

The next morning heralded the beginning of our real life at the academy. We all awoke to find a schedule slipped under our doors. Students would study for five days a week, with each session taking up two hours. For students on the magic course, an extra period would occur on 'Friday' which otherwise ended early for everyone else. There was a wide range of subjects on offer as first-year students were pushed in several different directions at once. There was an hour break period at midday so that everyone could eat. This was roughly translated from a time management mechanic in the original game. Also, in Love Revolution – the calendar was rendered in a more generic form without names for the days and months. These gaps had been filled. Unslaw, Erslaw, Arslaw, Gerstad, Gerwent, Karbur and Karvor had taken the respective places of each day of the week.

It was Erslaw, as the induction process had taken up all of the first day of the week. That meant my first-period lesson was a physics lesson. A new and innovative field in a world undergoing its equivalent of the industrial revolution. Before that, there was a morning roll call in the cafeteria where everyone could have their morning meal before the work really began.

I grabbed my uniform from the wardrobe and dressed in front of the mirror. I had taken a liking to the shirts usually reserved for the male students – as I discovered early on that there were no specific rules about what uniform we had to wear. As long as it was issued by the school, there was nothing they could do to stop me. It was a minor difference at best. The female uniforms came in a slightly different cut with shorter sleeves. The girl's uniforms were not so distasteful that I shied away from them out of respect for my past masculine self. That guy had worn a lot of strange disguises over the years. It was completely down to my own preference. And nobody was going to make fun of 'Maria Walston-Carter' for wearing something she wanted to wear. I was anticipating a movement where my fanclub started to copy me...

When that was done and my hair was tied back into a short braid – I headed out of the door and down the main stairwell to reach the cafeteria. Like most other areas of the building, it was a nicely decorated room with tall windows and red silk curtains. On the left side of the hall was a long serving bar with several staff members hurrying in and out of the kitchen to put out various options for the students. In the morning it mostly consisted of dry, room temperature food like bread and toppings. I tried to ignore the way that some of the others were staring at me and grabbed a plate. I elected for some bread, which was freshly baked and warm to the touch, jam, butter and a small salad. I then located the most isolated table in the room and sat at the very end so that I didn't have to deal with anybody getting into my

personal space. The tables and chairs were not cheap plastic things like you'd find in a modern school. They were finely crafted wooden thrones placed behind an equally lavish grand table. I had never gone to a private school in my past life, but this was how I imagined it to be.

The bread was fantastic. I enjoyed my meal as more and more early risers filtered in through the doors and broke off into their respective cliques. I groaned internally as several of my self-declared groupies locked onto me from across from the room. Before they could ruin my morning and lavish unneeded praise on me, another girl slid in beside me and started to quietly eat her own breakfast, earning a glare of jealousy from the head of the group. My defences were bolstered further as Claudius and Maxwell sat across from me on the opposite side, completely preventing any irritating groupies from following me.

The girl next to me was wolfing down her food at a rapid clip. I stared at her for a moment, briefly meeting her auburn eyes. She swallowed a mouthful of jam-slathered bread; "I saw you speaking with the Ice King yesterday evening," she said suddenly, "Do you two have something going on?"

"I've been here for one day – what do you think?"

She smirked, "So? A lot of those marriage arrangements happen outside of school, don't they? I wouldn't be surprised to find out that someone as influential as you is marrying into the royal family."

"I can assure you that no such plan is being made."

"I wasn't worried about it. I have a bad habit of looking for gossip. A lot of your fans are already talking about how you and him are the perfect couple and junk like that."

"I see."

"I'm Talia, I sleep in the room across from yours."

"Maria," I replied simply.

"I think we're in the same class together. Would you like me to grab the seat next to you in first period?"

"Why?"

She smirked, "I know that look you keep throwing those girls. You don't want anything to do with them. I thought I'd do you a favour and keep a bit of distance between you. I'm not

expecting anything in return, it's just that we both prefer a bit of peace and quiet. I won't even talk to you if you don't want me to."

"Not that I have much of interest to say," I sighed, "If you'd like – you can take the chair next to me."

"Great, thanks a bunch."

This girl was stupid to do something like this. She was painting a huge target on her back for the mean girl squad to throw a lot of abuse at. I fully expected her to give up on her plan after a few days of having insults uttered behind her back time and time again. I'd need to handle the fanclub myself eventually and make it clear to them just how little I appreciated their near constant badgering. This school was meant to be for people of high birth and good manners, but they certainly didn't seem to care that it was rude to stare at someone while they were trying to enjoy a meal. Claudius and Maxwell hadn't noticed me before they chose their spot in the back corner. They were arguing about a crime story that Claudius had seen in the morning paper. I wasn't sure where he had gotten it from. He must have taken a second-hand copy from one of the teachers.

"I'm serious Claude – the only thing you talk about these days are people getting murdered. Give it a rest already! I don't want to hear about it while I'm trying to eat."

"It's important to keep up with all of the recent news, you know. It expands the mind, and gives you new perspectives. Don't come crying to me in a few years when your ignorance comes back to bite you."

"I don't see myself needing such things! The professor is hardly going to ask me about the exact details of how to conceal a dead body in the woods, you fool. Even talking about this is running the risk of someone getting the wrong idea."

It was a little late to worry about that given the volume of their discussion. Claudius' interest in the morbid wasn't an expression of deep discontent, or the result of childhood trauma. He was just someone who had become infatuated with the idea of being a gallant detective, solving mysteries and confounding criminals. He would be sorely disappointed to learn that most murderers didn't have a matching flair for the dramatic. There was nothing stimulating about the real act of finding a killer. It required patience and lateral thinking that I didn't believe he had. Claudius finally noticed that I was staring at him and he clammed up, turning bright red and averting his gaze elsewhere. Maxwell rolled his eyes and turned to me.

“Good morning, Lady Maria.”

I kept my manners and greeted him in turn, “Hello Maxwell.”

“You should have heard what he was saying about you yesterday-”

Claudius leapt back into the discussion and slapped his hand over Maxwell’s mouth before he could divulge all the dirty details. He laughed nervously and bowed his head, “Never mind! Maxwell, you shouldn’t make things up like that. People will get the wrong idea.”

Maxwell wrenched the invading hand free from his face and snarled, “Don’t shove your hand into my mouth, I’m trying to eat here!”

“They’re such good friends, aren’t they?” Talia commented dryly.

“Indeed, they are.”

I had to wonder why Samantha hadn’t joined in on this poor comedy routine. I looked around the room and tried to spot her in the crowd – her blonde hair was enough to make her stand out from most of the other girls, but I couldn’t see her. I had to wonder if she had made some friends during her first day here. I grabbed my plate and pushed out from my spot at the table. I handed the cutlery and the plate back to the staff, who placed it on a cart to be cleaned later. There was still some time before the first period as I had eaten my meal quickly for the sake of avoiding any conversations. It was high school all over again, at least this time it was by choice. I headed out of the hall and decided to wait by the classroom door for the lesson to start. There was a small courtyard nearby where I could get some fresh air and clear my mind.

I had to appreciate how clean the air was out here. We were rather close to a major city, but the lack of industrialisation in the area kept things breathable. The rich and the powerful weren’t going to let their favourite city turn into a smog covered hellhole. I sat down on one of the wooden benches and watched the clouds roll by. Enjoying a peaceful life in this new world was too kind a reward for the likes of me. My momentary reflection was unfortunately short lived, as another girl poured out from the door behind me like a tidal wave. She had long purple hair and straight bangs, “Lady Maria! There you are!” I remained completely silent as she bent over to catch her breath. When she was finally ready to speak again she straightened out and struck a cocky pose, “Why did you leave the hall without me?”

I didn’t want to ask – knowing that she would never shut up if I did, but the temptation was too strong; “And you are?”

She smiled, “My name is Catherine Selldorf! I was hoping that we could have a moment to speak, but those unscrupulous people took my place by your side before I could get to you. I presume you came here to escape their inane blather.”

She wouldn't recognize inane blather if it hit her over the head with a brick.

“No. I merely wished to enjoy the fresh air.”

“Ah, there's no need to hold back and be polite, Lady Maria. You can speak openly with me, I will not divulge a word of it to anyone else.” She wasn't going to take the hint and leave me alone that easily. She was the head groupie from my self-declared fanclub. I saw her shooting daggers at Talia earlier.

“If you respect me so much, who don't you take my words at face value?”

Her grin wavered for a moment, “Ah. I just... Some people are very polite, such as yourself. An esteemed lady would never speak a bad word to anyone, regardless of your real feelings.”

“I didn't mind. Who sits next to me while I eat is merely a brief inconvenience at most. It's nothing worth getting angry about.” Catherine nodded as if that was what she expected me to say the entire time, even as she tried to bait me into bullying some of the other students. I stood from my seat, revealing that I was significantly shorter than she was. “And I'm not looking for friends, if that's what you want.”

She did a very poor job of concealing her disappointment.

“It would be very presumptuous of me to assume that a lowly girl like me could be your friend, Lady Maria! I just wanted you to know that you have a great many supporters here among the student body; we all believe that you are the most fabulous girl and we all want to be like you.”

I scoffed, “I can handle myself.”

“O-Of course, that strength of character and will is just another part of your charm.”

Even my coldest stare wasn't enough to make this girl leave me alone. When I refused to respond again, she bowed her head respectfully and hurried back inside. That wasn't going to be enough to get them off my back. Nothing short of a full-throated rejection in plain terms was going to get through to them, if at all. They could just rationalise a new reason as to why I wanted to stay away from them. If whoever reincarnated me wanted my skills – they could have done better than putting me in the flashiest body around.

