

**PART 2:**

**A CHANCE  
ENCOUNTER**

Present Day...


Now... to  
better prepare  
you for  
taking your  
oath...

...I'd like you  
to show me if  
you've made any  
progress in your  
ability to obscure  
your magical  
casting.

What?

You want me  
to cast magic  
right here, in  
the middle of  
the street?





Oh! Dear  
me, girl!

Certainly  
not!

If you  
failed at your  
attempt, I'd have  
to jump back  
into my office to  
retrieve you!





No. There  
are far safer  
ways to test your  
skills that do not  
require you to  
cast magic in  
public!

Oh? Like  
what?



Well, we  
can try this  
for a start!

Snap!



Uh...

...what  
the heck,  
Mira?

*Oh, by the stars! I'm so sorry, Robin!*



A woman with short, vibrant red hair and striking blue eyes is depicted from the waist up. She is wearing a form-fitting, black, glossy latex suit with a zipper down the front and a small gold ring at the collar. Her expression is one of surprise or indignation, with her mouth slightly open and her hands raised to her chest. The background is a blurred, outdoor setting with a light-colored ground and a dark, out-of-focus structure in the distance.

I wasn't  
expecting my  
spell to transform  
your outfit into  
anything remotely  
resembling  
that!

*It was simply  
supposed to change  
your outfit into  
something that people  
would find very  
hard to ignore!*






Like not  
so long ago, it  
merely shortened a  
girl's dress so that it  
showed a touch  
too much  
ankle!








Well, this outfit  
will definitely  
attract a lot more  
attention than a  
bare ankle!

A woman with short red hair, wearing a black, shiny, form-fitting latex suit and high heels, stands on a city sidewalk. She has her arms crossed and is looking to her right. The background shows a blurred city street with trees and other pedestrians. Three speech bubbles are connected to her by thin black lines. The first bubble is on the left, the second is on the right, and the third is at the bottom right.

So can  
you please  
undo this?

There's a  
lot of people  
out here on  
this street...


...and I'm  
feeling really  
exposed!



Don't worry,  
there's nothing  
to be scared  
about...

...yet.

You're  
under my  
protection.




*Because if you  
spared a moment  
to focus on your  
surroundings instead  
of yourself...*


*...you would  
notice that not  
a person here has  
taken an ounce of  
interest in your  
present attire.*



*Magic is  
loud, flashy,  
it catches  
the eye.*



*Much like  
your current  
outfit.*


A woman with short, vibrant red hair and bright blue eyes is the central figure. She is wearing a sleek, black, form-fitting catsuit with a zipper down the front and a small gold ring at the collar. Her hands are raised in front of her, palms facing forward, in a gesture of surprise or surrender. The background is a blurred city street with a sidewalk and a building in the distance.

So, your  
test is to use  
the skills you've  
learned to walk all  
the way around  
this city block  
unnoticed.

What!?  
Hold on

And if you  
can do that,  
then we  
can-






Hold that  
thought...

...that...  
...that's not  
right.





What  
is it?



Those  
parasitic  
creatures over  
there, behind  
that wall?

They feed  
on excess  
magic.

They should  
not be roaming  
this city's  
streets.

And to  
see them out  
here in broad  
daylight?

That is  
unacceptable.






Wait! What do you mean by "they feed on excess magic?"

Is that man a wizard?

Far from it...

SNAP!  
SNAP!  
SNAP!



...that man  
is just an  
ordinary  
human.

SNIP!

SNAP!

SNIP!



All living things that think and dream are sources of magic to varying degrees.

Creatures that simply react and do not think, such as insects and these parasites, produce none at all...

Every creature that dreams, like birds and mammals, generate at least a touch of magic, with humans creating far more than any other non-magical entity.



*This city's inhabitants  
are responsible for the vast  
majority of the background  
magic that presently  
surrounds us.*

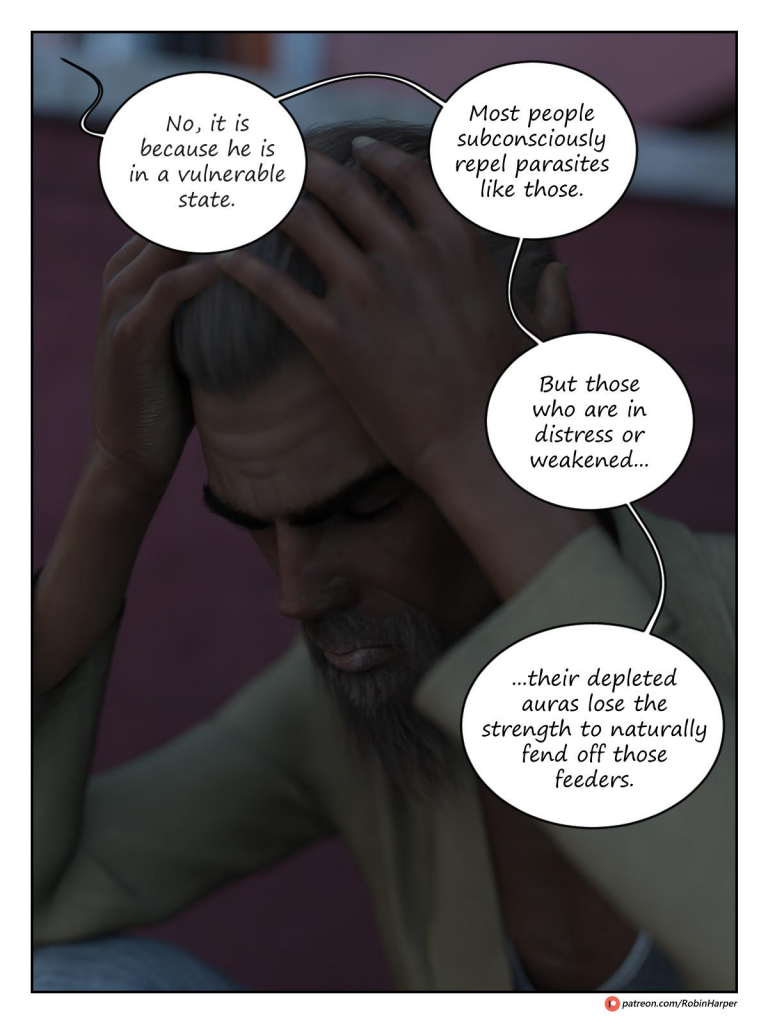


*But few are aware of  
it or strong enough to  
harness what they  
create on their own.*



So were those things feeding on this man because he produces more magic than most?






No, it is because he is in a vulnerable state.

Most people subconsciously repel parasites like those.

But those who are in distress or weakened...

...their depleted auras lose the strength to naturally fend off those feeders.




*But now that  
you have destroyed  
those things, he'll  
recover, right?*



I'm sorry,  
Robin, but those  
things were not  
responsible for  
this man's  
misery.

They merely  
took advantage  
of it.

The cause  
of his suffering  
is due to  
something  
else.



But we can help him, right?

We can use our magic to fix this.




*Magic can certainly  
be used to help  
many people and  
fix many things.*

*But it can also  
be used to hurt  
many more people  
and break far  
more things.*



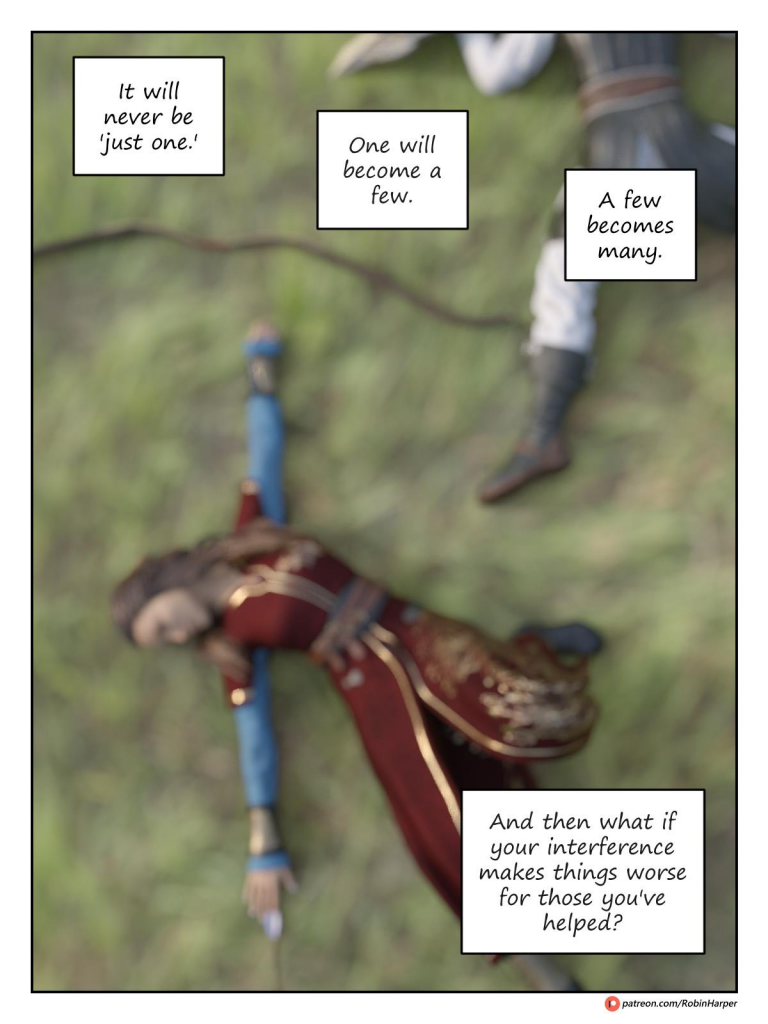
*If you interfere with the natural order of the world, what results of your meddling, whether good or ill, becomes your responsibility.*





*But what harm  
can come from  
helping just  
one man?*




A woman in a red and gold costume lies on her back on a grassy field. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved top under a red tunic with gold trim and a red cape. Her eyes are closed, and she appears to be unconscious or dead. In the background, the lower legs and feet of another person in white and blue clothing are visible, suggesting a scene of aftermath or conflict.

It will  
never be  
'just one.'

One will  
become a  
few.

A few  
becomes  
many.

And then what if  
your interference  
makes things worse  
for those you've  
helped?



So, you're  
telling me that  
despite it being  
within my power  
to help...

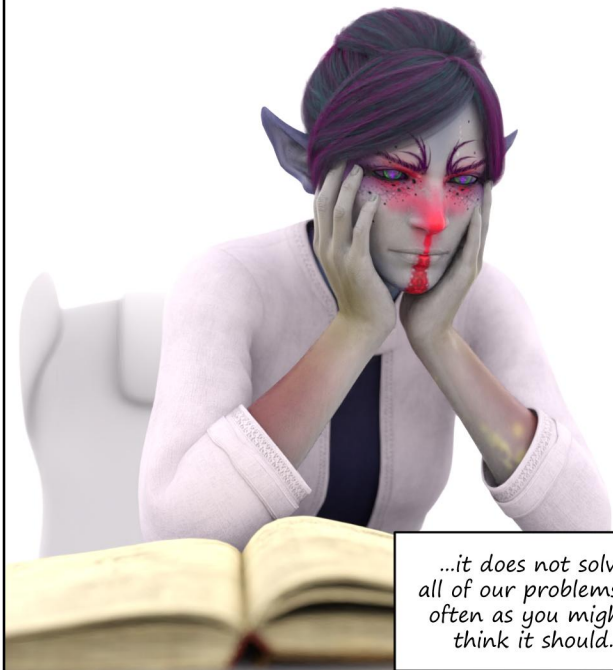
...I should  
do nothing  
at all?

No, I'm telling  
you that magic  
is a powerful  
tool.

And if you use it  
to alter the course  
of another's life...

...you must be willing  
to accept that good  
intentions can have  
consequences.

*Because while  
magic can do  
a great many  
things...*




*...it does not solve  
all of our problems as  
often as you might  
think it should.*



Well, while I might be a mere medical resident...

...I am still a doctor.

And I have to deal with that sort of ethical dilemma almost every day at work.



And while  
a little fear  
encourages us  
to act with  
caution...

...I can't let  
too much caution  
prevent me from  
taking any  
action at all.


Besides,  
I have a duty  
to provide aid  
where I can.

And this  
man needs  
help.



Very well,  
let me take  
a look at  
him.






Can I  
try first?

I know I  
was supposed to  
spend this week  
learning about how  
to hide my  
magic...

...but my  
curiosity  
got the better  
of me.

And I got  
sidetracked for  
few hours reading  
about healing  
magic.



So, um...


...before  
I try anything,  
I'm still under  
your magical  
protection,  
right?

Like, if I  
cast visible magic  
right now, I won't  
be caught by the  
enchantment?


A woman with red hair, wearing a black suit, is shown in profile on the left. She is reaching out with her right hand towards the forehead of a man sitting on the right. The man has grey hair and is wearing a tan jacket over a blue shirt. A glowing, purple and white neural network or brain scan visualization is projected onto the man's forehead. The background is a red brick wall. Two speech bubbles are present: one at the top left and one at the bottom center.

That's right.

Okay, here I go then.

A woman with short red hair, wearing a light-colored ribbed shirt, is looking down at a glowing blue energy construct. The construct is a complex, multi-layered structure of light blue lines, resembling a stylized face or a complex geometric shape. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and a fire escape.

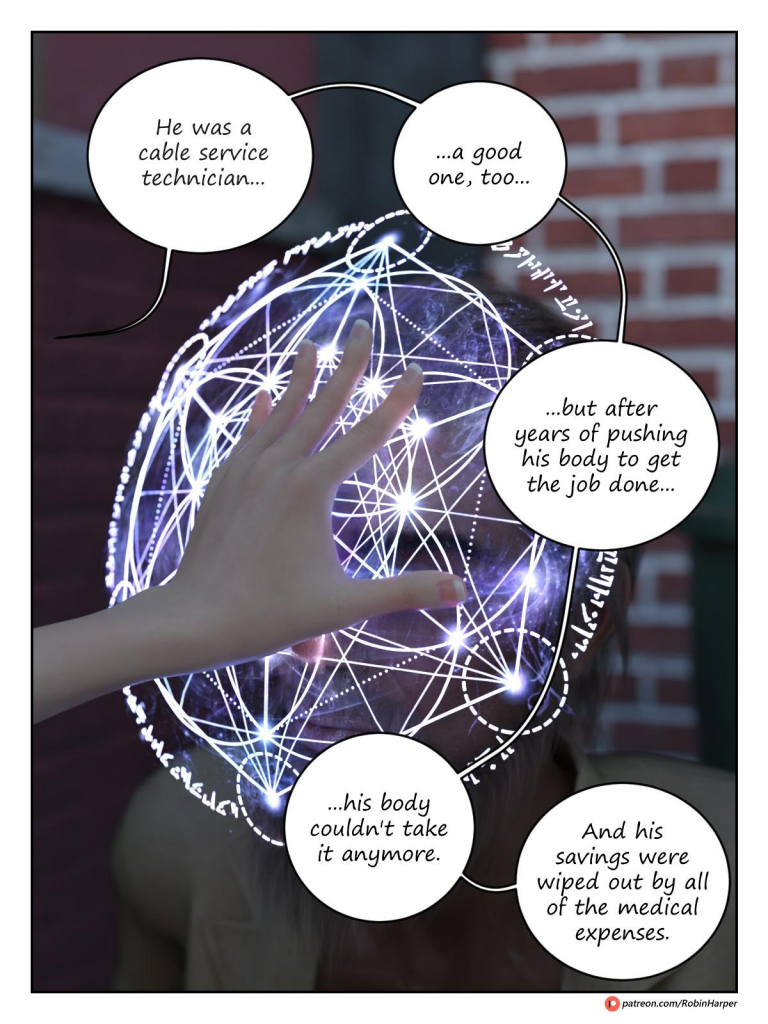
Oh fuck, how  
can he stand  
this?



What's  
the matter?

I felt a sample  
of what was  
causing his  
suffering.

And his  
lower back  
pain, among  
other things, is  
unbearable.



He was a  
cable service  
technician...

...a good  
one, too...

...but after  
years of pushing  
his body to get  
the job done...

...his body  
couldn't take  
it anymore.

And his  
savings were  
wiped out by all  
of the medical  
expenses.



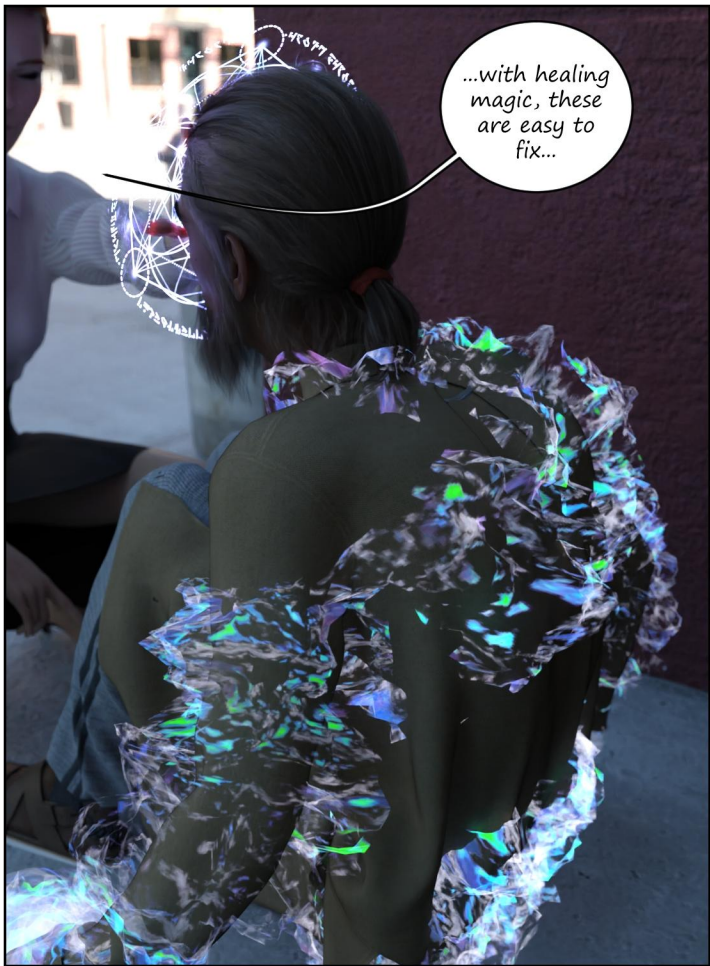


Thinning  
cartilage...


...micro-  
fractures...

...a possible  
bulging disc...





...with healing magic, these are easy to fix...




...but his system is dependent on the pain killers and other drugs he consumed to moderate his constant pain.

He craves them.

Even if I had a cleansing spell that could remove all traces of those drugs as if they were poison...

...I doubt it would eliminate his need for them.



That is  
something  
I don't have a  
spell for.



Well then, I  
suppose that will  
be part of your  
homework for  
this week.

But for-

A 3D rendered woman with short, wavy purple hair and blue eyes. She is wearing a white, textured jacket over a grey top. She has a confused expression, looking slightly to the left. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and a red fire hydrant. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image.

Hold  
on...

What  
is it?

More  
parasites.





A woman with short reddish-brown hair and blue eyes is standing on a city sidewalk. She is wearing a white, vertically-ribbed, long-sleeved button-down shirt tucked into a black, knee-length pencil skirt. She has a surprised or questioning expression on her face, with her mouth slightly open. Her right hand is raised slightly, and her left hand is resting on a grey trash can. The background shows a city street with multi-story buildings and a statue in the distance. A speech bubble is positioned to her left, containing the text "More of them!?".

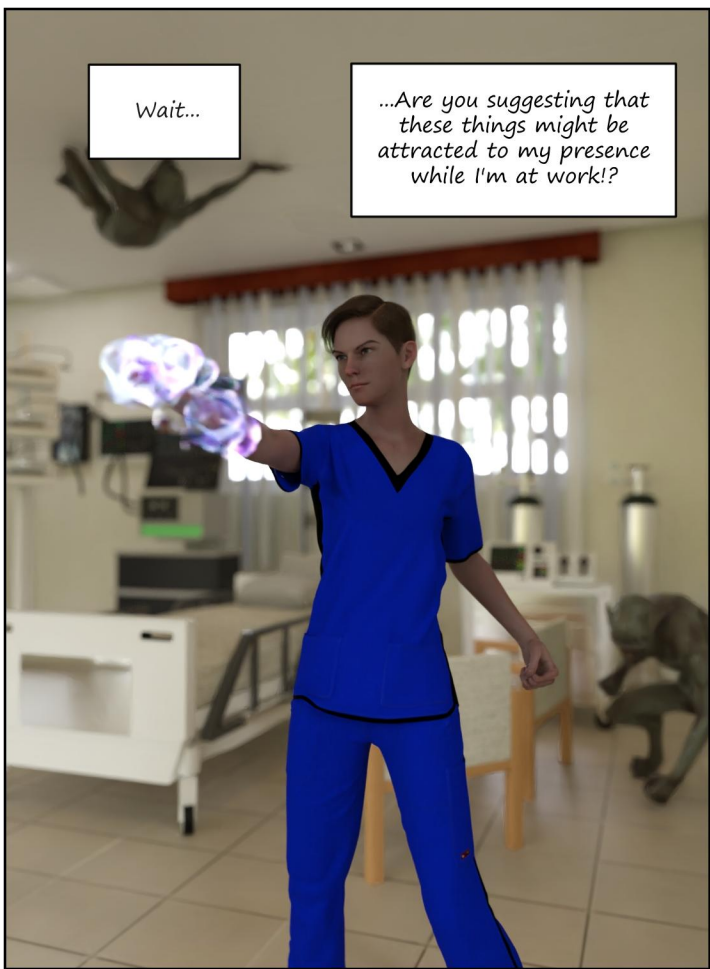
More of them!?






Wait...


*...Are you suggesting that these things might be attracted to my presence while I'm at work!?*





Yesterday,  
I would have  
said no...

...but that  
was before we  
encountered them  
here today.



Well, they can see those ghouls, all right...


...but I don't think the purple-haired one is the mysterious Purple Heart Guardian we've been searching for.

She's  
certainly  
not!

I never  
imagined I'd  
see someone like  
her walking  
these streets...

...but I think  
that purple-haired  
woman might be  
a High Lady of the  
Court of Faerie!



A character with red hair styled in a bun with two pink, horn-like accessories. She is wearing a red and white outfit with a heart-shaped pendant. The background is a light blue gradient.

Seriously?

She's a  
fairy like your  
master?

Going by the  
ridiculous amounts  
of magical energy  
she's carelessly  
radiating...

...I'd have  
to say yes.





Great!

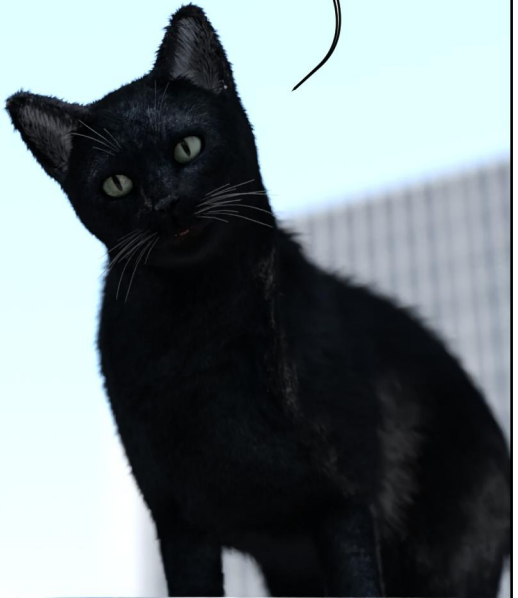
Maybe  
she can  
help us!

Wait,  
you fool!



*Shit! I hope  
that reckless idiot  
doesn't get himself  
vaporized!*

*Or worse,  
turned into  
a potato!*





Hey!




You can see us!?



Well,  
yeah...

...you're kind  
of hard to  
miss...

...your friend  
is giving off so  
much raw magical  
energy that at first we  
thought that a calamity-  
level monster had  
appeared.



*And believing that, you came here alone, without the rest of your team!?*

Cat!

I see you  
up there!

Come down  
here at once  
and explain  
yourself!



Oh, fuck  
me...



Apologies,  
my lady!

Psst!  
Bow, you  
fool!





By the stars!

I don't give a snail about formality!

What concerns me is the neglected state of these streets!

Well... uh...  
my lady...

...that's  
actually why  
I approached  
you...





...we haven't been able to keep up with our duties because someone is going around and killing Heart Guardians.

By 'Heart Guardians,' she means the Stewards, my lady.



Someone  
is what!?



*Cat! Does  
your master  
know about  
this!?*




He does.





And he's  
had no success  
in tracking down  
the culprit?




A black cat is sitting on a blue carpet, looking upwards. A speech bubble is positioned above the cat, containing text. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

Well, he  
didn't seem  
very interested  
in trying.



*Of course  
he doesn't...*

*...first  
Gildamore's  
warning, now  
this.*



Robin, your test will have to wait until tomorrow.

I have some urgent business I must attend to.



Oh, and  
Robin?


Yes?

If the  
Stewards are  
indeed as under-  
staffed as they  
say...

...and these  
things have  
become as  
widespread as  
I think they  
have...


...be careful  
when you cast  
magic to defend  
yourself.





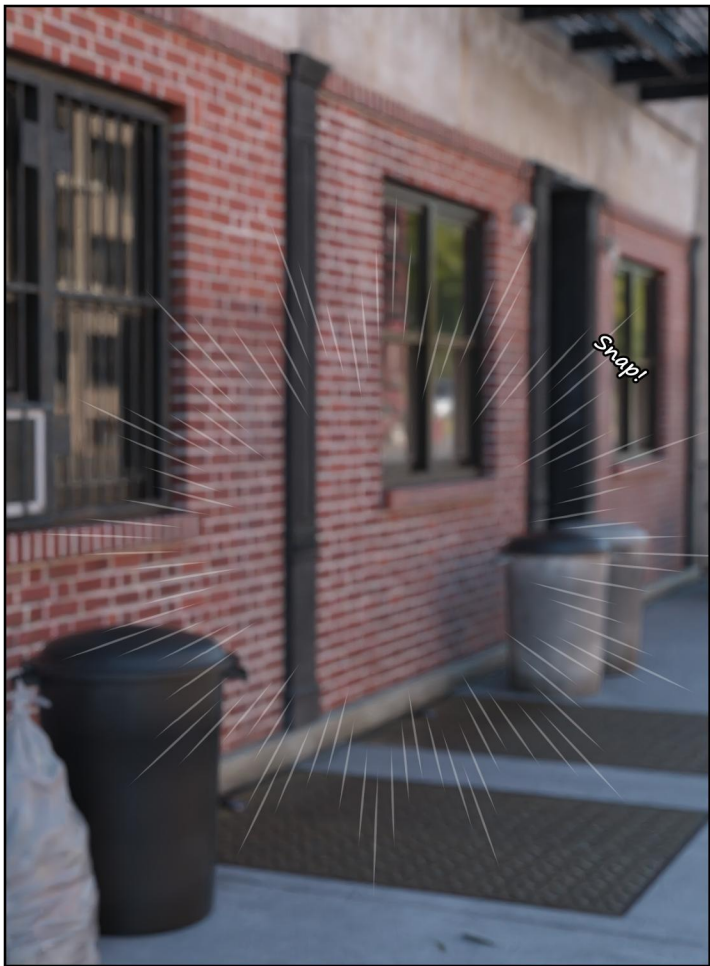
*Don't worry.  
I'll be careful.*





*Good.  
Stay safe.*










Yeah.

And are  
you a real  
magical girl?

My sister  
would be so  
jealous.



Yeah, but  
not in the  
traditional  
sense.


How  
so?

Apparently  
the 'Stewards'  
can look like  
anything.

But a  
generation  
back, a lot of  
the teams became  
obsessed with  
magical girls...

...and started  
calling them-  
selves "Heart  
Guardians."





So, because of that, and because I didn't know any better...

...when I saved the "Magical Girl" who was looking after this entire state by herself...

...I thought I was supposed to look like a Magical Girl when I was given my powers!



And you and  
the other  
Stewards are  
being hunted?



I'm only  
in danger if  
I do my job  
too well.

Which is kind  
of impossible  
when my partner  
and I have to patrol  
every city in this  
state by  
ourselves!



So as long as we just do the bare minimum, it seems like the Shadow Man is happy to leave us alone.

Except now I have some rogue Guardian who, for the past few days, has been flying around and cleaning everything up!





If I don't  
get her to stop,  
she's going to  
attract the wrong  
sort of attention  
and get us all  
killed!

By this  
Shadow  
Man?



Look, as  
much as you two  
ladies would like  
to keep on  
chatting...

Red here has  
a patrol to finish  
before flying home  
for a dinner  
engagement  
tonight.

*Oh? You  
have a date  
tonight?*




No, my partner has family coming over tonight.

But they're always late, so I'm not too worried about getting home on time.








Well, I won't  
keep you from  
your work,  
then.

I have my  
own dinner  
with family to  
get to tonight  
as well!


But it  
was cool  
meeting you,  
though.

And hopefully  
Mira can sort  
things out and  
get things back  
to normal for  
you and your  
partner!

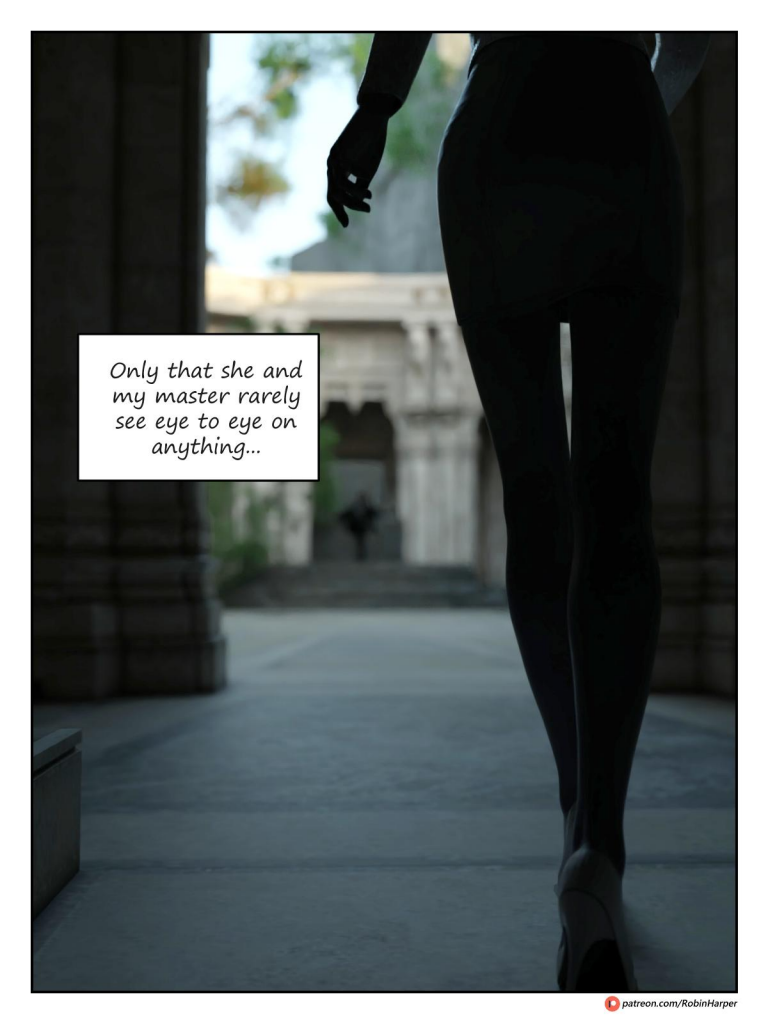


A black cat with green eyes is sitting on a light-colored, textured surface. The cat is looking slightly to the right. A speech bubble is positioned above the cat's head, containing the text "Wait, that was Mira?". The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

Wait, that  
was Mira?



Yeah, do  
you know  
her?

A person is shown from the waist down, walking away from the viewer. They are wearing a dark, form-fitting outfit, possibly a jumpsuit or leggings with a top, and high-heeled shoes. The person is silhouetted against a bright, out-of-focus background of a courtyard or garden with stone buildings and trees. The lighting is dramatic, with the person in deep shadow and the background in bright light.

*Only that she and  
my master rarely  
see eye to eye on  
anything...*

*...so I'll be shocked  
if she is any more  
successful than I was  
in getting him to act.*






Mira!

*Crawled  
out of your  
little bird cage,  
have you?*

*What brings  
you to my  
humble home  
today?*





You swore  
an oath that  
you would  
protect them!





Ah, so that  
is what this  
is about...

...figures it  
would be this  
stupid thing  
again.

Always so  
quick to act  
and so slow  
to think.

You're  
embarrassing  
yourself, little  
sprite.

For the  
hundredth  
time, I did not  
take responsibility  
for every stray  
flower.

I only swore  
that I would  
tend to the  
garden as  
a whole!

A garden  
that is presently  
being overrun by  
feral spirits and  
parasites!



*I never  
promised  
perfection.*

*And a  
few weeds  
will do little  
harm.*

*Besides... all  
that matters  
is that the  
magic flows.*

*In fact, under  
my care, our  
magical yield has  
become more  
bountiful than  
ever before.*





My garden  
is currently  
producing so much  
magic that most  
of it is going  
to waste!



So, if it isn't running at maximum efficiency, it is of little concern to me.

And should be of no concern to you.

*So crawl back  
into your hole  
and concentrate  
on your own  
duties.*

*I'm sure one  
of the youngsters  
has turned some  
cabbages blue  
somewhere.*





*Because I  
have no patience  
to spare for an  
overbearing nanny  
who does not know  
her place.*





And I wish  
I could say it  
was a pleasure  
to see you  
again, Mira...



*...but truthfully,  
it wasn't.*

