
Micoto Sakurai
ill. Kuroyuki
A Royal Rebound:
Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by the Prince
2


Micoto Sakurai
ill. Kuroyuki
A Royal Rebound:
Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by the Prince
2

A Royal Rebound: Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by the Prince! Volume 2 [Complete]

1. Part 1
2. Part 2
3. Part 3
4. Part 4
5. Part 5
6. Part 6
7. Part 7
8. Part 8
9. Part 9


Micoto Sakurai
ill. Kuroyuki
A Royal Rebound:
Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by the Prince
2

Chapter 1: The Second Spring

The scent of flowers filled the air.

The flower buds in the back garden of the academy must have bloomed.

Amelia's second spring in the royal capital had arrived.

Amelia alighted from the carriage and stopped to look up at the building of the Royal Academy of Magic. Her black hair fluttered in the gently blowing breeze.

The breeze was perfectly warm too.

A year had already passed since she had left the land she'd been born and raised in to attend the academy. Amelia quietly reflected on all the things that had transpired since and how greatly her life had changed.

Around this time last year, she'd still believed in her longtime fiancé, Reese.

They were meant to be married and eventually inherit her father's title of count and her family's land, the Lenia domain. She'd never once doubted that would be her future.

But Reese, who was a year older than Amelia, had entered the academy before her, and in that one year, he had changed completely.

Despite his engagement to Amelia, Reese had become close with another young woman, and while Amelia wasn't around, he'd spread an unsavory rumor about her, making it so Amelia was completely friendless when she entered the academy the following year.

If Amelia hadn't met Sarge, everything would likely have gone as Reese had planned.

One year had passed since then.

Reese hadn't just betrayed Amelia but even this kingdom of Bedeiht, and he was now imprisoned for his crime of communicating with the Beltz Empire. His own family, the Thurmas, had relinquished their title, and now his parents and older brother had gone into hiding.

According to the rumors, they were living quietly in another country.

Amelia still had mixed feelings when she thought about Reese, but she prayed that the people who she had once been prepared to call family had she actually married Reese were at least able to live peacefully in that foreign country.

And Amelia had officially become the fiancée of Fourth Prince Sarge, who had reached out to her during her time of isolation.

Like Crown Prince Alexis, Sarge was the son of the queen consort, which meant that even after marrying Amelia, he would remain as a member of the royal family and would support his brother, who would become king in the future.

That meant that Amelia would eventually be marrying into the royal family.

Since there was much she needed to learn in preparation for that role, and since she also needed a bodyguard, Amelia, who had once lived in the academy dorms, had been living in the royal castle ever since becoming engaged to Sarge.

The count title of the Lenia family, which had originally been meant for Amelia and Reese, would now be inherited by her cousin Sol. Sol, who was a year younger than Amelia, would be entering the Royal Academy of Magic that spring. Soon, once he was settled in the royal capital, he would likely be announcing his engagement as well.

Sol’s fiancée would be Meena, the younger sister of Sarge’s knight guard, Kaid.

Meena had the rare power of earth magic, and she wished to live in the countryside, which was lush with nature, over the royal capital. While Sarge was the one who had set up the engagement, it was also what Meena herself wanted.

Since Meena had come to visit the Lenia domain so many times, she and Amelia were already friends.

She also seemed to be getting along with Sol.

Surely the two of them would be able to develop the Lenia domain even

further.

“Amelia?”

Someone called her name, snapping her back to reality.

Sarge, who had disembarked from the carriage first, turned to look back at Amelia.

His shining, golden hair and handsome countenance resembled those of the queen, who was renowned for her beauty. His vibrant green eyes were filled with kindness. Amelia still couldn’t quite wrap her head around the fact that he was her fiancé.

“What’s wrong?”

“...I was just remembering all the things that have happened over the past year,” she answered.

Sarge narrowed his eyes, as if remembering the events of the past himself. “I see. It’s already been a year, has it?”

As of this spring, Sarge was a third-year student at the academy and Amelia a second-year. However, last year, the two of them had advanced into the specially established Special A class and were not participating in regular classes.

Every day, they attended the Royal Magic Research Institute adjoining the academy.

The director of the laboratory was Sarge’s older brother, Third Prince Julius.

Julius, who was one year older than Sarge, had already graduated from the academy.

However, since he still belonged to the academy as the director of the laboratory, Sarge and Amelia were able to see him there every day, just as they had last year.

His fiancée, Marie, was a third-year like Sarge.

Marie was a dear friend of Amelia’s and her future sister-in-law, so she was happy they could spend their days together as they had before.

Marie had also been in the same year as Amelia's former longtime fiancé Reese, but after that incident, he had been expelled and his magic sealed. His paramour, Sarah, had received the same punishment.

Thinking about the events of last year still made Amelia's heart ache a bit.

But these peaceful, gentle days would soon make her forget all that.

In front of the laboratory, Sarge and Amelia's knight guards were awaiting their arrival.

Sarge's knight was Kaid, while Amelia's was Kaid's fiancée, a female knight named Liliane.

Amelia was a fiancée of royalty, and it was also possible that the Beltz Empire was targeting her due to Reese's actions, so she now had a guard with her constantly whenever she was at the academy.

She'd never imagined that she, a mere rural noble, would be walking around on school grounds with a knight escort.

However, Liliane was so kind and gentle that one wouldn't even think she was a knight, and since she wore a dress, she just seemed like a young lady from a well-to-do family. That was why Amelia didn't feel intimidated having her by her side and was able to stay relaxed around her.

Nevertheless, Liliane had exceptional capabilities as a knight, and she was the only one who could gently stop Amelia, who was prone to getting immersed in her magic research without realizing it. Which meant that ever since Liliane had become her companion, Amelia hadn't forgotten about lunch even once.

"While your research is also important, please do take better care of yourself. Continuing with these all-nighters is not good for your skin."

Liliane would occasionally say that and then brew Amelia some tea that was good for the skin.

Last winter, Liliane had gone to Amelia's home along with Marie and Meena, where they had all quickly become the best of friends.

I wonder if this is what having an older sister is like?

With the kind Liliane watching over her, she was now able to live a life filled

with tranquil, rewarding days.

Immediately after arriving at the Royal Academy of Magic, Sarge made his way not to the laboratory but to the library, his knight guard Kaid in tow.

Recently, he had been devoting himself to the further improvement of the selectively bred grains, so there were often times when he and Amelia would go their separate ways like this.

Whenever Amelia was alone, she was also dedicating herself to her own research in the laboratory.

There was still a paucity of data about the enchanted water Amelia had developed last year, and it was not yet clear if there were any side effects, so now, she was working hard compiling the data. If there were any issues, she would have to deal with them immediately.

When she arrived in the laboratory, Marie was already there.

“Morning, Amelia,” she said with a smile.

Amelia’s engagement to Sarge meant that she and Marie were to become sisters-in-law, so Marie had told her they should speak with each other more casually.

And so, even though Amelia was one year Marie’s junior, she had obliged.

“Morning. You aren’t with Julius today?”

Amelia had asked that question without much thought, but Marie nodded, looking somewhat uneasy.

It was unusual to see her make that sort of expression.

Amelia went to her side and softly took hold of her hand.

“Did something happen?”

At Amelia’s question, Marie sighed deeply, then smiled.

“It’s nothing serious. It’s just, I’m kind of worried about something.”

“About what?”

Amelia urged Marie to confide in her, and Marie explained, albeit a bit

hesitantly.

“Julius is the director of this laboratory, but you know how, after graduating from the academy, he’s been busy with his official duties, right?” said Marie.



Amelia nodded.

“That’s right. He seems really busy.”

Julius, who was one year older than Marie, had graduated from the Royal Academy of Magic that spring.

But seeing as he had taken up the position of director of the laboratory, which was adjoined to the academy, he commuted to the school campus as frequently as he had before.

Even so, now that Julius had graduated, he had official business to take care of as a member of the royal family. Therefore, it was often the case that they would only see him in the mornings or when he’d show his face in the evenings.

“So now, I’ve been made his assistant. But I can’t be his assistant without a title, so I’ve been made the vice director of the laboratory... But I don’t have any special talent or knowledge like you do, Amelia. And yet I’ve been made vice director—it’s too much for me.”

It seemed that was what Marie was worried about.

“It’s all right,” Amelia said, smiling as she continued holding Marie’s hand. “I know you can do it. Knowledge isn’t required to lead people. The fact that Prince Julius is more apt to be the director than Sarge is proof of that.”

“Julius is special. He’s got the charisma to lead people. I don’t think I have anything like that.”

Amelia assured Marie that wasn’t the case by saying, “When I was isolated, you didn’t treat me unfairly like the others did. You really listened to me, and you told me Reese was in the wrong. Don’t you know how much that helped me?”

Thinking about those days still brought Amelia some pain.

But the people who had become her friends had encouraged her.

“That’s why I think you’re qualified to act as Julius’s deputy. You are just and kind. And you look pretty powerful too.”

“...I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that last part. But you’re right. It’s been decided.

Instead of being anxious, I should be positive about it. Thanks, Amelia."

"Don't mention it."

The pair smiled at each other and then went to work on their respective research.

When morning turned to afternoon, Julius arrived at the laboratory.

"Marie, Amelia. I have something I want to speak with you about. When you're free, come to the director's office."

Soon afterward, Amelia gathered up her materials and headed to the director's office with Marie, where Julius was waiting. He'd said to come when they were free, but Julius was a busy man. They could not have kept him waiting.

"Ah, sorry for making you rush."

Julius laughed softly at Marie and Amelia, who had rushed over, and then urged them to take a seat.

"The thing is, I'm to go to the Janaki Kingdom as a proxy for my brother Est."

Sarge and Julius's older brother, Est, had a weak constitution. Thus, Julius, who was now devoting himself to his official duties having graduated from the academy, would be going in his brother's stead.

"The Janaki Kingdom?"

"That's right. I'm going on a diplomatic errand, as well as to receive Princess Chloe, who will be studying in our kingdom as an exchange student."

"Hmm... That's right, Princess Chloe is Prince Est's..."

The fourth princess of the Janaki Kingdom, Chloe, was Est's fiancée. In order for her to become used to the customs of the Bedeiht Kingdom, its climate, and such, it seemed she would be studying at the Royal Academy of Magic before the two wed.

The Kingdom of Bedeiht had four princes. Crown Prince Alexis and Sarge were the sons of the queen, while Second Prince Est and Third Prince Julius were the sons of the king's concubine.

But the queen and the concubine were cousins, and the four princes also got along very well.

The four princes all had the precious power of light magic. For that reason, they held the attention of foreign nations.

The Janaki Kingdom was considerably far removed from this kingdom.

The Kingdom of Bedeiht was situated in the northernmost region of the continent, and to the south were the Kingdoms of Niida and Sorina, the former known for their many ore mines and the latter for their flourishing dairy farms. Beyond those two kingdoms lay the Kingdom of Janaki.

Their territory was mainly farmland, and they had supplied Bedeiht with a great amount of food in their time of need due to cold-weather damage.

“The Kingdom of Janaki has long been a kingdom with thriving agriculture. It’s been decided that we’ll dispatch a delegation there to inspect their situation and engage in technological exchange. Marie, as the vice director of the Royal Institute of Magic, I want you to come along with me.”

For an instant, Marie looked anxious at Julius’s words.

She probably hadn’t thought her first job as vice director would be to go to a foreign country as a delegate. But perhaps remembering her earlier conversation with Amelia, she straightened her back and gave a firm nod.

“...Yes. Understood.”

Julius nodded, seeming satisfied by her response, then looked at Amelia.

“Amelia, I want you to come along to support Princess Chloe as her companion. It’ll be your first official duty as Sarge’s fiancée. Is that all right?”

Huh?

Amelia had thought that Julius had called her here to tell her she would have to take care of things while he and Marie, the director and vice director of the laboratory, left on their diplomatic mission. She was surprised to be suddenly faced with this new duty, but since she had just given Marie encouragement, she couldn’t very well say she would be unable to carry out her own responsibilities.

However, while she hesitated to answer, Julius said worriedly, “Although they’re separated by the mountain range, Janaki is adjacent to the Beltz Empire. Perhaps you’re uneasy about that, all things considered...”

As a result of what Reese had done, Amelia could no longer move about as freely.

Reese had tried to take Amelia with him and flee to the Beltz Empire, which was in need of people who could use water and earth magic. Because of that, Amelia not only had to have a guard with her at all times but was now restricted in her movements.

Julius seemed to think that Amelia felt anxious about going somewhere so close to that very empire.

Between the Beltz Empire and the four kingdoms, including Bedeiht, lay a precipitous mountain range. The mountain passes were so perilous that they were not easily traversable, which protected the rest of the continent from the militant empire.

But while this side of the continent was suffering from severe cold-weather damage, the Beltz Empire, on the far side of the mountains, was suffering from desertification.

The Beltz Empire was doing everything within its power to rectify the situation, which meant that someday, they might very well cross the steep mountain range and invade this side of the continent.

The rulers of the four kingdoms were on guard against that risk, strengthening their unity in order to deter the empire’s threat.

The Kingdom of Janaki was the closest nation to the Beltz Empire.

But Amelia said, decisively, “No, it’s all right. I will do my utmost.”

Though of course, it would have been a lie if she’d said she wasn’t anxious about the situation.

However, she would be with both Marie and Julius, so she answered with firm resolve.

In response, Julius offered words of apology. “Sorry about this.” Then, looking

uneasy, he continued. “More than a member of the royal family, Sarge has been living as a researcher, and people expect that of him. Which means your burden will only increase from now on.”

“Julius...”

Amelia understood what he wanted to say.

Sarge, who would be more of a researcher from now on, would likely not have to appear in public as a member of the royal family very often. As Julius said, that meant that, as Sarge’s fiancée and future princess, Amelia would have to take on the burden of public appearances more and more often.

However, Amelia believed that Sarge’s research would surely save this kingdom. Also, she wished to be the one to be by his side supporting him the most, so she’d already resolved herself to the inconvenience.

“Of course. I’m prepared for anything.”

She replied with a smile, and Julius looked relieved.

“Thank you. Of course, Marie and I will both be there to help as much as we can.”

“Yes, that’s right. I’ll do anything I can for you.”

To Marie, Amelia said, “Thank you. I feel very reassured.”

She would do her best to fulfill her duty.

Although Amelia was working as Sarge’s assistant, there were still many respects in which she couldn’t catch up to him, so she was happy to assist in other ways.

Also, although Chloe was the princess of a foreign nation, she would eventually become Marie and Amelia’s sister-in-law. It would probably be difficult for her to live in an unfamiliar country, and she would undoubtedly need help with various things.

Just as Crown Princess Sophia and Marie, Julius’s fiancée, had warmly welcomed Amelia when she and Sarge had gotten engaged, she decided that she would devote herself to doing the same for Chloe.

She was resolved to do so, but of course, she felt a bit sad that she would be away from Sarge for so long.

When she met with him for their afternoon break, he brought up the topic right away.

“Apparently Julius will be heading to the Kingdom of Janaki next month.”

“...Yes. Marie and I will be going along with him.”

She informed him that Marie, in her capacity as the vice director of the laboratory, would be accompanying Julius, as would she herself. Naturally, Sarge was already aware, and he nodded as he listened to Amelia.

“I also intend to go to Janaki. Not on official business like you or my brother, but as a researcher.”

“Huh?”

Though flustered, she asked him for more details, and he explained everything to her.

It seemed that from the moment Julius had decided to go to the Kingdom of Janaki, Sarge had said he wanted to come along in order to research some vegetation that grew only in the south.

Apparently, his older brothers had been against the idea, but once they understood that it was for the sake of improving the new variety of grain that was resistant to cold damage, they couldn’t object to his wishes any longer.

And so the plan was for him to conceal his identity and just go as a researcher.

“Janaki has also been suffering from cold-weather damage; it’s been increasing little by little for the past few years. Their harvests have definitely been declining as well, and I want to look into that in more detail.”

“I see...”

Although he would be hiding his identity, she herself would have to go as the fiancée of a royal.

Considering that, it was a big responsibility.

But Julius and Marie had both said they would help her, and most importantly of all, she wouldn't actually have to be away from Sarge for a long period of time.

She was genuinely happy that they could go together.

But I never thought the day would come when I'd have to carry out official duties as the fiancée of a member of the royal family...

Until just a year ago, Amelia had been nothing more than the daughter of a country noble.

Although she had learned a lot ever since becoming engaged to Sarge, there were still many things she had to learn.

However, eventually Amelia would have to live as a member of this kingdom's royal family as Sarge's wife. She couldn't allow herself to feel intimidated by them forever.

When the afternoon break came to an end, Amelia was the first to return to the library.

After a while, Sarge arrived in the laboratory along with Kaid.

It seemed that, in preparation for his journey to the Kingdom of Janaki as a researcher, he needed to meet with other researchers and discuss the upcoming investigation. Among those researchers was Marie, who had been appointed as the vice director.

However, though they were all going to Janaki together, Amelia, who was not going as a researcher, had nothing to contribute to their meetings.

There were still many things she had to learn about Janaki, after all. She also felt like she needed to review the kingdom's mores and etiquette once more.

In the meantime, the two of them would just have to do their own things—so she told herself as she watched him from a short distance away.

After the end of the school day, they parted with their respective knight guards. In the carriage bound for the royal castle, Amelia began talking to Sarge.

"I feel reassured by the fact that we will be going together to visit the Kingdom of Janaki. I was feeling a bit anxious about this being my first official

duty, but it is much better than being away from you for a long time.”

She had told him her honest feelings, and Sarge smiled at her with the kind face that he showed only to her.

“That’s right. Of course it’s true that I want to see the plants in Janaki and study their cold-weather damage situation, but if you weren’t coming along, I probably would have just asked that a researcher send me detailed data.”

“...Sarge.”

He did not want to be apart from her either.

That thought alone made her feel she could do anything.

“There’s a lot for you to learn. It must be hard.”

“It is. But I can do it.” Amelia looked straight up at him. “Besides, everything I learn will be useful for the future.”

Her studies were for the sake of their future together as well. If she thought of it that way, it wasn’t so difficult after all.

“My research on botany is important, but I don’t want to put all the burden on you, Amelia. We’ll both work hard together,” he said out of concern for her. It seemed that Sarge was aware of others’ expectations for Amelia. “So don’t push yourself too hard. I’ll also tell Julius not to put too much on your plate.”

“No, really. I’ll be fine,” she said hastily, but Sarge wouldn’t hear it.

She felt so happy knowing he cared for her that she promised him she wouldn’t push herself.

They arrived at the castle and Amelia returned to her room to relax. The maid who had brewed her tea returned to inform her that Sophia wanted to meet with her.

“Lady Sophia does?”

Sophia was the wife of Sarge’s older brother, Crown Prince Alexis.

Meaning she was this kingdom’s crown princess.

Sarge and Julius were half brothers, but he and Alexis were full brothers. Perhaps because of that, Sophia looked after Amelia, Sarge’s fiancée.

“I will be right there.”

She asked the maid to let Sophia know she was on her way, got herself ready, and then headed to Sophia’s room.

“I’m sorry for calling for you so soon after you’ve returned from the academy,” said Crown Princess Sophia, welcoming Amelia into her room.

“It is no bother at all.”

Amelia couldn’t help but be fascinated by Sophia, who was as beautiful as ever.

She had perfectly straight, silver hair and skin as white as snow. While her beauty could come across as cold, Amelia knew just how kind she was.

“I thought you might be nervous about your first official duty. When it was my first time, Her Majesty the Queen helped me out, so now, it’s my turn to help you,” she said, then smiled, her face radiating affection.

“Thank you so much.”

The warmth of her gaze permeated throughout Amelia’s chest.

This would be Amelia’s first official duty as the fiancée of a member of the royal family.

She planned to continue studying many things in preparation for her journey, but compared to Crown Princess Sophia, she was definitely lacking in knowledge and experience, so she was grateful to have any help Sophia could offer.

“Firstly, about the Kingdom of Janaki. You’ve probably heard from Sarge, but they’ve been seeing decreasing crop yields over the past few years.”

“Yes, he said it was due to cold-weather damage.”

In Bedeiht, which was also suffering from cold damage, Sarge was putting all his effort into the selectively bred grains, so even in the midst of the worsening weather, the crop yields were in the process of returning to normal.

Once the enchanted water that Amelia had developed came into more

widespread use , they would probably see an even greater effect.

However, Janaki, which had once boasted the best agriculture on the continent, was seeing a gradual decline in harvests. When Amelia considered that that kingdom, situated in the southernmost part of the continent, was finally suffering from cold-weather damage that had been afflicting the other three kingdoms, she grew a bit uneasy.

But both she and Sarge were working hard to reverse that trend.

“Of course, this kingdom’s technology is not reserved for us alone. But before spreading it to foreign countries, we’ll need it to show more results domestically.”

“That’s true. There’s still not enough data on it.”

That was true not just of Amelia’s enchanted water but also of the grain, which had only been bred recently.

“Sarge has been saying that data from Janaki is necessary for that to happen, so the inspection there will probably focus on the farms. But that’s your specialty, so I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“Yes.” Amelia nodded.

If they were to discuss the kingdom’s countermeasures against cold-weather damage—the selectively bred grains and enchanted water—she would probably be able to explain things in more detail than Julius could.

“The problem is Janaki’s fourth princess, Princess Chloe,” said Sophia, looking distressed. “She is the youngest sister by several years, and she’s been very much doted on by her siblings. But she has accepted her engagement to Est as her royal duty, and she is willing to learn about Bedeiht. She’s apparently been working as hard as she can.”

But recently, she had begun acting strangely.

There had been several times when she’d posed as a maid and attempted to sneak out of the castle, which was becoming quite a big problem.

“Why has she suddenly started doing that?”

“She’s probably gotten anxious about her quickly approaching marriage into a

foreign country. After a discussion between both kingdoms, it was decided she would be entrusted to our kingdom under the pretense of being an exchange student.”

“...Oh, is that so?”

Amelia hadn’t thought this would be the situation of the princess she would be serving as a companion.

“I wonder what in the world happened?”

“Me too. Perhaps she’s gotten cold feet about marrying into a foreign country. Or perhaps she’s found someone she likes.”

Despite being royalty, she was still a young woman. That was a likely possibility.

However, even in the Janaki Kingdom, no matter how much the youngest princess was babied by her siblings, she was a royal and so could not live as she pleased. If she really did have a lover, perhaps her family was thinking they had no choice but to separate the two.

It must have been a difficult decision for them to make as well.

“It’s the same in every country; royals and nobles simply cannot live as they please. But why is she trying to run away from her obligations? That’s unacceptable.”

Sensing that Sophia was harboring some anguish she couldn’t speak aloud, Amelia reflexively grasped the princess’s hand.

“U-Um...”

“Thank you. For comforting me.”

Surprised by her own behavior, Amelia tried to let go of Sophia’s hand, but before she could do so, Sophia grabbed hold of both of Amelia’s hands.

“Her Majesty the Queen has Lady Saria, but I’m on my own. That was what I thought until last year, anyway,” Sophia said, breaking into a smile.

Saria was Est and Julius’s mother, the king’s concubine.

The queen consort and Saria were cousins and got along very well, and Amelia

had heard that she had become the king's concubine in order to support the queen.

The Kingdom of Bedeiht was unique even among the other nations on the continent.

There was of course the matter of those in the direct royal line inheriting the light magic affinity, but in addition, it was the only country in which all nobles were born with magical power.

There was a rumor that in the Beltz Empire, those who could wield magic were few and far between. Since the situation of the empire on the other side of the mountain range was largely unknown, even that fact was uncertain. There were also those who believed that rather than having few mages, Beltz had almost none.

And in other countries, apparently only members of the royal family could use magic.

In addition to the royal family, who could use light magic, Bedeiht was the only nation that had so many mages.

Being the crown princess of such a kingdom meant that Sophia had to be prudent when interacting with foreign nations. And she also faced the pressure to eventually bear children who could use light magic.

"But now that you and Sarge are engaged and you will become a member of the royal family, I won't be alone anymore," said Sophia happily. Then she suddenly cast her gaze downward. "I'm really glad you're here. I don't think I can become someone like Her Majesty. No matter how heavy the pressure put on me, I don't think I could stand for there to be another woman by Alexis's side. So I've resigned myself to many things."

At Sophia's words, Amelia remembered when she'd met Saria. The queen had invited her, Sophia, and Marie for a tea party. Est and Julius's mother, Saria, had also participated.

As rumored, the two cousins had a great relationship. Saria had told them that she had volunteered to become a concubine because she wanted to support her cousin the queen.

A rural noble like Amelia didn't quite understand, but perhaps the queen of this kingdom was under more pressure than she could handle alone.

"And I of course will do anything to help you. So if you are ever in any trouble, please come to me right away."

"I will. Thank you very much."

Being the companion of a princess in such a complicated situation would surely be difficult.

But Amelia couldn't help but consider Princess Chloe's feelings.

Amelia understood that it was the duty of royalty to protect the kingdom.

However, the princess must be feeling some anxiety now that the prospect of marrying into a faraway foreign country was suddenly becoming reality.

The homeland she'd been born and raised in. The people precious to her. Her friends and her favorite views. She'd have to leave everything behind and become a bride.

Amelia understood the pain of being engaged to someone against one's choosing, and the loneliness of being in a place in which one had no friends, spending one's days alone.

So regardless of how anyone else felt, she for one wanted to welcome a princess marrying into the kingdom from a foreign country.

"I may not be capable, but I will do my best to make sure Princess Chloe has an easy time. I'm sure she's anxious..." Her words trailed off, and Sophia looked at her in surprise.

"...You're right. It's as you say. If we don't welcome her, she'll have no place to go."

"I'm sorry. I've said something impertinent, even though I don't know anything."

"No, you haven't. It seems I hold some distaste towards the princess for going so far as to disguise herself as a maid to run away. I suppose I'm being a bit biased... Please, continue to speak your mind around me, okay?" Sophia squeezed Amelia's hands tightly.

Amelia nodded. “Yes, of course.”

Never mind international affairs, Amelia didn’t have a complete grasp of domestic affairs, so she didn’t think she could help Sophia, but she could at least provide some emotional support.

If she could lessen the burden on the crown princess just a bit, Amelia would do as she asked.

“I’m so sorry—this turned out to be a long chat, hasn’t it? Well then, we’ll see each other at dinner.”

“Yes, Lady Sophia.”

Sophia giggled. “You can call me sister now, you know.”

It rather seemed as though Sophia was begging her, so even though Amelia was a bit embarrassed, she decided to comply.

“Okay, sister. Thank you so much for everything you’ve told me.”

“Anything for my cute sister. Don’t worry about it.”

After giving her thanks to Sophia, who seemed to be enjoying herself, Amelia was escorted to her own room by a maid back.

Prior to her engagement, she had been living in one of the castle’s guest rooms. But now, she’d been given her own room in the royal family’s private living quarters.

However, she and Sarge were still just engaged; it wasn’t as if they’d gotten married and she’d become a member of the royal family.

And yet Sarge’s brothers and her future sister-in-law, Sophia, treated her fondly, as if she were already their younger sister.

Nonetheless, Amelia still did not feel that she was suitable for Sarge.

Her looks were ordinary; she just happened to have been born into a family that had lots of farmland, which produced data that was useful for Sarge’s research.

Although Amelia, like Marie, was from a count family, one was not recognized as a high-class noble unless one held territory near the royal capital or was

permitted to maintain a residence near the royal castle. Amelia was just a rural noble who had only come to the capital a handful of times before entering the academy. Her status was entirely different from Marie's.

Yet Sarge had picked Amelia, and the royal family had accepted her graciously. She strongly wished to do what she could for him and his family.

That's why I need to do more research on Janaki and Princess Chloe on my own.

There was still some time before dinner.

The library she had been using until now was also used by the civil officials who worked in the castle, so it was outside of the royal living quarters.

But since Sarge often stayed there from night until morning, and since it wasn't a suitable place for controlling confidential documents, as well as for security reasons, another library had been set up in the castle's private living quarters that year.

Only members of the royal family could enter this library; there wasn't even a caretaker. Thus, Sarge was in this library more often than his own room.

Rather than a library, it's almost like Sarge's office.

And he would surely be there now. As Amelia knocked on the door, she took care not to disturb or startle him and then quietly stepped inside.

As she'd expected, he was here in the library.

He must have been focusing rather intently, as he didn't seem to have noticed Amelia enter. Naturally, that was the sort of behavior that made his brothers worry, and they'd probably felt it was necessary to set up a library in a safer spot.

She wavered on whether or not she should call out to him.

Eventually, she decided not to disturb him and to borrow the book she needed and read it in her room.

Let's see, a book about the Kingdom of Janaki...

As she found the right book and went to pick it out, Sarge, possibly feeling

someone else's presence, looked up.

"Amelia, you're here?"

"Ah, Sarge..."

She was about to apologize for bothering him, but he smiled when he saw her.

He extended his hand to her, and she placed the book on the desk and went to his side.

"A book about the Kingdom of Janaki?" muttered Sarge, seeming interested, as he looked at the cover of the book she'd been holding.

"Yes, I thought I could study up just a bit so I can become someone suited to be your fiancée."

If they couldn't be on equal footing in terms of their status and knowledge, then she at least wanted to be helpful to the royal family and to Sarge. After she said that, Sarge looked down sadly for some reason.

"...Sarge?"

"It must be Reese's fault that you have such a low opinion of yourself, mustn't it?"

What he'd said in such a low voice was, for some reason, the name of her ex-fiancé, Reese.

"Um, why are you bringing him up?" she asked, bewildered that he had mentioned Reese.

"He intentionally set you up to isolate you. As a result of all that, you don't recognize your own worth. You don't recognize how much your enchanted water invention has benefited this kingdom."

He was looking at her with such serious eyes. She was unsure of how to react.

"Well, but, that was originally magic that you thought up..."

"My only part in the project was wanting to elevate the popular perception of water magic. The one who thought of how to put it into practice, and how to spread it efficiently, was you. You thought of all that—unlike me; all I was

thinking about was you.”

“You...”

Amelia covered her cheeks with her hands, looking down in embarrassment.

He was just thinking about me...?

She didn’t know how to respond to something he’d said as if it were perfectly natural.

Somehow, she managed to get a grip on herself, then frantically ran her words together.

“I used to patrol the farmlands and listen to the people’s opinions. All I did was draw from what they told me.”

Certainly if the nobles in the royal capital had heard that the daughter of a lord was patrolling her family’s farmlands, they would have been appalled. And yet her experiences were useful to Sarge.

“Your experiences and the ideas built from them—those are things that I don’t have. I think it’s amazing. I’m actually a bit jealous of it.”

“You are?’

She would never have thought that someone of his intelligence and magical talent would be jealous of anyone. And the fact that he was jealous of *her* was shocking.

“That’s right. So I wish you’d have more confidence in yourself. No one else can take your place. And more than anything, you are the person dearest to me.”

“...Yes.” Amelia looked straight at Sarge and nodded.

She was certain her face was turning bright red.

But having someone as great as him say that to her, she couldn’t hang her head.

“Let’s move on from talking about me. But it’s true that I want to be helpful. To Princess Chloe too.”

Amelia picked the book up off the desk.

“I’ve heard the situation is a bit complicated. I think she’s feeling lonely and anxious about marrying into a faraway land.”

Amelia understood what it meant to suffer from isolation.

The loneliness—having no friends at all—she understood that better than anyone. So, she told Sarge, she wanted to help her.

“I see.”

Sarge smiled softly at her and stroked her black hair.

“If that’s what you feel, I won’t stop you. If you need me to, I can tell my brother too.”

“I’m sorry for being selfish.”

“No one thinks you’re selfish. It’s going to be a long journey. We’ll have to observe the situation of the nations on the way as well.”

They both then picked up their own books with the intention of productively passing the time they had until dinner. However, as usual, it seemed they had focused a bit too hard.

“Sarge, Amelia. It’s dinnertime.”

The one who had come to call for them was not the usual maid but the crown prince and Sarge’s full-brother, Alexis.

“Your Highness! I’m terribly sorry.”

She hadn’t thought he would come to get them himself.

Amelia hastily gathered up her books. Alexis watched her with a gentle smile on his face.

“If you’re calling Sophia sister, then I want you to call me brother too.”

He must have talked to Sophia. The crown prince and princess really did get along well.

She was a bit at a loss when he said that, but Amelia also felt affection for Alexis, who treated her kindly, as if she really were his younger sister.

“Understood. Brother.”

Hearing her say that, Alexis smiled with joy.

“My younger brothers are cute too, but I’m looking forward to having more younger sisters-in-law soon.”

So saying, he urged along Sarge, who was still reading a book, and shepherded him towards the dining room.

Amelia followed after them.

The king’s firstborn son, Crown Prince Alexis. His wife, Crown Princess Sophia.

The second son, Est, and the third son, Julius.

And Julius’s fiancée, Marie.

Everyone had welcomed Amelia and cherished her.

Everyone has treated me with such warmth and kindness. I’m sure they’ll do the same for Princess Chloe...

Amelia believed that there would be a future in which everyone was happy.

After dinner, as always, they enjoyed some leisurely conversation while drinking tea. It seemed this was a custom of the royal family, so in the beginning, Amelia had wondered if she should actually be present, but now she was perfectly accustomed to it. It was often at this time that she would speak with Sophia, woman-to-woman.

“By the way, I’ve had some dresses made for you, Amelia. They should be finished shortly, so you’ll have to try them on,” Sophia said all of a sudden.

“Oh, no, I have plenty of dresses,” Amelia said hastily.

Unlike the researchers, who could just wear uniforms, Amelia would be going as Fourth Prince Sarge’s fiancée.

Naturally, there would be events such as a welcome party. She knew she would have to go in a dress, but ever since her engagement, she’d received many dresses not only from Sarge but also from Sophia and Marie. Those dresses would be enough.

But Sophia admonished her, “Those would be fine within our kingdom, but Janaki is warmer than here. You’ll need a dress made of thinner fabric.”

Sophia also explained that when traveling to a foreign country, one had to make sure the way one dressed was in line with local customs.

There were countries that frowned upon bare skin and countries in which one’s feet must be covered; it seemed there were all manner of things one had to be mindful of.

“My apologies. I failed to consider all that.”

Even though she had thought she’d done so much research into the Kingdom of Janaki, she hadn’t considered what she would wear.

If Sophia hadn’t prepared something for her, Amelia wouldn’t have been able to arrange things in time.

“It’s all right. This is your first time, so of course there are many things you don’t know. You can leave the arrangements to me now,” said Sophia, smiling kindly.

The heir apparent was Crown Prince Alexis, but if something were to happen

to him, the next in line was not Est or Julius but Sarge, who, like Alexis, was a son of the queen consort. Thus, Amelia, who would be his wife, would normally have needed a princess's education.

However, Sarge and Amelia needed to prioritize their research on botany, which would serve the interests of the nation, so for the time being, Sophia was explaining things to her whenever it proved necessary, like now.

"Also, Kaid will be serving as a knight guard, but there are areas where only women can enter. Liliane will be accompanying you as a maid-in-waiting, so you can relax."

Kaid was Sarge's knight guard, but since Sarge was just going as one of the researchers, he couldn't openly have his own guard, so Kaid would be going as Amelia's.

Furthermore, Kaid's fiancée and Amelia's current guard, Liliane, would be with her as a maid-in-waiting.

"Thank you. That's very reassuring."

Kaid would be there, and Liliane would also be by her side.

During their diplomatic errands, Julius would be with her, and even Marie would be going as the vice director of the Royal Magic Institute.

And above all, Sarge would be there.

Amelia had been feeling nervous about her first trip out of the kingdom, but it seemed everything would turn out all right.

She glanced at Sarge, whose three older brothers were strongly warning him not to wander off on his own for any reason.

"I'm worried. Maybe I have no choice but to come along as a guard..."

Julius immediately shot down Alexis's preposterous suggestion.

"Please stop, brother. I really have sympathy for Kaid. I'll be there, so it'll be fine."

"Your specialty is healing water magic, isn't it? Well, Kaid will be there, so I guess I won't have to worry."

Kaid, who was currently Sarge’s knight guard, had been Alexis’s guard during their school days.

In the past, Alexis had led him around, and now Sarge was giving him trouble; thinking about that, Amelia, too, sympathized with him a bit. But the fact that he was now Sarge’s guard was proof that Alexis trusted him and that he was also considerably skilled.

Amelia also felt at ease knowing that he would be coming along as a knight guard. With him, she thought, they would be safe.

Chapter 2: First Official Duty

There was a great deal Amelia had to do, such as trying on her dresses, confirming the rules of Janaki etiquette, and reviewing things with Julius.

She was terribly busy, but Sophia and Marie were helping her out as well, so she managed it.

Tomorrow is the big day, isn't it?

In her room, Amelia exhaled softly.

The preparations were perfectly complete, and tomorrow morning, they would be departing from the castle.

There would be seven researchers, including Marie and Sarge.

The researchers would be going by another carriage, but due to security concerns related to moving in a large group, they would be leaving one day later.

However, Sarge and Marie would of course be leaving with Amelia and Julius.

The following day, they had to have an audience with the king of Bedeiht to inform him of their departure. Although the researchers would be leaving tomorrow, they would also be coming along to pay their respects.

Amelia stood by Julius's side, her head lowered in silence.

His Majesty the King, Sarge's father, was a dignified king, but when he would occasionally pass by Amelia's room, he would call out to her amicably. He could not let his kingly demeanor slip in public, but with his family, he wore a kind expression on his face.

The people present today had received an explanation in the laboratory about important precautions to take when visiting a foreign country.

In order to avoid any trouble, the researchers participating as delegates would generally not be permitted to use magic in the foreign land. Julius and Amelia, who were going as members of the royal family, were different, but even so, they would need the king's permission to use magic.

Sophia also came to see them off.

“Take care of yourself, okay? Don’t go anywhere dangerous. Liliane, look after my sister.”

“Yes, Lady Sophia. I will.”

So Liliane responded with a smile to Sophia, who was also her friend.

Amelia and Liliane boarded the carriage that had been prepared for them. Marie entered after them.

Sarge would be traveling with Julius and Kaid.

They would travel like this until just before they entered the Kingdom of Janaki. When they got close to the border, they would meet up with the carriages carrying the other researchers. At that point, Sarge and Marie would travel with the researchers, while Amelia and Julius would board a carriage exclusively for the royal family.

“It’s a long way until Janaki. Let’s relax until then,” said Marie. Amelia nodded.



She felt a bit sad that Sarge was in a different carriage, but since it would be such a long journey, perhaps she would be more comfortable traveling with just other women.

To the south of Bedeiht were two kingdoms: Niida and Sorina. Each was about half the size of Bedeiht, but both had skillfully developed their natural resources.

The Kingdom of Niida had many ore mines, and its roads were dangerous, so their group would be going by way of the Kingdom of Sorina this time.

Sorina was a kingdom with thriving dairy farms and a mild climate. The pastures Amelia could see from the window were a novelty, so the journey proved quite enjoyable.

When they drew near the border of Janaki, they switched carriages.

It had been a long journey, but at last Janaki was just ahead.

Since she was traveling on official business, Amelia was wearing a dress rather than a uniform as she and Julius boarded the carriage for the royal family. Liliane accompanied her, dressed as a maid-in-waiting, and Kaid and the other knights were all close by the carriages.

“That was a long journey, wasn’t it? You must be tired,” said Julius with evident concern for her.

Amelia shook her head. “I’m all right. I’m actually fairly strong and healthy, since I used to spend so much time walking around the farms.”

She told him that it had actually been a fun trip filled with new sights. Julius smiled and said she sure was reliable.

“The welcome party will be held soon after we arrive in the royal capital. Since we probably won’t have much time to rest, you should take it easy while you can.”

“Understood. Thank you.”

It would be quite difficult to attend a welcome ceremony immediately following such a long journey. However, since they were here on a diplomatic mission, such pressures were to be expected.

“After the researchers take tonight to rest, they’ll be shown around the farmland early tomorrow morning.”

“...I am a bit envious of that.”

If Amelia were participating as a researcher like Sarge was, she would have been able to tour a foreign country’s farmland to her heart’s content; when she thought of that, she felt disappointed.

“Sorry.” She raised her head at the sudden apology. Julius continued, looking a bit awkward. “Honestly, going out on official duties is something that one does after graduating from the academy. But due to the circumstances in this case, I was asked if there was anyone who was around Princess Chloe’s age and could serve as her companion—someone she could turn to for advice.”

Since it had already been decided that Marie would be visiting in her capacity as vice-director, the only member of the royal family who could act as Chloe’s companion was Amelia.

“Oh, I see. And what will Marie be doing tomorrow?”

“As the vice director, she’ll be going along with Sarge to see the farmland. While we’re staying in the royal castle, I’ll have Kaid stay with Marie as her guard. The plan is for Liliane, disguised as a maid-in-waiting, to accompany you.”

“Understood.”

Amelia would have to attend the welcome party with Julius.

Even though she had only ever attended a handful of parties even in Bedeiht, she would now be attending a party in a foreign country as a member of the royal family; as one would have expected, she was nervous.

However, not only Julius but Liliane would be by her side. That being the case, she felt she would be okay somehow.

“Ah, sorry. Here I am telling you to rest and yet I keep talking your ears off. You should get a little sleep. We still have some time before we arrive at the capital.”

“I will. Thank you.”

At Julius's suggestion, Amelia leaned back and softly closed her eyes. In that position, she fell asleep for a bit.

"Amelia."

A gentle voice suddenly called her name, waking her up.

Huh? I was...

The carriage jolted, and she remembered where she was.

She'd thought she would just close her eyes for a bit, but now that she realized she had fallen asleep, she became flustered.

"I-I'm sorry."

Thinking she couldn't be a bother to Julius, she hurriedly made to rise.

"Relax. There's no rush."

"Huh?"

She raised her face at the familiar voice and saw that it wasn't Julius who was peering down at her. It was Sarge, looking at her with the beautiful face she had grown accustomed to.

"Sarge? Why are you...?"

She'd thought he was in the carriage with the other researchers.

"We'll be arriving in the capital soon. Once we do, I won't be able to talk to you much in public. I asked my brother to switch spots for a moment."

As he said that, he gently stroked Amelia's black hair. She was still a bit dazed.

"I've heard that once we arrive at the castle, there will be a welcome party. My brother will be escorting you—since you'll be with him, I'll feel at ease."

"Yes." Amelia nodded, having been told that prior.

Since Amelia would have Julius and Liliane with her and said she would manage with their help, she was able to turn the conversation around on Sarge himself. She was worried about him, seeing as he would be leaving the capital to tour the farmland.

"And please be careful yourself. I heard you will be going to see the farmland.

I’m sure there will be many plants you have never seen before, but please take care not to stray far from other people.”

After she issued her warning, Sarge gave an embarrassed laugh. “...I know. More importantly, you might get invited to dance by the men of Janaki. It’s okay if you refuse them. I’m sure my brother will be able to handle any issues.”

Having been suddenly told that, Amelia swallowed down her further words of warning.

“...I will not dance with anyone else,” she answered, turning bright red. Sarge nodded contentedly.

“In that case, I’m glad. Be careful.”

“I will be fine. Julius and Miss Liliane will be with me, after all.”

“Right. Then you don’t need to worry about me either. I have Kaid. It’s a shame we won’t be able to observe the farmland together, but I’ll be bringing back a lot of data, so once we return home, we can take a look at it together.”

“Yes. I’m looking forward to it.”

When they returned to Bedeiht, she and Sarge would once again pass days filled with research.

While it was difficult, every day was fun and fulfilling. In order to return to that life, she had to work hard now.

“Amelia, here.”

Sarge gently slipped a ring onto Amelia’s finger.

“What is this...?”

The ring had a modest yet beautiful emerald within magnificent gold craftwork. As she realized those were Sarge’s colors, a smile rose naturally to her face.

“It’s a charm. It’ll protect you.”

“...Thank you.”

It was as if he was by her side; it made her feel comforted.

She wrapped the ring up in both her hands, held it close to herself, and smiled.

As she did so, they finally arrived at Janaki's royal capital, and Sarge returned to the researchers' carriage. It seemed he had come to give her this ring.

Julius returned to the carriage, taking Sarge's place, and together, he and Amelia headed for the castle. The researchers, including Sarge, would be staying at an establishment in the royal capital.

Since Amelia would be staying in the castle with Julius, she wouldn't have many opportunities to see Sarge, but their sojourn would only be for ten days.

Once they returned to Bedeiht, they could be together always.

But still, I can't believe I feel this lonely. I...

Perhaps she was even more deeply in love than she had thought.

She didn't want to be apart from him.

But this was what she had to do in order to stay by Sarge's side. She pulled herself together, thinking about the duty she had to fulfill.

Right. I'll do my best.

They arrived at Janaki's royal castle, which looked like a sturdy fortress.



The castle walls were solid and tall, and soldiers were standing watch all around. Apparently, the warlike Beltz Empire had tried to cross the perilous mountains several times in the past.

However, the mountain range was incredibly rugged, and Amelia had heard the Beltz Empire had barely any mages. So far, all their forays had ended in vain, but although it was impossible to lead an army through the passes, they could have spies infiltrate their neighbors to the north.

That must have been why the Kingdom of Janaki was always on guard against the empire.

It was to be expected; they had no diplomatic contact with the empire, so it was impossible to know their situation.

Amelia and Julius, accompanied by Liliane, entered the Kingdom of Janaki's castle. All the people who had assembled to greet them welcomed them with a smile.

Everyone in Janaki was tall, so Amelia, who was petite even by Bedeiht standards, ended up getting buried in the crowd. However, unlike in Bedeiht, where people had many different hair colors, here people only had brown or black hair. Since Amelia also had black hair, she ended up feeling a sort of affinity with them.

The welcome party would be held that day, so she had no time to relax in the room that had been designated for her; she had to get ready immediately.

As her maid-in-waiting, Liliane would be sharing the room with her. It would be Liliane and not the people of this country who would be helping Amelia with her day-to-day necessities.

Although Liliane was a guard, Amelia felt that as a marquis's daughter, she shouldn't be made to do such things, but Liliane laughed and told her it was fine, as she was used to it. Female knights were often appointed to guard other women, and dressing up as a maid-in-waiting was the easiest way to protect them, so it was a common practice.

"Lady Amelia, please watch out for men from Janaki," Liliane, who was helping Amelia get dressed, said out of the blue.

“What?” Amelia tilted her head, unsure of what she meant.

“Earlier, I met with some of the maids who work in the castle, and they told me that the preference in this country is for women who are black haired and petite. That matches your description in every particular, Lady Amelia.”

Black haired and petite.

Amelia, who fit that description perfectly, felt conflicted about that.

She knew she had an ordinary-looking face, so the prospect of being valued only for her height and her hair didn’t exactly make her happy.

Besides, the only one Amelia needed was Sarge.

“Lady Sophia has done it again. That looks very good on you,” Liliane said, smiling; she had just finished getting Amelia dressed.

The dress that her sister-in-law Sophia had prepared for her was an elegant one made of a light material that covered most of her skin.

It also seemed as though she had considered what design would look best on Amelia. After Amelia looked in the mirror, she let out a sigh.

“Sister really is perfect, isn’t she?”

Amelia felt she needed to work hard to catch up to Sophia, but she feared that she could never quite reach her level.

“May I ask about that ring?”

After arranging Amelia’s hair, Liliane seemed to have noticed the ring that Sarge had given to Amelia.

“Sarge kindly gave this to me in the carriage. He said it’s a charm,” Amelia answered, clasping it tightly in her hands.

“Of course—those are Prince Sarge’s colors. They suit you very well.”

“Thank you.”

Liliane’s words made Amelia so happy, she couldn’t help but smile.

When Amelia wore this ring, she felt as if he were by her side.

Eventually, when Julius was done with his own preparations, he came to get

them.

“Shall we leave soon?”

“Yes.”

Julius was much taller than Sarge, so when he and Amelia were next to each other, she looked even smaller.

“Prince Julius, please look after Lady Amelia.”

Liliane told him about what she’d heard from the castle maids, and Julius nodded seriously.

“Understood. I won’t leave Amelia’s side for even a second, so don’t worry.”

So saying, Julius took Amelia’s hand in his own and began to walk.

“I’m sorry for causing you such trouble.”

“Not at all. Of course I’m going to protect my sister-in-law. Sarge, too, often asks me to do so. I don’t think anyone would do something imprudent to a guest in the country, but agents of the Beltz Empire have even infiltrated Bedeiht, which is farther away from the empire than Janaki. We can’t say for sure that they haven’t infiltrated this kingdom as well. It’s better to be cautious.”

“...Yes.”

Remembering the incident with Reese, Amelia also braced herself.

As they walked, they began to hear music.

Amelia felt nervous; her heart was pounding.

It’s okay. Just calm down and do your best.

She looked at the ring Sarge had given her, which calmed her heart.

And now, Amelia’s first official duty had begun.

As the unfamiliar local tune played, Amelia and Julius walked slowly forward.

The venue was crowded with people, and everyone’s gaze was on the two of them.

Most people had their eyes fixed on the third prince of Bedeiht, the one who

could use light magic—Julius. But there were also more than a few gazes showering Amelia, who was walking hand in hand with him.

Goodness...

She was so nervous, her hands were nearly trembling.

She was about to hang her head when she caught a glimpse of Sarge's ring.

Sarge...

"I wish you'd have more confidence in yourself. No one else can take your place. And more than anything, you are the person dearest to me."

Remembering those words, she raised her head.

I will become someone suitable for him. I can't hang my head anymore.

There were those who were captivated by Amelia's small frame as she smiled softly and walked in a dignified manner.

But she took no notice of those stares. In her mind was only the image of her beloved.

As Amelia and Julius progressed straight to the back of the spacious hall, they saw the members of the royal family of the Kingdom of Janaki standing in a line.

The king and queen beside the crown prince and princess.

Next were the second and third princes and the four princesses.

About half had black and half had brown hair.

The Kingdom of Janaki was famous for having a large royal family, but lined up like this, they were an even more splendid sight than Amelia had anticipated.

That must be Princess Chloe.

At the very end of the line stood a tall girl who was scowling in Amelia's direction.

The position in which she was standing and the fact that she appeared to be the youngest made Amelia realize she was the one who would be marrying into the Kingdom of Bedeiht.

She must have been around Amelia's age.

She had brown hair and dark eyes. She was tall and slender, yet her face still retained traces of childishness.

However, based on her glare, she didn't seem to feel favorably towards Amelia. Even while she hid behind her brothers and sisters, she was shooting Amelia an openly hostile look. That wasn't the way one looked at someone one was meeting for the first time.

Amelia was confused, but considering the girl's circumstances, she decided that sort of reaction was unavoidable.

I'm sure she's anxious.

Trying to show the princess there was no animosity on her own part, she smiled in her direction. But Chloe looked even more displeased and abruptly turned away.

Oh no... I think I messed up.

Feeling nervous, she looked at Julius, who also seemed to have noticed Chloe's gaze.

Even while he looked exasperated that the princess was regarding the guests of the kingdom with such open hostility at their welcome party, he properly greeted the royal family of Janaki.

They, in turn, welcomed the delegation from Bedeiht, and then the king announced the start of the party.

The light music grew louder.

The crown prince and princess of Janaki began to dance to the music in the middle of the hall, and then other aristocrats took their partners' hands and followed suit.

As Amelia had previously heard from Sophia, parties in the Kingdom of Janaki didn't follow any particularly strict rules, and everyone had fun dancing without any regard to sequential order.

As Amelia had promised Sarge, she didn't dance with anyone and passed the time quietly.

Julius danced with the other princesses, but Chloe was the only one who stubbornly refused to dance with anyone. She just kept her lips shut tight and stared at the floor.

Since Amelia wasn't dancing with anyone either, she naturally ended up standing by the princess's side. However, since the princess seemed as if she would rebuff everyone around her, Amelia didn't feel as if she could talk to her.

"...I'm not going to the Kingdom of Bedeiht," said Chloe in a brooding tone, almost as if to herself, while Amelia was still trying to figure out what to do. "I won't get married. I..."

Noticing that their sister had spoken, the princes and princesses rushed over to her.

"Chloe, what's wrong? Why are you saying such things all of a sudden?"

"Didn't you say just last year that you were looking forward to going to Bedeiht?"

Judging by their baffled rather than scolding demeanor, Chloe must have changed her mind quite suddenly.

Julius, who had been dancing with the second princess, looked confusedly between Chloe and the other princes and princesses.

"We have no intention of forcing her to come with us. Why don't you talk this over a little more? Even if this engagement doesn't work out, it won't affect the relationship between our countries."

"Huh?" At Julius's words, Chloe's eyes widened in surprise. "...We can break off this engagement?" she said, her voice a mixture of disbelief and happiness.

But the other people around her reacted differently.

"Listen here. You are this kingdom's fourth princess."

"I don't care. I have Alois—"

"Chloe!"

As soon as Chloe said that name, her siblings harshly cut her off.

Unsure of what to do, Amelia looked at Julius, who stepped in to mediate

with a smile.

“It seems we were too hasty in making a decision as well. We still have ten days in the kingdom. You can decide things in that time.”

Saying that, he took Amelia’s hand.

“Since this is a party, why don’t we dance? I’m sure Sarge won’t mind if it’s me.”

“Ah, yes.”

Thinking the siblings probably had much to discuss, Amelia accepted Julius’s invitation and left the scene.

They then went to the middle of the hall and danced to the music.

Amelia heard the sounds of people sighing in admiration as they watched the two of them dance. Surely it was because Julius was a good dancer. He carefully led the petite Amelia, and they were able to dance without any obvious mistakes. She was relieved by that. Having been invited to the kingdom as a guest, she couldn’t very well do things like step on her partner’s toes or stumble about.

As if her dancing with Julius had been the catalyst, she received several other invitations to dance, but she politely declined all of them. There were several people in the venue who were not dancing, so it didn’t seem as though she would cause any trouble by refusing.

“Just as Liliane worried, it seems like you’re precisely the kind of woman the men of Janaki like.”

“...They only like my hair and height. That doesn’t make me very happy.”

“Amelia, you’re very pretty. But it’s actually probably a good thing Sarge isn’t here.”

He told her Sarge sometimes got surprisingly jealous, and Amelia unconsciously covered her cheeks with her hands.

She was certain she was turning red.

Amelia also felt she didn’t want Sarge to dance with anyone else.

But...

Amelia thought of her interaction with Chloe earlier. She'd said a man's name—Alois.

So she did have a beloved.

Amelia couldn't help but put herself in her shoes.

If I had to leave Sarge...

She was sure she would feel she couldn't go on living.

If Chloe was in that position, Amelia felt it was understandable for her to be so emotional.

"It seems there's something going on, but there's not much we can do about it, right?" murmured Julius, perhaps also worried. Seeing that Amelia was brooding, he continued, "You also shouldn't dwell on it, Amelia."

"...Julius."

"This marriage is a contract between the kingdoms. We can't meddle in their decision. And no matter how emotional the princess may be, she shouldn't have said something like that at a formal event such as this."

Julius seemed a bit appalled that Chloe had shown such animosity at a welcome party.

"They were the ones that proposed this engagement. And it was something that was decided a while ago. I'd thought she was prepared for it too, but from what she just said, I'm guessing she has fallen in love and decided she doesn't want a political marriage. I feel sorry for her, but..."

Chloe's partner would be his brother, Est. That must have been the reason that Julius's face remained stern even as he expressed sympathy for her.

"But neither my father nor my brother would want to force a princess to get married against her will. We'll await their decision."

"That's right..."

Amelia nodded.

Seeing that Amelia was feeling down in sympathy with Chloe's feelings, Julius

said kindly, “Tomorrow we’ll be doing our observation. We’ll probably be able to meet up with Sarge.”

“Yes.”

Hearing Sarge’s name lifted her spirits. Tomorrow’s plan included touring the market in the royal capital as well as a large food processing plant and a bit of the farmland on the outskirts of the capital.

Of course, the researchers would also be coming along.

It was one of the few opportunities she and Sarge would have to do something together. As she became excited for tomorrow, a smile came naturally to her face. Then, she suddenly noticed that at some point Chloe had disappeared from the venue. Several other members of the royal family were also gone.

Amelia couldn’t leave in the middle of the party.

She remained there with Julius until the end, after which she returned to her room, where Liliane was waiting.

A complicated expression crossed Liliane’s face after she heard Chloe’s story from Amelia.

“Prince Alexis and Lady Sophia’s marriage was a political one. And yet they have built an excellent relationship,” she said, bringing up her friends, the crown prince and princess.

According to Crown Prince Alexis, their marriage had been a political maneuver. However, each had compromised and been considerate of the other’s position in order to build the relationship they had now.

“Prince Est is a wonderful person, so if they were to wed, I am sure they would be able to build a relationship similar to that between the crown prince and princess.”

However, that would be difficult considering how strongly Chloe was opposed.

Although Amelia and Liliane didn’t know what sort of conclusion the engagement would reach, there was also the possibility that Est and Chloe

would amicably dissolve it.

Even if the marriage did not end up happening, the two nations would remain on good terms.

“Well, then—for now, please rest. I am sure you’re tired from attending a party soon after such a long journey. Tomorrow will be the observation tour you’ve been looking forward to.”

“You’re right. Tomorrow I’ll be with Sarge.”

Amelia’s brooding expression suddenly brightened.

She didn’t want him to see her looking tired from lack of sleep. She decided to stop thinking unnecessary thoughts and go to sleep.

She was not yet used to this country’s castle, but Liliane was here guarding her.

“I will be by your side all night, so please be at ease.”

“Right. Thank you.”

Under Liliane’s watch, Amelia closed her eyes.

Tomorrow, she would be able to meet Sarge. Even though she had already been seeing him every day, she couldn’t help but look forward to it.

The next day.

Amelia woke up early in the morning, got dressed, and left the castle with Julius to head out on their tour. Liliane was there as her maid-in-waiting, and even guides and knights from Janaki were accompanying them for additional protection.

First they would be going to see the market in the royal capital. On the way, they stopped by the establishment where the researchers were staying to join up with them.

Their lodgings, situated in the center of the capital, were heavily guarded by soldiers of Janaki. The Kingdom of Janakai was unaware that Fourth Prince Sarge was among the researchers, but they must have strengthened their

security since Julius's fiancée, Marie, was present. Even though Kaid was with him, Amelia was still worried about Sarge, so she was relieved to see the security.

The monarchy had invited Marie, as a fiancée of royalty, to stay at the castle even though she was coming as one of the delegates and the vice director of the academy.

However, Marie had declined, saying that she was visiting for research and that Julius had assigned Kaid to guard her out of concern for his fiancée.

That was what they had told them.

But while Kaid was of course protecting Marie as well, he was really there as Sarge's guard.

From where she sat waiting in the carriage, Amelia saw the researchers appear, accompanied by Kaid. First was Marie, who greeted Julius gracefully. In order to enter the country as a researcher, Sarge had previously used magic to change his appearance a bit.

Sarge.

When she spotted him, she almost called out his name without thinking.

His shining golden hair was now as black as Amelia's. And since he was wearing glasses and a uniform, he blended in among the other researchers. He was still a student and hadn't gone on any diplomatic missions, so it was unlikely that anyone would recognize him.

When Sarge caught sight of Amelia, he smiled softly at her.

Even though he looked a bit different, his smile was the same. Amelia resisted the urge to run to his side and instead smiled back at him.

Their first stop was the market.

The large market sold fruits and vegetables that she'd rarely seen. The researchers were picking things up and speaking with the vendors, but Amelia and Julius were just watching from inside the carriage.

I wonder what that is? It kind of looks like a riquet fruit, but...

Julius laughed at Amelia, who was glued to the window, trying to get a better look.

“I think we’ll be able to get a closer look when we tour the farms later on.”

“Ah, my apologies. I didn’t realize I was...”

She hurriedly sat back and straightened her posture.

There were also many ordinary citizens here in the capital’s market. As a guest of this country and a representative of the Kingdom of Bedeiht, she had to comport herself well.

She somehow managed to remain firm in that resolve while they were touring the food processing plant, but when at last they went to tour the farmland, it fell apart easily.

Amelia, who had disembarked the carriage alongside Julius, became entranced by the wide expanse of farmland in front of her.

“Amazing. It’s so...”

The vast farmland before her grew crops that were rarely cultivated in Bedeiht.

She became excited in spite of herself, but the experience was nevertheless very informative, as she had the opportunity to ask the guide many questions.

Sarge also seemed to be asking the local botanists various questions; Amelia was looking forward to being able to exchange information with him when they returned home.

Their observation tour was over before she knew it, and she would once again have to part from Sarge and return to the castle. She felt sad about that, but once they returned home, they could be together always.

After separating from the researchers and returning to the castle, Amelia quickly got to work compiling everything she had seen and heard today into data.

She was sure that Sarge had asked about the country’s rainfall and temperatures, so Amelia wrote down everything she had heard from the guide. He had explained that a great deal had changed in this kingdom over the past

ten years.

Even during the summers, temperatures weren't getting very high.

It had been raining more.

And in the winter, days had been colder than in years past.

Those were the same issues that Bedeiht was facing.

This region also grows gree, but with the passing years, the harvest has been decreasing.

Gree was the staple food of this continent, but it was susceptible to cold, and in Bedeiht they had only recently been able to breed it to the point that harvest yields had returned to previous levels.

However, the new variety was susceptible to insect damage, and in order to compensate for that weakness, Amelia and Sarge had created water magic as well as enchanted water with the same effectiveness as magic.

Farmers in this region should be able to grow Sarge's selectively bred gree without any problems.

However, there were not many people in this kingdom who could use water magic nor many mages who would be able to create enchanted water.

They would not be able to find success using the same methods that Bedeiht had.

What's the best course of action? Further selective breeding? Or maybe it would be better to distribute enchanted water even more widely?

In Bedeiht, all nobles possessed magical power. There were no other countries like it in that respect. However, no matter how many mages they had, it wasn't as though all of them had water affinities. Plus, most nobles only put their magic to use in their own domains.

I wonder if there's a good solution...

Neither Sarge nor Amelia held the opinion that as long as Bedeiht made out all right, that was good enough. No matter how well off their own country was, if the surrounding countries were starving, war was sure to break out.

And there were also the relationships between the kingdoms to consider. If Bedeiht provided other countries with their technology, she and Sarge would have to gather even more data and make their inventions safer to use.

She wanted to speak with Sarge.

She wanted to talk and exchange data and opinions, forgetting the time.

But now, she couldn't even see him.

Amelia sighed deeply.

Seeing her like that, Liliane called out to her. "We must get you ready soon."

At Liliane's gentle prompting, Amelia nodded. "Right. It's already time, isn't it?"

Amelia had been invited to a banquet this evening. She had to change into the dress Sophia had prepared for her and then head to their meeting place.

About now, Sarge was probably working on his research, free from any time restraints.

Feeling a bit envious, she suddenly realized something.

"I wonder if Sarge is all right? Is he eating and sleeping...?"

She became worried that he might be focusing too much on his research and forgetting everything else.

"I would like to say that he is fine, since he has Kaid by his side, but..." Liliane also seemed uneasy.

It was as if she was visualizing the two of them staying up all night, Kaid unable to stop Sarge.

"I will go check on them later. If I say I have a message from Julius, I'm sure I'll be able to get in easily."

"Yes, please do."

Deciding to leave the matter to Liliane for now, Amelia got dressed.

Today was the observation tour and banquet. Tomorrow...

She had been invited to a tea party with the princesses the following day.

Since Chloe should also be present, Amelia would probably be able to speak with her there.

While staying at the castle, she would be kept very busy.

But because of that, she would probably be able to forget the loneliness of being without Sarge.

Although Amelia was nervous throughout the banquet, Julius was with her, so everything went without incident.

The problem was the following day's tea party with the princesses.

Amelia was visiting this kingdom as a representative of Bedeiht, but since she and Sarge were still just engaged, she was not yet officially a member of the royal family. A mere daughter of a rural noble had to attend a tea party with the princesses of a foreign nation.

Liliane would be there with her, but since she would be present as her maid-in-waiting, it was unlikely that Amelia would be able to ask her for her guidance in public.

"It will be all right. I heard that Prince Julius sang your praises at the banquet yesterday," Liliane told Amelia, who was anxious.

"Well..."

Liliane had apparently heard that from another maid-in-waiting who worked in the castle.

Julius, who had been asked at the banquet yesterday about the new grain variety, had said it had some shortcomings but that Amelia was the one who was developing the magic to compensate for those weak points.

Of course, Amelia had hastily added that it had originally been Sarge's idea. But when Julius had explained that it had been due to that achievement that Amelia had been welcomed into the royal family, she could not deny that and could only smile vaguely.

"There's no one who would look down on you for something like your status when you're as brilliant as you are," said Liliane.

It was a well-known fact even abroad that Fourth Prince Sarge was studying botany and earth magic and working hard at breeding gree. Julius spoke of how Amelia made the finest partner for Sarge, in both his public and private life.

It was a bit embarrassing, but still, it made me happy...

And then—

Nothing of what Amelia had been concerned about actually occurred. Just like Liliane had said, the princesses had warmly welcomed her.

And yet missing among those princesses was the crucial personage—Chloe.

Apparently she had taken ill and had given short notice that she wouldn't be attending.

Guessing from the other princesses' flustered state, it seemed she really had given notice of her absence just before the event. Smiling, Amelia told the apologetic princesses that it was all right and offered her best wishes for Chloe.

What should I do...?

She wanted to speak with the princess at least once.

That was what she felt, but it seemed the princess was avoiding her, so there was not much she could do. The princess did not attend any of the banquets or parties that were held afterwards either.

However, regarding Chloe's engagement, Amelia heard that following talks between Julius and the Kingdom of Janaki, everyone had decided not to make a decision right away.

Chloe would study in Bedeiht as planned, and they would officially decide what to do about the engagement when she graduated.

As for the royal family of Janaki, they seemed to want to go ahead and send her off to be Est's fiancée.

However, at the moment, no matter what they tried to do to convince her, Chloe obstinately refused to change her mind.

But as for the royal family of Bedeiht, they couldn't bring themselves to force Chloe into an engagement, so they settled for putting the decision on hold.

Since she was the same age as Amelia, she would enroll in the academy as a second-year student. She would have quite a bit of time before she graduated.

If she could become accustomed to Bedeiht in that time, then all the better.

But if she could not, then she could just go back home to Janaki.

They'd shown consideration for Chloe, who was against the marriage;

however, for precisely that reason, she would be attending the academy not as the second prince's fiancée but as a princess of Janaki. Therefore, if she were to cause any problems, Janaki would bear the responsibility.

Even so, Amelia felt this was better for Chloe than for everyone to arrive hastily at a decision.

The reason they had been able to reach such a swift conclusion was thanks to Julius, who had used light magic to speak with His Majesty the King all the way in Bedeiht. Julius had apparently received the faraway king's acknowledgment and allowed the discussion to progress. Light magic allowed him to advance negotiations in a timely manner even when traveling to distant regions.

"It's useful magic, but I only resort to it in emergencies and when out on diplomatic missions," said Julius. "I want to communicate important information directly, after all."

"I see," said Amelia.

Light magic was indeed a powerful and convenient tool, but it seemed that was precisely why the members of the royal family tried not to rely on it too much and instead focused more on the variety of magic each had chosen.

Light magic was so powerful that it was said not to have any equal among the other magical affinities, but the particulars of its capabilities were not divulged to the public. There were surely secrets about it that only the royal family was privy to.

"Anyway, these past ten days must have been pretty rough, huh? Now we just have to get back home. You can enjoy yourself going back in the same carriage with Sarge."

"But I'm Princess Chloe's companion..."

She'd been chosen for that role. She couldn't just abandon her duty.

So she said, but Julius told her it was all right, as the situation had changed.

"Princess Chloe will be studying in Bedeiht as a princess of Janaki, so they will be the ones arranging her guards and maids-in-waiting. I believe that will make her feel more at ease too. So, Amelia, please stay with Sarge. It seems that he'll

be bringing back a mountain of data, so if he were alone, I think he'd just spend the whole journey analyzing them in his carriage."



“...All right.”

She answered with some hesitation because she didn’t feel confident that she could stop him from doing so any more than Julius could have. Rather, she would probably let herself be pulled along into doing exactly the same thing.

“...Right. I’ll have Liliane ride with you too. I’m sure she’ll be able to stop you two,” Julius said quietly; he seemed to have had the same thought.

Amelia cast her eyes down, feeling apologetic.

Given those circumstances, it was decided that on their return journey, she would share a carriage with Liliane and Sarge. Kaid would also be accompanying them as an escort.

Julius and Marie would be riding in the carriage for the royal family.

And escorting that carriage would be a knight from Bedeiht.

“We’re finally able to meet, Amelia,” Sarge said, clasping her hands. His hair was still black.

It had been a while since she’d felt his warmth, and it radiated in her chest.

“Even though we were here for different duties, I never imagined we wouldn’t have chances to meet.”

“Sarge...”

She hadn’t been expecting him to say something like that.

She’d thought he’d been completely absorbed in Janaki’s cold-weather damage situation or in researching the plants that only grew here in the south.

I can’t believe he was also feeling sad that we couldn’t see each other.

That made Amelia happy, and a smile rose naturally to her face.

“I was feeling lonely without you too. But I was able to learn a lot.”

Amelia felt her first official duty had helped her grow as a person. Surely what she’d learned here would be useful to her in the future.

“I see. I’m glad we were both able to get something out of this trip.”

Then Sarge touched the ring he’d given Amelia, which she had been wearing

that whole time.

“I’d like you to continue wearing this as well. It’ll protect you.”

“...I will. Thank you.”

Amelia held the ring close, enveloping it in her hands.

Wearing his colors filled her with happiness and made her feel as if he really were protecting her.

She would cherish it.

The two of them then spread out the documents they’d collected and reported their results to each other. Liliane, who was there under Julius’s orders, remained silent and watched over them.

“The guide from Janaki told me that the price of grain has skyrocketed over the last few years. It appears to be because of the decline in harvest yields,” Amelia said.

“I see. What have the prices been, exactly?”

“Right, you can see them here. Compared to four or five years ago, the price has nearly doubled.”

“That much?”

She handed over the market prices she’d compiled.

After Sarge took his time reading them over, he took out the documents he had on hand and compared them.

“There was an especially sharp decline in crop yields five years ago. The cause being...this?”

He pointed to where the kingdom’s annual temperature and weather were recorded. Five years ago, the summer had seen heavy rainfall, with the result that most of the grains had been washed away before the harvest.

“Ever since then, it’s often rained heavily even in the summertime, and they’re also using up their reserves, so little by little, the price has been rising.”

“So they haven’t had the chance to recover ever since that disaster, hmm? It seems like a much more serious situation than I was imagining.”

Sarge shifted his gaze from the documents to the window of the carriage.

What was being grown in that wide farmland was not grain. Rather, it seemed like mostly vegetables, which grew quickly and were resistant to cold damage.

Years ago, they must have been grain fields, just like in the Lenia family's domain.

For several decades, the Kingdom of Janaki had been known as a major agricultural power. Their high-quality, affordable grains had been sold all over the continent. Yet unfortunately, this was now their situation.

"Nonetheless, this kingdom's weather is still warmer than Bedeiht's. If we act now, we should be able to do something."

He began eagerly poring over the data. Watching him, Amelia felt that he was living more as a researcher than a member of the royal family after all.

Irrespective of the interests of the nations involved, he was putting all his effort into tackling the problem in front of him. Of course the interests of Bedeiht were important, but there was Crown Prince Alexis to handle those, followed by Julius and Est.

That was why Sarge was able to do this.

And Amelia hoped she could continue supporting him to the utmost of her abilities.

"The heavy rains begin around the end of summer, right?"

He was trying to find the right document out of the pile that sat on the carriage seats. How, he murmured to himself, had he gathered so much data in just a ten-day stay?

"That's correct. The heavy rainfall also frequently causes flooding, so it seems the grain often gets washed away before the harvest."

The grains they had painstakingly grown, gone to waste. That must have been why they were mostly planting vegetables and other crops.

"I heard that the vegetables are harvested earlier, so they aren't affected by the flooding."

However, the price of grain, which was the staple food in Janaki, continued to rise due to poor harvests. At this rate, it would likely have a major impact on people's lives.

"Even with the weather Janaki is having now, they would be able to harvest the grains without a problem if only the season for harvesting were a little earlier. Growth promotion magic might be effective, but it isn't realistic to cast earth magic on every single plot of land," muttered Sarge.

Indeed, if growth promotion magic were cast on the fields, then the crops could be harvested before the weather worsened.

However, very few people in the Kingdom of Janaki could use magic. It was possible they didn't even have anyone capable of using earth magic, which was a rare trait even in Bedeiht.

Amelia was suddenly struck with an idea—could they create something like the enchanted water she'd developed that would have the same effect as growth promotion magic?

"Sarge, could we possibly create something like enchanted water? If we use earth magic, maybe something like fertilizer..."

Last time, they had enhanced the water with magic that could protect against insect damage.

Perhaps they could promote crop growth by enchanting something like fertilizer with earth magic. That was Amelia's thought process.

"There aren't many earth mages, so maybe distributing it wouldn't be practical..."

"No, if we make something like fertilizer, then we could enchant it in a single large batch. Then we'd easily be able to sell it to other countries."

Sarge nodded deeply, then smiled.

"We'll need to experiment and gather data, but it's worth a try. Once we get back home, let's give it a go."

"Yes!"

Amelia was relieved to have been helpful.

“With this, you’ll have even more achievements under your belt, Amelia.”

Hearing Sarge say that so happily, Amelia hurried to refute him.

“No, Sarge, this time I’m really not doing anything... I can’t even use earth magic,” she said, but he wouldn’t listen to her.

“It was your idea, so it’s without a doubt your achievement. There are many things only you, who used to patrol the farms with your own two feet, can think up. I still don’t know if I can make this happen alone, so I’d like you to continue working on it with me.”

“Yes, of course.”

Amelia had no intention of refusing in that regard. She nodded vigorously.

She was happy to be able to stay close by his side, helping with his research in this way.

Then, seemingly thinking through a plan for that earth magic, Sarge resumed poring over his data without saying another word. Amelia decided to get to work as well, consolidating the data she had gathered.

The silence continued on.

But it was a comfortable silence.

Amelia decided to work harder in order not to squander this precious time. With that decision made, she was immersed in her own work before she knew it.

“Lady Amelia.”

A soft voice suddenly called her name, and she looked up.

At some point, the carriage had stopped, and Liliane, who was next to her, had called out to her. It seemed they had arrived at the place they were staying at that night.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.”

Amelia hastily gathered up her documents and called out to Sarge.

“Sarge, it seems we’ve arrived.”

At her voice, he finally raised his head as well.

“I see. Then I’ll continue this inside.”

Accompanied by Liliane and Kaid, they headed for that night’s inn.

“Prince Sarge, Lady Amelia, please enter this way. Your rooms have already been prepared for you. Will you be dining in your rooms?”

“Yes, I will. Kaid, bring my reading materials to my room.”

“Yes, sir.”

Along with Kaid, who had a large pile of documents in his arms, and with Liliane at her side, Amelia entered the building.

The inn was a high-end establishment in a large town.

Up to this point, they’d been invited to stay in the residences of nobles from Janaki, but now they had decided to stay at an inn along their route. Of course they had booked it for their exclusive use, so no other guests were present.

Princess Chloe would be staying at the same inn, but she had apparently shut herself in her room with her maid-in-waiting.

Amelia would be sharing her room with Liliane and Marie. Apparently they were really supposed to have their own individual rooms. However, Marie had previously said she’d always wanted to have a sleepover with friends. Since Amelia was now living at the royal castle, Marie had given up on that dream. But now that they had the chance to do so, Julius had put the three of them all in the same room.

“One big bed in a giant room. We’ll be sleeping in it together,” said Marie happily, adding that it was just the room she’d been hoping for.

It seemed she had told Julius exactly what she’d been wanting in minute detail, and he’d prepared a room to her liking.

“You will not be able to stay up all night working on your data like this, will you, Lady Amelia?” said Liliane, looking pleased.

Indeed, Amelia couldn’t take out her data with Marie right in front of her looking so enthusiastic.

They had their dinner brought to their room, and after a leisurely meal, they enjoyed some tea, desserts, and light conversation.

Marie told Amelia all about what Sarge had been doing when they'd been part of the delegation together.

"Prince Sarge was collecting data that whole time and avidly asking questions of the researchers from Janaki. They said he was young yet very promising."

He'd apparently been regarded as a more devoted student than any other.

"He also purchased a lot of crops and vegetable seeds and seedlings, so I'm sure you'll be very busy when we get back home, Amelia."

"You're right. Since I could only look out from the carriage, I couldn't see things very well."

She couldn't wait to see what kinds of crops he'd purchased.

Perhaps it was obvious Amelia was thinking about that, as Marie's expression became a bit unreadable.

"I feel like I finally understand what Julius means when he says you're 'one of them.'"

"That's right. Lady Amelia and Prince Sarge are both people we need to help keep in check."

"That's not..."

She was a bit sad that she couldn't say with certainty that it wasn't true.

"But Amelia, you're trying your best not to be like that for Prince Sarge's sake. I wish he would understand that a bit better."

At Marie's words, Amelia shook her head gently.

"It's fine. I really like seeing him devoting himself to his research."

And being by his side as he did so was a privilege reserved for her.

She didn't intend to surrender that right to anyone else.

"I see. Hee hee, gossiping is a very sleepover-like thing to do. Isn't that grand?" Marie said while looking at Amelia kindly, her eyes gleaming.

“Julius is very kind to his friends and family but also harsh and intolerant of his enemies. I think that, too, is a very wonderful trait. Having someone like that be kind to you makes you feel special, you know?”

“Kaid is also like that, but he changes when he holds a sword. I think that is a remarkable skill.”

They passed the time enjoyably talking about what they liked in their respective fiancés, alternately agreeing with and poking fun at each other.

It was a fun night, and in the future, they would smile whenever they looked back on it.

From then on, whenever they stayed at an inn, the three of them would share a room, call it a sleepover, and have an enjoyable time.

“When we get back to the capital, we should invite Meena to join us next time too.” Marie, who had explained she’d always wanted to have a sleepover with friends, said so as if lamenting the passing of time.

Liliane agreed with her.

“Indeed. I believe Lady Amelia requires a bit more time to relax. You are still a student, so you should enjoy student life more.”

The nights the three of them spent together had indeed been fun. If Meena joined them in the future, it would surely be even more fun. Meeting their gazes, Amelia also nodded.

“Yes, you’re right. Next time, let’s get together with all four of us. Maybe we can make something sweet again.”

At Amelia’s answer, Marie nodded deeply.

“That’d be lovely! What should we make next?”

“I can ask Kaid if there’s perhaps something even we could make.”

The three of them smiled at each other, looking forward to the occasion.

And so they decided that when they returned to Bedeiht, they would have a sleepover with everyone at Marie’s residence. Since Liliane would be there with

them, they wouldn't even have to worry about security.

"We can make something sweet in the afternoon, and at night we can gossip. Oh yes, and I'll need to order a bed big enough for us all to sleep in."

"Huh, a bed?"

Amelia didn't think Marie had to go so far as to buy one, but it seemed Marie held an extraordinary passion for sleepovers.

But still, how big would a bed have to be to fit all four of us...? thought Amelia as she looked at the beaming Marie, and at Liliane, who was watching Marie with kind eyes.

Would there come a day when Chloe would join them as well?

Chapter 3: Kidnapping Attempt

It happened just after they crossed the Janaki border and entered Sorina.

They went into the inn where they were staying that night, and as usual, Amelia began to head for the room that was meant for the three women. Then, she noticed that she had brought with her the documents she'd borrowed from Sarge.

It would probably cause him trouble to be without them.

"I'm sorry, I have to give these back to Sarge."

Since he'd had a considerable number of documents scattered about, he was probably still in the carriage.

"Shall I accompany you?"

"No, he's not far. Please look after Marie."

Since Sarge was likely with Kaid, Amelia declined Liliane's offer and went back alone.

She had only just entered the inn, so she quickly exited the building.

This was an upscale inn that people such as aristocrats stayed at, so there was a wide garden in front of the large building. In order to reach the carriage, which was stopped at the gates, she would have to traverse that garden.

But it was very pleasant to walk through so many varieties of blooming flowers.

In the past, she would often walk through the farmland, but she suddenly realized that ever since she had come to the royal capital, she no longer had the opportunity to do so.

It was probably a good idea to take these sorts of walks every now and then.

What's that...?

When Amelia was halfway across, she spotted two figures nestled up to each other in the shadow of the building.

She was sure this inn had been reserved exclusively for their party, so they couldn’t be other guests. Thinking it strange, she tried to get a better look and saw a tall woman with brown hair.

It can’t be...Princess Chloe?

The girl who resembled Chloe was tightly embracing a man who was even taller than her. The shocking sight made Amelia stop in her tracks.

Then, she heard the girl speak.

“Hey, Alois? Didn’t you tell me you’d run away with me once we left Janaki? We’re in Sorina now. Why don’t we elope tonight?”

Her fawning words made Amelia hold her breath.

Elope...

It had been a year ago.

She remembered that her former fiancé, Reese, had eloped with his paramour.

Had Chloe left Janaki just so she could elope with her lover?



However, contrary to the original plan, Chloe was going to study in Bedeiht as a princess of Janaki. If Chloe disappeared, the engagement would end, with the culpability falling on Janaki. Didn't Chloe understand that that would have an impact on the amicable relationship between the two nations?

No... That can't happen.

Amelia almost rushed over to them without a second thought.

If they went through with it, it would be a serious problem.

The two royal families would hold another discussion regarding the engagement once Chloe graduated from the academy. If she just held out for a year and a half, then they could end the engagement smoothly. She didn't have to go so far as to elope, which would destroy the relationship between the kingdoms.

Moreover, Amelia knew.

She knew that even if they did something like elope, it would end in disaster.

Just like it had for Reese and Sarah.

However, perhaps noticing someone else's presence, the man holding Chloe in his arms fixed Amelia with a piercing gaze. Then, he covered the princess he was holding and quickly ran off with her.

"Ah, wait..." she said reflexively, but the two had already disappeared.

Even if she tried to ask her later about what had happened, Chloe would just proclaim she hadn't been doing anything like that, so there wasn't much Amelia could do.

Should she tell Julius or Sarge what she had seen here?

So she thought, but Amelia couldn't move from the spot where she was standing.

Two people, hiding, whispering their love for each other.

Seeing the two of them talk about eloping brought the image of her ex-fiancé clearly to her mind.

I thought I'd forgotten that already...

It seemed her heart, which had been hurt by Reese's betrayal, was still not completely healed.

"...Sarge," she murmured instinctively, and a voice answered her from afar.

"Amelia?"

She raised her head to see Sarge walking straight over to her. Kaid was behind him holding his documents, so he must have finally come out of his carriage.

"Are you feeling ill? You look a bit pale."

She firmly grasped the hand he extended to her.

Little by little, the warmth she felt from him calmed her emotions.

Perhaps noticing her trembling, Sarge's voice hardened. "Did something happen?"

"My apologies, Sarge... I was just thinking about the past."

"The past?"

"Yes. Janaki is close to the Beltz Empire, so it brought up some memories..." she managed to respond.

Sarge held her up. "You should rest. You really don't look well. I'll bring you to your room."

"Ah—"

No sooner had she felt herself gently lifted into the air than she was being held in Sarge's arms.

Thinking it would be dangerous to struggle, all she could do was protest meekly. "Sarge, I must be heavy, so..."

"It's all right. Even I can easily carry someone of your size. More importantly, are you sure you're okay?" he asked worriedly. Amelia hung her head, unsure of how to answer.

What should she say?

If she told him honestly about what she'd seen, Chloe would surely be torn away from her lover immediately and made to return to her own country.

Before that, couldn’t Amelia talk to the princess herself?

If Chloe waited until she graduated from the academy, the situation of the two kingdoms might change, meaning the engagement would be broken off amicably and she could be with her lover. Thus, Amelia wanted to speak with her to get her to change her mind.

As he looked at Amelia, who hadn’t said anything, Sarge seemed to be thinking that she really must be in poor health. “You really do seem unwell. I’ll take you to your room right away.”

He instructed Kaid to prepare Amelia’s room. “I’m sorry. I must have pushed you too hard.”

Sarge had been reviewing the data he’d brought back from Janaki and devising new earth magic the whole time, even while riding in the carriage. Seeing as Amelia had been working with him that whole time, he evidently thought that was what had caused her to become unwell.

“No, I’m fine.”

Forgetting that he was holding her in his arms, she shook her head repeatedly.

“It’s just, I really was thinking about the past, and that just made me feel a bit unwell.”

It wasn’t as if being with Sarge had put her out of sorts. She denied his words frantically, wanting to make sure he didn’t mistakenly think that.

Sarge looked a bit relieved but also saddened to know that the events of the past still troubled Amelia. He brought his cheek close to her hair.

“It must be because you’re tired. That’s why you’re thinking of the past. You should take it easy. That will help you forget those unpleasant things.”

“...You’re right,” Amelia agreed quietly.

Sarge carried Amelia all the way to her room.

“You should rest here today. I’m nearby, so if anything happens, I can come right over.”

“Okay.”

A little later, Liliane and Marie, concerned about Amelia, came by to see how she was doing. The two of them apologized for having made Amelia go back on her own, but she smiled and told them it was fine.

“I’m sorry. I think I’m a little sleep deprived. If I rest well tonight, I’m sure I’ll be right as rain tomorrow.”

Liliane and Marie looked relieved by Amelia’s cheerful voice and expression.

“That’s right. You and Prince Sarge are both overworking yourselves. We haven’t even made it home yet.”

Marie, seemingly still worried about Amelia, told her to rest easy today.

“Right, thanks. My books and documents have been taken away, so I’ll be good and get some sleep,” she said, then saw the two of them off. There were still a few days before they reached Bedeiht, so she promised the three of them would share a room again next time.

Now that she was alone, Amelia once again thought about what she’d seen of Chloe earlier.

Even if they elope, they won’t be happy. I need to tell them that.

They might elope that very night. Before that, Amelia needed to somehow talk to Chloe.

But perhaps it would be better to go see the princess later in the evening. There were still a lot of people about. Thinking that, Amelia decided to get some rest.

However, she fell into a deeper sleep than she’d anticipated, and when she awoke, the sky outside her window was pitch black.

Thinking she had overslept, she hurriedly went to peek at the situation outside her room and observed that her surroundings were still and silent.

If Princess Chloe were gone, there would have been an uproar. By that logic, Chloe must still be in her room.

It had gotten dark outside, but it was still far from midnight.

If they were going to elope, they would probably do so after everyone had gone to bed.

I wonder where she's planning on escaping from...

This inn had been reserved for them alone, so there weren't guards stationed outside of each room. However, there would likely be guards standing watch at the gate and back entrance all through the night. Even if those two did try to run off, she didn't think it would go well.

Could they possibly have someone helping them?

Even if what Chloe wanted was to run off with that man, abducting a princess was a grave offense. And surely whoever aided them in doing so would be charged with the same crime. Was there someone helping them despite that?

At any rate, I need to meet and speak with Princess Chloe.

Amelia was about to leave her room with that thought in mind, but then she suddenly caught sight of her ring and stopped in her tracks.

With her finger, she lightly traced the treasured ring Sarge had given to her.

I'm keeping things from him, even after he was so worried about me... No. I'll go speak with him properly.

Shouldn't she go tell him about the situation now and ask for his advice? Surely Sarge would be able to think up a sound plan.

After reconsidering, she changed her destination.

Sarge was likely to be up late, and Kaid would surely be by his side.

Amelia could sense people outside the building, but the hallways were empty. Faint candlelight illuminated the beautifully polished floors.

When Sarge had escorted her to her room, he'd told her his own room was nearby.

There was no light in the room right next to hers, so that was most likely not his room. His must be the one next to that.

Walking towards the room that she thought was Sarge's, Amelia casually turned her gaze down the walkway.

"Ah!"

Startled, Amelia suddenly stopped in her tracks; she saw a shadow lurking there.

The person was hiding from the light illuminating the hallway and muffling the sound of their breathing. Although Amelia couldn't see them very well due to the darkness, she guessed from their silhouette that they were a slender woman.

"...Could it be...Princess Chloe?"

The reason Amelia called out to her was because she'd heard Chloe's plans to elope. Had that not been the case, Amelia wouldn't have done something like call out to a figure lurking in the dark.

The person jolted out of their hiding spot and started to run away.

"Please wait! Just listen to what I have to say," Amelia called out frantically, thinking that if she let the princess run away now, it would spell trouble.

"I don't have anything to speak with you about."

Even as Chloe said that, she was looking around her anxiously, which probably meant she had, after all, been waiting to meet her partner and run off with him.

Knowing she couldn't let Chloe leave like this, Amelia spoke of what she'd seen earlier.

"Are you meeting your lover?"

The princess gave a start at Amelia's words, but, as if thinking there was no way she could admit to what Amelia had suggested, she shook her head vehemently.

"Of course not. I was just taking a bit of a walk."

"I cannot allow you to walk alone, Your Highness. Allow me to escort you back to your room."

"No. I'm not going back to my room."

She must have somehow managed to escape without being seen. Seeing how frantic the princess looked, Amelia decided to propose something else.

"Shall we talk in my room, then? If you'd prefer not to do that either, then I can call a guard to escort you back to your room," she said, and Chloe bit her lip and looked away.

But then, perhaps thinking that going to Amelia's room would be better than having the guards called, she obediently followed Amelia. Chloe was a sheltered princess after all. Amelia felt it possible that the princess was being deceived by the man who claimed to be her lover.

Amelia returned to her room, which she'd just left, and invited Chloe inside. The spacious room was set up to receive visitors, and there was even a simple kitchen to allow maids to prepare tea.

Amelia had Chloe sit on the sofa and then sat across from her.

What should I do...?

Although she'd just been so firm in bringing Chloe to her room, Amelia was at a bit of a loss as to what to do now.

She'd been on her way to tell Sarge everything and ask for his advice; she hadn't thought she would run into the princess again. She'd hastily brought Chloe back to her room, thinking she couldn't let her elope, but now she wasn't sure what to say to her.

Nevertheless, she had to somehow persuade the princess to change her mind.

Amelia desperately racked her brains for what to say, then spoke.

“Princess Chloe, is your lover’s name Alois?”

If the silence continued for too long, it would just create needless tension, so Amelia broke the ice by getting straight to the point.

Hearing her say that made Chloe jump.

“How do you know that?”

“When we arrived here, I happened to see you and him embracing. I also heard what you were talking about.”

Chloe had no words; she must have been recalling what she’d been discussing with her lover at that moment.

Her face suddenly turned pale.

“How dare you eavesdrop on other people’s conversations.”

“I apologize, but I just happened to overhear you. Furthermore, there was also someone entering the inn right after me. If he had been the one to find you, I believe things would have turned out even more troublesome.”

After she’d overheard them, Sarge, who was the last one remaining outside, had been on his way to the inn. If Sarge and Kaid had spotted the two of them, there likely would have been a big fuss.

Amelia explained the situation in an admonitory but gentle way so as not to agitate Chloe.

Chloe, who had been scowling at Amelia, suddenly became flustered at Amelia’s words. “Alois noticed you? I didn’t know that. He didn’t say anything about it.”

She must really not have known.

“It’s true. He looked straight at me and then ran off with you, Your Highness. More importantly, from his position, he should have been able to see the carriage that was still stopped outside the inn. He was in that spot even knowing there were still people who had yet to enter the inn?”

It didn’t matter if someone saw them.

Amelia felt that had been what he’d been thinking.

The man named Alois, Chloe's lover, hadn't been trying to protect her. Considering that, he didn't seem like a very trustworthy person.

Amelia looked at Chloe, who appeared completely bewildered.

"Why were you thinking of eloping with him?" Amelia asked in a soft tone, trying to calm the trembling princess. "Although your engagement hasn't been dissolved, I thought it had been decided that you'd be studying in Bedeiht not as Prince Est's fiancée but as the fourth princess of the Kingdom of Janaki. Once you're finished with studying at the academy, then you can end your engagement peaceably. If you elope despite all that, it'll create a serious issue."

"...But, Alois said...if I go to Bedeiht, then I won't be able to return home."

So that was what he'd told her.

"That's not true," said Amelia, denying his words, as she recalled the figure of the man she'd caught a glimpse of earlier.

He was tall and fairly fit.

He had glossy black hair, as was the preference in Janaki, and amber eyes.

He'd been smiling gently at Chloe, but the piercing gaze he'd fixed on Amelia when he'd noticed her had been enough to give her chills.

"Neither His Majesty the King nor Prince Est of Bedeiht have any intention of forcing you into a marriage. Our kingdom has no reason to do such a thing."

She'd spoken discourteously, but wanting to make sure Chloe understood, she'd decided to go ahead and say it. Although Chloe was Est's fiancée, neither Est nor the kingdom felt his fiancée absolutely had to be her.

Chloe's gaze flitted about restlessly.

"But that was what Alois told me..."

No matter how ignorant of the world Chloe seemed to be, Amelia felt it was strange just how unreservedly the princess trusted Alois.

"Where did you meet Alois?"

At Amelia's question, Chloe opened her mouth as if to say something but then looked down without saying a word.

“Your Highness?” She reached instinctively for Chloe’s anxious face.

“I think he was my knight guard... No, someone else was my guard. Alois was...”

As she quietly murmured that she couldn’t remember, Chloe appeared to be on the verge of tears.

It seemed that when she’d searched her memories, she’d come to feel something was off.

“My father was the one who originally implored Bedeiht for this engagement. I think even I felt proud that I would be the only foreign princess able to marry a prince who could use light magic. So then how, despite all that, did things come to this?”

Hearing that, Amelia was also terribly confused.

Chloe couldn’t remember meeting Alois. How could that be, when they’d been embracing so tightly and she’d even said she wanted to elope with him?

She can’t remember meeting him? That can’t be possible.

It had been a settled matter that Chloe would marry into the royal family of Bedeiht. That fact weighed on Amelia’s mind.

Could it be that someone was manipulating her?

If Alois is doing that...

Then that meant eloping was not Chloe’s own choice.

“Your Highness.” Amelia looked straight into the princess’s eyes and asked, “Is he truly your lover?”

At that question, Chloe looked back at Amelia with a troubled expression.

“That’s what I believed. I even felt that I could cast everything else aside as long as the two of us could live together,” she answered in a trembling voice.

It was heartbreaking to see her desperately try to hold on to unstable feelings of love that were on the verge of disappearing.

“But then why can’t I remember how we met, as precious as he is to me?” The princess hung her head.

Amelia gently grapsed Chloe's hands.

The memory of the person she loved was fading.

The thought alone was terrifying.

Even if someone was manipulating her memories and consciousness, to Chloe, those must have been real feelings and real love. Moreover, it had been a love for which she would have thrown everything away; she would have run off with him if they were forbidden to be together.

Thinking that, Amelia felt anger towards that man who was trying to use Chloe. At the same time, she felt relieved that she could now protect Chloe from that danger.

"Could you tell me what you remember about him?" Amelia asked with concern, and Chloe gripped Amelia's hands as if clinging to them, then nodded.

"I can't remember when I met him at all. Before I knew it, I loved him. When he told me we couldn't be together because I had a fiancé, I felt sad. I remember declaring that in order to be with him, I couldn't marry into a foreign country under any circumstances."

"Were those your true feelings?"

"...I don't know." Chloe wordlessly shook her head. "That's what I thought, but now that I think about it, I don't know if those were my true feelings. But..." Chloe squinted as she said that, as if trying to remember. "When this engagement was decided, my father told me that Bedeiht had never before accepted a foreigner into their royal family. So when he told me that I would be the first to marry a prince who could use light magic, I remember feeling very proud. But I also believed that I really did love Alois. What should I do..."

The real Chloe had a family who loved her, and even though they babied her, she'd had every intention of fulfilling her duty. Had someone twisted her feelings and trapped her in this situation?

Moreover, what if Alois was using Chloe with the intention of damaging the relationship between Janaki and Bedeiht?

I need to tell Julius and Sarge about this.

She needed to tell them about Chloe's situation and consult them about what to do next.

It was late, but she would report everything to them. With that thought in mind, she took Chloe's hand and stood, pulling the princess upright alongside her.

"Let us go to Julius."

"Huh? But..."

Chloe was at a loss.

She was probably scared of Julius finding out about her plan to elope, after all. But once he knew the situation, Amelia was sure he would protect Chloe.

Amelia convinced her it would be all right, and Chloe—probably thinking that at this point, it would also be scary to rendezvous with the man she'd thought she loved—nodded despite her hesitation.

First we'll go to Sarge to explain things and apologize, then we'll go see Julius together.

It would be dangerous for Amelia and Chloe to walk around without knowing where Julius was. Surely Alois would be looking for Chloe, who had disappeared. Judging from the situation, he had to be plotting something. Ameilia was certain he would be relentless in trying to track Chloe down.

This plan would mean Chloe finding out about Sarge's identity, but she would have found out anyway once they reached Bedeiht.

As she exited her room, Amelia kept her eyes peeled.

With her hand still tightly gripping Chloe's, she headed for Sarge's room.

Kaid was sure to be there too.

He would protect Chloe without a doubt.

Amelia was frantic as she walked down the dimly lit hall, leading Chloe along by the hand. What she desperately wished to do was break into a run, but she couldn't while tugging a princess along behind her.

After walking for a bit, she saw their destination.

If they could just take refuge in that room, they'd be safe.

Sarge...

The image of her beloved came to mind, but no sooner had she breathed a sigh of relief— A figure appeared from exactly the same spot where Chloe had been hiding earlier.

"Ah!"

The figure grabbed Amelia forcefully by the arm, and in order not to drag Chloe along with her, she immediately let go of her hand.

The one who had grabbed Amelia was a tall man. Since he was restraining her from behind, she couldn't turn around, but she knew without a doubt that it was the one she'd believed to be Chloe's lover, Alois.

"...Alois." Chloe called his name, her voice shaking.

"Ah, Chloe. Finally found you. So this is where you were," he said, smiling at Chloe without releasing Amelia from his clutches. "But it looks like the brainwashing is starting to lose its effect. Well, whatever. I think I'm done with you. This girl seems like she'd be more useful."

"Huh?"

Hearing him say that, Amelia reflexively raised her voice. Was he a mage? Had he cast magic on Chloe to convince her he was her lover? But Amelia had never heard of any magic that allowed one person to manipulate another's mind.

"There's no such magic as that."

"It's probably a bit different from magic, to be more exact. I'm a failed mage. I can't use the normal elemental magic, but I can control a person's consciousness and memory. It looks like I can't use it on people from Bedeiht, though. Not even people like that maid and guard. Guess even their magic's just that much better than that of people from other countries."

"That maid" must have been a reference to Liliane, while "that guard" was Kaid. The two of them, who belonged to the knights' order, would of course have high magic power.

However, even if he could only use his "magic-like power" on people with low

magic, it was far too dangerous.

I need to tell Sarge about this right away!

She struggled as hard as she could to free herself from Alois's restraint, but his hands, larger than hers, offered no release.

"Lady Amelia Lenia, daughter of a count. The fiancée and right hand of Prince Sarge, the authority on earth magic and botany. I bet you'd turn out to be useful to the Beltz Empire if I brought you there," he said, apparently happy, although his voice was taking on a dark tone. His words sent a shiver down Amelia's spine.

Alois was going to try to take Amelia to the Beltz Empire.

"No! Let me go!"

She struggled to free herself from his grasp, but her small stature made it impossible to escape from him.

"Alois, wait!"

Chloe tried to entreat him to stop, but he callously tossed her aside and then made to run off with Amelia.

He had been about to elope with Chloe. The preparations for his escape from this inn must have already been set in place.

"Sarge!" Amelia suddenly called out his name and then touched the ring he'd given her.

At that instant, she felt herself gently floating.

Amelia was pulled away from Alois and enveloped in light.

That light was emanating from the ring Sarge had given her, so she felt no fear. She just closed her eyes and silently entrusted herself to the light.

The light filled her field of vision.

She felt like she had lost consciousness for a moment.

When she came to, she was collapsed on the ground.

Someone was holding her tightly.

However, it wasn’t that man’s grip that she was in.

Rather, these were the arms of someone more familiar to her than anyone else, the one she’d been longing for.

Sarge was tightly embracing Amelia.

His eyes were closed. She frantically called out his name.

“Sarge!”

In response to her cry, Sarge slowly opened his eyes. After seeing that Amelia was in his arms, he looked relieved.

“Good. I made it in time.”

“Sarge, what in the world is this...?”

Amelia fixed her eyes on the ring around her finger. It seemed that the ring had shone with light and saved her.

While Amelia was looking at the ring in wonder, Sarge explained.

“What I gave you isn’t an ordinary ring. It’s a magical tool of my creation. It allows me to know if you’re ever in a crisis. Since the ring was activated, I thought there must be an emergency, so I transported myself to you immediately, but...”

Sarge slowly rose and looked around. Still clinging to Sarge, Amelia also glanced at their surroundings.

“Where are we...?”

All around was a sight she’d never seen before.

Parched earth.

The sun blazing down on them.

It was so hot, even sitting made her sweat.

It must have been even hotter than in Janaki, where they had just been. It didn’t seem possible that this was the same continent that was being afflicted by cold weather.

There was no doubt they had been transported considerably farther south.

“Sarge, this is...”

“It looks like we got flown somewhere, since I used transportation magic at the same time the magical tool activated.”

Sarge told Amelia that he’d used magic on the spur of the moment when she was in danger.

“Even though it was an emergency, I should have assessed the situation a bit more carefully. Sorry.”

“No, don’t be!” Amelia shook her head from side to side. “This all happened because I acted on my own without coming to you for advice in the first place. This situation is my fault,” she said desperately.

Sarge drew her close to him.

“Sarge?”

“...I’m glad you’re all right.”

The warmth Amelia felt on her back reminded her she had nearly been abducted, and she trembled with fear. Sarge held her all the while, hugging her close.

Chapter 4: Country of Gravel

“Come to think of it, Kaid should be here too,” Sarge said once Amelia had calmed down. He looked around.

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. When I tried to use transportation magic, he immediately grabbed my arm, so we both ended up getting transported. Let’s look for him,” he said. They then walked around the area and eventually caught sight of Kaid.

It seemed he’d been flung quite far and had been walking around the desert searching for Sarge and Amelia.

“Oh, thank heavens...”

As soon as he spotted the two of them, he fell to his knees in evident relief.

“Prince Sarge, I reached out to you because you were about to use magic, but what is going on?”

“Well...”

Sarge told Kaid about how Amelia had just been nearly kidnapped.

He explained that the magical tool he’d given her had activated, so Sarge had transported himself to her side, and that Kaid, who had reached out for him in that instant, had ended up getting dragged along as well.

“You say I got dragged along, but it would have been a problem if I’d been left behind. And who tried to abduct Lady Amelia?”

At Kaid’s question, Amelia decided to explain everything.

“The truth is, before I entered the inn, I ended up seeing Princess Chloe embracing her lover. The two of them were talking about eloping.”

“Eloping?” Sarge echoed. Amelia nodded. “Princess Chloe would go to such lengths?”

“Well, it seems it wasn’t of her own volition.”

Amelia revealed everything she’d talked about with Chloe.

“That ‘magic-like power’ that was manipulating her thoughts and memories—it made Princess Chloe think that man was her lover?”

“Yes. Her memories were muddled, but she said she remembers that she had happily accepted the prospect of becoming Prince Est’s fiancée.”

“...I see.” Sarge nodded at Amelia’s explanation.

“Just who is that man?”

Amelia was the one to answer Kaid’s question.

“He told me he was going to take me to the Beltz Empire, so he’s most likely an agent of the empire.”

“He was going to take you to the Beltz Empire?” Hearing that, Sarge gripped Amelia’s hand. “I won’t let that happen. Moreover, I’m bothered by this ‘magic-like power.’ Just what is it? Did he say anything else?”

“If I remember correctly, he called himself a failed mage. He said he can’t use elemental magic.”

“Failed mage...” Sarge murmured, deep in thought.

“Prince Sarge, in any case, we need to ascertain where we are,” said Kaid, who was looking warily at their surroundings.

“We’re likely in the very Beltz Empire where that Alois was trying to bring Amelia.”

“The Beltz Empire?”

“That’s right. This heat, and this dry earth. And more than anything...”

Sarge pointed towards the horizon. There lay a precipitous mountain range that seemed to stretch all the way up to the sky.

“We’re now on the other side of that mountain range. It seems that since the magical tool rebounded off of the transportation magic, we got thrown pretty far away. I suppose the tool still needs some improvement.”

At Sarge’s words, Kaid’s expression hardened.

They were in the Beltz Empire—their national enemy. As Amelia, too, looked warily at their surroundings, she moved in closer to Sarge.

“If we truly are in the Beltz Empire, that in itself is dangerous, of course, but even more so, staying out in the desert for a long time is going to sap our strength. Let’s find a better place to stay and move there.”

Amelia nodded immediately. “Yes, let’s do so.”

The intense sun beating down on them was enough to make them sweat without even moving.

Amelia had never in her life known this level of heat. If they continued to stand around like this, they would end up consuming a considerable amount of energy.

“But, where should we...?”

Amelia hadn’t the faintest idea of where they could go in this dry land that stretched as far as her eye could see.

But then Kaid pointed out in the direction he’d walked from.

“There was a place to rest that way. Let’s move there.”

Thus, with Kaid leading the way, they walked through the desert.

While it was a bit difficult walking through the desert, since she wasn’t used to it, it wasn’t terribly hard for Amelia, who used to walk around the farmland often.

After they’d been walking for a while, a dilapidated house came into view.

The building was considerably old, but it hadn’t yet collapsed. Inside, they would be able to protect themselves from the sun’s rays.

I can’t believe there’s a house in a place like this.

Even as she took a look around, all she could see was cracked earth.

It was likely that this area hadn’t always been a stone desert but that over a period of several years, it had gradually become uninhabitable to humans.

Although Kaid had confirmed that the house was safe when he’d first arrived, he still entered first to check inside.

“Amelia, you go in too. You should rest.”

At Sarge's urging, she entered the house, which Kaid had finished inspecting.

The three of them weren't carrying anything with them. Therefore, they couldn't remain here for very long, but they needed to take a break now. Kaid cleared away the rubble and sand and spread his coat on the floor. Amelia sat on top of that.

"Amelia."

Sarge, who had sat down next to her, gently pulled her towards him by the shoulders.

"I'm sure it was frightening to be nearly kidnapped. I'm sorry I wasn't able to prevent that from happening."

"No, please. I'm sorry I failed to inform you of the situation in time."

"That was because you were thinking of Princess Chloe, right?"

Because she was kind.

When he said that, she looked down in embarrassment.

"But it's because of my careless actions that you got involved in this. I can't believe we ended up in the Beltz Empire of all places."

She wondered what was happening to Chloe, who'd been left behind in that spot. She'd been left alone and she'd witnessed Amelia being abducted. She was sure to be confused.

"I wonder if Princess Chloe is okay..."

"Right, I'll check with my brother," said Sarge.

"Huh?" she said in surprise, but then she recalled what Julius had said previously. "Do you mean that light magic allows you to communicate with people far away?"

"That's right. He probably realized I used transportation magic. Once I came to, he contacted me."

Julius had sensed that Sarge had used magic to move elsewhere and had informed the king of Bedeiht of the emergency and received permission to use communication magic.

“Right now, we’re exchanging information. Julius is keeping guard over Princess Chloe, but she’s just been crying about how it’s all her fault, so it seems he hasn’t gotten a handle on the situation yet.”

When Sarge had explained what he’d heard from Amelia, the situation over there finally seemed to settle down.

“He asked where we were, but I haven’t told him yet. Though I do think we are in the empire.”

After saying that, Sarge exhaled deeply, seeming exhausted.

“Sarge...”

“If it were just Julius, that would be fine, but all the messages I’m receiving from my father, Alexis, and Est, who now know of the situation, are getting a bit tiresome. I just told them I would contact them when I have more details and temporarily shut them off.”

Since Sarge had suddenly disappeared, there likely would have been an uproar if they hadn’t been able to contact him with light magic.

“I also asked that Liliane and Lady Marie be kept abreast of what’s going on. The two of them have been taking the initiative in looking after Princess Chloe.”

“Is that so? Thank you.”

Amelia breathed a sigh, relieved that they could leave things in Liliane and Marie’s hands.

Once they returned safely, she would have to give them a proper apology.

Princess Chloe will be safe with them. I’m glad...

Amelia was also utterly exhausted from worrying over Chloe and almost being abducted by Alois. At some point, with Sarge’s arm wrapped around her shoulder and her eyes closed, she fell asleep.

When she suddenly awoke, she saw that her surroundings were enveloped in darkness and a fire had been lit in what had once been the fireplace.

It seemed Kaid was keeping watch from a spot a little farther away from them.

Sarge, his arms still encircling Amelia after she'd fallen asleep, was gazing calmly at the desert outside the building.

"Um, I'm sorry. I fell asleep," she said softly.

Sarge turned to look at her and asked gently, "How are you feeling? You should rest a bit more."

"You should get some rest as well."

"I'm fine. I'm thinking about something," he responded, then turned his gaze back to the desert outside.

His hair, which had been disguised to appear black, had at some point reverted to its usual shining gold.

She couldn't help but look fondly at the glimmering gold color she hadn't seen in a while.

Then Amelia turned her gaze in the same direction Sarge was looking.

"I thought the desert would be completely made up of sand."

"Me too. But the Beltz Empire wasn't originally a desert. The continued infrequency of the rain and the rising temperatures likely dried out the soil."

Crops could no longer grow here, so the people had abandoned this land and moved elsewhere. Perhaps the other houses had crumbled or been torn down, with only this one remaining.

"I did a bit of research about desertification, but it's shocking to see up close. Has the desertification really progressed this far here?"

Amelia nodded wordlessly.

Given how arid the land was, it would not easily return to its original state no matter how much water magic was cast on it.

"I've no intention of letting them get away with trying to abduct my Amelia. But this level of desertification must also be impeding the lives of the imperial citizens."

"Indeed. In these conditions, it seems that not just crops but even trees are withering away."

After nodding at Amelia's response, Sarge sank deep into thought once more.

Deciding it best not to bother him, Amelia closed her eyes again.

Tomorrow they would likely have to move around. She wanted to make sure she was in top condition for that.

If she rested for just a bit longer, she'd be able to recover most of her strength.

Amelia rested until morning came.

They had no food, but her magic ensured they would have an endless supply of water.

Furthermore, if they were in the empire, that meant the restriction on using magic did not apply.

However, it was said that this country had barely any mages.

Since they had no diplomatic relations with the Beltz Empire, no one in Bedeiht knew for certain whether that was the truth, but in either case, Amelia felt she should take care not to let anyone see her use magic.

"I'm glad you're here, Lady Amelia. If it were just Prince Sarge and me, we would have had to search for water first," Kaid said gratefully, but if Amelia hadn't been nearly abducted in the first place, the two of them wouldn't have become entangled in this mess.

Moreover, they could not survive on water alone.

Tomorrow they would have to go searching for food. Since they didn't know where they were, walking around aimlessly would have been dangerous.

"There's also no guarantee that there will be another place for us to rest. For the time being, let's make this spot our base and investigate our surroundings," said Sarge, and Kaid agreed.

"Understood. I'll try to investigate the area little by little. Though we should prioritize obtaining food."

"That won't be a problem. Amelia, could you lend me a hand?"

After saying that, Sarge moved to a spot behind the dilapidated house. Amelia and Kaid hurried after him.

There lay a spot that appeared to have been a home garden at one point.

Kaid and Amelia watched as Sarge placed a hand on the dry, cracked earth.

The instant he did so, the desertified soil returned to its original softness. Sarge planted some kind of seed there and then spoke to Amelia.

“Could you please water it?”

“Yes, I will.”

Amelia supplied an ample volume of water with her magic, then Sarge followed it up by casting growth promotion magic. Immediately, the seed sprouted and grew until it bore fruit.

The instantaneous event took Amelia’s breath away.

“...Amazing. I can’t believe something like that is actually possible.”

She was aware that earth magic could promote plant growth, but she’d never seen it make something grow so rapidly.

“This type of tree shouldn’t actually be able to grow here, but as long as I sustain it with earth magic, it’ll produce fruit. This should stave off our hunger for now.”

Sarge plucked a fruit from the tree and handed it to Amelia.

It was a large, red apple.

“This reminds me of the apple pie I made with everyone,” she said, and Sarge laughed softly.

“I hope you’ll make it again when we return to the capital.”

“Yes, of course. We’ll all do our best to make it.”

Perhaps Chloe would join them too. That thought raised Amelia’s downcast spirits a bit.

“Well done carrying around those seeds,” Kaid said, impressed, as he also plucked an apple from the tree.

“They’re leftovers from when I was exchanging seeds with the botanists in Janaki.”

He’d been carrying them by chance, but thanks to that stroke of good luck, they wouldn’t starve.

Still, earth magic really is amazing...

Having witnessed before her very eyes how instantaneously the dry, cracked earth had transformed into soft soil reminded her once again of earth magic’s greatness. Of course, it was also likely due to Sarge’s superior magic, but she was still surprised at how quickly the seeds had grown into a fruit-bearing tree.

Of course she wasn’t going to excuse being almost forcibly abducted, but she felt it wasn’t unreasonable for the Beltz Empire, which was going through such a desertification process, to so eagerly desire magic power.

“Sarge, how long will this earth magic remain in effect? ”

After the three of them had finished eating the apples they’d harvested, Kaid had set out to explore their surroundings.

So now, it was just the two of them alone.

Amelia’s question to Sarge had been weighing on her mind.

“I forced the soil to change with magic, so the effects won’t last for very long. That being the case, I don’t think it would be very efficient to improve the soil with magic.”

“I see...”

If Sarge had to keep casting earth magic on the soil, it would, as he’d said, be rather inefficient. It was because of issues like these that Sarge was also studying botany and not just earth magic.

“What the empire needs is water magic more than earth magic. That was probably why they tried to take you away.”

Sarge gripped Amelia’s hand. He pulled her in close, and she surrendered herself to his embrace.

“I won’t hand you over to anyone.”

“Sarge...”

Feeling his warmth so close, she thought of how she’d just nearly been separated from him, which frightened her anew.

“Thank you for giving me this ring. I’m afraid to think of what would have happened without it.”

“I’m really happy you kept it close to you.”

“I wouldn’t part with something you gave me.”

Amelia enfolded the hand wearing the ring in her other hand, then closed her eyes, as if praying.

“I will treasure it forever.”

Watching Amelia do so, Sarge smiled happily.

Feeling as if she was seeing his true self, not his researcher self, for the first time in a while, Amelia also smiled.

“...Pardon me.”

Hearing a voice suddenly, they raised their heads to see Kaid standing in the doorway of the building, looking like he didn’t want to be there.

“Oh, you’re back?”

“Yes, as of just a moment ago. Anyway, there doesn’t seem to be anyone around. The area surrounding us is all desert, but I could see a town in the distance.”

Although they didn’t know the empire’s geography in detail, they must have been close to the border, judging by the fact that they could see the mountain range.

The capital of the Beltz Empire was located in the middle of its territory, so they could assume they were quite far removed from there.

Looking anxious, Kaid said, “If we’re that far from the imperial capital, they won’t easily find us. But on the other hand, getting back from here will be...”

Walking would take time, and it was too dangerous to cross the desert without proper preparation.

“It’s not as if I can’t use transportation magic, but I want to assess the situation a little more. Plus, crossing the mountain range would mean traveling quite some distance,” said Sarge, gazing at the faraway mountains.

It seemed even Sarge, even with his superb magic abilities, wasn’t able to transport them over such a long distance. The fact that he had launched them so far away must have really been a fluke.

“If I use transportation magic in an unfamiliar land, who knows where we’ll end up.”

Having been told that, Kaid looked grave.

“...Understood. I will protect you and Lady Amelia with my life.”

“That won’t be necessary. There are no mages in the Beltz Empire. It seems that even the man who tried to abduct Amelia can’t use regular magic. Nor are the soldiers likely to be an issue,” said Sarge in a calm voice.

Magic was incredibly powerful. The Beltz Empire wasn’t much of a threat to the great center of magical learning that was the Kingdom of Bedeiht.

“However, we can’t stay here for long. Once we’ve prepared ourselves for crossing the desert, let’s move closer to the border.”

“Yes, sir,” Kaid responded.

As they made ready to leave, Amelia's responsibilities were to water the apple tree and gather several apples to take with them. She worked while Kaid kept watch and Sarge examined the soil.

The tree, with its lush, verdant leaves, was at odds with the dry earth it grew from. Amelia harvested its fresh, juicy fruit and carefully watered it.

Would the tree, grown from Sarge's magic, wither once he left this place? Amelia felt a bit sad as she considered that.

In her arms, she carried a fruit basket that looked brand new. She picked fruit from the tree and placed them in the basket one by one.

It's thanks to Sarge that I have this basket and these clothes.

Right now, Amelia was wearing clothes of the kind that commoners of the Beltz Empire usually wore. When they'd arrived, Amelia had been wearing a dress, which had made her stand out far too much. At least Kaid had been in his knight's uniform, but Sarge, too, had stood out, since he had been dressed as a researcher from the academy.

Therefore, they had been in need of less conspicuous clothing, but getting their hands on some had seemed difficult. She'd been discussing a course of action with Kaid when Sarge came in.

She wondered where he had gotten those clean, new-looking clothes and that travel satchel that he was carrying in his hands. He even had a small basket for harvesting fruit.

"Sarge, where did those come from?" she asked him.

"I used magic to mend some of the things left in this house. I figured we'd need these when we set out."

"...Light magic can even do something like that?"

She'd heard that light magic did not require an incantation. Perhaps that was how he could freely transform his ideas into reality.

Thus, Amelia had changed into those simple clothes he'd procured and was gathering apples in this basket, which was like new. As she was bringing the fruit back to the house, she saw Sarge standing outside of the building.

He had also changed into plain clothes, but their very simplicity served to heighten his beauty. While she gazed at him in admiration, he noticed her there and turned around.

“Amelia.”

He waved her over, and she went to his side.

“I was thinking about how much time it would take to bring this barren soil back to life,” he said while holding her hand. “It’s easy to restore it with magic, but magic won’t last very long. Also, casting magic over and over in the same area would exhaust the soil. Maybe it would rather be faster to improve the plants that grow here.”

They were in the Beltz Empire, considered an enemy nation by the Kingdom of Bedeiht. And yet Sarge was contemplating ways they could improve this desert.

“However, the lack of rain is also a problem.”

Sure enough, Sarge’s true nature was that of a researcher. And Amelia wanted to stay close to his heart.

“The lack of rainfall is why the desertification is getting worse, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. I can’t say for sure without looking at the data, but from what I can tell by examining the soil, that must be the case.”

The weather was the one thing they couldn’t change.

“Um, about this ring...” Suddenly struck with an idea, Amelia looked at the ring he’d given her. “You referred to this as a magical tool, but could you tell me how it works?”

Amelia had never seen a magical tool before. Sarge, unfazed by the quick change in topic, answered, “The magic I used in your ring is light magic, so no spell is necessary to activate it, but the basic principle involves etching a spell into the ring. Once the tool is activated, it releases the magic inside.”

Once the magic inside the jewel was used, it was depleted, but it could be reused when it was infused with magic again.

“I was thinking...if there were a magical tool imbued with rain magic, then

even in this country, which has no mages, they could routinely make it rain.”

“...I see. A magical tool, huh?” Sarge nodded at Amelia’s proposal, sinking deep into thought. “Indeed, rain magic isn’t so complicated, so it’d be possible to imbue a magical tool with that power. Though to make it functional, we would need a core in which to infuse the magic...”

In the case of Amelia’s ring, the jewel acted as the core.

The Kingdom of Bedeiht had no diplomatic relations with the Beltz Empire; moreover, the two nations had a long, troubled history. Bedeiht wouldn’t offer aid without compensation. However, the empire would surely purchase magic stones if that was the cost of solving their food crisis.

However, any such exchange would be under the jurisdiction of the king of Bedeiht and Crown Prince Alexis. Sarge and Amelia would only be researching whether or not the task was feasible.

“When we return home, let’s get to work experimenting. Ah, right, there’s also the matter of the fertilizer, so it seems we’ve got a lot of work ahead of us.”

After saying that, he grew silent, likely thinking about the design of the new magical tool. In order not to bother him, she sat down quietly and gazed at the ring.

I can’t believe this was a magical tool all along—one he made especially for me.

The ring was infused with light magic. She didn’t know all the particulars, but it seemed that it alerted Sarge whenever Amelia was in danger. Even though they had been apart while they’d been in Janaki, he really had been protecting her that whole time. When that thought sank in, she felt happy.

After a few days, their preparations were complete, and they decided to set out.

First, they had to completely erase all traces of their presence here.

Sarge lifted the magic he’d used on everything except what they were

bringing with them, returning the house and its environs to their original state. She'd thought they would leave the garden and fruit tree to wither on their own, but it seemed that wasn't Sarge's plan.

While Kaid was patrolling the area, Amelia accompanied Sarge as he dealt with the apple tree.

"Are you going to let it die?" she asked as she looked at the apple tree, lush and green from Sarge's magic.

He shook his head. "No, I'm putting it back the way it was."

"The way it was?"

"That's right. Like this..."

Sarge cast his magic, and the tree began to shrink as if time were reversing. As Amelia watched on in astonishment, the tree instantly turned back into a seed before her very eyes.

"Wow..." The effect was so close to instantaneous that that was all she managed to mutter.

Since he hadn't chanted a spell, he must have used light magic.

She had been shocked by the tree's rapid growth, and now she was shocked once again that the magic had returned it to its seed state. Apparently that regression magic was something Sarge had developed.

"When I'm working on precious plants and crops and unintentionally make them wither and die, this magic allows me to revert them to seeds so that I can replant them. It's thanks to the development of this magic that my research has made any progress."

"That is...quite amazing magic."

Even if a certain cultivation method failed, he could just revert the plants to seeds and plant them again. If another botanist were to hear about that ability, they would surely be at a loss for words.

It seemed anything was possible with light magic.

However, even as Amelia made no attempt to hide her surprise, Sarge

continued speaking.

“Your ideas are much more amazing than my magic. First the enchanted water you made to protect against insect damage, and then your idea to imbue fertilizer with growth promotion magic. And now, a magical tool to make it rain. At this rate, you’ll save this entire continent.”

“That’s not true...”

Of course she quickly denied his words, saying that was impossible, but Sarge was looking at her with a fire in his eyes.

“There’s no need to be humble. It seems my being shut up in the lab and library has made it difficult for me to come up with new ideas,” he said, then looked out over the wide expanse of land. “I wanted to create something perfect. I thought, through repeated selective breeding, I could save the kingdom...no, the continent. But the gree I selectively bred in the castle garden was susceptible to insect damage, and for that reason, it couldn’t be distributed very widely. Thanks to your enchanted water, it’s finally being put to good use.”

With his gaze fixed on something far away, Sarge spoke of the time he’d spent selectively breeding the new variety of the staple crop, gree.

Rarely did any insects make it into the well-groomed garden of the royal castle. Thus, when Sarge had been conducting his research, he hadn’t noticed the grain’s susceptibility to insect damage. Moreover, when the grain was planted outside of the castle walls, it would generally be in soil that had only been tilled rather than enriched with magic.

“Even though it’d been a clear failure, my father and brother still thanked me for a job well done. That was why I started throwing myself into research—in order to finally create something perfect. But despite that, I produced little in the way of results, and before I knew it, I was alone.”

The other researchers must have been left behind, unable to match Sarge’s passion and talent.

Thus, working in solitude, Sarge had ended up becoming so absorbed in his research that he would forget to eat and sleep.

“But then, your enchanted water made up for those deficits in the gree. The

fertilizer and magical tool, as well, are things I couldn't have come up with on my own. It's all thanks to you. I need you."

"Sarge..."

Nothing had ever made her happier than being helpful to him.

But to her, he was the true genius.

He'd created a magical tool, and he'd used earth magic to make a seed grow into a fruit-bearing tree and had then returned it to its original state using regression magic. She'd been amazed at the capabilities of his repair magic.

No one else was capable of the things he was.

Moreover, even though he'd said that the gree he had selectively bred was a failure, as long as its susceptibility to insect damage was addressed, it was a splendid crop that resulted in increased harvests.

"No matter how many ideas I have, I don't have the ability to implement them. My ideas are only made possible because of you."

When she forcefully emphasized that fact, he gently took her hand in his.

"I'm happy you feel that you need me too. In that case, I'll keep putting your ideas into practice. Every single one."

"Sarge..."

Someone like him really would be able to do everything. As she thought about how her own ideas would be the driving force behind his work, her chest swelled with happiness.

Amelia suddenly recalled the time when she'd merely been his assistant.

She'd admired him as an expert on botany and seen him as the earth mage her family had been yearning for, and she had been working so hard to catch up to him.

A person as wonderful as him took her hand and told her he needed her.

She'd been by his side, both as his assistant and as his fiancée.

But now, she felt that he had acknowledged her as his partner, and her heart was filled with joy.

The two of us together might really be able to solve this food crisis.

She was sure she couldn't possibly do that on her own. She didn't have the ability or talent.

But Sarge was by her side. She could believe that together, the two of them would be able to make it happen.

As she gazed at the desolate earth, Amelia vowed to one day revive this land.

And so they walked through the desert for a few days, aiming for the town close to the border.

Amelia, who was used to walking all over her family's farmland, and Kaid, who was a knight, quickly became accustomed to traversing the difficult desert terrain.

However, it seemed like a rough journey for Sarge.

"Sarge..." Amelia called to him in concern, and he answered that he was fine.

However, exhaustion soon came over Amelia as well.

If their task had simply been to walk through a desert, that would have been fine, but doing so under the hot sun sapped much of her strength. Her birthplace, the Lenia domain, was in the northernmost region of Bedeiht, where the weather was continually cold, so she was not used to the heat.

Kaid, seeing that the other two had begun to slow down, suggested they find a large rock and rest in its shade.

"We still have a ways to go before we reach the town. Let's rest around here for a bit."

Finding a spot with some shade, Amelia and Sarge both sat down.

"Are you all right, Sarge?"

"...Yeah. Except I believe I used too much magic power," he said. Then, still wearing the cloak he'd put on to block the sun, he leaned against Amelia and closed his eyes.

It seemed that his present poor condition resulted not only from walking

through the desert but from using too much magic.

In addition to the growth promotion magic, repair magic, and regression magic he'd used, he'd also apparently conducted some experiments in the desert purely for curiosity's sake.

Even though he had high magic power, that much must have taken a toll on him.

Amelia was worried, but magic power was recovered through sleep, and even Kaid told her there was no need to be concerned.

"When Prince Alexis was a student, he would often use too much of his magic power and collapse. He would also become so interested in something he'd plunge into it headlong without thinking. They're very much alike in that way."

Even Alexis, who had so much magic power that when he was younger, it would sometimes get out of control, would collapse from overusing magic. How much power would he have had to use for something like that to happen?

As she imagined how annoyed Kaid had probably looked during those moments, a smile rose automatically to her face.

"...Really? I'll tell my brother you said that."

When Sarge, who had seemed to be asleep, suddenly said those words, Kaid jolted in surprise.

"N-No, I mean..."

Sarge smiled at the flustered Kaid and then spoke to Amelia.

"If imperial soldiers find us and I still can't move, I want you to leave me behind and flee."

"I couldn't possibly do that," Amelia said abruptly. Sarge soothed her by softly stroking her black hair.

"As long as I can recover my magic, I can escape to any destination I choose, so I want you to get somewhere safe..." As he spoke, he fell asleep once again.

"Sarge..."

She hastily supported his slumping body.

When someone used too much magic, their body was forced into a sleep state in order to recover that lost power. That must have been what was happening to him now.

Long ago, Amelia herself had once collapsed after she'd expended too much magic watering the fields. At that time, she'd slept until her magic had recovered.

No matter how much he insisted that she must run away if she was in danger, she couldn't leave him alone in this defenseless state.

She prayed that nothing of the sort would happen, but then she noticed some sort of disturbance coming from the town that was their destination.

She also spotted a group of people walking towards that very town. As she took a better look, she saw that they all appeared to be armed.

Perhaps soldiers were gathering in that town near the border.

Amelia tightly hugged Sarge, who was still asleep, and watched their surroundings with caution.

The town, visible from the shade of the rock, grew even noisier than before. The din of angry voices and people shouting orders reached her ears.

Please, don't let them find us...

Despite her desperate prayers, she heard the sound of galloping horses close by, and her breath caught in her throat. Kaid was vigilant, ready to move at a moment's notice. There was no way he would lose, no matter how many enemies surrounded them.

However, Amelia, with her small frame, could not run away while carrying Sarge.

While she was thinking of what to do, the sound of the horses' galloping hooves turned towards them.

"Please run, Lady Amelia."

Just as Sarge had, Kaid tried to let Amelia get away first, but she only shook her head.

“It’s no use. They would catch up to me easily.”

Their pursuers were on horseback. Even if Amelia tried to escape on her own, she would quickly be captured.

She would rather stay with Sarge.

There were several horses, and the men riding them were all armed.

The large man at the front of the group noticed the three of them and rode over. Amelia, still cradling Sarge in her arms, bit her lip.

But the man stopped his horse, peered at the trio, and said, “What’re you doing here?”

His face was swathed in a cloak, but judging from his voice, he seemed young.

After spotting Sarge leaning against Amelia, he asked with concern, “Is he sick? Where are you headed?”

She’d been on guard, but the tone of his voice released all her tension.

“We escaped here from the South,” answered Kaid, and the man nodded with understanding.

“Ah, right. I heard several towns in the South have run dry. So you came to take refuge here, thinking things must be better in the North, huh?” Still on horseback, he turned to look at the town near the border. “In that case, come to that village. Things are getting busy, so there are lots of odd jobs for you to do. If you work, I can at least give you a room for your sick companion to rest in.”

Amelia and Kaid exchanged glances. They’d been prepared for a fight, so his offer had taken the wind out of their sails.

“Don’t worry. There are other women working too, and you won’t be made to do anything odd. There are a lot of people in town, so you would just be doing things like cleaning and helping to prepare food.”

Hearing that, Amelia immediately responded, “Understood. We’ll work. So please, lend us a room for him to rest in.”

Kaid looked at Amelia in surprise but remained silent.

She felt that it would have seemed strange if they had refused at this point.

Besides, it would also have been dangerous to remain in the desert for much longer.

This time, they had been fortunate enough to meet some good people in the imperial army, but if they had stayed out in the desert, they might have gotten caught up in some needless trouble. There was also the possibility that they would be found by Alois, the man who had tried to kidnap Amelia.

Therefore, it would be safer to hide in a town, where there were many other people. Plus, Sarge, too, would recover more quickly if they had somewhere to rest properly.

“All right, will you go by horse?”

“No, we will walk. He’ll carry our sick companion.”

Kaid took Sarge in his arms, and they followed behind the man, who was having his horse trot at a slow pace for them.

On their way to the town, Amelia and Kaid spoke quietly about what to do next, making sure the men could not hear them.

The leader of the group had called himself Rhodan.

He was a local soldier who was guarding the nation’s border, but at the behest of the emperor’s brother, he had come to this town.

Amelia introduced herself as Lia, while Kaid introduced himself as Kai. They decided to say she and Kaid were siblings and Sarge was Amelia’s boyfriend.

It should have been fine to call him her boyfriend—she was his fiancée, after all—but for some reason saying it made her feel incredibly embarrassed. Seeing her reaction, Rhodan had laughed, calling her young and innocent.

Rhodan seemed like a good person, and his comrades in arms did not seem like bad people either. According to his comrades, Rhodan was going from place to place gathering people to take them to town and help them find work.

Thinking it would be all right, Amelia went ahead and asked a prying question. “Is a war starting?”

Rhodan’s face hardened and he went quiet.

In the end, it was another man who answered.

“...Ever since His Majesty the Emperor fell ill, his brother has taken control of the empire. As I’m sure you’re aware, this nation is in a grave predicament. His Majesty the Emperor’s brother has reached the conclusion that if we can’t get hold of our own food, we have no choice but to cross the mountains to steal it. In that town, at this very minute, they’re gathering weapons that have been developed for that purpose.”

These men, who were soldiers tasked with protecting the border, did not want this war in the least.

However, the emperor’s brother was planning to abandon this dry and starving land and go to war in pursuit of new land.

Amelia let out a soft sigh, making sure not to let anyone notice.

The Beltz Empire wasn’t filled solely with bad people.

Seeing with her very eyes these men, who opposed the decisions of the emperor’s brother and yet were forced to go to war, made her heart ache.

Is there no way to avoid this outcome...?

Rhodan led them all the way to the village and even prepared a room for Sarge to rest in. There was only one room for the three of them, but since they had just spent so many days in that dilapidated house and then wandering in the desert, they were thankful just to have a bed.

Kaid laid Sarge down on the bed, and as the two of them shared a light meal, they discussed what to do next.

“Are we really going to help the army of the Beltz Empire?”

Amelia nodded. “Yes. We need to work in exchange for this room. What will you do?”

“It seems like they’re going to refer me for work too. While I’m doing that, I’ll try to look into the weapons they’re bringing here.”

“All right. Don’t overdo it, okay?”

“You be careful too, Lady Amelia. If the time comes for it, I can use our magic to get us out of any dangerous situation.”

“...Right.” Amelia nodded.

There weren’t many ways to attack with water magic, but Kaid would surely be able to take care of any enemies with his fire magic, no matter how numerous they may be.

And so Amelia began her short stay in the town on the empire’s border.

She was nervous at the thought of having to interact with the soldiers of the Beltz Empire, but she was relieved that, as promised, all she had to do was help the women who were already seeing to the soldiers’ needs.

“You’re working hard for your sick boyfriend, Lia? How admirable!”

“A cute, young girl like you should stay away from those soldiers. We’ll take care of them, so you can help out with the other tasks.”

They asked her to assist with preparing food and cleaning the areas where no one else was present. They even shared their food with her, telling her she should eat it with her brother.

Kaid was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the weapons that the imperial soldiers brought into town. As a result, he was able to examine them closely.

“As I thought, they’ve prepared quite a lot of weapons. Based on the fact that many of those are gunpowder weapons, it seems like they’re planning on cutting through the mountain to clear a path they can use from now on.”

“They would do such a thing...?”

Amelia gazed out the window of their room at the precipitous mountain range.

Indeed, in order to cross the mountains with a large army, they would have no choice but to cut through them. But that would take time and money. It didn’t seem very practical.

Why was the emperor’s brother so fixated on invading other countries?

“Also, I heard something odd,” said Kaid, looking at Amelia. “Someone called the imperial prince Alois. I wondered if he could be the same man who tried to abudct you.”

Amelia gave a start at Kaid’s unexpected words.

“He may not be, but just in case, you should be on guard. To the extent that you can, perhaps you should try to stay out of areas where people can see you.”

“...I will.”

Since she was already doing her work where other people couldn’t see her, she should have no problem doing that.

“Prince Sarge should also recover soon. Once he does, he’ll be able to transport us to Janaki. We must tell them of the Beltz Empire’s preparations for war.”

While she was concerned about the kind people of this town, it was for those people’s sakes as well that they must put a stop to this plot by the emperor’s brother.

After her conversation with Kaid, Amelia left for work.

Amelia was the daughter of a noble, but before she became Sarge’s fiancée, she had often helped the villeins on the farmland. Even though she still wasn’t particularly skilled at cooking, she was reasonably adept at cleaning and tidying up.

Now she was diligently cleaning the windows, the latest task she’d been assigned.

I’m sure Marie and Lady Sophia would be shocked if I told them I was cleaning in a town in the empire...

She was sure they were concerned for her, just as she was for them.

Once she returned home, Amelia would have to properly apologize to them for making them worry. She was also worried about Chloe, whom she’d left behind so suddenly.

As she thought about that while wiping the window, Amelia suddenly felt someone’s gaze from below. She inadvertently looked that way and saw a

young man in an opulent military uniform standing there.

He looked surprised when he saw Amelia, but then a bold smile appeared on his face.

She gave a wordless exclamation.

He was tall and fit.

He had glossy, black hair and amber eyes.

As soon as she recognized his face, Amelia dropped her cleaning tools and ran.

There's no mistaking it. That was Alois, the man who tricked Chloe into thinking he was her lover!

She didn't know if he was the prince, but judging from his appearance and clothing, he had to be of high status.

Why would someone of his status have infiltrated the Kingdom of Janaki by himself?

Panting, she ran into their room.

He'd clearly been looking at her.

There was no mistaking it—he'd recognized her.

What should I do...?

She took several deep breaths to steady her breathing, and then she heard a voice from within the room.

"Amelia?"

At the sound of that voice, Amelia ran into the middle of the room.

"Sarge!"

Sarge, who was sitting upright in bed, looked around as if he was trying to take in the situation. When Amelia ran to his side, his expression relaxed.

"I'm sorry. It looks like I've put you through some trouble."

"No, you really haven't."

Amelia rushed into his open arms and clung to his chest. The warmth of his embrace eased her tension, nearly bringing tears to her eyes. However, there was a great deal she had to tell him.

Especially the fact that Alois was a prince of the Beltz Empire. And she had to tell him that Alois had seen her.

“Sarge, listen...”

She also needed to tell him how they had arrived in this town, and about the people here who had treated her kindly.

And finally, she had to tell him that Prince Alois was planning to cross the mountains and start a war, even if it meant cutting through them.

“I see. You’ve been through a lot,” Sarge said, nodding.

“It looked like he noticed me. He might be chasing after me,” she said, frightened.

Sarge stroked her hair to calm her down. “It’s all right. I’ll seal the room with magic so that no one can enter.”

As soon as he said that, she could sense his magic enveloping the room. At the familiar feeling of his magic protecting them, her fear was finally melted away.

“I’ve caused you a lot of trouble because I misjudged my own magic power. I shouldn’t have any issue using transportation magic now.”

“You caused me no trouble, but...”

Sarge, who had spent so much time alone, was not used to consulting or relying on other people for help.

That was why, Amelia thought, it was important for her to say this aloud.

“I was very worried about you...” She almost couldn’t hold back her tears when she told him her honest feelings.

“I’m sorry,” he said, looking more flustered than she’d been anticipating.

But it wasn’t as though Amelia wanted an apology from him. She only wanted him to take better care of himself.

“I’ll be more careful from now on. So please, forgive me.”

“Yes. It’s a promise.”

She responded with a smile, putting Sarge at ease.

“Where’s Kaid?” he then asked, rising from the bed.

His movements were as graceful as ever, and seeing that he appeared to have recovered completely, she felt a sense of relief.

“He’s working now. He’s been tasked with taking care of the imperial army’s weapons.”

“Weapons? So they’re serious about crossing the mountains?”

Sarge gazed out the window at the steep mountains.

“Yes. Kaid said they’ve amassed a lot of weapons that use gunpowder.”

“...Gunpowder? But even you could render a weapon like that useless on your own.”

Just as he said, even Amelia’s water magic, which wasn’t specialized for combat, could easily make a weapon like that unusable.

Perhaps the Beltz Empire underestimated the power of magic because they were unfamiliar with it.

“Besides,” Sarge continued, “the Beltz Empire’s current emperor only has a younger sister. Is that man, Alois, really the emperor’s brother?”

“What?” Amelia exclaimed reflexively at Sarge’s question.

“If he was able to pose as Princess Chloe’s lover, then it’s possible he’s also feigning to be the emperor’s brother.”

“Ah...”

Indeed, it was as Sarge had said—Alois had posed as the lover of Janaki’s Fourth Princess Chloe. And he had tried to sabotage the engagement between her and Bedeiht’s Second Prince Est, Sarge’s half brother.

“I wonder what he meant when he said he was a failed mage.”

Alois had said he was unable to use elemental magic but could slightly control

a person's memories and consciousness. However, he could only use his abilities on people with lower magical power than his own.

Sarge answered Amelia's question. "Magic power and the affinities associated with it are passed down through blood. It's possible that one of his ancestors was a mage. Maybe he inherited magic power, but what he inherited wasn't strong enough to allow him to use elemental magic. However, being able to control a person's thoughts and memories, that could possibly be..." He trailed off midsentence, then closed his mouth.

"Um, Sarge...?"

His grievous expression made her uneasy.

It looked as if he were seeing something from the distant past.

Perhaps Sarge, who could use reenactment magic, had seen some images from the past.

"No, never mind. It's just, I've heard the Beltz Empire barely has any mages, but since we don't know much about the state of the empire, it's impossible to be certain. It's also a possibility that Alois is the only person in the empire who has any magic power. If that were true, he would be able to manipulate anyone living in the empire."

"That would be very dangerous..."

It was frightening to consider that it wasn't the Beltz Empire trying to incite this war but a single person.

"It would be. If it were true magic power, it would be considerably more dangerous. But since he can only use his 'magic-like power' on those with lower magic power than his own, it should be easy enough to undo. It's possible the effect doesn't last very long either. Princess Chloe's brainwashing also lost effect fairly quickly, right?"

"That's right. Also, all the imperial citizens I've met in this town are very kind. For their sake as well, I don't want Alois to incite a war."

After she said that, Sarge gave her a gentle smile.

"I see. In that case, let's act quickly. It'll be safer to stay in this room, but what

will you do, Amelia?”

“...I’m coming with you.”

“All right. I’ll make sure to protect you, so you don’t need to worry.”

She tightly clasped the hand he held out to her.

“Oh, right,” said Sarge, recalling Kaid. “Before that, let’s join up with Kaid too.”

“Right.”

They left the room with him leading Amelia along by the hand.

She’d steeled herself in case Alois was lying in wait, but no one was outside the door. In fact, it was dead silent, as if there wasn’t a single person around.

The room they’d been assigned was in an old, three-story building beside the barracks; it served as a dormitory for the many workers who attended to the soldiers quartered next door. Since the workers had alternating shifts, it seemed someone was always up and about at all hours of the day.

And yet, no one was around. That in itself was abnormal.

Despite the situation, Sarge was completely composed, which allowed Amelia to gradually calm down as well.

When they exited the dorm, they saw a group of soldiers lined up in the town square. Among them was Rhodan, the soldier who had helped them.

However, all the soldiers were standing stock still, their faces expressionless, as if they had no will of their own. Not a single one of them moved even the slightest bit.

“So many people... Just how strong is Alois’s magic?”

“Since it’s not proper magic, perhaps using it doesn’t require very much magic power. And as I said before, there’s no need to worry, since it can be dispelled easily. First, let’s meet with Kaid, and then we’ll search for Alois. Afterwards, we can save these men.”

“...All right.”

While she was concerned for the soldiers, Sarge was probably correct that it

was safer for them to be gathered together quietly like this. If the soldiers were forced to fight them, Sarge would be able to stop them.

They walked towards the armory and saw Kaid, who was heading for the center of town. He immediately noticed them and ran over.

“Prince Sarge, you’re awake!”

“Yes, sorry for causing you trouble,” Sarge responded. Then he looked at Amelia, whom he was leading by the hand. “Alois has caught sight of Amelia.”

“I’m so sorry. You even warned me... I was washing a window, and he was standing right underneath it.”

Sarge explained the details of the situation to Kaid, whose expression hardened.

He also explained how the soldiers gathered in this town were under Alois’s control.

“So what you’re saying is, it’s possible that man, Alois, is not actually the emperor’s brother.”

“I don’t know everything about the affairs of the Beltz Empire, but I do know about the imperial family. The current emperor should only have a younger sister. And based on Alois’s age, as Amelia describes him, he would be far apart in years. First, we’ll take care of their weapons. If we do that, Alois is sure to show himself.”

“Yes, sir. The armory is right over here.”

With Kaid leading them, Amelia and Sarge hurried to the place where the weapons that had been assembled in this town were being stored.

After walking for a bit, the trio eventually arrived in an area lined with warehouses.

They seemed as though they had originally been used to store harvested crops. However, with the worsening weather, their interiors had been emptied out, and now they were being used to store weapons.

“These have all been made into armories,” Kaid explained.

Sarge nodded. “I heard there are a lot of gunpowder weapons...”

“That’s right. They’re probably going to be used to cut through the mountain.”

Kaid opened the door to one of the armories. Since he’d been working as a caretaker, he could enter freely. The interior was packed full of weapons of varying size, from cannons to head cannons.

“They really have prepared a lot of weapons. That money would have been better spent on food imports.”

Even though they were suffering from a food shortage as well, a great agricultural power like the Kingdom of Janaki would have had enough to spare for the empire.

Amelia agreed with Sarge.

The magical tool he was going to develop to make it rain could possibly save the empire from its current predicament.

However, it seemed like the empire had never had any intention of negotiating with the nations on the other side of the mountain range. That was why, several decades ago, they had abducted a princess of Bedeiht, and why they had tried to kidnap Sarge when he was a child. And they had even tried to get Reese to spirit Amelia away to the empire.

With Alois involved, it was unclear whether all of that had been the emperor’s will. But considering Alois’s age, it was at least unlikely that he’d had a hand in kidnapping either the princess or Sarge.

“If only that mountain range weren’t there,” Amelia muttered without thinking.

The Beltz Empire was the only country south of the mountains. That was precisely why they couldn't understand how to cooperate with other countries or rely on them for help in times of crisis.

Nor did they know just how strong magic was; they underestimated the power that Bedeiht derived from its large population of mages.

"Lady Amelia, what are you saying...?"

However, what she'd said was probably quite extreme.

Kaid's startled voice brought her back to herself, but Sarge nodded in agreement with her.

"Perhaps you're right. I'm sure Alexis would be able to destroy those mountains even without using these weapons."

Since even Sarge had chimed in with similar sentiments, Kaid hurried to respond, "Well, yes, I'm sure Prince Alexis would be able to do something like that, but we cannot go around recklessly destroying nature. At least something like setting up a magic circle for relocation magic would be preferable..."

As Kaid had said, it was of course not good to destroy nature; something like a magic circle was probably a better idea.

"In any case, right now, we have to do something about these weapons."

As soon as Kaid finished his sentence, they heard a deep, menacing voice from behind them.

"...I can't let you do that."

They whipped around to see Alois and a group of armed soldiers blocking their way.

"Who would have expected that the famous fourth prince of Bedeiht would show up in a place like this?" said Alois with the same bold smile he'd had when he'd caught sight of Amelia. "I never imagined you'd come all the way here. Please, I must invite you to the imperial capital."

As he said that, he raised a hand and the soldiers surrounded the trio.

Sarged looked around at the soldiers and said, "They don't seem to be

brainwashed. Are they truly loyal to you?”

Alois looked visibly upset. “...What did you say?”

“The soldiers in the square were all under your brainwashing, but these soldiers aren’t. What’s your goal? Are you planning to take over the empire and then conquer the continent? Whatever it may be, we can’t overlook what we’ve seen here,” Sarge said, looking at the enormous number of weapons.

“And what can a mere three interlopers hope to do?”

“We’re three mages. You shouldn’t underestimate magic.”

He wasn’t trying to provoke Alois; he’d merely said it matter-of-factly. He turned to look around at the armory. That simple action reduced the large stock of weapons to lumps of earth, which then crumbled away.

Not only the imperials but Amelia too let out cries of surprise.

Rather than magic, I think it’s Sarge whom he shouldn’t underestimate...

Kaid was just as shocked, so she knew she was right in thinking that.

“...Tch.”

Alois stood there speechless, with his eyes open wide, as if he couldn’t believe what he’d just witnessed. Sarge approached him and then whispered something in his ear.

Amelia didn’t hear what he said to him. However, she saw a frightening, murderous impulse suddenly fill Alois’s dazed eyes.

“You bastard...”

“Sarge!”

Before Kaid and Amelia, who sensed the impending danger, could rush over to them, the enraged Alois wrapped his fingers around Sarge’s throat. Amelia shrieked as she saw Alois put all his strength into his grip.

She needed to save Sarge somehow.

She tried desperately to think of something, anything.

All she could use was water magic, but there wasn’t a way to attack with that.

It was only used for healing, and producing water.

But water could also be a threat.

Torrential downpours. Muddy floodwaters. The force of water was strong enough to wash away everything. As those ideas came to mind, Amelia, without any spell or magic circle, unleashed magic at Alois.

“Argh!”

She thought of Sarge and put all her will to save him into the magic she released at Alois, which blew him farther away than she’d been expecting.

And that wasn’t all.

The water, which had the force of a rushing flood, swept up the soldiers and washed them away. Amelia didn’t spare them a backward glance. She rushed to Sarge, who was now free from Alois’s grasp, and hugged him to her chest.

“Thank goodness...”

The water she’d used to attack Alois had left Sarge completely unscathed. She nestled her cheek against his hair, which was completely dry, and was relieved to see he was unharmed.



“I’m sorry, Amelia.” Sarge coughed several times, then put his arms around Amelia and stroked her back to calm her. “There was something I wanted to confirm. I didn’t think he would get that angry.”

“What did you want to confirm...?”

Amelia tilted her head, and Sarge looked to the back of the armory, where Alois was collapsed and covered in mud.

“Several decades ago, a princess of Bedeiht was kidnapped by the Beltz Empire. She was the younger sister of my grandfather, and I heard she could use some strange magic.”

“Strange magic?”

“That’s right. It was something like concealment. She used magic to divert people’s attention and interest away from herself.”

The princess would often use that magic to move about freely on her own.

Even though she was born a member of the royal family, her magical power was meager. She was a reserved princess who preferred to be alone.

“Diverting people’s attention... I thought maybe that could develop into magic that allowed the user to control another’s mind. Magic qualities are easily inherited.”

“So you mean...”

Was Alois a descendant of that kidnapped princess? Sarge had asked him that, thinking it was possible.

“What happened to the princess?”

“I heard that she fell in love with a man from the empire and that with his cooperation, they escaped to Janaki.”

The princess’s father had opposed the relationship, so she’d refused to return home and had instead remained in Janaki.

If those two had had children, and then grandchildren, wouldn’t they also be living in Janaki? Perhaps Alois had been there because that was the country in which he’d been born and raised.

That had been what Sarge had been thinking, but he didn't understand why Alois had gotten so agitated when asked about it.

He did understand, however, why Alois had called himself a failed mage. Although he might have inherited the blood of the royal family of Bedeiht, he was the son of a man from the Beltz Empire, which had long been devoid of magic, so he must not have been born with the aptitude or ability to use magic.

Although, that was all just conjecture.

"But never mind that now. Amelia, your magic was amazing. What was that?"

Amelia was unsure how to answer Sarge's question.

"I'm not even certain myself. I just thought wholeheartedly that I wanted to save you. I didn't use a magic circle or an incantation. I just struck him with water."

"Oh, really? But no one else outside of the royal family is able to use magic without an incantation. That really is phenomenal."

He was praising her highly, but all she'd done was use magic with the wish to save him. Even she wasn't sure of the nature of that magic.

"What will you do now?"

"Alois may have other supporters. I think we should take care of the rest of the armories."

After Sarge neutralized the other warehouses, he looked at Kaid, who seemed to understand his unspoken instructions and went to restrain Alois and his subordinates.

Judging from the past actions of the currently sick emperor, he probably wasn't much different from Alois. Amelia had no objections to Kaid's suggestion that they bring that up once they returned.

They ended up bringing Alois along with them.

If they had left him here, then he would just have brainwashed the citizens again and resumed his preparations to invade the countries on the other side of the mountains. Moreover, they still had many questions to ask Alois.

Sarge went to the soldiers who were gathered in the square and freed them from their brainwashing. They talked confusingly among themselves, unsure of what they had been doing or what they should do now. Meanwhile, the trio were finally able to cross back over the mountain range using Sarge's transportation magic.

Chapter 5: Returning Home

Through communication magic, Sarge had alerted his brothers ahead of time that he and his companions would be traveling to the royal capital of Janaki.

When Sarge transported Amelia, Kaid, and even Alois to the royal capital, they were greeted with a row of familiar faces.

There were Marie and Julius.

And Liliane, Amelia's guard.

Even Crown Prince Alexis and Crown Princess Sophia were there.

"Amelia!"

"Amelia, I'm glad you're okay."

No sooner had she taken in their appearances than she was bombarded with hugs from all around. Marie and Princess Sophia were hugging her on either side.

Never mind Marie, who had been en route back to Bedeiht; Amelia hadn't imagined that even Sophia would come to Janaki.

"Are you all right? Are you hurt?"

"I'm so glad you're safe. You must have been so scared."

"...Marie, Lady Sophia." Seeing their faces brought her a sense of comfort. "Thank you so much. I'm sorry for worrying you."

"Lady Amelia, my sincerest apologies for being unable to protect you," said Liliane, who was standing a bit farther away.

"It wasn't your fault, Liliane. It looks like he's able to use some peculiar magic."

Alois's power wasn't exactly magic, but it would have taken too long to explain things, so that was all Amelia said for now.

Plus, she was the one most at fault for having tried to stop Chloe from eloping without telling anyone. It was because of her actions that even Sarge had been

put in danger.

“I’m the one in the wrong here. I’m really sorry.”

Once she apologized, Liliane wrapped her in a hug.

After Amelia calmed down, she looked around and noted that they seemed to be in a great hall in the royal castle of Janaki.

Normally, foreigners were not permitted to transport themselves into the castle. However, they must have been given permission to do so, since the country’s princess, Chloe, had been the cause of all this trouble.

All around them were mages who had likely come from Bedeiht. They surrounded Alois and, at Kaid’s instructions, took him away.

Crown Prince Alexis and Julius were by Sarge’s side. Sarge must have told them in advance what had happened, since the two other princes seemed to understand the general situation. However, now it seemed he was giving them more details about Alois. Alexis and Julius’s faces grew stern as the three of them spoke among themselves in a serious manner.

“I think they’re going to be a while, so why don’t you get some rest, Amelia?” Marie suggested.

“But...” Amelia shook her head, not wanting to be the only one to rest.

Sarge seemed to notice Amelia’s hesitation. He excused himself to his brothers and walked over to her.

“You should rest, Amelia.”

“Really, I shouldn’t...”

“You used a lot of magic. You may feel fine now, but once you calm down a bit, you’re going to feel the exhaustion, so I want you to rest while you can.”

She couldn’t refuse when he said that with such concern in his voice.

“Understood. In that case, please allow me to excuse myself.”

“Of course. Liliane, please look after her.”

“Yes, sir.”

After giving quick words of parting to Julius and Alexis, Amelia left the hall, accompanied by Marie, Liliane, and Sophia.

A maid guided them to one of the several guest rooms with which the kingdom had provided them. Amelia's quarters were very spacious, and in addition to a bedroom, they contained a parlor room and a bathroom.

Since the maid had already drawn hot water for her, Amelia was able to take a bath right away. Although she had been keeping herself clean with magic, she had been in the dry desert for several days, so she was happy to be able to immerse herself in the warm water. She took her time enjoying her bath, and after she got out, Marie dried her hair with wind magic and Sophia personally brewed her some tea.

It was the herb tea Sophia always made for Amelia. The princess must have brought it especially for her. It gently melted away her tense nerves.

Before she knew it, she was dozing off and the two of them were telling her to get in bed.

"I'm sorry... You came all the way here for me..."

"It's all right. We *want* you to get some sleep."

"We'll be in the parlor next door, so you don't need to worry. Shall we have Liliane accompany you?"

"Yes, please."

"Lady Amelia, right this way."

With Liliane accompanying her, she headed for the bedroom. Having Liliane by her side allowed her to rest easily. Just as Sarge had said, she was exhausted and simply hadn't noticed it. She slept deeply until the following morning.

She woke up, got dressed, and then ate the breakfast that a maid brought her. Then Marie and Sophia came to see her, and she was finally able to ask the question that had been weighing on her mind.

First, she thanked them for yesterday, and then she went and broached the topic by asking, "How is Princess Chloe doing?"

The two ladies exchanged a look, apparently reluctant to speak.

“Even though she was brainwashed, she unquestionably put you and Sarge in danger, so she’s been confined to her room. I’m not sure what will happen with her engagement to Est,” answered Sophia.

“...I see.” Amelia’s shoulders slumped.

Alois targeted her because of her low magic power. But that’s not her fault.

Although everyone understood that fact, Amelia figured the princess could not be absolved of all accountability. Since it seemed like Amelia couldn’t meet with the princess now, she decided to write her a letter later.

“It must have been quite rough over there,” said Sophia with concern. She had apparently heard what had happened from Alexis while Amelia was asleep.

“I can’t believe you ended up all the way in the Beltz Empire...”

“Sarge was with me, so we didn’t have a terribly difficult time. His magic really is something else.”

His earth magic, which had made a seed sprout in an instant, and his repair magic. And his regression magic, which had returned everything to its original state.

As Amelia explained everything that had happened while they were stranded in the empire, Sophia heaved a deep sigh.

“His magic is certainly amazing, but he collapsed from overusing it. He really is just like Alexis. They both overwork themselves to the point of exhaustion. At least Julius has some common sense...”

“Yes, he does. Julius never does anything reckless.”

Seeing Marie’s full confidence in Julius, Sophia muttered, “I’m so jealous...”

Sophia must have had her own troubles to contend with.

Nevertheless, whenever Sophia spoke of Alexis, her eyes were filled with passion, so it was clear the two of them had a relationship built on trust.

Amelia hoped she and Sarge would be the same way.

It won’t do to have people saying that it’s more worrisome when the two of us are together. I need to do my best so they can say they feel reassured when I’m

by his side.

Sarge had also promised not to push himself. She was sure he would uphold that promise from here on.

Amelia refrained from telling Marie and Sophia that Alois might be descended from Bedeiht royalty.

Amelia wasn't sure of all the details, and the situation was probably being looked into more closely right about now. Rather than giving them an incomplete story, she thought it would be better for them to find out after the investigation had concluded.

The three of them passed the time in a relaxed manner, and then finally, after lunch, she was able to meet Sarge.

In contrast with Amelia, he didn't seem to have rested since their arrival and had instead been enthusiastically telling his older brothers about the fertilizer infused with growth promotion magic that he planned to develop for the Kingdom of Janaki, as well as Amelia's idea for a magical tool that could make it rain.

Eventually, Julius had had to force him to retire to his bedroom.

Before she went to meet with Sarge, she visited Julius, who asked her about the marks around his brother's neck. Those marks must have remained because Alois had grabbed him so forcefully.

Amelia responded honestly that they were Alois's handiwork.

Apparently, Alexis was also carefully looking into Alois's lineage.

It was known that the princess who had been abducted several decades ago had not borne any children. Julius told her that much.

Did that mean Alois had never had any connection to the royal family of Bedeiht in the first place? Or perhaps the princess did have children, but it had been covered up?

The ongoing investigation would illuminate the answers to those questions.

However, although neither Julius nor Amelia said anything about it, they both knew that if Sarge thought Alois had inherited his magic from that princess, it

was highly likely to be true.

“We plan on questioning Alois tomorrow, but seeing as he can be dangerous, I won’t ask Sarge to be present there. Amelia, thank you for saving him.”

In response to his thanks, she shook her head.

“No, I really just lost my head in the moment. I wouldn’t have been surprised if I were punished for using magic and putting a member of the royal family at risk.”

Fortunately, Sarge hadn’t been hit, but considering she hadn’t had complete control over her magic, it had been a very dangerous thing to do.

“Don’t worry about that. Magic that’s used spontaneously like that reflects the wielder’s nature. It would have been impossible for your magic to hurt anyone, much less Sarge.”

She was happy that Julius had faith in her; it made her feel she never wanted to betray that trust.

After parting with Julius, she went to go see Sarge, who was compiling the data he’d brought back from the Beltz Empire. He must have been considerably focused, as he did not immediately notice Amelia come in.

“Oh, Amelia.”

When he finally noticed her, he put down all his documents on his desk and extended his hand to her. As always, she took his hand and allowed him to guide her to the seat next to his.

“Did you sleep well last night?”

“Yes, I did. Please make sure to get some proper rest as well.”

“...You’re right. I should rest today.”

Even after he said that, Sarge proceeded to speak of nothing but new plans for developing the fertilizer and the magical tool.

“Didn’t you just promise me you wouldn’t push yourself?”

At her words, he looked at her with a start and then smiled softly.

“I did promise that. And I’ll keep that promise, because it’s a promise I made

to you.”

Sarge tidied up his documents, and then the two of them enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea.

Amelia parted from Sarge and returned to her room, where she sat down on her bed and let her mind wander.

Atop her desk was a letter from Princess Chloe—a response to the letter Amelia had sent earlier.

As a result of Alois’s interrogation, it had been determined that Chloe was merely a victim of his plot, and she had been released from her confinement. It had also been confirmed that Chloe had been under Alois’s complete control, and that even her feelings of love for him had not been her own.

Earlier, Sarge had also told Amelia about how Chloe was doing.

Alexis, after rushing over from Bedeiht, had lifted Chloe’s brainwashing entirely, so she no longer spoke of holding any love for Alois. Rather, she seemed afraid at the prospect of ever seeing him again. Sophia and Marie had also expressed sympathy for her.

“If it was her weak magic that made it possible for her to be brainwashed, I actually think it would be safer for her to stay in Bedeiht. If anything were to happen, Alexis and the others would quickly notice something was off,” Sophia had said. It had been decided that Chloe would go to Bedeiht to study, with her engagement to Est still on hold, as had been the plan previously.

In her letter, Chloe apologized for causing so much trouble and wrote that she wanted to devote herself to her magic studies from now on.

Amelia was sure the princess would be just fine.

When Alois, the primary instigator of this crisis, had awoken, he’d apparently tried to put the people around him under his control and escape. However, the people surrounding him were not soldiers from Janaki but mages dispatched from Bedeiht. All of them were nobles and had greater magic power than Alois, so his attempts had proven fruitless.

Realizing he couldn't run away, Alois had quickly become compliant and was now keeping quiet. As a precaution, they'd placed a magic-sealing bracelet on him.

Alexis, who had been busy investigating Alois's case this whole time, called over Sarge, Amelia, and Julius to discuss the present circumstances with them.

What had been Alois's motivation?

And just who was he after all?

Sarge explained everything.

"When I was in the empire, I saw the past. What I saw was entirely different from what Alois believes to be the truth," he said. Then he spoke about what he'd seen. "The princess was abducted fifty-five years ago. She was apparently imprisoned in the imperial castle."

The emperor's aim had been to sire children with a light magic affinity.

Usually, only those in the direct royal line could inherit light magic, but there had been extremely rare cases in which children were born with a light magic affinity even though they were not children of the crown prince.

Betting everything on that slim chance, the emperor had intended to make the abducted princess his wife.

However, a knight working in the castle had felt pity for the princess and helped her escape. He had run away with the weak, helpless princess, and the two of them had fallen in love. While they were on the run, they had a daughter.

But the emperor had not given up on the princess; he had pursued her tenaciously.

As a last resort, the cornered princess had used transportation magic in an attempt to cross the mountain range.

"For a member of the royal family, she had weak magic, and moving several people consumes quite a lot of magic, so she failed. Her daughter, whom she'd been holding carefully in her arms, ended up being left behind in the empire."

Amelia's breath caught in her throat as she listened to Sarge recount the

events of the past.

The princess had desperately tried to return for her daughter, but her father, the king of Bedeiht at the time, would not even acknowledge the existence of her husband, who was from the empire.

Nor had the king offered her any help in her efforts to recover her daughter.

In an act of resistance against her father, she had refused to return to the kingdom and settled down with her husband in Janaki. Meanwhile, her daughter had been captured by their pursuers, and she was raised in the imperial castle as the emperor's daughter.

"The emperor raised that child as his own daughter and told her that her mother had abandoned her to run off with a man."

And so the daughter, raised in solitude, had hated her mother, whom she believed had abandoned her. The girl couldn't use any of the more common forms of magic, to say nothing of light magic. Before long, the emperor grew to detest the girl, who had no biological relation to him, and treated her coldly.

Alois was that woman's child.

To her own child, she had spoken ceaselessly of her hatred for her mother and resentment for her father. Eventually, she had succumbed to an illness, leaving behind Alois, who had been raised immersed in his mother's bitterness.

In an attempt to exact vengeance for his mother upon the Kingdom of Bedeiht, he had taken control of the Beltz Empire.

He had likely brainwashed Chloe into breaking off her engagement to Est in order to sever the ties between Janaki and Bedeiht, so that when the empire invaded Janaki, they wouldn't be able to request reinforcements from Bedeiht. Since his grandmother had fled to Janaki, he must have held resentment towards that kingdom as well.

"So Alois got it into his head that his grandmother from Bedeiht was a monster who had abandoned his mother to run off with a man—that she was the cause of his mother's unhappiness. Is that about the size of it?" Alexis asked.

Sarge nodded.

“But can you really see that far in the past with reenactment magic?”

Sarge again nodded at Julius’s question.

“It’s common for traces of strong emotions to remain in the world even after many years. And since we went to the very place where the event occurred, it wasn’t difficult to see.”

The town where Alois had been assembling the weapons must have been the place where the princess had accidentally left her daughter behind. Did the princess’s feelings of guilt and despair over losing her daughter linger there even after fifty-five long years?

Just like his mother, Alois had been born without proper magical ability, but he had inherited a small amount of magic from his grandmother. And with that ability, he had brainwashed the people around him and posed as the emperor’s brother.

Then, under the pretense of restoring life to the dry earth, he had plotted to invade the continent on the other side of the mountain range, where his grandmother had fled to.

However, his grandfather, who had run off with the princess, had been a mere knight, so Alois himself was not descended from the Beltz Empire’s imperial family.

What he had inherited was the blood of the royal family of Bedeiht.

“What did you tell Alois when he attacked you?” asked Alexis.

“I told him, ‘You inherited that magic power from your grandmother. And your grandmother did not abandon her daughter; it was just an unfortunate accident,’” Sarge responded.

When Sarge had pointed out that Alois had inherited his power from the grandmother he’d hated for so long and told him that the truth was contrary to what he believed, Alois had been stunned and then had flown into a rage, thinking Sarge was lying to him.

“I don’t think he’ll believe you even if you show him with reenactment magic.

It’s not easy to dissuade someone of a lie he’s believed for so long,” said Alexis, his expression grim.

The princes of Bedeiht all got along well and were firmly united. Realizing that Alois was related to them probably made them feel as if they couldn’t just neglect him.

“Whatever the case may be, we’ll bring Alois with us to Bedeiht. Leave the empire and Janaki to father and me.”

Julius and Sarge nodded at Alexis’s words.

Matters between nations were for the king and Crown Prince Alexis to handle.

“The plan is to return home tomorrow using transportation magic. There are three of us who can use light magic, so we should be able to move everyone.”

After that, they dispersed.

The next day, Alexis, Julius, and Sarge used their light magic to instantly transport their entire party back to Bedeiht.

As a familiar sight filled her vision, Amelia breathed a sigh of relief.

Even though they’d moved a considerable distance, she felt absolutely fine. It was just that she was deeply impressed that they had arrived in Bedeiht in an instant.

She took a look around. They seemed to be in the great hall of the royal castle.

Waiting for them were His and Her Majesty, as well as Est, the only prince who had been left behind in the castle. They appeared happy to see that Sarge and Amelia had now safely returned after having been missing.

“My deepest apologies. This all happened due to my own carelessness...” Amelia said, regretful for having gotten Sarge involved.

“There’s no need for that. It’s to be expected that one would protect one’s fiancée,” the queen responded, looking pleased with Sarge for protecting Amelia.

Due to everything that had happened, Princess Chloe, who had come with them to start her studies at the academy, shrank back considerably. However, the king and queen greeted her warmly, as did Est, although her engagement to him was now on hold.

When Chloe had met with Amelia, she had also repeatedly apologized to her, saying everything was her fault. Amelia had told the princess she didn't want her to fret over it, since she had been manipulated by magic she'd had no way of protecting herself against, but it seemed Chloe's feelings of guilt weren't so easily dispelled.

It had been suggested that Chloe commute to the academy from the royal castle, but Chloe had decided to start out by living in the dorms.

She'd looked completely serious when she'd said she wanted to study magic at the academy like any other student, keeping it a secret from others that she was Est's fiancée and a princess from Janaki. Surely that earnestness reflected her true character.

Although Princess Chloe was the same age as Amelia, she'd said she wanted to start learning from the fundamentals, so she would be enrolling as a first-year student.

Of course, they couldn't allow her to attend the academy alone, so Kaid's sister, Meena, who would be living in the same dorms as the princess, had been chosen to look after her. Meena was a very kind girl who liked looking after others. She and Amelia also shared a connection; she was fiancée to Amelia's cousin, the one who would inherit the Lenia domain. If anyone would be able to provide Chloe with the support she needed, it would be Meena.

Alois hadn't been brought to the great hall. Instead, he'd been escorted straight to an isolated room in the cellars where he would undergo nonstop questioning.

Alexis would be explaining everything that had transpired to the royal couple and Est, so Amelia and the others were dismissed.

"I don't think you'll be called on again today, so you can take it easy now. I'll have your dinner brought to your room," said Sophia.

“Thank you.”

After escorting Amelia to her room, Sophia left.

Declining the maid’s help, Amelia changed out of her clothes. The sun was still high in the sky, but she went ahead and crawled into the soft bed and exhaled a sigh of relief.

So much has happened...

She recalled all the events that had happened one by one.

She remembered how worried she’d been about her first official duty and her relationship with Princess Chloe. Then, she had learned that the princess was planning to elope with her lover and had acted to stop them. Furthermore, she’d discovered that Chloe’s lover was controlling her with some magic-like power, and then he had almost abducted Amelia.

She looked at the ring Sarge had given her, which she’d been wearing this whole time.

He saved me... We were flung into the desert, but as a result, I was able to experience a lot.

She had also been able to see once again the magnificence of Sarge’s magic.

Amelia herself felt that the issues at hand had become clear, as had her responsibilities from here on out.

There’s the development of Sarge’s magical fertilizer and the rain-producing tool and...

Depending on how the kingdom’s relationship with the Beltz Empire developed, there was also a possibility that they would not need the magical tool.

Setting aside the matter of Alois, Amelia couldn’t see the Beltz Empire compromising with Bedeiht. The previous emperor had kidnapped the princess, Alois’s grandmother, and the current emperor had tried to kidnap Sarge when he was a child. It didn’t seem possible that the emperor of that very empire would bow his head and seek help from Bedeiht.

However, Sarge’s magical tool was a wonderful thing.

And there were many warm, kindhearted people living in the empire. Amelia would continue working on developing the magical tool in the hopes that it would someday be of use to those people.

She also had a lot of data that she'd brought back from Janaki; she would have to organize it in a way that was easy to read.

But I'm so tired today...

Since she'd told Sarge so many times that he shouldn't push himself, she couldn't very well push herself too hard. Still lying in bed, Amelia closed her eyes.

At some point while she was sleeping, the maid came to bring her dinner. After eating, she took a relaxing bath. Then she once again crawled into bed, this time sleeping soundly all through the night.

When she awoke the next morning, she felt completely refreshed, with no trace of weariness. The maid who assisted her in getting ready asked what she would do for breakfast, and after a bit of thought, Amelia answered that she would go to the dining hall.

In the dining hall were Sophia, Julius, and Est.

Apparently, Alexis had been busy since yesterday. The moment Amelia began to wonder where Sarge was, he arrived, albeit a bit tardy. Amelia had been worried that he was once again pushing himself too hard, so she was relieved to see that his complexion looked good; he must not have been awake all night working on his research..

"Were you able to sleep well last night?" Sophia asked.

"Yes, I did. I slept for most of the day. I feel rejuvenated."

"I'm glad to hear that. How about you, Julius and Sarge?"

The two princes nodded.

"Is Prince Alexis all right?"

Amelia was concerned when she noticed he wasn't present, but Est laughed and responded that she needn't be concerned.

“You don’t need to worry about Alec. He’s strong, as is the protection of light magic. It’d be better for him to worry about the people around him.”

Est said regretfully that if he moved around as much as Alexis did, his body wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Amelia and Sarge would be able to take a break from attending the academy for a bit. She was worried for Princess Chloe, who would be living in the academy dorms, but since she would be attending class as a regular first-year student, Amelia likely wouldn’t have had many chances to meet her there regardless.

But the princess would surely be fine with Meena and Sol looking after her.

After breakfast, Sarge promptly shut himself in the library. Amelia had been planning to assist him, but on second thought, she decided to return to her room.

She wrote a letter to Meena and Sol asking them to look after Chloe. Then she wrote a letter to Chloe letting her know she could always come to her for advice if ever she were in any trouble. After entrusting the letters to the maid and asking her to send them to the girls, who were living in the dorms, Amelia headed towards the library.

Sarge noticed her immediately. He stopped his work and raised his head.

“Amelia, you’re right on time. I wanted to discuss the water magic we need to imbue the magical tool with...”

Evidently he was plowing ahead with the research on the rain-producing magical tool.

“I’ve been doing some experiments, and it seems like a gem would make the best core for the magical tool. I want to figure out what gem would be optimal for imbuing with water magic.”

“Understood. Shall I try a few out?”

“Yes, please.”

Then, after spending the whole day trying to infuse various gems with magic, she found that aquamarine produced the best result.

After promising she would continue helping tomorrow, Amelia returned to her room, where she found a letter from Chloe waiting for her. The princess's response included another apology for causing so much trouble, as well as gratitude for Amelia's concern.

Amelia hoped the two of them could someday have a tea party with Meena and Marie.

Afterwards, Amelia didn't hear much more about Alois, but he was apparently still undergoing interrogation; he was also involved in discussions with members of the royal family.

What he'd done was unpardonable, but now that she knew about his unhappy upbringing, she hoped there was some way he could find redemption.

She'd thought the Kingdom of Bedeiht and the Beltz Empire would never reach an understanding with one another. But now, it seemed that events were unfolding rapidly.

The emperor had ultimately passed away from his illness, and a new emperor had taken the throne. Apparently, the young emperor was very eager to do something about the food crisis that was afflicting the entire empire. He was striving to scale down the military and establish connections with other nations.

The new emperor had also become aware of the situation with Alois and had requested the opportunity to offer his apology to the kingdoms of Janaki and Bedeiht, which had suffered harm from Alois's actions. Alexis had gone to Janaki to consult with the kingdom and select a place to meet with the new emperor.

The swift progression of events left Amelia in a daze.

Bedeiht had a long, strained history with the Beltz Empire. She hadn't thought that as soon as the new emperor took over, they would move so quickly to resolve their issues. She'd also thought the ascension of a new emperor would occur in the future, not now.

Perhaps the people of this continent, the Beltz Empire included, would no longer have to fight amongst each other.

This side of the mountain range was suffering from severe cold, while the

other side was suffering from desertification. Conditions on both sides were growing harsher year after year.

Sarge, unbound by things like national borders, wished to save as many people as possible. And if that was what he wanted, she would only continue to support him in his endeavors.

Chapter 6: A New Goal

The new emperor of the Beltz Empire was a 28-year-old named Carloyd. He was still unmarried and had yet to even decide on a candidate to make his empress. This seemed unthinkable for a crown prince, but before the previous emperor had fallen ill, Carloyd had never been in the public eye.

Apparently, he had incurred his father the emperor's displeasure after expressing his opinions to him frankly, and the emperor had locked him away in the depths of the imperial castle.

Expand agriculture rather than strengthening the military. Establish communication with the nations on the other side of the mountains rather than invading them. It seemed that there were those in the empire who agreed with the beliefs he continuously voiced.

Those very same supporters had tried to save him from his imprisonment after the emperor became sick. However, Alois had intervened, brainwashing the people and acting as the emperor's brother.

He must have posed as the emperor's brother in order to place himself in a higher rank than that of the crown prince, Carloyd. It was a matter of course for the emperor's brother, in whom the people were made to think the emperor had entrusted his full authority, to have more power than the imprisoned crown prince.

Thus, the crown prince had been forgotten and shut away deep inside the castle.

But then, the emperor passed away and Alois was captured by the Kingdom of Bedeiht, allowing Carloyd to return to the castle as the crown prince and next emperor.

"His first act as emperor was disarmament."

Alexis, after finally returning to the royal castle, had gathered Sophia, his brothers, and Amelia in a parlor to explain the present situation.

He was working without rest each day, going back and forth between the

empire and Bedeiht. However, as Est had told her previously, there was no need to worry; no hint of exhaustion was evident on Alexis's face.

"When I said it was alarming to have soldiers gathered on our border even with a mountain range between us, he left a minimal security force and withdrew the rest."

From the very beginning, Carloyd had known that Alois was not the emperor's brother. However coldly she'd been treated, Alois's mother had been raised in the castle as the emperor's daughter. Carloyd hadn't known he and Alois were not related by blood, so to him, Alois was his aunt's son and his cousin.

Then, after learning the truth, Carloyd had expressed the desire to apologize to Alois for the cruelty he'd endured at his grandfather's hands.

After wrapping up his explanation, Alexis heaved a deep sigh. "I'm happy this new emperor is a decent person. It's at least a step up from the last two emperors, who were dictators. But even with a new emperor, the domestic situation remains unchanged. The new emperor is trying to enact policies too quickly, and he also has a lot of enemies. That nation still has many difficulties ahead of it."

Carloyd, who had been imprisoned until just recently, did not have many allies. Furthermore, in an attempt to realize the ideals he'd been pursuing for so long, he was trying to forge ahead with his reforms, and his forceful manner might increase the number of people who opposed him.

There were also those whose ideals aligned with his own. However, the previous emperor had shunned those people and stripped them of all their political power.

"Carloyd also has two younger brothers, the sons of two of the emperor's favorite concubines. The emperor passed suddenly and hadn't left a will, so Carloyd, as the eldest, was made the new emperor. But his younger brothers haven't given up on the possibility of seizing the throne. It's only a matter of time before there's a power struggle."

"Oh no..."

If a domestic conflict were to break out, the empire's food crisis would only

grow more acute. Amelia, who had now experienced the desert for herself, thought it completely absurd to consider fighting a war in those conditions.

However, Alois, who had grown up in the imperial castle, had the mindset that if the empire couldn't obtain something, they should steal it from others. There might very well be those in the empire who thought the same way he did.

If that were the case, then perhaps Carloyd's opinions alone deviated from the norm.

If Carloyd were to lose the power struggle, then the nations on this side of the continent would not be left uninvolved. Even if the empire couldn't invade the great magical powerhouse that was Bedeiht, it was possible for them to invade the other kingdoms, starting with Janaki.

"It's meaningless to continue fighting. That is why we've decided that our kingdom must join hands with Emperor Carloyd."

At Alexis's words, Est, Julius, and Sarge nodded without raising any objection.

Carloyd was indeed trying to rush towards a revolution. However, he was the only one who could lead the empire in the right direction.

If Carloyd left his goals unfulfilled, the fires of war would not be confined to the Beltz Empire.

"Emperor Carloyd wants to win over the imperial citizens. So, Sarge."

Having his name called, Sarge raised his head. He understood exactly what his brother wanted to say.

"You're thinking of the magical tool that Amelia proposed, the one that can produce rain, aren't you?"

"That's right. I'm sorry for putting this on you, but I want you to complete a prototype as quickly as you can. Carloyd's enthronement ceremony will be held before long. I'll attend and give him the magical tool as a celebratory gift. It's all right if it's just a prototype. They'll purchase the completed product from us later on. The enthronement ceremony is in one month."

If Bedeiht demonstrated their power as the leading nation in terms of magic, and demonstrated how much interaction with other countries would benefit

the Beltz Empire, the empire would see that even if they did decide to proceed with an invasion, they would not emerge victorious.

Sarge looked straight into his brother's eyes, and, with a serious expression, nodded.

"Understood. Leave it to me."

Amelia knew Sarge would be busy from now on.

Thus, she intended to help as much as she could, but he told her he wanted to research something on his own that weekend and declined her help.

This had never happened before, so Amelia was left feeling a bit saddened.

Maybe he thinks I won't be of any help...

But since the tool would need to be imbued with water magic, Sarge shouldn't be able to finish it on his own.

Despite that, he'd told her he didn't need her help.

Feeling down, she returned to her room, where she found a letter from Meena had arrived. In her letter, Meena wrote that Princess Chloe strongly wished to see Amelia, and that Marie wanted to have a sleepover at her house this weekend with the princess and Amelia.

A sleepover...

It was true that she and Marie had promised that they would have one after they returned to the capital. And now that Sarge had rejected her help, Amelia's weekend was free.

She'd also been wondering how Chloe was doing; they'd been in contact only through letters.

It would probably be better for her to go to the sleepover rather than brooding alone.

Not wanting to bother Sarge, Amelia went to Sophia to ask about spending the night away from the castle. Sophia immediately approved and cheerfully sent her off, so that weekend, Amelia would be staying over at Marie's house.

In addition to Marie, Liliane, and Amelia, Meena and Chloe would be joining in the fun.

Liliane came to meet Amelia at the castle, and together, they headed for Marie's residence.

It had been a while since Amelia had seen either Meena or Chloe.

"You look well! I'm glad," Amelia said to Chloe, who bowed her head and thanked her.

"Thank you so much for all your letters; they have really helped to encourage me. Meena has also been very kind to me."

When Amelia had slept over with Marie and Liliane during their journey back home from Janaki, she had hoped that a day would come when Chloe would join them. Amelia was happy that wish was now coming true.

The residence of Marie's family, which was one of the wealthiest in the kingdom, had such extensive grounds that Amelia thought of it as several acres of farmland.

"So this is what a mansion of a noble from Bedeiht is like...?" muttered Chloe in amazement.

Meena responded that Marie's residence was exceptional even in Bedeiht.

"My house is about half this size," she said.

"Yes, as is my home," Liliane chimed in.

Amelia's home was even less than half the size of this one.

My house is... Well, we have a lot of farmland...

There was no comparing the home of a country noble with that of a family in the uppermost echelons of the aristocracy, one that owned a residence in the royal capital. As Amelia consoled herself with that thought, Marie emerged to greet them, as if she couldn't wait any longer for their arrival.

"Welcome, everyone! Thank you for coming. Amelia, you had no issue leaving the castle?"

"No, I had no plans," she answered a bit dejectedly, remembering Sarge's

rejection of her help.

Marie's response surprised her.

"Oh, good. When I asked Prince Sarge about your plans, he said you would be free on the weekend. He said you would be getting much busier soon and that he wanted you to take a bit of a breather first."

"...He did?"

So he'd said he wanted to do some research alone because he'd known Marie wanted to invite her to the sleepover.

Amelia's low spirits instantly lifted.

"Also, my custom-made bed finally arrived! We're going to have so much fun!"

"Yes... So you really had one made?"

Amelia looked at each of her friends in turn.

Marie. Liliane. Meena. Chloe. And then there was herself.

They were girls, but just how big was this bed that could fit five people?

As large as Marie's bedroom was, Amelia's gaze was drawn to the giant bed, which took up a quarter of the room.

"Isn't it wonderful? But we can save gossiping in bed for tonight. This is a sleepover, after all. First, let's have tea in the garden," Marie said before leading them in that direction.

The beautiful, meticulously groomed garden was blooming with flowers. Amelia couldn't help but sigh at the gorgeous sight.

"It's so lovely."

"Some of the flowers bloomed just this morning. I'm glad you can all see them at their peak."

Varioust types of sweets were lined up atop a table in the middle of the garden.

When Meena saw them, her expression clouded over.

“Big sister, I don’t know what to do...”

Meena, who was engaged to Amelia’s cousin Sol, had begun to call Amelia “big sister.” Since Amelia was an only child, that made her happy, and she doted on Meena as if she really were her little sister.

“What’s the matter, Meena?”

“There’s only so much I can eat, but there are so many delicious-looking treats... How can I choose which ones to eat?”

“Hee hee. Meena, don’t forget we’re also planning to make a dessert together after this.”

As Marie dealt her another blow, Meena crumpled in despair.

“Ah, right...”

Sol had told Amelia of Meena’s love for sweets, but Amelia hadn’t imagined it was this extreme.

What if she just chooses some to eat today and saves the rest for another day? thought Amelia, but it didn’t seem like the right time to suggest something like that.

“Lady Meena, there’s no need to fret.” Princess Chloe, who had been looking on shyly, took hold of Meena’s hand. “Though I have come to this kingdom to study, and that under complicated circumstances, you have treated me with so much kindness. That is why I shall show you what my elder sister taught me. And that is...going half and half.”

“Half and half...?”

“That’s correct. If we split each in half, we’ll be able to enjoy twice the pastries. By all means, go half and half with me.”

“Thank you, Princess Chloe.”

Marie nodded with satisfaction. Amelia cast a glance at Liliane, who was tilting her head quizzically.

“I think one person could handle this amount, though...”

Amelia pretended not to have heard her and, with a smile, took a seat at the

table.

Since Marie had assembled the most highly recommended teas and pastries, everything was of the finest quality. They were all products that were in limited supply or sold only to valued customers, so there were many things they could only partake of here.

Amelia felt she understood Meena's concern.

"This fruit tart is delicious," Meena said with an expression of pure contentment.

Indeed, everything about it—the acidity of the fruits and the sweetness of the cream in combination with the crust—was top notch.

"It really is. But this chocolate cake is also to die for."

Marie must have really been looking forward to this day.

She happily gave suggestions of the various sweets to try, and she'd also prepared many different types of teas.

"Actually, Prince Julius also likes sweets. His favorite is the fruit tart," said Marie, sparking a discussion about each of their fiancés.

"Princess Chloe, have you already met Prince Est?" Marie asked.

Chloe nodded bashfully. "...Yes. He's a very kind and gentle person," she responded, then blushed. "Our engagement is on hold right now, but he said he hoped that I would give it some more serious consideration. Even though I was the one who caused a great deal of trouble, and he should be the one with the right to decide."

"We would also be delighted if you were to become our sister-in-law," said Marie.

Amelia followed up with a nod. "Yes, she's right."

Tears welled up in Chloe's large eyes, then she thanked them and bowed her head.

The investigation had found that Alois had posed as Chloe's lover in order to prevent Janaki, which would be the first country to be invaded, from forming a

strong alliance with Bedeiht.

If Chloe really had eloped with him, the relationship between the two nations would surely have suffered; communication between the two nations might even have been cut off. Then, when the empire invaded Janaki, their pleas for aid from Bedeiht would have been delayed.

With that having been the case, the king had personally thanked Amelia for her extraordinary service in preventing Chloe from eloping with Alois. For her own part, Amelia felt she had just gotten Sarge wrapped up in trouble by acting on her own. She felt tremendously grateful that, even though she should have been apologizing, she was rather being shown gratitude.

“I want to do my best in my studies in order to repay Prince Est for his graciousness,” Chloe said resolutely. There was no trace of the person she’d been when Amelia first met her.

Realizing that Chloe had originally been such a nice, earnest girl made Amelia think that no matter the circumstances, what Alois had done to her was unforgivable.

Apparently, Alois was still stubbornly refusing to believe the truth about his grandmother. He still believed that she, who had been a princess of Bedeiht, had abandoned his mother, condemning her to a life full of despair, and therefore deserved to be hated.

Alexis and Julius had gone to meet him, but he refused to speak to them or even listen to what they had to say.

“He was determined to risk his life for revenge. If he admits we’re telling him the truth, then he’ll have lost his reason to live. There’s no need for us to rush. We can take our time convincing him,” Alexis had said.

Alois had committed a crime which he needed to atone for. However, Amelia didn’t think he should have to atone for the rest of his life. They would have to discuss with Carloyd what to do with Alois after he’d atoned.

The girls all finished their tea and pastries. Next on the agenda was making their own pastries, as had become their custom.

“Since this is Princess Chloe’s first time, I’ve decided we should make

something simple: chocolate mousse!”

“Chocolate mousse...” Meena repeated, looking spellbound.

They changed into comfortable clothes and went to the large kitchen of the Edori home, where a kind-looking maid was waiting for them with the assembled ingredients.

That maid would be showing them how to make the mousse.

“First, we’ll need to whip up the egg whites. This is a bit of a demanding task, so we’ll leave that to Lady Marie’s wind magic.”

“Yes, leave it to me!”

Marie cast a spell on the egg whites in a bowl, instantly whipping them into a foam.

“Yes, that should be sufficient. Next, we’ll have to melt the chocolate in a water bath.”

Meena and Chloe worked together on that task.

“Lady Liliane, could you take care of the cream? And Lady Amelia, please mix these two together.”

After they followed the maid’s directions, all that was left was to chill the mousse until it hardened.

“Quite simple, yes?”

“Yes, and yet it looks amazing.”

“Let’s eat it together after dinner.”

Chloe repeated how much she was looking forward to eating the mousse. She must have had a lot of fun with her first time making a dessert.

Then came the main event of the sleepover: nighttime.

When Marie’s parents arrived home, the girls greeted them and then ate dinner together with them. Afterwards, they headed for the enormous bed in Marie’s bedroom.

Marie’s parents were moved to see how many friends their daughter had

made, and they bowed their heads, asking them to continue looking after her.

“Honestly, you don’t need to keep talking about how I had no friends!”

Marie seemed peeved, but in the past, Amelia hadn’t had any friends either. When she told Marie that she had been her first friend, Marie beamed.

The girls all lay down on the giant bed and spoke of many different things: their fiancés, the future, and more.



The others said Amelia seemed to have things the hardest, but she felt that nothing made her happier than being able to stay by the side of the person she loved, supporting him in his research.

When she expressed her honest feelings, they all nodded, seeming to understand.

“I know what you mean. I’ll also do whatever I can for Prince Julius.”

“I also hope I can support Sol when he becomes responsible for the Lenia domain.”

“There’s not much I can do, but I hope I can stay by Prince Est’s side.”

“I feel precisely the same way. I became a knight again to help Kaid, after all.”

They all took turns expressing their feelings for their respective fiancés, at times agreeing with and at other times poking fun at each other.

There seemed to be no end to their conversation.

They continued chatting jovially late into the night.

After a weekend of fun, Amelia returned to the castle.

“Welcome back. Did you have a nice time?” asked Sophia as she welcomed Amelia inside.

“Yes, it was very enjoyable,” Amelia responded with a smile.

Then she headed straight for the castle library. It was still early, but Sarge was there, as she’d expected. He was concentrating intensely and didn’t notice her come in. All around him were scattered papers with numerous revisions of designs for the magical tool. He had undoubtedly been here all night.

“Sarge,” she called out to him softly. He raised his head and, upon seeing her, broke into a cheerful smile.

“Amelia, you’re back,” he said, reaching out a hand to her. She took it, and he guided her to sit next to him.

“Yes, I’ve just returned. I had a really wonderful weekend. Thank you,” she said.

“I’m glad you had an enjoyable time.”

“Have you slept?”

“...Since you’re back, it must be morning already, right?” Sarge responded a bit sheepishly.

Amelia tugged on his hand.

“You promised me you wouldn’t do this. Please, take a break.”

“But I believe we’re supposed to return to the academy today...”

He was right; they’d been absent from the academy for a while now and were meant to return today. Nevertheless, no one would force Sarge to go after he’d been up all night.

“You can go back tomorrow.”

Pulling him by the hand, she forcibly led him out of the library.

He looked a bit apprehensive, but he made no move to stop her. She brought him all the way to his room and into his bedroom.

“Now, please rest,” she said.

After making him rest, she got ready, thinking she herself should go to the academy, and made her way to the dining room to eat breakfast. Alexis and Julius were already there and greeted her.

“What’s Sarge doing?”

“He seems to have spent all night in the library, so I had him go to bed,” she said. Both princes looked relieved.

“Thank you. I tried so many times to convince him to sleep, but he just wouldn’t listen.”

“I thought he was getting better, but I guess he reverted to his old ways without you around.”

Amelia apologized to the two sighing brothers.

“My apologies. It’s all because I left his side.”

“You don’t need to worry about that, Amelia. It’s just that since I’m the one

asking him to do so much, I feel like I can't scold him too harshly," Alexis said, his voice full of worry. Amelia told him things would be fine, since she would be by Sarge's side from now on.

"I know there's not much I can do, but I will do my utmost to help him."

"With you by his side, I feel reassured. I'm sorry for putting this on you, but I appreciate your help."

Amelia was touched that he'd finally told her that. She vowed to never return to the time when people had said it was more dangerous for the two of them to be together.

Amelia decided to go to the academy on her own. Once Sarge was asleep, he would be out for a while—probably until Amelia returned. Before heading to school, she went to quickly organize the documents he'd left in the library and to get a grasp on what he was pursuing.

Measurements of the amount of magic that can be stored in a gem... That must be related to the size of the magical tool, right?

They had decided that they would use aquamarine as the gem in the magical tool, but they still needed to research how much magic it could store. If the amount was less than they were expecting, they might even have to consider a different gem.

Amelia headed to the academy alone, and after briefly stopping by the laboratory, she headed straight to the academy library. Of course, Liliane was with her as her guard.

Amelia's topic of research was gems.

She tried gathering all the data she could about various gems, but the available data were limited to analyses of each gem. There were no records of attempts to imbue gems with magic.

What should I do? Using expensive gems for experimental purposes doesn't seem right...

Julius would likely say it was a necessary expense and procure some for her.

However, she wanted to subject the gems to repeated experiments in order

to determine their average magical capacity, which would undoubtedly destroy them; for that reason, she was reluctant to accept Julius's offer.

As she pondered what to do, Amelia suddenly remembered her days in the desert.

What if I had a set of gems to work with and Sarge used his magic to repair them so that I'd be able to experiment on them as much as I wanted?

Of course, if it ended up being too great a burden for Sarge, she wouldn't do it, but she figured it wouldn't be an issue, considering the small size of the gems.

She consulted Julius, and he told her that shouldn't be a problem. By the end of the school day, he supplied her with the gems, which Amelia brought back to the castle along with a quick summary of the data pertaining to them.

Sarge was already awake and in the library. He seemed to have been sleeping all day, as his face looked well rested. Relieved by that, she told him about the data she'd gathered and what she wanted to experiment with.

"Julius provided me with all types of gems, so as long as it won't be too much for you, I thought maybe you could repair the gems when they end up getting destroyed."

"Ahh, that way you can obtain the average values efficiently. That should be easy enough."

When Amelia returned from the academy, Sarge had been researching gems in the library, so he was happy to be able to start experimenting on them immediately.

"As long as you're okay with it, Amelia, let's jump right into experimenting. It will be dangerous to do it here, so let's borrow Alec's training grounds."

Sarge stood and went to obtain permission from Alexis. In the meantime, Amelia prepared the gems and a way to measure data.

Alexis quickly granted his permission, and Julius also dropped by the training grounds.

"I'm going to help out, since I can also use water magic. Alexis didn't tell me

to watch over you two because he was worried or anything.”

“...He did tell you that, didn’t he?”

Sarge was pleased to be able to get the data he wanted so immediately, and Amelia was happy to help him. As long as it was just the two of them, they could continue to experiment until they consumed all their magic.

Amelia had been glad to learn that Alexis felt reassured with her by his brother’s side, but she still had a ways to go towards learning to keep herself in check.

With Julius’s cooperation, the experimental process went off without any problems. They repeated the same experiments over and over in order to determine the average values for the gems.

Seeing the two of them run through their experiments and collect their data in silence, Julius, partly impressed and partly astonished, said, “You’re the only one who can follow Sarge to this extent, Amelia. But let’s stop things here.”

Amelia raised her head at his words and saw that the sun was already setting. Alexis was unlikely to allow them to continue using the training room for any longer than this.

She called out Sarge’s name, and he looked up from silently scribbling down data.

“We can continue tomorrow.”

“...All right,” he responded, nodding even though he looked a bit disappointed. They gathered up their things quickly and thanked Julius.

“Thank you so much for your help. We were able to make a lot of progress because of you.”

“Oh, really?” Julius laughed, seeming puzzled. “I didn’t really understand what we were doing.”

“We were running experiments to measure the numerical values of the magic needed to infuse the magical tool. For someone without Sarge’s deep understanding of how magical tools work, there’s bound to be a lot that’s confusing.”

“But you understand, don’t you?”

“Only because I’ve read through Sarge’s documents.”

Julius seemed unconvinced that that was the only reason. But when she explained that she’d come to understand through helping with Sarge’s research, Julius nodded.

“I see now why he considers you to be the only one for him. Sarge, no pushing yourself any more today.”

“I know. Amelia’s already scolded me about that, so I’ll take care not to.”

Watching his younger brother say that while organizing the data, Julius smiled, the corners of his eyes crinkling.

“I’ll go report to Alexis. You two, don’t forget about dinner. I’ll see you later.”

“Yes, we’ll see you then.”

After they parted with Julius and were making their way back to their rooms, Sarge suddenly halted.

“Sarge?”

He looked at her, his eyes serious.

“Hearing what Julius said made me realize I’ve been taking it for granted—your ability to always understand things without needing an explanation. It’s thanks to you that my research has been going well... Thank you. For everything.”

Amelia hadn’t been expecting those words. She could feel tears welling up in her eyes in spite of her best efforts to suppress them.

“Am I...really helping you?”

“Of course you are. If you weren’t here, my research wouldn’t be going anywhere.”

A feeling of joy slowly spread throughout her chest.

All the effort she had put in was being rewarded.

“I need to complete this magical tool no matter what. I hope you’ll lend me

your support in that endeavor.”

“Of course, with pleasure.”

Sarge smiled softly at Amelia’s prompt reply.

“Thank you. I’m counting on you.”

Amelia almost felt like she was walking on air, and she was absentminded all through dinner, to the point that Sophia became concerned for her. Amelia told her she was fine and they then passed the time as usual. However, once she was alone in her room, she felt her unfettered elation rise once again.

I’ll keep doing my best. For his sake, and for this kingdom’s sake.

With that resolve in mind, she opened up the thick tome she’d borrowed from the library.

And so, Amelia and Sarge both dove headfirst into the development process. With Julius’s cooperation, they were even able to select the optimal gem to use in the magical tool.

“So, aquamarine is the best for a wide coverage, huh? But I’m concerned about its sustainability.”

“I agree. Lapis lazuli seems the best in terms of duration. It might be a good idea to use both for different purposes. If someone wants to make it rain over a wide area, they can use aquamarine. And if they want to make it rain for a long time, lapis lazuli. Though it would be best if there were a gem that could do both.”

“Alec has been negotiating with the Kingdom of Niida to acquire some minerals from them. Once we complete a prototype, we could experiment to see if we can substitute minerals for gems,” said Sarge.

Amelia nodded.

“That’s a good idea. Minerals aren’t as costly as gems.”

And if they regularly purchased a set amount of minerals from Niida, that kingdom would also benefit from the arrangement.

It seemed they would have a lot of work to do even after completing the

prototype.

Nevertheless, the prototype was undoubtedly close to completion. And since the kingdom had so many water mages, there should be no issue with manufacturing the magical tools once they reached that point. There were many people who could use water magic, especially among nobles who owned farmland in the countryside, like Amelia's family. There was no question that once the magical tool was complete, demand for water mages would grow.

Amelia's parents and her cousin Sol were also water mages.

Until recently, water magic had been regarded as useful only for healing, but thanks to Amelia and Sarge's development of enchanted water, that perception was gradually changing.

In addition to that, the magical tool that the Beltz Empire wanted more than anything would utilize water magic, so Amelia expected the demand for water mages to increase even more.

Sarge had told Amelia, who had lamented that she could only use water magic, that they should raise the perceived worth of that magic.

Now, that dream was becoming reality.

When I first started at the academy, I never thought something like this could happen...

She no longer wished she could use earth magic.

Instead, she was happy she could use her water magic to support her fiancé.

After much trial and error, they finally completed the prototype with time to spare before Emperor Carloyd's enthronement ceremony.

After the tool's completion, Amelia and Sarge decided to take their overdue summer vacation, which they'd missed because of their prolonged diplomatic mission to Janaki. Their destination was Amelia's birthplace, the Lenia domain. They would be able to test run the magical tool in the wide expanse of farmland.

Since Marie had also gone to Janaki as a researcher, she was able to join them

on holiday. However, as the director of the laboratory, Julius could not take an extended leave from the capital.

“I’m sorry I can’t come, but look after Marie.”

“Yes, of course.”

Meena and Chloe, who were attending regular classes at the academy, could not join them either.

It was a shame, but this time she would be going home with only Sarge and Marie, accompanied by Kaid and Liliane as their guards. At least, Amelia thought that was the plan, but one more person joined at the last minute.

“I’m curious about the magical tool. Besides, how can I present it to another nation when I don’t even know how it works?”

The one who said that and would be coming along with them was Crown Prince Alexis.

Kaid’s face looked grim when he learned the crown prince would be accompanying them, which was understandable, but Amelia was surprised to see that even Liliane seemed nervous.

Alexis must have really been a handful during his school days.

“I’m not going to do anyting reckless in front of my little brother,” said Alexis with a wry laugh, but the tense expressions on the faces of both guards put even Amelia on edge.

However, Alexise followed through on his promise. As they traveled by carriage to the Lenia domain, he even listened intently to Sarge’s explanations and thanked Amelia for her cooperation in creating the magical tool.

Eventually, the carriage arrived in the Lenia domain.

“Ahh, so this is the Lenia domain? What splendid farmland,” murmured Alexis as he gazed out the window of the carriage at the fields of gree.

As summer had just ended, the harvest season was soon to begin.

The gree swayed in the autumn breeze. With the added effects of enchanted water, the grain was growing more abundantly than it had the previous year.

As he had last year, Sarge immediately stopped the carriage and began surveying the fields. Amelia descended from the carriage and followed after him.

“Liliane, go on ahead with Lady Marie. I’ll stay with these two,” said Alexis, ushering Marie and Liliane ahead of him.

Last year, Amelia and Sarge had kept Marie waiting for quite a long time. Thinking, too, about her parents, who had grown fatigued waiting for them at the manor, Amelia felt this was the right call to make.

It also meant Amelia was free to accompany Sarge as he carefully surveyed the fields.

“Does it snow around here?” asked Alexis, seeing the branches of the trees that had been broken due to snow accumulation.

“Yes. In the past, it never snowed, but for the past few years, it’s been snowing not just in the mountains but on the farmland as well,” Amelia answered, remembering what Sol had told her last year. “Since it used to never snow in this region, it seems the fruit trees have taken a lot of damage.”

“I see...”

This year would probably bring even more snow than last year, but now that they were taking precautions against the snow, they should be able to mitigate some of the damage.

“Even if we can make it rain with a magical tool, we still can’t do anything about the air temperature. Snow removal expenses will likely go up. I’ll have to check in with each domain in the kingdom.”

Amelia nodded deeply, having heard how laborious the task of snow removal was.

She’d even heard there were those who would fall ill from the cold. A fireplace couldn’t warm every single room in a home.

“If only there were a magical tool that could warm individual rooms,” Amelia said.

Sarge, who had been checking on the condition of the gree, muttered that

that could be possible.

“Pardon?”

“My brother casts fire magic inside the greenhouse in the castle garden. It doesn’t last forever, so he has to keep recasting it periodically, but if we were to use a magical tool...”

“...Then instead of casting magic, it would be possible to warm entire rooms just like the greenhouse, and we could make the effects of the magical tool last longer too. Also, if we make a tool that sacrifices duration for a wider area of effect, then we could even grow vegetables and other crops in winter...”

“Hold on, you two. I’m glad you have so many ideas, but we need to take things one at a time,” interrupted Alexis. “Janaki is eagerly anticipating that growth-promoting fertilizer. Frankly speaking, that’s the reason they’re letting us handle the talks with the Beltz Empire.”

“Ah, yes...”

Having completed the prototype of the magical tool, they now had to work on making it into a product.

Also, in addition to developing the fertilizer, they still had to compile data on enchanted water after the end of the harvest season in order to make any necessary improvements and begin preparations for its mass production.

As Amelia considered all of that, she reflected that it was going to be quite a lot of work.

“Of course, there’s no need for you two to shoulder the entire burden yourselves. Luckily, our kingdom has excellent magic researchers. You can leave to them whatever you need to,” Alexis said, looking at Amelia.

“Understood, and thank you.”

He seemed to be looking at her in the same way he looked at his own younger brother. It made her happy to think he already regarded her as part of his family.

While Amelia was recognized as the developer of enchanted water, the rights belonged to the royal family, per her own wishes. Therefore, they could leave

the matters regarding enchanted water to Julius, who was a water mage as well as the director of the laboratory.

Kaid had been silently guarding Sarge as he examined the fields. Having listened in on Alexis and Amelia's conversation, he said, deeply moved, "I never thought you'd be the one chiding others, Prince Alexis..."

"Hey, I've changed a lot since the old days," Alexis responded, looking a bit embarrassed; perhaps he was remembering the past. "Once my brothers get married, our family will get even larger. Also, there's going to be a new baby next year."

"Huh?" said Amelia and Kaid in unison. At the sudden confession, even Sarge stopped his work to stand up.

"Brother?"

Now that Amelia thought about it, Sophia had been planning to come with them to the Lenia domain.

Sophia had heard about the upcoming trip from Liliane and Marie and had said she was excited to join them, but then she suddenly canceled her plans. The princess had said she was feeling unwell, but although Amelia had been worried, she hadn't suspected that the true reason was that Sophia was pregnant.

"Is she really...?"

"She is. We haven't officially announced it yet, but she seems absolutely certain."

Hearing that, Amelia's eyes sparkled. "Congratulations!"

As the child of the crown prince, the baby would surely be born with a light magic affinity. The birth of another light magic user into the world was a felicitous occasion.

Julius and Marie would also likely be holding their wedding next year.

And then next will be us...

Amelia covered her face with her hands, trying to hide her blushing cheeks.

Next year, Sarge would be graduating from the academy, meaning they wouldn’t be able to spend as much time together.

However, that, too, would be temporary. Once Amelia also graduated from the academy, she could always be by his side.

She was happy now, but she was sure she would be even happier in the future.

They were able to get the magical tool prototype to work successfully.

There were still areas that needed improvement, but they would now work towards developing the final product with the added opinions of other researchers.

Sarge stepped away from the magical tool for a moment; since he was in the Lenia domain, he had decided to take the opportunity to to start developing the new fertilizer that the Kingdom of Janaki was eagerly anticipating.

In the meantime, he entrusted the fine-tuning of the tool to Amelia and Alexis.

“This should work well in the Beltz Empire too.”

As the crown prince repeatedly checked to confirm that the tool was activating properly, the care he took really resembled Sarge’s, which was one respect in which Alexis differed from Julius.

“I’m really happy for you and the crown princess.”

As Amelia once again gave her congratulations, Alexis’s dignified expression softened. Then, after deliberating over his words, he thanked her.

Alexis and Sophia’s marriage had been politically arranged, but they very much cherished each other. Amelia had always felt they were the ideal couple, so it pleased her to see the two of them happy.

When they returned to the capital, she would have to give Sophia a congratulatory gift. She was looking forward to picking something out for her future sister-in-law.

Several days had passed since they had arrived in the Lenia domain.

That day, Alexis decided that while he was visiting the domain, he wanted to take a look around, so Amelia’s father was guiding him on a tour of the estate.

Marie had been enjoying her time on holiday in the domain, but she returned to the capital earlier than everyone else. She must have felt regretful for leaving Julius behind after all.

Since Sarge had been doing research for the fertilizer all morning, Amelia compiled the data related to enchanted water to give to Julius. Alexis had given his consent to hand over the research to Julius and the researchers at the Magical Research Institute, as had Sarge.

That meant that it had already been decided to hand over the enchanted water to Julius before checking with him. Marie would be delivering the message to him, but he would surely accept the task readily. He'd helped them out in so many ways already.

I'll just add the current data to this...

Amelia was including a write-up of the current issues and a summary of the data gathered so far. As she was writing down potential ways to solve those issues, an abrupt knock came at the door. The only ones home were her mother and Sarge. Wondering who it could be, she opened the door to see Sarge standing on the other side.

She thought he would have been devoting his whole day to research on the fertilizer.

"What's the matter?"

Thinking he must need her help with something, she hastily began tidying up her materials. However, he'd come for a different reason entirely.

"We'll be returning to the capital soon, won't we? Before that, I thought we could walk around the farmland together."

Amelia looked at Sarge in surprise; she hadn't expected the invitation.

"You want to walk around...?"

"That's right. You said you often used to walk with your former fiancé...with Reese. So I wanted us to walk alone together too."

It was true that she and Reese had frequently walked through the farmland. It seemed like such a long time ago now, but they had done it for several years.

While she and Sarge had toured the farmland together several times, they had always had Kaid with them as a guard; they had never once been able to go alone.

Right now, Kaid was accompanying Alexis at Sarge's behest.

Sarge had told him that he would just be in his room doing research and that he was worried for his older brother, but that seemed to have been part of his plan to arrange this outing.

"Shall we, Amelia?"

Perhaps she should decline, for his safety. But if she was being honest, it made her happy that he wanted to walk around the farmland with her.

As she fretted over what to do, Sarge took her by the hand and led her out of her room.

He had never done something so assertive before.

Surprised, Amelia couldn't stop him, and she allowed him to guide her away.

"Um..."

"It's all right. The Lenia domain is a peaceful place."

"That is true, but..."

Amelia's father had certainly taken great care to ensure the safety of the domain, and there were sentries making rounds, so there were very rarely bandits or other miscreants around. Also, although Sarge wasn't supposed to use his transportation magic within the kingdom, exceptions were made for emergency situations. She herself knew well the capability of that type of magic.

She was struggling to resolve all the conflicting thoughts in her head, but before she knew it, they had arrived at the fields of gree.

Hand in hand, the two of them walked slowly as they gazed at the beautifully growing grain.

Amelia lost the motivation to say anything as she looked at Sarge's calm, content expression. She just held his hand and walked by his side. The villeins noticed Amelia and almost stopped their work to greet them. But Sarge, still smiling his gentle smile, said they didn't need to do so for his sake or Amelia's.

They walked leisurely through the farmland and then took a break at the spot

with a good view where they'd once had a picnic with everyone. Given that they hadn't prepared anything, Amelia was unsure of what to do. Meanwhile, Sarge sat down right on the grass.

Amelia followed suit and sat next to him.

She wondered if it was all right to make him sit down in a spot like this, but she was convinced it was fine when Sarge told her sitting on the grass was nothing compared to the desert.

Indeed, the soft grass was worlds away from that mixture of pebbles and fragments of rock they'd had to endure in the desert.

"I'm sorry for taking you away so suddenly."

"Not at all. I'm happy to be able to walk around with you. But what brought this on?"

It wasn't like him to go as far as sending Kaid away so that they could do something like this.

When she asked him for his reason, Sarge sank into thought, as if choosing his words carefully, and then spoke his feelings aloud. "When I heard my brother would be having a child soon, it made me think that eventually, you and I will be getting married and become a family."

"...Yes, that came to my mind too." Amelia nodded, glad that they were both thinking of the same thing.

"But ever since I met you, we've only been focused on researching botany and running magic experiments. I realized we haven't spent much time alone together, like Alec and Sophia do."

He told her that the reason he had taken her out into the fields today was so they could spend some time together.

"Sarge..." Amelia nestled her head against his shoulder affectionately.

She had never done something like that before.



But she felt that she wanted to do so now.

Since he was sharing his honest feelings with her, Amelia wanted to do the same.

“Even if all we’re doing is research, and even if we’re never alone, the days I spend with you are very precious to me. The happiness I’ve felt spending time with you is irreplaceable.”

“...I see.”

As she spoke what she really felt, Sarge nodded, seeming reassured.

Amelia had never imagined that he, who was always so perfect and blessed in talent and appearance, could be anxious over such a thing. Learning that there was this other side to him made her like him even more.

“You and I are a lot alike. I also enjoy getting lost in research and collecting data. It makes me happy that we’re both working equally hard towards the same goal,” Amelia said honestly as she nestled close to him.

It may not have been a conventional sort of happiness, but it was happiness to her nonetheless.

“So please, let me stay by your side forever.”

The sky darkened, and the autumn breeze grew colder.

And yet, cuddled close together, they were warm.

They passed the time quietly, feeling each other’s warmth.

They only learned after they returned to the capital that Kaid, who had gone out to fetch them, had felt unable to call out to the two of them while they were sitting close together, and had instead remained standing in the cold wind.

Several days later, Alexis, representing the Kingdom of Bedeiht, attended the enthronement ceremony of the new emperor of the Beltz Empire, Carloyd.

There were those among the aristocrats of the empire who did not look too kindly upon a visitor from foreign nation. There were also those who still did

not acknowledge Carloyd as the new emperor. Carloyd's younger brothers were also likely still keeping a vigilant eye on the throne.

And that wasn't all; there were still many people who, when Alois had pretended to be the emperor's brother, had agreed with his plan to invade the countries on the other side of the mountains, even without being brainwashed.

The conditions in the Beltz Empire were ripe for an internal conflict to break out.

Alexis, who had come as a foreign representative, was calm and composed even in that heated atmosphere.

Then, when Emperor Carloyd produced rain using the magical tool that Bedeiht had given him as a gift, the attendees let out a wave of excited voices loud enough to shake the earth.

This magical tool was a product of the Kingdom of Bedeiht.

When Alexis explained that if Bedeiht and the Beltz Empire could establish diplomatic relations with each other, the empire would be able to import the tools regularly, he saw a change take place among the members of nobility who had before so deeply detested interactions with other nations.

That was proof of just how urgent the empire's food crisis was.

Emperor Carloyd's position was not yet secure. However, he seemed to earnestly agree with Alexis's advice not to rush things.

Although it would take time, some day his ideals would become reality.

After Alexis returned to Bedeiht, Crown Princess Sophia's pregnancy was announced. Gifts and words of congratulation came flooding in from all over.

Sophia's expression had remained stiff while Alexis was away, but once he'd safely returned, the relief she felt allowed it to return to its usual softness.

One weekend after those hectic days...

With the first stage of developing the magical tool complete and research for enchanted water now in Julius's care, Amelia went to attend another sleepover

at Marie's residence.

Sarge still had work left to do on the fertilizer, but since that work was in the sphere of earth magic, there wasn't much for her to help out with.

Sarge had encouraged her to go, and after he promised not to stay up all night, Amelia went to Marie's house.

At night, Marie, Liliane, Chloe, and Meena lay on the bed, which took up half the space in Marie's room, and chatted about what each of them thought the ideal couple looked like.

Everyone must have been thinking about their own futures now that Sophia was pregnant.

"I would say it's a couple who respect and support one another. I really revere Prince Julius," said Marie.

Liliane nodded along to her words, and then spoke of her own ideal.

"Even after we get married, I want us to continue inspiring each other to improve ourselves. Underneath it all, Kaid truly is strong."

Liliane and Kaid were planning to get married after Amelia graduated from the academy, but apparently she would also continue to serve as Amelia's guard.

Female knights were invaluable, so this was very reassuring for Amelia to hear.

"I want for Sol and me to always be able to get along like good friends. I think we could become that kind of married couple."

The fact that Meena and Sol got along well also made Amelia happy.

"Our engagement is on hold until I graduate, but if I can become Prince Est's fiancée again, I want to become someone strong who can support him," said Chloe serenely.

Est and Chloe had been meeting on a regular basis. They had both been concerned about their age difference, but the ambience that surrounded them when they were together was very close and comfortable, and even Amelia felt they suited each other well.

“How about you, Amelia?”

“Hmm...” At Marie’s prompting, Amelia answered after only a moment’s thought. “I think we already have the ideal relationship. I don’t think we’ll change much even after we’re married.”

She respected Sarge from the bottom of her heart and loved him more than anyone.

Marie giggled at Amelia’s quick response. “I already knew it, but you’re the most romantic of all of us, aren’t you, Amelia?”

“Yes, she is,” replied Liliane promptly.

Chloe and Meena also nodded. Feeling embarrassed, Amelia hid her face in a cushion.

“Oh honestly, don’t tease me!” she cried, and then they all looked at each other and laughed.

Amelia had friends she cherished and a fiancé she loved more than anything.

And the family she treasured would only continue to grow.

When she’d been hurt by Reese’s betrayal, she had never imagined she would be spending her days as happily as she was now.

On her way back to the royal castle from the slumber party, Amelia incidentally raised her head right as she was passing in front of the academy.

She could see the great hall next to the academy, and she was reminded of the words Sarge had said to her when they’d first met.

“The party is starting soon. Aren’t you going in?”

Everything had begun on that day.

Even without the power of reenactment magic at her disposal, Amelia could remember his voice and appearance with crystal clarity. No matter how many years passed, she knew her memory of that day would remain fresh in her mind, never fading.

Extra Story: Promised Happiness

The change of the seasons brought Amelia's third spring in the royal capital.

At the castle, she boarded a carriage by herself that brought her to the Royal Academy of Magic.

She only had one more year of wearing this uniform she'd grown used to. And although she'd just recently been riding in the carriage with her fiancé, she was now doing so alone.

Sarge and Marie, who were both one year older than Amelia, had graduated from the academy that same spring. There was no avoiding it: unfortunately, Amelia now had to be apart from Sarge.

But still, her level of knowledge was not up to par with his. There was much she needed to study on her own.

Last year was so eventful that I didn't spend much time in the laboratory. I really need to work hard now.

During her first diplomatic mission, she had gotten wrapped up in trouble and ended up being away from the kingdom longer than planned. And then there had been a period when she was spending most of her time in the castle rather than the laboratory as she helped Sarge develop the magical tool.

Now that things had settled down and she could finally resume attending the academy like normal, she would have to dedicate herself to her studies.

Also, Marie would be remaining at the laboratory as the vice director, acting in Julius's stead as he was occupied with other work.

Sol, Meena, and Princess Chloe, who was in Bedeiht as an exchange student, were also still attending the academy in the year below her, so Amelia would not be completely on her own.

The work on enchanted water, which had been entrusted to Julius, had gone smoothly, resulting in no issues with its safety or quality, so this spring, they would begin selling it to the general public. Since more domains had accordingly

decided to plant the selectively bred gree, they could expect this year's harvest to be greater than last year's. If there were no issues domestically, the kingdom would gradually begin exporting it to foreign nations as well.

It seemed the other countries were anticipating that this would happen, so once Bedeiht decided to export gree, the kingdom would become busy producing it.

"Hmm... Oh, and this too."

Amelia had gone to the laboratory, sat at her desk, and was now writing down the important parts of the data she'd collected.

From what she could tell by the data on last year's gree harvest in the Lenia domain, things had almost returned to the way they'd been before the crops were affected by cold-weather damage.

That's not just thanks to the enchanted water but also the fertilizer.

Amelia thought about what a good idea it had been for Sarge to use his growth-promoting fertilizer in the Lenia domain last year as an experiment right after he'd finished developing it.

Originally, it had been developed as a countermeasure to the cold-weather damage in the Kingdom of Janaki, but now they knew it would be effective in Bedeiht as well.

If they could sell the fertilizer to the general public along with enchanted water, crop yields would increase even more. Perhaps they could even return to the way things had been before they began suffering from the cold.

Amelia was writing up data comparing the last two years' worth of harvest yields in order to report them to Sarge. While she was engrossed in her work, she suddenly noticed a person's presence and raised her head.

"Lady Amelia," said Amelia's knight guard, Liliane, in a softly chiding tone. "It's about time for a break."

"Yes, you're right. Thanks."

More time had passed than she'd realized.

She pulled her eyes away from her documents, stretched out her spine, and

then leaned back in her chair, unconsciously letting out a sigh.

“It’s not good for you to be alone, Lady Amelia. When Prince Sarge was around, you would take the initiative in pausing your work.”

Liliane’s words made Amelia inadvertently look away.

It was as Liliane had said. When Amelia and Sarge had been working together, she would be the one to suggest taking breaks out of concern for his well-being. But now that she was alone, she would unintentionally fall deep into her work.

“That’s true.”

Amelia had always liked collecting data on harvests, even in the past, when she’d had no one to show her findings to.

“...I’ll take more care from now on,” she said, straightening her back. Liliane smiled at her softly.

Since Sarge’s brothers had told Amelia that they felt better when she was by his side, she couldn’t now very well betray that confidence they had in her.

“Shall I brew some tea?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Following Liliane’s advice, Amelia went to rest briefly in the lounge attached to the laboratory. Marie also came by for the same reason.

“Amelia,” she called out, her face relaxing at seeing her. “You’re finally taking a break. You were so focused, I didn’t want to disturb you.”

Liliane brewed some tea for Marie as well. Marie thanked her and accepted the tea, then breathed a deep sigh. “Though I am a bit jealous of your ability to focus so intently...”

“Well, you’ve been busy lately. You can’t help it,” said Amelia.

A faint blush rose to Marie’s fair cheeks. “I suppose you’re right. The wedding preparations have kept me very occupied.”

Marie, who had graduated in the spring, had begun preparing for her wedding to Third Prince Julius.

They were planning to wed in the fall, which was still some time away, but it

seemed they already had various things they needed to start preparing.

They'd already begun making her dress. In consultation with Sophia, Marie had decided on a considerably extravagant dress. It would surely befit a radiant beauty like Marie.

Amelia was entranced just imagining what Marie would look like.

"How lovely..." she muttered without thinking. Marie looked surprised, then she laughed cheerfully.

"Next year's already your turn, isn't it?"

"There's still a lot of time until then. It's a whole year away."

Thinking it would be a long year, Amelia sighed.

"Ever since he graduated, we can no longer go to school together every day, and we're doing our research separately... It's a bit lonely."

When Amelia spoke her honest thoughts aloud, Marie and Liliane exchanged a look and then giggled.

"Well, you were spending all your time together until recently, after all."

"I also feel a bit lonely now that I don't have as many opportunities to see Kaid."

Marie and Liliane both spoke up in support of Amelia, who had looked down in embarrassment as soon as she'd put her thoughts into words.

"Kaid has become Prince Sarge's official guard, after all."

Kaid, who had been Sarge's escort within the academy, had now been appointed as his official knight guard.

Amelia was reminded of the circumstances under which Kaid had become Sarge's escort in the first place.

It was around the time when she'd first met the prince. Originally, his escorts had been other students in the same year, and he would have been appointed a knight as a guard after graduating.

However, in Sarge's case, the student escorts were unable to handle him, as he had a habit of moving about the academy on his own, so Crown Prince Alexis

had recommended Kaid, a member of the knights' order, to be his guard.

Whereas previously Kaid had only been by Sarge's side within the academy grounds, now that he was his official knight guard, he would be with him everywhere except for within the private living quarters of the royal family.

"Being Prince Sarge's guard must be difficult," said Marie.

In response, Liliane shook her head.

"Not at all. Since the prince spends most of his time in the library within the royal living quarters, Kaid is on standby more often than not. He said it's more taxing when Prince Alexis catches him while he's on standby and makes him train with him."

"Actually, I think I might have seen something like that happen yesterday," said Amelia.

Yesterday, when she'd returned from the academy, she'd seen Alexis happily walking along with Kaid in tow. It had seemed like Kaid was grumbling about something or other, but Alexis hadn't been paying him any mind. Their behavior was like that of close friends who had known each other a long time.

"Prince Alexis is still training even though he's been so busy," uttered Marie with admiration.

As she'd said, Crown Prince Alexis was frequently out of the country conversing with the representatives of both the Kingdom of Janaki and the Beltz Empire. With Janaki, he was discussing their current state of affairs and Sarge's improvements to the magical growth-promoting fertilizer. With the empire, he was discussing the future of their diplomatic relations as well as how to handle Alois, who was currently in the custody of Bedeiht.

There were also ongoing discussions regarding business dealings for the rain-producing magical tool.

Despite all that occupying Alexis's time, he never looked tired and was always moving about actively. It was very heartening to see.

I suppose that must be difficult for the people attending on him, though... Amelia thought.

It seemed there were many other people who were made to keep pace with Alexis's level of activity, just like Kaid.

"Princess Sophia also seems worried about him being too busy," said Marie, who had been frequently visiting Sophia to consult her about the wedding.

But Liliane, who knew Alexis well, laughed and responded, "I am positive Prince Alexis will have no problem. He's received permission from the king of Janaki and the emperor to use transportation magic, so moving between the countries does not take him much time. Even if Princess Sophia goes into labor early, he will be able to return home at once."

Liliane's words reminded Amelia that the crown prince and princess were expecting their child in just six months.

Alexis, who loved his family deeply, was taking even greater care of Sophia since he'd learned that she was pregnant. Apparently, his mother the queen had scolded him for his overprotectiveness, saying that it also wasn't good for the princess to not move around at all.

But Sophia looked to be in good health and had just said, with a troubled look, that she was merely taking care not to overeat.

Sarge, who had told Amelia all that, also seemed very excited for the baby to be born.

"Once the baby's born, I'll be an uncle," he told Amelia happily.

That wasn't limited to Sarge alone. Est and Julius were also looking forward to the birth of their new niece or nephew.

And of course Amelia was also eagerly awaiting the day when she would meet the baby.

Sophia, too, seemed to be in very high spirits. She'd always been beautiful, but ever since she became pregnant, she'd grown even more so and now seemed almost to glow.

Whether the baby took after her or Alexis, it would surely be a lovely, sweet child.

"The kingdom will soon be filled with celebrations, so please make sure to

look after your health, Lady Amelia.”

As Liliane cautioned her gently, Amelia nodded.

“Yes, I will. There’s so much to look forward to.”

Starting this year, the Kingdom of Bedeiht would see one auspicious occasion after another.

Around summertime, Crown Prince Alexis’s child would be born.

Then, in the autumn, Julius and Marie would be getting married.

Furthermore, next year, Amelia would graduate from the academy, and preparations would begin for her wedding to Sarge. Liliane would likely also be getting married to Kaid around the same time.

Even after they wedded, they would continue to work as Amelia and Sarge’s guards.

And then, in the autumn of next year, Est and Princess Chloe of Janaki were planning to hold a party announcing their engagement. Due to the events of last year, their engagement had been put on hold, but now, after a series of favorable interactions, they were rebuilding it.

The two were planning to wed after Chloe graduated from the academy. She was the same age as Amelia, but when she arrived as an exchange student last year, she had decided to enroll as a first-year student rather than a second-year, in order to learn the fundamentals of magic.

Sol and Meena, who were in the same year as Chloe, were also planning to get married after graduating.

In order for each of those couples to be happy, and for that happiness to last, the peace of this continent would have to be protected.

There’s still so much to do.

Amelia gazed at her own hand. Around her finger was the ring Sarge had given to her.

He’d created it specially for her—the sole magical tool of its kind in existence at the time.

When Amelia had been attacked by Alois of the Beltz Empire, this magical tool had saved her.

At some point, it had become a habit for her to gaze at this ring whenever she was pondering something.

The kingdom's countermeasures against the cold weather are perfect. Sarge's new variety of gree will be spread even farther with the popularization of enchanted water. And they've begun trying out the growth-promoting fertilizer in Janaki too. If that all goes according to plan, that should solve their food problem.

The fertilizer was Sarge's creation, so there shouldn't be too many issues with it.

If Janaki could recover from their food issues, then they could resume exporting food to the kingdoms of Niida and Sorina as they had done in the past.

Of course, if Niida and Sorina also sought advice for combating the cold-weather damage, Sarge and Amelia would both put all their effort into coming up with a solution. In particular, Sorina, which was a thriving dairy farming country filled with grassland, had apparently put in requests for the growth-promoting fertilizer.

Of course, Bedeiht intended to meet their expectations and export the fertilizer to them, but first they had to guarantee they could produce enough of it. Earth mages were already precious, and Amelia didn't want to put too great a burden on Sarge either.

It makes me think that what happened to Reese was a waste...

Remembering her former fiancé, Amelia sighed.

He had not only betrayed Amelia but was currently imprisoned for his crime of conspiring with the Beltz Empire. Rightfully, his magic power had been sealed.

However, he was a wielder of that precious earth magic.

"What's wrong, Amelia?" Marie, who was sitting in front of her, asked her in a

worried tone.

Amelia was reminded that she was in the lounge of the Royal Magic Research Institute, and that Liliane had just cautioned her to take care of her health.

Since she had let out a sigh while looking at her ring with a grave expression, Marie must have been concerned that something had happened.

“Oh, nothing’s wrong,” Amelia responded, hastily shaking her head.

Amelia had become lost in her thoughts, even forgetting that she was currently with Marie and Liliane.

“But...”

“Really, there’s nothing wrong. I was just thinking about how we’ll have to produce the growth-promoting fertilizer, and that what happened with Reese was such a waste.”

“By Reese, do you mean your ex-fiancé?” Marie asked with surprise.

Amelia nodded deeply. “Yes, that’s right.”

“You say it was...a waste?” Liliane asked, puzzled.

“I do. Leaving this kingdom made me see just how valuable people who can use magic are.”

All nobles in the Kingdom of Bedeiht could wield magic, so Amelia, who had never before left the nation, hadn’t yet realized its value. But once she’d left on her diplomatic mission, she’d come to understand well how precious mages were in other countries.

“I know that it needs to be strictly controlled, since it’s so much power for one person to hold, but when I think about earth magic and how few people can use it, I can’t help but feel that Reese’s fate is a bit of a waste.”

“You sure are peculiar, Amelia,” replied Marie with an astonished expression. “I can’t believe you’re saying something like that after what you went through.”

“The fact that you can say that just shows how happy you are now, Lady Amelia,” Liliane kindly followed up, and she was exactly right.

It was true that Reese’s betrayal had been a painful experience. Not

understanding what was going on, just having to endure the isolation and the malice of the people around her, had been incredibly difficult.

But just as Liliane had said, it was because Amelia was as happy as she was now that she could think that way.

Amelia had Sarge by her side.

And she had kind friends who worried about her.

Plus, Reese wasn't the only one whose fate she felt was a waste.

Sarah, Reese's paramour, was a water mage, and the marquis's daughter who had harassed Amelia and gotten expelled over it was a fire mage.

Either of them would have been considered an exceptional asset in the Beltz Empire.

Amelia thought of that nation across the mountain range.

Right now, that empire is going through a period of rebirth.

Alexis had held several discussions with the new emperor, Carloyd.

There were still those in the empire who disliked the idea of interacting with other nations; likewise, there remained the antagonism of Carloyd's brothers, who had not abandoned their designs on the throne. Despite that, the nation seemed to be stabilizing somewhat thanks to the rain-producing magical tool prototype they'd received from Bedeiht.

Many people had pushed back against Carloyd's rapid reforms, but he wasn't the despot the previous emperors had been. Instead of relying solely on the magic tool, he was also attempting to open a dialogue with his brothers and the forces that opposed him.

Alexis seemed to have taken a liking to Carloyd's sincerity and went to meet with him frequently.

Of course, he might also have been doing that in order to keep watch on the movements occurring within the empire.

If, for example, Carloyd were to fall before completing his goals, there was a possibility that the empire would return to being a dictatorship.

“There’s no doubt that earth magic is very valuable, but I just can’t forgive the person who did all those things to you. Besides, he wasn’t simply expelled.”

Marie’s indignant voice reached Amelia, who had once again gotten lost in her thoughts.

Amelia turned to face her, thinking to herself that she shouldn’t be preoccupied with other matters while her friend was getting upset on her behalf.

“...You’re right.”

Emperor Carloyd was also looking into past incidents that the Beltz Empire might have been involved in. As a result of his investigation, he’d found that Alois’s grandmother had not been the only person who had been kidnapped.

The other victims had all been magic users, with the purpose of their kidnapping being for the empire to get a hold of their power.

The empire had even attempted to kidnap Sarge, the fourth prince of Bedeiht, and it seemed that the emperor of the time hadn’t been the only one involved in those incidents. The ones who had gotten in touch with Reese and instigated him to try to take Amelia away to the empire were part of an influential noble family.

Carloyd, who was taking the situation very seriously, was proceeding with a full-scale investigation.

I don’t think Reese meant to betray Bedeiht. He’s not the kind of person who would do something so outrageous.

Reese had been expelled from the Royal Academy of Magic, which effectively closed off his future. And so, not knowing what to do and wanting to escape from the reality of his situation, he must have decided to run away to the Beltz Empire because he’d been told he was needed there.

Crimes needed to be atoned for.

However, the fact that Amelia felt that he should have some sort of redemption must have been because, as Liliane had said, she now had Sarge by her side.

She was filled with the love he gave her.

So even though Reese had betrayed her in the past, she could now think of him from the viewpoint of a researcher.

After they had a pleasant chat and promised each other they would have another sleepover, Amelia returned to her work.

Marie was also busy preparing for her wedding, so they hadn't been able to have a sleepover recently. Perhaps it would be good for them to all gather together at Marie's residence again before long.

But first, I need to finish this.

Focusing her thoughts, Amelia managed to compile all the data before the end of the school day.

Once Amelia returned to the royal castle, she immediately changed clothes and briefly fixed herself up to go hand over the data she'd compiled to Sarge. It wasn't an urgent matter, but perhaps because she had just been thinking about Reese, she strongly wished to see Sarge.

Ah...

But when she arrived at the library, she saw not only Sarge but also Alexis, who seldom visited them here.

The two of them were intently discussing the rain-producing magical tools they were providing to the Beltz Empire.

I shouldn't disturb them.

While she was disappointed, Alexis had taken time out of his busy schedule to call on him, so she decided it was better to save her business for later. With that thought in mind, she made to leave the library.

However, before she could, Sarge noticed her and quickly called out to her to stop.

"Amelia, perfect timing."

He stood up and extended a hand to her.

"Alec and I were just discussing how to improve on the magical tool. Would you mind lending your help as well?"

"Gladly," she responded, smiling as she decided to help them.

The prototype had operated smoothly with zero malfunctions, but since the entire nation needed it, the magic stone had quickly been used up. The empire wasn't worried about the cost, so they'd asked if Bedeiht could modify the tool so that it would withstand longer periods of activation.

"We'll need to reexamine the amount of magic the gems can hold."

"There's also a way to increase the number of magic stones that can be used in the tool."

At Sarge's direction, Amelia presented her data and offered her opinion when asked.

As Alexis watched over the two of them working, he spoke up. “Emperor Carloyd has been working very hard all on his own. He’s really trying not to rely too heavily on foreign aid, including the magical tool. While I admire his spirit, I’m concerned he’ll wear himself out sooner than later.”

It was as Alexis said; there was a limit to what Carloyd alone could do for the empire in its unstable condition.

However, the empire had almost no history of interaction with other nations. There were also many among the imperial nobility who despised any interference from foreign countries.

To make matters worse, by giving the empire the magical tool, they’d created a situation in which the empire was indebted to Bedeiht. Carloyd must have been thinking that he didn’t want to rely on the aid of foreign nations any more than they already were.

Alexis ruminated for a bit before looking at Amelia, seemingly having decided upon something.

“I’ve actually been thinking of letting Alois become Emperor Carloyd’s advisor.”

“You have...?” Amelia responded reflexively.

Right now, Alois was confined within the royal castle of Bedeiht.

His mother had been raised as the previous emperor’s sister, but really, she had been the daughter of a princess of Bedeiht.

Alexis and Sarge regarded him as a blood relation. That was why they were holding him within the castle rather than in the prison of the knights’ order.

Of course, the castle was protected by a barrier made with light magic, so Alois could not escape.

At Amelia’s words, Alexis nodded calmly.

“That’s right. Although Alois does not have imperial blood, he grew up in the imperial castle as the princess’s son. Even Carloyd said he regards Alois as his cousin despite the fact that they’re not related by blood.”

“And,” Alexis continued, “I don’t believe Alois will try to start any more

trouble.”

After that whole affair, Alexis had repeatedly gone to the Kingdom of Janaki in order to search for any traces left behind by the kidnapped princess and the knight from the empire. He’d found that although the princess and the knight had regrettably already passed away, the two of them had had another daughter together.

She was Alois’s aunt.

While Alois’s mother had taken after her father’s black hair, his aunt looked more like the princess, with pale golden hair. Since she would have stood out in Janaki, where everyone had either black or brown hair, she often hid her blond hair by wearing a hood.

Her name was Lynna.

Unlike Alois’s mother, Lynna had heard the entire story from her mother, so Alexis said that even when he had sprung a visit on her, she hadn’t been particularly surprised and had welcomed him imperturbably.

However, she had been quite shocked to learn about the unfortunate circumstances of the older sister she’d never met, as well as those of her son, Alois.

“Could you please give this to my sister’s son?” she’d asked Alexis, handing over the diary her mother had left behind.

“A diary?”

“Yes. If he reads this, I’m sure he’ll understand just how much my mother worried over my sister whom she left behind.”

After she’d said that, she quietly broke down into tears.

As Lynna had said, the princess had written in her diary the feelings of guilt and concern she’d felt for the daughter she’d abandoned.

There were also daily records of the many attempts to cross the mountains that the princess and her husband, the imperial knight, had undertaken in search of their lost daughter.

Their attempts had gone on for decades, until one day, they never returned

from their latest journey over the mountain range.

When she'd heard that story, Amelia had been unable to stop herself from shedding tears.

It was such a sad, heartbreaking story.

Alois's aunt had a daughter who, like him, could use a little magic. Alexis returned to Bedeiht with said daughter—Alois's cousin, whose name was Lyriann—along with the diary.

Lyriann was a beautiful woman with the same golden hair as her mother.

That, in combination with her fair skin and blue eyes, apparently made her the living picture of her grandmother. Amelia felt that Lyriann resembled Alexis and Sarge, who had the same golden-colored hair. The family likeness was strong.

Once Lyriann heard about how Alois had grown up and the crimes he'd committed, she'd said it pained her heart and had pleaded with Alexis to bring her to Bedeiht so she could meet him.

At first, Alois hadn't believed his grandmother's diary.

He'd decried it as a forgery and said that he believed his own mother's words over some diary.

But once he saw Lyriann in person, he could sense that the magic she possessed was the same as his own.

"That power—it can't be... Did my mother really have a younger sister?"

Alois, who had been locked up in the castle cellar and forced to wear a magic-sealing bracelet, fixed Lyriann with an expression of disbelief.

"Yes. I've also heard about my aunt from my mother. Please, believe grandmother's diary. It's all true, every word of it."

The teary appeal of Lyriann, who held the same type of magical power that he did, seemed to move Alois's heart at last.

Afterwards, Alois and Lyriann began to meet frequently under the watchful eye of Alexis.

In addition to the diary, Lyriann told Alois everything she'd heard from her own mother.

Naturally, Alois was left speechless when he heard that his grandmother and grandfather had tried to cross the mountains many times over in order to save their daughter, his mother, only to ultimately perish in those mountains.

"Mother...wasn't abandoned?"

More than the reenactment magic that had shown him the truth, the words of the cousin who shared his power seemed to resonate in his heart.

"My mother, your aunt, was always worried about her sister. She believed she would one day meet her. But I'm sure she would be delighted to be able to meet you too."

He really did have blood relatives.

That truth seemed to mend Alois's heart.

Thereafter, he began to accept what had happened in the past, even going so far as to send his apologies to Chloe and Amelia through Alexis.

He was able to do so because Lyriann stayed by his side, supporting him and telling him the painful truth.

"...I see." Amelia had come to know about all that through Sarge, so she was able to agree with Alexis's proposal. She continued firmly, "I have no objections to that. He's also been a victim, in a sense."

The situation had undoubtedly been terrifying for her, but Sarge's magical tool had saved her. Also, the one who had been in the wrong was the emperor of two generations prior who had abducted the princess of Bedeiht. If that emperor hadn't lied to Alois's mother that her own mother had abandoned her, Alois would not have done what he had.

"Is that right? Thank you. Chloe said the same thing. In that case, I'll proceed accordingly." Alexis looked relieved.

Of course, he couldn't allow Alois, who had caused such turmoil, to return to the empire just like that. Alois would have to keep wearing the magic-sealing bracelet as a condition of his freedom.

“Lyriann said she would go to the empire with Alois. The royal blood of Bedeiht runs in her veins, just as it does in his, meaning she’s part of our family. I want to help them as much as we can.”

Sarge seemed to agree, as he was nodding earnestly at his brother’s words.

There were sure to be those who would think Alois was getting off too lightly. In fact, some people had already been expressing that opinion in Janaki. However, after several discussions, not only Alexis but the entire royal family of Bedeiht had concluded that they wanted to make every effort to allow Alois the opportunity to start over.

“After all, it was our grandfather who refused the princess’s appeals to let her go back for her daughter, making no attempt to rescue Alois’s mother. That’s why Alois’s crimes are not his alone.”

His Majesty the King also agreed with Alexis’s assessment.

Although he’d gone about it by the wrong means, Alois had been working to do something for the Beltz Empire, which was suffering from desertification.

Perhaps he could now be trusted to assist Carloyd alongside Lyriann.

Surely Lyriann could become Alois’s support.

Alexis had been watching Sarge and Amelia do their research, wanting to tell them about all that. Then, relieved after obtaining Amelia’s acknowledgment, he made to leave. Amelia called out to stop him.

“Um, Prince Alexis...” She hesitated to continue but did so anyway. “Actually, I was thinking about something similar.”

Thinking it was a good opportunity, Amelia expressed to Alexis her thoughts regarding those who had been expelled from school and had their magic sealed.

“...It’s true that magical ability is a precious resource for other countries. I understand why you feel what happened to Reese, who has the rare earth affinity, was a waste. Especially considering what we have to do going forward.” Alexis hadn’t refuted Amelia’s opinion and had instead listened to her quietly. “As Carloyd’s investigation moves forward, it’ll become clear just who instigated Reese and what they told him. Depending on what the emperor finds out, it’s

possible Reese's punishment will be lightened."

Amelia thought it would be better if those atoning for crimes were not simply imprisoned with their magic sealed but made to work for the kingdom instead. Alexis understood that as well.

"...Sarge, you look unhappy."

But Alexis's next words made Amelia look at Sarge with a start.

As she did, she saw that, as Alexis had said, Sarge had a conflicted expression. When she and Alexis looked at him, he calmly voiced his own opinion.

"I just can't bring myself to pardon the man who used such deplorable means to entrap Amelia. No matter how much he was manipulated by the imperials, even before that, it was his own scheme to isolate Amelia."

"Sarge..."

He was thinking of her.

But for the first time, they were clearly divided on an issue.

"Well, yes, the people who have had their magic sealed have had that done to them for a reason. It's not as if we can easily release them from that. But I will hear your opinion out," Alexis told Amelia, who had been unsure how to respond.

"Of course. I apologize for saying something so impertinent."

"No, no, I want you to continue speaking whatever's on your mind," he said, smiling kindly at her.

Feeling reassured by his smile, Amelia nodded.

Even after Alexis left, Amelia and Sarge proceeded with their work on improving the magical tool together. While Amelia was thinking hard about the magical formula, she suddenly felt bothered by what they'd talked about earlier, and she looked at Sarge.

"What's wrong?"

Had he sensed her gaze on him? He'd looked up and asked her that

quizzically.

“Oh, um... It’s just, I said something selfish earlier...”

“Something selfish?”

He didn’t immediately grasp what she was referring to.

“Um, about Reese...”

“Oh, that,” he said, nodding in acknowledgment. He continued, “That was your own opinion, Amelia. It wasn’t selfish. I just can’t forgive what he did.”

“But...”

If Reese were contributing to the kingdom as part of his atonement for his crime, then he would be assigned to work on the earth magic that Sarge had developed. So if Sarge himself was against it, then Amelia had no intention of pressing her point.

“I just don’t want to increase the burden on you. That’s why I think it was a waste for Reese to have his power sealed away, since he can use earth magic.”

However, it was another story with Alois, whose situation was more complicated. Amelia covered her face with her hands, embarrassed by what she had said to Alexis on impulse.

“So you suggested that not because Reese is your ex-fiancé but because he’s an earth mage?”

“Yes, that’s right. That was the only reason.”

Amelia nodded repeatedly, and Sarge looked a bit relieved.

“...So that was it.”

He seemed to have thought that Amelia had spoken out of concern for Reese. Amelia continued affirming his words in order to make him understand that that wasn’t the case.

“I no longer hold any care for Reese. Also, I really haven’t been thinking about the past as much recently. Even though his behavior was cruel, all that is behind me now,” she said, smiling at him. “Liliane also said that it’s because I’m happy now that I can think that way. I think she’s right.”

“I see.” Sarge nodded and looked at Amelia with a gentle expression.

His direct gaze made her feel a little embarrassed.

Even so, she was happy he was looking at her so intently, and she called out his name, puzzled.

“...Um, Sarge?”

“Knowing you, I thought you’d brought that up because you were worried about Reese’s future. But that’s not the case, is it?”

“No, it’s not. The one I’m worried about is *you*!”

She felt that Reese had reaped what he’d sown.

When she’d given her hasty response, Sarge looked surprised, and then a soft, kind smile appeared on his face.

“I also might have been thinking a little emotionally because of what happened to you. He needs to repent of his crimes, but I’ll try to be more forward focused too.”

Each of them had only been thinking of the other, just as they had been when they were in Janaki on their diplomatic mission. Realizing that, the two looked at each other and laughed.

“Speaking of which, in a few days I’ll be going to the Kingdom of Niida to examine their minerals and gemstones,” Sarge told her, as if suddenly remembering.

“The Kingdom of Niida?” Amelia echoed, surprised by the sudden news.

Rather than for diplomacy, he was going to examine the mines.

“That’s right. They have abundant minerals, and I’ve heard there are also gems that aren’t found in our kingdom. I’m thinking I can find a gemstone that is more suitable for the magical tool.”

“Are you going alone?”

“No, I’ll be going with Kaid and Alec.”

“I see...”

If those two would be with him, then she wouldn't have to worry about his safety.

Though Kaid might have a difficult time...

Amelia was also interested in the minerals and gemstones in Niida. *I want to come too*, she wanted to say, but she swallowed those words and dropped her gaze.

Unlike Sarge, who had graduated from the academy, Amelia was still a student. If she wasn't traveling on official business, as she had to Janaki, she had to prioritize her studies.

Sarge seemed to understand what Amelia was feeling. He gently squeezed her hand.

"I know it's just one more year, but I can't help but feel lonely being away from you for so long. Even though that used to be the norm for me before we met," he said. Then, with a dry laugh, he continued, "I've also grown to be quite selfish."

"That's not true!" Amelia unthinkingly exclaimed, refuting his words in a voice loud enough to surprise him. "I've also been feeling lonely. It makes me happy to know that you've been feeling the same way," she said, gently squeezing his hand back. Then, she suggested timidly, "You're a researcher, so why don't we go to the laboratory together occasionally? I know how busy you are, though, so asking this makes me the selfish one."

"There's no way I could think you're being selfish for wanting to be with me. You know, Kaid has also been telling me that I shouldn't stay shut up in the library all the time, and that I should go out... Why don't we do so together tomorrow?"

There was also a certain chance that Kaid wanted to get away from Alexis.

Knowing that, Amelia couldn't help but giggle.

And so, the very next day, the two of them decided to go to the laboratory together.

It had been a while since they last boarded the carriage to the lab together. Kaid and Liliane were with them as their guards. Kaid looked relieved at being freed from Alexis.

With Sarge by her side, the familiar journey passed by in the blink of an eye.

They entered the laboratory next to the academy, where Marie greeted Sarge with surprise, then shot a glance at Amelia and whispered, “Good for you!” Amelia gave her a firm nod.

The laboratory was quieter than usual with Sarge there. People must have been trying not to disturb him. However, it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence. Rather, many people said that with the right amount of tension in the air, they were able to make progress on their research.

When the afternoon break arrived, Sarge and Amelia headed for their usual spot.

“I’ll be going to Janaki in the autumn to see the results of the experiments with the newly developed fertilizer. Since I’ll be going on official business, I’d like you to come with me as the one who thought up the idea.”

“Of course I’ll come,” Amelia agreed, happy that he had asked.

Going out on official duty would take priority over school.

And what was more, she would be able to go with Sarge.

On their first diplomatic mission, they’d had to act in separate roles, but the thought that this time they would be going together made her happy from the bottom of her heart.

“Right—before that, I’m also planning to go to the Beltz Empire with Alec to see the results of the magical tool. I also want to examine the desert soil. That will probably happen over the long summer holiday.”

Sarge had also been kept fairly busy ever since graduating from the academy.

“Well...if you’ll be going during the summer holiday, I would like to come too. I would like to see the people who were so kind to me and learn how they are doing.”

Sarge immediately agreed to her request. “All right. In that case, I’ll talk to my

brother about it.”

Her schedule for the rest of the year was gradually filling up. If she kept as busy as she planned to, then this year was sure to go by quickly.

Next year, after she officially became a princess, she would be even busier.

Marie and Sophia would become her sisters-in-law, and Alexis, Est, and Julius her brothers-in-law.

Then, when Sol and Meena married, both Meena and Kaid would become her relatives, along with Liliane once she and Kaid married.

And then maybe someday Chloe could also become her sister-in-law.

At Marie’s suggestion, the girls had discussed continuing to have periodic sleepovers even after they were all married. Surely Sophia would join them as well.

Amelia looked up at Sarge, who was next to her.

She knew that he was developing another new magical tool in secret.

It was another magical tool in the shape of a ring, like the one she never took off for even an instant, but with some refinements.

It was something he had been working on for a long time in preparation for their wedding next year.

In all likelihood, he would be giving it to her as her wedding ring.

His plan for the design was to inlay green and blue gemstones—the color of his and her eyes, respectively—in gold craftwork, the color of his hair. She had caught sight of the designs one day when she’d found him sleeping in the library and tried to tidy up his documents. The sight of it had made her unbelievably happy, so much so that she had nearly been brought to tears.

He really treasured her that much.

To think, he’s going to give me a magical tool as a wedding ring...

She knew that one of the reasons he was going to Niida was to find a fitting gemstone for that magical tool. That would explain why he was going without her.

If it were a simple survey trip, then even though she had school to attend, Sarge would have taken her with him. He wouldn't have waited to tell her about his plans until after he'd made them.

Of course he was also going to examine the ores and gems, but the reason he hadn't talked to her about it was because he was going there for her sake.

Knowing that was the reason, Amelia hadn't said she wanted to go.

I also have things I need to prepare while he's away.

Once she found out about the wedding ring, Amelia had wanted to give him something in return. She was currently in the middle of preparing a magical tool in the shape of a bracelet, with some consultation from Julius.

While she couldn't imbue it with complex magic like Sarge could, it would hold her own healing magic to act as his protection.

She wanted to make progress on that tool while he was out of the country.

After hearing what Amelia was going to do, Julius had said he also wanted to give Marie something, so they were planning to work on another tool together. Since both Julius and Amelia were water mages, she could teach him how to make it.

Amelia had learned the mechanics of magical tools by reading through Sarge's documents and watching him closely as he worked on one. She was sure she wouldn't have a problem making a tool infused with some simple healing magic.

Then, a few days later, Sarge headed for Niida with Alexis and Kaid.

Amelia, praying for his safe return, began constructing the magical tool bracelet with Julius in the castle library.

They weren't in the library within the royal living quarters but in the regular library, which had a librarian.

There was a reason for that.

"Since we'll just be putting simple healing magic into the gemstones, you can choose whichever one you like," Amelia explained, and not only to Julius.

Crown Princess Sophia was there too.

And so was Chloe, the princess of Janaki and Est's fiancée, who was in Bedeiht as an exchange student.

They were all water mages, and they all wished to give bracelets imbued with healing magic to their respective spouses and fiancés.

So, with Chloe joining them in the regular library, Amelia was in the process of teaching them all how to make a magical tool.

Everyone present was a kind, caring person. Seeing the serious expressions on all three of their faces, Amelia smiled softly.

"Whichever gemstone I like..." Sophia gazed at the sample gemstones lined up in front of her and picked up a sapphire, which matched the color of Alexis's eyes. "Maybe this?"

"It's got to be this one for Marie," Julius said, picking up a beautiful amethyst, which matched the color of Marie's eyes.

"And for Est, I'll go with something black."

Chloe picked an onyx, matching Est's black hair.

"And I'll use this."

Naturally, Amelia picked an emerald, the color of Sarge's eyes.

"Now, we'll infuse the gems with healing magic. It's a bit difficult, and you'll need to make sure not to put in too much magic or it will bre—"

"Ah."

"Hmm."

"Ahh..."

No sooner had she said that than all three of them destroyed their gemstones. Amelia gave a troubled laugh.

"If you put too much magic into the gemstone, it'll immediately break. Since we're using healing magic, you don't need to add a large amount."

All three nodded with earnest expressions.

However, that degree of restraint was incredibly difficult.

They tried many times over until finally they all were able to infuse their gems with healing magic.

Good thing I brought so many, Amelia thought with some relief.

Later, she could give the broken gemstones to Sarge to restore.

*Though, since there are so many, I'll have to bring them to him little by little, s*he thought as she gently placed them in a case. If she presented this large number of gems to him, he would undoubtedly ask her what she'd been experimenting on.

It had taken some time, but they had managed to make gems that would serve as the cores of their magical tools.

Now all that was left was to place the gems into the bracelets, which Amelia had prepared ahead of time after asking everyone's preferences.

"I brought this one for Princess Sophia. And this one is for Julius. As for Princess Chloe, this one here."

The bracelet Sophia had picked for Alexis was a large-ish one that seemed like it would suit him perfectly.

Julius had picked out something elegant and beautiful for Marie.

For Est, Chloe had selected something slender and light so as not to encumber him too much.

Amelia had refined the gemstones that would act as the cores so that they fit well into each of the bracelets, which were adorned with beautiful craftsmanship.

"Next we need to inlay the gemstone here. Since it's the core of the magical tool, we'll need to put some more magic into it to do so. But if the magic is too strong, the gem will break, so you'll need to be careful."

Listening to Amelia's explanation, all three put on determined expressions and set about making the magical tools for their partners.

Chloe, who had never had much magic power, seemed to have a difficult time

at first, but after saying she wanted to do her best on her own for Est's sake, she became more determined.

Although Amelia was concerned, she watched over Chloe with a smile.

As expected, Julius completed his right away.

Sophia and Chloe tried and failed several times, breaking their gemstones. But each time, they just started again from the beginning, infusing a new gemstone with healing magic, and tried again.

They spent the whole day doing this, until finally everyone had finished making their bracelets.

They all looked very satisfied holding the magical tools they'd made themselves.

"Thank you, Amelia. Once I give this healing magic-infused tool to Alexis, I think I can feel a little more reassured," said Sophia with a cheerful smile. She worried for Alexis, who was always rushing from country to country.

"The period before our wedding will also be the most dangerous time for Marie. Of course I intend to be by her side watching over her as much as I can, but I'll be able to rest easier knowing she has this bracelet when I'm away on official business," said Julius, stroking the bracelet lovingly. He was pressed by the preparations for his and Marie's wedding.

"I hope this can help to improve Prince Est's health some," Chloe said with a serious expression.

She was very concerned about her fiancé's poor health.

"It'll be all right. I'm sure the magic in your tool will protect Prince Est."

When Amelia told her that, Chloe's face finally broke into a smile.

Chloe and Est seemed to be building a good relationship, and the princess often spoke about how glad she was that she had come to study in Bedeiht, which also made Amelia happy to hear.

I've finally finished my magical tool too.

Amelia looked down at the magical tool she'd created. The thin gold bracelet

utilized an emerald, the color of Sarge's eyes, as its core. But unlike the bracelets made by the other three, hers also included an onyx and a sapphire.

Those were the colors of her own hair and eyes.

The magic stones she'd made were filled with her wish that her love would protect Sarge.

It had been very difficult to make three gemstones into a core, and she had made several prototypes in secret that had failed. But she felt a sense of relief now that she had been able to complete it while Sarge was away.

Around now, he was surely also searching for a gemstone for Amelia.

I really can't wait for next year...

Although she knew it was only a year away, she felt envious that Julius and Marie were getting married soon. She was anxiously awaiting her own wedding day, the day on which she would officially become Sarge's wife. She'd never felt that way with Reese, which was proof of just how happy she was right now.

Amelia suddenly recalled the conversation she'd had with her mother when she was back home.

"Considering all that happened, I was so worried about what would happen to you. But I'm glad to see you so happy now," her mother had told her, smiling with relief.

Amelia had felt that she had put her parents through a lot.

They were just a family of country nobles, but their daughter had suddenly become engaged to royalty, and their position had changed dramatically. That must have been a lot for them to deal with.

Furthermore, since they were cooperating with Sarge's research, the number of things they were asked for had also increased. She'd heard that since they now had to pay such careful attention to the farmland, her father had begun helping out Sol and was apparently struggling with the process of compiling data, since he was not used to doing so.

But then she decided that since her father had also put her through a lot, it was all right for him to struggle a bit. It was due to her father's obstinacy

regarding earth magic that Amelia had had such a hard time, after all.

Her mother, however, had always been on her side. She'd always offered her kind words, telling Amelia she could come to her if she were ever in any trouble. Amelia felt sorry that she had made her kind mother worry.

However, her mother had smiled and given her blessing, saying that she felt at ease as long as Amelia was happy. This was not because Sarge was a prince, nor because he was an excellent earth mage and botanist, but because he cherished Amelia and loved her deeply.

From the very start, that was all her mother had wanted in Amelia's partner.

I'm so happy that I met Sarge and fell in love with him, she thought, addressing her faraway mother.

Although she felt a bit sorry that she wasn't inheriting the Lenia domain, she knew she could count on her studious cousin and Meena.

Meena could also use earth magic. With those two in charge, the Lenia domain would see even more development.

Amelia looked out the window at the beautifully blooming flowers, signaling the coming of spring.

Her first spring in the capital, Amelia had been all alone, isolated from her peers.

But she had started her second spring feeling serene, surrounded by the people who were important to her.

And now, it was her third spring in the capital.

She knew that no matter how many more springs came, they would all be filled with happy moments spent with her loved ones.

That was what she believed.

Afterword

Hello, this is Micoto Sakurai.

Thank you for picking up volume 2 of *A Royal Rebound: Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm being Pampered by the Prince!*

I can't believe this is the second volume!

This work was originally serialized online. When I started publishing it online, I never thought it would be made into a book, and I was planning to complete the story in one volume.

It's really unbelievable to me that it's been published as a book, and that I was also able to put out a sequel.

This is all thanks to the people who followed the serialization online, as well as to all of you who picked up the novelized version.

Allow me to once again express my gratitude: thank you so much!

Also, a promotional video was even made at the time of the first book's release. Along with the wonderful illustrations by Kuroyuki-sensei, Manaka Iwami-sama and Nobunaga Shimazaki-sama provided voice acting for Amelia and Sarge, respectively.

It really turned out to be a beautiful, amazing video, so if you still haven't seen it, I encourage you to watch it. It's available to watch on Drecom's official site on the book summary page, as well as on the Drecom Media YouTube channel.

Also, there are promo videos for all of their other current releases, so please check out those works as well. I've already watched them all. Each video matches the feel of the individual works. They're really fantastic!

Also, the two voice actors who played Amelia and Sarge in the promo video created a bonus "voice insert" for the first volume. If you have a way to access them but still haven't listened, then by all means please do so!

I'm writing all the things I wasn't able to include in the first volume in the

second volume's afterword, but I'd also like to talk about the second volume now that I have the chance.

In this volume, Amelia leaves the Kingdom of Bedeiht on a diplomatic mission as Sarge's fiancée.

Amelia, who at first was merely Sarge's assistant, embarks on her official duty as someone who has grown to be a researcher in her own right and as someone who will one day become a member of the royal family.

I'm glad I was able to write about the "the ones pulling the strings" in the first volume—the Beltz Empire—and about Second Prince Est's fiancée, the foreign princess whose existence was only mentioned in the first volume.

I was also able to continue the story with the extra story in the print edition.

In the extra story, we learn more about the former fiancés expelled in the first book, and the mastermind in the second book, Alois.

I'd always planned for Alois to have a cousin, but I couldn't fit her into the main story, so I'm glad I was able to have her appear in the extra story. Her own life was also filled with ups and downs, so I would also like to try writing a spin-off story or something about that.

This work included a lot of characters, but my favorite was Marie.

Amelia is one year younger than Marie and Sarah, so if Sarah had had her eyes on Julius rather than Reese, then maybe she would have ended up in the villainess role. (Well, maybe not, since Julius wouldn't have been deceived by Sarah; he would have been able to use reenactment magic to expose her wrongdoings...)

I still have so much I want to write about, from Marie and Julius's wedding, Est and Chloe's wedding, and Alexis and Sophia's child. And of course, I want to write about Amelia and Sarge's future. I hope I'll be able to write about all of those in side stories or elsewhere.

Last but not least, I want to say something about the wonderful cover and illustrations drawn again by Kuroyuki-sensei. Thank you for making Amelia look so adorable and Sarge so handsome. Each time I received the rough drafts, I fainted from how beautiful they were.

I would also like to thank my editor for their continued help since the first volume. It’s all thanks to your guidance that the second volume was able to come together so beautifully. My thanks to you.

And also to you, everyone who picked up the second volume of this work following the first. It’s thanks to you that another volume was able to be published.

I hope we can meet again somewhere.