

Life was good for Sakura Matou. Well, Sakura *Tohsaka* would be more fitting to say. She lived with her friends and family, she had a dear sister who looked out for her now, and a beloved boyfriend with her much-adored senpai. She had honestly never been happier before. The tragedies of her past would remain buried in the past, and she could face the future with a renewed sense of hope and optimism.

That is not to say there weren't challenges. Though the dark days of the Grail Wars were behind them, the repercussions prevailed to this day. The Class Cards they kept finding, the appearance of Shadow Servants. It all pointed to something sinister happening behind the scenes. Those things couldn't just be manifesting on their own; there had to be an explanation.

One that she and Rin were no closer to finding out.

It was... frustrating. They had claimed this city under their protection; they were the Second Owners after all (well, Rin technically was), but they were of the Tohsaka family. This city was their responsibility. These strange occurrences kept happening, and they were failing their city.

The divinity in her, the aspect that watched out for people, felt indignant and outraged that they were failing their duty.

It tied with another source of frustration that was much more personal in nature. Her home life.

She *was* happy, she truly was. She loved Shirou, and Shirou loved her... and her sister... and Saber.

Even without the aspect of love tied to Durga, Sakura was not blind to his affections for the other girls, or what they felt for him. It'd be quite hypocritical on her part to condemn them for it, considering her own 'relationship' with Rider.

But she still couldn't help herself, those ugly dark feelings. A remnant of the time she kept her silence and let the darkness consume her. She still felt certain apprehension about having her beloved senpai's attention be split with so many women.

Particularly when she felt Rin's blessing on him... She got a strong suspicion of what they did, what she did to *him*. She filled him with divine power, blessing him like the gods of old would bless mortals, empowering him, making a paragon of virility and heroic strength. A side of him

she had yet to see because she *wanted* to be the one to bless him. So... there was still a hypocritical side of her.

Why was it that they could all get along so well, but *Shirou* was the point of contention? It hadn't brought the two to any conflict; their arrangement made it so they would share their love with him as their hearts willed it.

And Rin, hosting Ishtar, had *plenty* of it to give. Plus, she was also the goddess of lust; she did not judge Rin when she wanted to sleep with other people. But it felt like she had gone a step too far, behind her back even, to put a sort of 'mark' on Shirou that denoted him as hers.

The warrior side of Durga was furious at the indignity of it all.

But there were bigger concerns, so she had to put it aside for now. The Class Cards, the Shadow Servants. Taiga was revealed to bear another Servant host, one to a divinity of Mesoamerica of all things. As she had proved with her outstanding strength and more mystical abilities.

She was *so overjoyed* when she discovered she couldn't gain weight no matter how much she ate. And Saber took it as a personal challenge not to be outdone by the teacher, so the two engaged in an eating contest that pretty much drained poor Shirou's house of any supplies. And when that wasn't done, the two began armwrestling.

Of course, their bodies pushed themselves and grew as a response, ripping their clothes to shreds and providing a fantastic spectacle that Sakura had to respect. Shirou certainly enjoyed it...

And Sakura did not miss just how elated Taiga was to have Shirou's attention, the way she smiled so lovingly at him... she wanted him to look at her like that. Though Shirou remained oblivious. But perhaps he was also far more preoccupied by how his food storage had been completely drained, or his house was on the verge of breaking apart.

Once more, she feared for her spot in senpai's heart. The good household wife place she had carved for herself in the Emiya household was threatened from all sides, and her warring goddess side was treating it like a battlefield.

"You'll be fine." Rider's soft voice broke her out of her musings, once more offering a gentle smile she only reserved for her. "Shirou is lucky to have you, and one day he'll see you're the best for him."

"I have plenty of competition in case you don't remember," Sakura muttered pessimistically.

"You're always selling yourself short, even with the power of a god in you."

"Hmm... Rider, am I right to feel this way?"

"Do not ask what is right, ask what you deserve. The heart is a complicated subject, and morality is muddled when the affairs of love are brought up."

Sakura had to giggle at that particular line. "I didn't know you could be so philosophical about subjects like this."

"You remember I'm greek, right?" The pink-haired Servant's smile shifted to a slightly more teasing one. "We like to pontificate and think far too much about everything."

"Of course," Sakura chuckled once more. She sighed, feeling a touch more relieved. "Now, let's get the groceries back to the house," She lifted one of the plastic bags she was holding. "Poor senpai's fridge got raided that night."

"He knows the risk of the companionship he keeps." Rider shrugged, carrying her own set of bags.

"Hey now, it's not his fault he-"

Sakura's words died in her mouth as she saw something.

In between the bustling of the crowd, she spotted something further ahead.

Or rather, *someone*.

A very familiar hint of white.

“...Can’t be.” She muttered to herself.

“Sakura?” Rider called out in concern. “Is everything okay?”

The young woman did not answer; she merely kept watching as the figure seemed to look at her. Then she turned around and disappeared in the crowd.

“H-Hold this!” She thrust her bags into Rider’s arms, much to her confusion. “There’s something I gotta check out!”

“Wait, what is happening-?”

“Will explain later!” She held up her hands apologetically, running into the crowd and slowly disappearing from view. “I’ll be back!”

“Sakura, wait!” But it was too late, her Master was gone. “Oh, dear...” Medusa sighed to herself. “What’s going on *now*?”

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Impossible. Improbable. Unlikely. A trick of the senses.

Sakura said all those words to herself as she ran through the streets. The people and buildings became blurry images as she focused on that single, brief image her eyes had spotted.

The white hair... the red eyes.

If it was true, then Sakura had to be absolutely certain.

The figure vanished each time she got closer, further away from the city, and into the forest. Yet Sakura followed all the same because this was something she could not ignore, something that held far more importance than her own wants and worries.

Her supernatural senses allowed her to pick up the trail left by the figure. Small traces of so very familiar magical energy. She dashed through the trees, moving further away from the city limits. Sakura knew where she was being led and understood it could not possibly be a coincidence.

Sakura huffed. The act of running wasn't what was taxing her, but the way her mind swirled with so many thoughts and turbulent emotions unbalanced her, even as her body ran with all the proficiency of a seasoned athlete on instinct alone.

She had to know. Gods, she had to make sure...

If this were true, then Shirou-

She had no idea how he'd react.

Sakura stopped, her feet came to a halt, carving a small trench in their wake. She panted, looking up with a pained and bewildered gaze at the sight in front of her.

An old, run-down castle, western-style. Built many years ago by a very influential, wealthy German family. A private property that had only been frequented by an extremely low number of people. Common folk in the city didn't even know this place existed beyond a few rumors that it was private property. Kept that way by the boundary fields created a mild mental suggestion to any non-mage trespassers to leave.

Castle Einzbern had seen better days. In the few years since the Grail War Ritual had met its end, the wear and tear had begun to accumulate on the once proud brick walls. The paint was scuffed. Tiles had fallen from years of rain. Plants were growing over the base of the walls, climbing and growing upon the very foundations with moss and branches. Foliage was overgrown, and she had no doubt the once beautiful and carefully maintained garden inside had gone wild.

Shirou did not come to the Castle much, or often... or at all.

It was just too painful for him. Remembering how Illya gave away her life to save them all from the Grail's corruption.

To save *her*.

Sakura always left a few flowers here every year, on the anniversary of that day. Always thanking Illya for the life she was given, for the opportunities she herself never had.

Sometimes she wondered what she might say if she were still here, seeing how they were all living.

“What a mess.”

Well, Sakura didn’t have to wonder anymore.

Pearly white hair that reflected the sunlight, flowing against the wind.

The figure turned, and Sakura could see the full details of her outfit. It was white, with pink accents and purple gloves and tights. The outfit looked traditional, inspired by the old tribes of northern Asia. But the eyes, the *face*, it was unmistakable.

“...Illya,” Sakura muttered in disbelief.

“All these years and you couldn’t afford to do a little maintenance on my castle?” She huffed, looking disappointed. “Well, I’m glad to know my property is being taken care of.” She said with evident sarcasm. “Guess this is the thanks I get...”

She looked older, like the age Illya was supposed to be before all the experiments her clan had performed upon her. Her voice sounded older, too. It could have been another of the Einzbern homunculi, but they knew the clan had effectively shut down after the Grail Wars came to an end. Their single-minded ambition of a thousand years had ended, and with it the last vestiges of what kept them going. They could have created another Justeaze model, but that was highly unlikely.

But it was her; every instinct Sakura had told her *this* was Illya.

“You’re alive.” The violet-haired woman once more said, still in stupor.

"Very observant of you." The young woman giggled with a wink. "Those divine senses are coming really handy, I see."

"How?" Sakura took a tentative step forward, hands balled in front of her chest. "That they, the Grail, the Dress of Heaven, you-!" She let out a ragged breath. "You were gone, and we all had to-"

"Move on?" She flinched at Illya's words. "Yeah, unsurprising. I would have done the same. Honestly, I'm glad you all were able to do so and make something for yourselves. Would have been *really* mad if I found out you were all moping. But look at you!" She put her hands akimbo. "Wielding fragments of the gods and making this place your own personal kingdom! Not even the Association or the Apostles dare to delve too deeply! Not too shabby, I'd say."

"It's..." Sakura stammered, taken aback by the *suddenness* of it all. "It's more complicated than that."

"I'm sure."

Sakura shook her head, focusing on what was important. "But how are you alive?!"

"Oh boy, that was a *trip* and a half..." The Einzbern woman sighed, running a hand through her long white locks. "When the Grail came undone, my body dissolving itself down to the last magical circuit, it was like my soul was getting pulled into every direction. But... there was enough of the Grail's system still active there to make a *connection*."

"A connection?"

"There are a lot of powers keeping an eye on the world, even with the Age of Myth long since ended. A few took notice of what was happening and decided to... put me back together as best as they could."

"*I dare say we did a fantastical job!*" Sakura straightened when a disembodied voice rang out. "*That new body is a work of art!*"

A newcomer manifested in a show of golden dust, going from spiritual to corporeal. A Servant, Sakura realized. Long feathery wings for arms, crooked bird legs, her exposed skin was pale, and the slightest bit of modesty kept her nipples covered. At first, she thought she was a

harpy, but there were very few figures from greek legend who could qualify, and the magical power she was feeling from this woman did not feel similar to Heracles or Medusa.

“So a little more appreciation is warranted!” The winged woman huffed, ruffling her feathers at Illya, who merely chuckled.

“Of course, of course. This body is marvelously done! I do appreciate that you all gave it my true age.” She sighed exaggeratedly. “It was so taxing to remain a cute innocent girl well past her years.”

“Innocent?” The harpy droned. “Freya could already tell you were a bit of a sadist before.”

“Hmph!” Illya puffed her cheek indignantly.

“I’m... sorry, who are you?” Sakura slowly asked.

“This is Louhi, from Finnish legend, as Berserker class,” Illya answered for the Servant. “She was contracted to me to keep an eye on me. Not that it’s necessary.”

“I daresay it’s very necessary given your history.” The harpy, Louhi, muttered.

Sakura picked up another name they mentioned. “Did you just say, Freya? The goddess Freya?” A very powerful deity of the Norse legends.

“Indeed. As my soul was vanishing, Lady Freya gathered what remained of my essence and crafted a new vessel for me.” She twirled as if to show it off. “Using the body of Sitonai from Ainu legends, filling it with a portion of her power.”

“And used the essence of yours truly to serve as the glue that tied it all together!” Louhi proudly said, placing a wing over her chest and puffing it proudly. “After all, as someone who straddles the line between mortality and mysticism, my own essence was the perfect ingredient to revive our little princess here!”

Illya gave her a suspicious glare. “I still question why exactly Lady Freya did not bother using any German legends as the basis for this new body...”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Is the little lady picky about how she was *resurrected*? A feat that would have been *impossible* without the literal *divine intervention*.” Louhi huffed. “I’d say someone is acting a touch ungrateful.”

“Would it have killed you two to put, I dunno, Frau Holle, Brunhilde, or Perchta in there?!”

“Perchta?! Are you insane?! She’s a deity of terrifying gloom!”

“And you’re a crooked witch!”

“History is biased!”