“Please madam, we have many open rooms available. Would you not like to rest first?”

Jessica folds her arms across her chest and glares at the [Gentleman].

“I want to see Quasi!”

“Madam, your friend is still undergoing the trials. If you could just wait a bit lo-”

“No! I’ve waited ten hours already,” she growls, “I want to see him with my own eyes.”

The [Gentleman] looks at the young lady, his class’s instincts warring within. It would be ungentlemanly for him to interrupt the master’s test… but it would be far worse to allow a lady to continue to fret over her companion’s wellbeing. Sometimes in life, there are no good choices, but a [Gentleman] must strive to always find the lesser evil.

“Very well,” Clark relents, “we will take you to the trial room.”

The other [Gentlemen], though their faces retain smiles, hold no love for the decision but they understand their distractions could only work for so long. They had not expected the tests would drag on forever.

“Follow me, madam,” Clark turns and walks out of the room and Jessica follows. The other [Gentlemen] follow Jessica in orderly double file.

Explosions, destruction, mayhem. Each clash resounds; the sounds of violence echo through the passageways. She frowns. They don’t sound like Quasi’s usual detonations.

As she descends, the sounds become louder until, eventually, she and Clark reach a closed door.

“Here we are, the testing room.”

With a dramatic motion, he grabs the door’s knob, turns it, and pushes open the door. He stands to the side, to let Jessica see the ruins of what might have been an arena. Cracks line the walls, fissures and stray bits of stone litter the floor. Though the red, the blood, is what stands out to her eyes. And among it all, she sees the two culprits.

“Quasi!” she yells his name when she sees him. His body is injured and bleeding, his pants are ripped and torn, and his bone armor is so damaged she can see the torn muscles beneath.

He notices her and quickly raises a hand. She stops.

“Jess, I’m fine. Mr. Hannibal here is just administering his final test.”

The aforementioned [Gentleman] smiles and nods to Jessica. “Apologies, Miss Jessica. Your friend here is rather resilient and persistent.”

Jessica looks at Quasi, who just chuckles.

“A [Gentleman] does not give up in the face of adversity,” Quasi states, which gets an annoyed grunt of acknowledgement from Hannibal.

“Perseverance is, indeed, a hallmark of a [Gentleman], but to persist at failure with the expectation of success is a trait of the mad.”

Hannibal slashes his sword. Jessica hears the soft whistle of air through the holes in its blade, however Quasi staggers and his armor cracks from the sound, cleverly directed and amplified by Hannibal’s Domain.

“Stupid vibration magic bullshit,” grumbles Quasi. He raises his hand, forms a player piano from his mana, and hurls it at Hannibal. With a nonchalant wave of his sword, Hannibal elicits a soft hoot that disperses Quasi’s construct.

“Watch your tongue, Mr. Eludo.”

Quasi glares.

Jessica shakes her head in confusion. “What…” She stops to rub her temples. “What is all this? Why are you fighting?”

The [Hero] takes a deep breath in annoyance. Hannibal’s Domain let’s the old man control acoustic vibrations and multiply their power. All of Quasi’s bardic spells are pretty much useless since the [Vibration Master Gentleman] can just silence, or worse, reflect them. Only his [Arcane Instrument] spell is usable, but slow moving instruments aren’t the most effective weapons.

“The last test is to remove his hat.” He answers.

Jessica frowns. “So why are you fighting him?”

Quasi stops and looks at Jessica. He does a double-take when he notices the… changes. She looks refreshed, and her hair is no longer in a bun but flows down her back. Also, she’s wearing a dress, a very nice dress every [Gentleman] would agree, of modest length.

“Because I need to get the hat off his head.”

Jessica stares at Quasi like he is an idiot.

“So, why do you have to fight him?”

Quasi rolls his eyes, “Well, be-” he stops. His eyes widen as he finally comprehends the vastness of his folly. He looks at Hannibal, who reveals a knowing smile.

“Oh… Fuck.”

“Language!” Hannibal chastises him.

Quasi falls to his knees at the realization that he made a huge mistake. He just needs to remove the hat. It doesn’t need to be done forcefully. Nobody would have passed if violence were the answer.

“So uh, Hannibal, sir, I don’t suppose you would be willing to remove that hat of yours?”

Hannibal takes his usual stance.

“Quasi Eludo, you have just spent over six hours attempting to physically remove the hat from my head, and now you expect me to remove it myself?”

Hannibal shakes his head, “The answer is no. If you want me to doff my hat, then you will need to show me something. Give me a good reason, otherwise, you will fail.”

Quasi stands back up and scratches his chin. “A reason eh. I don’t suppose you can give me a hint? Maybe something you enjoy?”

Hannibal chuckles. “That would be cheating, wouldn’t it?”

Quasi shrugs, the armor of bone retreats slowly into his spine. It will take time for the skill to fully recover from the damage it sustained.

“Just tell me about yourself. Some interests, maybe a hobby? I’m sure a distinguished and well-regarded man such yourself would hold a refined taste?”

Hannibal tilts his head, curious, though amused. Nobody has ever asked about his interests during the trials.

“Art, Mr. Eludo. Art, above all else, is the expression of sublimity. Of the arts, of which there are many, the nearest and dearest to my heart would be music. For an orchestra, many skilled [Musicians] working in tandem, striving for common purpose and goal, toiling and practicing their part endlessly for merely one performance, is the truest form of beauty one may experience.”

Quasi walks to his discarded shirt and coat. He puts them on, wincing slightly from the bruises all over his body.

“Simple enough.”

Quasi spreads his arms. His shadows turn violet then grow and merge. From out his shadow, arise the undead. With hunger smoldering in their glowing, violet eyes, they step forth into the world.

Jessica chuckles as she watches a hundred humanoid undead form up in a semicircle, five rows deep, centered on Quasi and facing Hannibal.

Hannibal studies at the multitude of skeletons. Each one holds an instrument of bone. Of the fourteen musical instruments, he can distinguish the gross forms of trumpets and horn, flutes, lutes, and drums, yet the particulars of each he has never before seen nor heard.

Quasi’s shadow closes, the undead still. He reaches out his right hand and his cain flies across the room to land in his palm. He assumes Hannibal’s pose, then his poise cracks and he grins his usual, cocky grin..

"if this doesn't doff your hat, then I don't know what will.

"I call this piece, ‘*The Dance of Two’*.”

The music begins and Hannibal releases his domain with a smile.

Many think of it as an oncoming tide. A storm. A force of nature, bearing down from above, that none may escape.

Alas, for it is an ill metaphor.

Picture, if you will, a dance.

Emotion in every movement, synchronized, stylized.

No conductor, no leaders. Merely an audience, observers of the performance. A surge from the left, before recessing; the right, fleeing for merely a moment, before darting into the gap left behind. Not a ship, swallowed by a wave, but partners, perfectly balanced in action and reaction.

A step here, a twirl there. A shift in weight, one guiding the other before switching roles. A pirouette into dip, one supporting the other, before returning to stability. Over and over, closer

and closer as they twist and turn within the others reach, all for it to start again, as if it were always meant to be that way.

And then, silence.

But this is not the end. No curtains fall, no fade to black. The duo move away, but remain on stage. For it is the beginning of the next act.

Trumpets signal their arrival. Pairs enter from stage left and right, springing in all at once. They move in unison, following the dance of the first two impeccably in all ways. And still, tension builds, rising, rising, rising,

Until it breaks loose.

Grand Jete, En Pointe, Fouette, En Avant, all at once as the entire stage is filled with nothing but motion and disconnection. And yet even then, the discord is coordinated, the cacophony calculated.

The soft arrival, a jagged exit, and an abrupt stillness as the audience is reminded of the two who were forgotten. And, once more, they dance the same dance they did at the beginning. The swarm of people, frozen, still as statues, waiting…

And the cycle begins anew. The private, emotional back and forth of the two contrasts against the magnitude of the multitude.. Unified for a moment, only to separate in another. It almost seems like the independent parts of the dance call to each other, complementing their uniqueness yet signifying that desire to be one again.

Interdependence. Not truly one without the other..

The melding comes slow, sluggish to the point where unless specifically paid attention to would cause doubt that it would ever happen. The dance of two becomes the dance of two hundred, a side of deep and bold movements colliding with light and transient turns and shifts.

The limbs quicken, the breaths quicken, the air quickens. Motion!

The groups join each other's folds, the harmony with each other without flaw. The stimuli is overwhelming as it blends together in a tug, pulling against each other, vying for the last note, the last step, the last beat.

The finale.

...

And there is quiet once more.

A well crafted and heavily enchanted carriage rides down the streets of Camelot. The carriage is pulled by two well bred and skill enhanced horses. Pedestrians make way as they see the image on the side of the carriage. A stylized depiction of a staff, the heraldry of the Academy's [Headmaster], glows on each side of the carriage. Glowing staff. An image telling everyone that the [Headmaster] of Camelots prestigious academy resides inside.

Unfortunately for the would-be gawkers and agents of the free press, the enchanted, silvered windows show only their own reflections, obstinately ensuring the occupants' privacy.Were, however, the carriage's occupants known, it would be quite the talk of the town.

"I don't mean to be mean Thallom, but if he is the one leading Camelot, shouldn't we make an appointment first?"

Thallom chuckles. "You would be right, Franky, in most circumstances. But, Aodean is a bit... unique."

"Yes, but shouldn't we at least announce we are coming?"

Thallom smiles towards the young [Hero]. He points outside.

"We're here, and it looks like Aodean has started."

Franky looks at the mansion and then notices smoke wafting behind the large building.

The carriage stops and the [Coachman] opens the door. Franky and Thallom exit the carriage. They walk toward the mansion.

"Where is everyone?" Franky asks.

"In the back, probably."

They reach the front entrance. Thallom nocks on the large double doors. He sighs when nobody answers.

"Is he not home?"

Thallom shakes his head. He moves his hand to the doorknob. His eyes glow for a second, followed next by a click. He turns the handle and opens the door.

"Uh?" Franky gives Thallom a pointed look.

“It's fine, just another wednesday.”

Thallom enters the mansion, Franky following a moment later.

“It's empty.”

“Everones in the back.” Thallom walks through the hallway, reaching the far end of the mansion in less than a minute. Franky’s eyes widen as he realizes what's happening.

“It's a barbecue!”

“Hmmm, it does sound similar to what he calls it.” Thallom shifts the glass doors open and takes a step into the backyard.

The backyard of the mansion is large enough to allow dozens of people to sit, talk, and eat comfortably. In the center of the yard is a grill. Next to the grill is a smiling guy wearing an apron. The man looks up from the grill.

“Thallom, you cunt! It’s about time you fucking came to my barby!”

A slow smile finds itself on Franky’s face when he sees the tall man in the midst of grilling. The smile only gets wider as said man forcibly hands his tongs to a nearby man in a suit before walking in their direction.

“Every week, Thallom! Every week, I’ve and you said, and it’s all students this and papers that, but now,” Aodean looks to Franky, “you’re not even here to eat! Who's the kid?”

“This is Franky, another [Hero] that I thought it prudent for you to meet.”

Aodean blinks. He takes another look at the kid. He then smiles. “Oh, American, ey?”

Franky nods.

“And I’ve never met a man so blatantly Australian.”

Aodean laughs. “Good, we can skip the basic shit. Let's go find a place to sit.” Aodean turns and starts walking, ”I need a cold one anyway. Standing in front of a grill really gets you thirty.”

Franky looks at Thallom, who only shrugs.

Franky isn't much of a drinker. It’s not his preferred form of fun. Regardless, he will drink enough for a little fuzz, but he doesn't necessarily like the taste. The burgers on the other hand, now that is a different story.

“Mate, that's your fifth burger. Where does it even go?”

Franky looks to Aodean across the table, specifically the seventeen empty bottles of alcohol…

“Really?”

Aodean, cheeks red from booze, snorts before chugging down another bottle.

“I have skills, mate. [Engorged Bladder] so I don't have to pee for a good long while. I also have [Controlled Intoxication], So I can keep that perfect buzz going too.”

“You have skills to help you drink more?”

Aodean grabs another bottle, the cap falling off on its own.

“Being able to drink a lot really helps with making deals with Dwarfs.”

“Really.”

Aodean nods, “Oh yea. I’ve got the respect of a-”

Aodean stops talking. He frowns as he looks around. Everyone else also stops doing what they are doing. Everybody looks around, confused; even Thallom who can't pinpoint the source of ....

“Is that... music?” Aodean asks.

Thalloms scrunches his brow as he looks to the sky in bewilderment.

“The whole city can hear it.”

Aodean, still a bit confused as he listens to the orchestral music, turns to look at Franky.

“You okay mate? You look like you've seen a ghost.”

Franky swallows slowly. He blinks.

“The song is called… *The Dance of Two,”* a smile reaches his lips, ”by Quasi Eludo.”