

# Nomad Void

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# Sawellawell

With Reignited Flames

# Copyright

SAVEHAVEN: WITH REIGNITED FLAMES  
NOMAD VOID

Cover art by Sasazuka Shinon

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## Defiance

A stack of folders landed from Hane's hands onto the Magister's desk with a clap, expelling air from underneath it and into his face. His eyes stopped their run along the lines of a document. Eyes closed, he let the air course into his nostrils and out of the mouth. Bracing himself, he opened his eyes.

“Please tell me that is the last of it.”

“That is the last of it.”

Another puff of air escaped his lungs, which felt like it carried the weariness he had accumulated throughout the day with it.

“...for today.”

He turned to give her a disapproving look as she walked to her desk, only for it to be met with a smirk.

The next half an hour went by in silence, disturbed only by occasional rustling of paper.

The Magister's concentration was broken by a clanking sound resonating from a floor clock as it stroke twelve, followed by a ringing that filled the corridors outside. This sound was perceived as a signal for his body to relax.

With a screeching sound of a chair scratching the floor, the Magister approached a table by a window. On top of it, a metal self-boiler flashed with blinding radiance as soon as he pulled up a curtain.

A long match scratched the surface of a box and ignited a piece of charcoal in a chamber at the bottom of the boiler. The scent of burning wood filled the air around the table as it escaped through small openings into the window.

As the last drop of tea fell into a cup, the Magister popped open a box, the sound of which acted as a trigger, distracting Hane from her work. Her face expressed a high degree of distaste as she observed the Magister pour two spoons of sugar into the cup.

“If you want to clean the drains, there are better solutions.”

“Don’t be so judgemental about other people’s tastes.”

“Taste is what you are killing by mixing this abhorrent substance with tea.”

“I add it only to black tea. It just adds some substance to it.”

“I haven’t seen you drink anything other than black tea, and...”

As she observed the Magister return to his desk and start unwrapping a sandwich covered in paper, her expression changed from distaste to pitying concern.

“...you would not need substance in your tea were you eating properly.”

“I know how it looks like, but I just can’t digest food in large quantities. It causes a feeling of heaviness in my stomach.”

After several bites, a quick glance at the clock, which showed a quarter past twelve, prompted him to stuff the remaining chunk of the sandwich into his mouth, washing it down with tea.

Straightening up, his fingers intertwined, he fixed his eyes on the doors.

Five minutes later, he was still waiting, yet a doubt that he would see anyone walk in started poking his cheek. Five minutes more and the doubt was looking him straight in the eyes, demanding attention.

“Hane, you did relay invitation to Aeri, right?”

His aide only frowned in response, seeing this as an insult to her professional duties.

“I know, I know. It just bothers me that she didn’t show up on time.”

“If at all.”

“I can only imagine what she must be going through. A counselling session must be the least of her concerns right now.”

“I don’t think that’s the reason.”

“Then what?”

Hane, in her usual manner, responded non-verbally, frowning a little and raising a brow.

“Come now, I know you have some... prejudice towards aspiring witches, but even you couldn't possibly believe they're all unruly.”

“Oh, no. Definitely not her. You've witnessed it first-hand.”

“We don't know the whole picture. I am sure that was just a misunderstanding.”

After giving his chin a few rubs, immersed deep in his thoughts, his eyes jumped to a metal bookcase in a corner of the room.

“Maybe it was wrong to arrange a session so soon after the incident and in a formal manner. Maybe I should try another approach.”

His eyes fixed on the bookcase, he walked up to it and skimmed his fingers over folders tightly stacked on metal shelves. From the sixth shelf down to the fourth and then a sharp turn going across until his hand stopped at the “K” section. The search there yielded only confusion, making him go over each folder one by one from the very beginning. His confusion became only stronger when he found his object of search, a folder labelled “Kol of Omniscience”, in the “O” section. Comparing it against the other folders both provided an answer and brought up a new one, as the label had “kol” in it before the actual name, not after.

Inside he found four smaller folders, each bearing the name of a kol's member.

*So there are four of them in their kol. I wonder how the other girl is doing. Probably should check on her later.*

He pulled the one with Aeri's name and inspected the line that listed her address.

*She lives at the dormitories. This complicates things. Don't think Magistern visit dormitories often.*

Whilst inspecting the main page, a few pages peeking behind it drew his attention.

“Oh, there is her extended reference. I bet she—”

The very first line read how she had started a fight even prior to being enrolled, on the day she had gone to submit papers to the academy.

“Oh...”

The next one hadn't taken long, having occurred during her first month after admission.

“Ooohhh...”

The list just went on.

“Correct. I admit it. She might be a bit emotional and impulsive. Might require some more work than I expected.”

“I envy your confidence believing you can fix what those before you could not.”

“Speaking of which...”

He skipped past the records covering her prominent life at the academy to the page that reflected the counselling sessions conducted in the aftermath of each incident. To his disappointment, they turned out to be less than informative, each reading “Counselling session conducted following incident that had occurred on...”. The only variables that would change from line to line were the name of a Magister who conducted a session and corresponding date.

“They didn't put much effort into making these records.”

This left him with some things to think over as well as half-an-hour of time on his hands due to an unexpected cancellation of the session. Although it should have been spent tending to documents, the stack of papers on his desk would start draining his sanity the moment it entered his line of sight. Taking a break to restore his mental strength seemed like a more appealing use of the time.

His legs carried him to the most suitable place to have a rest: the inner square. For the most part, it represented a large open space on the second floor of the academy, surrounded by walls on three sides, whilst the farthest side

transitioned into veranda. The floor was paved with six-sided stone tiles, blue with clusters of white, as if imitating the sky. Along the perimeter a corridor ran, its roof supported by pillars on the inside. Four passages connected the corners of the square with a small fountain-crowned garden at the centre.

Cool breeze swirling around, the resonating sound of running water, and lively casual chatting of academy students walking around had positive effect on his mind. He quickly forgot why he had come here or rather what had run away from. That is until he noticed the reason he had spare time in the first place: Aeri, the hot-headed girl.

Standoffish, unlike everyone else, it seemed she had come here for the same reason the Magister had: to escape from her troubles. She stood there leaning against a pillar, her arms folded, blankly staring at a spot on the floor. By the looks of it, this place didn't appear to have the same refreshing effect on her. Her mind being elsewhere, she didn't even notice the Magister approach her.

“Aeri?”

Lifting her head, she turned to look in his direction, her stare still blank. The more her eyes focused on him, the more visibly discontent she became.

“Oh, it's *you*.”

Her addressing the Magister felt as if he was someone or even something annoying.

“We were supposed to have a counselling session right now.”

“Maybe we were, so what?”

“So that means you were expected to show up.”

“I have nothing to discuss with you, traitor.”

“Mind your language, young lady. And I don't recall doing anything to deserve this title.”

“Then you have very short memory. But I don't. I damn well remember how you sided with that Sorceress witch.”

“It appears you have a misconception of both the hearings process and—”

“I don’t care.”

She bent down to pick up her weapon, tossing its belt over the shoulder, before showing her back to the Magister.

“Aeri, you can’t just leave. This is a serious matter.”

“Watch me. Tch! Can’t even have a moment of rest. What an ass...”

She continued marching towards the exit, leaving a trail of grumpy noises behind.

“It seems I will have to try a different approach after all.”

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The day was coming to an end. For the students, at least, but not for the Magister. His desk was still visually skewed with much more documents on the left, the “in” side, than the finished stack on the opposite side.

After finishing another folder, he took his time pulling the next from the top, as if each word in it had been adding to the weight.

The door handles moved, and so did his eyes. They jumped to the doors just as Aeri stormed in. She slammed her hands onto the desk, her furious eyes conveying the message before she opened her mouth.

“What in the coven’s name do you think you’re doing?!”

“Oh, my saviour!”

“W-what?”

“No, nothing.”

He cleared his throat, coughing a few times, and put one hand onto another, as if trying to make some kind of impression.

“I am simply following standard procedures for a case like this. For a case like yours.”



“Do you have any idea what a letter from the coven means? Do you know what trouble it can get me into?”

“Very much so. Up to the point of expulsion in case of non-compliance. It wouldn't be as effective without consequences.”

In the background, Hane came in, closing the doors. As she walked to her desk, the Magister looked at her, giving a nod.

“I don't know what is it that you want with me. But you want to have a counselling session? Fine. I acknowledge my mistake. I was wrong. It will never happen again. There. Bye, old man.”

The Magister had barely enough time to inhale, ready to address her 'confession', yet the air left his lungs in a sigh, following a loud slam of the doors.

He closed his eyes, taking another deep breath.

“Hane, send the message to the coven, please. This time for real.”

He opened his eyes, seeing Aeri again, who appeared before him faster than the doors hit the walls.

“Are you serious?”

A silent gesture invited her to take a seat the opposite side of the desk.

“Thank you. I'm fine.”

The words came through gritted teeth, her lips barely moving, as if had taken her both mental and physical effort to utter each word.

“Now then. Let's start with your interpretation of the events that occurred that day.”

“She attacked us.”

“Correct. If I understand correctly, a sorceress attacked you when you and your friends, as any students after a day of studies, lost your way to the dorms of

your academy and accidentally ended up on the Sorceress Academy grounds. Did I get that right?”

“I— It was— We were there for a reason.”

“The reason being...”

“We— That— We needed—”

“U-huh. Yes. I see. Please continue. I think I start to see the picture.”

Aeri’s eye started visibly twitching.

“Fine, yes, you got me. I attacked her. But she provoked me, she was the one who started it all.”

“It looks like we’re making progress. So how exactly did she provoke you?”

This question made her frown. She got angrier, but not without reason, it seemed. It was like he hit a nerve or triggered unpleasant memories.

“She assaulted my friend, and she ended up in recovery. Harin is still unconscious.”

Recalling going through the kol’s folder earlier, it became apparent why the fourth member had not been at the site of the incident.

“Why? Did something happen between them?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. You don’t ask why somebody hits you, you hit them back.”

“Do you at least have any ideas? Anything that could have led to this?”

“I have never seen her before. And I doubt Harin has. We have no business with Sorceress witches. Did not have. Until now.”

“So you don’t even know her? Then how do you know she was the one who attacked first?”

“Are you deaf? Were you even listening to what I was saying? *My friend* is in recovery and *she* is unharmed.”

“There could have been a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? What kind of misunderstanding leads to someone ending up in recovery?”

“For instance, one in which three witches assault a sorceress on an assumption that she assaulted their friend, which results in tragic consequences.”

Aeri hit the desk with her fist, sending vibration across wooden surface.

“Do you think this is funny?! Do you even imagine what it is like to succumb to mortal wounds? All of my friends are in recovery and unconscious, and I don’t know when or...”

A word was on the tip of her tongue, one she was reluctant to utter, but it was apparent what kind of doubt was gnawing at her.

“...when they are going to wake up.”

“Under no circumstances would I ever consider something like this to be funny. And the only reason we are having this conversation is to prevent something like this from *ever* happening *again*.”

Hearing this cooled down her temper. Not because of what the Magister said, but rather how, simply changing his tone a bit. Up until now, she had been baring her fangs at him, believing he would not even snarl, but this was enough for her to catch a glimpse of his own teeth, and they were surely sharp.

“Take some time to think this over. We will continue this conversation another time.”

The opportunity was taken without hesitation with only wind left in the wake of the angry girl’s hasty leave.

The Magister’s gaze fell back to the desk, where a folder still hung from the top of a stack. He had expected this session to take some burden off this mind, not to add to it.

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Aeri's weapon landed on the wooden floor as she dropped on her bed. Submerged in silence, there was one sound she kept hearing still, that of the Magister's voice repeating one word: "misunderstanding". Staring at the ceiling, she tried to clear her mind, yet the more thoughts she purged, the louder the Magister's voice echoed inside.

She then tried to occupy her mind instead, first by reading a book, then maintaining her weapon, and even reluctantly tending to studies after barely having had any break from her lessons. Alas, the making herself busy didn't work either. Nothing could take her mind off that discussion.

A thought of cleaning her room momentarily slid off its squeaky-clean surface. Accidentally, this thought triggered an image of her friends' living space, Sumi and Harin. A room that had been missing its tenants for a few days would hardly need cleaning, but there was nothing else she could think of to distract her, even if temporarily.

As she approached a door on the opposite side of the hallway, her hand froze for a second on its way to a keyhole. For a second she was hit by a lingering echo of emotions of frustration and anger she had felt the last time she'd been here. The news of Harin's accident engulfed her in flames of fury, which took efforts of Sumi and Minali to quell.

Taking a deep breath, she inserted the key and turned it inside. As a handle went down, she cautiously looking to both sides and made several more turns in both clockwise and counter clockwise directions. With the last turn, a thud on the opposite side of the door could be heard, as if something small fell to the floor.

Stepping inside, she picked up a walnut-size metal cylinder, identical in size and shape to an indentation on the inner side of the door lock.

The room itself was almost mirrored inside: a bed in one corner, a wardrobe in the other, and a study desk between them. Only a dining table under a window was shared by both halves. A typical sight for a students' dorm room.

What wasn't typical, however, is the distribution of their belongings. Sumi's side was in relative order: books orderly stacked on the desk, shoes arranged on a

rack, and only one suitcase peeking from under her bed. Harin's part of the space was nothing but a mess: the desk was littered with tools, wardrobe doors were held open by boxes of mechanical components protruding from it, and the bed was supported a pyramid of suitcases.

Both girls' weapons rested on their desks. Unlike Sumi's, which required a stand to fit on the limited surface, Harin's, despite being bulky, easily fit there. White with golden elements, it had three rods, similar to Aeri's, protruding from a much larger main body. The rods were inside a series of rings pierced by two thinner rods. With such size, it was supposed to be held at the top with a grip closer to the back and a handle down the middle. The handle was larger in size than a feminine hand needed it to be, serving as a compartment for a belt that flown from underneath into a pile of folds to the side of the body.

Aeri crouched to the side of Harin's desk, her hand reaching for the back, when something cracked outside the window, followed by a sound reminiscent of a gasp. It didn't seem to be her imagination, which compelled her to check.

Hanging over the windowsill, she looked down from the fourth floor of the dormitory. There didn't appear to be anything broken down there, neither was there anyone walking outside.

Aeri was about to brush it off when a light blow of wind brought strands of green hair to her face. They belonged to a light-grey eyed girl in white trousers and a short coat standing on a ledge to the right of the window. A notepad on a string around her neck rustled in the wind. Her face was almost blue as she was holding her breath. In response to Aeri's annoyed gaze she cheerfully smiled.

"E-he-he. You might be wondering how I ended up here. If you let me come in, I will gladly explain!"

As she stepped in through the window, Aeri was there eagerly awaiting her "explanation", her arms folded and toes tapping the floor.

"So, um, the lock on my door broke and I happened to be locked inside my room. And, um, I had no choice but to get outside through a window so that I could get in through someone else's room."

“From your room on the third floor of the dormitory.”

“E-he... he...”

Her unnaturally cheerful expression dissolved as her facial muscles relaxed.

“Fine, fine. You caught me.”

Neither did she try to imitate a cheerful tone at this point.

“You are not going to fight me, right? Hey, I’m unarmed.”

Without a word, Aeri walked to the door and opened it for the unwelcome guest, much to her surprise.

“Oh, that is unexpected. Glad to see you act as a civilized—”

Before her foot stepped outside, a kick to her butt gave her a sudden acceleration. She took a dive into the hallway, landing with her aching butt up.

“Next time I catch you I will have my boot so deep up your butt, you’ll end up in recovery!”

Aeri ended her warning by loudly slamming the door.

Having gotten rid of a failed intruder, she returned to where she had been before the distraction. Her fingers flipped a switch at the back of the desk, and something fell to the floor again, this time from underneath it.

From a drawer she took a fountain pen as her other hand reached under the wooden surface. The moment her fingertip touched a pattern drawn there, the desk ignited along the perimeter, shooting up glowing walls of light that formed a rectangular barrier. The walls were not solid, having holes of various size float in all directions like bubbles. Moving out of synch, they would form larger holes when colliding before breaking apart a few seconds after.

Catching a moment when a large opening formed, Aeri put her hands through it to make a stroke on another pattern, under Harin’s weapon. The barrier faded and disappeared in a moment.

A push of a button to the side of the weapon's handle caused an internal response, pulling the belt inside the handle's hollow space. At the same time, a trigger at the top of the grip activated on its own as the rings around the rods in the front started rapidly spinning.

“What the... Oh, shite!”

The device charged up in a second, giving Aeri no time to react. Luckily, she was not in its way.

With a thunderous clap a yellow lightning appeared. It followed in one zig-zag line, getting thicker and making sharper turns the further it went. In a moment, it turned into clouds of fire, the explosive expansion shattering the frame of the window, which was luckily open.

Watching the flames jump onto flammable surfaces, Aeri tried to think how to put the fire off in confusion.

“Are you crazy?!”

A girl broke in just a few moments later and disappeared just as fast before Aeri could respond. She promptly returned with a device in her hands. Pointing a wide canon-like barrel at the sources of fire, she doused them with powerful water blasts. They were no less destructive than the fires, shattering wood and even making cracks in stone wherever they landed. At least the destruction wouldn't spread.

“Are you an idiot using a contraption in your roo— This isn't even *your* room! Just what were you doing?!”

“I— I— was just cleaning Harin and Sumi's room. I barely touched Harin's machina and it fired.”

“What? Don't you have safeguards? You first-years will lay ruin to the academy one day. Anyway, good luck explaining this to the Magisters.”

The girl tossed her weapon over the shoulder and walked out, leaving soaked and shocked Aeri to contemplate a few things: how had this happened and the cost of repairs.

Meanwhile, on his way home, the Magister gazed at the sky in the distance where a strange explosion had occurred just a few moments ago.

*Am I supposed to get used to this?*

His muscles started pushing his body forward, but he froze again short of making two steps.

There was a beautiful woman a few meters in front of him. Strands of golden hair aligned perfectly flowing from under the hood of a green cape worn over a blue dress. A shade partially covering her face couldn't hide the glimmer of her expressive green eyes.

Despite her gorgeous appearance, her cold expression and unsettling silence made it hard to admire.

“Um, hel—”

“Magister, please, resign.”

“Excuse me?”

“You are not suitable for your job.”

“What? What do you mean? Who are you?”

“My identity is not important. What is important is that your behaviour is out of line, raising serious concerns.”

It didn't take him long to figure out what she was referring to. There had been but one incident that would match the description. However, even though the Magister had not been aligned with his colleagues, it would hardly justify such request.

“And if I don't resign?”

“At the very least, you will lose your job.”

“I lose my job one way or the other. So I can only assume you mean there could be other consequence if I don't step down.”



“There might, but doesn’t have to. If you do so willingly, there are people who will help you find a suitable position elsewhere.”

“And the girls?”

“Her case will be reviewed thanks to your efforts.”

“‘Her’, not ‘their’. And you haven’t even clarified which girls I was referring to. But it doesn’t matter, does it? You had the answer prepared beforehand.”

“I have misspoken. It was obvious who you referred to.”

“I don’t believe you did. This conversation will not get us anywhere if you keep hiding your agenda.”

There was a subtle change in her expression, barely noticeable, but she had enough control over herself to make sure it was just for a split second.

“You are perceptive, and not for your own good.”

She took a pause, choosing her next words.

“Her sentence is already decided. She will be expelled and her grimoire—sealed.”

“I don’t like that little pause you’ve just made.”

Another change in her expression, this time more noticeable and taking a little more time to control.

“There is a high probability that her grimoire will be burned.”

“I don’t know what that means but I surely don’t like how that sounds.”

“It isn’t as bad as it sounds. No actual harm will come to her. She will simply not be able to be a witch anymore. Not a big loss, since it wasn’t her dream to begin with. Her motivation for becoming a witch was a result of a pure coincidence.”

It might have been accidental, but she spilt valuable piece of information. To know students’ motives for studying witchcraft meant having access to their profiles, a privilege granted only to Magistern and their aides. However, no

Magister would be aware of an actual sentence passed on a student, not to mention the witch-exclusive specifics of resulting punishments. She could be an envoy sent by a coven, yet her body language, the way that she spoke, and the look in her eyes creating this aura of intimidation told him she wouldn't be someone to simply run errands. This left only one possible option.

“You're a coven witch. What did this child ever do to you?”

What little confusion that had been in his voice was now displaced by a mixture of disappointment, disbelief, and disdain. He could not comprehend how such a powerful entity would use their power to harm an innocent girl.

The woman frowned. She did not try to hide her dissatisfaction any longer.

“Magister, it isn't wise to say such things out loud. You never know if a witch keeps her identity hidden.”

“You didn't answer my question.”

The intimidation attempt failed completely: there was no room left in his soul for fear.

“She is believed to be a revenant. A very powerful witch and an extremely dangerous individual.”

“A revenant? Like returned—”

“From the dead.”

Accidents were not rare at witch academies, not excluding ones resulting in lethal outcomes. It would have been much less appealing to become a witch compared to other paths of education if it had implied chances of dying in the process. And yet, she clearly did not mean the process of revival and recovery, like the one Aeri's friends had been subjected to.

“Is such thing even— Wait, *believed*? You're not even sure she *is* a revenant.”

“This conclusion is based on specific evidence. You have witnessed her abilities in person. They are out of the ordinary for a student, not to mention the similarity to De—”

She stopped herself abruptly, catching herself on a thought she was about to reveal yet more information.

“This is as much as you need to know. You don’t need more to make the right decision.”

Silence befell. The Magister looked away for a second, his mind skimming over the bits and pieces of information the woman had fed him.

“Does she like witchcraft?”

“What?”

“Orena. Does she actually like witchcraft?”

This question was unexpected, enough to shatter her intimidating image with confusion.

“I... don’t know.”

“So her profile doesn’t say that. What about her friends? Does she have friends at the academy?”

“Given the rumours surrounding her, this is highly unlikely, though not impossible. What does it—”

“So her profile doesn’t mention that either. What about her hobbies?”

“What are you getting at?”

Her voice became more aggressive as she regained her composure, her tone reflecting irritation caused by her inability to get into his mind.

“I am merely pointing out a fact that you have drawn a conclusion about the girl based on a single line in her profile. And you even have the audacity to claim you know what she might or might not be dreaming of. This is hypocrisy in its purest form. If you make such a crude mistake at such a simple task as profiling someone, what are the chances— how many mistakes could you have made identifying her as this ‘revenant’?”

Feeling how emotions were taking over, the Magister took a breath, slowly bringing them under control. The pause was seen as an opportunity by the mysterious woman, but as she opened her mouth, the Magister reignited the furnace of his train of thought.

“Has it ever occurred to you that she could have been framed? I don’t know anything about witchcraft, but what if someone made it look like she is the revenant? What if the real revenant is already within your ranks? This is rudimentary tactics: throw a decoy at someone and wait until they drop their guard down. What if she wants exactly that? And as soon as you get rid of the poor girl, she makes her move when you least expect it?”

“This is absurd. How would—”

She heard his words but did not listen to them. It almost worked, but the barrage of questions was too much for her mental shield to block, and one of them successfully made it through.

*Come to think of it. They were quite swift in making the decision. It is not the first time she reappeared, so there should have been similar cases, yet there were none. It is possible this case is unique. However, the rumours of the girl being a revenant originated not in the coven but among the aspiring witches. And they spread fast. Too fast. How could students possibly know about Devaura? It is possible one or two of them are descendants of her victims, but they must hold a heavy grudge against her in order to spread rumours with such persistence. Regardless, there is a factor of time intervals. She should not have appeared in another four years, unless—*

Lost in the ocean of thought, she realized her dive had taken her too deep. Swimming closer to the surface, she realized who had thrown her there in the first place.

“Wait, how would you know any of this?”

“Obviously, I do not. I have simply thrown the first wild idea that has come to my mind. But it appears it was enough to make you doubt your conclusion.”

“Yes, I admit. There are factors to consider. However, this won’t be enough to sway the others as long as there is the smallest chance she is the revenant.”

The Magister took another pause. It was clear he had exhausted all possible arguments, making any further debate pointless.

“No. As a Magister, I have a responsibility to aspiring witches. There is no one else to stand for them. Respective provisions of the Code are there for a reason.”

Given how she had approached the Magister with a sole purpose in mind, it was only logical to expect her attitude to deteriorate, and he was ready for that. What he wasn't ready for is to see a smile appear on her face. And not a malicious one, but seemingly friendly.

“I am happy to hear that.”

She approached him, extending her hand.

*And I am very sorry for you.*

Though somewhat alerted by this drastic change of heart, the Magister nevertheless responded in kind.

“My name is Yumi. I am—”

The moment their hands touched, the Magister felt his hand squeezed with force. Her feminine muscles couldn't cause any pain, and it did not seem to be her intent. Something was wrong. It became clear when she clenched at the cloth near her heart, eyes widening, her face an expression of shock.

Her hand slipped from the grip as it lost the strength. The Magister caught her as she was about to fall. He then came to the ground, pulled down by the weight of her limp body, taking her in his arms.

“Hey. Hey! What's wrong?”

The only response was a barely audible wheeze. Fingers wrapped around her wrist failed to feel one crucial sensation. He pressed his head against her chest. Nothing. He then brought an ear close to her mouth. Nothing again.

It was late evening, and the road was devoid of people. No one in sight to seek help.

The Magister pulled a flare gun from his bag, pointing it at the sky. As his finger pressed on a trigger, instead of a clap the gun only clanked. Repeated attempts to fire a flare did not produce any result.

“Curses! Why now of all times?!”

The gun quickly found its way into bushes on the side of the road as he threw it away, angry and confused.

*What... just happened? Did my heart stop? I can't breathe. Am I... dying? So they finally decided to dispose of me. Even if I am brought for revival... no, this must be taken into account... this is the end for me one way or another.*

Her darkening vision was rendering the Magister, who was slamming his head with the palm of a hand. His lips were moving, producing sounds that degraded from words to muffled noise as her consciousness drifted away.

*Ironic... the man I came here to dispose of... is worried over me... dying...*

“Think. Think!”

His mind erected an image of the academy building. The Magister walked out of the front gate, going through a large public space, taking a turn into a square, passing through it, and into the spot he was currently in. A trail of footprints traced their way back to the last person he had seen.

*It's been no less than 15 minutes. Even if I run, taking into account the time needed to find help and the return journey, it'll be half an hour at best. By that time, it will be too late.*

He was taken out of thought by a rustling sound, but it was only a newspaper carried around by the wind.

“Newspaper...”

It triggered something inside his mind. Something familiar, something important. He tried to focus on it, but his focus was broken when the woman's head fell to the side as her body lost the last bit of strength.

As the Magister released her from his embrace, placing on the ground and turning her head up, something finally clicked.

*Head. Newspaper. Article. Resuscitation.*

Another image appeared in his head. This time he was reading a paper at home. In it, there was a peculiar article about a fight between a surgeon and his colleagues. The article caught the Magister's attention because they fought in a literal sense. After several successful resuscitations by applying "bellows-like rhythmic pressure" to chest, the "perpetrator" had insisted this method be taught to the public. His opponents had objected, saying it could potentially cause damage if done carelessly or applied to fragile individuals. The article went further into the exchange of arguments which escalated into exchange of blows. Luckily, the author had focused on the details of the resuscitation process as well.

The Magister took off his shirt, folded it, and placed under the woman's shoulders.

*Raise arms to expand the chest. Then cross the arms over the chest to apply compression, twice per second.*

After repeating this cycle a few times, he checked her breath, yet her lungs remained still. One minute, two minutes, there was still no response, but he didn't give up. After four minutes, her warm breath finally touched his skin as he leant closer to her.

Now that she could breathe on her own, he lifted her and took to the nearest bench.

"Uh... what..."

Her vision was blurry, the senses were dull, and the whole body felt numb as she woke up to the Magister's gentle shake.

"Can you hear me?"

"Y... yes. Who... Where am I?"

“We were talking a moment ago, and then you fainted. Your heart stopped. Listen, I’m going to get help, but I need you to stay awake. Can you stay awake?”

“I’m a little dizzy, but I will manage.”

He looked closely at her for a few seconds, just to make sure she would not start drifting away.

“Good. I will be here soon.”

Watching the half-naked man leave in haste as he put on a dirty shirt, fragments of memories started slowly coming back to her.

*I was supposed to talk to someone... that Magister. It must have been him just now. But how? I talked to him, and then...*

She tried to trace the events that had led to her ending up in this state, but it was all blank.

*Did he say my heart stopped? How?*

For the next ten minutes, nothing came up.

As she regained control over her limbs, she stood up, and, though wobbly, started walking.

Arriving almost twice as late as he had expected to, her absence left the Magister in a state of confusion and with much explanation to be given to the people he had brought along.