

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. 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 background.

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. Three speech bubbles are positioned around her head, containing dialogue.

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 off of 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 off of 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.

So, while creatures that simply react and do not think, like 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.

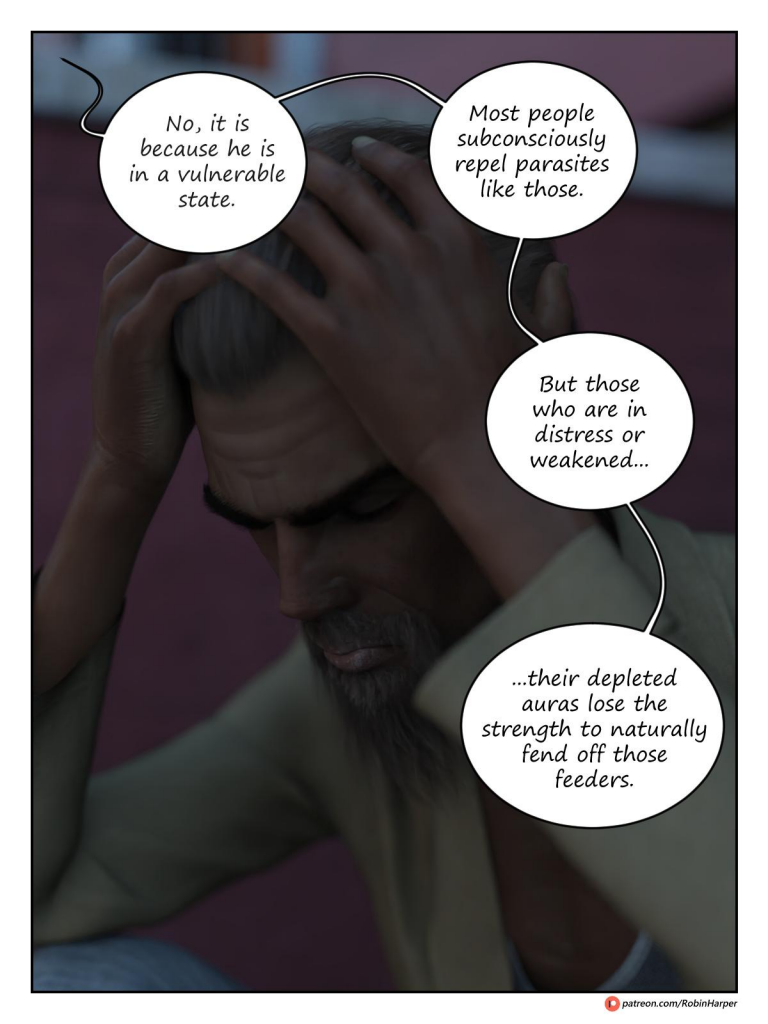
*This city's inhabitants
are responsible for the vast
majority of the background
magic that presently
surrounds us.*



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



So were those things feeding off of 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.*

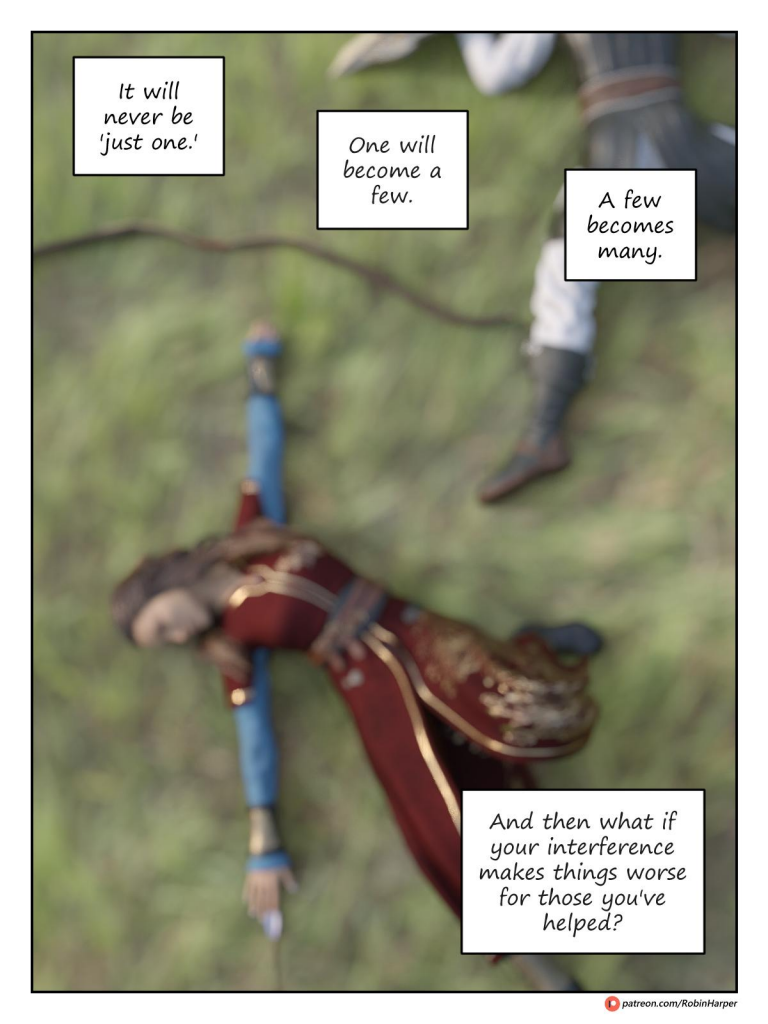


If you interfere with the natural order of the world, what results of your meddling, whether good or ill, becomes your responsibility.





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


A woman in a red and gold costume is lying on her back on a grassy field. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved top under a red cape with gold trim. 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 discovery.

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.

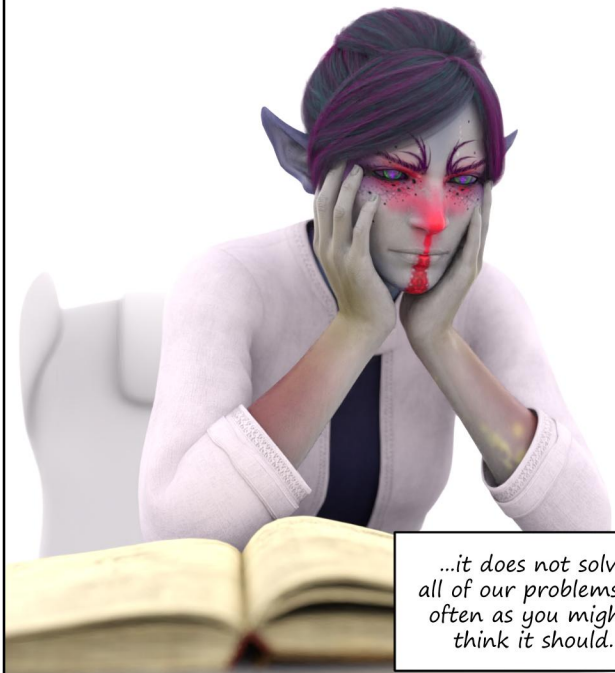
I should do
nothing at
all?

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

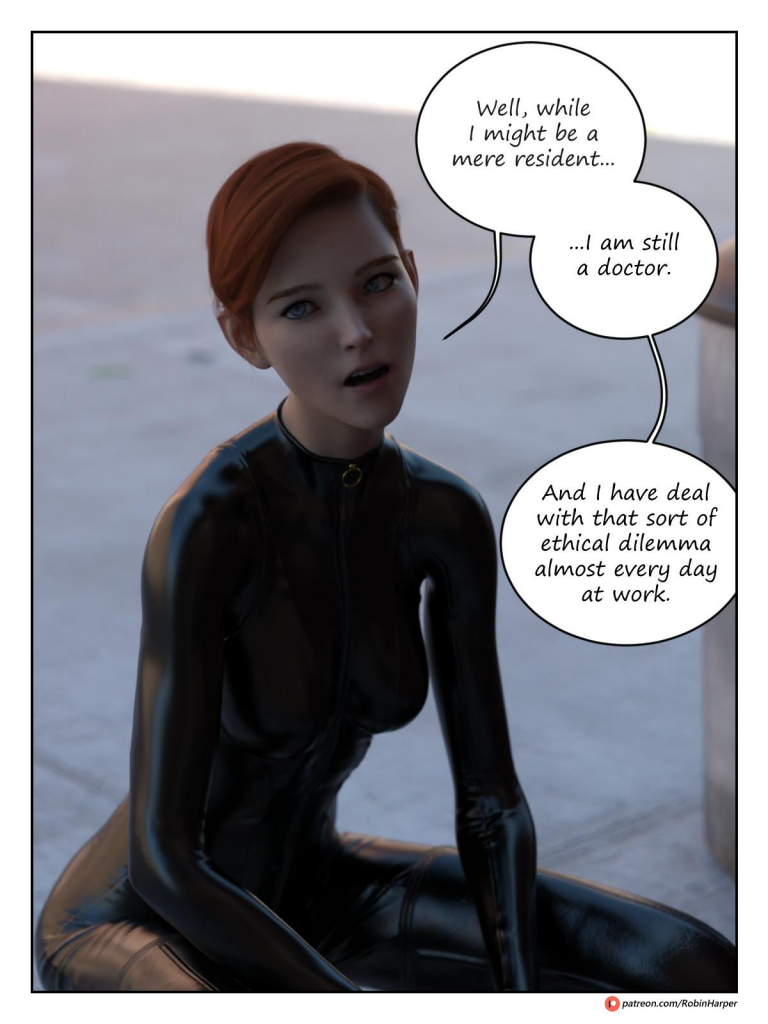
And if you use it
to alter the course
of another's life.

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.*

A woman with short, styled red hair and blue eyes is sitting on a ledge. She is wearing a black, form-fitting bodysuit with a zipper down the front and a small gold ring at the collar. She has a slightly open mouth and a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a light sky.

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

...I am still
a doctor.

And I have 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.





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 woman's hand is positioned as if she is interacting with or adjusting this visualization. The background is a red brick wall.

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.

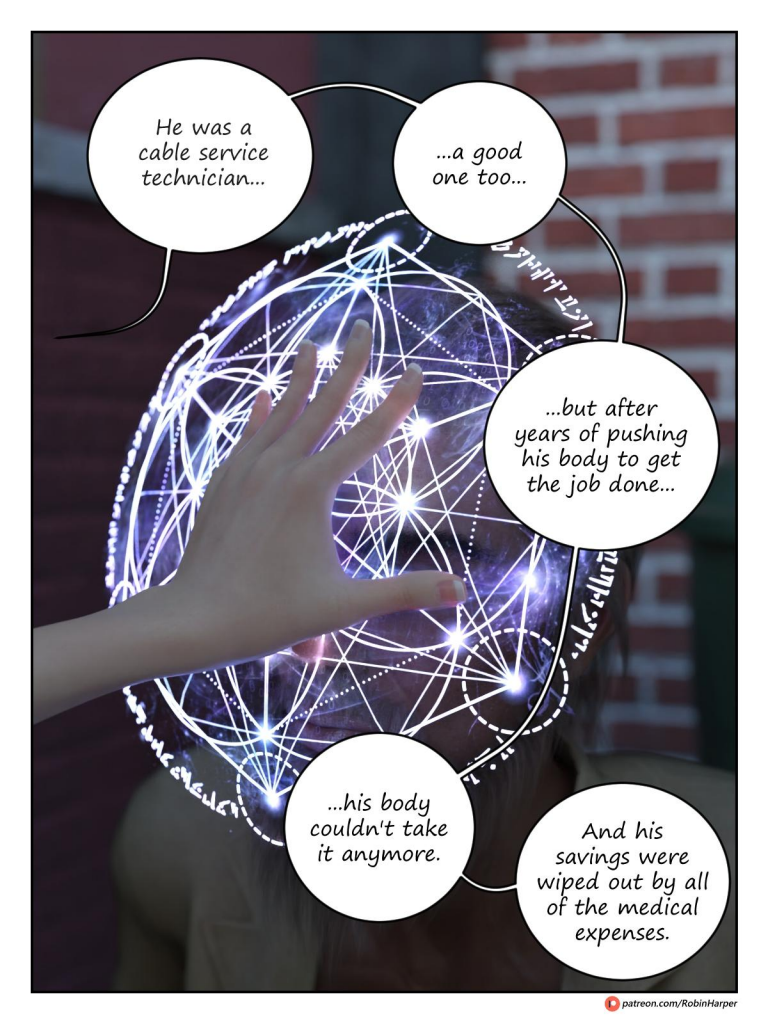
Oh fuck, how
can he stand
this?



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.

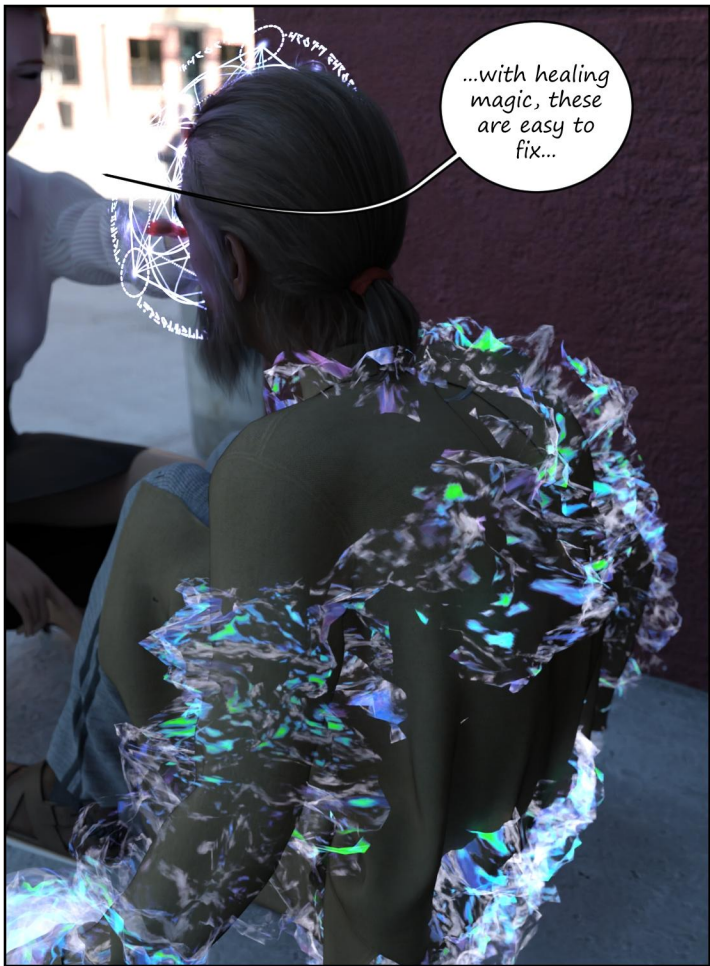
And his
savings were
wiped out by all
of the medical
expenses.




Thinning
cartilage...

...micro-
fractures...

...a possible
bulging disc...



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



...but his system
is dependant 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 also
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 or questioning expression on her face. 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.



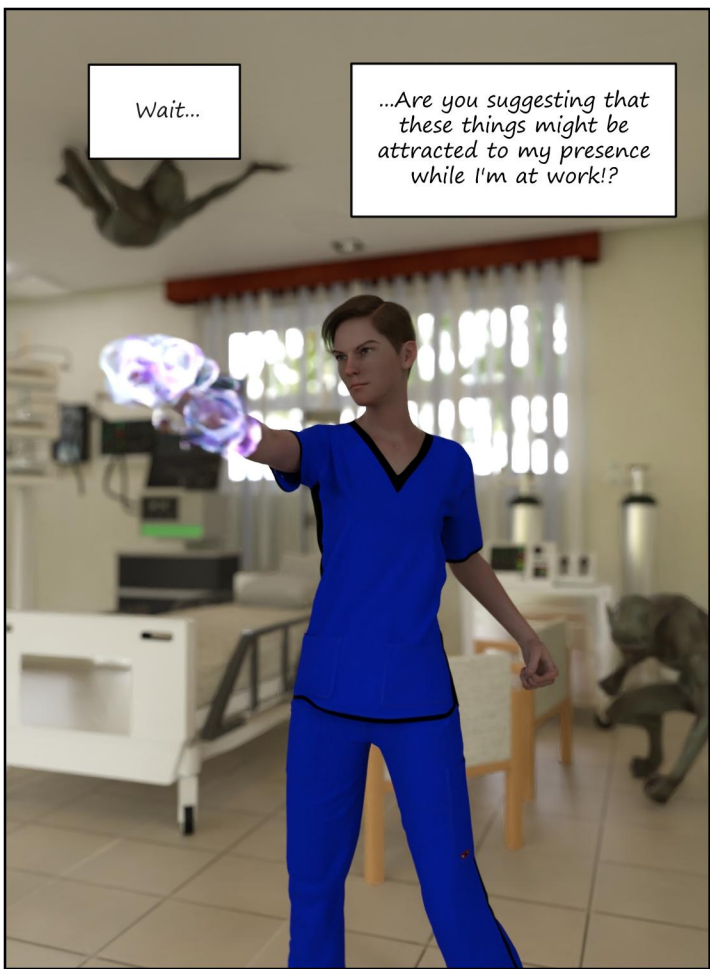
A woman with short reddish-brown hair and blue eyes is shown in a city street. She is wearing a white, vertically-ribbed, long-sleeved button-down shirt and a black, knee-length skirt. She has a surprised or questioning expression on her face, with her mouth slightly open. Her right hand is raised slightly, and her left hand is resting on a grey trash can. The background shows a city street with buildings and a statue. 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
alright...


...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.



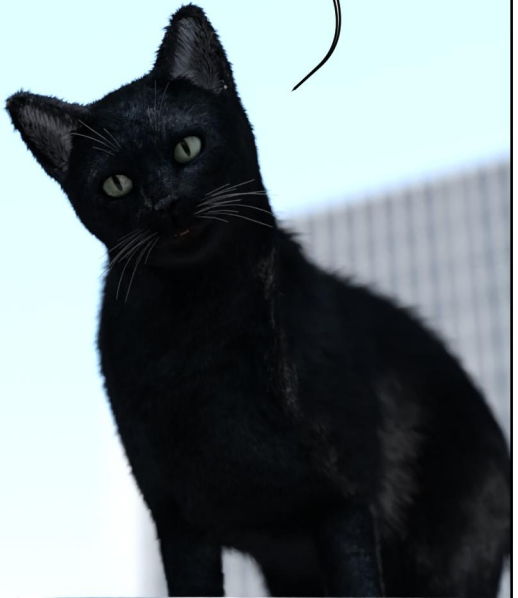
Great!

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's head, 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.

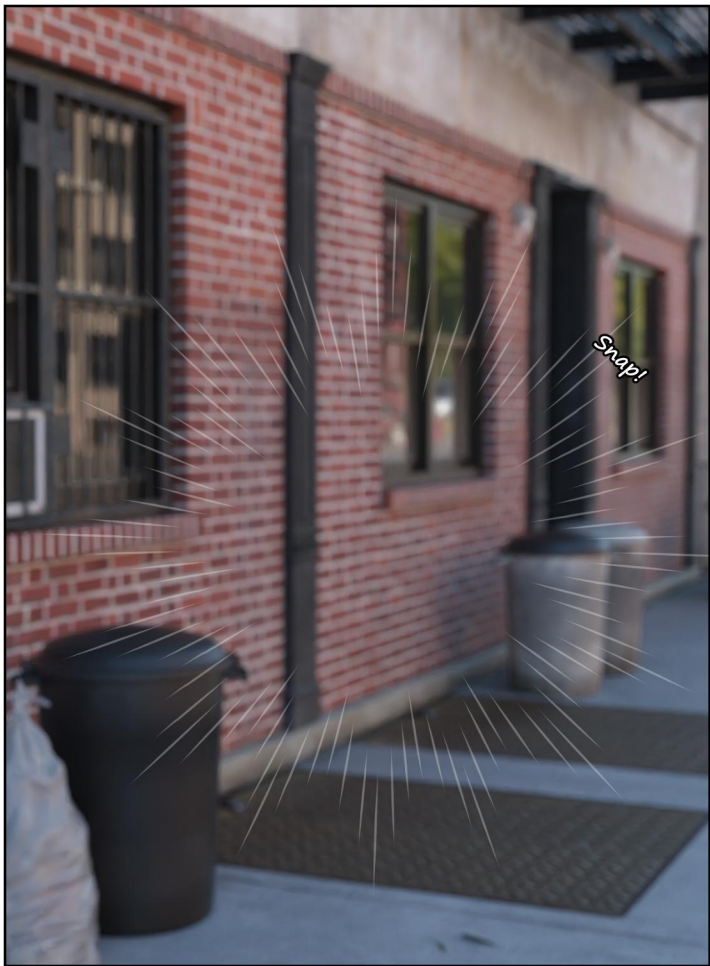




*Don't worry
I'll be careful.*



*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
chat...

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.

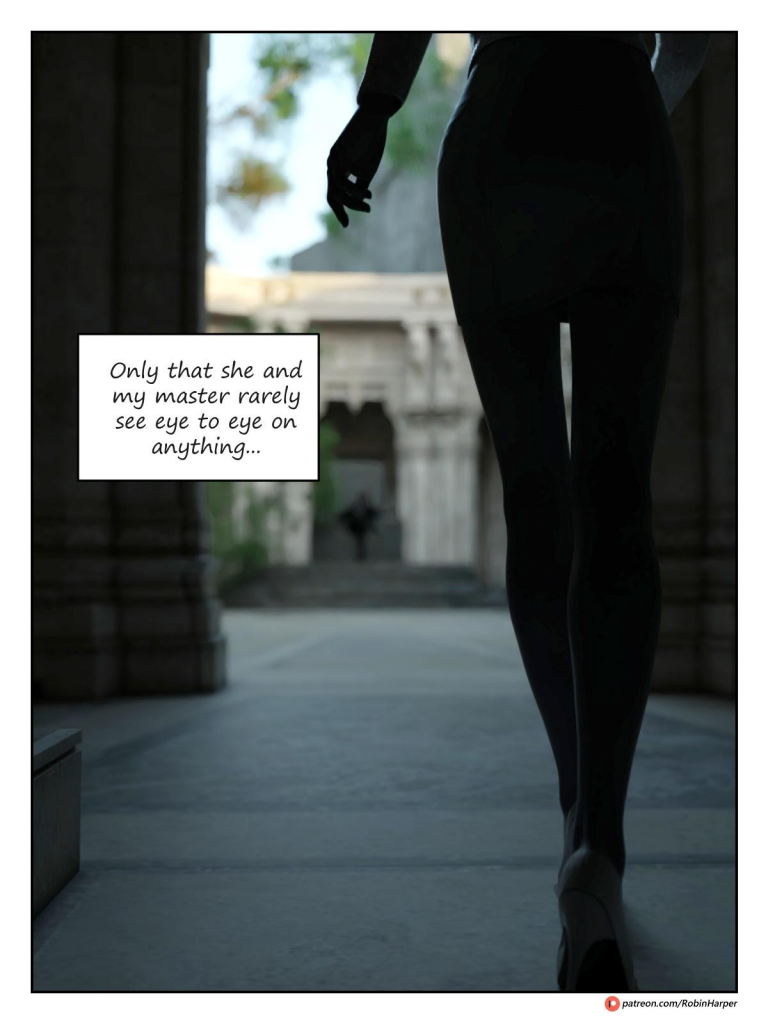
And hopefully
Mira can sort
things out and
get things back
to normal for
you and your
partner!

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 camera. They are wearing dark, form-fitting leggings and high-heeled shoes. The background is a courtyard with stone buildings and trees, slightly out of focus. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

*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
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.*





In fact, so much is being produced that most of it is going to waste!

A character with a pale, greenish-tan complexion and pointed ears, wearing a black suit with a grey vest and black gloves, stands on stone steps in a courtyard. He is pointing his right index finger directly at the viewer. The background features large stone blocks and classical architectural columns.

So, if my garden 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.*

