

They eventually left the dilapidated orphanage and were greeted with the sight of an artificial star – a golden building constructed in the center of a slum in the far distance.

But that still did not shine as brightly as Magus himself did, nor did the invisible star he kept staring at in the sky.

“You understand why I brought you here. It is of a resonance I felt. A ripple that swept the sands of this desolate place. While hope has enough flavors for us to remain here for the next ten years, it will all come down to one thing.”

“What is it?” Frost patiently asked, waiting for what felt like minutes before Magus’ card transformed into that of the Magician.

“A belief.” He stated. “And it is through belief that miracles can be born. What glues them together like the binding of a book is oneself. What I mean to say is that stars – the symbols of hope – should be determined by only ourselves. If we all look at the same things, then are damned to same fate as the last that failed.”

“Belief gives birth to miracles. The same can be said about the Stars too, right?”

It was a collective belief that brought them to exist in the first place according to the Arbiter. When the stars disappeared and they lost their literal meaning, perhaps it was their individual beliefs that had made them so monstrous in the first place.

“More than that.” Magus cleared his throat. “Us. That’s why an Awakening is a belief that comes from within more than just an epiphany. I felt it. But such thing has perhaps never happened before in this world. It’s still so abstract. Even the formation of literal stars is easier to understand than the formation of one’s true belief to make them their own Star.”

He himself was also confused, and he openly admitted it with what felt like a smile. His joyous tone steadily returned as he spoke of the prospects of the future, his body become more and more animated now that he had proof that people could truly become Awakened.

“An Awakening is akin to that. To become the you that you have not yet become, unlike the Corrupted that takes what already exists from within.” He concluded, panting, and brushing off the nonexistent sweat from his forehead.

“Like an idealized self?” Frost found it hard to hold back a small chuckle. Though they shared the same views, what they saw was completely different.

“Perhaps. It’s shameful for me to admit as the face of hope itself that I am not certain of it. But my friend, you have shown me that hope exists even here. I wept stardust when Res’ dear mother’s light finally extinguished. She would have been the first.”

It was not blissful ignorance or a veil that covered one’s eyes like Res. Rather, what Magus saw was an ideality – a manifested belief that came from the deepest reaches of oneself.

That was when Frost realized it as she saw a streak of light suddenly cross the sky.

Hope was something that existed when all lights were extinguished.

Hope was something that illuminated one's world in their darkest hour.

Hope was the thing that kept people chasing dreams.

But true hope was to transform into someone better.

"An Awakening isn't just a realization. It's..." Frost tried to find a better word for it, eventually landing on: "... A finalization, huh."

"A woman after my own cards!" Magus laughed. "Perfectly put. A finalization of oneself. Corruption is born from many aspects of emotions and thoughts. But it ultimately boils down to the things that pre-exist. An Awakening is more than just that. It makes you wonder how such a power came to be."

"... Maybe it's what Elysia intended for in the first place instead of Corruption." Frost threw in a curveball into the conversation.

"It could very well be. The Corruption and Awakening are two sides of the same coin. But one side lands on every flip of the coin. Yet even so, it goes to show how intertwined both Affinities are." He flipped a coin several times.

It landed on the same side each time before he chucked it straight into a breast pocket.

"As you can see from this Floor, hope incurs despair. I often wonder if I was a good person in the past. It can be easy to use the despair of others as the source of one's own hope. Ideally another's hope can be one's own." Magus fell onto the sand dune, sitting upright as he clutched tightly onto his cane.

A silent breeze swept by again. The Star Child and the Sleepy Frost suddenly came into view as Frost sat down beside him. Then to his surprise, he felt a warm arm wrap over his shoulder.

"You're a good man Magus. Don't let yourself say otherwise."

"Hearing that from a friend is a gift I shall cherish. Awaken people, Frost. Beyond your admittedly terrifying maw and powers will undoubtedly rival Corrupted like that of the Icon of Judgement – I think your power lies in something else."

"You think so?"

"Oh friend, I *know* so. How many people have changed because of you? How has this small part of the world changed because you took the mantle that others refused? While you can Corrupt, Realize and rescue through Salvation – You have shown that an Awakening is part of your deck of cards. Not just for the Floors and the Archetypes. But for all."

"... I... Mhm." Frost was at a loss for words. Hearing this from Magus meant everything to her, to the point where her eyes blurred. "Yeah. To me it's the natural thing to do. To call it a superpower feels absurd. Aha..."

She struggled to hold her grin, her eyes glistening despite the absence of the stars. Instead, her eyes were the stars of the night sky, and those tears that trickled down her cheeks sparkled more brightly than anything in the world.

“... yeah. It hits like a truck when someone else spells it out for you.” Her voice quavered as the lump in her throat grew. “I’ve helped a lot of people. And I’ve also lost so many more. I think I know what you mean by it all being two sides of the same coin. That loss has only taught me to be better —”

A surge of emotions caught her voice. The lump that formed was unbearable as she clutched her chest.

“— But it hurts so much sometimes. It’s unbearable. Hope takes more than just belief. It takes courage. That’s what I believe.”

“That’s still a belief, friend.” Magus’ tone changed again, not wanting to intrude on Frost’s outburst.

He then handed over a golden handkerchief to her.

“Those tears are proof of your resolve. Our existences that were once blips in a lost history have become something that can tangibly change the lives of countless. We are ‘stars’ to many. But you are even greater than that. The humility you still have is a trait most valuable for someone with so much power. Frost. You have gathered so many to propagate our ideas. It’s limited, but it has changed many lives for the better.”

“In one small part of the world. But I’m proud of it.” Frost thanked him as she wiped her tears away. “I really needed to hear that. An Awakening won’t be easy, but I believe many of us can get there one day.”

“As I said, miracles are born from beliefs!”

“Yeah. Belief. Those things direct us to where we need to go.”

“Now you’re understanding! Because without belief, it becomes a place where one wants to go, rather than needs.” Magus celebrated with a hearty laugh now that Frost had recovered. “When I Awaken, I wonder what will change. What I will discover. What will become of me. But I shall patiently wait until that day arrives. Because I can firmly believe that it is a matter of time with you at the helm of the Nexus. All of us trust you.”

“No pressure.” Frost laughed. “That’s what I’m aiming for. There’s a lot of things on my plate. But I’m happy everyone’s sharing it. Magus. Thank you. I’ve learnt a lot. I’m lucky that we have you around.”

“Likewise, my friend. Aim high. And in due time —”

Magus sought the stars again.

“— Everything in the Nexus will be Awakened.”