

## [Adam C. POV]

I found myself submerged in the calm, enveloping darkness of the sea, sitting at the bottom of the sea inside a spiritual barrier.

Inside this little box of twelve by twelve, I had more than enough oxygen to last a few hours if I wanted to. So, I had time to think, and ponder on my next move.

For the moment I was using Kaido to mend my wounds to an acceptable state, letting the familiar warmth of these wonderful techniques flow through my body.

I could feel it, a hum in the back of my mind, the energy signatures of my friends in combat. Each pulse of magic was a reminder of the battle that was still raging above me.

A spike in energy signaled the climax of one such battle, a force I recognized instantly. Erza.

I felt a small smile tug at my lips. I knew she'd come out on top, that being said, something felt off about this. It had taken her longer than I would've expected to finish her fight, Ikaruga was strong, but not strong enough to give her this much trouble.

It didn't make much sense.

I pondered over it, the rhythmic thrumming of the ocean around me providing a soothing backdrop to my thoughts. Could it be that Ikaruga had somehow managed to counter Erza?

As soon as that notion hit me, I dismissed it.

No, it couldn't be that the gap between them was big enough to cover any gaps in experience.

And then it hit me, The Tower. Our shared past, the specters of memories it held... it was probably affecting her more that she would care to admit, shaking her usual unwavering focus.

I didn't blame her.

Despite my usually calm demeanor right now, even I was being affected by this.

The thing was, that unlike Erza, I had some form of closure with this wretched place.

With a sigh, I shifted my attention to another familiar energy. Cana.

Her battle had started basically at the same time Erza's had, but unlike hers, Cana's battle had been swift and decisive, ending almost as soon as it had begun.

Heck, for a moment there I almost think I felt Laxus' power.

The point was everyone was winning their fights.

Meaning I could fully focus on figuring out if Jellal's threat had any bark to it.

Fortunately for me, I had someone doing just that for me. The old man, who I had called a few moments ago to confirm whether or not I needed to change my current strategy.

The sudden vibration in my pocket broke through my deep concentration, the familiar ringtone of my lacrima phone echoing softly in the underwater void.

I pulled out the magical device, reading the caller ID. Gramps.

"Good news, old man?" I said as I answered the call. After all, his next words would decide whether or not I stayed to destroy this place.

"Adam," He started, his deep voice rang out through the tiny speaker, an undercurrent of seriousness in his tone. "Your suspicions were correct."

I listened, my heart pounding a little faster, as he told me of his findings.

According to him, he had Mystogan help him scour the entire town, in order to examine every trace of magic around, every potential anomaly, but as I imagined, their search yielded nothing.

Meaning there was second Etherion, no imminent threat waiting to be unleashed.

A wave of relief washed over me, so strong that it momentarily took my breath away. However, as Makarov's words fully sunk in, the warmth in my smile faded.

And in its place, a different emotion began to stir in me, one that was cold and bitter.

Anger.

The coward of Jellal had resorted to the pathetic use of threats, playing on my connection with Magnolia to avoid his plans getting destroyed...

But, as I had expected, it was all a bluff. One I couldn't call out without reliable sources, but a bluff nonetheless.

A manipulative game played by the weak, a cowardly tactic used to put me on an edge, to make me question my every move, weighing the consequences behind them.

I had to admit, it was infuriating, but more than that, it was a stark reminder of the lengths some were willing to go in order to gain even the slightest upper hand.

Anger coursing through me, the grip tightened around the lacrima phone, my knuckles white with the intensity of my emotions.

"Thank you, Master," I said into the phone, my voice steady despite the storm of emotions within me. "I will finish this."

Makarov's voice softened at this, "I know you will, my boy."

With those words, he hung up the phone, leaving me alone in the dark, underwater chamber I had created as a temporary base.

The silence that followed was deafening, the only sound being the gentle lapping of water against the walls of spiritual energy.

I closed my eyes and took a deep, steadying breath, feeling my reiatsu simmering beneath the surface of my calm exterior.

It began as a flicker, a spark that ignited in the core of my being. Slowly but surely, it swelled, growing stronger, wilder, a fire threatening to engulf everything.

The raw manifestation of my spirit and power, reacting to my emotions.

I could feel my anger, my power, coursing through my veins, pulsating with my heartbeat, resonating with my very soul, as I remained silent, a stark contrast to the brewing storm within me.

"No more games, Jellal," I muttered, releasing a low growl that echoed throughout the chamber as my power broke free.

The sea around me reacted instantly, the calm, tranquil waters thrown into chaos by the sheer force of my unleashed energy.

The sea shook violently, undulating waves rolling and crashing against each other in a frenzy as the surface erupted into chaotic mess, echoing my rage and turmoil.

Yet, amidst the havoc.

I remained silent and still.

I wasn't angry that Jellal had rebuilt the Tower. I knew he had been brainwashed.

I wasn't angry that he wanted to kill me. Two out of every five people I meet want to.

I was angry at the threat he had decided to use to win.

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## **[Jellal Fernandes. POV.]**

I stepped out of the healing chamber, my body mostly revitalized, and ready for the battle to come. I hadn't expected Erza to reach me so quickly, proving Ikaruga was weaker than I had thought, but as I saw her enter the room, her sword at the ready, I couldn't help but smirk.

I might not be at my full power, but I had recovered enough to take her down.

"Erza," I drawled, my gaze flitting to her weapon, "Is that a way to greet a friend?"

She didn't respond at first, her gaze as icy as her sword's edge. "If you were my friend, you would see the error of your ways."

I chuckled at that. How naive of her.

Oh well, it was time for her to serve her purpose.

I had already made one of my two objectives pay.

"You will die just like he did," I said, my voice dripping with venom as I raised my hand.

However, before any of us could do or say anything else, a wave of power washed over us, so raw and forceful it nearly knocked me off my feet.

My heart pounded in my chest as the ground seemed to shake, a primal fear gripping me. The sheer magnitude of the power was monstrous, suffocating, almost tangible.

He... he had survived?!

Disbelief seared through me.

I had watched him plummet into the sea; his body wrecked by the Etherion's blast. And yet, there was no doubt, this was his power, his rage, and it was all directed at me.

A cold dread washed over me as I realized the implication behind this.



If he had survived and had waited this long before making his presence known, it could mean one thing. He had seen through my ruse.

Meaning he knew there was no second Etherion, no backup plan. That I had lied to avoid the annihilation of my goal.

I gritted my teeth, my mind racing.

This was bad, very bad, I had to act now, before Adam made his move.

I had to activate the Tower right now. As much as I wanted to fight Erza, to bask in her suffering, I knew better than to ignore the looming threat raging outside.

The chances of the Tower working without the sacrifice were small, but this change of events was leaving me with no choice.

If that monster arrived, I simply had no hopes of winning.

Making my decision, as regrettable as it was, I used my celestial magic to surge towards the activation runes of the Tower with blinding speed.

Erza, quick on the uptake, following after me, her intent clear. "You will not get away!"

However, before either of us could move any further, a shift occurred in the very fabric of the air around us. A powerful silent shriek, akin to a vacuum in the emptiness of space, echoed through the chamber.

For a moment, everything stood still, the ominous sound reverberating in the air.

Then, as sudden as the silence that had befallen us, everything tilted, as the Tower split in two, right down the middle.

The deafening sound of metal and stone shearing apart filled the air, as the room around us was torn apart, the space bisected with the frightening precision.

Shock froze me in place, my mind struggling to comprehend the reality of the situation. This was not part of the plan. This was not supposed to happen.

Suddenly, out of the settling dust and debris as the Tower crumbled down on its foundations, a figure emerged. His very presence seemed to suck the very air out of the room, his towering silhouette imposing and resolute amidst the crumbling ruins of my life's work.

"Jellal."

That one word sent chills skittering down my spine, igniting an icy dread in my gut. It wasn't loud or angry, it was calm and steady.

It was the calm that scared me, the controlled fury that seemed to underpin every syllable.

His figure stepped into the light, and his eyes met mine. His gaze held a promise, a vow of retribution that made me swallow hard.

I had failed.

Everything I had worked so hard for, ruined in a single second. And now. There was nowhere to run, no place to hide.

"Jellal are you ready for... Wait a second... Are you afraid?" Adam chuckled dryly. "Oh god! You are! Oh, my fucking God! This is pathetic, I can't stay angry at something so pitiful. It's demeaning for me."

"Adam!" Erza beamed at him, an uncharacteristic warmth filling her voice.

It didn't matter anymore.

I had failed.

My life was no longer worth a thing. I had no purpose.

