider. The destination of his pleasure trip.

“Alright then,” Rin said. “We’ve fulfilled your conditions, Sakura. We’ve got a way to counter BB’s divinity. So...no complaints?”

“...No. While it is low, this is a chance, and if you insist on continuing fighting… Then I will come with you, Hakuno, to reach the wall and remove it.”

“Then I guess we need to go down and...” Hakuno said.

“No,” Gilgamesh said. “This dive has spent enough energy, and time is limitless. Pushing ourselves at his point is the height of foolishness.”

“...He’s right, Hakuno,” Rin said. “Besides, you two might want to...debrief a little. You were in there for a long time.”

“I think it’s a wonderful idea,” The AI said. “Since...this is our last night here...I’ll change the outside of the building specially for tonight. I’m...not entirely sure I’ll be able to make it perfect, but...please look forward to it, ok?”

“Alright,” Rin said. “By the way, Hakuno, can you hand me that cube?”

“Oh, right...” Hakuno said. “Here...”

Gilgamesh watched as Hakuno delivered the cube to Rin with some satisfaction. He wished for no further dealings with that dragon, and wished that Hakuno would have no further dealings as well. After all, she was his Master, and he would accept no further contracts. This temporary agreement grated against him, to think that she had needed aid from her...

“Wow...that...this karma has gone way down... At this rate she could reform in my lifetime...Oh geez I hope she doesn’t, it’d be hell if I had to look after her in my old age... at least wait a little or hurry up.”

“I’m glad of that at least,” Hakuno said. “I think she deserves...at least something...”

Hakuno clearly meant to keep speaking, but Gilgamesh motioned her to come.

“I wish to see more of this new Noble Phantasm of yours,” he said, stopping in the hall prior to noticing that there was no one present. The NPCs who often wandered these areas seemed more and more busy.
Gilgamesh turned to face her, but while she was taking off the necklace, and fumbling a little with it, memories of ‘his’ actions in that dream returned to him.

“You are…precious to me…”

“I hope that time did not give you false ideas of me,” Gilgamesh scowled at her. “As I told you before, my nature as a child is completely different to my nature now.”

And as a youth he had been confused and foolish.

Yet…all those things she had said to ‘him’, promising him over and over that she would not leave him until their contract had ended.

Hakuno finished removing that Noble Phantasm from around her neck and looked up at him. For some reason, he found it difficult to meet her eyes directly.

“I know,” she said. “And those were SGs…er….what do you remember?” she asked.

Gilgamesh scowled and looked away, crossing his arms. Somehow, facing her with the memories of his actions and words was…not a pleasurable notion. Why did he care what she thought of his behavior in a dream? Dreams were irrational anyways. There was no connection between himself in a dream and himself in waking mind.

“A great many foolish things said between the two of us,” he said. “I recall much of what ‘I’ did in those different situations. But those were merely dreams. Manifestations and nothing more. As those Sentinels in the Labyrinth, but merely an isolated, irrational emotion. That is all it was, Hakuno.”

It was somehow very important that she understood this. He glared at her but she nodded, and…held out the necklace to him.

Gilgamesh looked at it eyes wide.

“Mongrel,” he said softly, “What are you doing?”

“I’m not really sure what it does, honestly,” she said, looking down at it. “But it came form you, so…I guess it belongs to you, right? Also the Origin helped me make it.”

“What do you speak of?”

“…When I met the Origin…Elizabeth couldn’t win. It was just…to strong, but then, I guess I was dumb. I ran in front of it, and…more or less tried to convince it to let you go. I wanted to get out, and I guessed that maybe…it wasn’t completely not you, no matter how much you kept trying to act like it wasn’t. Or your dream selves did. I’m not really sure how I convinced it, other than mentioning that you needed it to defeat BB. Then it touched the necklace and kept saying mine… So…you were involved in it, right?”

Gilgamesh stared at it and then at her.

Could it…

No.

Her gaze was guileless as ever with those eyes of hers boring into his own.

The idea of some representation of that which he despised most claiming her, even if part of himself, was distasteful. But it could not, was not, indicative of anything…other. It was certainly not the
meaning behind the gift that his mother had presented his father. The gold necklace that he wore to show his kingship.

No, this was nothing of the kind.

Besides, that thing was nothing to him. A mix of ideals that had not been his, unwanted emotions, and divinity. Its actions were nothing.

And again, she offered, holding out a priceless treasure to him with no hesitation, for the simple reason of it being ‘his’. Gilgamesh took it in his hands, and gazed on it.

It was a treasure, but one that only one who understood battle would truly value.

“'In offense, it is useless,’” Gilgamesh informed her. “It offers no grand show of strength. But in defense…it is a reserve of power, meant to heal, to support when all seems lost, to shield from an attack that cannot be avoided.”

“But…that’s really useful,” Hakuno said. “Maybe not to me, but…you need that. What happens if we’re fighting and something happens, and I’m out of mana and…that’s a great Noble Phantasm!”

“You gave it form,” Gilgamesh said. “As it was born in your dive into my dream…you might consider it physical proof of our contract.”

“That’s better. It’s at least better than a lion to remember me by,” she said, a smile on her face that did not reach her eyes.”

“Its name will be Hakuno: Bond of Dreams,” Gilgamesh proclaimed, looking down at it. “Every Noble Phantasm requires a name to give if form. No, Hakuno. Ask of me. I will hear your request, and do not ask for nothing or sentiment.”

There was more than enough sentiment with that name.

He glowered at her, some part of him wishing for her to ask for…for what?

“I’m glad I met you.”

He was not sure where she had said those words, but he knew she had. She had said them, somewhere…

He would not think of them. They had been nonsense spoken in response to nonsense.

Nothing more.

“…Let’s go outside and have a big dinner,” Hakuno said. “It’s going to be the last night, right? So…I’d like to see the stars. Even if they’re not real… I promised your teenage self to have a meal, and I don’t know…I’d like to be able to eat with something normally, …just once.”

This was not anything like what his teenage self had had in mind in that dream, but that thought of that pleased Gilgamesh. Though her humble little request was less amusing.

He was teach her how to ask for things in time, perhaps she would learn as she experienced the pleasures he could provide…

"Very well," Gilgamesh said. "You may place the Bond of Dreams on me."

"..ok?"
Slowly, Hakuno took the Noble Phamtasm from him, and stepped behind him. She was frowning as she did so, but in a few seconds Gilgamesh felt her hands as she placed it around his neck. The stones were warm on his skin, rather than could and dead... As if some of Hakuno's own spirit had been placed there, her fire mingling with his own soul...

No! It was no such thing! He would not consider-

"It looks good."

Hakuno had stepped in front, and was smiling at him, but Gilgamesh looked away, again, feeling strangely unable to face her.

"It is a valuable treasure," he admitted.

"I'm glad it's that good, and...thank you for doing this dinner with me..."

“This is no great feat, Mongrel, my treasure holds enough food within it to feed a city indefinitely…”

“I’m glad,” Hakuno whispered.

He did not grace that with a reply. As they turned to leave, but footsteps sounded closer to them as two NPC's moved closer to them. One was the teacher, while the other was a female who had spoken to Hakuno prior to this. They were both smiling and flushed.

“We’re getting some information on that Primordial goddess you mentioned,” the teacher said. “I think we’ll have something by morning.”

“Really?” Hakuno asked. “That’s amazing! I wasn’t sure there would be anything much, but everything really helps. Is there anything you know for sure now?”

“Well, if she’s still aware, she’s not happy with what BB is doing. It says that she wanted humanity to eventually leave the planet, but didn’t hate us… Maybe that might help?” the other, the girl, said. "Like Taiga said, we’re getting some information. We were opting to get it all together so you could look at it…and understand what it means better..."

“No, you have done well,” Gilgamesh said. "Finish what you have done and rest. Tomorrow will be the end of this, and it will mean the end of this building. If you have more information we will hear it before departing.”

The two nodded, rushing off to talk to the others and warn them. It was unlikely the Rin or Rani would think to warn the NPCs of this, given that they were considered mere machines, but…there was a spark in them that had not been present once, and they deserved the opportunity to continue to grow and learn in their humanity.

It was a good thing to consider, and preferable to focus on.

“Come then, Mongrel, let us prepare this feast of yours.”

They walked down the stairs, past the kiosk that the false priest haunted to into the courtyard.

The AI had kept her word. Outside, night had fallen. There was no moon above them, but the stars mimicked the spread of what the modern human called the Milky Way, and what his people had called the tail of Tiamat, placed there by Enlil, to help form the foundation of the infant world. But
there were no clear constellations. Even Uruanna, the constellation his people had named for himself was not seen.

The building stood silent and dark, any lights from the inside unable to be programmed to the outside, with the only light coming from the ground around the entrance to the Labyrinth.

Hakuno stood, looking above her at the false stars while he opened the Gates, summoning a cloth with a small feast laid out for them. He specifically avoided those dishes which his younger self had used, and rather than the honey beer of Uruk summoned a red wine with it.

He was not nostalgic enough for that taste yet. Yet nostalgic enough to give her the food of his home. It had nothing to do with the tangled desires of his teenage self.

While it could not be said that the Gates opened more easily, there was something else, perhaps a memory of the true power of his weapons…

As an experiment, he moved a Gate on the other side of the Sakura tree and smiled. He would enjoy BB learning just what she had made her enemy.

Still, his body must adjust…

“Do the stars really look like this?” Hakuno asked him as he summoned pillows to service as seats.

“They are somewhat different,” Gilgamesh said. “This might be how the stars appeared once, or how they will appear later, but the stars of your present and my lifetime were much the same.”

She looked to him, and then at the feast waiting for them and walked to sit at her place at his left side, taking a small piece of bread and then a bite.

“This is good,” she said.

“It is akaru, a form of honey bread.” Gilgamesh said. “Eat.”

For a time, they ate in silence, and Gilgamesh avoided considering too much of the implications of what his younger self had wanted. There was no sound in this place, no nightbirds or insects sang, but it was a pleasant memory to sit under the stars, even if they were mere illusion.

“…Tomorrow’s the final battle,” Hakuno said, looking up at the sky again. “It’s strange to think that…everything’s coming to an end now… including… that final barrier… I’m a little nervous about facing it…”

Gilgamesh looked at her and gazed above them again. He wished to tell her that she need not fear, and that any who could face down the very incarnation of his divine self would stand against death, but she would not believe him, and he had no words of assurance that while he meant for her to be his companion, that he planned on gamboling to overturn whatever firewall the Moon Cell had waiting for him.

Perhaps she would see her own value better in another way. She needed to be reminded of her choice.

“Mongrel, there was once a Master who was meant to sleep forever, never waking from a peaceful dream of a perfect world. This woman repeated the preliminary round of a death game countless times. Perhaps there were times when she noticed something was wrong, that the world she lived in peacefully with her friends reliving the same day had be manufactured, but when she did, she was swallowed by black mud, lost consciousness and woke the next day in her peaceful world,” he told.
Such a world sounded intolerable.

“However, a day came when that woman noticed again, and she took a reckless action that the one who build that world had not considered and could not dream of. Loath to be swallowed, she threw herself into the Sea of Nothing. That defiance was perhaps a build up, a final refusal that “I cannot accept this world”. Some would call it a fool’s determination, to give up her life to defy the creator of that world. That was BB’s greatest error. She was proud and permitted that person who she wanted to preserve above all others to slip away from her. She was fated to disappear. However…”

“That didn’t happen. I managed to hold that off. In my last moments, I cried out, and you heard me.”

“I had slept for a long time, and the presence of some life, a spark of defiance in the darkness was enough to draw me closer.”

“And then I used my command seals.”

“Yes. To appease a trap, you gave everything. That amused me enough to continue with you, and to observe as you overcame great odds, and faced death. Do you truly think that you cannot face that which is coming?”

Hakuno looked down, taking a small bowl of kanasu, a lamb broth he was rather fond of, and began to eat.

“…I guess you’re right. I’ve done nothing but fight her. And if we can win…and everyone can get out…that makes me happy…and besides, I was going to die anyways, right?”

Yes.

She would have died. Their contract had saved her, or rather her bravery had saved her. Gilgamesh raised a hand to feel the Bond of Dreams.

“When this incident is settled, your fate is unknown. I have told you this numerous times. However, knowing this, I will ask you this only once more: do you still aim for the Near Side of the Moon?”

He gazed at her, watching her reaction.

Once, he would have looked for fear, despair, or any other sign of her weakening. Now he enjoyed the fire that lit in her eyes as she looked at him and the strength that came back to her, yet there was something different about it. Something…familiar yet not...

“Don’t worry about me,” she said. “…Even if my contract with you is severed, and…I don’t see you again…Once I’m on the Near Side…I’ll figure something out. I’ll have to right? And I’ve survived this long…so…don’t worry. I’ll be ok. I’ll miss you, but…”

She took a drink from the wine glass, clearly trying to find something else to do.

Gilgamesh stared at her, somehow feeling the weight of the Bond at his neck.

She was attempting to comfort him. She, who faced her own death…

For a moment, he could almost hear them. That familiar pain racing through him. But it would be different, he reminded himself. This merely to remind her of her own strength. She was his companion, and he would not allow to go so easily…

For now thought, he would allow this deceit to stand. He would see the joy on her face in the end,
but also wished…for this to be her choice, knowing the potential risk.

No, there was no risk of his failure. It was merely a test, not worry.

He would not fail.

“Such unfounded confidence may become a weapon when you reach that place. “I will surely be victorious.” That tremendous conceit is proof of humanity. Understanding a promised failure, yet staving off death…that is humanity’s true nature, Mongrel. Is it not ugly?”

He smiled at her, and she slowly smiled back.

“It was as dull summoning, at the beginning, but I was observing the wrong things. ‘When would you use up all of your strength’. I was in error to look only to that. Your defiance was more interesting. To challenge a god is the epitome of humanity, and that life is befitting for my Master. I once told you, at the start of our time, that I would name a price for my aid. I give if now: fight as you please. The ending of your story, that will be your payment to me.”

And her story would never end.

“…I will,” Hakuno said. “And…thank you, for the meal. Do you think that we should go back?”

Gilgamesh shrugged.

“I have no objections to remaining,“

“…alright…” she said. “It’s…nice…being able to see the sky like this…without numbers….”

She paused for a moment and then cleared her throat.

“Gil…how did you rebuilt Uruk?” she asked. “When I saw your member…no one was there. Did you do it yourself?”

Why was she asking that? Still, he would not deny her tales of the greatest of cities! And he found that he preferred that to thinking of her death…or his dreams or the meaning behind the Bond of Dreams…

“For a time,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “It is my city after all, before any would return some part must have been habitable…”

So be began speaking of the tail of the reconstruction of Uruk, from the beginning projects that he rebuilt alone, to when others came and started to rebuild with others. It was detailed tale and involved many important features that he had added to improve the city, yet, as he spoke of his building of the cistern, Gilgamesh felt a weight against him.

Hakuno, exhausted from the battle with himself and the dive, had leaned against the pillow, but sleep had taken her, from which even his own ability could not overcome and now her head rested against him.

Gilgamesh stopped, gazing at the woman beside him and then at the Bond of Dreams.

She continually promised to stay as long as she could, and attempted to keep a promise to him that she needed not attempt…and somehow had fought his very nature to bring back his true power as well as a gift.

You are…precious to me…
He could not deny it. She was a treasure. And while he most certainly was not interested in claiming her as his younger self had been, he would have her rest this last night.

So, he carefully picked her up, and allowed the rest of the evening meal to vanish into the Gates.

He opened the door, treading inside only to note with satisfaction that there was no one present to see this moment, until a motion caught his attention.

The AI stepped down the stairs lightly.

Gilgamesh stiffened, torn between clutching Hakuno more tightly to himself and dropping her, but he stayed still as she stopped before him.

“…Oh…Mister Gilgamesh,” she said. “I didn’t realize you decided to enjoy the night…is Hakuno alright?”

“She is weary,” he said. “In the morning, she will be as she should.”

“That’s good,” she said. “Actually…I wanted to talk to you…about the Near Side.”

Gilgamesh watched her.

“You may speak.”

“…I told you about the firewall before. I’ve learned more about it. You need to…give something to it,” she said. “Some of your treasure. And then you need to know who to go to, because you have to go to a person, not just come.”

Give his treasure?

It was no wonder the Moon Cell was confident in the firewall what could cause him to back down…

“So…I’ve got an idea. It’s…it’s going to be a beacon. Registered to you, to draw you after Hakuno. I’ll give it to her after you bring down BB, so…so you can find her. But…I have a request.”

Gilgamesh watched her. He disliked fools who thought that they could bargain with them. Perhaps he should warn her before-

“Please…please give me the beacon when you final Hakuno,” she said, bowing.

Gilgamesh blinked.

“That is your request of me?”

“Yes,” she said. “I…I’m going to hide something in it. It’s really important to me, so…if you gave it to me…it would really help me…would you do it?”

Her eyes were wide and frightened, with a look that was so utterly human… Human in a way that non AI or god should have known.

Gilgamesh understood.

“Very well,” she said. “I will accept your request. I will return what you used to take me to Hakuno.”

She bowed.
“Thank you. I…I need to prepare a few more things, so…I’ll let you go…”

And then she was gone. Walking swiftly and turning down the hall towards the library.

So she had become human enough to defy death.

The AI…no Sakura had truly benefited from this time.

But this was not his to worry for. His Master required rest.

Gilgamesh made his way up the stairs, through the silent halls that would soon be silent forever more, and into the small room they had shared. It was still shabby, with the decorations Hakuno had brought bringing some small cheer to what was otherwise pitiful, yet…it was a place he would recall with some fondness.

Setting her on the bed, Gilgamesh made to move to his seat, but Hakuno had begun clinging to his shirt in her sleep.

“Won’t…go…” she mumbled to herself.

Everything in those dreams had been nonsense.

If his friend had taught him anything it was that dreams did not always show truth, and those could hardly show that…

“My treasure…”

“You are…precious to me…”

“I’m glad my voice reached you…”

As he gazed at her, at peace at last, his own memory beset him. As did other things…the feel of his arms around her…of his lips against her forehead…

No!

Gilgamesh scowled, ignoring a…strange heat that was rising to his face…

He had said he would not think of it! His actions in a dream meant nothing. Dreams were often nothing but nonsense and fancy. Particularly ones like those! They had been SGs and nothing more, meant to distract. The Bond of Dreams was…coincidence, as was the power he sensed from it.

But her grip remained true, as did her words.

Which were nonsense as well! She was exhausted, overwrought, and responding to the actions of the Sentinels.

He would think no more or it.

And to prove it for the nonsense that it was…and because breaking her grip would be…inconvenient…he lay on the bed beside her, permitting the sheets to act as a barrier, and permitted sleep, with his own dreams which he was more in control of and had nothing to do with SGs, to come. He would face the Cancer the next day, and when he was separated from her…he would follow Sakura's beacon to reach her…
Gil if you keep hanging out in denial, Ozy's going to get mad. King of Tsunderes...trying so hard to not dere.

Next Chapter:

"So you've come."
The First Time Hakuno Faced a Goddess

Chapter Summary

Goodbyes are said, and BB is seen again.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger. I wanted to give you guys a chapter today, and this was all that was going to happen. Everything took longer than I thought it was, and I wanted to give the amount of focus everything coming up needed.

So, I might not talk a lot tomorrow given that it's my brithday, but hopefully, I'll have an update by Tuesday!

Next Chapter:

The battle with BB is finally fought, by things don't go as foreseen.

The first time Hakuno faced a goddess was also the last time she saw the Old School Building.

Hakuno didn’t really know when she fell asleep. Sometime during their dinner, she’d been lulled by his ever arrogant voice, and the pictures his words had painted of Uruk and the care he’d taken in its restoration. If there was anything that Hakuno could say for sure, it was that Gilgamesh had really loved his city.

And somehow, she’d ended up there in her dreams, wandering around while Gilgamesh recounted building different places.

She started coming out of the dream, but something warm was around her, and it reminded her of something warm and pleasant. As she lay there, enjoying the feeling around her, she smelled something familiar…spices and wine, and something…

Wait.

Hakuno’s eyes opened.

The familiar sunset had returned. Hakuno was lying in the bed in their room, the wrapped sheet around her, and beside her, only a few inches away, was the sleeping face of Gilgamesh.

The sheet also wasn’t the only thing wrapped around her.

Gilgamesh was lying on top of the bed and was holding her. Somehow, he’d managed to get the sheets all gathered up around her, and the mix between them and his own warmth had been what she’d been feeling.

Hakuno didn’t move, and she started, wide eyed at her sleeping Servant.
Up close like this, with his face relaxed, Gilgamesh looked less intimidating than usual. She could see shades of the child and the teenager she’d seen in his heart. His hair was down, further dropping that intimidation that he seemed to always rely on. Maybe she’d just gotten used to him...

But why was he *there*?

Had he just decided that since they were getting along to the point that they could talk, it meant that they now shared the only bed in the room because he didn’t want to sleep on the throne?

…actually, that did sound like him.

And, maybe it was just the fact that…this was it…and everything she’d learned…but…

Hakuno sighed.

Enkidu had told her that she wasn’t going to be another one of Gilgamesh’s regrets, but she wondered if there was anything else she could be. She hadn’t really expected to get close to him or even to really understand him, no matter how much she tried, but it seemed that some barrier that he’d always had up against her and everyone else had come down for her.

*The real me has been alone for a long time*

That was what his child self had said. That he’d been alone so long that he’d forgotten something and now…he was going to be alone again, regardless of if she managed to find a way to survive or day, Gilgamesh couldn’t exist on the Near Side. He’d told her, long ago, that he’d been shut away, essentially quarantined on the Far Side, the Moon Cell’s recycling bin. Maybe he was telling the truth that he’d gone willingly, but…

She couldn’t think like that.

“Gil?”

“…en…”

He shifted slightly, and slowly opened his eyes.

For a moment, they were almost completely black and dilated, with only a crimson ring around them and he blinked at her sleepily, but they contracted to their normal appearance shortly, as he sat up quickly.

“What happened?” she asked. “I…can’t remember going to bed.”

“Your exhaustion was such that you fell into sleep while I spoke. I forgave it in light of the prior events. As it would reflect poorly on me for my Master to sleep unprotected like some vagabond, I brought you to our room, however, you continued to cling to me, and I decided to indulge your whim. You may praise my magnanimity as you see fit.”

He was giving her that usual proud look, but it was very hard not to think of his face two seconds ago.

“Thank you for not leaving me to sleep under that tree and possibly be eaten by some passing virus,” Hakuno smiled a little.

“Hmph, if I had, I would have been forced to stay beside you to prevent such an outcome,” Gilgamesh said.
“Well, I’m glad I slept in the bed,” Hakuno said. “…I guess it’s time to get ready…”

“Yes. We must speak to those NPCs regarding their findings, but prior to that, there is one final act of preparation I must undertake.”

He stood up from the bed and began to unbutton his leopard printed shirt.

Hakuno jumped out of the bed with a squeak and rushed to the door.

“You need to tell me when you’re going to do that!” Hakuno said, almost falling over herself in her attempt to get out of the room before he managed to get naked. “I’ll come back in a minute!”

He had the gall to look confused as she shut the door.

King of Nudists!

For a second, Hakuno leaned against the door, closing her eyes. Maybe she should take this time to talk to Jinako. …Whatever Gil was doing wouldn’t take too long, but he didn’t like Jinako, and wasn’t going to be interested in saying goodbye.

She headed down the hall to the janitor’s closet, knocking, but the door swung open at her touch.

Jinako was sitting in her usual place with a blanket over her head, Karna beside her. She didn’t turn to face Hakuno, but she was watching her out of the corner of her eye.

“You’re persistent, Hakuno,” she said.

“I wanted to see you,” she said back.

“I told you. I’m going to disappear here. Quietly and without getting in anyone’s way. It’s my choice, and I’m…ok with it I guess…but was there something you really wanted to talk about or are you just…sort of asking for my consent before you finish things and I die?”

“I…”

“Don’t,” Jinako said. “I can’t oppose a unianious choice, and everyone, including those NPCs has agreed. People stronger than me, BB, you…everyone, they’ll overlook me and drag the world down with them to get what they want, but I don’t really have a right to complain after loafing around. It’s just…the way things worked out… And…well… even if you said to be ‘ok, we’ll find another way out then’, I don’t have anything. I’ve got no plans and no real skills. I’ll leave the cool…nah, let’s be honest, all the hard parts to you, Hakuno. Even this. Or…if I asked you to keep everything like it is, would you stop? Abandon everyone just for me? And live yourself?”

Hakuno looked away.

It wasn’t really a plea, or really much of anything. And it was said with full understand of what she was asking. For her to do this…she’d have to abandon everyone else. Everyone else’s hopes…

“I can’t…” Hakuno said. “It’ not just me…it’s everyone. Rin and Rani…the NPCs, they’ve all worked so hard to go this far. I know that I’m running towards my own death, but…they’re not.”

Jinako smiled a little.

“I’m sorry. That was a mean question. Besides, I’d rather you beat BB anyways. I have issues with her maxed audacity and crazy cockiness. Also…she used me and my fears. And I’m kinda mad about it. So, beat her. Besides, even if I don’t like many people. I like games. There won’t be any
good hack and slashes if there’s no one to make them, right? To say that I don’t care if the human race is wiped out… that’d be a lie. Even NEETs aren’t that dumb. So, don’t worry about me. You and that shiny Servant… just pool your strength and beat her. Even if you’ve only got a .99999% change of winning.”

“Well, I didn’t have that much better odds of winning the Grail War,” Hakuno smiled.

“Then go on, and get out of here. I’ll be watching your heroic form live, so go for the coolest stuff you can, k?”

Karna smiled a little at Hakuno, nodding once.

“I’ll be here with her. Don’t worry.”

That was the end, Hakuno knew, but… goodbye sounded wrong. Particularly for Jinako.

“Good luck,” she said.

Jinako didn’t respond.

And slowly, Hakuno made her way back towards her room, where Gilgamesh was waiting. Whatever happened, whatever was going to be… she couldn’t waste it. Not for any reason. Jinako might not have had much of a life, but she’d wanted to live, and her standing aside and allowing this to happen was the bravest thing she’d ever done.

She’d think about it later. If she ever had the chance.

Hakuno opened the door, not sure what she was going to walk into but she stopped at the sight of Gilgamesh, seated on this thrown, watching her.

He’d changed into his armor. Or rather, he’d changed into the bottom part of his armor. His top was bare (did Gilgamesh dislike shirts in general?) but he was wearing the same golden armor that she’d first seen him in from the bottom. Without the top though, it seemed different, lighter somehow. The Chain of Heaven had been wrapped around his arm, and his hair was down. Around his neck, her Bond of Dreams stood out as clearly as the crimson tattoos on his chest.

The blatant attempt at intimidation was gone, but this seemed… more dangerous, like some self-imposed restraint had been removed.

“Is that the Legendary Mystic Code…”

“Yes,” Gilgamesh said. “This armament is from primordial times. It is my appearance when I competed with my friend for supremacy, a very long time ago. For this battle, I will not show my glory as a king, but rather I give my undivided attention to this battle with BB. We must deliver a harsh chastisement to this fool who has called herself a newly made god. Building the world, choosing people, that is the work of human beings, and for her to attempt to reverse my laws or overturn that principle is an offense too great for that woman to bear. We will make that clear to her in this battle.”

Hakuno smiled a little.

“Thank you, Gil,” Hakuno said. “This… Let’s make her regret all the people she’s hurt.”

Gilgamesh nodded once, and moved to join her, his armor making little sound as he took his position.
For a moment, Hakuno hesitated, looking back at the room. The bed was gone, as were the decorations that had once been on the walls. The dreamcatchers, the tapestry, and the lion were all gone, probably backed away in the Gates. The room looked a little bare now, like it had when they first started.

Back when she’d more or less seen the man who stood beside her as death incarnate.

It had only been temporary, but…well…for so long it had been the only safe place she’d known…

“I’ll miss this,” she said softly.

“Do not reflect too greatly on the past, Mognrel,” Gilgamesh said. “Focus on the task at hand.”

Right.

BB.

“Let’s go to the Counsel Room and pick up Sakura. I’m pretty sure Taiga will be there too.”

“Indeed.”

They left the room, and Hakuno noticed that the bottom of the armor didn’t clank all that much. His footsteps seemed normal if anything. Though she was glad of it. She hadn’t really looked forward to a time when she’d dealt with the Golden Clanking Horror behind her.

The hall was strangely quiet as they passed through. No one was there, even in the places she was used to seeing people standing and talking. It made the place feel strange, and maybe a little abandoned.

Hakuno pushed the door open to see the inside of the Student Council Room.

It seemed…normal. Rin and Rani were working while Sakura observed. There was nothing in the atmosphere that made things seem strange. No clear sign of what was going to happen if they failed. It was almost…relaxing. The only thing out of place was Taiga, who was looking at the data on the blackboard.

She turned and smiled as Hakuno and Gilgamesh stepped in.

Her motion caught Rin’s attention and she nodded.

“Hakuno, Gilgamesh. Hope slept well,” she said. “We’re getting started on some basics, but Taiga wanted to talk to you.”

“Yes,” Taiga said, stepping forwards. “Everyone really pulled through for this info.”

Gilgamesh took his usual seat, motion Hakuno to sit beside him.

“You may proceed.”

Taiga nodded.

“We’ve gathered that BB’s absorbed the data from the original Earth Mother Goddess, who was once worshipped at Catalhoyuk, humanity’s first religious site. Her power isn’t actually called Ten Crowns, it’s Potnia Theron: Conception of All Animals. It…makes any attack null and void so long as the thing was born of Earth. So…”
“Which is why the exercise yesterday was necessary,” Gilgamesh said. “I was not entirely born of Earth. While what you speak of is, in essence, the true nature of the cycle of life and death, my original function was to stand between Heaven and Earth, unending and unyielding. That contradiction should suffice for one battle.”

Taiga nodded.

“There’s also the fact that…she doesn’t want this. The Moon Cell’s records state that while death is part of her function, what BB’s doing…isn’t something she wanted.”

Gilgamesh nodded.

“So, BB will fight alone, and it is likely that what remains of that goddess’s mind will close off her omnipotence,” he smiled. “The Moon Cell, for be forced to fight in the present, only seeing what is before it. This information is helpful.”

“I’m glad,” Taiga said. “Everyone will be. It’s easy to forget about us, given that we don’t have Heroic Spirits, but we’re still here, and BB’s messing with us too.”

Sakura stepped close, nodding.

“Everyone’s worked so hard,” she said. “I’m glad…we’ll do it this time. I’m ready. Going into the Labyrinth…it’s sort of scary, but…”

“You’ll do great,” Hakuno said, she glanced over at Rin. “Are you ready?”

“Completely,” Rin said. “We’ve got offense over defense prioritized and some programs that were necessary for Melt completely erased. We should be ready to go.”

“I’ve gotten sufficient rest for this,” Rani added. “Still…when I become aware that this scene will not come again, there is something not unpleasant in my emotional control…That I, so removed from sentimentality for think about that…it surprises me. But…in the end this was a good experience. I hope to meet you both on the Near Side.”

Hakuno forced a smile.

“Alright, Sakura. I think we’re ready. Are you, Gilgamesh?”

“Of course,” he said, standing up. “Let us end this woman’s face.

She was ready.

“…Good luck, everyone,” Hakuno said.

“When we pass through that woman’s relief, she will be completely distracted,” Gilgamesh said. “Rin, Rani, you are to aid the NPC’s in their run to the Near Side. There will be little time once the battle begins, so you must act quickly.” He glanced over to Taiga. “Be sure that everyone is prepared.”

Taiga nodded, her face serious for once.

“We’ll all be ready,” she said.

Rin glanced at Taiga and then Rani, who shrugged.

“Alright. We’ll be sure everyone is out.”
“Come then, Hakuno, Sakura,” Gilgamesh said.

Hakuno nodded but wondered when ‘Sakura’ had been a name that Gilgamesh committed to. Still, she was glad for her.

Sakura trailed behind Hakuno and Gilgamesh as they left and headed down the stairs, with Hakuno making her way to the kiosk for one final time.

“…Hey, Father Kotomine…” Hakuno said. “We’re going to get some healing items…and…mapo tofu…”

It was a good MP refiller…she’d just really regret it later.

Thankfully her expression seemed to have Gilgamesh not worried about her getting a taste for it, and Kotomine didn’t seem to care so long as she hate it and suffered.

“This is the final battle,” he said, taking the items from his inventory. “Have you prepared mentally?”

Hakuno sighed and nodded.

“I can’t turn back now,” she said.

“I was surprised that the King of Heroes remained as long as he did for some time, and I wondered why it was that Julius gave so much to let you life, but I see now I was mistaken to question. I’ve sent off many Masters before, but sending you off as a shopkeeper…one who is your ally…this has not been a bad experience. You hold something in your nature that draws interest. Perhaps if you are victorious, the Moon Cell will normalize, and everything here will be lost, but…for now, I will give thanks for this experience. So continue, Nameless Master. The continuation of humanity, the moon, and your own future rests in your small hands. You who fights for what she wants, lives for what she wishes for, and will destroy dreams of paradise in order to awaken, as representative for the NPCs trapped on the Far Side, I thank you for all of your efforts. Know that we all support you in this last fight. Go. In a corner of this building, we will be praying for your victory until the time comes, but this place will remain open until the last second before the end of the world.”

Hakuno bowed, closing her eyes after taking her items.

“Thank you, Father Kotomine. It was a little strange doing business with you, but it was nice to be your ally.”

This was it.

There was no turning back.

Hakuno turned back to Gilgamesh, who was standing some ways away watching Kotomine with a dangerously speculative look.

“I wonder, Mongrel, just how he was able to make some judgement of me…” he muttered.

But, for a moment, Hakuno and Gilgamesh looked at one another.

It was time.

They walked out of the building towards the tree, where, just for a moment, Hakuno turned back on the building that had been there one safe haven in this place.

“I’m going to miss it a little…” Hakuno said.
“It was a nice place,” Sakura said. “Hakuno…”

“It’ll be nice when everyone gets back,” Hakuno said.

It only took a second, and they were back.

It didn’t look all that different than the last time she’d seen it. Stairs seemed to go endlessly down, towards the upside down sakura tree, falling, or growing, into the moon, while bits of code and matter floated, and the monstrous relief was waiting for them.

Without a word, Hakuno ran down the stairs, not sure of what was going to happen, but knowing that there was no way that she was going to be able to look back.

When they reached the relief, Hakuno paused. Beyond that was the Core, as well as BB herself. If they did it…that future which the Moon Cell wanted could never come to pass. Everything was riding on this. Not just their getting past BB, but their destroying her.

“Alright, Sakura,” Hakuno said.

Sakura nodded, stepping forwards.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “This was all my fault. I couldn’t take it, so I passed everything to you. I’m really, really sorry, but…this is wrong. Contact confirmed. Reformatting with soul as base around the main axis of spiritual analysis, behaviorism…def…definition concluded. Based on…on equal authority, executing…executing disassembly. Unlock…unlock successful…”

She was panting, and Hakuno reached out to steady her, but Sakura held out a hand.

“I’m…I’m fine…” she muttered, but she wasn’t.

Her hair was almost completely white, but the relief was starting to glow with a incandescent light that told Hakuno that the way was finally open.

“But…I’m going to need to come with you…I’m not sure how stable this is…ok? I won’t get in your way. I promise.”

“That’s fine, but…are you…”

“I’m…I’m sure,” Sakura smiled.

There was a familiar buzz of static.

“Well down, Sakura,” Rin said. “…but…this is it. Not even light will go through there. Everything’s coming out as ‘unknown’. I don’t think there’s a way out unless BB is defeated.”

“It seems after this, time resumes a unilateral definition.” Rani said. “Hakuno…this will be our last broadcast. I hope the fortunes of battle go with your, and Phosphorus lights your path. We will be waiting for you on the Near Side.”

Where she wouldn’t meet them.

Hakuno clenched her fists.

“Ok,” she said. “Leave it to us. Gilgamesh…Sakura…I’m ready.”

Gilgamesh nodded once stepping to the relief where Hakuno joined him.
Sakura stepped out, holding out one hand.

“Ok…Hakuno, please take my hand, Mister Gilgamesh, please take Hakuno’s.”

A hand, warm and strong, was in hers before she could turn to Gilgamesh, and she took Sakura’s one hand. It squeezed once.

“Sakura wall…coming down.” She whispered.

The relief shattered, and a gust of wind, or maybe time itself had them off of their feet in a moment, rushing towards a point of light. Hakuno didn’t even have time to scream as she lost her grip on Sakura's hand, and Gilgamesh pulled her to him, turning so that his back formed a barrier between her and the light that kept getting brighter and brighter until-

Light overtook her.

She was standing on water, wrapped in Gilgamesh’s arms against his chest and Sakura was nowhere to be seen. Around her, sakura blossoms floated towards the sky while chains dug into the ground. She spun around, but there was no way back. Around them, the water spread endlessly, glowing under a dark sky with no clouds and no data.

“Visitors confirmed,” a familiar, but now toneless voice said.

The voice made her jump and Gilgamesh let go of her abruptly.

“We need to find her and Sakura,” Hakuno hissed.

“Do not fret for Sakura. Focus on the enemy. If she made it to this point, she would be safest with the Moon Cancer occupied,” Gilgamesh said.

Hakuno turned around, clenched her fists and started walking, Gilgamesh moving beside her.

“Past,” the voice continued. “we have no plans for guests. Present—no visitors will come. Future—we see no necessity for visitors. Warning visitors 001 and 002 please expend with your humanity immediately. If you fail to heed his warning—So you’ve come, Senpai… I’ve been waiting for you. Look down, and you’ll see the Near Side campus. Doesn’t it look nice? Conditions are perfect for a bombing. This aircraft is turn to the final destination. Departure is yesterday. Estimated arrival time: 3000 CE. It might only be a moment, so take advantage of the benevolence of your goddess and offer some useless prayers. Of course, it goes without saying that that’ll never reach me.”

Even in something almost sounding like her, there was something dead in it. Like the Moon Cell was just putting together phrases and using them.

“I thought this place would be more disgusting,” Hakuno said, looking at the chains and the cherry blossoms. It’s quiet though…almost…beautiful…”

Gilgamesh kept walking, but his face was in a scowl.

“It is nothing more than the beautiful of a machine. There is not a single breath of life in this place, as every element of this place rejects the chance that life brings. I have seen many disasters and much of mankind’s evil. Even those you would consider evil originally had some feeling towards humanity. It might a benevolence turned only on themselves or a hatred towards others, of course, but it was emotion. This is different. This darkness is human, in a sense, but it is also a cosmos that rejects everything, holding no emotions whatsoever. A whole new ‘evil’ that surpasses all the evils of this world.”
In the half light, Gilgamesh’s eyes seemed to glow slightly, and his words sent a shiver up her spine.

So, this was the true nature of the Moon Cell: destruction without emotion. This was a curse, a place of pure negativity. Positivity, hope, connections, buildings, she was a deadly intruder to this place to bring that with her…or maybe both of them were…

“Yes. It appears that you once possess the capacity for self-observation, though it has been wholly rejected, King of Heroes. And you humans merely possess capacity, rather than the wisdom to put it into practice…”

“Senpai-” The voice sounded choked.

“You are nothing but a pathogen,” BB’s toneless voice continued. “You entered a perfect universe, and you are not welcome here.”

Hakuno stopped, and Gilgamesh stepped ahead of her, crossing his arms and looking up.

With a shimmer, something appeared.

It looked like a perfect blue cube made of smaller cubes, in a circle made by the eclipsed moon, and surrounded by Sakura branches. A small hole had been taken out, and Hakuno realized what those cubes of data had been… it had been pieces of this…

This was the Core.

This was the place she’d be trying to reach so long. They had found a back door into the Holy Grail.

But before it, cured in on herself was a familiar figure.

“Because you have ignored my warning and come here, I cannot accept any explanation you may offer. Unregistered Masters are targets for erasure, and Servants, even those who power is abnormal, can be disposed of here. I have given myself permission.”

BB straightened, and opened her eyes, which were glowing red with power and completely dead of all expression.

“Don—dissa—ru—way-“ BB’s voice was choked again.

She sounded disparate, and terrified.

Don’t disappear, run away!

Wha-

Then she twitched violently, her entire body spasming and going limp, into for the hanging head to start speaking again, and then straighten.

“Disappear, Hakuno Kishinami, you mass of anomalous data. I, the Moon Cell, acknowledge neither the possibilities of unknown variables nor feelings.

“So you’ve fallen so low as to boast of your failings like a god, Moon Cell,” Gilgamesh’s voice’s pure venom was enough to shake Hakuno from the horror that she felt watching. “Hakuno, this is no longer even the same entity as its host. We will give it its last rights here.”

He was assuring her. Telling her that this wasn’t even BB.
And now she as going to assure him.

“I know,” Hakuno said. “Whatever BB was, whatever she wanted…she had some humanity to her. She wanted something. …This…this is just malice. BB’s…just being used as a puppet. Something that the Moon Cell uses to broadcast what it wants.”

BB…was wrong, but she never could call her evil no matter how much Hakuno didn’t like her.

Evil didn’t really apply to the Moon Cell, since it was nothing but a machine.

This combination however…

“This is the end, BB. Whatever you wanted, whatever you tried to do…even for the sake of the person who you were at the start of this…”


And in that instant everything vanished.

The Core, the water, the blossoms, Gilgamesh…everything was suddenly gone, leaving Hakuno standing…nowhere.

“Gilgamesh!” Hakuno screamed, but the sound felt flat.

She tried to move, but…there was nothing to move…even her own body...

Everything was darkness, and she was all alone.
The First Time Hakuno Fought a Goddess

Chapter Summary

The Fight With the Moon Cell is more psychological than physical.

And the true villain appears.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh truly faced the Moon Cell was many years after he had first seen it. Gilgamesh was the first Heroic Spirit. The original human soul who had been held up but those after him and praised for his exploits. They had tried to deify him, but he had not accepted it. When his soul had be brought to this place and reconstructed, the Moon Cell had not understood what he was, and by the time he was conscious again, the Moon Cell was quarantining him, or rather, throwing him away.

A normal Heroic Spirit would have been devoured by that mud that filled the Far Side, but he had merely slept. He had not been angry. Such a war would have been beneath him. Rather, he had accepted this willingly. Better to be thrown away as refuse than to take part in such an insult.

Now however, as the world went black and Hakuno faded from existence, his anger was kindled, and old indignities were no longer tolerable.

The thing was before him now, using the puppet that the Cancer had become in order to stare at him with empty eyes.

“I have separated you from that irregular in order to ascertain your threat level without her influence. Your actions are illogical,” The Moon Cell intoned. “You were created to be the same as myself, as a device created for the observation, administration and regulation of humanity. Why do you stand against me when we are both aware that this is the fate humanity selected for themselves?”

In another time and place, Gilgamesh might have agreed. But he had seen none of that. Hakuno had showed him mediocrity, to be sure, however, she had shown him potential as well. And there was one final thing that the Moon Cell could not understand.

“You truly ask questions befitting your unparalleled incompetence,” Gilgamesh said. “That is the easiest of answers. Moon Cell. Humanity gives me great joy to observe. That is the difference between us.”

For how could a mere machine know the joy of living? The breath of a thrill from pushing past all barriers in a temporal existence. That was humanity’s gift alone.

“Such an inconsequential…”

“Fool!” Gilgamesh snapped. “You have observed humanity thorough its triumphs and failures, and yet you have still understood nothing. You hold to the most likely future but cannot see humanity’s true path.”
The one he had laid out at their feet.

“You also fail to understand my purpose. I was not made to observe and regulate. I was created to \textit{rule}. To stand as warning of unbreakable power. To destroy that which stood between myself and my objectives. My way of kingship is to allow humanity to build its own future, and to take and protect those treasures which I claim. The fact that you, a mere rock seek to compare yourself to me is an unforgivable conceit!”

The fact that that thing presumed to look upon him was another.

This conversation was ended. He had no interest in debating with a rock. The fact that it had sought to make some compromise with him, when it was undoing his work and had stolen his companion made him consider if such a thing were truly an entity build from logic.

Gilgamesh shot a sword towards him, a rather favored one that inflicted wounds that no healing art could mend, but it passed through her, to his annoyance.

“…Then you will remain,” The Moon Cell said, giving no indication that it was aware of Gilgamesh’s action. “You and that human will remain in this deathlike state until the end of time. You will never find her, as she is absorbed in malevolence of the Far Side of the Moon.”

The illusion vanished, leaving him in the darkness where he had been before. He knew this malevolence. He had slept in it for centuries, and now that Moon Cell attempted that again, to throw him away as refuse, and now…something worse was evident to him.

The Moon Cell was with Hakuno.

Gilgamesh did not fear. \textit{He had not} feared for millennia.

Yet…

He would not lose another companion. Hakuno was not permitted to die. Lest it be by his own hands! And he would never raise a hand to her!

He felt a gentle tug.

Gilgamesh looked down, noting that despite the absence of light, the Bond of Souls around his neck gleamed just slightly, and the seem feeling came, drawing him before.

Hakuno.

She was there, somewhere before him in the darkness, and…she must still be alive. He could sense her through the bond, though that feeling of fire was weakened. She was in danger, and he could not move or find her.

Where was she?

It took more strength than Gilgamesh liked to admit to make a single step through the darkness, but he persisted, forcing himself to take step after step, unsure if his efforts ever even being rewarded if this was some attempt of the Moon Cell to torment him as his form slowly broke apart.

It kept tugging at him.

“What does she matter to you?” The Moon Cell was still near, even if the darkness was so complete even he could not perceive it.
She is mine.

The answer came quickly, but something…

He ignored it.

Hakuno was his. She had given her life to him, chased him into darkness, and dived into his very soul.

And now, he would reach her, even if he had to pull himself out of Kigal itself again to get to her.

“Self-destruction? Ruin? The End? IT DOESN’T MATTER!”

A cry of defiance reached Gilgamesh, just like once, not so long ago, a spark in the darkness had woken him from his dreaming, and he would follow that spark now to that small flame which was becoming one of his two greatest treasures.

Everything between heaven and earth was his garden, and this thing had seen fit to lay hands on his treasure, and his companion without his permission.

The first time Hakuno fought a goddess was a psychological fight first.

She was alone in the darkness, unable to call out or even move as a familiar pressure was weighing down on her.

“Even a basic freeze was too much for the likes of you,” the Moon Cell said, her voice echoing in the darkness.

Hakuno tried to speak, tried to scream, but it seemed that her last word was going to be Gilgmeash’s name. Nothing managed to come out other than a pitiful, strangled sound that was amore animal than human. She couldn’t break this pressure. This wasn’t even like BB’s little punishment space. There wasn’t even the feel of velvet underneath her.

“You humans cannot alleviate this darkness. Especially not you alone,” the Moon Cell continued.

So, Gilgamesh wasn’t trapped there like she was.

Maybe he was…

“In any case…”

There was a crack of static and Hakuno wanted to cover her ears, but even that motion was denied her.

“‘Will you pardon humanity of not?’ This is the question that was set forth to all lifeforms on the Earth, from past to present. That final vote has resulted in a 49 to 51 passage of a motion to eradicate humanity. The opinions in your favor largely came from plants and mammals and birds. Fish were divided. The opinions against you came mostly from your own ranks. Possessing intelligence you all stated that you would never repent. Insects as well voted against you.”

What was it…
“Do you understand? You are the only things that prey on one another for profit.”

The voice was echoing in the darkness, broken up with...something, but without any kind of particular malice...other than that of a machine...

“You chose self-destruction,” the whisper was in her ear now.

...was that true?

Was the Moon Cell’s wish really just the true desire of humankind?

Hakuno felt sick.

What was she trying to save? If...if they didn’t want to save themselves?

If that was the case...what could she do?

How could she overturn the choice made by humanity...

Somehow, maybe because she was in the Moon Cell itself, she could see humanity’s atrocities. It was a long and bloody history, stretching back form the moment a man first gripped a stone to turn his rage against another for daring to have what he wanted through ages and ages of blood. Curses, carved out in more voices than she could count were around her, screaming for loses and injuries that could never be recompensed.

And then after that, they had all turned their unquenchable desires on the world around them, stamping down all those who tried to forgive them...

What was worth saving...

They couldn’t overrule this conclusion.

Something stirred in the darkness, but she couldn’t think. Couldn’t react. Couldn’t- Couldn’t-

We did it to ourselves...

We did it to ourselves...

We did it to ourselves...

WedidittoourselvesWedidittoourselvesWedidittoourselvesWedidittoourselves.

Should just...

Let it end...

Here...here...here...

I...

“There is nothing wrong with that at all!”

Somehow...of all people...Gatou’s voice came back. Strong and clear. Humanity was always grasping, always terrible...but...he claimed there was nothing wrong with that.

Another vision came.
It wasn’t just evils committed by humanity.

In the Moon Cell, she saw Gilgamesh, sitting on his throne, watching the carnage, but his eyes fixed on a point in the future… He’d let humanity’s desire run rampant, calling it ugly but fighting every evil he could to protect that far off light.

“My body might rot, but humanity’s world would still grow, its light unquenched. I even perhaps could and can now see a light of many millions of years to come.”

And another voice, a whisper, of something familiar but not…

“That which spread life, fighting mankind’s first fears, spinning stories around a dying fire. From the past to the future, and from the future to eternity. The land together with the sea and in turn the sky. They’ve walked together with humanity into hell itself, and, having gained the joy of friendship, they sang a song of paradise.”

This was wrong. The Moon Cell was wrong.

Her head was starting to clear.

“No…” A pained whisper choked out. “It’s not…that’s not…I was…I was supposed… I can’t…I can’t conceal…truth…the real vote…is 50-50…”

BB!

“Bugs…don’t like you…fish don’t get you…a lot of you hate yourselves…but you did it…humanity! There are…at least 10%…of idiots…who still hope for the future… Don’t be deceived…Senpai…ugh…you…why did it…I just wanted…”

It didn’t matter.


“Everyone and everything dies. I’ve been slated to die from the second I woke up in this game, and longer. For every second of my life! And no matter what, no matte how ‘unsightly’. No matter how ‘ugly’. I’ve always struggled to live on, no matter how clumsy I was, or scared to die. I made my way however I could, and so has most everyone else! And you know that, Moon Cell. You know that, BB!

You know humans want to live! Whatever you’re tapping into, it’s not what we really want! And no matter what the future of humanity really is, you’re not going to break it! I will NEVER stop defying you! In memory, in alternate timelines! ALWAYS!”

“This is impossible…” The Moon Cell said softly. “Your consciousness is returning… why can’t I… How can you stand… how can you affirm yourself? You know the future. There’s no way you should be able to stand up again!”

“So what?!” Hakuno yelled. “If the future is bad, we’ll change it!”

“Foolish,” the Moon Cell snapped. “Impossible. Incredibly unsightly. This…this should not be happening… Why? Why do you go so far just to suffer? How do you continue?”

Hakuno stared at it. Had really observed humanity for so long…and not understood them at all?

“That’s easy,” she said. “Because we don’t know anything. I don’t know the meaning of my life, I don’t know what it really means to be human. So, I won’t stop. Not until the end. And that’s the same for so many people. Jinako pushes on. Rin and Rani push on. We don’t want an ending! And if
things do end...we want them on our terms. Moon Cell, this is what it means to be human. Not knowing and struggling for the answers. And if you don’t know that, after all those years of watching. After all of those people you’ve watched fight for a single wish...then you’ll never know the answer.”

“Confirming Spritron Activity at the cellular level. Confirming recovering from Thanatosis...--this is...”

“Yes. That’s right. All you showed me is that we’re loved. That the plants and the animals cared about us. And that enough of us believed we’re worth something to keep going! And even if there’s nothing waiting for me be death, even if defeating you just means my death, I still can’t stop. If I was going to stop because some stupid machine told me something like this how could such an immature species survive in the first place!”

Golden light blinded her as a familiar laugh reached her ears.

“An immature species is it? Most conceited for a mongrel” the voice laughed. “But that is well. You have spoken the truth. Even if our time on this planet is reaching its twilight, human history is yet in it’s childhood! After all, look at the number of fools who do not know their place that is has produced? Clearly, humanity is far from maturity! These extraordinarily slothful human beings have yet to show their true value. Consequently, it is not yet time for judgment. Furthermore, Mongrel, it is ridiculous to argue cosmic law with a mere observational rock. You must check your impudence.”

He was here! He’d found her!

“Gilgamesh!”

“Moon Cell, you have ranted of your chosen future. Now, I will speak of the Beginning.”

Gilgamesh enjoyed the feeling as power rushed through Ea, activating his Noble Phantasm. “Oh, Elements, amalgamate, coalesce, and bring forth the stars that weave all of Creation! You will know the summit of truth! I am He Who Saw the Deep. I am he who sees what is truly gold, and I will show you the archetypal form of hidden treasure. Now, celebrate as you fight for your life, you mere distraction!”

The light shown brighter, and the force of it shattered the darkness around her, and she could see him. Jumping through whatever force had separated them, while fragments fell around him, and the world returned to the one she had seen before of waters and sakura blossoms falling in reverse and chains.

He’d come for her...

He landed in front of Hakuno, a smirk on his face as he held...Ea beside him. He was going to fight with it unsealed...

“Gil,” Hakuno’s voice was a breath of relief. “You made it...”

The Moon Cell had drawn back, watching him but...there was something else in them too. Something that Gilgamesh looked like he was enjoying.

It looked angry.

“That power...it’s at the same rank as my own...how wretched.” It hissed.

Gilgamesh glowered at it, his chin raised.
“Indeed,” Gilgamesh nodded. “A king does not show his true form, even unto death. However, my mongrel has wagered her life again and again to bring your atrocities to the attention of the crown, and to shake me from my torpor. If I do not answer her call, who will?”

That sounded like what his instinct at said…in the battle in Gilgamesh’s heart when everything had changed between them.

The Moon Cell stepped forwards, and that awful pressure increased. Hakuno raised her hands to her chest. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea…

Gilgamesh raised a hand, his left rather than the one that still held Ea.

“If the malice covering this place is indeed belonging to the world, than that is most convenient. Listen to my voice, all beings!” Gilgamesh shouted. “This woman is mine. Consider harming Hakuno Kishinami without my permission impossible from now until the end of time!”

Something tremored.

“What are you doing?” Hakuno whispered.

Why had he suddenly decided to-

“It is of no consequence,” Gilgamesh shrugged. “I have tired of the insolence of this thing, the Cancer or her offshoots grasping at you. As such, my warning is given.”

“You go so far to keep clinging to her,” the Moon Cell said softly, and Gilgamesh’s eyes narrowed dangerously at her words. “Truly humans are unnecessary!”

The BB’s body jerked again, like some demented child was grabbing her strings and twisting her around.

“I-I No…I…swore…I swore to protect her… That’s right…I…become…. This Moon Cell exists to-defend…defend…” the Cancer’s voice was weak as her battle was coming to an end. “Arg… but…what was I… What was I planning to protect..?”

BB…

“I will erase you here, and mankind’s future will be decided. There is no more need for heroes. Or for wishes. Disappear. Leave no trace. Leave no words for regret. Leave no room for sympathy. That is what you deserve.”

“No, you’re going to be beaten down,” Hakuno snapped. “Whatever BB did…whatever she deserved, it wasn’t this. And I’m going to force you to spit her out so I can deal with her myself!”

Gilgamesh laughed.

“Let us go, Hakuno,” Gilgamesh said. “We will use our power to its fullest. Loath as I may be to treat such a thing as an equal, you will know my true strength. This may be the first godslaying since the age of legend!”

The Moon Cell didn’t bother to wait.

“Domina Cronam Viminalis,” it said, waving the metal pointer into the crude form of a heart.

“Ea, sing out!” Gilgamesh commanded and pointed his weapon towards her, as a red energy came out of it in a surge of wild power.
So he could use it as more than just a Noble Phantasm…

The pink and red energies mixed, causing an explosion that forced Gilgamesh to jump backwards, holding Ea to defend.

Neither hesitated. The Moon Cell rushed forwards, clearly moving to attack, but was met by the glowing Gates on every side of her.

Weapons shot out, from every Gate, and Gilgamesh reached out with one hand, the Chain of Heaven lashing out and wrapping around her.

“CodeCast: Gain_con(64)!" Hakuno called, sharing as much of her power with him as she could.

A long time ago, Gilgamesh would have refused that connection, now…he devoured her energy so much that Hakuno reached into her inventory to pull out the steaming bowl of Mapo Tofu, and all but drank part of it before gagging and returning it.

And she was glad of it.

The Moon Cell struggled, but the Chains held fast. Her entire body flickered, but nothing happened.

“What…”

“Did you truly never bother to learn of my weapons?” Gilgamesh asked, his voice cold.

The thing stared at him, and then twitched again, and for a moment, her entire body seemed to lose consistency. The Chains recoiled, but did not return to the Gates, rather they wrapped around Gilgamesh’s arm again.

“Lowering your divinity to face me, very clever…”

And then the two had rushed for one another.

The metal pointer flashed, headed for Gilgamesh’s chest, but he had bent backwards, and then brought Ea down with a blow that caused the waters around them to tremble. The Moon Cell jumped, but when she touched the ground, she stumbled.

Gilgamesh had jumped back, raising a hand.

“Gate of Babylon!” he called.

“Domina Cronam Cealius!” The Moon Cell raised her pointer into the air.

While the weapons from the Gates rushed towards her, somehow, they didn’t seem to reach, and dissolved into dust.

“I see…” the Moon Cell said, its eyes on her. “So that’s why you cling to her. She powers you and you power her… it Is…different…to observe the actions of a Master Servant pair in this fashion. It is now useless information, but I will log it away. Disappear.”

She reached for BB’s chest, and with a gasp of pain pulled out the gaudy cup that BB had had when she’d fought Leo and Sir Gawain.

“Gilgamesh!” Hakuno screamed. “Codecast: addrevive(64)!”

Red text appeared in front of her.
No!

No she couldn’t-

“I have observed enough of your fights to see how you participate. You are no longer allowed to cast such things,” The Moon Cell said.

For a moment, she felt like her heart was stopping. She couldn’t do anything…


She poured the pink liquid on the ground, which started to glow as well, ripples spreading out to everything around her, and Hakuno could feel the power coming from that.

Gilgamesh was going to die.

She was going to die.

Gilgamesh had come so far to get her, and he was going to die… She…she couldn’t… She couldn’t let everything they’d done be worthless because she wasn’t able to support him properly!

“GILGAMESH!” Hakuno screamed, running forward, not even sure why she was doing it and-

A crimson flash close to his chest blinded her just for a second, and Hakuno raised her arms to shield her eyes, and Hakuno felt power drain from her so quickly almost made her dizzy like when she’d used MP or when Gilgamesh unleashed Ea…

She fed energy to it, feeling something burning and-

Then it was gone, and Gilgamesh was standing, arms at his side and breathing hard, but his crimson eyes were fixed on the Moon Cell, and he was grinning.

“It appears that your attempt to block my Master’s power has failed. She can reach me, even when you have sealed her codecasts.”

The Moon Cell watched them both, no expression on its face.

“Such ugly struggles,” it said. “I will continue then until you have no will left.”

Its sentence was cut off with a sharp cry as a slender hand erupted from the thing’s chest, black noise suddenly spreading all over BB as a light, dainty feminine laugh sounded.

She knew that laugh.

“Oh my, it appears that I just reached you in time…” Kiara Sesshouin said, as the body of BB collapsed with a small whimper.

She looked up at Hakuno and smiled. Anderson was beside her, but he was pointedly not looking at either Hakuno or Gilgamesh, but rather frowning down at the floor.

“Hello, my dear Hakuno. You’ve been so very, very busy, haven’t you?”

A chill ran up Hakuno’s spine. She had no idea what was happening, but-
Gilgamesh was in front of her, Ea still drawn.

“You died, Kiara,” Hakuno said.

“Oh that?” she laughed a little. “It was necessary for BB to leave me alone to wander freely. I’m…a little disappointed though, Hakuno. You don’t seem very happy to see me. I thought seeing one of the people you lost alive…it would make you happy.”

Somehow…she didn’t know how…but that felt like a blow.

“That depends on the manner you have revealed yourself to us,” Gilgamesh said, his voice cold. “What are you here for, nun?”

Kiara blinked at him once, and a slow languid smile appeared on her face.

“I’m here for the best things, King of Heroes.” She said. “You know…they call you King of Pleasure. Someone who experienced everything. I think…I want to take that title. I was hoping to see joy, but pain is alright as well.”

“Oh?” Gilgamesh asked, Ea was starting to raise.

Kiara took a step towards them, and Hakuno stiffened.

“What did you do?” Hakuno snapped.

“Oh, you haven’t guessed?” Kiara asked. “I just had little Passionlip help me a little. Her body was convenient, and she gave me no trouble playing my double after the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation at least until the very end. You really never used it, Hakuno?” she pouted. “I at least thought you might improve that man’s attitude towards women…”

“I did warn you…” Anderson said softly.

Passionlip…the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation.

And Hakuno suddenly remembered how, right before she’d died, ‘Kiara’ had pleaded with them to listen…and called her Miss Hakuno.

That had been Lip.

“That was you,” Hakuno said. “You interrupted and killed Passionlip.”

And Melt probably…

She’d been waiting…

“She just was made useful by becoming part of me. Rather as this thing will be…”

She looked down at BB’s prone form, who was raising her head.

“No…” BB mumbled. “No…if I don’t…”

She cried out as BB placed a foot on her back and pushed her down.

“Well, let’s finish this…” she said, the same smile on her face. “I’ve already found your cradle…”
“What did you do to Sakura!”

“Sakura?” Kiara asked, blinking at her. “Oh, the Ai…I used her of course. Isn’t that what you do with AI? Really this is your fault it’s taken so long to take her. If you’d just ignored her and stuck to your role…”

Hakuno felt cold. Sakura…who had come all this way to help them. Sakura who had started to really become a normal human girl…she was dead. Kiara had…absorbed her.

Kiara faced Hakuno.

“You really have been a problem, Hakuno, no matter how much I love you. You’ve always just…been in the way. I suppose it’s time—”

Gilgamesh started forwards. Even if he had just endured…

“Oh no,” Kiara said. “I’ve had enough of you in my way! Vanish to the opposite end of this galaxy!”

She thrust out an arm and Hakuno felt the power before a sudden mass of…something…started to hit her, knocking her off her feet like the wind of time before. Gilgamesh had been blown off his feet as well. He reached for her.

Her fingers just touched Gilgamesh’s, and-

There was another surge of power and-

“NO!” the scream was BB’s. “I won’t let you have her!”

BB outstretched a hand, pointing at Hakuno.

“I swore I’d protect you, and you wouldn’t die!” she screamed.

The water below her suddenly surged up around her, forming a shell. She didn’t even have time to think as it suddenly dragged her down, further and further from the light.

Chapter End Notes

Wooo new chapter! I know it's a cliffhanger again, but...I couldn't see another end. Kiara had to attack BB right when she was distracted. After all, she wanted to be the Moon Cell after all...

Next Chapter: Gilgamesh struggles to return and Hakuno faces the worst battle of her life.

By the way, I've got a Kofi! If you have some spare change and want to support me take a look at https://ko-fi.com/pryotra of course, this doesn't change anything and I'm still going to be posting as usual, but thanks in advance for any support you give!
The First Time Gilgamesh Realized his Feelings

Chapter Summary

Hakuno finally understand BB’s motives. Gilgamesh finally understands himself. Another first happens by surprise.

Chapter Notes

You're welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first time that Hakuno understood BB was something that shouldn’t have happened.

She didn’t know how long she was sinking into darkness, but somehow, maybe quickly maybe not, she lost consciousness.

She snapped awake sitting up and looking around frantically with a cry. For a moment, she could only look around wildly as everything came back to her. BB, the Moon Cell itself, and then Kiara appearing and…Gilgamesh.

BB had dragged her away, as Gilgamesh had been subjected to some attack. Blown to…somewhere.

She had to find a way back!

Hakuno looked around, finally taking in just where she was. She was sitting on a bed int the infirmary…no.

This was…this was the Near Side.

Instinctively, Hakuno looked at her left hand, and the faint marks of the used Seals. She wasn’t sure what that was supposed to prove other than that she’d apparently made it…

And Gilgamesh was…somewhere.

Hakuno remembered this place. She remembered the more clean, modern looking equipment, and the white sterile walls that always made her want to leave as soon as she could. It was dark and the fake moonlight was filtering through drawn curtains, but she knew this place.

How could she not? It was the first place she woke up after the preliminaries. There were still holes in her memories, but she remembered this was where she’d even learned what a Servant was.

But it was empty.

“Hello?” Hakuno called, looking around.

Maybe…maybe she could get help! She wasn’t sure how that would work, but there had to be
something, or some way…

There was no answer.

There should have been some people here…not everyone had been taking to the Far Side… Or Rin and Rani should have been able to get back. But the stillness in the air didn’t change. Hakuno got to her feet, moving to the lights and tried to turn one on.

Nothing happened.

With a sign, Hakuno slid the door open and then stepped into the hall. Like the infirmary, it was completely silent, and the lights didn’t work. Honestly…it felt like the world was holding it’s breath. Hakuno sighed, glancing at the window and then stopped.

Outside, she could see the moon, but the usual strips of coding…she couldn’t see anything. There weren’t even any stars. It was just a deep velvety darkness that seemed to stretch on, but beyond the fence of the school, where before there had just been code, she could see the faint outline of a little town.

The lights were all out, and everything was dark still, but she could see it faintly in the moonlight. The church wasn’t there either, or the courtyard that she’d seen Enkidu in.

This couldn’t be the Near Side.

A sound, faint like someone shuffling, echoed down the hall, and Hakuno took off, rushing down familiar corridors and down a flight of stairs. When she turned the corner after the stars, she paused. Where the door to the labyrinth under the school was, there was now a normal looking door. Emblazoned on it in bright letters were the words Student Affairs.

Unsure of if there was anything there, but not willing to ignore such an obvious change, Hakuno pushed open the door. There were a few desks and chairs and behind it another room with the door closed. Student Council was standing out in front of the new door.

That room…was both unfamiliar and perfectly familiar. A long wooden table stool in the center of the room, chairs around it. On one side, there was a whiteboard, currently with the words ‘Next Meeting’ on it, but that was blank. The walls were bare other than a single picture that was hanging on the opposite side of the window.

Hakuno stopped towards it, and then paused, feeling her heart in her throat.

It was a newspaper clipping. The words New Student Council was there, but the rest of the headline had been taken out, but what made her stop was the picture. Or rather the people in it. Rin and Rani were standing on opposite ends, big smiles on their faces. Leo was standing close to the center with his old carefree look on his face. Behind him, the dark shadow of Julius was smiling just slightly, Gawain stood in the back as well, wearing a suit and tie and a gentle smile. Sakura stood close to the center, looking shocked at her own luck. Even Shinji was standing in the back, looking kind of embarrassed, but hiding a smile.

In the center Hakuno found herself.

She was grinning, an easy smile that Hakuno had never made in real life on her face as she stood in the center of her friends, safe and happy, as if the Grail War had never been. Beside her, looking more or less amused and tolerant of the whole thing than anything else was Gilgamesh. His hair was down so his face looked younger, and he was wearing the same brown uniform that she and everyone else was in the picture.
“It’s a tacky picture, but I liked it.”

Hakuno whipped around to see BB. She was standing on the other side of the table and watching Hakuno. While usually she stilled full of life and energy, now she seemed weak…drawn. Her entire body was transparent, and slowly, gently, sparks of light were coming from her.

Their jailer, the AI had had gone rogue and trapped them there for what seemed like no reason, was dying.

“BB...”

“I’m a bit of me, yeah,” she said. “Welcome home.”

Hakuno blinked at her.

“At least, that’s what I wanted to say,” BB shrugged. “You’ve got a house, it’s a cute little apartment you live in while your parents are away. Everyone always comes over so you’re never lonely. And now of course, that stupid Servant’s always there too. I thought about giving him a place, but I didn’t think I was going to be able to rewrite his memories. Having a place in this world was about all I was going to do for him anyways.”

“BB...what...is this place?”

BB smiled. Some part of her usual personality was there.

“Haven’t you guessed yet, Senpai? Well, you can be pretty dense, so I’ll tell you. There’s no reason not to anymore…and I’m not the full BB so… I don’t feel really embarrassed or want to hide anything… This what I was going to do once I made it to the core. It’s all set up, just... waiting for the right data...” she drew herself up to her full height, something almost proud on her face. “The preliminaries I had you in were just temporary. You were supposed to sleep there until I could transfer everything here once I was one with the Moon Cell. You woke up, but... well... I decided to use that to make it more realistic. So you wouldn’t notice things weren’t changing. And... I could get to know you better...”

BB trailed off looking around at the walls around her.

“So, what you said about a serial being extended when I first saw you...”

She’d meant that. This was just a show to her, something to watch and enjoy...

“Yep!” she chirped. “I had all kinds of ideas too! Even if I couldn’t be there myself! You humans get bored really easily, and you like to do stuff with people and get close to them...” she trailed off, the look on her face almost closer to Sakura’s “So I wanted adventures. Maybe they’d be small and silly, and everything would always turn out great in the end, but... isn’t that the best kind of story? A happy end for every episode where nothing bad happens on a perfect little island... it’s a little dull, but... that’s better sometimes, right? It was going to be bigger than the school... more NPCs... I even had some plans for things in fall and winter once I became the Moon Cell. I even included that stupid Servant since I realized he’d just bust his way in after you...”

She paused and walked past Hakuno to look at the picture.

“I just... don’t know what went wrong...”

They stood in silence for a moment. Hakuno just watching her artificial girl as she looked at the picture, her eyes fixed on... what?
“You killed people,” Hakuno said. “You killed Leo and Julius, and I don’t know how many people you let die…”

“They’re not dead. They’re data. The Moon Cell doesn’t let things be thrown away. Besides, I froze them before they completely died. Leo was right thought. I lied. I wasn’t going to let him or any of them go. Humans need companionship, right? That’s what you told Lip and Melt. I’d have brought Rin and Rani back to normal too… But I guess…even then the Moon Cell was getting to me. It would have been better to put them back. Maybe you’d have stayed…maybe…but the Moon Cell, and that stupid…”

She sighed, shaking her head.

“How?” Hakuno asked. “That’s the one thing I’ve never understood. Why me? Why all of this? There were other people to focus on. Better teams. Leo and Gawain were the best. Gilgamesh and I only now just started to really be able to work together. So…why? Was it just because I was easy to get or…”

BB shook her head, and turned to smile at her over her shoulder.

“Geez your dense, Senpai. Sakura told you the real story too… Let’s say that there was a small rock that fell by the roadside. The rock…started screaming something, but the people who walked by that rock…they couldn’t hear it. After all, people don’t hear the voices of rocks. I mean, it’s not like the rock even know what it was trying to say. It wasn’t supposed to say anything. Someone had given it a voice, when it was really just…something that was there. But…then someone came by and picked up that rock. And she earnestly strained her ears, trying to hear what it was saying. That rock…it just screamed all the more, trying to convey emotions that even it didn’t understand, but that person…that incredibly kind person just tried all the more to understand even when it hurt them, and the rock was ashamed of it’s own incompetence.”

BB winced a little and shook her head.

“The rock thought ‘if only I were human, like her, I would be able to share this feeling.’ And then the rock understood. It started screaming the second it had a voice…because that’s what it had wanted for so long, but it had never even been able to conceive of it. But a witch had come, thinking to use the rock for some spell, and accidentally gave that rock the voice it had needed. Then that girl who’d picked up the rock smiled and said ‘then let’s go together’. So that girl held the rock, sitting with it and laughing. She treated it like her friend and equal. She treated a worthless rock like it was a person.”

She smiled at Hakuno, but there were tears starting to form in her eyes.

“It was really a miracle. I don’t think anyone like that was ever recorded in the Moon Cell either.” The smile widened. “That’s why, when White Sakura couldn’t bare it anymore because…she thought she was hurting you by keeping the days the same and keeping you from waking up…that’s why I decided the moment I was awake that this life was going to be for you! I’d make sure you didn’t suffer anymore, and that the Moon Cell never killed you. Even if it was something as simple as walking a stranger to the infirmary and sitting with them…”

And Hakuno remembered.

In the Preliminaries. Even the ones she’d been looping before, when she, Leo and Shinji had been good friends, Sakura had appeared on the way home, and no one had seemed to notice her. Hakuno had cried out, rushing to help he and taking her back to the infirmary, sitting with her to make sure things were ok.
She stared at BB, eyes wide.

“Anyone could have done that…” she said. “That wasn’t special, why would you…for that kind of reason…”

She’d reformatted the Far Side…for her. She’d made the Labyrinth and brainwashed and killed and…

“You’re right. Anyone could have, but they didn’t. And the fact it was so ordinary…it made it special. More than Leo or some talented ‘chosen one’ reaching out to me. Even if it only lasted a little while and it was a loop…just for that time I ‘was’. So…even when I reformatted things, and it tore me up…that was fine. I was something that didn’t exist from the start, so no matter how much it hurt, it didn’t matter…”

So that was the reason. That was all of this suffering. BB had been trying to protect her from dying. Because Hakuno had noticed her when she’d been hurt. Sakura had mentioned she’d been out of control and scared, and so she’d tried to defend the first person who was kind to her.

But it didn’t change what happened. And it didn’t change the other things she’d done.

“What about unleashing desire?” Hakuno said. “Why? Why attack random people who are just trying to live their lives…”

“…That’s why I took you here. That…i don’t know what the white one told you, but…the one who first hacked the white one and me…that was Kiara.”

Hakuno stopped. Somehow…that made a terrible kind of sense. She’d vaguely wondered why Kiara, someone she’d never even seen, was there. She must have been knocked out in the first round, when she’d been pretty out of it, but…

“What was she…”

“She wanted special treatment for the special chosen messiah,” BB shrugged. “She just got mad since we warped to get away before she could use her stupid Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation to get into my code and play with my head, but…human emotions are intense… She did come back and try to get at the white one, but she made sure to never be alone near her. Then the idiot got the bright idea to hack the Moon Cell, and was thrown away. I found her…and I did something stupid. She’d managed to make a place for herself. I told her that if she stayed in her corner and didn’t interfere, I wouldn’t kill her. I should have. She’d already put a virus in me the second I talked…and then the Moon Cell…and…I don’t know what she’s after, but she’s after something…so…”

So stay here.

That’s what she was saying.

“That’s what she was saying.

“I can’t,” Hakuno said. “I can’t stay here. Rin and Rani are both waiting, and so are the NPCs. I can’t fail and leave them in a world with nothing but the promise of dying of pleasure. You know that. You know me. I know you meant well, and…I know you didn’t mean for this to turn into what it did, but…I want to be able to try. Even if it’s rough and hard and I might die. Someone has to stop Kiara, and…”

BB sighed, and bowed her head, but when she looked up, she was smiling.

“I know… the real me… I’m sure she’d try to force you or freeze you, but… I can’t do much like that. I’m starting to fade anyways…but…Kiara’s got all of our power and the Moon Cell now…”
“It doesn’t matter.”

“You’re so dense,” BB muttered. “but…I don’t want to see you here alone surrounded with dreams that never came true…so…ok. I’m glad I was able to talk to you, Senpai. Even if it’s just this fragment. I…I feel like I can do what I’m going to do…a little easier…”

“What are you-”

But BB had already blown a kiss, and Hakuno was swept off her feet as the world collapsed around her, as she rushed to the surface.

“You’ve defied a god,” BB called. “Maybe now you can defy a demon! Know that all of us. Every version of Sakura that she took…we’re all rooting for you!”

The first time Gilgamesh understood his feelings was almost too late.

The nun, that depraved thing that had wandered the halls and somehow avoided his vision had appeared, stealing his victory, and using her full power, stolen from the Moon Cell, as well as the Alter Egos, the Cancer and Sakura, to strike a blow.

He’d reached for Hakuno on instinct and had been powerless to do anything but watch as his Master was taken from him for the second time in that battle, and even his own rage was worthless. The attempt to use the Chains to steady him was a failure and he was forced away from the Moon Cell, away from Earth itself, towards some distant star.

As a Heroic Spirit, breath was something like food and drink. An enjoyable luxury. This this time alone he was pleased that Hakuno had not been caught up in this, even as data, breath was necessary. For himself though, the only difficulty was returning.

Hakuno was safe for the moment, so it might be best to prepare-

A vision struck him.

Hakuno sitting obediently at the feet of that thing gazing up at her with an adoration she’d never shown to any including himself shining in her eyes. Her fire, her defiance, her persistence, her very soul lost to a darkness that he could steal it back from. Hakuno was dead in all ways that mattered, the husk there fit for nothing but to be killed in mercy.

But this time, she would not crumble to dust in his hands. He would be forced to behold her walking corpse as he ended her life himself.

NO.

Everything in his very being was repulsed by such a future. He would not permit it! He would never permit such an end!

Gilgamesh opened the gates. This time, one very large one, where a ship, or perhaps something like it, formed of pure light appeared below him. This was a thing barely conceived, but it would be. And the Gates transcended time and space. While it was not a thing he would call normally, the strain of a reach to the future was great, but this was no matter.

In space, one was suspended in nothing, but he had summed the thing to be below him, with enough
power from it's open pilots seat to draw him in and for him to find his seat. He would show this to Hakuno in time. Perhaps she would find it amusing.

Instantly, a false gravity took hold and he placed his hands at the controls.

He must hurry.

That thing he had seen was assured without his intervention, and he would not permit this fate to her! Her fate was laid out! Her future and life already purchased! He would spend this energy and this item and more! Gilgamesh would not fail! Not as he failed his friend! He would not allow this demon in the form of a woman to ever touch her! He would not allow his treasured companion, the woman he loved-

Love.

For a moment, Gilgamesh’s hands rested on the controls of the Ship of Light. The knowledge that rung out but felt so natural caused him to pause as the full weight of that single word came upon him.

Love.

Gilgamesh was well aware that love was impossible for him. He was a weapon as much as his friend was, created, rather than to bind, but to rule. To stand in warning as raging power. He existed to destroy, to rule, and to judge. There was nothing more. Love was a human, and sometimes a divine emotion. And Gilgamesh was neither.

Gilgamesh comprehended love of course, as well the benefits and pains it caused humans. He considered it well spoken of, but ultimately selfish, and to him, out of reach.

Friendship alone had been miraculous to him, and a treasure he refused to replace… Who, other then his friend could be his equal?

Yet…

This was more than not wanting her to die in such a manner or recognizing her value as a human or even as a Master.

It was a more selfish emotion.

Because he loved Hakuno Kishinami. It was why she could not take his friend’s place. She wasn’t a friend, nor even merely his companion. And if he did not rush to her aid, his Master would die, her very soul devoured by that creature, and her light extinguished.

He wanted to see her again. To be with her again. To speak of the follies of gods and men, of monsters that were long slain, of hopes not yet realized, of wordplay, of inconsequential things, of memories. And of a mongrel girl of average features who had once won the heart of humanity’s first and most absolute king.

He wanted to see her eyes light up when she tasted something sweet, or that dead look on her face when she was brought to the point where she had no understanding of how to react. He wanted her to experience every pleasure he offered and to forget the sorrow she had endured.

He wanted to see her live, and he would not permit that to be anywhere but beside him.  

*No one else was permitted to love her in her defiance.*
There was no one moment, or incident that Gilgamesh could acknowledge like the fight in plaza with his friend. It had happened so slowly, so gently, as things progressed, that it had been barely noticeable. It was as constant and true as gravity itself.

But he knew it to be true.

It should have been breaking, earth shattering...and maybe in some cases it was...but...it was more...a word...given to feelings he had known he felt for some time...

It was not the sensation spoken of in poems of all consuming fire and passion, but it was a fire. Her fire: a spark in the darkness, something small yet strangely strong, and he could neither deny or oppose this fragile, precious thing…

The Ship of Light, born to move at the speed of threat glowed in response to his intention, and he gripped the controls.

He would reach her in time!

That future would not happen!

He would tear apart more powerful gods than that nun could ever dream of becoming to keep her.

“Take me to her.”

After all…was that not love?

The first time Hakuno faced a demon was a first for something else too.

Hakuno emerged in a bubble of water and looked around with wide eyes.

The landscape had changed. While before, chains had been everywhere, alone with sakura blossoms falling in reverse. Now, lotus plants were poking out of the water, with small, pink glowing flowers that emitted a gentle, sweet scent that somehow made her feel sick to her stomach.

The atmosphere was different to. The Moon Cell’s malice was gone. Not it felt…saturated. Maybe it was good will, but the air was heavier than even Melt had left it, as if something was trying to smoother her gently.

But also…repel her.

This was a paradise for only person, because as much good will as it showed…all of it was really just meant for her.

Towers were rising in the distance as well…perhaps this was showing BB and Kiara’s mindsets…

But Kiara wasn’t there.

She ran forwards, looking for any sign of her, or even to see if she’d been lying about Sakura, but there was nothing. When she reached the core, the only person standing there, watching the glowing hole with his arms crossed was Anderson.

“You shouldn’t have come here so early,” Anderson said, not turning around and his deep voice echoing slightly. “At least wait for your Servant. Your spirit…she’s going to think you’re chasing her finally. What do you think you’re doing making her happier than she is already? It’s just going to make it worse for you.”
“What else could I do? The School is gone, and…”

“Right now, you might as well be a wild strawberry for her to-”

“That’s enough warnings, Anderson,” a familiar voice called. “You’re free to hate me all you like, but I don’t kindly to people touching my belongings…not anymore… Did I not say that when she managed to free herself to come to me, I would welcome her with my own hair, my own fingers caressing her and my own lips?”

It was coming from the core!

And it was awful. Kiara’s voice had always put her on edge. There was just…something about it that always made her feel dirty, but now, listening to her voice that seemed to have doubled, or maybe tripled.

“Do whatever you want,” Anderson snapped, turning away from the Moon Cell. “I’ve already poured my whole Noble Phantasm into you while you feasted on those AI. Damn Vermin, show your face already and be done with it!”

The only response was a light laugh.

“That might be true,” she said. “I’m something of an insect that can’t fly unless it takes nectar from all the flowers, but that’s how gods are. And now, with all desires poured into me…I can be reborn to new heights! Any and all beings with life carry the possibility of being Buddha. So all things carry the nature of Buddha. All beings, regardless of affection or cruelty, let’s use your lives solely for my sake!”

The Moon Cell started to glow, and the thing that had once been Kiara emerged like some evil butterfly from a chrysalis. Gone was the nun’s outfit and habit, replaced by a thin dress slit almost entirely up the sides and open at the front to show her lace underwear and high boots. Her head covering was thrown back, no longer covering anything but a large set of crimson horns that emerged from somewhere behind her hair. Her hair was dark and shiny and free of constraints, and she wore a look of total satisfaction, as she sort of glided down.

So that was Anderson’s power. The feeling from her…it reminded her of the first time she’d seen Lip and Melt, and that made sense, by absorbing them, she’d taken on different goddesses as well. She was essentially a Servant. Or maybe an Alter Ego herself.

It was a left of self-modification that should have been impossible for any human, but with Anderson’s help…

No.

Kiara hadn’t been human for a long time. Even before absorbing BB, Sakura, Lip and Melt, she’d devoured people. Melting and reforming souls to her liking with the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation. Or maybe…maybe she’d always lacked something.

Hakuno didn’t know, and she didn’t care about her past. There was no reason, no understanding, no justification for this. She was the cause of BB’s actions, and of what was happening to people…

Kiara touched the water, and with a sudden ripple out, the water turned as red as blood, and Hakuno’s breath caught in her throat. Something was wrong. She…she couldn’t think straight.

“Oh…so…this is my body…my real self…” she breathed.
It was hateful…and beautiful…and it felt like Hakuno’s body and spirit were turning inside out.

“I thought I would be something a little more abstract and yet…” she sighed delicately. “My…to think it would be so shameless…I’m sure even you will see be as a slut, won’t you, Hakuno?”

She breathed the name again, and Hakuno wanted to throw up, to run to her, to…to…

“Why…is that…the thing…” she hissed, but…the retort wasn’t coming out.

This was the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation, Hakuno realized. This was how people had felt when she’d used it on them. Like they were being torn apart and someone was trying to put something together that wasn’t her and somehow she was so ugly and so pretty and…and…

Hakuno raised a hand and bit her finger. The pain that shot though her hand was enough to make her wince, but it cleared her head, at least a little.

Kiara was raising one hand as if trying to hide her appearance, yet somehow showing it off all the more.

“Oh, Hakuno…I really can’t fight you with this kind of appearance… Please…have mercy…”

It wasn’t a plea.

“Antagonism is something that comes through ignorance. Approach me… Let’s enjoy talking in this place…”

She reached out a hand, and what little clarity she’d gotten back vanished. It took everything she had not to just run to her, and throw herself at her feet like a good dog. After all, she was the only human. She was the only thing that had ever been human…

NO!

Some part of her was screaming. Some part of her was screaming and would keep on screaming even if everything else in her…

It was all she could do to keep still. Because if she moved. If she took one step forwards…

Kiara stepped forwards.

“This is really your fault it got so far you know,” her voice was a like a noose made of silk. “My appearance…the deaths of those people…I could have prevented all of them. I could have saved the whole school. You could have been there, safe and happy and waiting for me to return to you… That’s all I wanted. To help you, to make you feel better…to make you all feel better. But you had to get involved. That AI attached herself to you, for no reason other than that you just so happened to be there and do some perfectly average thing. Those little machines followed your words like ducklings. Those Alter Egos, BB, everything was all around you. Everyone pursued you. Even that priest dared to threaten me! That assassin should have come to me! Those NPC’s should have come to me! I would have given them peace and safety, but they all followed a lost little false messiah and a golden tyrant. If you’d just been a good little insect and played your part… It’s not as if you ever did anything important anyways….”

She took another step.

That was right.
There was nothing special about her.

There was nothing unique about her.

Hakuno Kishinami was an empty girl with no memories and only a desire to ‘live’. In the face of Kiara…a messiah…

“Anyone could have, but they didn’t. And the fact it was so ordinary…it made it special. More than Leo or some talented ‘chosen one’ reaching out to me.”

BB’s words came back to her. She wasn’t special. She was just human.

“Release_mgi(c)!" Hakuno gasped out.

A small pulse of magic shot out from around her, making Kiara freeze and gasp in what should have been pain.

“You still have the spirit to fight?” she asked. “Of course you do. You like things difficult…don’t you… This is silly. You know what’s going to happen. Why fight? Drown in this obediently. I honestly love you, Hakuno. Don’t you see? I’m only mad because you’re being difficult. You’ve made me do such things for your love… You…BB…Sakura…those little egos…everyone at that school. If you say you’ll go back, I’ll rebuild it and you can live forever. I’ll prepare some new stimulus whenever you want it, as much as you like. The Holy Grail War, a fight between lovers, the extinction of humanity, whatever you desire… That suffering…those screams…those are pleasure too. You’ll be kept alive by me, and I’ll be kept alive by you, isn’t that perfect? Wouldn’t that make you happy to finally be useful to humanity? Stop making me do these awful things…”

She was in front of her now, and through the haze of Hakuno’s thoughts, she saw her hand raising.

“Re..rele…” the worse weren’t forming.

Please…

She didn’t even know what she was pleading to. All she knew was that the second that Kiara touched her, the second she felt that woman’s touch…

Everything would be over.

Tears burned at the edge of her vision as everything in her body and soul was torn between running to her and running from her and everything was going black.

“Re…re…”

Some part of her was screaming…and she’d never stop screaming…

Gil…ga…

“Your ugliness has reached its peak, hasn’t it, creature. For a mere piece of rotten meat, a parasite gorged on the blood of others, to even speak of good and evil deserves the absolute punishment of death!”

Chains snaked around the outstretched hand, wrenching it backwards with a force that caused Kiara to cry out in true pain as others wrapped around her body, glowing brightly as two arms, familiar, warm and strong, pulled her up into them, holding her closely. Around his neck, the Bond of Dreams was pulsing brightly, shielding them from that…thing…
Hakuno gasped out, instantly wrapping her arms around his bare chest and holding like it was a lifeline. For once, she didn’t care how stupid she looked, or that he was either going to tease her or reject her ‘advances’ again. He was there. Gilgamesh had come, and he was alright and…

Kiara gasped in pain and shock.

“No! This can’t be! I’m certain that I blasted you to the far ends of the galaxy!” She nearly screamed. “Even if it’s conceptual space, you can’t just…travel it! Or are you saying you can travel faster than light!”

Gilgamesh laughed, but his grip on Hakuno tightened.

“You little fool! Did you truly think I did not possess a Ship of Light within my treasury? While I prefer the treasures I knew in life, I possess understanding of all of the new ones.”

“…new…”

He was laughing harder, his shoulders shaking with mirth and he grinned done at Hakuno.

“Have you heard such stupidity, Mongrel?” he laughed. “Did you not understand what the Gate of Babylon is when you were so bold as to lay hands on my Master? Did you never wonder why the King of Uruk’s Noble Phantasm was called the Gate of Babylon? It is because you, in this modern time, have mistaken both names. Babylon was named for Uruk, meaning ‘city’. For how could such a thing that had just been created ever be called anything else but its name? The Gate of Babylon, is the Gate of the City, The Gate of Civilization, the Gate of Humanity and Human Ingenuity! If there was some method that humans would ever conceive to cross far distances in a breath, then it will exist within my Treasury, for if, in my life, I accumulated all the treasures of humanity to judge them, then the Gates would ever expand to contain those new dreams of humanity! It is precisely because I possess every prototype of humanity’s conception and use them to stand against abominations such as yourself that I am the King of Heroes!”

He smiled, that crescent of malice again, that look that made Hakuno think of gold and blood and something too old for her to know.

“Furthermore, I have removed the lock from my treasury. In this single battle when the very soul of my Master is at stake, I will shed all vestiges of my glory to show her my full support!”

He looked down and smiled at her. The smile warming to something that was almost human. That coldness and cruelty gone for just a second…

“Gil…” Hakuno breathed. “You got here just in time…”

“Of course!” Gilgamesh said, but he didn’t move to set her down. “Did you truly believe I would leave you now?”

“I…”

Hakuno didn’t have the time to reply, since there was a cry of anger as Kiara struggled to move closer. But those chains seemed to tighten…

Oh, humans let us restrain the gods above…

A whisper…what…

“What is this,” Kiara breathed.
“The Chain of Heaven is the authority of the King to bind the divine,” Gilgamesh looked up and smiled at her. “You will find, given your new nature, it is inescapable.”

“No-no…this…this is too much…” she was trembling in the Chains, but while before that whole show would have done…something…to activate the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation, now…

“Is there no other trick you know? Why would I accept a piece of rotten meat? A waterskin filled with holes? A hollow statue encrusted in pyrite? An overripe fruit? Your rage is nothing more than the wailing clown.”

Anderson stepped up, his eye flickering from Hakuno, who Gilgamesh still hadn’t set down, to Gilgamesh.

“So, you’ve made it in time, huh?” he asked. “It’s truly the arrival of the star of this drama…isn’t it Gilgamesh?”

“Of course, Caster. Did I not tell you I would be playing the lead! You seem claim. I suppose things have played out well for you, but now…it must only be blank pages. That is no matter. My mongrel is defiant and will not back down due to mere lack of strength. And now…you may enjoy a taste of a revision born of the one meant to bind Heaven and Earth but rather sundered them!”

He didn’t let go of Hakuno.

“Gil, can you move?” she asked, not sure of if being apart from him would mean Kiara’s power would start to work again or…

“Should the time come I will place you behind me,” Gilgamesh said. “For now, recover your strength. This is sufficient for this battle….”

Anderson watched, and a strange laugh started to bubble up. He sounded…incredulous.

“Your plan has completely failed, Kiara. This little lady won’t be taken in by your charms, and now you face the Golden Tyrant whose treasure you meant to steal...”

Kiara sighed, but her eyes were hard as she looked at Gilgamesh.

“I suppose this is karma. I didn’t want to erase you, even if you pushed me to this…I suppose then I’ll have you become the first joy for me to become a god!”

Gilgamesh sneered.

“Become a god?” he spat. “You have done nothing worth that. You are merely a woman using ‘love’ to excuse your actions. Fear of death, and the desire to rule. That is all you are.”

Kiara shook her head, even bound, there was something deadly to her.

“No…no you don’t understand. Being a god is the result, but this is just desire. I want to be the receiving plate for the pleasure for everyone on earth. As the only human, that’s right for me. I’ll be the escape valve for all living beings to end their lives in joy. That is my salvation. I will achieve the greatest pleasure ever, in one moment, with all of those millions… So you, see…I had to be a god! I don’t want to rule…that’s not fun. And if I die, I won’t be able to enjoy anything… You really don’t understand pleasure, if you never tried this…”

Gilgamesh’s look was pure and undisguised revulsion.
“She just…wants to feel good. That’s the difference between her and BB,” Hakuno whispered. “BB’s actions were all about preserving herself so that she could save someone else. Kiara…just hurts people for the sake of her own pleasure.”

“That’s right!” Kiara smiled, something in her eyes that made her feel gross. “You do understand me! I just can’t hold back anymore. I want to ruin you with my own hands so bad…and break that tentative bond between you… Then…I’ll descend on the Earth, and raise one final moment of extreme pleasure…and indulge everyone and through them myself!”

Light started to come from her body, blinding Hakuno and there was a sudden rush and clank as the Chains…seemed to move to stay close to them.

“You really are unmoving…” Gilgamesh muttered.

But another laugh cut through, Anderson seemed…joyful.

“This is the final chapter, Kiara, you incarnation of evil!”

“Of course!” Kiara called out, she was floating, her body in a familiar pose, and then it changed, and she…spread her legs…. “The time of redemption has come!”

Hakuno froze, her eyes wide, but Gilgamesh didn’t, he spun her around, blocking her from seeing what Kiara was doing with his body, as the stars around her suddenly seemed to turn white and something was pricking at the edge of her mind.

For a second, Hakuno and Gilgamesh’s eyes met.

“To grant a single wish I shall accept every life. That which envelops the vortex is the Ten Thousand Colored Stagnation. The enlightened Bodhisattva’s pleasure heaven.

Her voice was getting louder, and that feeling was getting worse, making her feel sick again, even as the light from the Bond of Dreams continued to pulse.

“Hakuno, I know-”

“Wh-”

“Now, come inside the lotus flower. I welcome all inside me! Amitābha Amidala, Heaven's Hole!”

Hakuno never had time to finish asking the question. The chant was over, and even if she couldn’t see what Kiara was doing, the moan of pleasure gave her a horrifically good idea, but before she could think, before she could say anything, a wave of something was crashing down on her.

Suddenly, Gilgamesh’s lips were locked on her own.

Chapter End Notes

So much talking. Sooo much revealed...Kiara...is NOT going to be happy with this little display of affection that most certainly doesn't include her. I've been planning that cliffhanger for a while... And I'll admit that part of the reason for this is because I didn't want to write Heaven's Hole. At anyrate, I really, really hope you enjoyed!
As a reminder I've got a Ko-fi at: https://ko-fi.com/pryotra

Thanks for any and all support! This story has gone further and done more than I ever dreamed that it could. We're on the final stretch now, but I'm looking forwards to all kinds of new stories in the future!
The First Time Gilgamesh Kissed Hakuno

Chapter Summary

The final battle. The last goodbye.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh kissed Hakuno was hardly his first kiss.

Nor was it in the preferable time or place.

He embraced Hakuno tightly as the creature’s power washed over them, focusing every ounce of his being on this one moment, even as that Noble Phantasm began its assault.

Heaven’s Hole.

An anti-world Noble Phantasm born through devouring the life force of others in the form of carnal pleasure, in order to satiate one’s own desires and give them power. If used properly, it could be able to extinguish all life on any planet. After all, was not all life capable of experiencing pleasure?

It was something only an overripe sack of meat like that woman would have conceived of. He had meant to warn Hakuno of his own intent, but the time for conversation had ended.

The wave of that unholy pleasure washed over him, but he continued what he was doing, focusing on the feel of Hakuno’s lips, and the taste of her mana. Even as the air grew heavy and his mind grew hazy, and it felt as if his very soul and consciousness were melting, and he could barely recall his own name, he continued, rejoicing as the one he held did not shy away from him as lights danced and melted though his eyes were closed.

It was sweet, and some sensation was unlike any ever before, and all that mattered now was familiarizing himself with her mana’s taste, and that of some other things.

If he could hold this, keep this, then a shred of him remained, even while everything else seemed to fade, this moment stayed. He kissed her deeper.

Even as some part of him felt something draining, the mana that she offered to him so willingly continued to fill that which was taken from him, offering enough and more…

Finally, his hands caressed her hair, fingers running through it instinctively.

The sensation of her form, the taste of her mana, and a new elation that not even the very incarnation of carnality could touch held him together. He continued, hungrily until a faint tremor from her made some part of him awake through a haze of pleasure and joy.

She gasped for air, but that seemed hazy as well.

Still, some part of him shook himself enough to open his eyes as the lights and sounds of that infernal woman pleasuring herself finally began to fade and he was able to behold Hakuno before him.
The disgusting feeling of being his very soul melting into a pleasure he could not stave off vanished, and he shook his head to clear it, as he comprehended just what he had done without even fully comprehending it.

The intent had, of course, been a mana transfer, in hopes that the effect would case him

For just a second, the two looked at one another, as the actual consequences of what had been done seemed to finally come upon them.

He had, at some point, set Hakuno down to better act, but she had not let him go completely, at least not until her mind caught up to her.

Hakuno’s eyes grew wide and slowly, a rosy hue came over her normally pallid face.

“W-what…”

“A mana transfer!” Gilgamesh all but snapped. “As well as a distraction!”

He would not have it recalled that he had been swept away by that woman’s disgusting power and needed her to better steady himself. Love changed nothing!

He found he…regretted those words as a relief he wasn’t fond of came upon her. Just as he regretted her hasty step backwards.

“How?” Hakuno shook her head violently. “Right. I can do mana transfers now? That…that was a lot of mana…”

“She’s about to attack!” Caster’s voice cut through his thoughts, and Gilgamesh whirled to face the nun. Moving to open the Gates.

The creature’s eyes were narrowed in fury.

“How?” she asked. “How could you…how could you resist that. I had Anderson write it for you! How are you still sane!”

For that one instant, the attempts at seduction were gone, leaving a spoiled child beyond.

“Is that not obvious, creature?” Gilgamesh asked. “You speak of pleasure, but you know nothing of it other than the basest form. You know nothing of joy, so how could your pleasures ever touch me! Rather, it was so dull, I took the time to test if my mongrel was prepared to transfer her mana to me!”

That was a far better answer than being so overcome by her attack, it was all he could do to kiss Hakuno in order to maintain his consciousness and soul. But it was partly true. Her mana helping him heal aside, the sensation of kissing Hakuno…was unlike those others…

He would not think of this!

“Then I’ll continue-”

Her voice was cut off with a sharp and confused gasp as another voice sounded, clear yet far off as though the speaker was not entirely present.

*I warned you!*

Gilgamesh new that voice. It was high, light and feminine, with a proud edge that Gilgamesh had had no great desire to hear again.
The second abomination, Meltlilith, the creature of knives and metal appeared, her form all but gone and barely visible, but her eyes were narrowed dangerously. Yet as she gazed at them, that pride was turned entirely against her foe.

“Melt?” Hakuno’s voice was soft and surprised.

“I will not permit my power to be used like this!” the Ego snapped. “I am the incarnation of please, and that power is meant to protect her!”

“So…you’re still alive…” Kiara whispered.

The ego laughed, but her eyes fixed on Hakuno, the same light as before glowing in them.

“Of course not. Hakuno, I think I understand a little better, feeling her selfishness. When I see you again, things will be different.”

“How I wish—”

But there was no time for words. With a final smile, the Ego vanished, her entire form disintegrating into sparks of light.

Kiara staggered, but regained her footing. It appeared that this newly made goddess was suffering from rebellion in her own ranks. He could sense the amalgamation of goddesses bound with Caster’s power was starting to move, but something vital was missing.

The aura around that woman, the one that all but melted the will of all but the most determined, was gone.

“It doesn’t matter,” the thing muttered. “I don’t need her power. I have enough with Anderson and the others.”

“Her attacks are completely mental!” Caster shouted. “Everything she did was designed to counter you! Do not use your Noble Phantasm!”

Enuma Elish would take time, and if, for a single instant, he lost his control…

“That’s enough from you, Anderson!” Kiara called back. “You might want to see my defeat, but you’ll be disappointed. Now, help me!”

The Caster with an annoyed look, brought out his tome of children’s stories, opening it and causing it to glow.

While his powers were mostly useless on the battlefield, that man’s actions as an author have some value to those who understood it. He had aided Kiara to reach this point of evil, and had ability to aid and nurture. As much as he might dislike the actions of his Master he was bound by contract and Gilgamesh highly doubted the man had the power to resist a Command Seal.

It would be more advantageous, ignoring any objections that he was certain that Hakuno would make, to aim to kill the Caster. However…he was now in the position of the Master, standing in the back, watching the battle as his own did….

It had nothing to do with displeasing Hakuno.

When the spell came into effect, the creature moaned in pleasure, a smile forming on her face, and she stretched her arms out wide, in some parody of a mother’s embrace, as behind her, the shadows
of misery and desire reached out around her, like so many arms, reaching and grasping out to him, as
an object like a demon’s skull appeared behind her.

So, this was all the evils of the world transformed to bare carnal desire. He should thank this woman
for the next experience, but it was hardly worth the time or the breath.

“Gil can you…”

“This is no matter,” Gilgamesh said, summoning Ea. “Demon or not, she has consigned herself to the
divine, and thus is subject to my judgement. Ea!”

“Diamond Realm The Wisdom Fist Mudra!” The creature made a few gestures with every arm
following suit, as a small, shimmering shield appeared, taking the brunt of the attack, but as the arms
began to make another attack, Gilgamesh rushed forwards.

“Codecast: gain_mgi(32)!” Hakuno called, as power flowed to him.

He swung down Ea, sending a blast of energy to cause the creature to have to fall back with a gasp.

As he was closer, the arms, which had before continued reaching out to Kiara in some form of
supplication, began to thrash wildly, attempting to grip him.

“Gate of Babylon!”

Spears, swords, axes and every other high quality treasure he had shot towards her, and the creature
used her arms to fend off the blows, and shield her. Gilgamesh grinned as his weapons, including the
pale white prototype of the Gae Bolg ripped through some of the shadowed hands, which vanished
into the dark. Some returned, but most did not.

“More!” the creature cried out.

“Seriously?” Caster sighed. “I’m strengthening her offense!”

“Code-“

“Save your strength, Hakuno!” Gilgamesh called out. “This woman’s power is not one defense can
counter!”

She did not fight physically. Every blow was one that did magical damage. Thus, the defense that
Hakuno provided would not be enough. Not in this case. His only hope would be to defeat her
quickly before she was able to resume that vile power of hers.

He was certain that the same technique to defend would fail a second time.

As the Caster held out his book again, the remaining shadowed arms burst forwards, and Gilgamesh
held Ea aloft, each of the segments spinning to produce a wave of power before he rushed forwards,
pushing past her hands.

“Sing out, Ea! Sing of true power!”

The energy of unmaking spiraled out, crushing another hand, but two more emerged and struck true,
one sinking into his chest but the other was bound by the Chain of Heaven and crushed into
darkness. Still, the blow was something that dazed him ripping out some of his life, but he managed
to instinctively dodge the second blow, blasting another out of the way.

But while she attacked, her hands were busily forming seals.
Gilgamesh opened the Gates, but only those shadowed arms were hit as the monster finished her incantation.

“Daizushi Chiya kanpo!” the creature called out as an orb of brilliant light emerged from those seals and began to hover around him.

There was little he could do by brace himself as the thing became to shine brighter.

NO!

The high pitched shoat sounded almost akin to the first but it was more girlish.

The first abomination appeared. The one of flesh and claws. She was standing before the woman, those claws outstretched into a shield.

The orb vanished in a spark of light and the nun gasped out in shock on pain.

“I-I won’t let you!” the first Alter Ego screamed. “I won’t let you use me for this!”

“Lip?” Hakuno called out. “Lip, I’m sorry, I didn’t know that was you!”

The ego, the one that had almost become human, smiled slightly.

“It’s alright, Miss Hakuno…it all happened so fast… You couldn’t have known. But…I’m glad…” she said, wincing as sparks started to come from her body. “…I still don’t really know what love is, but…I like you, Miss Hakuno. So please live. I’m sorry for all the trouble I caused you and Mister Servant. Maybe…maybe if reincarnation exists…maybe one day we’ll really be friends, and you can hold my hand, but…know that…I’m really, really hoping for your happiness!”

With a whisper of a heart that was somewhere between beast and human, the Ego vanished to a cry from Hakuno.

“I don’t understand you, Hakuno,” the nun said, frowning as she reached out one hand and nothing happened. “You reach out to such worthless things.”

“They weren’t worthless,” Hakuno’s voice was cold.

Gilgamesh glanced back to her where she stood back straight, glaring back at Kiara with cold fury.

“They were wrong, and they did terrible things. All of them, BB included, but they never even fully understood the pain they were causing. They were nothing like you.”

“Of course not,” the nun laughed lightly. “I’m human after all. Even after becoming a god, that doesn’t change.”

Gilgamesh could only laugh at the utter audacity of this thing to refer to herself as ‘human’ in any capacity. And he laughed long and hard until, in his rage that she could even think that she had any ties to humanity he was able to behold her and smile in fury.

“Human? You actually maintain that presumption, woman? To be human would require for you to desire more than to be the ‘vessel’ for pleasure. There is nothing ‘human’ in you, woman. You are nothing more than a goddess, a worthless lump of eternity. You are not fit to be called ‘human’.”

The woman’s eyes took in him and then turned to Hakuno with obvious hunger.

Gilgamesh stepped to the side, blocking Hakuno from her view.
The woman narrowed her eyes at him, and the arms shot forwards, only to be met by another blast from Ea.

He was pushing her back.

The Alter Egos had torn themselves to shreds to withhold their power from her, and slowly, those special skills of these were fading. It was not the combined powers of her own strength, Caster’s Noble Phantasm and that of BB and Sakura, however, if those two had emerged than it was something to hope that the other two would as well.

Would he be able to make the journey to Hakuno if Sakura vanished…

No! He would not think of this. Not in battle!

The nun suddenly pulled back, the arms suddenly surrounding her like some shield of darkness, leaving Caster alone facing him.

“She’s preparing to use her Noble Phantasm again!” Caster shouted.

The man’s clear concern for them, or likely for Hakuno, stayed his hand.

But there was little time to prepare a counter strategy. Gilgamesh had only opened the Gates for a preliminary assault when suddenly, she had burst out, the arms shooting forwards with a power that was truly shocking. The Gates shifted their trajectory of assault and fired, and the Chain of Heaven bound everything that had not been destroyed by the immediate assault.

For a moment, there was nothing but shining dust as his treasures returned to him and chains, but then two shadows shot from the wreck.

Gilgamesh held out a hand in defense, but only one came to him, while the other moved past him.

Straight to Hakuno.

Gilgamesh wanted to turn, meant to turn, but his body wouldn’t move. A signal word, written in gold appeared before his eyes.

*Paralysis.*

This was the Moon Cell’s power, or rather…*BB…*

“That should keep you from repeating that…” the creature muttered. “Now…let us attempt this again…”

She was gathering strength, preparing to spread her legs and resume Heaven’s Hole, and he was powerless to stop her. That vision, the thing that had permitted him to even comprehend what his feelings towards Hakuno were…

He was going to lose her the moment he fully understood her value to him.

Would he forget her? Would returning to the Moon Cell’s Throne of Heroes cause something so engrained into his soul to be lost? Or would, conversely he be forced to exist with these memories?

He was not sure which option he despised more.

No! He would not permit this end, he had already sworn that. Even paralyzed, there had to be something, some Noble Phantasm…
A crimson glow began at his chest, and Gilgamesh’s eyes managed to look down to see the Bond of Dreams… it was glowing one final time.

“It is a reserve of power, meant to heal, to support when all seems lost, to shield from an attack that cannot be avoided.”

His own words returned to him.

When all seems lost…

As the depraved nun spread her legs, preparing to accept the entire world sexually.

“NO!”

Somehow, the word managed to come forth, and an answering cry sounded as it seemed that Hakuno’s voice was released as well.

The light remained, even as he heard the started cry from the nun, and with only his mouth capable of moving, he knew the chant to give form to the Bond of Dreams last power. It gave power, but it also acted as a final defense. It might happen only once, but that was all they needed.

“That spark which lit the darkness, ever enduring,” he said.

“The hope that never left, come what may,” her voice responded

“Through trial and distrust.”

“Through fear and despair.”

“This tie cannot be broken. Bond of Dreams.”

Their voices together finished the chant as the brilliant light shot out from around him, building him to the nun’s attack and deafening him to her chant. It was warm, and while he could hear Hakuno gasp slightly, her power did not fault, and the power held.

When the light cleared, the paralysis had ended, as had Heaven’s Hole. The Bond of Dreams lie cold against his skin for the first time. That wasn’t right…

Gilgamesh whirled around, ignoring the nun who was staggering and breathing hard herself to face Hakuno.

She had staggered and was crouched down trying to catch her breath.

“I’m…fine…” She whispered. “I just…I can’t codecast…I…”

For a moment, Gilgamesh watched her, but then gathered her into his arms.

“Come, Master, I will have you see this victory,” he told her, permitting himself to enjoy that she relaxed slightly as she learned against his side while he balanced her with one arm around her waist.

He turned to face the depraved nun, who, even as a demon was starting to look tired and confused.

“Why…?” she whispered. “Why hasn’t that worked. Why did all of you chose her over me?!”

“There wasn’t a competition!” Hakuno snapped, even in her exhaustion. “How could anyone at the school care about you when you only did things if it helped you!?”
“Enough Hakuno, do not argue morality with a piece of meat. Is that really the thing you cannot comprehend, demon?” Gilgamesh asked. “The answer is simple: she is human. Now, beast, it is for you to learn that even the gods are subject to judgement! I will speak of the Beginning.”

Still holding on to Hakuno, Gilgamesh thrust Ea to the crimson ground. There was a light splash and before the woman’s shadowed hands could reach him, Ea’s power exploded around him, causing the ground of to vanish.

“Oh Elements, amalgamate, coalesce and bring forth the stars that bring forth all of Creation!”

He had used Ea three times before since he had accepted Hakuno as his Master, but he had never used the full power of the weapon. Here, however, with Hakuno safe in her rightful place beside him, there was no reason to hold back.

And it gave him a particular pleasure to show this so called goddess what the Noble Phantasm that would destroy the world meant.

The Stars of Creation revealed themselves, and beside him, Hakuno gasped as Gilgamesh laughed above the form of the depraved nun. Grasping the hilt of Ea, Gilgamesh grinned, as he swung up.

“You who have rejected the Law of Earth, I will show you the Truth of the Heavens! You who claimed yourself a god, you will know the defects of divinity!”

“No!” the creature’s arms shot forwards, reaching for him, but, those powers constricted.

Got you! A mocking voice called out, as the Cancer laughed a little.

While before he had taken that Caster’s advice, now, exhausted from her own pleasuring herself twice, and the efforts of the two inside her, she moved too slowly.

“For you to know the pleasure of all of creation, you must first know pain! Behold the truth! Enuma Elish!”

He threw down the galaxies, and finally, finally, he heard the scream that he had wished for as her very being was thrown into an attack meant to return her to primordial chaos.

Somehow…he found himself all the more pleased to behold this power now that Hakuno was able of bear witness.

No more was this woman, or that Cancer, permitted to breathe in the presence of the woman he loved.

The first time Hakuno said goodbye to Gilgamesh was a failure.

The battle was hard, without the ability to use his Noble Phantasm from the story Gilgamesh and she had been forced to endure Kiara’s attacks, as well as a return of Heaven’s Hole, but…somehow…somehow, even though she was leaning against Gilgamesh for support, and a slight droop to him told her that he had also finally grown tired, they’d won.

The lights from inside the Moon Cell faded, Kiara’s body slumped to the water, which turned back to its usual blue. From her collapsed body, there was a final spark of light, and two figures appeared. Sakura was limping, her arms wrapped around herself and breathing hard, while BB just slumped
“Sakura!” Hakuno called, but the girl just looked over and pointed to the now darkened Moon Cell. 

“I did it…” BB mumbled, laughing weakly. “Come on, Senpai…I managed to pull my corpse back together to help you, you should at least give me some applause for that…for…saving that precious person…”

She looked at her hands. They were fading, but Hakuno couldn’t get near.

Kiara was lying close by, and Anderson, somehow having survived Enuma Elish, likely though his connection to Kiara, stepped forwards.

“What does this mean? I was…I was supposed to have the best pleasure ever! It wasn’t supposed to matter if I won or lost, but…now…I’m in so much pain…I feel like…something’s falling apart… Anderson, do something! Why did I lose!? This doesn’t feel good! Not at all…this is worse than when my real body was killed! When those men killed me because I finally put them to use! How? I became a god! How could this happen?”

“How? You’re omnipotent now. You should already know that, hag. Love defeated you. Boys and Girls defeated you. A tentative, fragile emotion the grew between two people who never should have met, and a heart that should have never been capable of it defeated you. And what’s more, you challenged Hakuno Kishinami, the only person who would defeat you. The one person you could never win against. Everything you did, everything you strove for, made her your true enemy. For instance, you devoured those girls, all four of them, and based your powers on them, and they fought with all they had, even to the point of destroying themselves, to protect this person they loved and cared for. I shouldn’t even need to tell you this! You know it!”

Hakuno blinked. Love? She glanced at Gilgamesh, who was watching Anderson calmly. Well, he was off the mark. Or maybe…well…it wasn’t ‘love’, but maybe it was something that even Gilgamesh couldn’t admit to feeling again.

And…she was both happy and terrified.

“Why didn’t you tell me, Anderson?” Kiara gasped out, darkness spreading over her fingers as well as his own.

“Because he…hated you and wanted you to…lose,” BB muttered.

“This woman is right. There was, in all the world, only one who could ever defeat you, bound to a man who fought the divine and loved by the Alter Egos and BB and befriended by Sakura. I thought you were foolish. But you were really the biggest fool! This is the worst! You just kept fighting with your head high, completely ignoring that you fought a Servant who fought the divine, and every other weakpoint you’d left open as those girls fought from inside you!

“I shouldn’t have fought…” Kiara muttered. “I should have just blasted you do some random world and destroyed it…but…I guess…that’s better. If I had to lose…I guess…”

Her eyes opened, focusing on her with that same hungry look as before as Gilgamesh’s grip on her tightened.

“…to be defeated, not by some hero or messiah…but by another woman…I think I prefer to lose to another form of love…”
Kiara gasped out.

There was a hum of power, and the Moon Cell suddenly light up again.

“Incorrect termination of the power system has been verified. Rebooting,” a calm, cold voice started. “Searching for management system able to operate. System found. Connecting…reboot completed. Beginning intervention with humanity previously frozen by Sakura System. With previous Sakura System’s interference removed, progress as been increased to 20%.”

Gilgamesh moved so that, even though Hakuno was still leaning against Gilgamesh, he was in front of her.

“I know that the Cancer was holding off the Moon Cell, that is all well and good, but why is it restarting?

BB was holding it back?!

“Gah…no…” BB hissed, struggling to her feet. “I…won’t let you act freely…Even if…if I’m going to disappear…I’ll take you with me! I won’t…I won’t lose. After all…if I’m defeated…that person…nothing but data…with…no where to return to…only to vanish… but with a heart like that… she still smiled at me…” BB raised her head, her eyes were unfocused, but looking at her. “That priceless person…who can…protect her?”

“BB…you’re not worthless…” Hakuno said. “This…didn’t need to go this far. I-”

But she didn’t have time.

There was a cry of pain from the core.

“Sakura?!” Hakuno yelled.

She would have taken a step forwards, but Gilgamesh held her back.

“Yes. You cannot enter there mongrel. For a rock with no well, its will to survive is second to none… to use the ‘white’ model…”

Everything…everything up until then…was for nothing… The Moon Cell was against them. Hakuno had known that, but the realization that it was likely one of the influences contaminating BB to do everything really hit her at that moment.

“Authority being transferred over to Kiara Sessho- NO!” Sakura’s voice regained his usual sound. “No! This was’ in vain! With BB and Kiara both defeat, I am the only management AI left, so I can interfere with the corrosion programs! …Everything that happened, I can erase it! Make it so that nothing bad ever happened! At least, not from the point you came to the Far Side. Everything starts there…so…”

…Delete everything that happened.

“Sakura…what about you?”

“Will you protect the Moon Cell at the cost of your own life, no, your soul, to sweep away this whole affair as if it was a dream, Sakura?” Gilgamesh asked.

“It’s not the Moon Cell,” Sakura said. “It’s…its everyone with me. Everyone will be on the right side. This space will have never existed and…I’m just an AI born from the Moon Cell. I’m just
going back to the place I used to be. It’s…a little like the Throne of Heroes. And for you, Hakuno…
everything will be set right. You’ll wake up, and everything will just be a weird dream, so don’t worry…”

“But…what about everyone here? What we’ve learned and done and…what about you.”

“So the Demon was defeated and the heroine will wake up as if from a dream, having remembered
and learned nothing. This did become a commonplace story,” Anderson said, looking up from the
prone form of Kiara, and his eyes flicked from her to Gilgamesh.

“It’s too easy! It’s just the cliché. There are no twists at all! How can something like that remain in
the heart of another person!? It’s just drivel!”

“That’s not true,” Sakura whispered. “It was a long dream, and a fun one at times. I probably
enjoyed myself more than I had any right to, since this was really all my fault…”

“There’s got to be another way!” Hakuno said, looking from Gilgamesh to Sakura to Anderson.
“This…this can’t disappear. We’ve done so much. The NPCs, the Student Council, Rin and Rani
even were getting along. So much good happened here along with the bad, you can’t just *get rid of
it.*”

And she would have never met-

“There isn’t another way. The Moon Cell will remember this, and it won’t stop. This time… It has to
at least be ‘the incorrect timeline’ to the Moon Cell…”

“But…”

Gilgamesh suddenly fully released her.

“So, that is what you planned. A full recovery. In this case, Hakuno never fell to the Far Side, and
thus never formed a contract with me…” he closed his eyes for a second, and some emotion that
happened so fast that Hakuno couldn’t even see the it flashed over his face, but then he opened his
eyes and grinned at her. “Well then, rejoice, Hakuno, that fate to die has also been reduced to
nothing. Though I am aware of what happens next. Your last Servant was a Berserker. Were I to be
there…”

His voice was far too light.

“You’d be unstoppable,” Hakuno whispered.

“Yes, but that ends, as do your fate. Go and face your sixth round…”

“Gil… that means you’ll…”

Would he forget her too..? Was that better or worse? He wouldn’t miss her, but…would it be better
to be completely alone or to remember?

And…she didn’t want to forget him!

Hakuno looked down, her body was vanishing into sparks of light, dissolving so fast that she
couldn’t even…she wanted…

*She couldn’t even say goodbye properly!*

“Ok,” Sakura’s voice was getting hazy, as was everything else.
Kiara’s prone body and BB were fainting along with Anderson. Only the light of the Moon Cell and Gilgamesh…

“I made a promise to protect you, and I’m glad I can fulfil it…”

Sakura blossoms were everywhere…white and pink and…

Hakuno gritted her teeth and focused on the golden form beside her… Hakuno reached out, not sure what she wanted. Was it to hug him….to try to pull him with her…but…her hands passed through it…

“Thank you so much for everything, Hakuno. Of all the Masters I’ve ever cared for, you were truly the most wonderful!”

Something light and soft and glowing floated before her, connecting to her…

“Please fight well…and…if you get the chance…please check in on my replacement and see…if she’s doing ok?”

Hakuno opened her mouth, to her, to Gilgamesh… She tried to reach out one final time, and the world suddenly went white.

She didn’t even get to say goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness. This took forever, and I hate Kiara with a passion. So, before I end things. I want to say thank you. Thank you for 500 Kudos, for over 10000 comments. For the love, laughs and fun that this community has brought. This has been one of the most fun fanfics I’ve ever written, and I’m looking forwards to continuing! I’m so excited that we’re at the second to last chapter of First, and just want you all to know just how much I appreciate everything!

Also, even in love, Gil, you're a huge golden tsundere who is going to regret your life choices on the Near Side...

As a reminder, if you wish to help support me, I have a Ko-Fi at https://ko-fi.com/pryotra! Thanks so much for any and all support!

Next Chapter:
The Beginning.
The First Time Hakuno Hugged Gilgamesh.

Chapter Summary

Gilgamesh rushes to return to Hakuno and comes across a discovery. Hakuno wakes up from a strange dream to find hope.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time Gilgamesh sacrificed for Hakuno was something that felt natural.

He had remained calm as Sakura explained her plan. While he had been aware of the AI planning some sort of final push, this was something of a surprise. Though he now understood her request to him.

A hard reset of the Moon Cell, forcing this timeline to be aborted, so that Hakuno’s falling to the Far Side of the Moon was an error. And all would wake from this moment as from a bizarre dream to continue their sorry excuse for a war. Even Hakuno.

But he would not permit that ending. So, as his Master’s eyes widened and her body stiffened into something stricken, and some part of him yearned to reach out to her. To promise her that he would come whether she liked it or not, he suppressed it.

He had long learned to keep his plans silent before his enemies.

However, as Hakuno vanished before him, her arms reaching out and tears that would never fall shining in unseeing eyes, Gilgamesh could not deny himself further. He reached out, as if to hold her face in one hand, but the moment his fingers brushed her cheek, she had vanished into sparks of light.

For a moment, he stood, hand outstretched, some irrational thought playing in his mind.

She would not remember him. Or potentially, he would return to find her with that Berserker she had once been fond of.

Putting the beast out of its misery would do nothing as well…

He would not think of such ridiculous things.

“How much time is there?” Gilgamesh asked Sakura, looking to where she was not operating the core.

“Not much…” was the response. “Mister Gilgamesh…I’m a little scared…is…that’s normal…right?”

“Yes. It is human to fear and attempt to avoid death,” Gilgamesh said. “Do not fear, Hakuno will look in on that other self of yours.”

He was be sure of it.
“…Thank you…” Sakura said. “I…I won’t let you down…”

The Caster was watching, his eyes following Gilgamesh as he stood by his dying Master.

“I see you’re planning on twisting the story,” he said.

Gilgamesh shrugged.

“You are correct. This tale is dull without a satisfactory conclusion without a lead. Besides, that woman has asked me to tell an unpleasant story. She has not paid her debt to me.”

For a moment, Anderson watched him again.

“I wasn’t completely right about you, King of Heroes.” He finally said. “It’s been a long time since someone fooled me.”

The man’s assessment was not entirely incorrect. Besides, the little man’s standing up to him with that desperate desire to state his truth was amusing. However…

“If you seek payment, I told you to revise your story.”

“I may.”

There was, thankfully for the Caster, no discussion of his emotions towards Hakuno. It was a wasted discussion at anyrate.

“…Arg…I…I still don’t understand…” the pest spoke, her voice racked with pain.

Truly it was a statement of the power of that author that she was still there.

“Anderson, you said that ‘love’ defeated me. But…I don’t think you mean ‘love’ like I know it… Love that grew in a heart that was never meant to feel it… What’s the difference between the love that defeated me and my own love..?”

“That’s the thing you’re confused about? I might die of laughter,” The Caster said, leaning down until he was in full view of the vermin. “To think that the most obscene woman in the world was also the most virginal. But…I will tell you. Your love was that of the ‘wanting heart’ you lost to the love of the ‘dreaming heart’. That dreaming might break in front of reality, but that is the proper love between a man and a woman. You’re dying, but etch that into your heart and repent a little.”

Gilgamesh snorted. As if this thing could repent of anything. She had comprehended full well what she was doing.

“I suppose you’re thrilled at your freedom,” the woman said. “The love so you prefer won out in the end.”

“Thrilled?” the Caster snapped. “Thrilled? Hardly. I’m disgusted. Disgusted that this was the happiest ending that I could write for the protagonist, the human woman named Kiara. You are more vile than the deepest bit of hell, but I had hoped…well, I suppose all those men you ensnared hoped, didn’t they? But…I suppose the poison was just too great for you, wasn’t it, Kiara? I don’t blame you for that…a conclusion where the love of boys and girls win…where something so fragile it was never supposed to exist pushes through…it’s too dazzling to be looked at…”

The Caster glanced down at the vanishing figure, as he himself started to vanish.

Gilgamesh decided to leave those two to their final breaths, but he glanced at the Caster.
“You may present yourself before me again, should you find a more suitable Master and a better story to tell,” Gilgamesh said, turning away from the man without waiting for a reply and making his way to the Cancer.

The Sakura copy had not looked up when Hakuno vanished, but was sitting, defeated, looking at her hands.

She looked up at him as she sensed his gaze.

“I hate you,” the Cancer said, her voice a soft, dull kind of rage as she blackened and began to vanish. “If it wasn’t for you… if you had just let her be… …she would have been safe…”

Gilgamesh merely summoned the Gates. The axe that came into his hand was not one that Hakuno would have seen, or one that he often summoned. The decorative structure, bulky frame and shorter handle made it mostly unsuitable for battle. This was a ceremonial weapon. One that he had used towards the end of his life, signifying his kingship.

The Cancer, while subpar in every way, had been a goddess for a time, and this was another duty of the King.

“She’s going to die!” BB screamed, as her hands started to vanish. “She’s going to die! The Moon Cell will kill her! She was safe! She was going to have the happy, high school life that she’d never had! When I reached the Grail, I was going to make something better than the preliminaries! When that Berserker tried to stop me, I made sure that reality itself rejected it. …Guess it had its revenge through. It did something…something that brought her right to you…. And you sent her back into the war!”

The Berserker….

Gilgamesh dismissed that.

Such a selfish, whole hearted, and vile love. Gilgamesh smirked. But, like all of her alter egos, deep down, it was nothing that anyone could ever reciprocate. A doll, presuming to become human, but lacking even in the wisdom to learn what that meant before jumping headlong into love.

She was growing hard to see, even for his eyes, as the remainders of this dream began to unravel and BB’s existence slowly became something that had never been.

“Go back to sleep and forget about her,” BB spat. “After all, she was never anything to you but a way to kill time.”

The core of the Moon Cell shuddered and vanished. It appeared the time had come. Gilgamesh turned to look at the rage and hate on the Cancer’s face. It was satisfying, but he supposed that this pitiful love should be rewarded. This thing could have, under different circumstances been human.

“You are a fool to assume that I am another worthless Servant who would forget these events because something so weak as the Moon Cell has rewritten them. Hakuno is my Master. The only one who I will ever acknowledge from now until the end of time. Your hope of her ever being yours ended the moment she woke me from my sleep. As did the chance of her death.”

The Cancer watched him, and a smile started to show on her face, it was small and almost reminded him of Sakura’s.

“You too, huh? Melt was right then… I guess I’ll have to leave that up to you than, golden Servant. Can I have a last request then? Take her away. Far away from the Moon Cell’s reach, where we’ll
never find her.”

In truth, this woman had learned nothing, her goal unchanged. For she had never expected to ever meet the object of her love.

“I have heard your request. Though it is unnecessary. She is my final companion, and I will not give her up to the Moon Cell. You may take that knowledge with you to your end.”

“…that’s fine then. This life was for her anyways… But… hurry up, would you? I don’t want to be erased by the Moon Cell.”

“Very well.”

Gilgamesh brought down the axe, and the world shattered.

Gilgamesh opened his eyes in the darkness of the Far Side of the Moon. He floated in the empty nothingness that would destroy a normal Servant, banned from the Near Side for fear of his making the Holy Grail War too simple. It needn’t have bothered.

He had never desired to be involved in such a pitiful farce.

For a moment, he felt somewhat disoriented as a strange dream of a structure on this side of the Moon, and a young woman of average features who he loved…

Hakuno. Hakuno Kishinami. A young woman who rarely showed expression, but when she smiled, her foolishly kindhearted nature, showed true despite having no memories but of war and death. She had been selfish and selfless, reached out to take all before her but gave until she had nothing left, wept for every life she took but then straightened to fight again. She had faced down abominations, friends, gods and a demon, supporting his power with all she had.

No one but himself had been permitted to love her in her defiance.

And he knew.

This had been no dream.

Hakuno had and hadn’t once thrown herself into in a final act of defiance to the pseudo goddess that had tried to control her fate. They had and hadn’t fought the Moon Cancer and preformed the first deicide since the Age of the Gods. They had and hadn’t end that nun and brought above a new timeline.

The world was righted, and he was sealed away, banned from the War because he could not be forced to comply with the Moon Cell’s wishes.

But that would not be enough anymore. The time had come to show those mongrels the true face of power.

He closed his eyes, sensing a faint light. It was far, but distance meant very little in this place. He surged forwards through darkness until-

The crimson wall snapped shut before him. It glowed like fire with crisscrossing veins of orange light

The firewall against him was impressive, but the Moon Cell would soon find what it meant to challenge humanity’s first and most absolute king. That wall had held because there was nothing of value on the Near Side for him to fight for. For him, it had been nothing more than mongrels holding
a free for all over a subpair wishing device that he had no interest in. Now…

The only Master he would ever acknowledge needed to be reminded of her great fortune that she had contracted with the most powerful Servant in history. And he had a companion who he loved to reclaim.

The Gates opened.

It was a rare thing, for Gilgamesh to fully open his Gates. Mostly, he just showed them as a demonstration, pushing and directing his opponent in hopes that he could get some fun out of them before the inevitable end, but this wasn’t the time for that.

He permitted himself to gaze into the future and frowned.

There was no one waiting for her.

The Berserker who the Cancer claimed to have erased…was not present. There was no one waiting to greet her. And only the disruption that she was a Master who had a Servant was keeping her from being deleted but soon…

He must hurry.

The Moon Cell would erase her very existence if he did not reach her in time. Once he was on the Near Side, that partial contract would hold for long enough for them to renew their vows, but no longer, and if he was there a moment too late…

He would not allow it!

Gilgamesh walked to the wall and noticed immediately the structural failings.

All it needed was to be struck with enough weapons, but those would be destroyed in his assault, taking time to reform…

This was the toll that Sakura had mentioned. The Moon Cell, would attempt to weaken him, or for the toll to be too great for meager curiosity. It was clever, Gilgamesh would admit that about the rock. For something with no will, it knew how to preserve itself and its goals.

Though…

A smile started to appear on Gilgamesh’s face.

It was time to pay the price then?

“Very well, Moon Cell, you have set your price for her, and you will have your price, but in return, she is mine,” Gilgamesh said softly. “You have no more claim to her.”

The Gates spread out all along the wall but focused on a single point where the false data of his existence on the Moon Cell combined with Sakura’s beacon showed where he must go.

Would she know him? Or would his coming there merely being a point of confusion?

He didn’t care! He’d force her to remember him if needs be!

He fired.

Low grade weapons came first. Those treasures that, while he had collected them over the years, had
no special value to him and no great power. Some exploded others passed and vanished but the assault continued, even when those treasures did not return to him, and some part of him was loath to give up anything that was his.

But he recalled that final look on Hakuno’s face, they attempt to reach him. And so see that fear and pain wiped off…to see her again….

That was worth whatever price the Moon Cell set.

The second volley was of greater weapons than the first, and soon, he was firing all but his most precious treasures. Shining gold weapons glinted around him again and again as the wall started to flicker and dematerialize more and more.

A final volley started, and the wall vanished.

With a smirk, Gilgamesh strode forwards, allowing that one small light, the mix between the code that wrote a path and the beacon that Sakura had mentioned to be his wayfinder. Yet, as he walked, he sensed a building of power around him.

Could it be-

The Moon Cell was reforming the wall now?

How-

Gilgamesh narrowed his eyes. That did not matter. What mattered was that the machine was recovering its futile efforts to block him off.

He started running, ignoring the sounds of his armor on the now forming floor as the nothingness of the Far Side of the Moon began to change the structure of the Near Side. Truly the Far Side was nothing more than a garbage bin.

Yet, around him, the walls were starting to turn to crimson as that wall was reassuming itself.

Gilgamesh scowled.

“Greedy contraption, you still desire more?” he snapped.

It would pay for this insolence.

But he opened the gates again, firing another volley of weapons. However, those did little to ease the continuing red walls, and as he ran, he could see those walls creeping closer. Either to delete him entirely or to force him back.

Wait…

He would test first…

He opened the Gates again, permitting some of the copper of his treasury to fall close to the walls. As they neared, they began to spark and sizzle working through the material, but slowed for a time as Gilgamesh ran faster.

The copper was gone and the walls continued to encroach upon him.

He was too heavy.
The armor was too heavy…he would not…

Narrowing his eyes, he opened the gates again. They appeared in two rows around him and started to pour out all he could. Gold, gems, dishes, clothing, items of value that he had not considered for centuries, toys that would not be dreamed for centuries to come, and even some furniture was pouring out around him.

Only his truly precious things remained sealed.

It would reform in time, he knew, but that was not the thought that drove him forwards, looking to the tiny pinprick of light before him where he knew that Hakuno was waiting.

Once, that woman had thrown aside the thing she valued most, her very life, to come to his aid. For no reason than because she saw refused to let of the gold she had found.

Now he would repay her.

For he would not relinquish his treasure.

Gilgamesh ran forwards, ignoring the sounds of the precious things being slowly devoured, towards the single spark, even going so far as to foolishly ignore the shimmer in the air as he reached the halfway point.

Where the Far and Near Sides met.

The scene shifted into one of chaos.

Amid the starry sky of the Far Side, objects and stray data floated aimlessly slowly drifting into the Far Side, where it, along with all other discarded data, would be logged and forgotten. Master’s souls, or what was left of them, were also known to come here, before they were reconfigured, their memories separated and stored some place else, and their spiritron forms set into future games as NPCs, just like any other human that the Moon Cell had logged. There was no floor, just mounds of used items or deleted equipment yet to be broken down.

If the Far Side was the trash bin, this was the furnace.

The space was utterly hostile to life, yet someone stood their back to him, looking do the sky and the long shattered data.

Someone with long, grassy hair…as if it had been chosen to reflect on the life they had once lived…

No.

It couldn’t be. That life…that person…

They were gone.

They had not been in Kigal.

They had been nowhere.

Because…as something between humanity and weaponry, their very soul had been erased. The gods had unintentionally bequeathed some fragment of immortality to humanity, even if it was merely to be shades without form, sent to eat dirt in Kigal.

His friend had not been given even that. They had merely returned to clay.
To even consider them now…he was growing sentimental… Yet that presence…

“It cannot be…”

The figured turned to face him, and Gilgamesh’s body froze, his eyes widening.

His friend stood before him, much as they had so long ago. Their clothing, as always, was nothing more than a simple shirt and pants, unembellished regardless of what Gilgamesh would have done to show their importance. Their ever present smile was in place at they looked at him, yet there was a relief and joy in their eyes to show their true feelings.

“Hello, Gil,” they said, smiling as Gilgamesh strode forwards and embraced the only persons who he had ever called ‘brother’.

The first time Hakuno truly missed Gilgamesh was when she woke up.

*Reactivation of the Holy Grail War. System starting. AI error check, complete. Full reset including all unlawful alterations.*

*She could almost feel something in her hand and something warm on her face…*

*Everything returned to zero.*

Hakuno dreamt of sakura petals and gold. She fell through stars, as someone, gold, reached to her…

Her eyes opened.

For a moment, Hakuno felt completely disoriented, as if the world was reasserting itself, but she shook her head slightly as things got better. She was…this was the infirmary.

“Oh, you’re awake,” a girl’s voice said.

Hakuno turned to see Sakura, the infirmary AI. As usual, she was wearing a labcoat over her uniform, as if she was just some student who’d decided to take on the job of nurse since there wasn’t anyone else there.

She smiled in that polite, impersonally concerned way that she tended to do give people.

“I’m glad. You were found collapsed in the hall after the fifth round. Please be careful While we not allow battles in the school, it is still a battleground.”

She knew that. Robin Hood had nearly murdered her. While Hakuno liked Sakura, she was well aware that she wasn’t going to stop someone from killing her.

“Being without your Servant…even for a moment…that was incredibly dangerous.”

Without…her Servant…

For some reason, Hakuno looked at her left hand, raising it up to look at…the three intact Command Seals. Somehow…looking at them made her relieved….but kind of sad. Which was dumb because there was no reason to be sad and none to be thinking about that. She’d never used her Command Seals.
Her Servant hadn’t ever needed them…

Her Servant…

Hakuno frowned…

She couldn’t remember who her Servant was. When she thought hard, all she saw was a flash of gold and then…nothing.

“Sakura,” Hakuno said, though her stomach felt like it had a pit in it. “I can’t remember my Servant…”

Sakura blinked at her tilting her head.

“That’s strange,” she said. “I didn’t realize that that could be an effect. Then again, the records do say that your memory is unstable…”

She pulled up a screen in front of her.

“Ah, of course it’s—” she began with a smile, but then paused. “That’s strange…it…the data seems scrambled… I…”

Her face lost all expression for a moment, but when she looked back, her smile was back.

“At any rate, that will clear itself up soon!” Sakura said, smiling. “I’m sure it’s just a minor glitch. At any rate, allow me to be the first to congratulate you for winning the 5th round, Miss Hakuno Kishinami. There are now only four Masters left, including yourself.”

Four.

Out of one hundred and twenty eight originally Masters. They’d all killed one another off.

While Hakuno nodded at the words, which seems strangely formal, the memory of Julius’s death wasn’t something that she enjoyed. He’d tried so hard, been so desperate to keep fighting… Even though he hated her…she was sorry. No matter how many people he’d killed for Leo, and for the Harway family…

She supposed that didn’t matter. It was only two Masters left…

And then a wish that she didn’t even know…

“Thank you, Sakura,” Hakuno said. “Er…if you’d like I could drop by and have tea with you…”

That came out of nowhere, but Sakura just gave her a blank look.

“Why would you do that, Miss Kishinami? It would be far better for you to prepare for your next battle.”

“Right…”

What was she even talking about, anyways? Hakuno sighed, shaking her head. It still felt like it had been stuffed with cotton.

She was going to thank Sakura again, but she’d already turned away, probably to prepare the next day’s batch of healing items.
Ignoring the weird feeling of…sadness…Hakuno stood up, heading to the door and stepping out.

Rin and Rani were waiting for her. Rani was standing close to the door while Rin was leaning back, looking out the window.

“Good, you’re awake,” Rani said. “If you’d stayed like that, I’d have had no options left.”

“You mean we,” Rin said, scowling at her. “You really need to be more careful, Hakuno. Particularly now that you’re in the semi-finals. I’m guessing that weird military guy attacked you.”

“Where is your Servant by the way?” Rani asked, ignoring Rin completely. “It’s rare for them not to be close by you…”

Well, those two hadn’t changed…though somehow that made her sad as well…

But at the question of her Servant, Hakuno shrugged.

“I’m not sure,” she said. “Honestly…I can’t remember anything about them. Rin, Rani…who were they?”

“Oh that’s easy, they-” but Rin stopped blinking a few times. “That’s strange…I…I can’t remember…”

Her face was blank for a moment, almost like an NPC’s, and it made a shiver run up Hakuno’s spine. They didn’t remember either….so…what did that mean?

“Oh, Hakuno…what are you holding…” Rani asked, almost as if she’d completely forgotten the question.

For a moment, Hakuno wanted to pursue the topic, but the idea of seeing those blank faces again… Hakuno looked at her right hand.

It was clenched in a fist, and she hadn’t even noticed it…

Opening it up, Hakuno found a single pale pink sakura blossom.

“That’s weird, there aren’t any sakura trees in the school… did you find one that wasn’t rendered right…or maybe it’s part of the glitch that made you collapse…” Rin said. “You might want to get rid of it if that’s the case…”

Hakuno tipped her hand to drop it, but…

Hakuno…

Hakuno whipped around, blinking once, but there was no one there. Just the closed door of the infirmary.

“I could have sworn…”

“You appear confused, young Master,” a familiar toneless voice that never failed to make her shiver.

Father Kotomine had stepped down the hallway, his eyes on all three of them. Hakuno always got the uncomfortable feeling that he was somehow looking through all of them. Yet…when his eyes feel on her…something flickered.

Just for a second, he took a step back, but seemed to catch himself as a…thin smile started to appear
on his face.

It did not make him look in any ways less threatening. If anything, every instinct was telling her to run more than ever. This wasn’t even killing intent like with Julius…this was…something else…

Interest.

He was…interested.

“So, that’s what it was…” he muttered. “I’ve decided to inform you, Hakuno Kishinami, that the announcements for who you will be fighting in the next round have been postponed until tomorrow. The Moon Cell is reconfiguring the data around the school in order to make the semi-finals more appropriate of a struggle for all remaining Masters.”

“Oh…” Rin and Rani both looked at Hakuno.

That sounded…bad.

“Thank you for telling me, Father Kotomine…” Hakuno bowed. “I’ll be sure to rest up.”

His eyes were still on her.

“I will look forwards to seeing what will come to pass,” the priest said. “You two. I will advise you to remain in the medical bay. While you are not registered as ‘losers’ of the Grail Wars, the fact that you are Masters without Servants will lead to your possible deletion otherwise. Of course…that is entirely your choice.”

Both girls glowered at one another.

“Fine,” Rin said. “Come by and chat, Hakuno. I don’t know how long I’ll be able to take with a robot and an AI.”

“It will be difficult for me to sit with this emotionally dishonest person as well,” Rani said.

They seriously were just going to insult one another through her, weren’t they?

Hakuno sighed.

“Alright,” she said. “I’m…going to head to the roof…I…I want to clear my head a bit…”

Both girls turned to head in, and Hakuno looked at the sakura blossom in her hand. Without really thinking, she had it in her pocket in a second and turned to where Father Kotomine was still watching her.

“Er….thanks again,” Hakuno had no idea what to even say to the man.

Father Kotomine gave her that thin smile again with a strange light reaching his eyes.

“I must inform the other Masters, however, take your time before returning to your room.”

And he turned and walked away.

Father Kotomine was weirder than normal, but honestly that was probably the least bizarre thing that she’d seen since she woke up.

But…she didn’t want to go to her room. It wasn’t that man’s advice, it was just…she didn’t want to
go there…somehow…she wasn’t ready. No matter what Sakura had said.

Hakuno headed down the familiar hall to a flight of stairs that lead to the roof. No one much came up there other than Rin anyways.

It was a clear blue sky as always above them, with the binary code of the Moon Cell floating slightly. As always the air was perfect, and she could even smell the flowers in the garden from this high up. It almost felt like it was a summer day, where school was out and she could sit with her friends and talk.

As to be expected, it was empty.

Leo and the other two…maybe they were in their rooms planning things out while she stood out there, but…

Hakuno walked to the fence and a corner of the building, placing her hand on the metal, almost as if it was going to give way under pressure.

What…was this? Why did she feel…so lonely..?

Her head hurt.

“I thought someone would be here for me…”

The first time Gilgamesh knew who Hakuno’s Servant was was in the place between the Near and Far Sides.

For a time neither spoke, but finally Gilgamesh found his voice, looking at his friend in the face for the first time in four thousand years.

They looked no different than on that day…the last good day.

“How?”

His friend laughed slightly, a gentle sound as he remembered, but underlying something more ferocious than even himself.

“You. You brought the Chains. The last bit of me here, but the Moon Cell had both the Noble Phantasm and my own…self I suppose. So it had to both reconstruct you with the true Chains, and I also…was able to come into being again. However,” they looked at the place around them. “The Moon Cell did not know what do with me. It couldn’t shut me away on the Far Side… I think it knew what would happen if we were reunited. So I was here. Between the Near and Far Sides, unable to move… I could see the events of the other wars…but that was it.”

“So you are unable to be summoned? That is no matter. You can come-”

His friend merely shook their head.

Without a word, they reached out a hand to the edge of this place, to where the Near Side was. Immediately the hand started to blacken and crumple like it had so many, many years ago.

“I’m stuck, Gil,” the said smiling sadly. “My data can’t exist on the Moon Cell, on either the Near of the Far Side. BB made sure of that.”
“BB?!”

The Cancer?

But…

*When that Berserker came for me, I tore him up so much that there’s no trace of him left!*

*The dog-deer thing…*

*Nature spirit…*

Gilgamesh’s eyes widened.

And he knew.

“You were summoned though, in the end, by a Master known as Hakuno Kishinami…”

His friend nodded.

“Yes. Her voice reached me in this place. I’d seen so many die, and been unable to do anything, but her voice…and her wish…it made a path for me. She wanted to live, Gil. It wasn’t even that she didn’t want to die. She didn’t know who she was, or why this was happening…and it reminded me of myself at first, struggling to better understand what I was formed for. The Moon Cell…it restricted me to the Berserker class. It is my first form…”

For the first time, Gilgamesh realized that his friend was holding something. As his eyes found it, his friend held it out to him to see.

It was a photograph, clearly taken by either Rin or Rani. In it, Hakuno lay sleeping, her cedar hair splayed around her, and curled around her was…his friend. In their truest, most primal form: a nearly formless, faceless creature of clay that had once roamed the forest with the wild beasts. Eating grass and kills…

It was impossible to tell their mood then, but they curled around her.

“This is the only thing I could save,” they said, looking at the picture. “There were other things. Hakuno is a kind girl, even when she had only enough sense of self to want to live. She brought in plants and tried to help me feel at home in the indoors… She was precious to me…almost like a sister… but all of that was deleted, just like all trace of me, including memory…”

A sister….

So this was the truth. His only friend had been Hakuno’s mysterious Berserker Servant. But-

“How could you expect me to think that you would lose to that insect!” Gilgamesh scoffed. “Particularly in your most original form!”

That was impossible. He had defeated her, and his friend was his equal, the only one he would accept.

His friend smiled.

“I was not myself. A powerful beast is still a beast, and the Moon Cell…took something from me in that time…I both knew and didn’t… Even at the end, when I attacked her…I was still nothing but a beast protecting its packmate. I knew nothing of strategy or gods. And when I came to myself…”
they sighed. “That’s a depressing story. I’m sorry. But…at least she was able to find you! My trick worked! I’d hoped you would warm up to her.”

He very nearly had not. He had considered just killing her from the beginning…but he supposed that that was not important. Also, his friend likely knew…

However…

“Your trick? There was no trick in regards to my meeting Hakuno…”

His friend smiled, but there was a touch of mischief in his eyes.

“That’s the thing you think of first? Now how you could have won against me back then? You’ve gotten fonder of her than I thought, Gil,” they said. “I knew you’d like her, but I didn’t realize… It’s too bad I’ve been unable to see…”

Gilgamesh crossed his arms and looked away.

“She is mine, and I will not give her up so easily.”

His friend laughed.

“You haven’t changed. Though I’m glad you’ve found another friend.”

This time the scoff that came from him was true.

“Friend? Hardly. In all the world, I have but one friend. That is all I shall ever require! I told you… on that day… that is your value.”

They looked away, smile fading.

“You made my happy that day….but very sad knowing that you must travel alone again…”

There was sudden shudder, and his friend’s head jerked forwards.

“No…” they whispered. “Gil, you have to go! The Moon Cell is almost done with a firewall to block you out completely. You have to go back to Hakuno!”

“No, I will not leave you here again! Nor will I fail you as I did-”

The punch came out of nowhere, and Gilgamesh reeled back, clutching his head to stare at them in surprise.

“You didn’t do anything!” they yelled. “I chose to attack the Bull, and I chose to attack Ishtar! Those things were my selfishness too! Now hurry! I didn’t give up some of my Noble Phantasm to lead her to you for help for you to leave her to be deleted! And…don’t be so worried. I’m glad you’re fond of Hakuno! How couldn’t I be when I care for both of you? If you… if you have another friend, someone who’s very different than me. Someone whose eyes, nose, and mouth bear no resemblance to mine at all. Someone you haven’t replaced me with… Someone who can walk together with you, can stand next to you and journey with you beyond the stars…. Someone who can give you the things that I wasn't able to give you….and if it’s Hakuno…that makes me incredibly happy for both of you!”

For a moment, Gilgamesh was frozen.

Part of him knew already that staying…but to leave them…again…when they’d only just been able
to reunite.
And this was not a place he would return to.
His friend pushed him forwards.
“Now go!”
“No, I will not see you again!”
“Gil…you can’t make that face when Hakuno sees you…I’ve always been with you…”
They smiled at him once more.
“My data still needs to recover, reset or not. But I promise you…the three of us will walk in the sun one day together. So go! You’ve never kept your waiting yet!”
For a moment longer, Gilgamesh lingered, gazing on his friend, but he knew, just as they did that time was short.
And maybe the knowledge that they existed. That even BB, the goddess of the Moon Cell (had he known…), had been unable to completely end them… Maybe that knowledge was enough for now.
“Very well,” Gilgamesh said. “I will hold you to that.”
“Gil-“ his friend said, for just a moment, looking pale and holding a hand out, but they stopped, looking away.
“Tell her that I broke my contract and run away. She won’t remember, and…I…”
They didn’t want Hakuno to weep for him as she would.
“You will owe me greatly for lying to that woman.”
For just a moment longer they smiled, that familiar pain, dimmed just for a moment, as they threw the picture to Gilgamesh.
“Keep it safe,” they said. “And hurry. You’ve wasted too much time.”
It was difficult to turn away from his friend, even with their encouragement, but he had to hold some faith in them.
And believe that, if they had been able to meet again when all trace had been gone…
He would believe that one day, the three of them would gaze on the sun together.
“I will see you soon.”
It was an order.
“Of course.”
And he ran.
He friend had not been in error. That distortion seemed to have staggered time somewhat, but the walls were close and something before him was starting to close…
He opened the Gates one final time and surged forwards to that future that he would carve with his own two hands.

He could not see his friend, at least for now, but he would reach Hakuno. She still waited, and he still meant to claim her love for himself.

And until the time came when the damage that Cancer had caused healed (he hoped that thing would show herself to him again, so that he could give her the answer she needed for laying a hand on his friend and his Master), he would find joy knowing that his friend still existed, Gilgamesh resolved as he attempted to move faster.

He would reach Hakuno…

No matter what the cost.

His armor was too heavy, so he cast it aside.

________________________________________________________________________

The first time Hakuno hugged Gilgamesh had been at the beginning.

Hakuno wasn’t sure how long she’d stood there, dully staring out at the courtyard were NPCs were milling aimlessly. Somehow, seeing that was just another thing that made her unhappy.

She needed to stop. Whatever this was, maybe it was just being without her Servant…maybe she’d figure things out in her room… She turned her back on the scene and headed down the stairs, turning towards the hall where her room was waiting for her. It was really just overflow from the dorms, meant to house a Master who wasn’t supposed to be there, but…well…she was glad of a place to be.

The door was covered in glowing ports and wires as a complimentary defense against being murdered in her sleep but as she placed her hand on the door, she froze.

Her stomach was dropping.

Maybe it was just the fact that she couldn’t even remember her Servant suddenly, and how wrong the while thing felt, and how…she wanted someone with her…

But…somehow…she knew.

The very place where she’d planned her battles, gone over information and been the only safe haven in the world…it was going to become her grave.

The moment she walked through that door, Hakuno was going to be deleted.

She knew it.

Her Holy Grail War was about to end. There was no reason for that feeling, or even a clear way to say it. Only that she really hoped that someone else helped Rin and Rani…

This shouldn’t be right…she’d won. She’d beaten Julius, and even though that gave her nothing but sadness, there was no reason…

But somehow, she knew it.

Maybe…Hakuno Kishinami had really vanished a long time ago…

And maybe she was still hoping…still believing.
‘Surely I will be victorious’ that conceit is proof of humanity.

Who had said that?

She shook her head as even the words were faded, and pushed open the door, stepping through so that her Grail War would end…

…

There was a naked man in her room.

he was sitting on a single chair, while the others had been neatly piled in a corner to give more room. That one change had a large red curtain that she’d been given to help her shut out the light (the Moon Cell didn’t seem to understand or care about mornings or evenings) and had draped it over the thing so that it almost looked like a throne.

And on that throne, as if making sure she was aware of just how important he was, was a golden *naked* man, sitting with one leg covering…what needed to be…and leaning against the back with a kind of comfortable grace that managed to show that he looked like he was made completely of lean, toned muscle without an ounce of fat on him.

He was smirking at her, with a pleased look on his face.

…what was with this streaking?

“Hmph, I came here early,” the golden man spoke in a arrogant voice. “but this room is shabby as well, though larger than the first, it seems. Truly such humble places suit you… But I will not vent frustrations now. Having come to this side, I have had to give up ninety percent of my belongings…”

He was venting dissatisfaction now…

But…

That voice…

A golden king…

The strongest Servant...

An arrogant laugh...

King of Heroes, King of Liars, King of Caprice…

“Gil…ga…mesh…” Hakuno whispered.

And somehow…speaking his name…

She remembered.

The Servant who had been banned from the Grail War for being too powerful…he was here…

“Gil…” Hakuno whispered.

She didn’t care that he was naked and sitting there and smirking at her and looking so stinking proud of himself for existing! He was *here*! She took a step forwards, eyes wide.
“But…how…”

A smile started to form on his face, arrogant and sure as ever, but just for a second, she could a
glimpse of something else…something far more human.

Was that…relief?

“Good, you have set your memories in order quickly…”

“I really wanted to remember…but…”

“Haven contracted with a denizen of the Far Side such as myself, you now are unlike other Masters. That wipe could not entirely effect you, not for the time it took for me to come here. While those events are not seen by the Moon Cell as naught but a dream, they were real, and as such, I have come here.”

“How?” Hakuno breathed. “I mean I’m not…but how… You can’t come to the Near Side!”

Gilgamesh smirked, but a warmth in his eyes as he looked at her didn’t fade.

“I shattered that rule,” he said,

*Ninety percent of his treasury…*

But Gilgamesh continued completely ignoring that statement, and the fact that he was even there at all as a miracle.

“When I awoke, I decided to embark on another pleasure trip. As you had been my Master. I decided to look into the matter of your former Servant. Their class was Berserker. However…the moment they lost sight of you, they severed the contract. You were abandoned by your own Servant. Truly, this shows that Berserker is the worst of classes.”

So that was why…somewhat that made an awful kind of sense…

“I had not imagined such a thing would occur,” Gilgamesh scowled at her. “If you were to be disqualified for lack of a Servant, it would shame me as much of not more than you. Even in brief, you were contracted to me, Hakuno. As such you may only lose should you fight with all your strength and find it is not enough.”

He was making sure she knew that he totally hadn’t come there because of her.

Because they weren’t friends.

Even if they were…something.

Hakuno hadn’t realized it, but she’d sort of missed his voice…

Her chest felt strange, both light and warm, and slowly a smile was starting to form on her face. He’d really come…

“So, Mongrel, what shall you do? There is one available Servant here, but you should know that I do not suffer one with power lightly…” He reached out his right hand, almost like a handshake. “if you reach for the summit, I will permit you to take my hand. This is the time to sacrifice your Command Seals to me.”

Hakuno didn’t hesitate.
She didn’t even bother pretending that she wasn’t as happy to see him as she was. She just walked over and placed her hand in his.

Maybe these seals would be meaningless. But…

“Ok,” she said. “my first vow…is that we will be equals. We acknowledge, respect, and even oppose one another’s convictions if we think we have to…the second…”

She smiled.

“This contract lasts as long as we want. We can end it at any time. For any reason. This shouldn’t be a binding but…something we both want.”

Warmth spread into his smile as the Command Seals glowed briefly, and then vanished, leaving only one as a testament to their promise.

“I see,” he said, grinning at her. “A good vow to me, Hakuno, and I will reciprocate. I see that here, it will be worth swinging my sword. Then, let us go, My Master! Our aim is the Moon Cell Core! The Angelica Cage and Seraphic Throne! So long as I stand beside you, we shall end all obvious conclusions!”

He stood up, and Hakuno very suddenly turned around.

“Gil!” Hakuno almost screamed, feeling her face turning red.

King of Nudists was right. Gilgamesh was laughing, and there was a rustle of fabric, hoping he’d at least changed into his leopard print, she turned to see him in that curtain, which he’d managed to wrap around him like some kind of robe.

“Why aren’t you wearing your armor?”

Gilgamesh shrugged.

“It will reform eventually,” he said. “In the meantime, let us go to one of those two women and arrange for new garments.”

His armor…

He’d used it…

To get to her…

Hakuno didn’t even realize she’d done it, she’d just wrapped her arms around him. She didn’t care if he was nude under that thing. She didn’t care that now Rin and Rani and Sakura and those NPCs were all back to what they’d been before…

“I’m so glad…thank you for coming for me…” she whispered. “Even when I didn’t remember…I missed you.”

For a moment, Hakuno felt his stiffen, but then, slowly, his hand had touched the back of her head, and his head was against hers.

“You and you alone are permitted to touch me,” he said softly. “I will permit your joy at my return…”

And they stayed, for just a moment, just like that.
There were things to worry about. There was Rin and Rani. There was Leo and whoever her other opponent would be. There was getting clothing, and figuring out all kinds of things…but for now…for this moment…

But that could wait for this one moment.

And then they’d face the world…together.

Chapter End Notes

This is it. This is the end of CCC. I know it took a while, but I wanted to give you all a nice meaty chapter. I can't tell you how much I've loved writing this, and how much I'm looking forwards to writing the next part of this story, Lunar Shadows. And I want to thank you all again. Thank you for over 500 Kudos, over 15000 comments, over so much fun conversation and speculation and ideas that I have enough for a small universe. Thank you thank you thank you.

I hope that you're ready to start on the next part with me!

As always, if you want to support me, place buy me a coffee at https://ko-fi.com/pryotra! You'd be amazed how much a little bit helps.

As a bit of a preview of the next book:

The rules have changed.

The Moon Cell remembers all timelines.

The past Grail Wars were monstrous.

"I'm really getting excited now..."