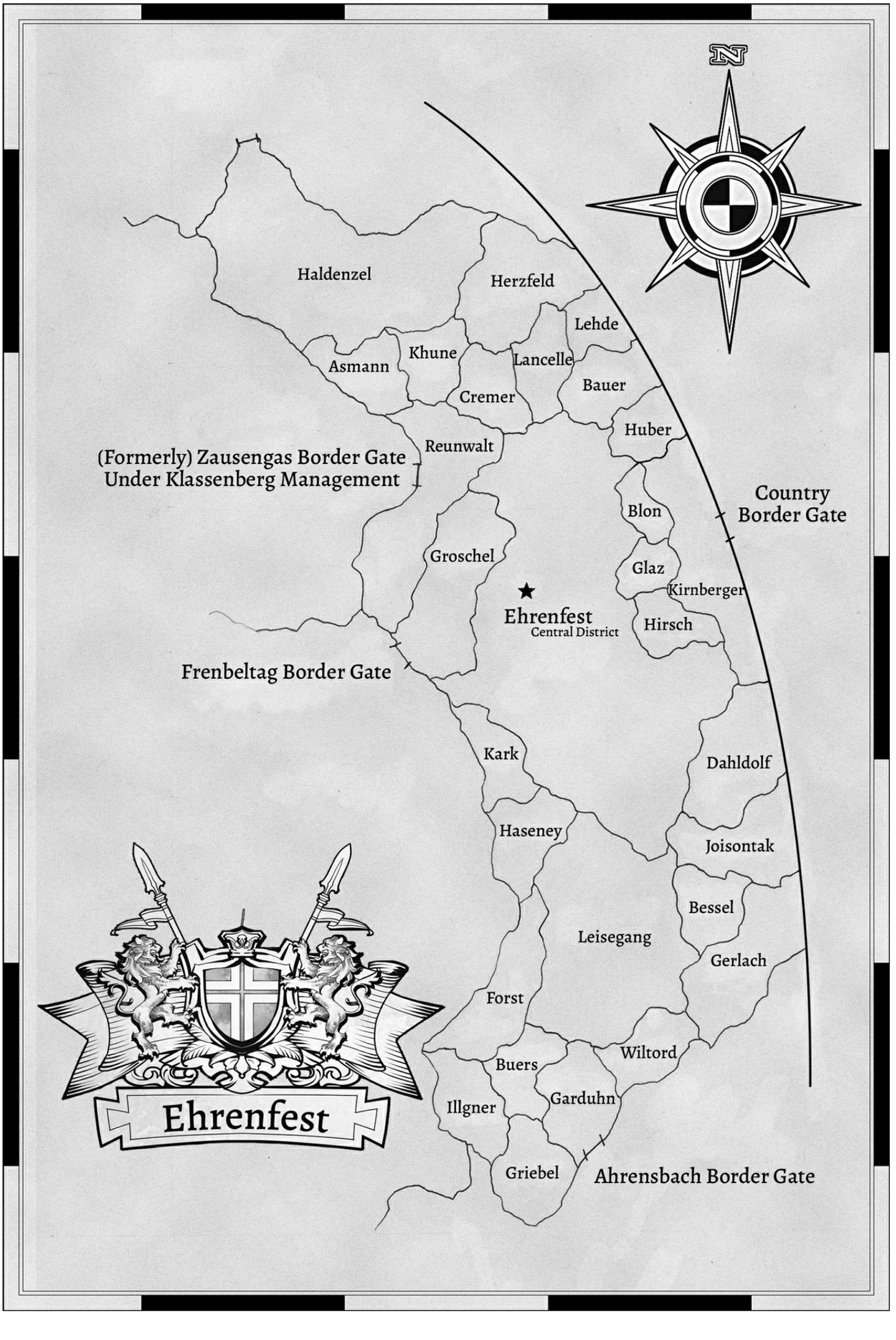
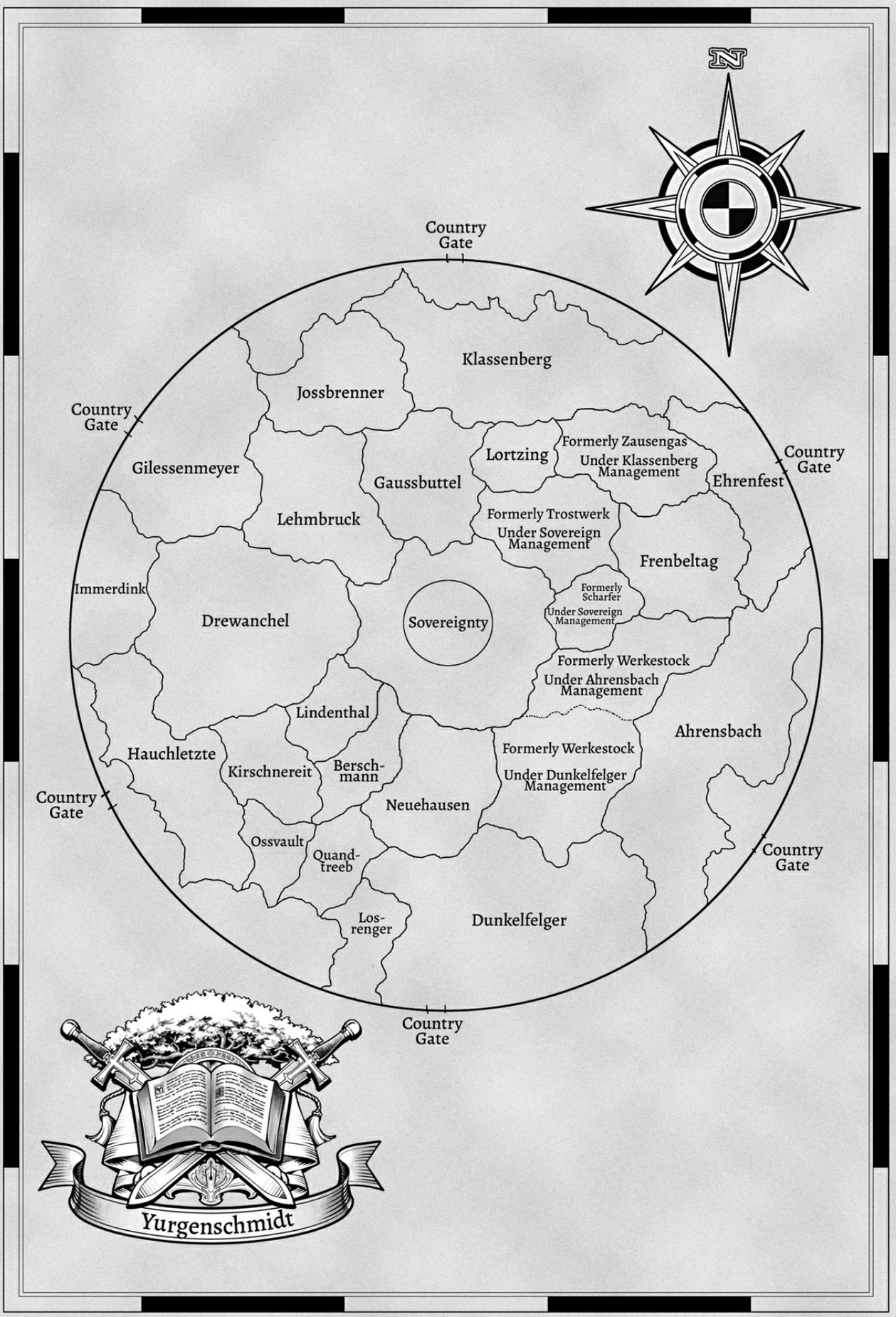

ASCENDANCE OF A BOOKWORM
I'll do anything to become a librarian!
Part 4 Founder of the Royal Academy's So-Called Library Committee Vol. 1
Author: Miya Kazuki
Illustrator: You Shiina






N
Haldenzel
Herzfeld
Lehde
Khune
Asmann
Lancelle
Bauer
Cremer
Huber
Reunwalt
(Formerly) Zausengas Border Gate
Under Klassenberg Management
Country
Border Gate
Blon
Groschel
Glaz
Kirnberger
Ehrenfest
Central District
Hirsch
Frenbeltag Border Gate
Kark
Dahldolf
Haseney
Joisontak
Bessel
Leisegang
Gerlach
Forst
Wiltord
Buers
Garduhn
Illgner
Griebel
Ahrensbach Border Gate
Ehrenfest


N
Country Gate
Klassenberg
Jossbrenner
Country Gate
Gilessenmeyer
Lortzing
Formerly Zausengas
Under Klassenberg Management
Country Gate
Ehrenfest
Gaussbuttel
Lehmbruck
Formerly Trostwerk
Under Sovereign Management
Frenbeltag
Immerdink
Formerly Scharfer
Under Sovereign Management
Drewanchel
Sovereignty
Formerly Werkestock
Under Ahrensbach Management
Lindenthal
Ahrensbach
Hauchletzte
Kirschnereit
Bersch-mann
Formerly Werkestock
Under Dunkelfelger Management
Country Gate
Neuehausen
Ossvault
Quand-treeb
Country Gate
Los-renger
Dunkelfelger
Country Gate
Yurgenschmidt

# Cast of Characters



## Rozemyne

The protagonist. Still looks like a seven-year-old due to having slept for two long years. She hasn't changed on the inside either. She will do anything she can to read books in the Royal Academy, which she is attending as a first-year.

## Ehrenfest's Archduke Candidates



### Wilfried

Sylvester's oldest son, Rozemyne's older brother, and a first-year at the Royal Academy.

### Charlotte

Sylvester's daughter, and Rozemyne's little sister by one year. Not yet attending school.

## Rozemyne's Guardians



### Ferdinand

Sylvester's half-brother and Rozemyne's guardian.

### Sylvester

The archduke of Ehrenfest. He adopted Rozemyne, making him her adoptive father.

### Florencia

Sylvester's wife and the mother of his three children. Rozemyne's adoptive mother.

### Karstedt

The commander of Ehrenfest's knights. Rozemyne's noble father.

### Elvira

Karstedt's first wife. Rozemyne's noble mother.

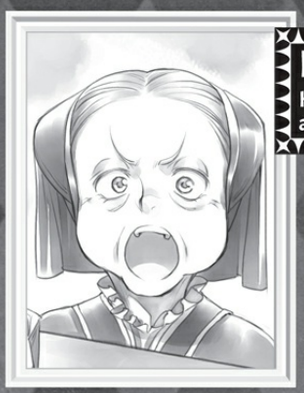
### Bonifatius

Sylvester's uncle, Karstedt's father, and Rozemyne's grandfather.

# Summary of Part Three:

Rozemyne was exceedingly busy after becoming a noble, with her work as the High Bishop and the archduke's adopted daughter having left her with very little spare time. She finished the printing press, sold karuta and playing cards in the castle, and made steady progress in her aim to proliferate books. The atmosphere became a lot more tense when Georgine visited, however. Wilfried fell victim to a political trap, and Charlotte was kidnapped, during which Rozemyne almost died of poisoning. Rozemyne was soaked in a jureve to recover, but when she awoke, two whole years had passed.

## Rozemyne's Retainers



**Rihyarda**
Head attendant. An archnoble who cared for Ferdinand, Sylvester, and Karstedt when they were kids.

**Lieseleta**
Angelica's little sister and a fourth-year apprentice medattendant.

**Brunhilde**
A third-year apprentice archattendant.

**Hartmut**
A fifth-year apprentice archscholar. Ottilie's son.

**Philine**
A first-year apprentice layscholar.



**Angelica**
Lieseleta's older sister and a sixth-year apprentice medknight.

**Leonore**
A fourth-year apprentice archknight.

**Traugott**
Rihyarda's grandson and a third-year apprentice archknight.

**Judithe**
A second-year apprentice medknight.



**Cornelius**
Karstedt's son and a fifth-year apprentice archknight.

**Damuel**
A layknight. Stayed in Ehrenfest.

**Ottilie**
Hartmut's mother and an archattendant. Stayed in Ehrenfest.

## Rozemyne's Personnel

| | |
|---|---|
| Ella | Personal chef. |
| Hugo | Personal chef. |
| Rosina | Personal musician. |

## Royal Academy

| | |
|---|---|
| Hirschur | Ehrenfest's dorm supervisor. Previously taught Ferdinand. |
| Primevere | Klassenberg's dorm supervisor. |
| Rauffen | Dunkelfelger's dorm supervisor. |
| Fraularm | Ahrensbach's dorm supervisor. |
| Solange | The Royal Academy's librarian. |

## Students of the Royal Academy

**Roderick**……An apprentice medscholar from Ehrenfest. Formerly of the Veronica faction.
**Anastasius**……The Sovereignty's second prince.
**Detlinde**……An archduke candidate from Ahrensbach. Georgine's daughter.
**Rudiger**……An archduke candidate from Frenbeltag.

## Other Royal Academy Figures

**Schwartz**……A library magic tool.
**Weiss**……A library magic tool.

## Other Nobles

**Eckhart**……Ferdinand's guard knight. Karstedt's son.
**Justus**……Ferdinand's scholar. Rihyarda's son.
**Lamprecht**……Wilfried's guard knight. Karstedt's son.
**Oswald**……Wilfried's head attendant.
**Brigitte**……Rozemyne's former guard knight who returned to Illgner.
**Moritz**……Wilfried's teacher and an archnoble.
**Georgine**……Ahrensbach's first wife. Sylvester's older sister.
**Veronica**……Sylvester's mother. Currently detained.

## Temple Attendants

**Fran**……In charge of the High Bishop's chambers.
**Zahm**……In charge of the High Bishop's chambers.
**Monika**……A cook who helps in the High Bishop's chambers.
**Gil**……In charge of the workshop.
**Fritz**……In charge of the workshop.
**Wilma**……In charge of the orphanage.
**Nicola**……A cook who helps in the High Bishop's chambers.

## Lower City Family

**Gunter**……Myne's dad.
**Effa**……Myne's mom.
**Tuuli**……Myne's older sister.
**Kamil**……Myne's younger brother.

## Lower City Merchants

**Benno**……Head of the Plantin Company.
**Mark**……Benno's right-hand man.
**Lutz**……A leherl apprentice.
**Otto**……Head of the Gilberta Company.
**Corinna**……A seamstress for the Gilberta Company.
**Damian**……Grandson of Gustav, the guildmaster.

## Gutenbergs

**Ingo**…… Foreman of a carpentry workshop.
**Zack**…… A smith. Comes up with ideas.
**Johann**…… A smith. Turns ideas into reality.
**Heidi**…… Ink craftswoman. Josef's wife.
**Josef**…… Ink craftsman. Heidi's husband.

## Other

**Volk**……A former gray priest who was bought by Illgner.
**Dirk**……An orphan forced to sign a submission contract with Count Bindewald.
**Delia**……Rozemyne's former attendant from when she was a shrine maiden.
**Lily**……A gray shrine maiden who returned to the orphanage after getting pregnant.

# Table of Contents


Cover

Color Illustrations

Map of Ehrenfest Duchy

Map of Yurgenschmidt

Characters

Prologue

Just Call Me Urashima Taro

Moving to the Castle

Dinnertime

Cramming and Preparations

The Gifting Ceremony

The Winter Playroom and Our Departure

My Retainers and Entering the Dormitory

The Better Grades Committee

The Advancement Ceremony and Fellowship Gatherings

Royalty and Nobles from Other Duchies

Math, Theology, and Controlling Mana

History, Geography, and Music

Mana Compression and Creating a Highbeast

The Fourth Step of Mana Compression

Registering at the Library

Schwartz and Weiss

Court Etiquette and Hirschur’s Visit

Schtappe Acquisition

My First Earthday

Dedication Whirl

Passing Highbeast Creation

Schtappe Fundamentals

Epilogue

A Productive Earthday

Myne Awakes

Afterword

A Comfy Life with My Family by You Shiina

The 2nd Ascendance of a Bookworm Character Poll!

Bonus High Resolution Illustrations

About J-Novel Club

Copyright

# Prologue

“Ferdinand, I think it’s about time you told me what happened over the past two years,” Rozemyne said with a firm look when the man in question arrived at the High Bishop’s chambers. She was clean and well dressed, no longer covered in the jureve. Her tone was bright and there was a liveliness in her golden eyes, but her muscles had atrophied so much over the past two years of sleep that they could no longer support her, so she was lying limp on a bench, completely immobile.

Not a single person in recorded Ehrenfest history had slept in a jureve for such a long time, so she would no doubt be a valuable research subject when it came to analyzing the effects of using one for such an extensive period.

Rozemyne noticed Ferdinand falling into thought after glancing down at her. “Well?” she asked, just barely managing to tap an impatient finger against the table. “Are we going to talk or not?”

“...There is much we cannot discuss here. May we move to the hidden room?”

Not even in the temple could one carelessly discuss what had happened in the castle. But rather than confirming the request with a nod, Rozemyne simply closed her eyes.

“I don’t mind going to the hidden room, but I can’t exactly walk.”

“A fair point. Have you felt any changes since waking up? Are you slowly regaining the ability to move certain parts of your body? Can you say how close you are to being as mobile as you used to be, preferably in the form of an estimated percentage?”

As Ferdinand started listing off every question that came to mind, Rozemyne gave a smile so bright that it was blatantly fake. “You really are a (mad scientist),” she said.

Ferdinand didn’t know what a “mad scientist” was, but he could tell it was an insult of some sort. Without a word, he flicked her on the forehead.

“Ouchie!” She cried out as she usually would, but she couldn’t reflexively rub her head. Her movements were too sluggish; it took her some time just to raise a hand.

*...If she is in this state now, just how long will it take for her muscles to recover enough for her to move normally? What needs to be done? She will ideally return to her usual self soon, but it is possible the process will take too long for her to attend the Royal Academy in time.*

Ferdinand silently opened the door to the hidden room, pondering what medicine and magic tools could be used to get Rozemyne out of this situation. Fran and Zahm carried her inside on the bench, then promptly exited and closed the door behind them. The moment they were gone, Rozemyne’s expression morphed into an unhappy frown.

“Just so you know, Ferdinand, I really feel like (Urashima Taro) right now!”

“Who or what is that...? I do not understand your words.”

“You were the first person I saw when I woke up, but you look exactly the same as you always do, down to the creases between your brows, so it didn’t really hit me that two years had actually passed. But Nicola and Monika are both of age now; they have their hair up, their skirts are long... And even Gil’s super tall now, so...”

Both Wilfried and Charlotte had left her behind as well. Ferdinand was well aware of this, but he chose to remain silent. Given that Rozemyne had worked almost foolishly hard to be an excellent and respectable big sister, he didn’t even want to imagine how she would react to learning that her little sister was now taller than her.

*I suppose I will need to face the aftermath eventually, though...*

Ferdinand let out a heavy sigh, then immediately realized Rozemyne’s mana was likely wavering. Her voice became increasingly distraught, and her worried eyes shifted in color from their familiar gold to a violently shifting rainbow.

“Everyone’s left me behind! I’m in a whole new world, and I don’t know anything! It feels so... so terrible! So scary!”

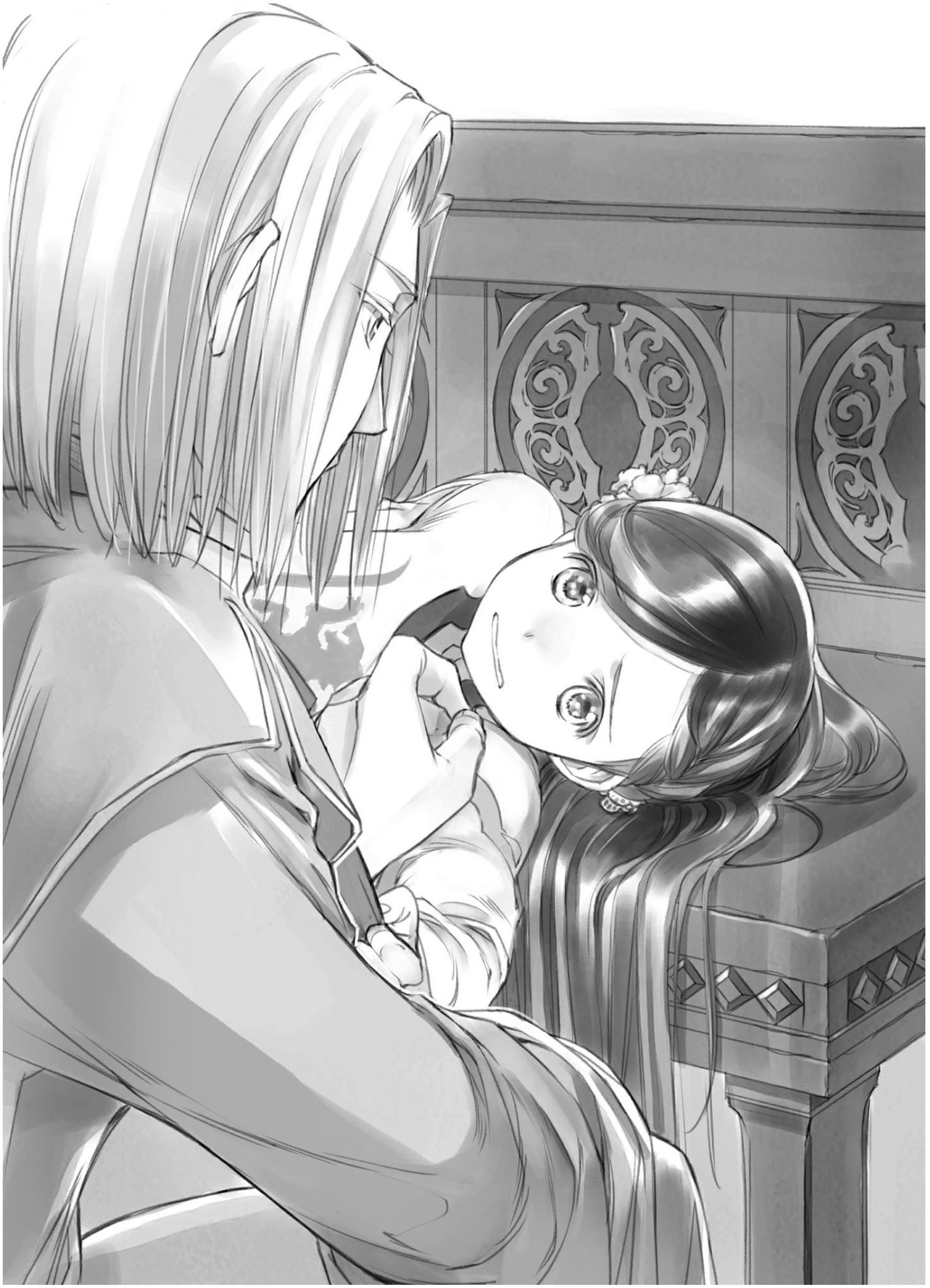
“Rozemyne, calm yourself.”

“I can’t! I mean, everyone is different now! Everyone but me...”

“That is not true—your mana flow has changed over the past two years. But you are going to lose control over it if you do not compose yourself.”

Ferdinand could already see Rozemyne’s mana stirring. Having expected this, he took out a feystone from his back hip pouch and pressed it against her forehead. It was filled with mana in the blink of an eye, as was the next he pulled out, and the next.

Rozemyne gasped and opened her eyes. She blinked several times, then inhaled deeply to catch her breath. Only once her emotions were under control did she weakly stretch out a shaking hand to grip Ferdinand’s sleeve, just as she had done upon awakening in the jureve.



“...Ferdinand, please tell me what happened over the past two years. Everyone is so different now that I’m scared to even go outside.”

“That is quite a broad subject. Where am I to begin...?”

“Did you catch the kidnappers? Is Charlotte safe?”

The kidnapping incident had ended two years ago for Ferdinand, but to Rozemyne, it had essentially taken place yesterday. Only now did this thought occur to him; it seemed filling in the two years of missing experience would prove harder than he had expected.

“Charlotte’s kidnapper was revealed to be a member of Rozemary’s family. He has already been executed, though he denied involvement in your kidnapping and the poisoning. Viscount Gerlach drew much suspicion for having previously owned the Devouring soldiers used in the operation, but there was no evidence against him; he was confirmed to have been inside the sealed grand hall when the attack was brought to our attention. It was concluded that the guard knights had not acted improperly, but for failing to protect their charges, they were punished with decreased salaries.”

“I’m glad that was their only punishment... What happened with the winter playroom?”

“Wilfried and Charlotte both did their best to lead using the instructions in your letters, according to the attendants there. Damuel confirmed this as well, having been tasked with bringing books to the castle and lending them out. It seems the two also received much assistance from a laynoble by the name of Philine.”

The laynoble apparently idolized Rozemyne, and her efforts were often brought up by Damuel, Wilfried, and Charlotte. It seemed that Rozemyne recognized the name, as her worried expression instantly gave way to a slight smile.

“I see. Philine did all that for us... She wrote a lot of stories, didn’t she?”

“I believe so. The stories from the playroom were all written in the colloquial speech of children, however, and your attendants bemoaned that they could not be turned into proper books. In the end, they were somewhat useless,”

Ferdinand said, recalling the struggles that Fran and Gil had endured.

Rozemyne let out a giggle, then looked up in realization. “Ah! What happened with Hasse? Was Spring Prayer carried out okay?”

“Charlotte performed Hasse’s Spring Prayer in your place, determined to fill the hole you left behind,” Ferdinand explained. It would have been more accurate to say he had ordered her to perform it, but it wasn’t untrue that she had wished to compensate for her big sister’s absence.

“Did Charlotte have enough mana for that...?” Rozemyne asked, a worried look on her face.

“Of course not,” Ferdinand scoffed. “She used the mana that had dissolved into your jureve. She and Wilfried performed the Harvest Festival and this year’s Spring Prayer in your place as well, so be sure to thank them. They have grown used to working with feystones.”

“That’s good to hear. They’ve... sure grown up a lot, huh?” Rozemyne whispered sadly, lowering her eyes.

Ferdinand didn’t know how to console her. The only words he could offer were a blunt, “Naturally. Two years have passed.”

“...Right. Well, what about the lower city? I bet Dad and the others were really worried about me being asleep for two years...”

This time, it was Ferdinand who lowered his eyes. Her family treasured their bond even after the walls of status had torn them apart; he could imagine they had been even more worried about her than he had, since they were not able to check up on her frequently as he was.

“I do not receive reports on the status of your family,” he said. “My only information regarding the lower city is that the hand pumps have successfully begun to proliferate. Perhaps your attendants in charge of the workshop can give you the answers you seek.”

“...I’ll ask Gil and Fritz later. Did the printing industry freeze without me? How did the paper-making in Illgner go? Things were going so well too...”

Rozemyne was making herself depressed before she had even received an

answer, so Ferdinand graciously told her what had actually happened in Illgner.

“What? Volk is having a child?! I’m so glad he’s found happiness.”

Upon receiving an update on the Harvest Festival, Rozemyne rejoiced as though she had found happiness herself. Ferdinand was endlessly baffled by her capacity to empathize with others.

“As for the printing industry, Elvira refused to allow its stagnation, taking the initiative to establish printing workshops within her home province of Haldenzel. The Gutenbergs were all mobilized for this purpose, leaving for the province in spring and returning following the Harvest Festival. Benno gave me his report on the matter just recently.”

“What? M-Mother got involved with the printing industry?” Rozemyne asked, her eyes widening with surprise.

Ferdinand gave a firm nod. He had already been overwhelmed with work, so Elvira had willfully taken his place, absolutely dedicating herself to leading the industry her daughter had started. As an archnoble, she was not very informed on the business practices of commoners, so her unreasonable demands certainly put Benno through the wringer, but Ferdinand appreciated the relief nonetheless.

“You owe much to Elvira’s motherly love,” he said.

“I am grateful to her, but...” Rozemyne trailed off uncomfortably, looking up at Ferdinand with a hard-to-read expression. There was a pause as she struggled to find the right words, then she closed her eyes and murmured, “I’m surprised you gave her your permission.”

“In all honesty, I did not have the time to personally involve myself with the printing industry; it was such a great boon that Elvira elected to handle it all for me.”

“That makes sense—all my work did go to you, after all. You’ve done well. I’ll ask Gil and the Plantin Company about the printing industry later on. So... has the former Veronica faction calmed down yet?”

Rozemyne had given Ferdinand praise and then changed the topic as though it were the most natural thing in the world. She hadn’t criticized him for

entrusting some of his work to someone else, and it was perhaps due to this consideration that he then allowed himself to show a kind of vulnerability he would never dare show to anyone else.

"The former Veronica faction has shown no signs of mobilizing. Viscount Gerlach has been deftly avoiding our attempts to prove his wrongdoings, and while I was told to trap and extract evidence from him, I was too busy with the work in front of me. As such, I have not captured the one who kidnapped you. Forgive me."

Rozemyne's workload was immense—far more than one would expect a child to have. It had proven too much for Ferdinand to shoulder alone, and so he had needed to seek much assistance from others. Her temple work alone was a heavy burden, but she was also involved with ceremonies, the orphanage, the workshops, and the Plantin Company. All that, combined with him no longer having her services as a calculator nor her guarding against the castle exploiting his labor, meant the dam holding back the water had finally burst.

Ferdinand had been summoned to the castle more frequently, where he would receive unreasonable demands from both Sylvester and Bonifatius. The latter in particular constantly demanded that he put into action some scheme or another to capture Viscount Gerlach, and that he do something to wake Rozemyne as soon as possible.

*Perhaps I would have been able to capture Gerlach by now had Bonifatius not been so invigorated...*

Eckhart had initially helped Ferdinand as his assistant, Damuel had worked in place of his charge, and Brigitte had provided her assistance where possible, but all three were abruptly snatched away by Bonifatius to engage in a brutal training regimen. Had Ferdinand kept them by his side, perhaps he would have had more options for trapping Viscount Gerlach. He had few retainers he could trust, however, and with Viscount Gerlach being extra cautious ever since he was summoned for questioning, Ferdinand lacked the leeway to properly lay out a trap to gather evidence from him.

"We were able to block Georgine's return, and we are currently working to prevent any official interactions between Ahrensbach and Ehrenfest, which I

imagine is leaving them unable to make any moves. Lamprecht, however, is a cause for concern in this regard. There is a chance he may sow the seeds of conflict."

"Lamprecht? My brother?"

Ferdinand furrowed his brow as he thought back to what had happened over the past two years. "At the end of the winter you fell into your long slumber, Lamprecht attended the Royal Academy's graduation ceremony to celebrate his lover's graduation. He had possessed less mana than her while he was at the Academy, so her father had been reluctant to bless their relationship, but your mana compression method had resulted in his capacity increasing a little over the winter."

"And that was enough for her father to accept their marriage?"

"Yes. He was told that his mana continuing to grow would be enough. As such, when Lamprecht returned from the Royal Academy, he asked Sylvester and Karstedt for permission to marry her."

Rozemyne nodded excitedly and gestured for Ferdinand to continue, her eyes glittering with hope. Ferdinand truly did not understand why women were so enthralled with the romance of others. He sighed, then continued. She certainly wasn't going to like how it ended.

"However, as his lover is an Ahrensbach archnoble, his request was denied on the spot. He knew ahead of time that they would reject him based on recent Ehrenfest politics, and so after an unsurprised nod, he sent a farewell letter to his lover."

No matter how much a couple wanted to marry, it could never happen without their parents' approval and the archduke's permission. They were allowed to have personal relationships based on feelings up until their graduation, but after that, society ruthlessly clamped down on them. It wasn't rare for marriages between nobles to contain no love whatsoever.

"Lamprecht *is* Wilfried's guard knight, I suppose... It would be problematic for him to marry a high-status Ahrensbach girl," Rozemyne said. Her brow was furrowed slightly, but her tone made it clear that she understood the situation.

“Under normal circumstances, a situation such as this would have ended with the farewell letter. Lamprecht’s lover, however, is the niece of an archduke, and during last year’s spring Archduke Conference, Aub Ahrensbach demanded to know why Sylvester had refused to permit the marriage.”

“Yikes...”

After being accosted at the Archduke Conference, Sylvester had managed to fend off Aub Ahrensbach with as many excuses as he could muster. For one, there were nobles other than Lamprecht who wanted to marry Ahrensbach girls, but with so few nobles at the moment, no archduke would want to allow their archnoble women to go to other duchies instead of producing powerful children for their home duchy. Ehrenfest was also weaker than Ahrensbach, so no matter how much Sylvester wanted to allow the two to be together, he couldn’t afford to lose a powerful archnoble by allowing him to marry into another duchy, nor could he permit Lamprecht to marry while denying others with similar ambitions.

“It is expected that he will again be accosted during this year’s Archduke Conference,” Ferdinand continued, “so you will need to learn what you can about the current state of Ahrensbach politics after entering the Royal Academy.”

“Haah... Well, I’ll do what I can, I guess.”

Rozemyne’s blatant lack of interest prompted Ferdinand to rub his forehead. “Were you listening to a word of what I just told you?”

“Yes, but since Lamprecht’s marriage is guaranteed to fail for political reasons, I’m a lot more interested in what happened between Brigitte and Damuel.”

“You are more interested in a marriage between your guard knights than the marriage of your own brother...?”

“Absolutely. I’ve spent a lot more time with them than I have with Lamprecht.”

Ferdinand sharply inhaled at her unexpected reply. She had shown such devotion to Wilfried and Charlotte that he had assumed she treasured anyone

who was legally her family, but as it turned out, it wasn't blood or technicality that determined her attachment to someone, but the amount of time she had spent with them. This was his first time realizing that she clearly delineated between those who were her family and those who weren't, which he hadn't expected from the girl who treated everyone with such consideration that her family seemed to grow by the day.

"Ferdinand, what happened with Damuel and Brigitte?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but they did not end up marrying one another."

"Why not?!" Rozemyne exclaimed, her eyes wide with shock. "Didn't they both love each other?! There aren't any interduchy politics at play here either..."

Ferdinand was equally surprised—not because the marriage hadn't worked out, but because she had truly believed there was a chance it would actually happen.

"Their hopes and dreams simply were not aligned. There was nothing that could be done."

"Mutual love isn't enough for things to go well, huh...?"

"There are countless things that depend on outside circumstances, are there not? Surely you understand this, having come of age once before in a past life."

"I read about it a lot in books, but, well... I'd never actually met a couple who didn't have a good relationship after mutually falling in love."

This was enough for Ferdinand to realize that the world Rozemyne came from was only deceptively similar to his. There were many substantial differences, and he could guess that the way people perceived marriage was among them.

"There were two possible paths they could have taken to make their marriage a reality: one was for Brigitte, the little sister of a landowning mednoble, to descend to the rank of a laynoble and live in the Noble's Quarter; the other was for Damuel, the second son of a laynoble, to become a mednoble through marriage."

"What's the problem with Damuel becoming a mednoble? Surely that's an

improvement for him," Rozemyne said casually, which revealed just how little she knew about nobles.

"That would require Damuel to step down from serving as your guard knight and move to Illgner. While that would be acceptable for an average layknight, his position is rather unique: not only does he owe both his position and his life to your kindness, but he knows too much about you to be safely let go," Ferdinand explained. For obvious reasons, neither the public nor Brigitte knew Damuel possessed information about Rozemyne's time as a commoner.

"Can't I just give him my permission to quit? Like, right now? Could they get married then?"

"It is too late for that. Elvira introduced Brigitte to a new man, to whom she got married this summer. She has now returned to Illgner."

"That happened way too fast... I can't believe it."

She had been more than ready to release Damuel and send him to Illgner despite everything he knew about her, all to ensure that their relationship worked out. Ferdinand had no choice but to respectfully applaud Elvira, who had sensed this danger and swiftly prevented it from happening before Rozemyne could wake up.

Ferdinand had no intention of telling Rozemyne this, since she was so emotionally weak when it came to matters of death, but had Damuel chosen to go to Illgner, he would have experienced a sudden and mysterious demise by the end of the month. Keeping such critical information about the archducal family private was more important to Ehrenfest than the life of a single laynoble.

"Speaking of which, your personal chef requested permission to get married," Ferdinand added. "These arrangements could also not be made while you were asleep. They are still awaiting an answer, so I would rather you settle this matter than dwell on the past."

"I guess Hugo's spring has finally come..." Rozemyne said, feebly attempting to smile. "I'm happy for him." Despite her words, the expression on her face was the same one she had worn when voicing her fears about how much everyone had changed.

“I imagine your attendants will know more about the orphanage and workshop than I do. It would be best for you to ask them any further questions.”

“...Right.”

Noticing the anxiety in Rozemyne’s stiff expression, Ferdinand paused in thought, wondering what he could do to ease her concerns. He knew many people who had used a jureve before, but they had slept from ten days at the least to a season at most; someone remaining asleep for two whole years was simply unheard of. And more than anything else, he had been watching her so closely over the years, so desperately praying for some kind of change, that he could not quite empathize with her feelings of worry over the changes she saw. Rather, he felt more empathy for her attendants and relatives, who had spent the past two years worrying themselves to death over when she would wake up, or whether she would wake up at all.

“Rozemyne, I do not know what you are afraid of, but all of your attendants have been waiting for you to awaken. They followed the instructions you left behind and managed your chambers, the orphanage, and the workshop in your absence. They dedicated themselves to making new books and doing whatever work they could to ensure your happiness when you returned. You should not fear their growth, but rather celebrate it.”

“You’re right!” Rozemyne replied enthusiastically, a big smile now spread across her face. It was the same expression she always wore, and it was for precisely that reason that Ferdinand let out a long sigh of relief.

# Just Call Me Urashima Taro

I came out of the jureve feeling entirely like Urashima Taro, a man from Japanese folklore who went to the undersea Dragon Palace for a few days, only to discover that a hundred years had passed when he returned.

Ferdinand hadn't changed in the slightest, so I had barely even felt the passage of time at first; in fact, I had mainly just been upset about not getting to experience being nine years old. But once he carried me out of the room, I saw that Nicola and Monika had come of age—their hair was up, they wore long skirts, and their chests were bigger. Gil must have gone through puberty as well, because despite being only up to Fran's chest in my memories, he now stood far above Fran's shoulders. His voice was also so deep that he sounded like someone else entirely.

*Those two years of sleep were like a single night to me, so waking up to find everyone having grown up so much is equal parts weird and terrifying...*

I alone was the same as always—in fact, I was arguably in a worse position than before, because my muscles had atrophied so much that I couldn't even move properly. I was basically paralyzed, at the complete mercy of those I technically knew but didn't recognize as they stripped off my clothes and bathed me.

While I was scared and nervous beyond words, I couldn't ask them to stop or say I would handle things myself. I desperately tried flapping my mouth, moving my legs, and opening my hands. Slowly but surely, I got used to moving my immobile body, plastering a smile on my face all the while to hide the fear dominating my heart.

Ferdinand gave me a concise version of the events that had occurred while I was asleep, and hearing how much everyone had worried about me had eased my nerves a little. But now, with the unstoppable flow of time being thrust right into my face, it felt as though there was an obstacle in front of me that could never be surmounted. I needed to get my life back in control as soon as

possible, so that I could get to work adjusting to this new time period.

"I'll get things back to normal starting tomorrow!" I announced. "If something can be done about my body, that is."

Ferdinand abruptly stood up as though my words had reminded him of something. "I wish to fetch a magic tool. Would you prefer to wait here or come outside with me?"

"...I'll wait here. Could you hand me one of those books before you go?" I asked, pointing with my eyes to the stack Gil had made while I was asleep.

Ferdinand picked up the top book, set it on my stomach, then turned around and left.

"A new book! Yay! Eheheh."

After pumping myself up, I slowly moved my hands to touch it, the sensation of a new book bringing a broad smile to my face. I tried to open it with my weakly shaking hand, but it was harder than I had anticipated—even gripping and turning a page was an immense challenge.

"Ah..."

I couldn't properly support the book as I tried to open it either, so it ended up sliding off my stomach and thudding onto the floor. Despite my best efforts to pick it back up, my arm just pathetically hung off the bench, too heavy for me to raise with my own strength. No way could I retrieve the book when I couldn't even raise my arm.

*I can't believe I'm so weak that I can't even read a book...*

Even after sacrificing a whole two years of my life, I didn't feel the slightest bit healthier than before. In fact, everything was worse—my body hadn't grown, my muscles had atrophied, and I had even more mana. What was the point in forcing a smile onto my face? The remaining strength drained from me in an instant, and tears started to well up in my eyes.

"I am back," Ferdinand announced. "Why are you crying?"

"I... I can't even read books. My hands don't... I can't turn the pages. I hate this..."

Ferdinand sighed, then grabbed my left hand and stuck some fancy bracelet-looking thing around my upper arm. It shrunk in size like a magic ring, clinging to my skin before starting to suck up my mana.

“Ferdinand, what are you...? Wha? I can move my arm?”

“These are magic tools for reinforcing enhancement magic. I used them in the past in order to grasp the fundamental technique of physically enhancing oneself with mana. They should be perfect for you, since you are presently overflowing with excess mana. I expect they will allow you to move normally. Hold out your other arm.”

He stuck a second bracelet around my other arm, and with that, I could move my entire upper body with ease. It was incredible. I spun my arms around experimentally.

“Now I can read books!”

“...Could you please get excited over something else for once?”

“But why? I’m more moved and grateful right now than I’ve ever been in my life.”

Ferdinand shook his head, appearing to have immediately given up on the matter, then held out two more bracelets. “Attach these to your legs later on,” he said.

I took them from him and tilted my head. “Why aren’t we putting them on now?”

“They require contact with skin to function. Do you intend to expose your bare legs to me? I cannot say I am fond of such immodesty. It does not concern me if you are an exhibitionist, but at the very least, I ask that you satisfy such urges somewhere I am not present. I would rather not be mistaken for one of your kind.”

I was currently wearing socks that were attached by string to a belt around my waist, like a crudely made garter without a hint of sexiness, beneath a pair of old-fashioned drawers. In other words, for the leg bracelets to touch my skin, I would need to remove my underwear and have them clasped around my thighs. Given that I couldn’t move my legs on my own right now, asking

Ferdinand to put the bracelets on for me was akin to me asking him to take off my underwear.

“Excuse me?! I’m no exhibitionist! I just assumed you could put them around my ankles or something. It’s your fault for not explaining that they need to touch the skin, Ferdinand. Now go call Nicola and Monika so they can put them on for me.”

Ferdinand exited the hidden room, with Nicola and Monika arriving a moment later to take his place. They removed my clothes and secured the bracelets around my thighs. I tried swinging my legs around, and much to my excitement, they moved just fine. The two girls widened their eyes in surprise at my once drooping limbs suddenly becoming so mobile.

“Ferdinand allowed me to borrow these to help me move again,” I explained. “Could you lend me your hands? I want to try standing up.”

“Of course.”

I put some strength into my legs and managed to stand up just as I wanted to. I slowly let go of their hands, walked a lap around the room on my own, then struck a victory pose.

“Yes! I’m finally healthy again!”

“The High Priest’s magic tools certainly are incredible...” Monika mused.

“I’m glad to see you smiling again, Lady Rozemyne!” Nicola exclaimed, now wearing a relieved smile herself. They had evidently realized that the smile I worked so hard to force while they were bathing me was completely fake.

“Sorry for worrying you two.”

With that, I went to exit the hidden room on my own two feet. Never had I thought that simply being able to move my body could feel so good. Reveling in the glory of my new health, I skipped to the door and threw it open.

“I can move on my own again thanks to you, Ferdinand. I thank you ever so much.”

Fran and my other attendants looked at me with shock, then broke into relieved smiles. Ferdinand, meanwhile, merely nodded as though it had been

obvious that the magic tools would work.

"Rozemyne, you are to leave for the castle three days from now. Once there, you will be educated on what you need to know for the Royal Academy, and then it will immediately be time for winter socializing."

"The Royal Academy...? Do I really need to go there, even in this state? Can't you just delay it for a year so I don't have to cram anything?" I asked, grimacing at the very thought. There was no chance Ferdinand would show me any mercy—he would expect results appropriate for the archduke's adopted daughter, despite the fact I was recovering from a coma and needed magic tools just to move. His brutal teaching regimen was not something I was looking forward to right now.

*No matter what happens, I'm not going to the Royal Academy! Ferdinand's crazy expectations will definitely kill me!*

"You will not be considered a noble until you graduate from the Royal Academy, as each noble undergoes their coming of age ceremony and their graduation ceremony at the same time. If you delayed your attendance by a year, you would not be considered an adult in noble society even after turning fifteen. This would make it harder for you to marry, find work, or do anything as a noble; it would introduce a considerable weakness for others to exploit."

"Mm... Well, my noble life started with me pretending to be one year younger than I really am, and I already have a ton of weaknesses like being sickly, having been raised in the temple, and so on. I don't really think holding back on this for now will change much, plus delaying my coming of age ceremony means I get to spend an extra year in the temple, right?"

When it came to attending the Royal Academy, I didn't feel there was any need to rush whatsoever. The longer I went before coming of age, the longer I could spend in the lower city.

Ferdinand appeared to have fallen into thought. "All children go to the Royal Academy upon turning ten, and it is my honest opinion that you will find things more peaceful there. If you stay here, expect to spend the winter enduring strange looks from nobles and countless questions about whether the child of an archduke can survive after having their schooling delayed by a year."

“That may be true, but I have the Dedication Ritual and the Lord of Winter hunt to take care of, plus I’ll be staying in the temple to recover, so I doubt I’ll see many nobles at all over the winter.”

Ferdinand gave a nod, but the contemplative look on his face remained. While I had managed to deflect his attack, he still intended to make me go to the Royal Academy. I prepared for his next move, determined to remain steadfast no matter what.

“Consider that if you delay your schooling by a year, you will end up in the same grade as Charlotte. You already look younger than her due to having slept for such a long time; if you end up in the same grade as well, where would your status as an older sister go?”

*...Bwuh?! Missing a year will put me in the same grade as Charlotte?!*

Now that was a serious problem. My heart wavered, and as if sensing my weakness, Ferdinand allowed his lips to curve into a grin. “Charlotte was devastated that she was responsible for your going into a coma,” he said. “If she ends up in the same grade as you, her dear older sister, as a consequence, she will surely regret her deeds each and every day you spend together in the Royal Academy. Do you truly wish to put her through such emotional turmoil?”

I had rushed out the window to save my cute little sister, not to cause her further hardships. The thought alone made my heart sink, and it annoyed me how much Ferdinand understood that.

“You will not have to cram as much as you did prior to Charlotte’s baptism, and the magic tools allowing you to move will assist you greatly. You may have lost two years of your life, but you can still remain an older sister she respects, if only you try.”

“...Fine. I’ll do it. As Charlotte’s big sister, I have to.”

“Good. In that case, I will see you in the castle three days hence. If you wish to meet with the Plantin Company before then, do so sooner rather than later.”

Ferdinand opened the door to the hidden room, signaling that our conversation was over. I had completely and utterly lost. The minutiae of noble politics didn’t really matter to me, but as Charlotte’s older sister, I absolutely

needed to go to the Royal Academy.

“Lady Rozemyne, may we give our reports on what happened while you were asleep?” Fran asked.

I looked up to see my attendants standing in a line before me. Fran, Zahm, and Monika were grouped together, since they had collectively managed my chambers, while Nicola stood alone to give a report on the kitchen, where she had predominantly worked over the past two years. Then there were Wilma and Rosina, who would give a report on the orphanage—it seemed that Wilma had at some point conquered her fears of entering the noble section of the temple, as she was confidently standing right next to Rosina. At the very end were Gil and Fritz, ready to give reports on the workshop.

“Please do,” I replied.

“No major incidents occurred within your chambers,” Fran explained. “Zahm, Monika, and I spent each day working in the High Priest’s chambers to assist him with his workload. During Spring Prayer and the Harvest Festival, Lady Charlotte and Lord Wilfried traveled across the Central District in your place. They struggled somewhat during the first year, but during the second, they handled the divine instruments brilliantly and gave generous blessings to all.”

“I see. I’ll need to thank them later.”

“Their visiting the temple before and after the ceremonies has also resulted in a change of attitude among the blue priests—more have begun to take their duties seriously to earn their favor,” he continued. That motivation was definitely the result of greed, but I supposed it was better than nothing. “What we were most worried about was the High Priest’s use of potions. He is relying on them as much as he did previously, so we ask that you please encourage him to stop, as you did before. He merely shrugs off our advice.”

I gave a nod, trying to ease the worry in Fran’s eyes. The workload Ferdinand had endured was so immense that not even regular potion usage was enough for him to do it all himself, so there was no doubt in my mind that warnings from his attendants wouldn’t have even come close to getting him to cut back.

“I suppose I will need to help him with his work so that he doesn’t have to continue using those potions...” I replied.

Once Fran's report was concluded, Nicola stepped forward with a wooden board in hand. "Thanks to you, Lady Rozemyne, I got to spend two years working in the kitchen as an assistant. I've learned to make all the recipes you left us, plus there were cooking competitions between Hugo and Leise that produced even more new ones."

*Cooking competitions? What the heck? Those sound like so much fun!*

"I'm looking forward to the new recipes, but who won?"

"So far, they have won one each."

"I look forward to the tiebreaker, then."

"Also, Hugo and Ella have asked to get married. Hugo wanted me to tell you as soon as you woke up."

*...Come again?! Ferdinand never mentioned that* Ella *was the person Hugo wants to marry!*

"It is apparently tradition for noblewomen to quit their work after getting married, but Ella wishes to remain a chef. If possible, I would appreciate you handling this matter for her."

"It's nice that she wants to keep working even after getting married, but... how will we handle their quarters? I'll speak to Ferdinand, but for now, let's arrange for them to get married next summer."

"Aah, Hugo is going to be so happy! I thank you ever so much."

Nicola completed her report by mentioning that the recipe book had been completed, then moved aside for Wilma and Rosina to step forward.

"Here is our report on the orphanage," Wilma began. "We received three new orphans during the two years you were asleep. Two were found abandoned at the gate, while the third was born from a gray shrine maiden named Lily, who had previously served Brother Egmont."

I knew Egmont—he was the villain who had wrecked my book room in the past.

*And now he impregnated one of his attendants, then sent their child to the orphanage? Um, hold on a second. Is that normal here, or am I allowed to get*

*mad about this?*

I was too taken aback to respond immediately, and in the end, I decided to entrust the ethical debate to someone else rather than try to figure it out myself.

“Should I take that to mean she gave birth in the orphanage?”

“No—as there was nobody there who knew how to serve as a midwife, we were unable to care for her ourselves. We discussed the matter with Tuuli and the Plantin Company, then moved her to the monastery in Hasse so that the people there could help.”

Ferdinand had apparently told them to leave Lily alone and allow the baby to be born on its own. Wilma had been uneasy nonetheless, and so she had consulted Tuuli and Lutz, who naturally pointed out that this was definitely not the case.

*Good work, you two.*

There were about twenty women in the orphanage, but none had any experience helping with a birth, so they had moved Lily to the monastery with the gray shrine maidens at Benno’s direction. Nora took the lead there, since she had assisted with a birth before, and with other women from Hasse helping out as well, things proceeded smoothly without any major complications.

It seemed that Benno had yelled at Wilma for her unwillingness to accompany them to Hasse, despite her being responsible for the orphanage, so she was ultimately forced to go along as well.

“That... That must have been very hard for you,” I murmured. “Are you, um... Are you okay, Wilma?”

Getting shouted at by Benno was scary enough already, but with her fear of men, I could imagine it had been outright terrifying for Wilma. I couldn’t see how it would have accomplished anything other than reinforcing her existing trauma.

“It certainly was difficult, yes, but it was a valuable experience,” Wilma explained. “The mother and child are now staying in the orphanage. We are using our experience with Dirk and taking turns to look after the baby.”

“How is Dirk, by the way? Have you been draining his mana?”

“Yes. Once he shows signs of a buildup, we immediately send Fran to inform the High Priest, who in turn responds at once. As a result, Dirk has had no problems whatsoever.”

Dirk was in a tough spot, since a mana buildup would put his very life in danger, so it was good to hear he was doing well.

“The musical training in the orphanage is going splendidly as well,” Rosina added. “We allowed them all to touch the harspiel, though only those who expressed an interest were taught how to play. As far as I can tell, only one has the talent necessary to become a personal musician, but the fact they do not enjoy practicing means they will most likely never make use of said talent.”

Nobles had to study music for their debut, but the orphans had no such obligation. My only goal here was to identify the children with both talent and the drive to learn. There would almost certainly be children who were talented but had no interest in music, and there was no point in focusing on those who weren’t properly motivated.

“However, there is a child who seems to have a future as an artist. They love to draw, and whenever they have the time, they mimic Wilma’s art on their own stone slate.”

“I see. Feel free to buy as many replacement pens as you need.”

“Understood.”

It seemed that Rosina was taking her job of teaching the children in the orphanage very seriously, which came as a huge relief. I had been worried she would outright refuse, since this kind of work wasn’t normally expected of a musician.

“Now for the workshop,” Gil said in his shockingly deep voice. He was so tall and looked so much like an adult now that I couldn’t believe it.

He summarized the events of the past two years for me. They had run out of manuscripts they could print, so they had decided to borrow a book from Tuuli. In return, she and Lutz were taught proper etiquette in the orphanage.

“I believe they now observe etiquette well enough to be presented to mednobles,” Fritz said, having taught Lutz.

Wilma nodded in agreement, having taught Tuuli. “They have both shown much ambition and worked incredibly hard. They regularly visited the orphanage, and their help raising Dirk and assisting with Lily’s birth proved crucial.”

“I suppose I will need to thank them both as well,” I replied.

Gil suddenly looked up as though he had remembered something. “Tuuli recommended we make books that teach etiquette, and we finished printing them last winter. They are selling well among the rich upper class, since they cover noble greetings. You should thank her for that as well.”

*...You know what? Tuuli might just be a real angel.*

Five books in total had been released as products while I was asleep: the collection of knight stories, the collection of Mom’s stories I had given to Tuuli, a recipe book written by Nicola and illustrated by Wilma, and two books about manners that had been put together by my attendants at Tuuli’s suggestion.

“There was also a manuscript given to us by Lady Elvira, but since we were given a strict deadline to print them, we only made as many as were needed. Lady Elvira requested ownership of all copies, even those with errors, so we no longer have any versions at all,” Gil explained.

His wavering eyes told me everything—of course Elvira wouldn’t allow any loose copies to be left lying around the temple. Were Ferdinand to catch even a glimpse of one, he would no doubt fly into a rage and put his all into completely obliterating the workshop.

*Mother, did you really want a book about him so badly that you would risk everything?*

Gil had a progress report on Haldenzel as well: The Gutenbergs had mobilized on a large scale to establish branches of the Plant Paper and Printing Guilds in the province, whereupon they had negotiated the distribution of profits and such. They had then gone to the workshops Giebe Haldenzel had prepared to share our technology with the workers.

“We brought the metal parts needed to make the printing presses with us from Ehrenfest, since Johann wasn’t sure he could make them without his usual tools. We shared the schematics with the workers, but tools aside, they don’t even have the technical skill to put the parts together.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” I replied. With Johann handling my precise orders one after another, his technical ability was only continuing to improve. At this point, he was basically on a whole other level from anyone else.

“They’ll try making their own metal letter types over the winter, and they wish for us to check their quality come spring.”

“Very well. I appreciate you having traveled so far for this, Gil.”

“It was for the sake of spreading the printing industry,” he responded, breaking into a grin that reminded me so much of the younger him that I couldn’t help but smile as well.

“I understand well how hard you have all worked in my absence. Thank you. I would expect nothing less from my attendants,” I said, praising everyone once their reports were done.

With our business concluded, Fran put me to bed with several wooden boards. “I received these from the High Priest today, Lady Rozemyne. Please rest and spend your time reading them. He made it clear that you are not to overexert yourself whatsoever.”

“But I need to write letters...”

“Fear not—I have already contacted the Plantin and Gilberta Companies. You may rest now and leave the meeting arrangements to us. In three days’ time, you will be leaving for the castle, and from that point onward you are expected to cram until it is time to depart for the Royal Academy.”

I nodded, then leaned back on my bed and started looking over the boards. On them were long lists of everything I needed to know before entering the Royal Academy, sorted in order of priority. At the top were country history and geography, the ranking of duchies based on mana and economic power, the names and histories of the royal family, and the names and histories of the archduke candidates attending the Academy at the same time as me. As far as I

was concerned, this was perfect.

*Eheheh... Eheheheheh. I bet there are going to be sooo many books for me to read. I... Hm? Wait, I need to practice... dedication whirls? And Grandfather is going to put me through a physical training regimen? Am I going to die before I even make it to the Royal Academy?*

Fran had organized my meeting straight away. It would be held tomorrow afternoon, so my morning schedule was the same as always.

Now that I was awake, Damuel would come to the temple as soon as second bell rang to serve as my guard knight. His youthful air had vanished completely, such that he now came across like a full-grown adult. I initially assumed that the visible exhaustion on his face was due to his lost love, but it was actually because Bonifatius was working him to the bone during training.

“Lord Bonifatius has spent every day training the archducal family’s guard knights to ensure you will not be put at risk again. Both Angelica and Cornelius have gotten so much stronger that I can hardly believe it.”

“I see. That makes me look forward to going to the castle a little more.”

I practiced the harspiel with Rosina after breakfast, but I was so rusty that I could barely move my fingers properly.

“They say that three days without practice will change one’s sound, and you have spent two years asleep, so there is no avoiding a slight deterioration in your playing ability. I must say though, you are getting back into the flow of things quite quickly. Perhaps it is because, from your perspective, the last time you played was only a few days ago.”

“Am I good enough to avoid embarrassing myself at the Royal Academy, I wonder...?”

Due to my time in the jureve, I was still playing at the level one would expect of an eight-year-old, which surely wasn’t ideal when I was going to a place packed with nobles who had practiced until they were ten.

“There is no need to worry; simply continue practicing and you will be fine. The study plan the High Priest arranged for you increased in difficulty quite

rapidly, so once your fingers are moving properly again, you will not need to worry about embarrassing yourself."

Even then, I could guess I would just barely be reaching a passable level. It was hard to make up for lost time in skill-based things like this, but my only choice was to continue practicing to the best of my ability.

At third bell, I went to help Ferdinand in his chambers. His attendants practically wept tears of joy when I arrived there with Fran and Zahm, which went to show just how painful the workload had been for them.

"Please be aware that I will soon be going to the Royal Academy, so I will only be helping today and tomorrow..." I warned them.

"Even just receiving fewer summons from the castle is more than welcome. We now have the strength to go on."

*Grr! Sylvester! How dare you exploit Ferdinand again!*

In any case, I did my best to blast through the math I was given, determined to lessen Ferdinand's workload as much as possible. When I was done, he gave me a nod with an exceedingly satisfied expression.

"Very good," he said, handing me a rejuvenation potion.

"Thank you ever so much."

I accepted the potion, though I actually felt pretty conflicted about doing so, whether the taste was improved or not. That said, I knew Ferdinand had made it out of... whatever kindness he possibly had in his heart, so I needed to at least *act* grateful.

After lunch, I went to look over the orphanage and the workshop, both to announce my recovery and praise everyone for their hard work. Gil and Damuel accompanied me, with Monika and Nicola returning to my orphanage director's chambers ahead of time to make the necessary preparations.

The orphanage had changed in many ways: Several of the apprentices had come of age, and some of the kids who hadn't been any bigger than me were now full-fledged apprentices. As for the pre-baptism children, Dirk and three babies were crawling around. Delia had always looked pretty, but now she was

a jaw-dropping beauty, while Dirk was a toddler without much of a baby face anymore.

*I guess Kamil is about this big now too...*

If they kept growing at this rate, Kamil and Dirk would end up taller than me before long. The thought alone filled me with an instinctive sense of dread.

“Lady Rozemyne, the Plantin Company has arrived,” Fran announced as I was sitting at my desk, looking over the workshop’s balance sheet I had received from Gil.

Benno, Mark, and Lutz climbed up to where I was on the second floor. While he hadn’t grown as much as Gil, Lutz was much taller now, reaching all the way to Fran’s shoulders. He wore a sharp expression, and perhaps due to him having been forged in the fires of constant busyness, I sensed the aura of a capable workingman radiating from him.

After the standard tedious introductions, I went into my hidden room. Gil and Damuel followed, as they usually did when I was dealing with the Plantin Company, and no sooner had the door closed than I leapt straight into Lutz’s arms.

“Lutz, you’re so tall now!”

There was an audible thump as he caught me. Instead of my head reaching his shoulders like I was used to, it ended up buried somewhere between his chest and lower stomach. The fifteen-centimeter gap between us had evolved into something like thirty centimeters, and my mood plummeted in an instant.

Benno walked over, patted my head as I clung to Lutz, then blinked a little in surprise. “Rozemyne... have you shrunk?”

“No! I haven’t gotten taller, but I haven’t shrunk either, you meanie! It’s not like I slept because I wanted to...”

I could feel the floodgates inside of me give way as the words left my mouth. Before I knew it, tears were streaming down my cheeks, and maybe because I wasn’t usually permitted to show my emotions, there was just no stopping them.

“Er, sorry about that... Has anyone else mentioned it? Or have you just been holding back those tears for a while now?” Benno asked, which really made me think.

“Ferdinand told me not to get emotional; I’ve got even more mana now, so I can’t risk losing control. I guess I really did want to cry after all, though...”

“Isn’t losing control of your mana really damn serious?!”

“It’s okay, really. I’ve got four physical enhancement magic tools on my limbs.”

“Alright. Cry as much as you want, then. This is probably the only place you can do that, huh?” Benno said, ruffling my hair before stepping away.

Lutz gave a small smile and patted me on the back. “Yup, yup. Cry all you want. Honestly, I’m glad to see you haven’t changed much. I was talking to Tuuli the other day about what it’d be like if you suddenly ended up a totally new person.”

“Luuutz...”

Knowing that I could freely let out my emotions at last caused all the tension to drain from my body. I clung to Lutz and cried so hard that I even surprised myself, until eventually it was all out of my system. I felt a wave of relief, like all the fear and frustration that had built up inside of me had flowed out along with the tears.

I looked up and saw Lutz’s face, which was higher up than I remembered it being. It was nice to see that his jade eyes were the same as ever, at least.

“Lutz, you feel a lot different than you used to; you’re all hard and muscle-y now. Both you and Gil have grown up way too much. Plus, you both look so manly now, and Gil sounds like an entirely different person... Not you though, Benno. You just look old.”

“Gah! What was that, you little brat?!”

I giggled and stuck out my tongue while using Lutz as a shield, but Benno still managed to grind a fist against my head with a grimace.

“Gyaaah!” I cried out. “It hurts! It hurts!”

“This feels like a decent enough punishment. It’d do you good to remember how hard we’ve worked for you.”

“Aww! But we’re here to talk about exactly that, aren’t we?!”

“Then quit screwing around and pay attention! I’ll tell you everything that’s gone on.”

I nodded and sat down... on Lutz’s lap.

Benno sat across from me, then shot me a cold glare. “You being serious?” he asked.

“Let me have this; I haven’t yet recovered from my Lutz deficiency. Plus, I need to cram two years’ worth of studies in before going to a school full of nobles for a while, so I need to charge up now while I still can.”

“Right, right. Do what you want. I’ll just go ahead and give my report.”

Benno brought me up to date on the progress and status of the printing industry in Haldenzel. Unlike in Illgner, where we had only needed to teach them how to make paper, we had apparently needed to teach the locals how to make metal letter types and manage other crucial aspects of the printing industry. One season ultimately hadn’t been enough, so their plan was to visit the province again next spring to check up on everything. There were also several other things that had been stalled, since they required my approval.

“Right. We’ll shoot over there next spring on my highbeast, then blast through all the work that needs to be done,” I said.

“Blast through it, huh...? Couldn’t ask for anything more. For now though, I’m just glad you finally woke up. We really need you to rein in your people; I can’t take any more meetings where a bunch of archnobles stare me down while the High Priest gives me a sympathetic look.”

I quickly averted my gaze. It wasn’t hard to imagine Benno in that situation, surrounded by Haldenzel nobles questioning whether printing would really bring them a profit, while Elvira stood eagerly at their side, driven to establish a workshop by her own ulterior motives.

“Well, er... what can I say? My sympathies.”

Benno went on to explain that they had struggled with an ultra-express order from Elvira that she had needed done in time for winter socializing. When he was finished, I handed Lutz a letter for my family.

“What should I do with this?” he asked. “I’ve been living in the Plantin Company since last summer, and Tuuli’s living in the Gilberta Company now.”

“Wha? Oh, right. She’s a leherl too...”

Back when Tuuli had turned ten, the Plantin and Gilberta Companies were in the midst of relocating after becoming two separate businesses, so she hadn’t been able to move into the store immediately. Benno’s group were now staying on the second floor of the Plantin Company, while Corinna and Otto had moved from the third to the second floor of the Gilberta Company. Only once this was all done was a room prepared for Tuuli.

“You can deliver it straight to her house,” Benno chimed in. “Just hold on to it for now, Lutz.”

“Understood, Master Benno.”

With that settled, I explained that we wouldn’t be able to meet for a while, since I was going to the Royal Academy from the winter onward. Benno asked me to speak to the nobility about the printing industry in Haldenzel, after which my meeting with the Plantin Company came to an end.

“Gil, crouch down. I’ll give you a head pat for having worked so hard,” I said. His eyes widened in surprise as I reached out my hand.

“Lady Rozemyne, I’m too old for that now.”

“Whaaat?! Oh, um... Okay. Right. Sorry.”

Gil wore such an uncomfortable expression as he turned me down that I reflexively pulled back my hand. While he had certainly grown taller, I had thought he was the same person on the inside, but only then did I remember he was a fourteen-year-old right in the middle of puberty.

*The Gil I knew who loved head pats is gone forever... I feel kind of sad now. After two whole years, I guess it only makes sense that he would change on the inside too.*

But as I slumped over sadly, Gil knelt down and lowered his head in front of me. “E-Er, actually... I just remembered that I do want head pats. Please go ahead.”

I knew that he was just saying it for my sake, but I didn’t want to rebuff his kindness. I reached out for his grown-up head and gently stroked his hair, which felt a little coarser than I remembered it being. This would probably be the last time I ever got to praise him like this.

“You worked really hard over the past two years, Gil. I can’t describe how happy I was to wake up and see five new books right next to me. Thank you. Keep up the good work.”

“...Right.”

# Moving to the Castle

Time seemed to pass in the blink of an eye, and soon enough, it was time to leave for the castle. I prepared my Pandabus and called for Rosina, Ella, and Hugo to climb inside, at which point Ferdinand's attendants started loading it with boxes of work stuff. It seemed that Ferdinand intended to stay in the castle and continue his temple duties while observing my high-density cramming lessons.

*Talk about a workaholic...*

"I will be returning for the autumn coming of age and winter baptism ceremonies. Do not fail to prepare for both," Ferdinand said to his attendants. Deciding to follow his example, I turned to my own attendants.

"Even after being asleep for two years, I awoke to no problems whatsoever. I trust you all to perform your duties while I am away for the winter. Be well."

"We pray for your safe return."

I climbed into Lessy and followed Damuel's highbeast up into the air. Then, with Ferdinand staying close behind, we made our way to the castle.

Angelica and Cornelius were kneeling in wait when we arrived, while Norbert came over to greet us. "Welcome back, Lady Rozemyne," he said. "It is good to see you well again."

"I am glad to be back."

"Norbert, have this luggage brought to my office," Ferdinand instructed.

Norbert rang a bell that he must have pulled out from somewhere, and in an instant, servants came pouring out of the castle to take the boxes we had brought from Lessy. Ferdinand called for me without even sparing them a glance.

"Rozemyne, come to my office once you are finished changing. I have books and documents that you will need to read."

“Okay. I’ll try and be quick.”

“No, do not rush. You need to develop the grace and dignity expected of a ten-year-old.”

*...Okay, you’ve lost me. What exactly is “the grace and dignity expected of a ten-year-old”?*

Deciding to ignore that which I didn’t understand, I instead focused on Cornelius and Angelica. Cornelius was fourteen now, and it only took a glance to see he wasn’t a little boy anymore—he looked much more like an adult, and while he wasn’t super muscular, he was about as tall as I remembered Lamprecht being. He had resembled Elvira a lot in the past, but now that he looked more masculine, I thought he was a bit closer to Karstedt.

“I am glad to see you are healthy, Lady Rozemyne.”

“You picked up Lessy’s feystone, didn’t you? I’ve been wanting to thank you for that, Cornelius.”

“Such praise is wasted on me. I am a failure of a guard knight—one whose mistake forced you to sleep for two years.”

“Oh? But you saved Charlotte for me just like I wanted you to, right? To me, this all happened just the other day, so please allow me to express my gratitude. I thank you ever so much, Cornelius.”

“I am honored.” He looked up to meet my gaze, and we gave each other small smiles.

Angelica was the next to speak. “I have been awaiting your return, Lady Rozemyne.”

She was fifteen and due to have her coming of age ceremony at the end of winter. Her light-blue hair was bundled in a ponytail that swayed each time she turned her head, and she looked at me with deep, ocean-blue eyes. Her dainty and pretty features had only gotten prettier, and while I knew from Damuel that Bonifatius had been training her hard, I couldn’t tell that just from looking at her.

*Her looks* have *always been deceiving though, so I guess that makes sense...*

“I’ve been worried about you ever since I learned how much time has passed,” I replied. “Did you manage to pass the fourth and fifth grades?”

“Fear not—thanks to Lord Bonifatius, Damuel, and Cornelius teaching me, and Stenluke learning alongside me, I just barely managed to scrape past them.”

“Just barely...? Well, erm... I’m glad to hear you have been doing your best.”

My apprentice guard knights were both looking very much on the verge of adulthood. I made my way into the castle, heading toward my room with them and Damuel.

“Rozemyne, use your highbeast,” Ferdinand said.

“Hm? But I can walk to my room just fine.”

“You are far from healthy. While you are able to move thanks to the magic tools, your body is so weak that even sitting up in bed should be beyond you. Walking around the temple is one thing, but the castle is much larger. Use your highbeast.”

I noticed a rush of tension shoot through my guard knights as Ferdinand repeated his warning. Cornelius’s eyes were wavering with worry, and so I immediately brought out my one-person Pandabus and got inside.

We were making our way to the northern building when I suddenly froze in place. We were right before the hallway where I had been attacked, and an overwhelming fear washed over me as I remembered the kidnapping.

“Lady Rozemyne, is something the matter?” Cornelius asked.

It seemed I was the only one showing any hesitation. I quickly continued forward, hoping my guard knights wouldn’t notice my stiff expression.

“...My apologies. I just remembered that the attack took place here.”

“That is understandable,” he replied. “There was a time when both Lord Wilfried and Lady Charlotte seemed apprehensive about walking down this hallway as well. Even we guard knights remained tense for quite some time afterward.”

It was a relief to know I wasn’t the only one.

When I arrived at my room, Rihyarda and Ottilie were waiting inside to welcome me. “We are so glad to see you well,” they said, their tearful eyes speaking to just how worried they must have been.

“Lord Wilfried and Lady Charlotte are in the middle of studying right now,” Rihyarda explained, “though they are so eager to come and see you that they are practically fidgeting in their seats.”

“Everyone has been waiting for your return,” Ottilie added. “Lady Elvira has been sending new rinsham and the like to your room, and Lord Bonifatius is so excited to see you that he mistakenly came a day early, much to his devastation.”

*I’ve barely interacted with Grandfather, so I don’t really know him that well, but is he actually a bit of a goof?*

The two changed my clothes as they talked, then I made my way to Ferdinand’s office with Rihyarda and my guard knights.

“Excuse me,” I said upon entering.

Ferdinand glanced at Rihyarda before pointing to two boxes. “Rihyarda, could you take these to Rozemyne’s room? They are filled with documents that she needs to look over before leaving for the Royal Academy.”

“Certainly, my boy.”

“Rozemyne, I believe I already gave you the overview. Study the documents in line with their listed importance. They are notes and transcriptions from my time in the Royal Academy, in addition to newer material organized by Damuel. And here is a schedule from now until you leave for the Royal Academy. Review it sooner rather than later.”

“Okay.”

I looked over the schedule while Rihyarda gave instructions to the servants behind me. It was mostly packed with studying, which wasn’t actually so bad considering that this was pretty much just reading time. What *was* bad, however, was the physical training and dedication whirl practice.

“Sit down and read these before dinner tonight,” Ferdinand said.

“What are they?” I asked, sitting on the chair that he gestured to and tilting my head. The board had a long list of names on it.

“They are the names of every duchy in the country and their current rank.”

“Um, I know a lot about Ehrenfest, but I don’t know much about the country itself...”

“Ah, yes, I suppose your studies two years ago were predominantly focused on Ehrenfest.”

Ferdinand stood up, opened a locked box, then placed two maps on the table. They were hand-drawn, and judging by the handwriting marking the locations, I could guess he had made them himself. “This is an old map, and this is a new one,” he explained once they were both spread out.

There had once been twenty-five duchies, but due to the civil war that had taken place in the Sovereignty, they had since been restructured. Now there were twenty-one duchies: four greater duchies, nine middle duchies, and seven lesser duchies, plus the Sovereignty in the center of the country where the royal family ruled.

Ehrenfest seemed to be a border duchy at the northeasternmost point of the country. Despite being decently sized, its population and ranking made it clear that it was basically as close to being a lesser duchy as a middle duchy could be.

*Frenbeltag to the west is where Florencia is from, right? And to the south is Georgine’s Ahrensbach.*

I started by focusing on the parts of the map with names I could recognize, and it was then I noticed something extremely important—there was an ocean to the south of Ahrensbach. Perhaps it was the land of tasty seafood.

*Maybe they have kombu and wakame! Aah, I might even get to eat sashimi again if I ever go there!*

I had long since given up on eating Japanese-esque food here, but now my eyes glittered with newfound hope. My new mission was to make friends from Ahrensbach in the Royal Academy and acquire seafood from them, but just as excitement swelled in my heart, I remembered the cruel reality and sadly slumped over.

*The political situation right now won't exactly allow for that, will it? Tch.*

"Ehrenfest's influence and power is about the median, as you can see," Ferdinand said, pointing at the board in my hands.

It seemed Ehrenfest had previously been at the bottom of the rankings due to being a country province without any specialty goods. We had risen up to just below the middle thanks to having emerged from the Sovereignty's civil war unscathed, but that was simply because other duchies had lost power, rather than having anything to do with our own merits.

"However," Ferdinand continued, "our students have been doing increasingly well at the Royal Academy over the past few years. I imagine our ranking will be a place or two higher next year."

"Um, Ferdinand... The Royal Academy is a place for kids, right? Why would their grades impact the duchy's influence?"

"Those who graduate from the Royal Academy will either work in the Sovereignty or in their home duchy. Better grades show that the duchy is raising more skilled individuals, and generally indicates it will wield more influence in the coming years."

I gave an understanding nod, and so he continued explaining the situation in greater detail.

"Angelica, Cornelius, and Ernesta received higher grades in the knight course thanks to your mana compression method, and some of those who learned with your study materials in the winter playroom have since begun schooling as well. It seems other duchies have been probing us to find out why our performance has improved so suddenly and so drastically."

"That's nice."

"A lukewarm answer. Do recall that you are about to be attending this school yourself," Ferdinand said with an annoyed glare, but I was only going there under duress after being emotionally blackmailed. I just wanted to survive the year without having to deal with any funny business, so I wasn't interested in anything except what I absolutely needed to learn.

"I'm going to the Royal Academy because I don't want to end up in the same

grade as my little sister, but I don't have any interest in the place myself. I'm not in great health right now, so I'm not even going to give my studies my all. I just want a passing grade fit for an archduke candidate," I explained, hoping that would be enough for Ferdinand to allow me to cram less. No way could I give studying my all when I couldn't even move without the aid of magic tools.

Unfortunately, Ferdinand seemed to have some kind of attachment to Royal Academy grades. "That simply will not do," he said.

"It'll have to. My options are limited here, and there are some things that I just don't want to do. I haven't got enough leeway to work hard for someone else's sake right now."

Ferdinand looked at me with slight surprise, then fell into thought. "I suppose Charlotte alone is not enough motivation for her..." he muttered. A shiver ran down my spine as I realized he was about to corner me again.

"I-In any case, you certainly know a lot about what's going on at the Royal Academy, don't you?" I asked, trying to swiftly change the subject. I had assumed that not even Justus could infiltrate the Academy, but Ferdinand was evidently getting his information from somewhere. He rubbed his forehead and gave me a deeply exasperated look.

"You are the one who instructed the students to gather information at the Royal Academy, are you not? Damuel organized everything they gathered; I merely reviewed the report. He paid them a flat fee and said that he wanted you to pay extra based on the value of the information they brought."

*Oh yeah. I asked them to gather information.*

That said, I hadn't asked them to spy on other students or anything like that. I just wanted to know what books were there and what kinds of stories other duchies had. My explanation had apparently been lacking though, as what they were bringing me wasn't at all what I had expected. I decided it would probably be best to confer with Ferdinand about the value of the information, since I would consider certain things more worthwhile than he would.

"Thanks to your efforts, Ehrenfest now has its own specialty product; we will only grow in strength from this point onward. Furthermore, when archduke candidates are attending the Royal Academy, the morale of students from their

duchy always rises. Charlotte and Melchior will follow after you and Wilfried, which in turn means Ehrenfest will have archduke candidates at the Academy for quite some time. We would like for you to motivate the other students and raise the duchy's overall grades yet further, and judging by what I am told about the winter playroom, that is your specialty, correct?"

I couldn't help but blink in confusion. I hadn't said anything of the sort, as far as I remembered, nor did I even believe I was particularly good at that kind of work.

"Actually, that's not my specialty at all. I just thought teaching kids to read would lead to more people reading books, and more people reading books means more people that might be interested in writing books. That's all," I explained, puffing out my chest with pride.

I was thinking about getting more people to write books, and getting more people interested in reading to encourage the opening of a library at the public's expense. The thought of increasing the duchy's influence in the country by raising our overall grade point average hadn't crossed my mind for even a second.

"...It seems I yet again underestimated your passion for books," Ferdinand murmured, placing a hand on his forehead and slowly shaking his head. My answer had apparently come as a considerable surprise to him. "However, I now understand how to motivate you properly. I have not mentioned this in detail before, but the Royal Academy has a library with the second-largest book collection in the entire country. It is incomparable in size and scope to the book rooms you are familiar with in Ehrenfest."

"Whaaat?! The second-largest?!" I exclaimed, suddenly struck with the urge to leave for the Royal Academy at once.

As he watched me eagerly wiggle in place, Ferdinand's lips curved into a slight grin. "You will surely be allowed to spend your time outside of classes in the library, though naturally, you will need grades befitting an archduke's child."

"Of course. It's only normal to have one's reading privileges taken away as punishment for bad grades," I replied. My mom had used that method all the time back in my Urano days to ensure I kept up with my studies, and that

memory alone made me nostalgic for the time I had spent in that world as a student. I would go to the school library at lunch, then visit another nearby library when all my classes were over.

Maybe I could get into a similar routine at the Royal Academy—visiting the library during lunch and after my classes, just like I used to. That realization blew away all my despair about going to the Academy, and now the place shone like a beautiful castle in my mind.

"I'm going! The Royal Academy's library awaits! I'll do everything I can to go there!" I declared, throwing myself into my studies with a sudden change of heart.

"Milady, it's about time for you to get changed," Rihyarda called as I was busy studying. I looked at Ferdinand, certain that I hadn't done nearly enough to visit the library without being chastised, but he merely pointed at the board.

"You have made good progress today. Study up to this point by tomorrow."

"Understood. I thank you ever so much. See you at dinner," I said, beginning to stand up, but he raised a hand for me to pause.

"Tonight's dinner is going to be in celebration of your recovery. Karstedt's family will be in attendance, Bonifatius included. Although it is true he was somewhat careless while handling you, it is extremely likely that the antidote would not have been given to you in time had he not found you so quickly. He has been exceptionally worried about you over the past couple years, and that includes him worrying about how he almost killed you by accident. Please make sure to thank him—for his help, that is."

In all honesty, when it came to Bonifatius, my thoughts were kind of dominated by the fact he had violently shaken me around in a bag, then launched me toward a tree at such tremendous speed that I surely would have shattered every bone in my body had Ferdinand not caught me. Still, it was true that I probably would have died anyway had he not come to rescue me. Thanking him was probably for the best.

"Okay. I'll write out a letter of gratitude before dinner."

“If you are going that far, then be sure to thank him for training the guard knights as well. He has been quite active in improving the entirety of the Knight’s Order, with a particular focus on the guard knights protecting the archducal family, all to ensure you are not put in such danger again.”

Ferdinand was underplaying it somewhat, but I could tell Bonifatius had been working like crazy to boost Ehrenfest’s military might over the past two years.

“Additionally, when you hand him your letter of gratitude, you would do well to ask him about physical enhancement magic. To Bonifatius, it comes as naturally as breathing. I believe he has been teaching one of your guard knights to use it as well.”

*Grandfather and Angelica, huh...? They do seem like they would get along great as a muscle-headed duo. Is that heartwarming or terrifying? I’m honestly not sure.*

“Milady, it has been decided that I will accompany you to the Royal Academy as your attendant,” Rihyarda said on the way back to my room. Students were allowed to bring one adult attendant to their dorms with them.

“My my... I will feel much better with you at my side, Rihyarda.”

She had been serving as my head attendant while simultaneously overseeing Wilfried’s studies, so I could imagine she was chosen because she was capable enough to manage the entire Ehrenfest Dormitory if necessary. When I mentioned this to her, however, she merely laughed.

“Ohoho. No, milady—I was chosen in case you decide to hole yourself up in the library and need to be dragged out. That was Ferdinand’s biggest worry.”

“O-Oh my... My goodness... I would, *ahem*, I would certainly return to my room upon closing time. Ohohoho...”

Back in my Urano days, I would almost always leave the library when it got late—that is, aside from one occasion when I was so busy reading in a corner that I missed closing time. That had only happened once, though. They had nothing to worry about as far as I was concerned, but it seemed they had stopped trusting me long ago.

When we arrived at my room, Cornelius knelt in front of me. “Lady Rozemyne,

as I will be attending this dinner as well, I humbly request to be relieved of guard duty for the rest of today and permitted to temporarily leave your person."

"Certainly, Cornelius. I am looking forward to eating with you soon."

He couldn't sit at the table in his knight armor after having received an invitation from the archducal couple. To put it simply, he needed to change into fancy noble clothes with those massive sleeves.

I entered my room with Angelica, while Damuel stood guard outside the door.

"...It feels lonely without Brigitte here."

Brigitte, who I knew so well from all the time she had spent guarding me in the temple, was nowhere to be seen. There was no helping that, considering her age, and I was happy about her marriage, but there was no escaping the inevitable sadness when someone you were close to just... left. In the temple, the only one I could talk to about this was Damuel, but I felt hesitant to bring it up around him for obvious reasons.

"Brigitte is Giebe Illgner's family, after all," Ottilie said with a calm smile, going on to explain the situation a bit more in detail while changing my clothes.

Illgner had apparently been put in an incredibly tight spot due to the death of the previous giebe, Brigitte canceling her engagement, and her former fiancé subsequently antagonizing their family. The nobles who had previously served the giebe mostly moved elsewhere, and with dramatically fewer nobles to support the land, the giebe's family had needed to gather together to protect the province.

"In order to help end this terrible situation, Brigitte agreed to become your guard knight, Lady Rozemyne, and obtained your support. It is only natural she would hope to marry and expand her family. At the moment, she is doing her best to support Illgner as the paper-making industry introduces more and more changes."

"Lady Elvira found Brigitte a good husband so that your connection with Illgner would stay strong, milady. He will do right by her," Rihyarda added. Elvira loved romance and was quite a socialite, unlike me, so I could imagine she

had found someone who was excellent for both Brigitte and her home.

“If this is the path Brigitte has chosen to walk, then I am fine with it. Speaking of which... has a replacement female knight been found for her yet?”

“At the time, nobody had ever seen you before, so most declined due to the fact they would need to enter the temple. Now, however, there are quite a few knights who wish to serve you. You may choose whomever you feel comfortable entrusting your life with,” Rihyarda said.

Ottilie nodded. “Angelica is due to graduate this year, so starting next year, you will also need a female apprentice knight to accompany you at the Royal Academy.”

“It would be best to pick an archknight or a medknight with a high mana capacity. Now that Brigitte is gone, your only adult guard knight is a laynoble.”

Rihyarda wasn’t wrong, but I was pretty comfortable with the current situation and didn’t really want to change things. Damuel may have been a layknight, but just as one would expect of someone who claimed to be more of a scholar, he was excellent at tutoring the two apprentices and keeping everyone on good terms. My guard knights got along so smoothly because Cornelius and Angelica—an apprentice archknight and medknight, respectively—recognized Damuel’s good qualities and trusted him despite his layknight status. I cared more about someone who could work well with that dynamic than someone with a lot of mana or status.

“I will discuss this with my guard knights and make my decision later. Not even a strong archnoble with plentiful mana would be worth ruining the cooperation my knights have right now.”

*I don’t want everyone to be all prickly and hostile with each other... All I want is a comfy atmosphere to read books in without having to worry about everyone around me.*

## Dinnertime

After getting changed, I wrote Bonifatius a letter of gratitude just as Ferdinand had suggested. I was using allegras paper—that is, paper with red clover-like allegrases mixed into it—which was now being made exclusively for my use thanks to Elvira having negotiated with Benno. I relied on my Earth memories to structure the letter properly, then folded it as I would the notes I used to pass to my school friends.

*It's a good thing I remember how to fold paper into a heart shape. This looks a lot like the leaves of an allegras, which makes it even cuter.*

I wrote "Grandfather" on the heart as a finishing touch, then got in my highbeast and drove to the big dining hall where we were having dinner. I would not only be eating with the archducal family today, but with Karstedt's side of my family as well.

"You seem excited, milady."

"Indeed. My father and brothers usually serve as guard knights during dinner at the castle, not to mention during ceremonies and feasts, but this time we will finally be eating together in the same dining hall. I really am quite excited."

The cherry on top was that we were going to be eating Hugo's new recipe and Ella's new dessert. I couldn't wait.

"Lady Rozemyne has arrived," a servant announced, opening the doors to the dining hall for us. Inside were the archducal family and Karstedt's family, including both Ferdinand and Bonifatius.

"Rozemyne!"

"Sister!"

Both Wilfried and Charlotte called out to me, then Wilfried rushed over. He looked so much more like an adult now, having grown quite a bit taller over the past two years; in fact, he hardly even resembled the little prankster in my mind anymore. In the past, we had just about looked the same age thanks to me

having repeated my seventh year—albeit with him being on the bigger side and me on the smaller side—but that was evidently a thing of the past. The height difference between us was now so significant that we looked like a fifth grader and a first grader standing next to each other.

*Aw... No way are people going to believe we're in the same grade now.*

"Hm? Were you always this tiny, Rozemyne?"

"I-I'll grow taller too! Just you wait!"

Since seventy to eighty percent of my mana clumps had now dissolved, exercising wouldn't make me abruptly pass out anymore; I'd finally be growing at the same rate as a normal girl.

"I've worked hard the past two years so that I can protect you. I think I've pretty much caught up to you now," Wilfried said with a confident grin. I wanted to shoot back that he was still far behind me, but I couldn't act smug until I'd seen how much he'd really improved for myself. After all, I wasn't even ready for the Royal Academy yet.

"You don't need to grow any taller, Sister. You are more than cute enough as you are now," Charlotte chimed in. She had grown as well, having transformed from an adorable child into a beautiful young woman. She was taller than me, enough that if we stood next to each other, everyone would think I was *her* little sister.

I wanted to cry. My pride as an older sister was in tatters.

"I wish to protect you now, Sister, so I have worked even harder than Wilfried."

"No! I'm your older sister! I'm going to protect *you*, not the other way around!"

"Oh my!" Charlotte exclaimed, her indigo eyes gleaming with excitement as she looked down at me. I could tell from her expression that she thought my declaration was cute; from her perspective, I was just a little child trying to look tough.

*How could this be happening? I'm supposed to be the big sister here...*

I slumped over sadly, at which point Ferdinand rested a hand on my shoulder. “Rozemyne, they are only being enthusiastic; it is not yet possible for them to surpass you. Show them your dignity as an older sister now, before you depart for the Royal Academy. Leave no doubt in their minds that you are on an entirely different level from them.”

*I’ll study as hard as I can before leaving for the Royal Academy and show them what a real older sister is made of. Sure, they’ve learned a lot over the past two years, but they’re just kids. I can burn through everything they’ve learned without any trouble at all. I’ll have Charlotte’s respect again in no time.*

I shot my head up and clenched my fists, steeling my resolve, and it was then that I noticed Bonifatius impatiently clearing his throat. Status dictated that I greet the archducal couple first though, so I stepped before them and knelt.

“My deepest apologies for any worry I’ve caused you,” I said.

“Stand, Rozemyne. I cannot see your face like that,” Sylvester replied with some audible bemusement. I did as he asked, only for him to get on *his* knees to meet my gaze.

A stir ran through all those present while I merely blinked in surprise. It was unthinkable for the archduke to kneel before someone of the duchy. I had no idea how to react, but Sylvester ignored the commotion entirely. He placed his hands on my cheeks and pulled me a little closer, carefully peering over my face before pinching my cheeks.

“Yup, it’s good to see you’re better. Ferdinand didn’t let anyone else check on you after you were put in your hidden room in the temple, y’know. We were all worried about you.”

I could certainly remember Ferdinand saying something about eliminating all those who would attempt to disturb my sleep. He had apparently taken this duty very seriously, having stopped even the archducal family from checking up on me.

“Rozemyne, there’s something I’ve wanted to say to you every day for these past two years,” Sylvester continued, letting go of my cheeks to take my hands instead. It came so suddenly that I had to fight the urge to reflexively pull away.

“What might that be?” I asked, tilting my head in confusion.

“I’m saying this not as the archduke, but as a father. Thank you for saving my children. Thank you,” he said, pressing his forehead against my hands. The gesture was presumably a very significant way of expressing one’s gratitude, as his retainers standing by the walls all gasped.

*You’re grateful, I get it! Let go already! Everyone’s staring!*

I looked to Florencia for help, since she was standing a step behind Sylvester, but that only made things worse. “You have my utmost gratitude as well,” she said, kneeling beside him. “You are more than the Saint of Ehrenfest to me. In my eyes, you are my savior—the saint of my family.”

This was killing me. I’d gone on an irresponsible rampage to save my cute little sister; I hadn’t done anything to deserve the archducal couple bowing their heads to me.

“That will do for now. Rozemyne is clearly petrified,” Karstedt said, saving me in my time of need.

Sylvester stood up, now having to look down at me again as per usual. “Ferdinand has told me you need to make up for the two years you have lost before you leave for the Royal Academy. That will not be easy, but I trust you to accomplish what you must.”

“You often push yourself much too hard,” Florencia added. “I think you would do well to respect your body just a little more.”

That concluded our greetings, and so I crossed my arms in front of my chest.

“You may now speak to those who were worrying about you,” Sylvester said. But as I turned to Karstedt and Elvira with a nod, he stopped me with a whisper. “Bonifatius is next. As the son of a former archduke, he’s higher in status than the knight commander. Don’t mess this up.”

*Oops... That was close.*

I changed direction mid-step. If Sylvester hadn’t stopped me, I wouldn’t have noticed until it was too late. The thought alone made me break out in a cold sweat.

“Um, Grandfather... I wanted to express my gratitude for you saving me the other—*ahem*—for saving me two years ago. Ferdinand informed me that, had you not found me, I might have died.”

Bonifatius gravely nodded. “I am glad to see you well again,” he said with a stern expression.

“This is a letter of my gratitude,” I continued, nervously holding it out to him. “Will you accept it?”

“Yes, of course... Hm? This is an unusual shape.”

“Aha, it’s a heart. Don’t you think it’s cute?”

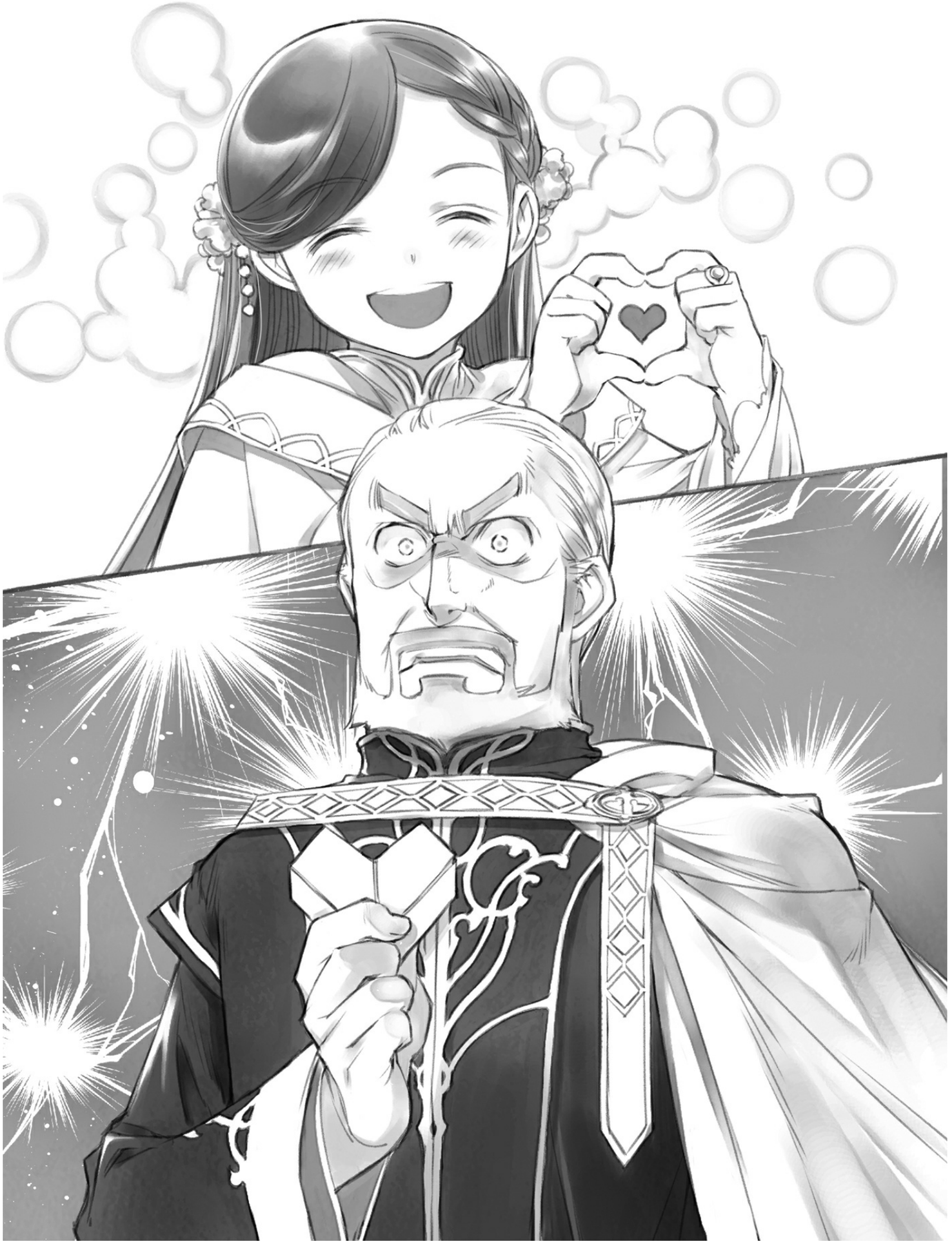
“A heart...? I do not believe hearts look like this,” Bonifatius said, examining the origami with a clear look of confusion.

I gave a big nod, then used my thumbs and pointer fingers to recreate the shape. “It’s a symbolic heart that represents love,” I explained.

Bonifatius froze in place, his eyes wide open. It took him several seconds to slowly return to life, then he glared at my letter with a conflicted expression.

“I-I see...”

The silence in the hall as Bonifatius stared at the letter weighed down on me like a boulder. Did he not like the heart? He was a military guy through and through, having continued working with the Knight’s Order even after his retirement, not to mention having served as a representative of the archduke. Maybe I should have made a tough-looking shape instead of a cute one.



*I'm so dumb! Of course a man would prefer to have, like, a helmet or a dragon or something! If only I'd stopped to actually think about this!*

But as I cradled my head in agony, I suddenly realized something—origami could simply be unfolded and then refolded into something else. There would of course be a few weird creases, but that was better than cursing him with this foul mistake.

"Um, Grandfather... I can always fold it into another shape. Please, let me make it into something else for you."

"Oh, no, no. This is fine. In fact, I have taken a liking to this shape. There is no need to unfold it."

Bonifatius raised the origami heart higher into the air, repeating that he was fine with the shape as it was. I sadly slumped my shoulders; this was definitely a frantic attempt to avoid hurting my feelings.

*I made Gil worry at the temple, and now I've even made Grandfather worry...*

It truly was failure after failure. I decided to surrender to his consideration and pointed at the letter in his hand. There was no culture of origami here, so he was unlikely to discover the writing without an explanation.

"If you open the letter, Grandfather, you can read its contents."

"Hrm? Open?"

"You cannot read the letter as it is now, can you? Please hand it to me for a moment." I took the paper heart from Bonifatius, who watched with tightly knitted brows as I unfolded it and then held it out to him. "And now it can be read, see?"

*...Bwuh?!*

He was staring down at my letter as though the world were coming to an end: his eyes were wide open in disbelief, and the blood was quite clearly draining from his face. It certainly wasn't the expression of someone happy to be receiving a letter of gratitude. Had I made some terrible blunder without realizing it, like the previous mayor of Hasse? My own face started to pale as I glanced between Bonifatius and the letter.

“Grandfather... C-Could it be that I’ve used some sort of rude phrasing?”

“Not at all! I am just surprised by how well written this is. You have got excellent handwriting too, Rozemyne.”

*So he says, but that wasn’t the look of someone who’s about to give praise. It was more like he was losing his mind over what I’d just done.*

I was only trying to thank him, but in the end, I’d managed to offend him so badly that he hadn’t even been able to maintain his composure. He was currently collecting himself and trying to smooth things over with praise, sure, but he couldn’t convince everyone that easily. The worst part was that I didn’t even know what I had done wrong—I evidently needed to apologize, but I wasn’t actually sure why. Trembling in fear, I scanned the room with tearful eyes in search of help, only to notice that Sylvester’s cheeks were twitching as he just barely managed to hold back laughter.

*Well, I can count him out... The harder I fall, the harder he’ll laugh.*

I promptly decided to ignore him, since he was clearly just glad to have new material to make fun of me with, and instead looked to my two parents. They had a deep bond with Bonifatius, so I was sure there was something they could do.

Elvira noticed my gaze and approached us.

“M-Mother, have I done something incredibly rude by chance?”

Bonifatius immediately began floundering. “No, Rozemyne, of course not. You have done nothing wrong. There’s no need to start crying. Everything is fine, isn’t it, Elvira? Rozemyne is a fine young woman, isn’t she?” he asked, his eyes anxiously flitting between the two of us.

“Might I suggest you both calm down?” Elvira said coolly. “Rozemyne, I shall check the letter to see if there are any mistakes.”

“Thank you, Mother.”

I showed her the letter. She read through it in silence, then looked up. “It is quite fine. There are no mistakes.”

A relieved sigh escaped me. It had her full approval.

“I imagine Bonifatius was merely surprised to see the shape unfold,” Elvira explained. “You can return it to the way it was before, correct?”

“Yes, it will take just a moment,” I said with a nod, which in turn made Bonifatius sigh in relief. He seemed to quite like cute things, despite his appearance, and so I placed the letter on the table and folded it back into a heart.

Wilfried and Charlotte watched me with great interest.

“You can make sheets of paper look like that, huh?”

“Sister, please write such a letter for me in the future as well. It is absolutely adorable.”

“Certainly,” I replied. At the very least, it seemed I had managed to catch Charlotte’s interest and scrape up a little respect from her. Holding back the broad smile that was starting to play on my lips, I handed the finished heart back to Bonifatius. “Here you are, Grandfather.”

Bonifatius took the letter and once again stared at it with a conflicted expression. Then, after a pause, he nodded gravely. “Excellent.” It seemed that was just the face he pulled when he was carefully examining something.

Relieved, I glanced around the room again. Ferdinand quickly caught my eye, and upon seeing his expression, I remembered something—he had told me to ask Bonifatius to teach me physical enhancement magic.

“I have a request, Grandfather. Might I ask you to teach me the basics of physical enhancement magic?”

Bonifatius stared at me in surprise, then a huge grin spread across his face. He thumped his chest and snorted. “Leave it to me! I will make you the strongest person in Ehrenfest!”

I didn’t want to be the strongest person in Ehrenfest, of course, nor did I think that would actually be possible for someone like me. I quickly realized that I’d need to better explain my intentions, since the risk of Bonifatius’s intense training sending me to an early grave was becoming all the more real.

“May I clarify, Grandfather? It’s not that I wish to become stronger, but rather

that I wish to be capable of moving without relying on assistive magic tools."

"Y-You wish to be... capable of moving?" Bonifatius repeated, blinking in utter confusion.

I nodded. I had long been spared any physical training due to my complete lack of stamina, but now that I was healthy, I needed to boost my strength.

"My muscles have atrophied so much from my time in the jureve that I can't move properly without body-enhancing magic tools attached to my body," I explained. "My first goal is to no longer have to depend on them."

Bonifatius's eyes widened in pure shock, then he looked me over from head to toe as if making sure I really was alive. "That... certainly won't be easy," he said. "I've never taught enhancement magic to a person who can't even move. How does one make someone who cannot move, move?"

"Um, th-that is quite the philosophical question."

"Is it really safe for you to train at all?"

"I ask only that you do not work me to death."

Bonifatius and I put our heads together as we tried to come up with a solution, at which point Ferdinand let out an extremely heavy sigh, rubbing his temples with exasperation. At his recommendation, we decided to start by removing the magic tool on my right arm, focusing on using enhancement magic exclusively for that one limb.

Dinner soon began, and the events of the past two years were explained to me from the perspectives of those who lived in the castle. Most of what they told me I had already heard from Ferdinand: my three brothers all served as guard knights for the archducal family, and they had been worked to the bone by Bonifatius.

"You certainly are strong, Grandfather. It is a shame that, with the bag obscuring my view and the poison keeping me from opening my eyes, I could not see your heroic efforts for myself."

"Yes, I am strong. Karstedt hasn't beaten me just yet!"

Bonifatius, who was sitting next to me, went on to explain that the knights

had shown much more improvement over the past two years than they had previously. Those who had learned my compression method had all grown at an extraordinary pace and continued to grow even now. The technique seemed to have the biggest impact on apprentices still going through puberty, and it had proven so effective that more and more nobles were asking to be taught.

"What say we hold a conference teaching the mana compression method soon?" Bonifatius suggested, carefully observing my reaction. "Erm, your health comes first, of course, but there are many who cannot wait to learn it."

My mana compression method had primarily been taught to the guard knights serving the archducal family, with the rest being mainly archknights and medknights. Damuel was an exception as the only laynoble to have learned it. His mana capacity continued to grow slowly but surely, so those who were previously of a similar level to him were now getting fairly impatient.

*Well, that makes sense. Grandfather's training them all equally hard, but Damuel's growing mana capacity puts him at the very top. Anyone in their position would want to learn the method too.*

"Have you finished deciding who is going to be taught?" I asked, looking at the archducal couple.

Sylvester gave a slow nod. "All we need now is your approval."

"Very well. We can hold seminars after winter socializing."

"*After*?! That is a very long time from now!" Bonifatius exclaimed.

I gave him a nod. "Normal mana compression is taught to first-years in the Royal Academy, correct? In that case, I wish to see how much Wilfried has grown. I will use this to determine whether he is ready to learn my method. If so, his guard knights can be taught as well."

Wilfried's guard knights let out a quiet collective "Ooh!" from where they stood along the wall. I had previously forbidden them from learning the method alongside the rest of the archducal family's guard knights, since the Ivory Tower incident had put their trustworthiness into question. They had experienced fairly poor mana growth as a result—that is, with the exception of Lamprecht, who I had taught as a member of my family.

My decision had been somewhat rash in retrospect, but the Ivory Tower incident was fresh in everyone's minds at the time, and I hadn't anticipated entering a two-year coma so soon after. Regardless, the inexorable march of time had put a considerable gap between the strength of Wilfried's and Charlotte's guard knights, and it didn't take a genius to realize that this wasn't exactly an ideal situation.

Ferdinand nodded at my suggestion. "That would be wise if you wish to give Wilfried a chance as soon as possible. You may make your decision after confirming his behavior and growth. Wilfried, as a ruler of men, you must continue to think before you act."

"Understood, Uncle."

*Looks like Wilfried and Ferdinand have gotten a little closer over the past two years.*

It wasn't just on a surface level either—they really did seem to have a deeper bond than before. As that thought stuck in my mind, the others took turns updating me on the past two years: my brothers told me about their special training with Bonifatius; Elvira told me about the growing printing industry in Haldenzel; then Wilfried and Charlotte told me about the winter playroom, and how far they had progressed with their studies.

In no time at all, our dinner together had come to an end.

# Cramming and Preparations

My cramming lessons with Ferdinand started the very next day. I spent my time after breakfast reading and reviewing what I had learned the day before. Then, when Norbert came to get me, I moved to Ferdinand's office where I continued studying hard until noon. There were two desks lined up, on which were stacks upon stacks of documents all placed in a neat row. I was having geography and history beaten into my head, both of which were difficult to understand without hard data to look at.

*Just you wait, O library of the Royal Academy... I'll be there as soon as I can!*

After lunch, I practiced the harspiel with Wilfried and Charlotte. It seemed the practice schedule Ferdinand had gotten me to follow before I went into the jureve was incredibly intense, because despite my two-year-long absence, it seemed I was already good enough to go to the Royal Academy, even when compared to how far Wilfried had come. I would need my fingers to adjust to playing again first, of course, and my time studying music on Earth had probably helped a lot, but still.

*Thank you, Ferdinand! For the first time in my life, I'm genuinely grateful for your brutal teaching methods!*

After harspiel practice, I would alternate between practicing dedication whirls and training with the Knight's Order depending on the day.

Dedication whirls were apparently a religious act one performed at their coming of age ceremony, which was held on graduation day. One would express their gratitude to the gods through song and dance, celebrating winter turning to spring and new life being born.

Out of all the apprentice knights, twenty especially talented individuals would be selected to perform sword dances, while seven archduke candidates would be selected to perform whirls. Everyone else would sing and provide music. Being chosen to perform was a great honor for both the individuals and their duchies, so everyone worked their hardest in hope of somehow becoming one

of the lucky few. I interpreted this all through the lens of graduation ceremonies being theatrical, thinking back to all the festivities on Earth that were exaggerated as well.

"I don't even need to practice if there's a selection process, right? I can just leave it to everyone else."

"No, you fool," Ferdinand scolded me. "Archduke candidates are forced to participate, and you can expect practical examinations at the Royal Academy. There are times when archnobles are selected to perform for grades that do not have enough archduke candidates, and if you do not at least match their talent, you will bring shame to the entire duchy."

Dedication whirls were apparently far more important than I had expected. I clearly had no choice but to put my all into practicing so that I was ready for those practical examinations. Maybe my Urano experience would pay off a little here too.

"Can you whirl as well, Ferdinand?" I asked out of curiosity.

He responded with a dry, "Of course."

I could imagine Ferdinand had performed a dedication whirl so perfect that it made all the female students faint, just like his harspiel playing had.

And so I practiced performing the dedication whirl alongside Wilfried and Charlotte. They had already been learning for about a year now, so they had the form down, and their dancing was pretty decent.

"The dedication whirl has two styles, one for men and one for women, but spinning is at the heart of them both, as I'm sure you can imagine," our whirl instructor explained. It wasn't about jumping or hopping around like in traditional dancing—it was all about spinning while gliding as gracefully and as beautifully as possible. "Establishing and maintaining tension is absolutely necessary. In that sense, it is fairly similar to watching a kreisel."

Kreisels were exactly the same thing as spinning tops: toys that you spun and then watched as they kept their balance.

"When a kreisel spins, it almost looks as though it is frozen in place, no? And in that moment, there is a captivating feeling of tension. A proper whirl requires

you to reach this point where you too look as though you are standing still, for this is when the atmosphere reaches its peak. You must remain perfectly balanced, else your whirl will cease to be beautiful, and the tension you exude will disappear in an instant."

Now that I thought about it, I seemed to recall my traditional Japanese dance teacher having said the same thing back in my Urano days. My mom had made me go to these dance and ballet classes for three years on the off chance that I developed an interest in them. She had said that she would buy books for me if the teacher reported I was making good progress, and so I had tried my hardest in hope of getting as many as possible. Not being able to read books during lessons was exceedingly painful, but I was able to survive all three years nonetheless.

*Not that any of that experience is helping me now, since I can't move my body at all.*

"What matters above all else, however, is having true gratitude for the gods in your heart."

*I see, I see... In other words, praying seriously might end up like my harspiel performance during my winter debut. I'll need to be careful.*

"I understand everything now," I intoned.

Once we had covered the basics of the dedication whirl, we started with a few preparatory exercises.

*Ow ow ow ow! My body's even stiffer than I thought!*

On training days, I went to the Knight's Order, where I worked on mastering enhancement magic alongside Bonifatius and Eckhart. I would remove the supporting magic tool from one of my arms and practice strengthening that limb, aiming to eventually move it with just my own mana. That said, I apparently couldn't say I had truly grasped enhancement magic until I could swing weapons and form my highbeast while using it.

After days of practice, I was finally capable of creating my highbeast while using enhancement magic on my unsupported right arm. The sight caused

Angelica to stagger back and fall to the ground, her shoulders sinking in despair.

“Why can you use enhancement magic so easily, Lady Rozemyne? It took me a year and a half of training to form my highbeast while using it. I think I’ve lost all my confidence as a guard knight...”

“Bwahaha!” Bonifatius roared. “Rozemyne is a member of the archducal family! She has more than enough mana for other things even while using enhancement magic, and there’s no point envying the mana capacity of someone mana-rich enough to get adopted by the archduke. You’ve been working hard to boost your capacity while training to minimize how much mana you use when casting enhancement magic. Just continue as you have been—in fact, why not look to Damuel as an example? The man’s a master at preserving mana!”

Damuel was fully dedicated to using his mana as efficiently as possible, and so he would always try to expend as little as possible during combat. His fighting style was bland and rather straightforward as a result, but it was far less wasteful, even when compared to those of other layknights.

“Your teacher is correct, master,” Stenluke chimed in. “The master of my master has not yet grown used to enhancement magic, and so she wastes much mana while using it. You are certainly the more adept magic wielder here; there is nothing for you to feel down about.”

Angelica raised her head. Bonifatius had recognized her as his apprentice, and she had since become a knight capable of using enhancement magic that was rare to see even among archnobles. Stenluke seemed to be growing steadily as well; his blade was much longer than the last time I had seen him.

“You certainly have grown, Stenluke. Have you learned a lot about the world yet?”

“I had no choice, considering my master’s poor memory. My struggles know no end,” Stenluke replied. He was of course speaking about Angelica, but just hearing those words in Ferdinand’s voice made me feel as though I were the one being scolded here.

Just as a sad frown crossed my face, Bonifatius cleared his throat and held out a short sword. Judging by the sizable feystone in its hilt, I could guess it was also

a manablade.

“Rozemyne, I am growing a manablade as well,” he said. “Could you pour some of your mana into it?”

“Um, Grandfather... The truth is, I’ve been forbidden from pouring my mana into the manablades of others.”

“Th-That can’t be!”

I hated to disappoint him when he was so clearly excited about it, but it just wasn’t something I could do without permission. I explained that Ferdinand had forbidden me from doing it again after the Stenluke incident, which caused Bonifatius to knit his brow.

“Permission from Ferdinand, hrm...?” he murmured, his voice almost a growl. I could sense that he was about to charge forward and smash his way through whatever barriers were stopping him from getting what he wanted, so I hurriedly tried to stop that from happening.

“But even with Ferdinand’s permission, I don’t think I could manage it until after I master controlling my mana again. I still struggle to use it properly, due to my time in the jureve.”

To use an analogy, it was like going from pouring water into a glass from a pitcher to pouring water into a glass with a bucket—it was a lot harder to control the flow. Enhancement magic required so much mana that it didn’t make too much of a difference, since a bucket worked just fine when you were pouring water into a washbasin, but manablades were a whole nother story. I essentially needed to pour my mana in by the spoonful, so a bucket wouldn’t do at all. It would take some time before I was used to working with my new increased capacity.

“Plus, Angelica’s manablade ended up sounding like Ferdinand because I thought she would need someone to give her strict guidance. I can’t think of anything that you need, Grandfather; you are more than strong enough already.”

“I see... More than strong enough, huh?”

Once training and practice were over, I took a bath to refresh myself and then

had dinner. My last task for the day was to read in preparation for tomorrow, though Rihyarda always ended up having to snatch the book away to get me to sleep.

I was constantly learning new things, with more study materials piling up by the day. I naturally enjoyed reading them, but memorizing everything was quite the task.

*Still, I'm not going to give up. I'll earn Charlotte's respect, become the best big sister in the world, and spend every day in the paradise that is the Royal Academy's library!*

The first-year lessons about magic didn't seem that difficult; they were centered around the basics of mana and feystones. There were also elements associated with them, which were connected to the divine colors of the gods. All I needed to do was memorize which element was associated with which color, and as someone who already needed to have memorized the bible, I understood everything after just a quick review.

History, on the other hand, was considerably harder—there were so many kings with long, similar-looking names that my brain just turned to mush every time I tried to learn them. The only silver lining was that I already knew religious stories from the bible that led into the founding of the country, so that saved me a bit of time.

"You need only memorize the general flow of events for ancient history; more precise information is only relevant for the most recent decades," Ferdinand explained. "In particular, you will need to learn about the civil war that occurred in the Sovereignty, what changes it caused, and who prevailed. This will be enormously important when interacting with others at the Royal Academy."

I looked at the huge royal family tree that Ferdinand spread out in front of me. The royal family and their children had fought among themselves, with the strongest among them doing everything they could to become king. The civil war had started due to the first and third princes coming into open conflict, and the resulting battle was intense enough to split the country in two.

The first prince had ultimately lost the war, but the third prince was killed by an assassin the first prince had sent out before his death, resulting in them both

dying. This reignited the flames of conflict, with the fourth and fifth princes picking up the fight with their respective allies behind them. The fifth prince won in the end, but perhaps due to having been exposed to life-threatening dangers throughout the fierce battles, he held no mercy for the fourth prince, subsequently enacting a large-scale purge against him, his immediate family, and the web of nobles who had provided him with support.

“Which resulted in the whole country losing a lot of power... Are the royal family a bunch of idiots?”

“Yes, but you are without a doubt the biggest idiot of all. Keep such thoughts to yourself. The Royal Academy is presently dominated by nobles who support the fifth prince—that is, the current king.”

“Sure, but he executed more than just his enemies, didn’t he? Did he really have to kill these princesses and all their children too?” I asked, pointing at a section of the family tree. Those who had died normally had a single horizontal line through their names, but each person who had been purged following the civil war was crossed out with a big “X.”

It made sense that the fifth prince would purge the men who could rightfully lay claim to the throne, but he had executed a princess from the previous generation and other women in the family as well, none of whom seemed to have much to do with the war of succession.

“It may appear excessive to you, but there was no need to allow seeds of war to grow,” Ferdinand explained. “Does it not make sense when you consider it insurance?”

“I can understand that, but we’re still recovering from the fact he purged so many nobles who played important roles supporting the country. I don’t see how that’s *not* going too far. At the very least, shouldn’t he have let this one princess live so that she could keep giving birth to strong children? He could marry her to a noble in his faction, perhaps use her to usurp the weakened rival faction... I really don’t think he needed to kill her.”

“Those are strong arguments, but this princess in particular sealed her own fate. She infamously had many affairs with multiple men in hope of obtaining children with as much mana as possible. By leaving her to her own devices, the

fifth prince would run the risk of someone claiming one of her children to be the son of one of the dead princes, which could possibly lead to an entirely new war."

Hearing about the royal family doing whatever they wanted without consequence made me sick to my stomach. So what if the princess had a bad reputation? So what if nobody knew whether she had given birth to one of the princes' sons? It wasn't much different from the blue priests, if you asked me.

"Now that both the royal family and the nobility have diminished greatly in size, both wish for nothing more than to increase the size of their houses. Due to the magic tools attached to your body, I believe your enormous mana capacity will not be immediately apparent to others at the Royal Academy, but regardless, take care to not be abruptly kidnapped while you are there."

"What the heck?! That's terrifying!"

"It is the reality of your situation. Under no circumstances are you to leave the sight of your guard knights or Rihyarda," Ferdinand said. I nodded over and over again, my eyes brimming with anxious tears.

In between reading my study materials, practicing the dedication whirl, and training with Bonifatius to learn efficient enhancement magic, I needed to prepare to leave for the Royal Academy. First came deciding what outfits I would wear. Plenty of cloth had been prepared so that clothes could be made at a moment's notice, but since nobody knew when I would wake up, nothing had started yet.

There wasn't much time left before I needed to leave for the Royal Academy, so Elvira's personal seamstress, Florencia's personal seamstress, and Corinna (who was basically being treated as my personal seamstress) were all working together to make clothes for me. To that end, both Elvira and Florencia visited my room.

"To think you had students gather information on fashion trends in the Royal Academy, Rozemyne. You are so full of surprises," Florencia said.

Among the information Damuel had organized from the Royal Academy students were detailed notes on what fashions were popular with archduke

candidates from other duchies. An archnoble by the name of Brunhilde had recorded this information explicitly for Charlotte and me to reference when preparing our outfits, it seemed.

It wasn't as though I had intended for this to happen, but Florencia nonetheless praised me for the foresight I certainly didn't have. It felt as though all the information was benefiting someone in one way or another, so it seemed best to just have the students keep doing what they were doing.

Incidentally, not a single person had recorded any stories from other duchies for me. I had to admit though, the fault was all mine for not having provided clear instructions, instead writing nothing more than, *"Please gather information in the Royal Academy."* When I had realized this and sadly hung my head, Cornelius had pointed out with a smile that nobody could have extrapolated that I wanted to gather stories from a request like that.

"Milady, the first thing we need to decide on is an outfit for you to wear during this year's winter socializing."

"Can I not just wear what I wore two years ago? For better or worse, I haven't grown in the slightest."

Rihyarda and I discussed which of my outfits needed to be made first. She wanted to make them in the order that I would be wearing them, but I wanted to prioritize those I would need at the Academy. I sadly hadn't grown at all while asleep, but this meant I could just continue wearing my clothes from two years ago without issue.

Elvira, having heard both sides of our conversation, let out a sigh. "I now understand what Ferdinand meant when he said your perspective is frozen in the past, Rozemyne. Do listen. Going to the Royal Academy is a proclamation that you have become ten years old. Your skirts will need to be extended, and so even with your lack of growth, you cannot continue to wear your old clothes."

*Oh, good point... The skirts do need to be longer now.*

Upon turning ten, girls' skirts changed from being knee-high to shin-high. This was supposed to be a moment when one reveled in their growth, but I was the same on both the outside and the inside. On top of that, I'd missed my birthday

celebration, so I didn't feel even the slightest bit overjoyed about being ten. It just felt wrong.

"What else can we do but prepare a new outfit for you to wear while participating at the feast marking the start of winter socializing?"

"...I say we simply alter the skirt on one of my existing outfits. Mere alterations shouldn't take that long to complete, right?" I asked, then called Corinna over from the group of seamstresses lined up against the wall. "Corinna, I would like for you to alter the skirt part here. Add new cloth to the inside so that it reaches my shins, then pleat the existing skirt like so and decorate it with flowers."

I was suggesting we make something similar to a bubble skirt, like I had done with Tuuli's baptism ceremony outfit back in the lower city. My socializing outfit wasn't very important to me, so I wanted to get through it with only the simplest alterations possible.

Corinna had long since learned my simple alteration methods from Mom, and so she understood what I wanted at once. She took out a needle and thread, held the material together, then secured it with basting stitches to make a simple bubble skirt. From there, she had another seamstress bring her more cloth while she explained to Elvira and Florencia how she was intending to alter the outfit.

"If we stitch new cloth to the inside of the skirt and pleat it as Lady Rozemyne has explained, it will appear like so. Is this acceptable?"

"Oh my, how lovely. The shape is delightful, but you must use cloth of a color in fashion this year for the extended skirt," Elvira said.

Florencia nodded. "Plus, if you are going to decorate the pleated skirt with flowers, would it not be ideal to decorate the chest area in a similar fashion?"

Corinna noted down Elvira and Florencia's orders on a board, then took out the flower decorations she had brought with her and placed them on the suggested parts of the outfit.

"If we were to implement your suggestion, honorable archduchess, I believe it would look most attractive to line up small flowers next to each other like so,"

Corinna said. “Do you have any preferences?”

My two mothers excitedly chatted amongst themselves while deciding on the size and colors of the decorative flowers, then selected which cloth to use from all those Corinna had brought based on color and quality. My measurements were taken in the meantime. There were no changes, as expected.

With my winter socializing outfit selected, I next needed to decide what to wear at the Royal Academy. There were no school uniforms, but it was a rule that students needed to be dressed primarily in black. This was apparently a show of respect to the all-absorbing God of Darkness, with the color also symbolizing one’s desire to greedily take in the knowledge being taught.

Black being the primary color was the only rule, however; students were allowed a fairly surprising amount of freedom with everything else. According to the information Brunhilde had gathered at the Royal Academy, there were some who wore frilly clothes with colorful embroidery, and others who wore tight-fitting clothes beneath bolero-esque jackets with wide fluffy sleeves, allowing them to adjust their sleeve size according to the classes they were attending.

“I would prefer an outfit with adjustable sleeves over one with impressive embroidery,” I noted. Long sleeves were nothing but an annoyance to me, but there were some classes like those on court manners that required them. The most practical and convenient solution I could think of was a long-sleeved bolero, which could simply be removed when the long sleeves weren’t necessary.

But unfortunately, Florencia, Elvira and Rihyarda all shook their heads at my suggestion, crushing my dreams at once.

“An archduke candidate cannot wear such an outfit.”

“Really...? But archduke candidates have to attend practical classes as well, no? Won’t the sleeves get in the way?”

“Conquering that challenge with grace is only natural for an archduke candidate, my dear,” Florencia said with a smile, refusing my suggestion without any further room for debate. I supposed it wasn’t too much of a problem; I would just need to bring a long cord of my own so that I could

manually adjust my sleeves as necessary.

Aside from my proposed alterations, my opinions on the clothes were largely ignored; the three women decided what outfits I would be wearing almost entirely on their own. This was probably for the best though, since I didn't want to end up wearing abnormal clothes that made me stand out completely from everyone else.

And so, thanks to the many seamstresses all mobilizing at once, my outfits were safely completed before winter socializing began.

"Rozemyne, what do you think about your personal chef and musician being sent to the Royal Academy with you?" Sylvester asked one day at dinner.

At the Royal Academy, students lived in dormitories that were separated according to duchy. The musicians who worked in each dormitory were selected from the personnel of five high-status nobles, while five chefs and their servants were chosen from the castle's kitchens.

As Wilfried and I were the highest-status nobles in our dormitory, being archduke candidates and all, our personal musicians were naturally to be included. Ella and Hugo, however, weren't castle chefs—they were my personnel who followed me wherever I went, so it seemed Sylvester wanted to get my permission before sending them off.

"You were planning to send them back to the temple while you're at the Royal Academy, correct? That'd be a waste. We should use their skills as much as possible."

"I don't mind taking them along with me—after all, I'd prefer being able to eat food I'm familiar with. To be clear though, we won't be teaching the chefs that come with them any new recipes." I didn't mind Hugo and Ella sharing the original recipes they had made while I was asleep, but my personal ones were business secrets that I couldn't share without first receiving payment.

Sylvester nodded sadly, having clearly been at least a little hopeful about obtaining new recipes. "No helping that. Still, if possible, I want you to debut the recipes I bought from you at tea parties and archduke candidate gatherings."

“Did you not want to keep those a secret?” I asked, remembering his strict orders to keep my study materials, picture books, and recipes hidden from other duchies. Perhaps this was him lifting the ban.

Sylvester deliberately crossed his arms. “Everything you make carries with it enormous influence, so I thought it best to keep them a secret until you entered the Royal Academy. You are to spend the next six years there as an archduke candidate, and I want to use this opportunity to boost Ehrenfest’s influence as much as possible,” he said, wearing the serious expression of an archduke. I couldn’t tell exactly what future he was envisioning here, but given our current relationship with Ahrensbach, I could imagine we would want as much power as we could get.

“From what Ferdinand has said, you want me to raise everyone’s grades in the Royal Academy, I believe?”

“That’s right.”

“What’s my budget for accomplishing this?” I asked. “If you genuinely want to raise the entire duchy’s grades, there are several plans I could execute, though they are much too expensive for me and the other students to finance ourselves. My options will change depending on how much the duchy is willing to dedicate toward this.”

Money was necessary for doing pretty much anything, and then we had to consider time as well. Had I woken up just a year earlier, there was a lot more I could have done to prepare for this.

“I am leaving for the Royal Academy so soon that there is not much I can do right now. Concrete preparations will need to start in spring. I will spend this year focusing on confirming the results of my study materials, comparing the gathered information to reality, and so on—in other words, getting up to date on the current situation. I will solidify my plans to increase the duchy’s overall grades once that is done, and I trust you to provide me the funds necessary to enact them.”

“...Alright. I’ll leave the Royal Academy to you and Wilfried. Do your jobs as archduke candidates and lead Ehrenfest to prosperity,” Sylvester said, once again speaking as an archduke.

Wilfried nodded with a stern expression. “Understood.”

My packing for the Royal Academy progressed smoothly under Rihyarda’s guidance, and autumn came to an end as Ferdinand continued cramming knowledge into my head through dense lectures. The falling snow signaled that winter had begun.

# The Gifting Ceremony

The winter feast was being held today. There was the winter debut and the baptism ceremony for children born in the winter, followed by the Gifting Ceremony for new students of the Academy. Since I myself was a new student, Ferdinand was going to be performing this year's ceremonies. I had my hair done at a leisurely pace and changed into my outfit, all in all taking my time with my preparations.

"Sister, shall we go to the grand hall together?" Charlotte asked, visiting my room as though she had been waiting for the very moment I was ready.

I naturally agreed at once, and together we left my room.

"I have been so lonely, Sister. You are finally living in the castle again, but due to your special lessons, I only ever get to see you during whirl practice and dinner."

*Charlotte is as cute as ever, I see.*

Seeing that my little sister had grown taller than me was such a shock that it had come close to breaking my heart, but the instant she had thanked me for rescuing her and apologized for putting me in danger by distracting my guard knights, my love for her smashed through the roof with such overwhelming force that all my surprise was blown away in an instant.

*My little sister is so cute, so healthy, and so adorable.*

I took out my highbeast and got inside, continuing to chat with Charlotte as I drove down the stairs. Wilfried was waiting for us at the bottom, having finished his preparations already.

"You're still using your highbeast?" he asked, blinking in surprise. "I thought the potion was supposed to make you healthy."

"I technically am healthy now, but I can't walk without magic tools yet."

"What?! Didn't you say you were training with Bonifatius in the Knight's

Order?! Are you *trying* to die?!" Wilfried exclaimed. He had undergone some training himself while his guard knights were being worked on, and in his eyes, training with Bonifatius was equivalent to an act of suicide. I had certainly felt like I was on the verge of death at times, so perhaps that was a perspective everyone who trained with him ended up having.

"Grandfather is simply teaching me about enhancement magic; we haven't been doing anything too arduous."

"You have been making such swift progress during our dedication whirl practice, Sister, that I thought you had already recovered entirely," Charlotte said. It seemed that she'd also assumed I had recovered over the past few weeks, but that couldn't have been further from the truth.

"...At the moment, the plan is for me to remove the magic tools after returning from the Royal Academy," I explained. "From there, I will work on slowly building my muscles back up. Keep this a secret, if you can; I won't need to wear them for too much longer."

With that, I started driving down the hall in Lessy. Wilfried and Charlotte were walking beside me, while our guard knights circled around us in a tight formation. The three of us hadn't walked together since the attack two years ago, and I could sense that everyone was tensing up a little.

"I am a bit nervous about all this, but they did catch the culprit. We should be perfectly fine," Charlotte said with a small, reassuring smile. Everyone else smiled a little as well, putting me slightly more at ease.

Once we turned the last corner to the grand hall, I got out of my Pandabus. I couldn't keep riding my highbeast beyond this point, which meant I would be standing for just about the rest of the day.

*Will... Will I really survive this?*

My worry must have shown on my face, because Wilfried soon furrowed his brow and held out a hand to me. "Rozemyne, want to lean on my arm?"

"No, I am such a slow walker that doing so would only tire you out. You may go on ahead with Charlotte. I will walk at my own pace."

"That's not an option. We've been told to stick together today."

Wilfried and Charlotte stood firm, so in the end, everyone ended up walking with me. We took our places at the very front of those lined up in the grand hall, dragging all our guard knights along as well. I couldn't see much along the way due to all the knights around us, but the nobles who came to greet us all widened their eyes upon seeing me.

"I see that you have awoken, Lady Rozemyne."

"What a joyous day. Now we can attend the Royal Academy together, Lady Rozemyne. I cannot wait."

"Indeed, Count Groschel, Brunhilde. My sister is at full health once again," Charlotte said, stepping forward and handling the nobles with a smile.

Brunhilde was two years older than me; I remembered seeing her in the winter playroom three years ago. Her eyes were light brown and she had straight hair that was pure crimson. From what I remembered, she was a fashionable girl who loved to talk, and she was the one who had gathered all the information about fashion trends at the Royal Academy for me.

I stood next to Charlotte and gave Brunhilde a smile. It would be best to thank her here.

"Brunhilde, the fashion information you gathered at the Royal Academy proved highly useful."

"Oh my, I am glad to have been of use to you," she replied in a bright voice, at which point others began gathering to greet us as well. I was something of a curiosity to everyone, given that I had been asleep for two full years, so noble after noble continued to approach.

"Please do allow me to greet Lady Rozemyne as well," came a voice.

"Ah, Viscountess Dahldolf," Wilfried said, stepping in front of me before I could say anything. "I am glad to see you are in good health as well. Incidentally, I am interested in speaking to Viscount Dahldolf. Do you know where he is?"

"Oh my. Hello, Lord Wilfried... I shall search for him. If you will excuse me."

Shikza's mother hated me, so I was pleased to see her attack get deflected. I

was grateful for Wilfried, but as the waves of nobles continued to greet us, I suddenly realized something.

*Wait... Wilfried and Charlotte are protecting me.*

Whenever a noble came forward to greet me, one of them would smoothly step between us. Unless I actively stepped forward to involve myself, the exchange would end without me having to say a word. I was now watching their backs as they protected me during noble exchanges—a complete reversal from two years ago.

“You have both learned so much, haven’t you?” I commented.

Wilfried nodded. “We couldn’t rely on you to protect us forever.”

The manual about dealing with nobles that Ferdinand had beaten into my head was pretty sizable, as I recalled. It was genuinely impressive that they had managed to master it at such a young age.

“There is much to memorize. I imagine it has been quite the struggle.”

“...It certainly has,” Charlotte replied. “But it was not much more than you were made to study two years ago, and you had to prepare for my baptism ceremony and winter debut on top of that, correct? I thought I would collapse from exhaustion after seeing all the boards of religious ceremonies that you had to memorize, Sister.”

It seemed that Ferdinand had pushed both the manual for dealing with nobles and the wooden boards covering the Spring Prayer onto them at once, so they ended up catching a glimpse of the constant studying I had needed to endure.

“I have been told that you even helped with my High Bishop work. I am so sorry to have forced so much onto you both.”

“Sister, we too are children of the archduke. We learned well over the past two years just how important and taxing it is to fill the Central District with mana. I intend to participate in Spring Prayer next year as well; I cannot allow you to shoulder such a heavy burden alone.”

“Right,” Wilfried added. “We can get it over with a lot quicker if we all help each other.”

*Oh no. They've both grown so much, they've completely left me behind.*

As I chewed over how the two of them had grown both in body and spirit, the archducal couple arrived. They ascended the stage, took their seats, then directed gentle smiles our way, which we naturally returned.

"The High Priest may now enter," came an announcement.

Ferdinand walked up onto the stage and gazed across all those below. "We welcome the new children of Ehrenfest," he announced, his voice resounding through the grand hall. No sooner had he spoken than the door opened, and the noble children baptized this year started to enter.

*Ngh. Some of those kids are taller than me.*

"Lady Rozemyne," Cornelius whispered as I watched some of the children climb up onto the stage to be baptized. "There's a boy named Nikolaus among those about to have their debut, and... he's the son of Father's second wife. Our half-brother."

I had been baptized with Elvira, the first wife, as my mother, while Nikolaus had been baptized with Trudeliede, the second wife, as his mother.

"I imagine he and Trudeliede will come to greet you later."

"...Is there anything I need to be careful about?" I asked, noticing that Cornelius looked a little on guard.

"No, but Father did ask me to tell you not to show him any blatant favoritism in the winter playroom. You have a tendency to be especially sweet with younger family members, so..."

Since I was the archduke's adopted daughter, Wilfried and Charlotte were my main social priority as my adoptive siblings, then Eckhart, Lamprecht, and Cornelius as my brothers. Nikolaus was fairly low on the priority list due to him only being a half-brother, and it was apparently important that I not dote on him excessively.

*But little brothers are cute too, and I want him to rely on me...*

As an archnoble, Nikolaus was the last to play harspiel at the debut, and his performance made it clear just how much he had practiced. He was a young

boy with light-chestnut hair and bright-blue eyes. Given how little he resembled Karstedt, he probably took after his mother, but he was well-built and probably taller than me.

The Gifting Ceremony followed the winter debut. Ferdinand climbed down from the stage; then eight scholars carrying ornately carved boxes moved to take his place, standing in a line. Once everyone was in place, Sylvester strode to the center of the stage.

“The Gifting Ceremony shall now begin. New students of the Royal Academy, step forward!”

The voice of a scholar rang out, then Wilfried escorted me up onto the stage. We lined up together alongside six other children—the same six we had lined up with three years ago at our debut. I scanned the group and recognized everyone, but they were now all a lot taller than I remembered. My heart sank at how blatant my own lack of growth was now, and that was when Philine caught my eye. She gave a happy smile, which I promptly returned. It was nice to see a genuinely friendly face after all the weird and curious looks I had gotten so far today.

“Rozemyne,” Sylvester called.

I shot my head up and stepped forward. One of the scholars set his box in front of Sylvester, who delicately opened it before taking out the cape and brooch within, which he then held out to me.

“I ask that you live life to the fullest—that you learn well, grow, and become a noble worthy of Ehrenfest.”

“In honor of the God of Darkness, I will do my utmost to turn my experiences into personal strengths,” I replied, accepting the cape and brooch before stepping back to rejoin the line.

Once everyone had received their gifts, the scholars informed us when we were to move to the Royal Academy. As was tradition, the oldest students would be leaving first, with the new students—Wilfried and me included—leaving on the final day.

And so began our daily lives in the winter.

# The Winter Playroom and Our Departure

Lunch followed the Gifting Ceremony, after which winter socializing began. Before I could participate, however, Ferdinand instructed me to return to my room; I had apparently already moved around more than my body could manage for one day.

“But I was told that Nikolaus and Father’s second wife would be coming to greet me...”

“Your health is more important than such obligatory greetings, do you not think? Do not forget that you are moving solely due to the power of magic tools. You collapsing will disturb your upcoming schedule, and there is not much time until you leave for the Royal Academy as it is. I should not even have to explain this to you,” Ferdinand said, going on to detail all the potential problems that would arise. I understood that he was worried about me, but my appreciation dwindled the longer his speech continued.

*If you could stop dragging these things out, Ferdinand, you’d be a much better person.*

I sadly hung my head as I continued to listen, but really, Ferdinand did understand my current health situation better than anyone. He was definitely worried about me, and in order to put an end to his lengthy lecture, I decided to obediently return to my room.

“Very well. As you suggest, I will return to my room for today. However, since tomorrow is the first day of the winter playroom, I plan to go there in the morning. I need to greet the children who have had their baptisms, and I wish to grasp the situation there as well. I will visit your office in the afternoon, so please summon those who gathered the information I gave you yesterday.”

That was enough for Ferdinand to understand my intention. He nodded, put a hand on his cheek, then furrowed his brows just a tiny bit.

“You will not be paying them at the Royal Academy?”

“Those on the documents I gave you graduated in the two years I was asleep. I will pay those still enrolled in the Royal Academy once we arrive there.”

I also had Ehrenfest’s leaders read the documents Damuel had organized, since much like Ferdinand and I, they would most likely each have their own ideas of what constituted valuable information. This ultimately proved to be the case, with some even asking for follow-ups on certain reports.

Those who had provided information that was deemed valuable were paid for their efforts, with the money coming from whichever area of the government had found it useful. The scholars didn’t know me very well, so they were initially stunned when I came to charge them money, but they could hardly refuse after seeing the archducal couple and the knight commander paying with bemused smiles.

And so I acquired the money just as I had always planned to.

“Ah, yes. You certainly did sell the information to various places. Very well. I will arrange for them to be gathered tomorrow afternoon.”

“That is much appreciated.”

“So will you only be at the playroom tomorrow?” Charlotte asked, giving me puppy-dog eyes once my plans were settled. I faltered slightly, remembering how sad she was about only getting to see me during whirl practice and at dinner.

“...That may end up being the case. I intend to at least drop by to say hello to everyone, but I truly do not have much time if I am to compensate for the two years I have missed.”

Seeing how much the kids my age had grown at the Gifting Ceremony made me painfully aware of not only my own lack of growth, but also the dangers that I faced. There was no mistaking that I would be mocked and scorned for still looking so young, so the least I could do was ensure I didn’t fall behind with my studies as well. After all, in order to raise the grades of everyone in Ehrenfest, I first needed to achieve excellent grades myself. Attempting to push my study methods without evidence to prove their effectiveness would only make people skeptical.

*Not to mention, getting good grades is a requirement for me entering the library...*

Once I had a grasp on the state of the playroom, I wanted to dedicate as much time as I could to my own studies.

"I understand how you feel, Sister. In that case, may I ask you to prepare rewards to be distributed to the children tomorrow? There are many who have been eagerly awaiting to experience the taste of your sweets again."

"Certainly. I will make sure to have them ready," I replied with a reassuring smile. It had completely slipped my mind that Wilfried's and her chefs had been preparing the sweets given as rewards for the past two years, so I had very nearly forgotten to prepare some of my own.

*Whew, that was close... Thank goodness Charlotte was here to remind me.*

Now that I thought about it, though, it took a lot of money to prepare sweets. Sugar was stupidly expensive, and while honey could always be used as a cheaper alternative, the costs would surely mount if sweets were being prepared every day. I could manage since I was making my own money, but I had to wonder how they had managed to afford it.

*It would probably be weird for me to ask and then offer to repay them, but still... This was something I started. It's my fault they had to fund it while I was gone.*

I fell into thought, which caused Wilfried to narrow his dark-green eyes. "Let me guess, Rozemyne—you're planning to lead the playroom all by yourself again, aren't you?"

"Yes. I started its present customs on a whim, and while not much else could be done while I was asleep, I cannot allow you both to continue carrying this burden," I said, causing Charlotte to purse her lips and glare at me with her indigo eyes. Seeing my cute sister give me such a reproachful look actually shook me to my core.

"Sister, should you truly be taking on more work when you are already so busy with your own matters? Not to mention, Father said it is the duty of all his children to educate those in the playroom and improve Ehrenfest's future

grades, did he not?”

“I-I suppose he did...”

Charlotte scooted closer, forcing me to slowly raise my head to look up at her slightly higher, intensely smiling face. My little sister was overpowering me, and as I wavered, Wilfried gave me a friendly slap on the back.

“In other words, it’s our job to lead the playroom too. You don’t get to keep it all to yourself. We’ll be considered incompetent if we leave it all to you, and you’re smart enough to know what that means, yeah?”

They were both trying to do their work as children of the archduke, viewing us all as equals. For that reason, it was best for me to figure out what they were skilled at, then delegate work accordingly.

“Very well. I will observe the playroom tomorrow and delegate the work based on what I see,” I suggested.

Wilfried’s eyes lit up at once. He patted me on the head while proudly puffing out his chest. “Yep. For now though, you should go and rest. You’ve got a big day ahead of you tomorrow.”

“Yes, we would not want you to collapse again,” Charlotte agreed. Her expression seemed a lot lighter as well, no doubt an indication that she was happy I was trusting her with work.

*Well, as long as they both want to work...* I thought, getting up and heading toward the door to leave the dining hall.

“Rozemyne.”

“Yes, Ferdinand?” I asked, turning around to look at him.

“Your body needs rest, but your mind is still fully capable of work. Continue to read the documents I gave you while in bed.”

“Gladly.”

I returned to my room, bathed and changed with Rihyarda and Ottilie’s assistance, then climbed into bed. There was a box of study materials that I needed to read on a nearby table.

“Goodness, Ferdinand sure has put you through the wringer, hm? If he truly wishes for you to rest, he should forbid you from reading as well,” Rihyarda said, not even trying to hide her anger.

I simply sighed in relief as I took a book out of the box and spread it open on the bed. As much as I appreciated Rihyarda’s consideration, I was at my calmest while I was reading. To me, Ferdinand had come across as an actual god when he instructed me to continue studying.

“Unfortunately, there is simply too much I must learn before leaving for the Royal Academy,” I said. “I have no choice but to read these documents. Aha.”

Rihyarda was annoyed about Ferdinand giving me work despite having told me to rest, but I could guess that everyone knew he was simply protecting me from the other nobles. My two years in the jureve meant I hadn’t grown at all, which made the other nobles look at me with curiosity, scorn, and anything but friendliness. Despite being prepared for it all, the staring and whispering had been more intense than I had expected, causing me to lose my patience in no time at all. Wilfried and Charlotte had protected me, but even so, simply being there had been exhausting.

The next day, I headed to the winter playroom, with Rihyarda and Ottilie carrying the sweets Ella had prepared. People would start leaving for the Royal Academy today, and Hugo was among the first wave to be moving to my dormitory’s kitchen. I had told him to keep Ella safe, to immediately report to me if anything were to happen, and to have her room prepared just in case there was an incident of some kind. I didn’t want to send a young woman like Ella somewhere I couldn’t see her, so she was going to be leaving for the Royal Academy with me instead.

Of course, the chefs and servants weren’t the only ones going—the students and such were heading to the Royal Academy as well. Since Angelica was now in the final grade, she was leaving today as well, leaving only Damuel and Cornelius to guard me.

“You’re going to the Royal Academy tomorrow, right, Cornelius?”

“Yes. The experienced older students enter the dormitory first and prepare

for the younger students to arrive.”

I entered the playroom while Damuel and Cornelius told me about the dormitory and the advancement ceremony.

“Good day, Sister.”

“Good day, Charlotte.”

A stir ran through the playroom the moment I entered. The students were old enough to recognize me, but those who had been baptized during the past two years had never seen me before. Some looked as though they had doubted my existence despite all they had heard, while others squinted as they tried to figure out who I was, having most likely not attended the start of winter socializing yesterday.

In the midst of all that, Wilfried took my hand, led me in front of everyone, then raised his other hand to silence them. “I imagine some of you do not recognize the young woman before you, given that she spent the past two years recovering, so allow me to introduce you. This is Rozemyne, my little sister and Charlotte’s older sister. I imagine all of the older children among us know that she invented the picture books, karuta, and playing cards we all use here, as well as the sweets unlike anything we have ever tasted before.”

*Wh... Wha... What kind of an introduction was that?!*

As I gasped in terror, Charlotte stepped over and put on a bright, extremely cute smile. “Even as she slept, my sister Rozemyne blessed Ehrenfest with her enormous quantity of mana, as one would expect from the Saint of Ehrenfest herself. I am sure you have all heard of her, even if you have not actually seen her, correct? My sister has accomplished feats so great that she has earned my utmost respect.”

*No, stop! Some of the kids actually believe you! The sheer sense of awe radiating from them is hurting my eyes! I’m no saint!*

I wanted to deny it with all my might and run away, but Wilfried and Charlotte were on either side of me, plus we were surrounded by guard knights. There was no escape. All I could do was put on a twitchy noble smile while Rihyarda sat me down onto the chair that had been prepared for me.

“I permit you all to greet Rozemyne,” Wilfried said, and a line promptly formed in front of me. It consisted only of the children I had never met before, and so it was only about thirty people long.

“I am Bertilde, daughter of Giebe Groschel. May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?”

“You may.”

I went through the greetings with a smile while receiving the small lights of their blessings. My half-brother Nikolaus was standing near the middle of the line, and when he eventually reached me, he knelt down and crossed his arms in front of his chest with enough enthusiasm that his light-chestnut hair fluttered slightly.

“I am Nikolaus, son of Karstedt the knight commander and Trudeliede. May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?”

“You may.”

Once he had finished the greeting, Nikolaus moved to leave. I wondered for a moment whether I should have treated him more warmly as his older half-sister, but no sooner had that thought crossed my mind than Cornelius called my name.

“Have you forgotten my warning?” he asked, an intense smile much like Elvira’s appearing on his face as he glared down at me.

“...I remember.”

“Thank you.”

When the children had all finished greeting me, stone slates were distributed to those who had joined the playroom this year, while Professor Moritz gave a simple test to see how well they knew their letters and math. At the same time, the older kids split into last year’s groups with Wilfried and Charlotte at their center, then started playing games of karuta and cards. They were seeing how much better everyone had gotten since the previous spring.

I looked around from where I was sitting, impressed. It was clear they had polished the process and mastered leading the playroom in my absence.

“For the first time in two years, Rozemyne’s sweets will be given as today’s rewards,” Wilfried announced. The children immediately reacted in one of two ways: they either blinked in confusion, having never eaten Ella’s sweets before, or instantly became very serious.

“I will use my full power today,” one boy said. “This is a battle I cannot afford to lose.”

“Hah! I won’t show you any mercy!” another exclaimed. And with that, they started a rousing game of karuta.

“Lady Rozemyne, these are documents I’ve put together describing the playroom studies over the past two years. Please look them over,” Moritz said.

I took the documents and scanned them. “From what I can see, everything has been managed quite well. The documents indicate that the average grade has increased, so we should be safe to increase the difficulty of the math problems.”

“You wish to increase the difficulty *again*?” Moritz asked, widening his eyes.

I nodded. “Aub Ehrenfest has instructed me to raise the average grade level for the entirety of the duchy while I am attending the Royal Academy as an archduke candidate. I will be requesting your help to make this a reality, Professor Moritz.”

“As you wish.”

“That said, I certainly placed quite a burden on you. It hadn’t been my intention to start my sleep in the winter, so I left nothing but the vaguest of plans for the winter playroom. It must have been difficult to manage without any precise orders.”

The jotted-down memos I had written for future playroom plans and such had apparently been given to people in the form of orders from me. I could imagine they had all struggled with how unclear they all were.

“...To speak frankly, we encountered many setbacks in the first year, and

recovering from them was no easy task. We were forced to repeat a process of trial and error as we discovered all the minor, considerate ways in which you had been steering things in the proper direction. The winter playroom does indeed flow smoothly now, but it took us two years to reach this point," Moritz replied.

The confidence he had developed through the past two years of work was now clear on his face. At this point, it seemed safe to leave managing the playroom entirely to him and Charlotte.

"I must compensate for the two years I was asleep, and so I will be unable to visit the playroom from tomorrow onward. I entrust managing things to you."

Moritz knelt and crossed his arms in response, and at that moment, the games of karuta concluded. The winners let out victorious cries and pumped their fists in the air, while Wilfried punched the floor in frustration.

The winners were called over in group order to be given their rewards, with everyone else watching on in envy as they bit into the sweets and trembled with delight.

"Ghh... I demand a rematch!" Wilfried yelled.

"Creating new teams based on the results comes first," Charlotte chided.

"Ngh..."

Wilfried had evidently become too caught up in the game, but that one comment was enough to bring him back to his senses. He stood up, his mouth bent into a frown, and then joined Charlotte in remaking the teams. All in all, the process was handled fairly expertly. Not only were the children generally separated into students and those too young to be students, but it was clear they were also divided into members of a Wilfried faction and a Charlotte faction, judging by the way the kids flocked to help them.

"Lady Rozemyne," came a voice. I turned to see Philine looking up at me and fidgeting. The moment I saw the boards she was hugging to her chest, I knew what she had with her.

"Philine, will you show me your stories?"

“Yes, Lady Rozemyne.” Her eyes sparkled as she showed me the collection of stories she had gathered over the years. The earlier boards were written with clumsy handwriting and childish parlance, so they were difficult to read, but two years of practice had only led to her getting better and better. Her grasp of written versus spoken language had strengthened considerably, and just a single glance at the latest board showed just how much she had grown.

“You certainly have written much,” I said, feeling a smile play on my lips.

“You accepted my mother’s story into your collection of knight stories, and I cannot describe how happy it made me to hear that other nobles have enjoyed reading it,” she said. “Everyone else was overjoyed to see their stories included as well.”

The book in question had included stories collected from the winter playroom. It seemed the children had borrowed copies while I was asleep, and it was heartwarming to hear how pleased they had been to see their own stories within.

*I wish I could have seen that...*

“They had never anticipated that the stories they had desperately tried to recall in order to borrow teaching materials would be turned into a book. After that, Roderick spent much time gathering new stories.”

“I recall reading Roderick’s stories. They were quite enjoyable. I plan to rewrite the others into written language and add them to books as well. Have you written the rest of your mother’s stories, Philine?” I asked, thinking back to two years ago.

She lowered her eyes sadly, then shook her head. “No, not all of them. There are some stories that I have forgotten, and... that makes me very sad.”

“Philine, there are a number of common patterns that stories follow, so you will find ones oddly similar to those you know even in distant lands. There are many students from different duchies gathered in the Royal Academy, yes? Perhaps you could ask them about their stories in hope of remembering your own,” I suggested.

Philine’s grass-green eyes widened, then she let out a giggle. “Lady

Rozemyne, could it be that you plan to gather stories in the Royal Academy as well?"

"Why yes, I do. Is this not the perfect opportunity to gather stories known only outside of Ehrenfest?" I replied, puffing out my chest.

She knelt down and crossed her arms. "I, Philine, swear to gather information from every duchy as an apprentice scholar and offer up their stories to you, Lady Rozemyne."

"I am quite looking forward to it," I replied, and an instant later, a stir ran through the room. Uncomfortable tension filled the air, and a number of the students rushed over in wide-eyed shock.

"Lady Rozemyne, have you accepted Philine as your retainer?" they asked.

Taken aback by this sudden development, I glanced up at Cornelius who was standing guard beside me. He seemed to understand what was going on, as he smoothly stepped forward.

"No, she has not. As someone who heard the entire exchange, she said nothing of the sort. Philine simply agreed to grant Lady Rozemyne's wishes. She may be taken as a retainer in the future, but that is not presently the case," Cornelius said.

Some of those gathered sighed in relief, while Philine hugged her boards to her chest again and stepped back into the crowd, looking embarrassed and uncomfortable.

"Lady Rozemyne, have you decided upon your retainers yet?" one girl asked, having steeled her resolve to speak.

Everything finally clicked into place. Wilfried and Charlotte already had followers consolidating around them, and those who hadn't won a place by their side were no doubt aiming for me now, since I needed to have my retainers assigned soon. Children lived in the shadow of their parents, however, so it wasn't a decision I could make lightly.

"Selecting those who will serve me in the Royal Academy is a matter I will discuss with Rihyarda, my head attendant."

“Have candidates already been chosen?”

I didn’t know who the candidates were, but considering we were prioritizing members of my mother’s faction, I could imagine almost all of them had been decided upon long ago. I couldn’t give any clear answers though, so I decided to evade the question as best I could and ask Rihyarda later.

“The candidates have been chosen, yes, but they will only be announced after I have departed for the Academy,” I said with a smile. The tension in the air faded at once, and the students quickly dispersed.

*Well, I guess I need to think about my retainers now.*

Fourth bell rang while I thought things over. I exited the playroom and started making my way to my own room to have lunch.

“Rihyarda, have my retainer candidates been chosen? Um, that is, people within our faction and everything...”

“Yes, of course. Much has changed among the factions over the past two years.”

Rihyarda and I discussed the matter as we walked, and in the process, I learned that my only retainers were Ottilie, the three knights, and Rihyarda herself. The apprentice attendants had apparently been removed from my service while I was gone.

“Generally speaking, women resign upon getting married or to give birth. Apprentices often seek new employment when the one they serve is away for an unknown amount of time, since the quality of partner they find is greatly determined by their place of work,” Rihyarda explained, then noting that my apprentice attendants had been distributed between Florencia and Charlotte. “It is not at all unwise to select your retainers at the Royal Academy dormitory, considering that you are going to be living there. Those you are staying with cannot keep up appearances forever; sooner or later, they’ll show their true selves.”

*But doesn’t that mean they’ll also see* my *true self...? That’s no good at all.*

I went to Ferdinand’s office after lunch, where those who had gathered

information for me were already waiting with their guardians. They were all standing in a line, looking sick to their stomachs; I could guess that receiving a summons from the archduke's half-brother wasn't very good for the heart.

"Ferdinand, everyone seems a little nervous," I observed. "Might I ask what your exact phrasing was when you summoned them?"

"To come at once upon finishing lunch. Why?"

*Holy gods, Ferdinand! Of course they'll shove their lunches down their throats and rush over when you phrase it like that!*

My stomach started to ache. I felt so, so bad for them.

"Hello, everyone. You were not summoned here today to be reprimanded in the least; rather, you may relax, for I wish to reward your hard work," I explained. The information gatherers sighed in relief, while their guardians looked down at me curiously, unsure what to expect next. "Thank you all for dedicating yourselves to gathering information in the Royal Academy while I was asleep. I appreciate that this comes a little late, but you will now be paid in full."

The information gatherers blinked in surprise, looking as though they had entirely forgotten about the remaining payment. I took this opportunity to begin calling them up one by one.

"The vice commander of the Knight's Order was quite happy to see your information," I mentioned to the first. "Aub Ehrenfest was quite moved by the insight your perspective provided," I then said to the second.

I continued to summon them by name, thanking them for their efforts, apologizing for paying them so late, giving them a few words of encouragement, and then finally delivering their payments until everyone had been seen to.

"You are all skilled enough to have obtained information desired by the leaders of Ehrenfest. I look forward to your continued good work," I said.

"Do not falter in your dedication," Ferdinand added.

We saw everyone off as they exited the room with motivated expressions,

and my studying began as soon as they were gone. There really wasn't much time before I needed to leave for the Royal Academy.

"Ferdinand, am I really ready for the Royal Academy as I am now?"

"These studies are all an investment for the future. You would pass in your current state, but passing alone is not enough. There is only one reason why I am enforcing these studies on you. Do you know what that reason is?" he asked, narrowing his light-golden eyes.

I could only think of one reason why Ferdinand would take the time to teach me directly when he had so much work to do himself: "So I won't embarrass myself as a daughter of the archduke, right?"

"...More or less, I suppose. Consider it an investment for the future."

My studies continued until the absolute last minute, and finally it was time for me to leave for the Royal Academy. I put on my mostly black outfit, as well as my brooch and cape which were both the color of ocher, then headed for the teleportation hall with Rihyarda. Angelica and Cornelius had already departed themselves, leaving only Damuel to guard me.

The room was dark and windowless. The only light came from the teleportation circle glowing upon the floor, atop which servants were stacking boxes filled with living necessities. Many people were here to see me off: the archducal couple, Charlotte, Karstedt, Elvira, Bonifatius, and Ferdinand with his guard knight Eckhart. Wilfried was going to be teleporting after me, so I could see him and Lamprecht in the crowd as well. My entire noble family was here.

"You won't need to worry too much with Cornelius around, but please take care of your health," Karstedt said.

"Indeed, dear. Take care of your health," Elvira added. "I will eagerly await the day you return, when we can have a tea party once again."

"I'll be careful. And I shall look forward to that tea party as well, Mother."

"Do not forget I trained your guard knights," Bonifatius interjected. "Angelica and Cornelius will keep you safe. And while you're gone, I'll train Damuel even harder. You have nothing to worry about."

I saw Damuel recoil with fear at Bonifatius's words, but there was no way for me to save him now. The most I could do was offer him my thoughts and prayers.

*Godspeed, Damuel. Godspeed.*

"Keep an eye out for Ahrensbach," Sylvester said. "If there's something you want to know, send out your apprentice scholars. Don't do something as careless as getting directly involved."

As I nodded, Florencia asked me to look after Wilfried as well. Given how much he had grown lately, though, I had a feeling he would be the one looking after me.

"I can't wait to hear your stories of the Royal Academy, Sister."

"Of course, Charlotte. And I shall be trusting you with the playroom while I'm gone."

"You may count on me."

The last to speak was Ferdinand. "Now, Rozemyne—I advise you to pass all of your exams and return before the Dedication Ritual begins."

"Ferdinand, the Dedication Ritual begins halfway through the winter. Isn't that a bit unreasonable?" I retorted. While it was true that I had crammed pretty hard for the sake of getting access to the Royal Academy's library, asking me to pull off a miracle like that after having missed two whole years of studying was just too much.

Ferdinand smirked. "For what purpose do you think I assisted you with your cramming despite having so much work of my own?"

"Well... didn't you say it was an investment for my future?"

"I believe I said it was an investment for *the* future," he replied with a poisonous smile.

I could feel my cheek twitch. "Wait... are you trying to tell me this was all for *your* benefit?!"

Ferdinand didn't answer my question, instead putting on a bright smile so blatantly fake that it made me sick. He wasn't about to give me a clear

confirmation I could use against him.

"I have faith in your abilities," Ferdinand said. "You are to finish your exams as soon as possible, and return before you instigate any disasters at the Academy. Is that clear?"

*Hmph!*

I too avoided giving a clear confirmation, and after giving him a tight-lipped smile, I stepped onto the teleportation circle.

# My Retainers and Entering the Dormitory

The teleportation circle filled with mana before shining with black and gold light, the feystone embedded in my brooch shining along with it. I saw the air in front of me begin to shimmer, and for a brief moment, I was hit with a feeling of dizziness. Rihyarda must have noticed my head wavering, because she reached out her hands and hugged me against her.

Just as I sighed in relief, I realized that the shapes of those standing in front of me had started to twist about like they were caught in a whirlpool. The sight made me blink in surprise and then rub my eyes as I tried to process what was happening. A few seconds passed, and by the time my vision was back to normal, everyone who had gathered to see me off was gone.

“Welcome to the Royal Academy, Lady Rozemyne. This is the Ehrenfest Dormitory,” came a voice.

In front of me was a wide-open pair of doors with two knights standing on either side to monitor the magic circle. The teleportation circle beneath me was the same as before and the room looked fairly similar, but I could tell this wasn’t the same place by the chairs positioned near the knights, the assorted magic tools nearby, and the fact that all the people who had seen me off were no longer there.

“If you aren’t feeling well, milady, let’s hurry to your room,” Rihyarda said, placing a hand on my back and gently guiding me out of the teleportation room. “Lord Wilfried cannot teleport until the servants have brought your things to your room.”

Once through the doors, I found myself standing in a waiting room similar to the one in the castle. This was where those wanting to use the teleportation circle would bring their belongings and wait their turn, though only Angelica and Cornelius were here right now, having come to greet me.

“It is good to see you have arrived safely, Lady Rozemyne.”

We left the waiting room together and stepped into a corridor lined with doors. It looked so much like one of the castle's hallways that I genuinely doubted whether I had actually teleported to the Royal Academy.

"The Royal Academy's dormitories were made using the creation magic of archdukes who have long since passed, so the aesthetic of a given duchy's dormitory tends to resemble its castle," Rihyarda explained. Each duchy's dormitory apparently had its own style, with some being fancy, some rustic, some rounded and elegant, some sharp and crude, and so on. "That said, as you cannot enter the dormitories of other duchies, you will only see their exteriors when you are flying on your highbeast."

It seemed that the brooches we were given during the gifting ceremony were specialized magic tools unique to our respective duchies, such that even if one was stolen, it couldn't be used to enter the dormitory of another duchy.

"This way, Lady Rozemyne. Your tea has been prepared," Cornelius said.

"Angelica, Cornelius, where exactly are we going right now?" I asked.

"The common room has been prepared to welcome new students."

Those who teleported from the castle to the dormitory were unable to enter their rooms until their attendants had finished preparing them, so they waited in the common room in the meantime. Here, the senior students, whose rooms had already been prepared, would welcome their juniors.

"I'm leaving milady in your care," Rihyarda said when we reached the stairs; then she went up to put away the luggage the servants had brought in.

"Lady Rozemyne has arrived," my guard knights announced, prompting some upperclassman apprentice attendants to begin preparing tea and serving me sweets. When I looked around, I saw some of the other new students in my year nervously sipping their own tea.

"Please feel free to sit over here, Lady Rozemyne," Brunhilde said with her amber eyes narrowed in a warm smile, her crimson hair fluttering slightly as she came over. She had been nine when I first debuted in the winter playroom, so she was now a twelve-year-old student in her third year. "My... Your outfit is simply magnificent. It plays on the Royal Academy's current fashion trends

while incorporating flower ornaments of your own design."

"It was made based on the information you provided, Brunhilde. Your help was much appreciated, as I am not familiar with the trends of the Royal Academy."

"It is my wish that your clothing designs and hair ornaments grow in popularity here in the Sovereignty. I would like for Ehrenfest fashion to dominate for at least a brief period while I am attending the Royal Academy," Brunhilde explained. As a fashionable archnoble who stayed on top of trends, she apparently found it quite humiliating for her home duchy to be considered a backwater.

"I am certain that the trends you established in Ehrenfest have the potential to be just as popular in the Sovereignty," she continued. "I previously asked the archducal couple whether I could spread them myself, but they forbade any such actions until you were attending the Royal Academy. I have been waiting oh, oh, *oh* so eagerly for you to arrive. This year will certainly be the best one yet."

Brunhilde's smile remained just as bright as she spoke about spreading sweets and fashion throughout the Sovereignty, her eyes burning with the same naked ambition I so often saw from Elvira. In all honesty, I found it a little overwhelming—I only ever made things when the thought struck me or when I needed something in particular, so all this business about trends was pretty much beyond me.

"Lady Brunhilde, you mustn't just speak of your own interests. How can you expect Lady Rozemyne to relax?" one girl chided as she quietly stepped forward. Locks of emerald-green hair framed her face, with the rest tied into a long braid that rested over her shoulder. She was a bit shorter than Brunhilde, and the fact that I couldn't remember speaking to her meant she had probably already entered the Academy by the time I joined the playroom.

"Very true, Lieseleta. Do forgive me, Lady Rozemyne. It seems I was so overjoyed that I forgot myself."

"Think nothing of it, Brunhilde. I understand well that you are determined to strengthen Ehrenfest's influence. That is an important trait for any archnoble to

have,” I said reassuringly.

Brunhilde stepped back with a sigh of relief, at which point Lieseleta stepped forward to take her place. “My apologies for the disturbance, Lady Rozemyne. Please enjoy your stay,” she said with a polite smile before quietly leaving.



Lieseleta's hair was tightly braided so that it wouldn't get in the way when she moved, and her dark-green eyes shone with an intelligent light. The colors were all different, but she looked a lot like Angelica. They had to be sisters, or at least cousins.

I turned to look at Angelica, who was standing behind me. "Lieseleta certainly looks like you, doesn't she?"

"Yes, she's my little sister. She's very competent, unlike me, so our parents compliment her all the time."

Lieseleta seemed to be quick-witted and tactful: she was speeding all around the room, preparing damp cloths for those who had dirtied their hands with sweets, pouring fresh tea for the newly arriving students, and so on. She carried herself with restraint, saying only that which was necessary as she worked with an unfaltering smile. It all went to show just how well raised she really was. While she looked a lot like Angelica, the way she spoke and acted couldn't have been more different.

*Was that "skilled attendant bloodline" her parents mentioned fully concentrated into Lieseleta?*

"Well, Angelica, was it not the case that you simply have a poor affinity for attendant work? You are an excellent knight, are you not?"

"That's exactly right, Lady Rozemyne," came a sudden voice, speaking up in defense of Angelica. I blinked in surprise, while Angelica frowned slightly.

"Lady Judithe..." she said, sounding troubled.

Judithe was one of the girls I had seen in the playroom three years ago, and I seemed to recall her being one year older than me. She had sparkling violet eyes and fluffy bright-orange hair that was bundled into a ponytail just like Angelica's.

"Lady Angelica is an expert at enhancement magic despite being a medknight, and she's so skilled that even Lord Bonifatius recognized her talents and took her on as an apprentice. She's amazing. On top of that, she's received your favor, Lady Rozemyne, and her manablade has a mind of its own. It can even talk. What other manablade can do that?" Judithe said, extolling Angelica's

virtues at length. “I want to raise a manablade of my own, but I don’t have the mana for it, and I can’t do enhancement magic either.”

It certainly was nice to hear my guard knight receiving so much praise. I listened with a smile before voicing my agreement. “Yes, it is amazing that Angelica has learned to use enhancement magic so well, isn’t it? Lord Bonifatius did tell me that she has grown much while I was asleep.”

“Exactly! I want to be strong enough for Lord Bonifatius to recognize my efforts too. Lady Angelica is my role model.”

*Well, well, well... Looks like Judithe is a member of an Angelica cult. She pretty much worships her.*

“Lady Judithe, please leave it at that...” Angelica interjected.

“You’re right. Lady Rozemyne can’t relax like this. To think you even take perfect care of your charge, Lady Angelica! I have so much to learn from you. If you’ll excuse me.”

It occurred to me that Judithe was actively interpreting Angelica’s words and actions in the best, most convenient way possible. I glanced up to see that Angelica was trying not to make eye contact with Judithe, while Cornelius was barely containing his laughter. It seemed that she was so unaccustomed to receiving praise that she didn’t quite know how to react to the avalanche of compliments.

“Judithe certainly is a good girl, isn’t she?” I said.

“...No. She is a *weird* girl, not a good one,” Angelica replied, correcting me with a thoroughly troubled expression.

I smiled and scanned the room. A thick carpet was spread across the floor and the walls were covered with tapestries, all of which incorporated the color of our capes. It was as I was looking over these decorations that I noticed a bunch of young students sitting at an isolated table. They were all staring at the floor, and during the brief moments they glanced up, I could see a profound sadness in their eyes; they evidently wanted to join in with the others, but something was stopping them. Roderick, who had worked so hard to get stories for me, was among them.

“Cornelius, why are those students sitting at such a distant table?” I asked, turning to look at him.

“Those are the children of nobles belonging to the former Veronica faction. Some of them were among those who tricked Lord Wilfried into disgracing himself during the hunting tournament two years ago. They are being kept at a distance so they do not endanger either of you.”

A great many people had been in the former Veronica faction, which came as no surprise given that it had once been the largest faction in the duchy. It hadn’t fully collapsed even after two full years, and a solid quarter of the students in the Royal Academy were now considered worthy of suspicion. This meant that around fifteen of the sixty-five students living in the dormitory were being isolated. It was for my safety, of course, but keeping them excluded would make it a lot harder for me to boost everyone’s grades at once.

“Is there anything we could do to get them on our side?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, this is simply how factions function. Eckhart has told me that Ferdinand was once isolated in a similar manner despite being one of the previous archduke’s sons, all as a result of the Veronica faction ostracizing him. Before Eckhart joined the Academy, Ferdinand’s only retainers had been those directly ordered to serve him by the previous archduke.”

I tried to imagine Ferdinand sitting alone, looking on at the Veronica faction in envy, but that mental image didn’t really fit him. He had almost certainly walked the lonely road of a mad scientist with glee, pleased to have people avoiding him. As he had mentioned, he had used all manner of tricks and excuses to stay in the Royal Academy, doing whatever he could to remain in the one place he could truly be free.

*The castle was apparently a terrible place for Ferdinand, but he was pretty lively at the Royal Academy according to Eckhart. He surely tricked all sorts of people into “investing in the future” just like he did with me.*

“Lord Wilfried has arrived,” came an announcement.

“Sorry about the wait,” Wilfried said as he entered with his attendants. His retainers prepared tea and sweets for him, and as they busily moved around, he sat down in the chair next to mine. “So this is the Royal Academy, huh? It sure

looks a lot like the castle."

"It certainly does," came a sudden voice from behind him.

I turned around to see a slender, serious-looking woman wearing a calm smile. She looked to be somewhere between thirty-five and forty-five, and my first thought upon seeing her was that she reminded me of a scientist, almost certainly due to the monocle resting over her left eye.

"I am Hirschur, dorm supervisor of the Ehrenfest Dormitory," she said.

It turned out that Hirschur was formerly an Ehrenfest noble but had moved to work in the Sovereignty after securing high enough grades. She was now a professor at the Royal Academy, where she held lectures on magic tools.

"Ferdinand contacted me for the first time in quite a while recently. It seems you are his prized disciple, Lady Rozemyne. I am *quite* interested to see what miracles a genius prodigy taught by the man who received perfect grades in the archduke course, knight course, *and* scholar course all at once will show me."

*"Prized disciple"? "Genius prodigy"? Um, when have those terms ever been used to describe me? And how am I possibly supposed to live up to such high expectations?*

Before I could even consider how to respond, Hirschur shot me a smile and moved to the center of the room, where she began explaining the dormitory rules to the new students.

The girls' rooms were on the third floor, the boys' rooms were on the second floor, and communal spaces such as the dining hall and common room were on the first floor. Boys were prohibited from going up to the third floor, and apprentice knights would take shifts watching the stairs for this very reason.

The rooms at the farthest end of the second and third floors were for the archduke and archduchess, respectively. These were used when they visited for the Archduke Conference, which was held here at the Royal Academy.

"If you fail your exams and are forced to spend your spring here at the Royal Academy, the archducal couple will remember you for all the wrong reasons," Hirschur warned. "Do take care, everyone."

*Oh no, Angelica... Oh nooo...*

The girls' and boys' floors each had three rooms for archduke candidates. It was tradition for archnobles to use the rooms farther back while laynobles used the rooms closest to the stairs, but retainers were exempt from this rule, since they always had rooms by their charge. Laynobles and mednobles normally had to live in shared rooms, but those who saved up enough money could rent one of their own.

Meals were eaten in the dining hall on the first floor, with all the students being told when it opened. We were also expected to prepare our own baths in our own rooms, just like at the castle.

"The advancement ceremony and fellowship gatherings will be held two days from now, with classes beginning the day after. You have until then to adjust to dormitory life and ensure you are ready for your lectures. Remember—preparation is essential for all things. Any questions?"

"I have a question!" I exclaimed, immediately shooting my hand up. Hirschur looked my way, as did everybody else. "Does the dormitory have a book room?" I asked excitedly.

Hirschur forced a smile. "There is no book room in the dormitory, as the Royal Academy has its own full-fledged library. Incidentally, the library will open when classes begin. New students will be taught how to use it in order of duchy, and only then will they be allowed to freely enter." She must have been able to tell how hard my heart was pounding in my chest, as her expression grew even more bemused. "You certainly are passionate about your studies, Lady Rozemyne. I am sure that an archduke candidate showing such dedication will encourage the others to work hard as well. I look forward to seeing what you accomplish."

*So you're telling me that, as an archduke candidate, my reading will make other people read too? Oh goodness! I guess it's my duty to read all the time then!*

Rihyarda came up to me once Hirschur had finished her explanation. "Your room is ready, milady," she said as she urged me along. The corridors were long enough that I was told to use my highbeast, and so I brought out my Pandabus

and climbed into it.

“This is as far as I can go,” Cornelius said when we arrived at the stairs to the third floor. He couldn’t go beyond the second floor, given that he was a boy, and so Angelica would be my only guard knight from this point onward.

When we reached the third floor, I found myself in a long corridor lined with doors on both sides. My room was right at the back, which was much farther away than I had anticipated; I probably would have collapsed midway had I needed to climb up the stairs and walk the entire way without Lessy.

“This is your room, milady.”

The interior wasn’t much different from my room back at the castle. I could imagine this had been done deliberately so that I would feel more comfortable, and so that Rihyarda would have an easier time moving around.

“Now, milady, let’s decide on your retainers. Is there anyone in particular who has caught your eye today? Please select them from this list.”

I took a seat at my work desk—though I suppose it was technically my study desk here at the Royal Academy—and saw that there were already several sheets of paper lined up for me to look at. On them was a list of students that Cornelius had prepared for me, and beside each name was one of three marks representing how suitable each person was to be one of my retainers. Those with a circle were completely acceptable, those with a question mark I could choose but weren’t necessarily ideal due to various quirks with their family or status, and those with a cross were best avoided due to being untrustworthy. There were also students with Wilfried or Charlotte’s initials next to their name, indicating that they were already serving as their retainers.

“Let’s see here... Brunhilde, circle... Lieseleta, circle... Judithe, circle... Philine, question mark... Roderick, cross...” I muttered the names I recognized while looking down the list.

“Roderick was among those who tricked Lord Wilfried, so he is by no means fit to serve you, milady.”

“Is it not probable he was just doing what his parents told him to without realizing the implications? I think we should talk to him about this to see

whether he deserves a second chance, like we did for Wilfried."

"The point still stands that we presently do not know him well enough, so he cannot be trusted as your retainer," Rihyarda said, instantly shooting down my suggestion with an argument I couldn't refute. "I will arrange for any of the others to be your attendants. Perhaps Brunhilde and Lieseleta as apprentice attendants, and Judithe as an apprentice guard knight. If you so wish, you can also include Philine as an apprentice scholar—though as she is a laynoble, you will need an apprentice archscholar to train and support her. I'd suggest Hartmut, milady, if you have no objections."

"Who is Hartmut?"

"Ottilie's youngest son. He's a friendly young man who loves talking to people. Much like his father, he's quite good at gathering information."

Hartmut was about Cornelius's age and had entered the Royal Academy before I was even baptized, so I didn't really know him, but him being Ottilie's son and having Rihyarda's recommendation meant I had no reason to doubt his abilities.

"With that settled... it would be wise to select an apprentice knight to take Cornelius's place when he graduates. What about Traugott? He's the child of my daughter and Lord Bonifatius's son."

"Grandfather's and your grandson... I can only imagine how powerful he must be."

"He is nothing compared to Cornelius, who was trained by Lord Bonifatius and taught your mana compression method, so I would say he still has a very long way to go."

Traugott had previously been considered to serve Wilfried, but as nobody knew when I would permit Wilfried's guard knights to learn my new mana compression method, he hadn't been very enthusiastic about it. Wilfried had apparently struggled to secure retainers now that he was no longer guaranteed to be the next archduke.

"Moving on," Rihyarda continued. "Having Judithe take Angelica's place when she graduates is fine, but Angelica is not much of a teacher. What are your

thoughts on this?”

“Rihyarda is right, Lady Rozemyne. I’m sorry,” Angelica said, though she didn’t sound at all torn up about it.

Rihyarda sighed. “Cornelius could teach her, but there are many things that are best left between women. You will want either a head female knight, or an apprentice female knight who can work with Cornelius to teach Judithe. Do you have any ideas, Angelica?”

Angelica merely tilted her head. It seemed she hadn’t considered the matter in the slightest, and she wasn’t about to start considering it either.

“Are there any female apprentice knights who could think in your place, Angelica?” I asked with a bemused smile. Her expression became serious in an instant.

“...Leonore is friends with Cornelius, and I think she’s smart.”

“You truly have no intention of ever thinking for yourself, do you?”

“No. None at all.”

*Oh no... It looks like Angelica has given up on using her mind even more than she had two years ago.*

“Master, you truly are foolish!” Stenluke scolded. “It is not always ideal to give such blunt answers. The more you study under your teacher, the more you rely on feelings and instincts over thought. This trend must be reversed.”

There wasn’t anything for me to add in that regard; this kind of strict lecturing was best left to professionals like Stenluke with his Ferdinand voice.

“Let us ask Leonore and then progress things further if she is receptive,” I said.

“As you wish, milady.”

Thus concluded the initial selection of my retainers.

# The Better Grades Committee

“The candidates have all agreed to become your retainers, milady. They are already being moved into their rooms. You will be meeting with the boys during the announcement after dinner, since they can’t come up here,” Rihyarda said, having returned from speaking to all of the candidates. Those selected to be my retainers needed to move into rooms specifically for retainers, and with things suddenly sounding a lot busier outside my door, I could imagine this was already taking place.

“Lady Rozemyne, may I allow your retainers in?” Angelica asked, standing by the door.

“You certainly may.”

Once the door was open, my new retainers stepped inside. The girls had come to greet me and discuss their upcoming work while their attendants and servants moved their things for them.

Brunhilde came over first and knelt before me. “Lady Rozemyne, I am ever so delighted that you selected me. You may count on me to make your trends fashionable.”

“Indeed. I intend to rely on you quite heavily when it comes to social matters, Brunhilde. As you know, I was asleep for two years; I do not know the precise details of country-wide politics, nor the relationships between duchies and their various factions. I will be trusting you to gather information and provide support when I am to socialize.”

Lieseleta was the next to quietly kneel before me. “You saved my older sister when she was about to fail her studies, Lady Rozemyne. My family—no, my entire house—is infinitely grateful. I will do all that I can to make your life here as comfortable as possible.”

“Angelica has told me that you declined every other offer you received, deliberately waiting for me to awaken so that you could serve me,” I replied.

“The strength of your feelings fills me with true joy. I look forward to having you in my service.”

Unlike apprentice scholars, who could begin work at once by making study guides and assisting with assignments so long as they knew how to write, attendants needed to spend a full year honing their skills before exclusively serving anyone. This was to minimize the risk of them greatly displeasing their charge.

Lieseleta had been a first-year when I was baptized and had hoped to serve me when she finished polishing her skills, but unfortunate circumstances had resulted in me getting attacked and put into a coma right as she finished her year of training. The dreadful timing had caused her to stagger in disbelief, but seeing Angelica steadily continue to grow stronger while I was asleep encouraged her to train even harder for my sake.

“Milady, I will teach the two apprentice attendants what work needs to be done here,” Rihyarda said. I gave her a nod, and then she began running them through my daily schedule and such. It would most probably be safe to leave the two girls in Rihyarda’s capable hands, so I turned my attention to the kneeling guard knights. Judithe was looking up at me with a giddy expression.

“I can’t believe I get to serve you, Lady Rozemyne. I’m going to get as strong as I can. That way, I can be of as much use to you as possible!”

“I look forward to seeing your efforts firsthand, Judithe.”

Kneeling next to her was Leonore, a girl with violet hair and indigo eyes that sparkled with intelligence. She seemed quite mature to me, perhaps due to the calm air she exuded or her well-developed body. I never would have guessed from looking at her that she was an apprentice knight; in terms of appearance, she looked a lot more like an apprentice scholar to me.

“Lady Rozemyne, I am ever so grateful that you have taken me as your guard knight.”

“Leonore, I am aware that I am asking much of you. I will provide assistance whenever necessary, so I ask that you work with Cornelius to guide and support both Angelica and Judithe.”

She glanced over at Angelica and Judithe, then nodded with a stiff expression. “I will do all that I can.”

I sighed in relief, having thought that she might refuse. Angelica looked just as relieved; there was a broad smile spread across her face, no doubt due to her now having someone to think in her place.

“Angelica, tell these two what their duties will be,” I said.

“Understood.”

No matter how bad her explanations were, Stenluke would probably pull through for me. That said, we still needed to formulate some sort of plan to reverse the damage done to her thinking patterns—or rather, the lack thereof.

As I pursed my lips in thought, Philine hesitantly stepped forward and knelt. “Um, Lady Rozemyne... I am happy beyond words to have been taken as your retainer, but are you truly okay with having a first-year layscholar in your service?” she asked, a nervous look on her face.

I could understand why she was worried, considering how rare it was for a member of the archducal family to take on a laynoble as a retainer, but Philine was the only person who had vowed to collect stories from all over the country for my sake. She was a true comrade.

“My only expectation, Philine, is that you continue gathering stories. I will also have an archnoble scholar here to support and guide you. If you ever find that someone is treating you unfairly for being a laynoble, please consult me at once; I will take care of them.”

“Thank you ever so much, Lady Rozemyne.”

As my retainers were busy discussing work matters among themselves, I took the opportunity to mention the Better Grades Committee to Philine.

“What is the Better Grades Committee?” she asked.

“I have been ordered by Aub Ehrenfest to increase the duchy’s overall grades, coinciding with the archduke candidates enrolling in the Academy. It is now my duty to raise everyone’s grades while I am attending school, and this committee shall serve as a tool to accomplish that. Wilfried and I will of course be the

presidents of the committee, but every student from Ehrenfest shall be a member; I will not let a single person escape."

With that, I spread out a number of documents about the Royal Academy that Damuel had gathered for me. There were twenty-one duchies, including the Sovereignty. Ehrenfest had ranked thirteenth last year and was just barely hovering around the middle, but in the past, it had been competing with lesser duchies for last place.

Our ranking had gone up a little while Ferdinand was attending the Academy, but it then plummeted back down as soon as he graduated. In other words, having a single genius wasn't enough—we needed to create a system that would increase Ehrenfest's grades permanently.

"I've heard from the senior students that Ehrenfest's grade average has risen considerably thanks to the karuta and picture books, but what can we do to raise it further?" Philine asked.

"The karuta and picture books have shown results only among the younger students; the material they cover isn't complicated enough to have an impact on older students."

In addition to this, it seemed the younger students' grades had only increased in written lessons. One could perhaps say they had gotten a little better at their practical music lessons as well, but that was about it. The growth we had seen so far was mainly just because they had been so bad before, meaning there was still much room for improvement.

"I am told that my brother Cornelius became an honor student during my two-year absence. He was able to achieve this because he studied for his written lessons with Damuel a year in advance so that he could teach Angelica, learned my efficient mana compression method, and spent time being trained by Grandfather—that is, by Lord Bonifatius."

While the efforts of the Raise Angelica's Grades Squadron had helped other apprentice knights to boost their grades a little as well, there was a clear gap between Cornelius and his peers. Angelica, meanwhile, was still just barely passing her written classes despite the tremendous efforts of so many people, which truly was a headache-inducing situation.

“From what I remember, you created the mana compression method yourself, didn’t you?” Philine asked.

“Yes. I intend to teach it to others once we return from the Royal Academy. I cannot teach it here and now, as it requires both a sizable sum of money and the permission of Ehrenfest’s leaders. If you wish to learn it, I recommend gathering stories and information now so that I can pay you for it all at a later date. I will readily buy stories from other duchies.”

Philine’s grass-green eyes sparkled at my words. “I’ll do my best. It’s nice that I have time to earn money, but... waiting until we return to Ehrenfest means I won’t get more mana right away, doesn’t it?”

“Indeed. For now, we will focus on improving everyone’s written lesson grades instead.”

First-and second-years in the Royal Academy all attended the same classes, where they were taught the fundamentals of various subjects, while third-years and beyond narrowed their focus down to specific courses. Ferdinand had already beaten all the content for the first-and second-year written lessons into my head, since he had instructed me to pass their exams on my very first day.

Ferdinand had gotten me to make these preparations for good reason; I needed to know the information covered during the first two years at the Royal Academy just to have basic conversations with archnobles at tea parties, and I was told that Wilfried had been working hard as well for this very same reason. It was also apparently common practice for archduke candidates and archnobles with older siblings to pass these exams on their first day, though as these exams only covered the written portion of our studies, we couldn’t just relax once they were over—we would still need to focus the rest of our time on practical lessons and socializing.

I wanted to dedicate as much of my time as possible to the library, and the only way I could achieve that goal was by setting things up so that everyone could study while I was away reading. The current students had all studied with karuta and picture books, so they wouldn’t encounter any issues with magecraft and theology until their third year, nor would they struggle with math. Our biggest problems were with history and geography, since these were

areas where some people were significantly better or worse than others. These were also the subjects I knew the least about myself.

"Many students with older siblings rely on study guides and the like that are passed down to them, no? I wish to make similar guides myself and create an environment in which everyone studies together to boost their grades."

We had documents from when Eckhart was an apprentice knight, and if Cornelius lent them out, everyone could make a great deal of progress together. If we repeated this process for other courses as well, studying would instantly become a lot easier.

"We're going to raise the grades of every student from Ehrenfest, including the children from the former Veronica faction," I explained.

"Back when you led the playroom, Lady Rozemyne, all of us worked together regardless of age and faction to complete the work given to us, hoping to be rewarded with your sweets. I truly did love the energy in the air," Philine said with a nostalgic smile.

As it turned out, Wilfried had been so shocked by his friends betraying him at the hunting tournament and subsequently being attacked in the castle that he had started acting hostile toward the children of the former Veronica faction while I was asleep. He may have looked calm on the surface now, but that was only because Charlotte had taught him not to show his emotions so openly. The former Veronica faction remained ostracized to this day, and for this reason they were neither taken as retainers nor given any important duties. That needed to be fixed, and fast; I wanted to recreate the atmosphere from the playroom that Philine loved so much here in the Royal Academy.

*I think making everyone compete for rewards again is* probably *the best move. Maybe all this internal strife will fade if we can establish an outside enemy for everyone to focus on...*

"Please remain here after dinner," I said to everyone gathered in the dining hall. "I will announce my retainers, pay those who provided information while I was asleep, then convey a message directly from Aub Ehrenfest himself."

With that, I took my seat. The tables were generally divided into factions.

Wilfried and I were sitting with our retainers at a large table with a dozen seats, while everyone else was split between four large tables with their friends.

*It's kind of funny that we're bothering to announce my retainers when it's already obvious to everyone who I've chosen.*

"O mighty King and Queen of the endless skies who doth grace us with thousands upon thousands of lives to consume, O mighty Eternal Five who rule the mortal realm, I offer thanks and prayers to thee, and do take part in the meal so graciously provided," Wilfried said, leading the prayer. When that was done, we finally started eating.

Incidentally, Wilfried and I had slightly different menus from everyone else, with both of us getting unique desserts. I could see the others glancing at our plates with wide-eyed surprise.

"The food here has been getting better over the years, but this year's is something else entirely..." said one of the students.

"Yeah, the food is what I look forward to most at the Royal Academy. I was at a loss for words the first time I ate here," replied another.

The quality of the food had been steadily rising over the past three years due to the dormitory having chefs sent from the castle, and now that Hugo and Ella were here, the quality had shot up even further. It was funny seeing how much the perspectives of the senior students, who knew how the food had been before, differed from those of the newer students, who were only familiar with these high-quality meals.

"These fantastic dishes were made by my personal chefs, who have been sent here for the first time this year. They have trained very hard over the past few years," I announced. "Oh, and I plan to release a recipe book containing these foods at the end of winter."

"Oh my... Do you mean to say the book will contain instructions for how to make these dishes?" Brunhilde asked, elegantly placing a hand over her mouth to indicate surprise. I needed to learn from her example.

"It will be more expensive than the picture books, but I believe the recipes are worth every coin."

“You are certainly right about that, Lady Rozemyne; recipes are very expensive. Will you also be selling them in the Sovereignty?”

“My plan is to sell the recipe book in the Royal Academy next year, or perhaps the year after that. This year I will only be debuting a single sweet recipe or two in order to build up anticipation. Trying to change trends too abruptly will only inspire resistance,” I said.

This earned me a small pout from Brunhilde, who wanted to spread these trends faster than anyone. She was an elegant and mature girl, but she really did look her age when she made expressions like that.

“It is best to introduce trends gradually,” I explained with a smile. “While I am an archduke candidate, other duchies have their own archduke candidates as well. If we consider the Sovereign royalty and the archduke candidates of greater duchies to be archnobles, then we of a middle duchy like Ehrenfest would be equivalent to mednobles. Now tell me, what would archnobles think of mednobles abruptly starting new trends without any warning?”

Brunhilde gasped in realization.

“We must move like mednobles. The inventions and such that we can introduce as trends are our secret weapons for establishing connections with the archnobles and increasing our influence. There is no need for us to reveal all of our cards at once; we are better off showing our hand little by little.”

“It is as you say.”

After dinner, it was time for me to reveal my new retainers. Everyone already knew who I had chosen given that they had just eaten with me, but official announcements like this were apparently important.

“I shall now announce my retainers. My apprentice attendants shall be Lieseleta and Brunhilde. My apprentice knights shall be Angelica, Cornelius, Leonore, Traugott, and Judithe. My apprentice scholars shall be Hartmut and Philine.”

I had already spoken to the girls back at my room, but this was pretty much my first time seeing the boys. We had exchanged our first greetings three years ago at the playroom, but in all honesty, I had greeted so many people back then

that I couldn't remember anyone who hadn't been on the blacklist I had memorized.

"It is an honor to serve you, Lady Rozemyne," Traugott said while kneeling before me. He was a twelve-year-old apprentice archknight in his third year, and despite being both Rihyarda's and Bonifatius's grandson, he didn't really look like either of them. He had exceptionally blond hair and deep-blue eyes, and the silence he exuded was only further emphasized by his unmoving expression.

Hartmut stepped forward after Traugott. "I have been awaiting your return ever since you first instructed us to gather information in the Royal Academy, Lady Rozemyne. I am overjoyed to serve you," he said, his amber eyes crinkled in a bright, peaceful smile. His way of speaking made him sound exactly like Justus, though his noticeably red hair meant he probably wasn't as suited to stealthy reconnaissance. He was Ottilie's second son, a fourteen-year-old apprentice archscholar in his fifth year.

Once the greetings were finished, I had Rihyarda bring me a pouch filled with coins.

"With much gratitude in my heart, I will now distribute payment to those who gathered valuable information for me while I slept," I announced.

I began calling the students over one by one, giving them each a few words of appreciation. Brunhilde in particular had earned high praise from Florencia and Elvira for the fashion-and trend-related information she had gathered, while Ferdinand had been quite satisfied with the information Hartmut had collected. A proud light shone in their eyes as they accepted their payment.

"Furthermore, Roderick and Philine have both gathered many stories at my request. It is thanks to them that I will soon be able to make yet another new picture book," I continued. While neither of them had been Royal Academy students at the time, they had still gathered information that I found valuable, so I was naturally going to pay them in full. Doing this would also encourage more people to gather new stories for me in hope of making some money themselves.

Philine happily walked over and accepted her payment, but Roderick looked

between me and the coins in his hands with worry. “Is... Is it truly acceptable for me to take this?”

“But of course. You are being paid for your services, Roderick.” He must never have expected for his efforts to be recognized or rewarded, as his face momentarily scrunched up like he was about to cry. “I look forward to your continued efforts. Please find many stories for me in the Royal Academy.”

“As you wish. I will live up to your expectations without fail,” he replied, gripping the coins tightly as he returned to his seat. Wilfried watched him go, then looked at me with narrowed eyes.

“Rozemyne, do you not know? Roderick was—”

“It is best to reward deeds fairly, dear brother. Roderick gathered many stories for my sake, and I am merely compensating him for his efforts—that is all there is to it. One’s faction is irrelevant to their accomplishments and good deeds.”

This announcement caused a stir at the table where the children from the former Veronica faction were seated. “Lady Rozemyne, does that mean any information I gather will be rewarded equally as well?” one asked.

“Of course. Everyone values things differently. Brunhilde gathered information about fashion and trends, while Hartmut prioritized information on interduchy relations. Not everyone found use in what they obtained, but some did. Thus, if someone appreciates the information you gather, I will reward it fairly.”

Nobody from the former Veronica faction had brought me any information. I had initially assumed this was because their parents had forbidden them from doing so, but as it turned out, it was because they hadn’t thought their efforts would be rewarded. Given how Wilfried had reacted to me paying Roderick, I could hardly blame them.

“Now, we shall convey to you all the message from Aub Ehrenfest,” I began. “Wilfried and I are enrolled in the Royal Academy as archduke candidates, and next year our sister Charlotte will be joining us.”

Wilfried stood up and faced everyone, then continued in a loud, clear voice.

“Starting with us, Ehrenfest will have archduke candidates in the Royal Academy for the next ten years. My father wishes to use this opportunity to increase our duchy’s influence as much as possible, so we want all of you to band together and provide your support.”

“First, let us consider how to raise everyone’s grades,” I said.

The apprentice knights spoke up at once. “Simply being taught your mana compression method will be a significant boon. Please teach it to us so that we may raise our duchy’s grades.”

It was clear to everyone just how drastically my mana compression method had increased the mana capacities of Angelica, Cornelius, and Ernesta, the last of whom was Charlotte’s apprentice guard knight. But most importantly of all, it was a hot topic in the Knight’s Order that even Damuel—an adult layknight—was still seeing a steady increase in his capacity.

“...I plan to gradually teach my mana compression method to those I deem trustworthy. I will observe your behavior over this winter and select those who catch my interest, then pass these names on to Ehrenfest’s leaders for approval. When this semester ends, I plan to hold seminars to teach those who are accepted.”

“Is that true?”

“Yes, though please keep in mind that those who are accepted will need to pay a hefty fee before they can be taught,” I explained, resulting in a number of excited and defeated expressions among the students. “Lessons on using the compression method to increase one’s mana capacity will begin next spring. As for this year, my goal is to raise our written grades, both for Ehrenfest’s and for your sakes. Let us all improve together, regardless of rank and faction.”

My words caused many to raise their heads. Some were noticeably tense about what I was going to say next.

“We will first split into groups,” I explained. “The first-and second-years will be put together, as all their lessons are shared, while the rest of you will be divided into your respective specialty courses. In summary, there will be the first-years’ team, the second-years’ team, the apprentice knight team, the apprentice scholar team, and the apprentice attendant team.”

The teams differed slightly in terms of size, but there were around ten people in each. This was the most efficient method of dividing the students, considering my plans to have them share information and study guides, but people immediately began to complain.

“Rozemyne, are you insane?!” Wilfried exclaimed. “If you’re going to put them into groups, you should at least divide them by faction!”

“That’s right. I could never work with someone from another faction!” came a voice from among the students.

“Lady Rozemyne, please consider how those of us being ostracized feel,” added a student from the former Veronica faction.

It seemed that my decision wasn’t much appreciated by Wilfried, the members of my own faction, or even the members of the former Veronica faction, but I really didn’t want the dormitory to be awash with faction politics. As far as I was concerned, there really was no point in caring about such distinctions here.

In the midst of all the complaints, I put a hand on my cheek and shook my head, wearing the most exasperated expression I could manage. “Goodness, everyone... Might I ask why you all seem to love faction squabbling so much? Are you aware that the country at large considers Ehrenfest a backwater duchy without any notable merits? Is it truly wise for us to fight among ourselves in such a dire situation?”

“Th-That’s...”

“Rozemyne, have you forgotten that you were attacked?!” Wilfried retorted.

I couldn’t help but sigh. I had been wondering why Wilfried was so invested in faction politics all of a sudden, and now it made sense—he was trying to protect me. As much as I appreciated his efforts, he was getting in the way of my plan.

“I have not forgotten what happened, nor am I happy about it,” I said, looking over the dining hall. “Even so, it is worth noting that we have no parents to rely on here in the Academy, which in turn means we have no parents to spy on us and force us to commit misdeeds. The faction squabbling can wait until we return to Ehrenfest, can it not? Here, the foes we must face are the honor

students of other duchies—that is what you all must understand. Is it not standard practice for us nobles to consider the future, hide our emotions, and ally with our enemies to defeat yet greater foes? This is what I was taught long ago. Goodness. To think you are all so feeble of spirit."

Wilfried and all the other children fell silent.

"That said, I understand that being abruptly told to study harder is not the most motivating thing in the world," I continued. "For this reason, I have prepared rewards to encourage you all. The first team to have all its members pass their exams and the team with the most talented students shall each receive my pound cake recipe, meaning you may have your chefs at home make them for you when we return to Ehrenfest."

Freida had said that I could publicize the pound cake recipe, but it was still mostly a secret. I had of course taught it to a few people who were close to me, but they had paid so much for the recipe that they were keeping it close to their chests. As a result, those in the Noble's Quarter who wanted pound cake either had to buy some at the guildmaster's store, or secure an invitation to one of Elvira's or Florencia's tea parties. Introducing the recipe as a reward would allow the students to eat pound cake at home, serve it to visitors, and do pretty much whatever else they wanted with it.

Everyone suddenly looked a lot more receptive to the idea—that is, everyone except Wilfried and Cornelius, who still seemed unhappy.

"Would you two rather be rewarded with Ella's new sweets recipe?" I asked. That was evidently enough to solve the problem, as they both nodded with motivated smiles.

"Given the easier material, I imagine the lower years will pass their exams sooner, but it is unlikely they will be selected as the most talented students for this same reason. Those in the higher years may be able to exploit this chance for victory," Hartmut mused aloud. He then shot up a hand while eyeing Cornelius. "Lady Rozemyne, there are many guard knights among the apprentices who already know your mana compression method and have access to Lord Eckhart's excellent study guides. I think this gives them an unfair advantage here."

The others immediately began to voice their agreement. Faction squabbling had already ceased to matter entirely.

“The other teams can surely acquire study guides from their own siblings, but I agree that the mana compression method does provide an unfair advantage. Some adjustments will need to be made to account for this. In which case... I forbid Angelica from using Stenluke in class.”

“What?! No way are we going to win now!” several of the older apprentice knights cried out. Angelica was similarly taken aback—her face paled as she attempted to choke out my name, but I looked her straight in the eye and didn’t back down.

“You have relied on Stenluke so much over the past two years, Angelica, that you think even less than you did before. That simply will not do. Please use your head going forward and learn on your own merits. You survived your previous two years; you can surely survive this one as well.”

“Do you hate me, Lady Rozemyne...?” Angelica asked tearfully. She was almost radiating despair, but I was unmoved. No matter how much of an ephemeral and melancholic beauty she was right now, I wouldn’t be deceived by appearances; she was putting on the same face she always made when she didn’t want to use her brain.

“Of course not. I would not assign someone I hate to be my guard knight. This is all to aid your growth as a person, and I trust that you understand this as well, Stenluke. I will not tolerate any violations,” I declared, having noticed Angelica touch her manablade’s feystone in a desperate bid for help.

Naturally, a manablade with Ferdinand’s personality and speech patterns would never in a million years permit any fraud. He responded with a clear, “Understood.”



“Knights must abide by the rules,” Stenluke firmly continued. “And most of all, I too wish for my master’s growth.”

“I am glad to see that we are on the same page.”

“No, Stenluke!” Angelica cried out. “Why, Lady Rozemyne?! Why?!”

I cheered Angelica on with a grin, then turned to look across the entire dining hall. “Now then, get into your groups. Come up with plans, work together, and do your very best in your classes. With that established... Wilfried, when will we first-years begin our strategy meeting?”

Wilfried, who had been staring at the table where Roderick and the other children of the former Veronica faction were, abruptly stood. “Spend tonight checking over the study guides and other information you have received from your older siblings. We will hold a strategy meeting first thing after breakfast tomorrow. Victory shall be ours!”

And so Ehrenfest’s Better Grades Committee was established, with the intense battle for results beginning at once.

# The Advancement Ceremony and Fellowship Gatherings

Thanks to my head attendant Rihyarda being here, my new life in the Royal Academy wasn't all that different from my time spent in the castle. One thing I hadn't entirely gotten used to, however, was Lieseleta and Brunhilde already being dressed and waiting in my room when it was time for me to get up. It really pained me knowing that I was relaxing in bed while everyone else was awake, but such was the fate of anyone who had attendants. Waking up earlier would only lead to my attendants having to get up even earlier than usual to make their morning preparations, so my only option as a high-status rich girl was to wait in bed and at best pretend to be asleep until everything was ready.

Breakfast was eaten in the dining hall rather than in my room, so once I was changed, my female retainers and I all went there together. Cornelius and the boys had already been informed that I was ready, so by the time I had climbed into Lessy and reached the second floor, they were already waiting for me.

"Good morning, Lady Rozemyne," they said.

Once classes began, there wouldn't be time for the usual process of my retainers having to wait for me to finish my food, so we all ate at the same time. We were served by the adult attendants we had brought with us, which meant Rihyarda served my food for me.

After our meal, I fetched the documents Ferdinand had prepared when beating the lessons into my head, then moved to the common room. There we would begin the first-years' strategy meeting.

"I already have Rihyarda to attend me and Philine as a fellow first-year, so I will only need one guard knight to stay with me," I said. "The others can go and be with the knight group, assuming they are holding a meeting as well."

"We may be inside the dormitory, Lady Rozemyne, but it is not enough to have only one guard knight here to protect you," Cornelius said. Both he and

Wilfried were wearing clouded expressions.

“I will be perfectly fine here. Ferdinand gave me many protection charms.”

“Did he?”

“Oh yes. They’re magic tools so deadly that I genuinely feel bad for anyone who would attempt to attack me.”

Since I didn’t have a schtappe, the only way I could attack anyone was by praying or getting so mad that I Crushed anyone in sight. Upon hearing that the attack two years ago had occurred too suddenly for me to fight back, Ferdinand had given me magic tools that would absorb my mana on their own and activate the moment I was attacked. For this reason, he had told me to keep them on me at all times.

“I cannot say where the magic tools are or when they will activate, since we cannot risk any plans being made to counter them, but trust me when I say that they are exactly what you would expect from Ferdinand,” I explained. That alone was enough for Cornelius and Wilfried to grimace; I could only wonder what had transpired between them and Ferdinand while I was asleep.

“...Very well. In that case, I will entrust this duty to Leonore.”

“No, Cornelius,” Angelica said, stepping forward with a broad smile. “Please allow me to guard Lady Rozemyne.”

Cornelius faced her down with an equally broad smile. “You are the one and only thing posing a threat to the knight team’s victory. Neither the strategy meeting nor the study group can begin without you,” he said before promptly dragging her away. They might have grown on the outside, but they were still acting the same way as they had two years ago.

I couldn’t help but giggle at Judithe’s dazed expression as she watched Angelica getting dragged away. In an attempt to reclaim her focus, I gestured to a nearby table. “Judithe, the second-years have already begun their meeting.”

“R-Right. I’ll be right there.”

I had to wonder whether her saintly mental image of Angelica had just been shattered to pieces. I genuinely felt a bit sorry for her, but learning the truth

sooner rather than later would save her a lot more heartache down the line. Besides, it was only studying that Angelica was bad at; her strength was the real deal.

"Do you not need to study with them, Leonore?" I asked.

"Fear not. Cornelius has lent me his study guides, and I have already looked over all the fourth-year material."

"My, you really are talented," I said, remembering how much the Raise Angelica's Grades Squadron had struggled.

Leonore gave a conflicted smile. "He informed me that it was all material you learned two years ago, Lady Rozemyne."

"I only helped Damuel organize it so that he could teach Angelica. I certainly haven't memorized it all, and there is much I have forgotten."

"Yet more humility. You truly are a modest individual, Lady Rozemyne."

*Er, no... It's just the truth.*

It was true that I had learned a lot while participating in the Raise Angelica's Grades Squadron, but most of that knowledge was already long forgotten. That said, it had mostly covered the ways knights fought and battle strategies involving magic, so I couldn't imagine this would be much of an issue; it wasn't like battle magic would ever come up during tea parties with other duchies.

"Wilfried, what written subjects did you struggle with the most?" I asked.

"History and geography. I learned everything else in the playroom, and Moritz said I'm already good enough to pass. I think we should have everyone else focus on history and geography too, then get as much practice in with the practical subjects as we can," he said, clearly having thought up his own study plan. The main subjects were math, theology, magecraft, history, and geography, with history and geography evidently being the main problem areas.

"What should we expect on the practical side of things? Ferdinand was quite strict with teaching me the written subjects, but we had no time for practical exercises."

"First-year magecraft lessons cover mana control, mana compression,

highbeast creation, and schtappe acquisition—none of which you'll need to practice for, of course. There's also court etiquette, music, and the dedication whirl, but from what I saw in the castle, you're fine with those as well."

...In a shocking twist, Ferdinand had gotten me to learn most of these things two whole years ago. He truly had planned ahead to a fearsome degree.

"Am I already passing?" I asked. "I certainly don't feel like much of a whirler..."

"First-years don't perform public dedication whirls, so all we need to do is practice. Either way though, I expect you are already above a passing grade in all areas. Uncle would not sit still if you were blatantly lacking at something."

Wilfried was right. Ferdinand had been working hard for the sake of *"the"* future, so he would have made it painfully clear if there was a subject I wasn't doing well enough in. I had been a little worried about whether I would finish things in time for the Dedication Ritual, but surprisingly enough, I was now feeling a lot more confident.

"Okay, let's all study history and geography together until third bell," Wilfried said. "Harspiel practice will begin right after."

Wilfried and I divided the work, then started teaching everyone history and geography. Some of the archnobles already knew the material we were due to cover, but the laynobles barely knew a thing—they hadn't been blessed with skilled tutors, and neither subject had been taught in the playroom. Philine in particular was in an immensely bad spot, since she didn't have any older siblings to rely on.

"Let's start with a basic history," I said.

"Yeah," Wilfried agreed. "The picture book bibles already covered a bit about the founding of the country, so this should be easy to remember."

The first-year team was the smallest of all the groups, being the only one with fewer than ten students, and that was exactly why we were focusing on winning through having all of our members pass first.

"Goodness me. I see we have a passionate bunch of students this year," Professor Hirschur said with a surprised expression as she walked into the

common room. Despite her being our dorm supervisor, she was so busy with her work as a professor that we rarely saw her in the dormitory.

“Hello, Professor Hirschur,” I replied.

“I imagine you are all busy with your studies, but your attention please,” Hirschur said. “Tomorrow’s advancement ceremony will be held in the auditorium at third bell, with the fellowship gatherings then being held concurrently with lunch. Always keep in mind that Ehrenfest is ranked thirteenth this year; it will give you an idea of how you should act around others. I myself will be focusing on my own research until my class begins, so I will be in the main school building. I ask that the archduke candidates manage everyone carefully so that no problems interfere with my work.”

And with that, she briskly left. The fact that she was prioritizing her research over managing the dormitory surely hinted at why Ferdinand was still in contact with her—no doubt she was a mad scientist as well.

“That is one weird professor...” Wilfried muttered.

The guard knight standing beside him nodded. “Indeed. Professor Hirschur is somewhat eccentric. In previous years, however, she only ever showed her face when unlocking the dormitory at the start of the semester, and then when closing it again at the end. Despite how it may seem, she is making an effort to show herself out of respect for you and Lady Rozemyne. From what I know, she previously settled all business matters through ordonnanzes.”

This had apparently extended to dealing with the students in her dormitory as well. Hirschur would normally receive an ordonnanz when the new first-years had gathered, and then she would rely on ordonnanzes to inform the students of any official matters.

Wilfried furrowed his brow. “Hirschur didn’t even kneel or greet us when she first came by. What kind of Ehrenfest noble is she? That just isn’t right.”

“No, Lord Wilfried, you must remember that Professor Hirschur is not an Ehrenfest noble—she has moved to the Sovereignty, and so she is now a Sovereign noble. Furthermore, it is well established in the Royal Academy that professors are of a higher status than students, so I do not believe you will find any professors kneeling to students on the Academy’s grounds.”

“...I see.”

We spent our time going over the material in our groups and identifying our weakest points. From there, we just needed to work on our shortcomings and strengthen ourselves overall.

“Well, now we know for sure that harspiel practice in the playroom is having a big impact,” Wilfried said. “Seems like even laynobles won’t have much trouble passing now, which means we should add history and geography lessons to the playroom, yeah?”

“Yes, that sounds like a natural next step. I’ll need to print picture books that can be used when studying those subjects; Professor Moritz would definitely struggle having to do it all on his own,” I said, clenching my fists with determination as I thought about making new books for the children.

“Hold on,” Wilfried said with a grin, raising a hand to stop me. “If you’re going to be making study materials, at least start with something we’ll be able to use ourselves as second-years. I can already tell you’re gonna make everyone study like this again next year.”

I nodded. It was necessary to establish a system in which everyone supported each other so that things would continue functioning even when I withdrew into the library. If our current group system went well, I would naturally be reusing it next year.

“Indeed. I will start with material for the second-years then.”

“Great.”

Once we’d had dinner, it was time for a bath. With the advancement ceremony and fellowship gatherings being held tomorrow, I decided to thoroughly clean my hair with rinsham. Brunhilde’s eyes sparkled when I asked her to prepare it.

“Rinsham certainly is wonderful, isn’t it? Did you have this order specially made, Lady Rozemyne?”

“I certainly did. The Gilberta Company made it at my request.”

Brunhilde turned out to be quite a regular user of rinsham. She opened the jar

of the newly-made product and let out a dreamy sigh as she inhaled its scent. It seemed that beauty and fashion transcended factions for women, such that all archnoble girls had started using rinsham over the past two years.

“In that case, do you think washing the hair of all the Ehrenfest girls will draw attention to us at the ceremonies and potentially kick off a trend?” I asked.

Brunhilde fell into thought for a moment, then nodded. “I do. It is rare to see anyone with hair this glossy, after all. I imagine unobservant men will not take much notice, but it will catch the attention of other women without fail.”

“In that case, please distribute rinsham to the girls who don’t have any. We shall all attend the advancement ceremony with clean hair.”

As Brunhilde and I talked, Lieseleta came to call me for the bath she had just finished preparing with Rihyarda.

“I shall distribute the rinsham for you,” she said. “Please take your bath, my lady.”

The children who were sharing rooms also shared bathwater, so there wasn’t much rinsham needed in the end. Lieseleta had volunteered to distribute the rinsham among them while taking the opportunity to teach them how to use it as well. She was an observant and overall very considerate girl.

“It might be wise for everyone to wear hair ornaments next year as well,” Brunhilde suggested, taking the long-term into account now that we had decided to start spreading trends. “We can have a universal design, but with a selection of colors to match people’s hair.”

“That is an excellent idea. I must ask though, will laynobles be able to afford ornaments the same as the ones I wear?”

“...Considering the cost, perhaps a universal design will not be so easy after all. Using the same color would certainly be a foolish misstep though, as there is no single color that would look good on everyone.”

“I suppose we have until next year to think of a solution.”

By the time Rihyarda had finished bathing me, Lieseleta had already returned. She gave me a massage, and as I sipped the fruit juice Brunhilde had prepared

for me, I asked how the rinsham distribution had gone.

“The girls who had never used it before were quite excited to finally try it out,” Lieseleta replied.

“You and Philine may use it as well. I look forward to seeing you both with glossy hair.”

“As you wish.”

Following my bath, Philine and I studied together until it was time to sleep—or rather, I tutored Philine while organizing study guides for the second-years like Wilfried had said. We would need them next year for everyone to study together again.

The sun rose on a new day, and at breakfast, the boys gawked at how all the girls’ hair had turned glossy and shiny overnight. Wilfried demanded to know what I had planned, and to that I simply laughed.

“It’s just a casual statement that we’re going to push a new trend.”

“How the heck is this casual?! You’re going to be shoving it in their faces!”

“I could be spreading countless more trends, but instead I’m just going with one. That makes it casual. I am also currently figuring out how to have everyone wear matching hair sticks and the like next year.”

On a personal level, I wanted to kick off a trend of selling and buying books, but considering the need to raise our grades, we had to keep that a secret for a bit longer. Bookselling needed to wait until after the Better Grades Committee had left its mark on Ehrenfest history. For now, we could start by gradually pushing trends in beauty, fashion, and cuisine. With the rinsham having been embraced by all women regardless of faction, I could guess these three areas would be accepted by everyone across the country regardless of politics.

“I understand that you’re thinking things through as best you can,” Wilfried said, “but don’t do anything that’ll draw too much attention. You already stand out enough because of your appearance.”

“...Fair point.”

We soon finished breakfast. Since we needed to head to the auditorium at third bell, I made myself presentable enough to leave the dormitory, making sure to put on my cape and brooch—I wouldn't be able to get back into the dormitory without them.

"Lady Rozemyne, as the fellowship gatherings involve so many people, they are held separately by rank. Please select three guard knights, one scholar, and one attendant from your retainers," Rihyarda said.

Wilfried and I would be attending the gathering with the other archduke candidates and members of royalty, so it would probably be safest to stick with archnobles and older students who already knew the ways of the Royal Academy.

"In that case, I select Angelica, Cornelius, and Leonore as my guard knights. Hartmut shall be my scholar, and Brunhilde my attendant."

"As you wish."

I got into my highbeast like normal once our preparations were done, but Cornelius advised me to climb out again just as we were about to exit the dormitory. Though the Academy grounds were overall quite massive and highbeasts could be used freely outside, it was apparently against the rules to ride them in the halls.

"A new student riding an unfamiliar highbeast on the first day will make a very poor impression," Cornelius said.

"You already look unusually young. You should try not to stand out any more than you already do," Wilfried added.

"I understand your points, but will I really be able to walk all the way to the auditorium?" I asked. Surely I would stand out even more if my attendants had to carry me there.

"The auditorium is close enough that this won't be a problem. You shouldn't have an issue getting to classes either, given that they are initially held either in the auditorium itself or in large nearby classrooms. If you find the distance is too much for you to manage, Hartmut or I will carry you; that will stand out less than your highbeast."

When we were all gathered together, our primarily black clothing with identically colored capes and brooches really did make us look like a team, even with the unique styles of our clothes.

The door leading out of the dormitory opened, and my retainers surrounded me as I started walking. The exit led not outside, but into a corridor. When I looked around, I spotted another door open nearby, out of which streamed a number of children wearing blue capes.

“Ehrenfest Dormitory is the thirteenth door in the corridor,” one of the older students said. “Please take care not to forget that. The doors to the other dormitories will of course not open for you, and your first mistake will naturally be forgiven, but if you attempt to open the wrong door too many times then you may be imprisoned on suspicion of attempted assault or intimidation.”

We younger students nodded with bemused looks. Our dormitory was the thirteenth door to match Ehrenfest’s position in the rankings, which were determined by a duchy’s influence and grades from the previous year. By this point, it was clear that the ranking of our duchy would have significant influence on our lives in the Academy.

“Duchy rankings influence everything from the order of greetings to the placement of seats,” the student continued.

The farther we went down the corridor, the smaller the numbers on the plates above the doors became, and the more students came out of their dormitories. It seemed that we needed to cede the corridor to students of a higher rank than us, and so we waited by the door for those ahead of us to finish leaving.

*Those capes are dark green...*

All of the students in the Academy were gathered in the auditorium, and there seemed to be about two thousand of us in total. Ehrenfest was a middle duchy closer to a lesser duchy in terms of population, so we had less than seventy students. Greater duchies, meanwhile, had much larger populations, with some even having over one hundred and fifty in attendance, while some of the smallest duchies didn’t even have fifty.

We stood in our designated place and waited for the advancement ceremony

to begin. I thankfully didn't stand out since I was buried among my retainers—so much so that I could only see Ehrenfest capes around me.

*Since we're all lined up according to our duchies, I wonder if we look like a rainbow from above...*

Someone began a speech that echoed throughout the auditorium. "Once again, it is that time of year when the children who bear the future of Yurgenschmidt come together to grow and develop. You would all do well to dedicate yourselves to increasing your respective duchy's influence and to being accepted as Yurgenschmidt nobles," he began. The older students were already looking exasperated, so I could imagine someone gave this same speech every year.

Once the speech celebrating the advancement of years was over, announcements pertaining to the upcoming classes began. I couldn't see who was speaking, but I could hear them just fine thanks to the voice-amplifying magic tool they were using.

First-and second-years had only shared lessons, which were all carried out here in the auditorium. This was also where the first-years were due to take their written lessons in the morning before moving to practical lessons in different classrooms based on their status. Since there were so many people in the lower years who passed the classes during their first exam, the lectures would be moved from the auditorium to classrooms once few enough people remained.

Thus ended the speeches from the teachers. The upcoming fellowship gatherings were apparently the really important part; since this was where one would socialize with students of other duchies, it was equivalent in significance to socializing back home, meaning no failures would be permitted.

"You will now be moved to gatherings according to your status, but take care to stay close to members of your own duchy. Seniors of all statuses, take care of your juniors. Juniors, you have much to learn, so take care and obey the wisdom of your seniors."

The sixth-years subsequently divided everyone into laynobles, mednobles, archnobles, and finally archduke candidates, who of course kept their retainers.

We would be leaving the auditorium in order of our duchy's rank once again, and so we waited as the massive crowd started to move.

Once we had exited the auditorium, the seniors split up and took us to our respective gathering locations. We archduke candidates were taken to a small gathering hall rather than a massive meeting area.

"Lord Wilfried and Lady Rozemyne from Ehrenfest the Thirteenth have arrived," announced a scholar standing by the door, after which we were guided into the hall. There was a table at the very front that was considerably larger than the others, so I could guess that the royalty were sitting there.

I couldn't see their faces, but I knew who they were. The fifth prince had risen to kingship immediately after winning the civil war, and his son, the second prince, was currently attending school as a sixth-year. His name was... Anastasius, from what I remembered. Since we would only be attending the Academy together for a single year, Ferdinand had said that I would almost certainly never have a meaningful interaction with him. For this reason, I only needed to memorize his name.

*He sure made that sound easy, but all these nobles and royals have names that are super hard to memorize! They're so long and weird-sounding! Geez!*

As I silently complained, I looked around the hall and saw a line of separated four-person tables. Given that the tables closer to the front already had people sitting at them while those toward the back were still empty, I could guess they were also determined by duchy rank.

"What's with that tiny girl...?" came a voice.

Everyone in the hall suddenly looked at me with curious eyes, with a few students here and there even making amused commentaries. I could hear Wilfried grinding his teeth. Those currently here were all of a higher status than us, so speaking up to defend ourselves wasn't an option; we had to stay silent and endure it.

"Looks like a toddler wandered in. Anyone know where her parents are?"

Trying to ignore the sneers and mockery, I headed to my table. Brunhilde pulled a chair back for me and I sat down. Hartmut then sat beside me as my

scholar, while my attendants and guard knights stood behind me. From what I could see, this was also the case at the other tables.

“Take this, Lady Rozemyne. You’ll want it for the greetings,” Hartmut whispered, handing me a folded sheet of paper. I glanced down and saw it was a cheat sheet detailing each duchy’s color, current position in the rankings, and archduke candidates. I had already memorized the names of each duchy and their respective colors, but I didn’t have a full grasp of the rankings or the names of the new archduke candidates, so this was very valuable information to have.

“You have my thanks, Hartmut.”

“It is my honor. Your next course of action is to greet the royalty, then those of the higher-ranked duchies. When you are done, those of the lower-ranked duchies will come to greet you. It should be clear once you observe what those who come before you do.”

Once all of the archduke candidates were in the hall, the doors were closed and the greetings began.

The archduke candidates from Klassenberg—a greater duchy known to have more power and influence than any other—stood up at once, their red capes fluttering behind them. They approached the royalty with their retainers, greeted them, then returned to their seats.

Next to stand were two archduke candidates from the greater duchy Dunkelfelger wearing blue capes. They greeted the royalty and then Klassenberg’s archduke candidates before returning to their seats.

“Why is Ahrensbach ranked sixth despite being a greater duchy...?” I asked, looking over my cheat sheet.

Hartmut frowned. “Their influence has decreased over the past few years, and from what I understand, they are struggling with an inner turmoil of sorts. It is not easy for apprentice scholars to gather information about them, however, so I do not know much more than that,” he replied, insinuating that it was hard for lower-ranked duchies to gather information about higher-ranked duchies.

Soon enough, the light-purple capes of Ahrensbach began to move. Standing at the front was a girl with gorgeous blonde hair, who I assumed was Georgine's youngest daughter. I glanced down at my cheat sheet.

"...Detlinde."

After greeting the royalty, Detlinde glanced my way. The similarity wasn't immediately apparent due to her hair color, but her face, eyes, and other features all looked very much like Georgine's.

For the briefest moment, I could have sworn that our eyes met.

# Royalty and Nobles from Other Duchies

When there was more than one archduke candidate present for a particular duchy, they all went up together during the greetings, while duchies without any sent an archnoble student of the highest year. I observed the process and absorbed the unwritten laws until it was eventually Ehrenfest's turn. Wilfried stood up at once, but Brunhilde had to help me down from my chair.

"Look, she can't even get up on her own."

Quiet snickering could be heard from among the other students. Wilfried wore a stiff expression as he tried to endure them, but the way his fists were clenched told me that the whispers were getting to him a lot more than they were me.

*I guess that makes sense. He's not at all used to being insulted.*

I had been called tiny ever since my commoner days, and nobles had used their status to insult me on numerous occasions in the past. It was one thing to be insulted by people I knew, but strangers? That didn't bother me in the least. I was used to it, but the same couldn't be said for Wilfried.

"Wilfried, I care not what strangers have to say about me. I know that I have many friends and allies by my side," I whispered, placing a hand on his balled fist. Our retainers gave small nods.

"Right. Let's go, Rozemyne."

Still wearing a hard expression, Wilfried matched my walking speed as we headed straight to the royalty's table with our retainers.

I moved as gracefully as I could, making sure to keep my back straight, a smile on my face, and my eyes forward. These instructions had been so thoroughly beaten into me that walking gracefully with a fake smile was now like second nature to me.

We knelt in front of the royalty's table, crossed our arms in front of our chests, hung our heads, and then spoke the traditional greeting used when

meeting someone for the first time. The prince gave a slight nod of recognition in response, regarding us with beautiful gray eyes that were completely unobscured by his regal blond hair.

Back in Ehrenfest, I had muttered something about how disappointed I would be if the prince turned out to be ugly, but Ferdinand had assured me that those of such high status were generally very attractive, as only the most beautiful of women were taken as wives. The sight before me pretty much confirmed that he was right—surely one had to have come from a long line of stunning people to end up looking like this.

"Prince Anastasius, may we pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?"

"You may."

He replied as expected, and so Wilfried and I poured mana into our rings to give a blessing. I put in just the tiniest amount so as to not overdo it.

*...Perfect.*

I let out a relieved sigh at the fact my blessing hadn't been any larger than Wilfried's before continuing the greeting.

"It is an honor to meet you, Prince Anastasius. We are Wilfried and Rozemyne of Ehrenfest, here to learn to become proper nobles fit to serve Yurgenschmidt. May the future be bright," we said together.

Once we had finished greeting Anastasius, he told us to raise our heads. We did so slowly, and when I saw the prince's face again, I noticed he was gazing down at me with a somewhat displeased frown. He looked me over from head to toe, then sniffed.

"Rozemyne, was it? *You* are the so-called Saint of Ehrenfest? The rumors claimed you have unparalleled beauty and wisdom, enough mana to be adopted by an archduke, and a compassionate heart that moves even the stoniest of men to tears. How laughable. Must such reports always be so untrustworthy?"

*What the heck?! Since when has my reputation been that unreasonable?! I'm*

*more confused than anyone right now!*

"It is often the case that time and distance distorts the truth," I replied carefully. "This is my first time hearing of any such rumors. I can only imagine there were jesters somewhere along the line who exaggerated things further for their own amusement." It was little wonder the other nobles were laughing at me if they had heard all these rumors as well—that amount of praise was much too excessive for someone who looked young enough to have just recently been baptized.

My attempt to brush aside the subject didn't seem to please Anastasius. "Good grief..." he said, raising an unamused eyebrow. "Ehrenfest must be in truly dire straits if they have no choice but to prop up such a middling girl as a saint."

"That is exactly correct, Prince Anastasius. Your wisdom truly does befit your status," I said with a smile, planning to stroke his ego and get this over with. "As you know, Ehrenfest is a dearly lacking duchy with nothing of note. Our mana shortage is so great that the archduke had no choice but to adopt me and build me up as a saint. Our situation is so dire, in fact, that we hopelessly pray for the flowers we offered to the gods to perhaps return to us one day."

*Like you don't know it's your fault. We were a backwater duchy struggling to survive to begin with, and then you royals had your dumb civil war that caused so much damage that you had to steal mana from all your duchies just to keep functioning. At least give back the priests you took for the Sovereign temple.*

While complaining on the inside, I put a hand on my cheek and tilted my head in a generic worried pose. The Sovereignty was probably carrying on just fine; they had compensated for their purge-induced mana shortage by taking nobles and priests from other duchies, who were now facing serious difficulties themselves as a result. It was annoying to be mocked by a member of the family that had caused all the problems in the first place.

"They say you became a saint to bring order back to your duchy, but Ehrenfest hardly seems better off with you. In fact, were you not attacked by nobles of your own duchy, even?"

"Indeed. Whether big or small, there is always some chaos following a shift in

power. I am just glad I was the only victim."

Anastasius raised an eyebrow again, then waved a bored hand in our direction. That was a sign for us to leave, so Wilfried and I stood and excused ourselves.

*Whew, that went well. Good, good.*

We weren't done yet though—if anything, that was only the beginning.

I pumped myself up and started approaching the other tables. The greater and middle duchies from ranks one through five were not on bad terms with Ehrenfest, so each greeting ended after the blessings and the exchange of a few polite words.

Then it came time for Ahrensbach the Sixth. Detlinde welcomed us with a kind smile, looking exactly like Georgine.

"Lady Detlinde, may we pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?"

"You may."

Once the blessings were finished, Detlinde smiled. "I am delighted to finally meet you, Wilfried. You invited my mother to visit Ehrenfest two years ago, did you not? She was going to bring me with her. I was ever so excited to meet you for the first time; we children of archdukes are not afforded many opportunities to visit family in other duchies, are we?" she asked.

The innocent smile on her face, plus the fact she was referring to Wilfried without any title, made it hard to tell whether she was treating him as close family or someone not even worth recognizing as a rival archduke candidate.

"Of course, the visit was sadly canceled due to the attack on your family," she continued. "I was devastated—we are cousins, after all. I pray that we can at least be friendly together here at the Royal Academy."

"I pray for the same," Wilfried replied, a polite smile on his face.

Detlinde's own smile deepened. "No need to be so formal. We are family. You may rely on me whenever necessary; I am a fourth-year and know much that

can help you.”

“We are honored,” Wilfried and I replied together.

Detlinde put a hand on her cheek and tilted her head slightly. “So, Wilfried... I am told that Rozemyne was poisoned and forced to sleep within a jureve. It is not always the case that the potions of one’s parents will work for a child, and sleeping for two years straight is quite rare indeed. How is she doing? Is she well? It must have placed a lot of strain on her body,” she said. But for all the worry in her voice, she didn’t so much as glance in my direction.

“Rozemyne is fine,” Wilfried answered. “As you can see, she has recovered enough to attend the Academy without issue. Your kindness is much appreciated, Lady Detlinde.”

“Thank you ever so much for worrying about me, Lady Detlinde. I have always been of poor health, so I am used to being bedridden,” I added. “Even so, I am fortunate enough to have already recovered.”

“I see. Does this mean I will be able to visit Ehrenfest this summer then? I would like to spend even more time with you, Wilfried.”

It was then that I realized she wasn’t affording me so much as a smile. Her attention was focused entirely on Wilfried.

*Okay, this is just too blatant. What’s her goal here? Maybe she just doesn’t like me, which is understandable enough, but it’s possible that she’s planning something. The only problem is, I have no idea how much she actually knows.*

“Permission from Aub Ehrenfest is required before any noble from another duchy can visit, so I can give no answer on my own.”

“True. In that case, I hope you will convince him for me, Wilfried.”

Our greeting with Ahrensbach ended with me being entirely ignored, and from there, we started moving to the next table. I thought things over as I stood up.

*So, it seems that even the prince knows I was attacked by nobles from Ehrenfest. Just how much information has leaked, exactly? Is it common knowledge throughout noble society that I was in a coma for the past two*

*years? Or was Detlinde warning me that Ahrensbach knows absolutely everything that happens in our duchy?*

I had no answers to those questions, and so to avoid leaking any information myself, I decided to return any inquiries sent my way with vague smiles and ambiguous responses.

The middle and lesser duchies holding ranks seven through twelve were currently engaged in a brutal battle against Ehrenfest to preserve their positions. As these ranks truly could turn on a dime, they met us with harsh words and spiteful insults, all commenting that they hadn't expected the Saint of Ehrenfest to be so tiny. Behind their sneers, however, it was clear they had been afraid of us overtaking them. As a result, seeing that I wasn't the saint they had feared actually came as a relief to them.

I blew through the greetings with three set phrases powerful enough to handle whatever was thrown at me: "As I am still recovering, there is not much I can do," "Let us all work to grow together," and "I am glad to see that you consider me an equal."

I wasn't yet sure how much of an impact a change in the rankings would really have, but with how insulting the other duchies were being, I was feeling motivated to do my best and work my way up.

*Alright. Time to take the Better Grades Committee seriously.*

Once we had finished greeting those above us, it was time for us to be greeted by the lower ranks. As expected, they also viewed us with hostility—including those from Frenbeltag, the duchy to the west of Ehrenfest.

Frenbeltag was currently fifteenth, the lowest rank of any middle duchy. They had been on the losing side of the civil war, and I recalled that they had been in the middle of rebuilding themselves when I went into my coma. There had been two years when I helped to fill up their small chalices, and their rank was a clear indication that they were still struggling to get back on their feet.

*That maaay have something to do with me refusing to fill chalices from other duchies...*

Sylvester had been accepting chalices year after year, and so when winter

came three years ago, I informed him that I would no longer be filling them going forward. On top of that, there was also my ending up in a coma; even if Sylvester had accepted the chalices again, it was hard to imagine Ehrenfest having the capacity to help other duchies when even Wilfried and Charlotte had to rush around the Central District refilling it with mana. Frenbeltag had no doubt fallen even further down the rankings due to losing this support.

"Lord Wilfried, Lady Rozemyne. May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?"

"You may."

"I am Rudiger of Frenbeltag, and I am a fifth-year student here at the Royal Academy. If you will excuse my saying so, Lord Wilfried and I share much blood owing to our parents being siblings," he said after kneeling down and blessing us.

As one would expect given his comment, Rudiger looked a lot like Wilfried—so much so that they really could have been mistaken for brothers when standing next to each other. The two most notably shared the same hair color, though Rudiger also had the same indigo eyes as Charlotte.

"I pray that we can have a good relationship, just as our parents do," Rudiger added.

"We feel the same."

Once everyone had exchanged their greetings, the food was brought in. I would be eating with Hartmut, Cornelius, and Leonore. Brunhilde would serve me, while Angelica stood guard.

After taking my first bite, I pursed my lips in thought. I had been expecting the cooking in the Sovereignty to be more refined than what I was used to, since Ehrenfest was such a country province, but it just tasted like normal food. I could guess that the cuisine here was somewhat standardized, since all the duchies got together each year for the Royal Academy and the Archduke Conference.

The food wasn't noticeably good, but it did use ingredients that weren't

available in Ehrenfest. I was curious to know what else they had, though I couldn't imagine this would be easy to find out, since I wasn't allowed to go into the food storage area.

"It tastes a bit... unremarkable," I observed.

"A few years ago, I thought this was the most delicious food in the world," Hartmut replied with a wry smile. The food at the dormitory had changed three years ago and had only continued to improve since then, which was probably due to the chefs getting used to the new styles.

"Well, I suppose we shouldn't talk about the food too much," I said. We then started discussing the greetings, and Hartmut complimented me on how smoothly I changed the subject. There was a lot we needed to think about and discuss when it came to our relations to other duchies, but we couldn't talk about it here; it needed to wait until we returned to the dormitory.

"The fact that you have only recently awoken from your slumber is the perfect excuse to avoid post-meal socializing. You can remain seated this year; leave the information gathering to me."

"Very well, Hartmut. I entrust that all to you."

We started making plans as we continued our meal, until eventually we were served dessert: galettes with rutreb jam, plus cute little sweets in the shape of birds. The plates practically shone, and the presentation was perfect. Neither Hugo nor Ella had the artistic knack for decorating plates like this. The dessert looked so nice that I really wanted to take it back with me just so they could learn from it.

"Feels like a waste to actually eat it..." I said before taking a bite of the galette. The flavors exploded in my mouth with such force that I jerked back in my seat, at a complete loss for words. It wasn't that the food tasted good—rather, the sweetness was offensively over the top, so much so that I couldn't manage another bite. Since sugar was considered an expensive luxury, it was clear the chefs had thought it best to use as much as possible.

*Guhhh... My mouth feels all gritty now.*

I set down my cutlery and reached for my drink. There were a few mutters of,

“At least the first bite or two tastes nice,” from those eating with me, but they were all making similar expressions. It just went to show that restraint was important in all things.

“Will my recipes truly catch on in the Sovereignty?” I asked, setting my cup down with a sigh. “If they think this is delicious here, it might be more difficult than I thought.”

“I believe they will, but it will take a considerable amount of time for the chefs to learn your techniques and master the flavors,” Cornelius replied. “Even the head chef of our estate had great difficulty.”

I nodded slowly. Cornelius was right that it would take some time for the chefs to get up to par once I spread the recipes, but did that mean I would have to battle with this overbearing sweetness at every tea party I was invited to until then?

*Bwuh... Now I’m even more scared of going to them.*

“Spreading your recipes is a good idea, Lady Rozemyne, but I think you should introduce them gradually rather than all at once. Am I right to assume you know more than what is available in your recipe book?” Hartmut asked with a raised eyebrow. It seemed as though he was testing me.

I wiped my mouth, then answered with a smile. “Of course. There are some I don’t mind making public, some I am happy to share with Ehrenfest’s leaders, some I am willing to share with my guardians, and some I would much rather keep to myself. I keep my public and private plans strictly separate, even when it comes to recipes.”

Hartmut’s eyes started sparkling with interest. “Then I am looking forward to learning about them. So, how do you intend to establish your reputation as a saint here at the Royal Academy?”

“Hm? There is no need for that. I wish to live a humble life as a normal student.”

If everyone was going to talk about how underwhelming of a saint I was and how much my reputation preceded me, then I wanted to go all the way and live out my school days as a normal student. My plan was to hide out in the library

and spend as much time there as possible.

Hartmut, however, seemed to disagree. He frowned at my response, then quickly forced a smile back onto his face. His expression looked calm on the surface, but it carried an intensity that made it clear there was no room for debate.

“Unfortunately, that is not an option,” he said. “The presence of a saint is absolutely necessary for increasing Ehrenfest’s influence.”

*Um... Did I just flip some weird switch inside him?*

For some reason, Hartmut began espousing at length about his first encounter with the legend of my sainthood. Ottilie had apparently brought him with her to see my baptism, then pointed up at me and explained that she would be serving me from now on. The young Hartmut had been ashamed to hear that his mother was serving someone who was not only a child, but an archnoble of the same status as them—even if said archnoble was about to be adopted by the archduke.

“However, when you returned the blessing at your ceremony, blue light rained down upon the entire hall, covering all the attendees at once. It was the biggest blessing I had ever seen in my life, and the first time that watching one had ever moved me,” Hartmut explained, making it clear that the memory was deeply engraved in his heart.

“That was an evil plot concocted by my guardians—all part of a plan to force nobles to accept my adoption,” I explained. “You were fooled, Hartmut. They played you like a harspiel. I am no saint.”

“Your baptism is not the only reason I understand you are a true saint, Lady Rozemyne.”

When autumn came and Hartmut heard from his mother about my desperate efforts to save Wilfried’s future, his only thought had been that I should have used the opportunity to kick Wilfried down and become the archduchess myself. He had maintained that he would have crushed Wilfried into the dirt had he been my retainer, then advised his mother on what to tell me, though she refused to pass the information on.

“Lady Rozemyne does not wish for such a thing. She thinks only of raising others up, not dragging them down,” she had told him. “You would be better off coming up with ways to strengthen the legend of her sainthood while improving the lives of those around her.”

“And so I did just that,” Hartmut said. “In the end, however, nothing I thought up surpassed what Lord Ferdinand himself was already putting into motion.”

*I don’t even want to know what plans he concocted...*

“Furthermore, your acts prove your sainthood more than anything else could, Lady Rozemyne. I have not heard of anyone else giving a blessing simply by offering music to the gods at their winter debut. The light that shone from your fingers as you strummed the harspiel was truly stunning in its beauty. Your blessing to Leidenschaft drifted slowly to the ceiling while spreading throughout the hall, remember?”

*Um... Did it? I was in such a panic over screwing up that I don’t really recall what happened.*

The only thing I could remember was being shocked at the sudden development and then Ferdinand forcibly carrying me out. I had been frantically trying to stop the blessing in its entirety, but I guess it hadn’t looked that way to everyone else.

“It was from that point onward that I knew for sure: you are a saint who has far surpassed even what Lord Ferdinand has planned,” Hartmut concluded. “I wish for everyone else to consider you as much of a saint as I do, and to that end, I will spare no expense.”

My cheek twitched. Up to this point, I had thought of Hartmut as a mini Justus with some common sense, but that couldn’t have been further from the truth. He was genuinely skilled, which meant he had the power to accelerate the spread of my sainthood faster than I could ever hope to contain.

*Is it just me, or have I taken someone as my retainer that I reeeally shouldn’t have?*

# Math, Theology, and Controlling Mana

Classes were due to begin tomorrow, starting with an orientation for the new students during which the various subjects and institutions throughout the Academy would be explained. With this in mind, Cornelius spent dinner telling me what my average day would be like going forward.

"The number of times the bell rings will change on days with classes," he began. Second bell apparently marked the start of breakfast, with second-and-a-half bell then marking the start of morning classes. Third bell signaled a change in subject, as did third-and-a-half bell, then at fourth bell we would return to our dormitories for lunch. Afternoon classes would begin at fourth-and-a-half bell, continuing until dinner at sixth bell. Seventh bell was curfew, meaning this was when the doors to the dormitories would be closed.

"So my free time will be from fourth to fourth-and-a-half bell," I said. "I believe I shall spend my lunches in the library."

"That is not free time, Lady Rozemyne—you are expected to spend it preparing for your afternoon classes. Furthermore, you have not even been registered at the library yet," Cornelius said, a broad smile spreading across his face.

I fought back with an even broader smile. Spending my lunch reading in the library had been an iron rule of mine ever since my Urano days.

*There's a library here, so no way am I going to let my opportunity for lunchtime reading slip through my fingers!*

"I am of course referring to after I am registered," I replied. "I will prepare for the entire day in the morning before leaving for my classes. That way, there will be plenty of time to—"

"No, there will not."

*Nghhh! I* won't *lose here! I'll fight Cornelius to the bitter end for my reading time, even if that means prying it from his cold, dead hands!*

“You must allow me to visit the library!” I exclaimed. “I will return as soon as the bell rings for afternoon classes.”

“This is unnegotiable, Lady Rozemyne. Do you think we can trust you to hear the bell and actually stop reading?” Cornelius asked. His words hurt, though there was some truth to them—back in my Urano days, the librarian had gotten used to forcibly kicking me out whenever the bell rang.

“But, but... The books need me, and I need the books. At the very least, allow me to very, *very* thoroughly look over them. I will even go without lunch, if such is what it takes.”

“No. That is incredibly unhealthy. Plus, if you go without lunch, then your retainers will be forced to do the same.”

“N-No way... My precious library...”

I had come to the Royal Academy with the understanding that I would get to go to the library once I arrived, and now here I was being denied entry right outside the gates of paradise. The cruelty was astounding.

As I glared at Cornelius with tearful eyes, I heard Wilfried sigh from where he was sitting beside me. “Rozemyne, leave it at that. You look young enough already, so throwing a tantrum like this will make people think you’re an actual toddler.”

*What...? I look like a toddler throwing a tantrum?!*

Shocked by the accusation, I hurriedly looked around. Wilfried was right—Cornelius, a fourteen-year-old, was repeatedly rejecting my pleas while I, a girl with the appearance of a seven-year-old child at best, stubbornly refused to accept his answer. From an outside perspective, I was clearly throwing a tantrum.

“You have to be more careful than anyone about how you act,” Wilfried warned me. “Your appearance can create openings for those from other duchies to exploit.”

“...You’re right. I’ll give up on going at lunch and just visit the library after class,” I said with a weak nod, hanging my head sadly. Wilfried had grown so much while I was asleep that I really had turned into his little sister. It was

incredible how much children could change over just two years.

"Excellent work stopping milady there, my boy." Rihyarda praised Wilfried with a smile, then knelt down beside me. "And milady, Ferdinand has instructed me to not let you into the library until you have passed all of your exams. He said it should be your highest priority to pass them quickly so that you can return in time for the Dedication Ritual."

"Whaaat?! That's so unfair! Cruel, even! At least let me spend my free time how I please!" As far as I was concerned, forbidding me from entering the library at all was just going way too far.

"You may use your free time here as you wish, milady, but we cannot allow you to access the library so readily when we know you will only cause trouble for everyone while you are there. In the temple book room, you prioritized reading over eating until you eventually collapsed, terrifying all those around you. At Lord Karstedt's estate, you rushed to the book room with such fervor that you collapsed on the way there and traumatized poor Cornelius. And then, when you first entered the castle book room, you became so focused on reading that Oswald could not get your attention, and I had to be called to drag you out. The library ban is there for a reason."

"Exactly. I still remember how shocked I was when you collapsed. Lord Ferdinand's decision here isn't cruel—it's a necessity."

I couldn't even argue back; those were indeed all things that had happened.

*Grr! Curse you, Ferdinand! How far will you go to interfere with my plan to hole up in the library? It seems like you might be my greatest foe after all.*

"In return, he has given you permission to spend entire days in the library once you pass all of your classes," Rihyarda said. "You'll have all the free time in the world—except for when you have to return for the Dedication Ritual, of course—so if you pay attention to your health and remember to eat, he said you can read as much as you want."

My head shot up at once. "So I just have to pass my exams then?"

"Indeed, milady. Is that not why you studied so hard in the castle?"

I nodded. My cramming with Ferdinand had been intense, but it was

predicated on the fact that it would allow me to finish my exams before the Dedication Ritual. Assuming I really was already at a passing level, then I would surely still have plenty of time to go to the library.

“Very well. I will dedicate my all to my classes so that I can visit the library as soon as possible!” I declared, my fists clenched in determination, but Wilfried merely shook his head.

“Hold it, Rozemyne. Don’t forget you need to make sure all the first-years pass too.”

“...Is it absolutely necessary that they all pass?” I asked. I was the only one who had undergone Ferdinand’s brutal study regimen, and there was no guarantee I could bring everyone else up to the required level before the Dedication Ritual.

“Yeah. We can’t have you locking yourself away in the library and abandoning the Better Grades Committee. Remember, you’re an archduke candidate,” he said, making it clear that I couldn’t escape my duties of raising everyone’s grades and ensuring the victory of the first-years’ team.

“I see... Very well. I shall put my all into that as well,” I declared, cackling to myself as I thought over tomorrow’s plans. I then turned to address all the first-years in the dining hall. “Tomorrow we have the introductions, math, and theology, correct? I’m told that, over the past two years, everyone with prior experience from the playroom has passed math and theology on the first day. In other words, we should all be able to do the same. I will not allow anyone to shamefully fail the exams.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

I nodded in satisfaction at the first-years’ prompt response. Each one flinched and straightened their back the moment I made eye contact with them.

“In the afternoon, we have a practical lesson regarding the control of mana. Once that is over, return to the dormitory at once and study so that you might pass the history, geography, and magecraft exams that are going to be held the next day. You will be working on the weak points you identified yesterday, and I will assist you all with your studies. Our goal is for everyone to pass all of their classes at once.”

“Everyone, all at once?! Rozemyne, are you insane?!” Wilfried exclaimed, abruptly rising to his feet. But what else did he expect? I wasn’t allowed into the library until everyone had passed, so I was obviously going to make sure it happened as soon as possible.

“I said I would be dedicating my *all* to this, Wilfried, and I meant it. If I am expected to sacrifice my library time for the sake of everyone else, then I expect everyone else to sacrifice their peace of mind for my sake in turn. They will work as hard as I am working to contain myself.”

It was so quiet that only the nervous swallows of the first-years could be heard, and in the midst of that, Hartmut smiled to himself. “And so begins another chapter of the legend of the Saint of Ehrenfest.”

After dinner, I made the first-years study history and geography until seventh bell. Some of the kids ended up exhausted in no time at all, which was honestly pretty pathetic, since classes hadn’t even started yet.

Come seventh bell, I was bathed and then put to bed. I made sure to wake up earlier than usual at first bell so that I could start organizing cheat sheets to help the five children—a mixture of mednobles and laynobles—who weren’t quite good enough to pass yet.

“Lady Rozemyne, what in the world are you doing up so early?!” Rihyarda barked upon entering my room. She had come in to clean before waking me up, only to find that I was sitting at my desk in my bedclothes.

“We don’t have much time before the exams.”

“You are pushing yourself much too hard, milady. This isn’t good for your body.”

“I’m not pushing myself at all. Compared to when I had to prepare for Charlotte’s baptism ceremony, there is practically nothing for me to do. It would be easy for me to pass on my own, but whipping the others into shape is really hard,” I replied, all the while wondering how much I would be able to pack into their heads today.

Once it was time for breakfast, I headed to the dining hall with the cheat

sheets in hand, which I then distributed to the five children who needed them. “Use these to study. I’ve written down everything that you haven’t memorized yet.”

They accepted the papers, albeit with sickly expressions.

Wilfried furrowed his brow. “Rozemyne, do you really have to push them this hard? All so you can go to the library sooner?”

“Yes. I mean, didn’t you forbid me from going there specifically so that I would push them and make everyone pass as soon as possible? Need I repeat that I said I was putting my all into this?”

After breakfast, we immediately started preparing for our classes, then studied in the common room.

“Philine, you misspelled the king’s name,” I said. “Roderick, you have mixed up the names of these two duchies.”

“My apologies.”

“I will fix them at once.”

I put the five children through a brutal training regimen, and soon enough, it was time for class. I crossed my arms and frowned slightly as I looked over their progress; things weren’t going quite as I expected.

“...Well, it’s time. You should have no problems with today’s exams, at least. I trust that you will all pass without issue,” I said, causing the five who had been struggling to lean back in their chairs in relief.

“Milady, aren’t your expectations here just a tad too harsh?” Rihyarda asked, making her concern clear.

“This is absolutely too harsh,” I said with a nod, “just like it was too harsh to deny me my time in the library until all the first-years pass their exams. But I will stay strong nonetheless. I will swallow the pain in my heart, complete my duty as an archduke candidate, and then speed to the library as soon as humanly possible. I’ll do anything to peacefully read my books!” I declared, balling my fists with conviction.

I could already hear Wilfried apologizing to everyone nearby.

I headed to the auditorium, accompanied by my retainers and with Rihyarda carrying my study tools. Once I was inside, my guards would be changing places with the Sovereign soldiers on watch by the doors.

“You must not leave the auditorium before we come to get you,” Rihyarda warned before leaving with my other attendants. The first-years and I went into the auditorium, then sat next to each other in chairs with the number thirteen on them.

“The introduction will now begin. Listen well, as it will come in very useful for life in the Royal Academy,” began the professor standing at the podium. He was going to be explaining more about our upcoming classes, though as there were exams on the first day of any subject, only those who didn’t pass would actually be attending them. “Many first-year students pass their written exams on the first day, but practical classes take much longer,” he explained.

Shared classes were held in the auditorium for all years, but practical lessons depended on one’s mana capacity, so they were divided by status. These classes took place in the rooms that yesterday’s fellowship gatherings had been held in, though they would be moved to classrooms once the class became small enough.

Next began an explanation about the library. It was open from today onward, and anyone could use it by going there and registering themselves. Registering could only be done when the library manager—that is, the Academy librarian Solange—was there, so we were told to make sure we schedule the meeting in advance. This, alongside having to wait for a reply and then the day of the meeting itself, made registering seem like a much longer process than I had expected.

*I need to schedule that meeting as soon as I get back to the dormitory for lunch.*

Registering at the library also required a fee that many laynobles wouldn’t be able to afford by themselves, so we archduke candidates and other archnobles were asked to give them work so that they could save up for it.

*Right. I’ll have the laynobles transcribe books that we haven’t already got in*

*the castle book room.*

We were also told that mingling between duchies was encouraged, and that we should therefore actively involve ourselves with interduchy socializing. Since students could not enter the dormitories of other duchies, there were numbered rooms based on rank intended to be used for tea parties. I didn't care about that though, since I didn't care about tea parties. I would have preferred that the professor go back to talking about the library.

The explanation continued for quite some time until third bell eventually rang. It was time for our math exam, and we had a short break before the new professor arrived.

"Now, one student from each duchy come forward to fetch the exam papers."

Roderick the apprentice scholar went up for Ehrenfest. The exams themselves seemed to be on parchment, which was actually quite refreshing given how much I had been using plant paper lately.

"Prepare your writing utensils," the professor said. "You will be expected to write down the questions as I state them. I will repeat each question three times, and you may think of your answers after writing them all down."

We were all using magic pens as our writing utensils—that is, those weird pens that required you to pour your mana into them. I had been told that I didn't need to use one when writing down notes in class, but using one was necessary for Academy exams; the professors would apparently dip the parchment into mana-dissolving liquid afterward, which would erase the writing and allow the parchment to be reused. That was certainly something I wanted to learn more about.

"The exam will now begin," the professor announced. We all set our papers in front of us and readied our pens.

The exam itself was hilariously simple, covering addition and subtraction involving two-digit numbers at most. I could solve every problem before the teacher even finished repeating the questions, and a quick look around the auditorium revealed that all the students from Ehrenfest were working through the exam with easy smiles. It seemed that we were all going to pass.

“What do we do when we’re done?” I asked.

“...Once all students of a duchy have handed in their papers, you may begin studying for your next exam,” the professor explained. “However, we request that you do so quietly.”

With that, I signaled for the papers to be passed down. Once I had all eight from Ehrenfest, I handed them to the professor, then quietly instructed everyone to begin studying. We would naturally be preparing for tomorrow’s history and geography tests.

“All passing grades for Ehrenfest,” the professor announced, his voice echoing throughout the auditorium. It seemed he had already finished grading the papers.

A few let out quiet cheers while others sighed in relief, then everyone quickly shifted their attention back to the topics that were actually worrying them. While everyone was desperately working their hardest, I started to think about the upcoming exams.

All of the Ehrenfest students had passed this test with excellent grades, but first-year classes weren’t hard at all, and there were plenty of students from other duchies who passed relatively quickly.

Our next exam was theology. Once again, we students from Ehrenfest finished first, with all of us getting passing grades. It wasn’t particularly rare for every student of a duchy to pass, but the fact we had finished both exams before anyone else earned us a bit of attention—at least, that was what Wilfried said when we returned to the dormitory for lunch at fourth bell.

“Rozemyne, did you not notice everyone looking at us?” he asked.

“I was so focused on our exams tomorrow that I didn’t even think to look around. What’s important here is making sure everyone passes so that I can go to the library. It would be one thing if we were getting attention because our grades are bad, but this is the complete opposite, so who cares?”

“Me. Everyone. Our reputation is important.”

“Then I shall leave that to you. You already seem capable of passing all the exams without issue, so you can pay attention to what the other duchies think

of us.”

With that settled, I spent my lunch break helping the five struggling students with their studies and writing a letter requesting a meeting with Solange the librarian, which I then asked Brunhilde to deliver.

*I pray that Solange’s reply arrives soon...*

The second-years used the auditorium in the afternoon, so first-years were divided into groups based on status for their practical lessons. There weren’t many archduke candidates, so we would be learning alongside the archnobles.

Today we would be learning to control mana. Hirschur stood at the front of the wide room and set a box down on her podium with a dull thump.

“Inside this box are feystones,” she explained. “I want you each to take one and dye it. Direct your mana at the feystone, then show it to me once you’ve filled it. You will then need to completely remove the mana from the feystone. That will conclude today’s lesson.”

Knowing how to put one’s mana into a feystone and then remove it again was necessary for all manner of things, so students were expected to learn to do it quickly and accurately before anything else.

“Remember, you will need to dye your feystone when we move on to making your highbeasts later,” Hirschur added.

We went up and got our feystones in order of our duchies. I got one as well, but by the time I was back at my seat, it was gone; all that remained in my hand was golden dust.

*The feystone... disappeared?!*

As I blinked at my hand in surprise, Wilfried gave me a confused look. “Rozemyne, did you not get one?”

“No, I did. I was holding it normally, but...”

Once everyone else had gone up to get theirs, I got back in line to get another. This time, I rested it on my palm and watched it carefully on my way back to my seat, only to witness the clear feystone turn yellow before my eyes. It then shone brightly and dissolved into golden sand.

I recognized the process—the same thing had happened when I poured mana into the black feystone Bezewanst had once held out at me. It hadn't been the same size as this one, and it being black rather than clear meant they probably weren't the same element, but the end was nearly identical.

*But why...?*

I hadn't even thought of pouring mana into the feystone yet, but it had sucked some up anyway and crumbled to dust on its own. My brow furrowed as I looked at the golden sand on my palm.

"Now, pour mana into your feystones," Hirschur said with a clap.

Everyone began focusing on their stones. Wilfried, who was sitting next to me, must have really gotten used to handling his mana over the past two years, because his stone ended up completely dyed in the blink of an eye.

"Alright... Done," he said. "Rozemyne, where's your feystone?"

"I messed up..." I murmured, sadly looking at the sand.

"Wow, that's rare for you. Maybe go get another one?"

"I suppose I'll have to..." I replied, but it was hard to imagine the same thing wouldn't just happen again. There was no point in me getting another one until I figured out why they were sucking up my mana on their own.

While I was busy stewing over what to do, Wilfried eagerly went to show his feystone to Hirschur.

"You've finished quickly and done well," she said. "Splendid work."

Wilfried returned with a broad smile, then immediately withdrew his mana to empty the feystone. "Never thought I'd get through a practical class before you, Rozemyne," he said proudly before skipping out of the room. He had finished before anyone else.

I tried turning the golden sand back into a feystone by pouring mana into it and chanting "Stick! Stick! Turn into a sphere!" over and over again, but nothing happened. The other archnobles and archduke candidates, meanwhile, were all dyeing their stones and withdrawing the mana with ease. Thanks to their excess of mana, they were able to finish their practical lessons in no time at all.

When there were only a handful of students left, people started sneering about how long I was taking despite being an archduke candidate. The next thing I knew, I was the only one remaining.

“Lady Rozemyne, surely it is not that hard to fill a feystone with mana. If you cannot even...” Hirschur began, sounding exasperated, only to trail off upon seeing the sand on my desk. “Aah, I see.”

“What’s going on? They filled up and broke apart on their own; I didn’t even try to pour my mana into them. I don’t know what to do.”

“Ferdinand did inform me you would have enhancement tools on you at all times. They are responsible for this. You are constantly enveloped in a shell of powerful mana, which instantly fills up small feystones such as these just by touch. Remove the tool on your left arm,” Hirschur said, setting another feystone down in front of me while gathering up the golden sand with a bright smile.

“Um... Sorry, Professor Hirschur. I didn’t mean to break your feystones...”

“There is no need to apologize. This mana-saturated gold dust is quite a valuable resource.”

*Valuable, hm...? I wonder what happened to the sand from Bezewanst’s feystone then. Did Ferdinand, being the mad scientist he is, gather it all up in secret?*

As I pondered such deep mysteries, I removed the magic tool as instructed. My left arm dropped down to my side in an instant, now too heavy for me to move on my own. I had to move it with my tool-assisted right arm.

“First, do nothing more than touch the feystone. Confirm that you are now capable of doing that before you start pouring any mana in, though make sure not to accidentally touch it with your still enhanced right hand.”

I moved my barely mobile left hand to touch the feystone’s surface, resting my fingers on it without pouring in any mana. Seconds passed, though its color didn’t change.

“Everything seems to be fine,” Hirschur said. “Now try pouring mana into it.”

I tried pouring mana into the feystone of my own volition, only for it to burst a moment later, scattering pieces in all directions.

“Eep!”

“You’re adding too much mana, and you’re doing it much too quickly. Add less, and do it more delicately,” Hirschur advised while placing another feystone in front of me. With my heart still pounding over the unexpected explosion, I touched the feystone again with trembling fingers.

*Just a little. Pour just a little mana...*

I once again tried pouring in some mana. It was just a teensy amount as far as I was concerned, but the feystone still exploded with a loud pop.

“Eek!”

“Try again.”

Another explosion.

“Again.”

In the end, ten noble feystones gave up their lives before I was able to fill and then drain one.

“You have an excessively large mana capacity, so your homework for now will be to learn how to precisely control your mana usage. Now turn these into dust, if you will.” Hirschur set down the fragments of all the exploded feystones in front of me. I put the enhancement bracelet back on my left arm and started touching the shards, causing them to turn into golden dust one after another.

“Professor Hirschur, how can I learn to control my mana?”

“That is a question for Ferdinand. He too had an excessive amount of mana when he first arrived at the Academy, though he studied mana compression to increase his capacity even further. He never so much as batted an eye no matter how compressed his mana became, but it was quite heart-stopping to watch, I assure you.”

I recalled how Ferdinand had consumed rejuvenation potions while trying out my new mana compression method, and it was then that I realized he really

hadn’t changed at all since his days in the Academy.

“Ferdinand is still just as much of a research maniac now as he was then,” I informed Hirschur. “He’s still doing the same thing to this very day.”

“I see. He said in the past that he preferred life in the Academy to life in the castle, so it is nice to know he has now found a place in Ehrenfest as well,” she said with a nostalgic smile.

# History, Geography, and Music

After talking a bit about the past with Hirschur, she asked me to repair the magic tools Ferdinand had made as a student. I naturally refused in an instant; I didn't want her viewing me as the same as Ferdinand.

"More importantly, what did Ferdinand write in his letter to you, anyway?" I asked. "It seems like you know things that are being kept secret, so..."

"Everyone here knows that you were attacked in your own duchy and put to sleep in a jureve. The doctor observing your recovery noted that you might not wake up before winter, which would delay your entry to the Academy. During last spring's Archduke Conference, Ehrenfest provided documents from the doctor and requested that a special environment be prepared for you in such a case."

Noble children needed to enter the Academy once they turned ten, where they would then study until they came of age. This process was necessary for them to be officially accepted as nobles, and for this reason, there were special accommodations that could be made for those with extenuating circumstances. These would allow the student to attend for an entire year rather than just the winter, and they would need to accomplish various things before coming of age. To that end, a professor had to be stationed in the Academy, and the archduke needed to petition for it ahead of time.

These special accommodations had seen the most use right after the civil war, when the apprentice blue priests and shrine maidens returning to noble society were allowed entry into the Royal Academy to replace the immense number of nobles who had been lost.

"What I personally know is that Ferdinand is your guardian; that you have magic tools attached to your body that allow you to move; that said tools may interfere in your practical magecraft lessons, which I have been asked to account for; and that you have an innovative mind that will likely come up with quite interesting ideas," Hirschur explained.

*“Interesting ideas”? Really? I appreciate that Ferdinand is trying to be considerate, but for some reason, I just can’t find it in me to thank him.*

“I have heard from many Ehrenfest students that their saint is to thank for everyone’s written grades having risen so much over the past few years, and even Ferdinand himself gives you his approval. Consider me excited to see what you come up with in your second year when we begin covering how to make magic tools.”

It took me a long time to get used to finely controlling my mana. When I eventually exited the auditorium, I found Rihyarda and Cornelius in the nearby waiting room with exceedingly concerned expressions. It was late enough for Cornelius to have already finished his work for the day.

“That took you quite some time,” he said. “I know you are perfectly capable of controlling your mana, so I was worried something had happened.” It seemed that, much like Wilfried, he had been convinced I would pass the lesson without issue.

I slowly shook my head. “Due to my enhancement bracelets, I am unable to properly control my mana.” It was probably more accurate to say that I simply wasn’t used to my capacity after the jureve had melted my mana blockages, but the bracelets had almost certainly been a factor too.

“Ah, I didn’t realize they would interfere like that... I suppose I didn’t really consider it, since you’re moving normally now. Have you spoken to Professor Hirschur about any solutions?”

“She said that I just have to get used to it,” I replied, slumping my shoulders sadly. Cornelius’s expression turned from that of a guard knight to that of a caring brother, and he gave me a friendly pat on the back.

“Alright. Let’s get back to the dormitory.”

And so we returned to the Ehrenfest Dormitory through the thirteenth door. As soon as we were inside, Angelica came rushing over, her blue eyes brimming with tears.

“Lady Rozemyne, please assign me to guard you again. I have so many more chances to protect you now that you’re here at the Academy, but I’ve done no

work at all.”

To the untrained eye, she was a young beauty so passionate about fulfilling her duties that she had been brought to tears, but I wasn’t going to be fooled that easily. What she actually meant was that she had been looking forward to skipping out on her studies by guarding me, and now she was agonizing over the fact I wasn’t accepting that as an excuse. Everyone was working hard to study as much as they could, but all Angelica was thinking about was escaping.

I looked up at Cornelius, who looked back down at me with his dark-brown eyes and nodded. The message written across his face was clear: *“Finish her.”*

“In that case, Angelica, I order you to pass your written exams as fast as is humanly possible. That is your most important duty. I too look forward to the day when you can guard me again.”

“Lady Rozemyne...”

“You heard her, Angelica. That was an order, and knights need to prioritize orders above all else, remember?” Cornelius said, shutting her down in an instant. “Come on, let’s go study. Sorry, Leonore, but could you swap places with me?”

He dragged Angelica away, and in the blink of an eye, Leonore was standing guard beside me. I took out my highbeast, climbed inside, then started heading to my room to get changed. Angelica’s wails could be heard as I went up the stairs, and when I glanced back, I noticed Leonore was already looking toward the source of the noise.

“You and Cornelius certainly are close with Angelica, aren’t you?” she asked. “It seemed at first that you were simply being harsh with her, but the truth of the matter is that you are desperate to ensure she does not fail her classes or get expelled.”

“Angelica is my guard knight, after all. I could never allow her to fail while I am here with her in the Academy,” I said, proudly puffing out my chest.

Leonore continued looking down the stairs with an exceedingly envious look, then lowered her eyes. “Are the rumors that Angelica will be marrying one of Lord Karstedt’s sons true? She is Lord Bonifatius’s treasured disciple, after all,

and everyone cares so much for her...”

“This is my first time hearing about this...”

*Angelica, marrying one of my brothers? That’s crazy. I can’t even imagine it.*

“No matter how much mana she has, Angelica is still a mednoble. Even if Grandfather did wish for her to marry one of his descendants, surely she would end up with one of his grandsons born to a second or third wife, like Traugott. She would also be more suited to being a second or third wife.”

Of course, nobody would be able to oppose the union if Bonifatius put his weight behind it, but status-wise, marrying the son of the knight commander himself would put a huge amount of strain on a mednoble. Angelica was also a notoriously bad thinker, and she tended to act purely on instinct—two very undesirable traits for a first wife.

“A second or third wife, Lady Rozemyne? What sort of person do you think would make a suitable first wife, then?”

“My three brothers are all guard knights of the archducal family, remember. An ideal first wife is someone who can support her husband through his deep involvement with the archducal family, manage the estate during his regular absences, and socialize for the benefit of the house. My mother is incredible, you know; I truly hope to become as capable as her one day.”

Elvira had not only been willing to hear out her husband when he had arrived with some random girl who he claimed was his daughter, but also baptized said girl as her own child, taught her to be a proper archnoble, and treated her as the archduke’s adopted daughter when necessary. Not everybody could accomplish such feats.

“She secures that which benefits her, pays back into society as an archnoble should, receives praise from all around her, and is unrelenting when it comes to hobbies,” I continued. “She is my ideal role model, and I say that from the bottom of my heart.”

“In that case, I too will consider Lady Elvira a role model,” Leonore said with a smile. I couldn’t think of anything better; as two fellow noblewomen, we could work together in hope of one day reaching Elvira’s level.

I got changed and headed to the common room, where I found everyone throwing themselves into their studies. The first-years were the only ones who looked like they were fighting a desperate battle to the death, but their enthusiasm seemed to have infected the other years as well. It really was the ideal situation.

Wilfried, who had been watching everyone study, looked up. “Sure took you a long time to finish your practical lesson today, Rozemyne.”

“Indeed. The magic tools were interfering with my mana control and proved to be quite troublesome. But in any case, how is everyone progressing?” I asked, walking around the room to check up on the students. Philine responded that she was doing her best, while all the other first-years were facing down the cheat sheets I had made to help cover for their weaknesses.

*Hm... If they keep this up, it looks like they’ll all just barely manage to pass.*

“Speaking of which... Wilfried, do I need to have everyone pass their practical exams now as well, or will just the written ones suffice?” I asked.

Everyone looked at Wilfried, who recoiled in fear before hurriedly shaking his head. “J-Just the written ones! That’s all you said we would be focusing on this year, remember? And with the gap between our mana capacities, there’s no way we can teach them practical lessons ourselves. Passing the written lessons is more than enough,” he repeated as clearly as possible.

The first-years let out a joint sigh of relief, and in all honesty, I understood the feeling. Not having to focus on the practical exams right now meant I was closer than expected to accessing the library.

“If everyone is on track to pass their written exams, then I should be able to go to the library in just a matter of days. Let us all work together and do our best to ensure everything continues smoothly.”

Wilfried and I split up to start tutoring the students, at which point Brunhilde returned. In her hand was a wooden board, which she promptly held out to me.

“Lady Rozemyne, Professor Solange of the library has given her reply.”

“Oh my!”

I swiftly took the board and started to read it, overjoyed at having received a response so soon. On it, Solange informed me that she preferred to register all the students of a duchy at once, and for this reason, she wanted me to bring all of our new students to the library during lunch four days from now. She also told me what the registration fee would be, and mentioned that there was an additional deposit for those taking out books. With so many expenses, I doubted many students would actually be able to use the library.

“It seems the registration fee is one small gold per person,” I said. “That’s fairly expensive...”

“I certainly can’t afford that...” Philine murmured, looking overcome with despair.

“I am more than happy to lend you the registration fee, and you can repay me by collecting stories and transcribing books. You are going to have much free time once your written classes are done, no?”

“Lady Rozemyne,” Roderick timidly interjected, “would you be willing to buy the books I transcribe too?” I noticed that the students of other years were looking my way as well, and so I turned to look at them all and gave a big nod.

“Of course. Their value transcends faction squabbling. My goal is to gather as many books and stories as I can while in the Royal Academy, so I am willing to buy anything transcribed from the library that does not already exist in the castle book room. That said, the amount you receive will depend on the quality of your handwriting and the number of mistakes in your work.”

My intention had always been to put the money I earned toward bringing more reading material into the world, so when there were people willing to transcribe entire books for me, I would spare no expense.

“I will provide ink and paper for the purpose of transcription, but as both are expensive, I intend to record exactly how much is provided to each individual and how much is used in the transcribed books they return to me. By doing this, I can ensure that the materials are not being stolen or sold.”

The eyes of the laynobles shone once they heard I would also be providing them the materials for transcribing books. It seemed that the money I had paid them on the first day for stories and information had ended up having a huge

psychological impact.

"Rozemyne, how will you tell whether the books transcribed are already in the castle's book room?" Wilfried asked.

"I made a catalog of every book already available to us, so we need only consult that."

"Wait, what? When did you do that?"

"Is it not normal to record a book after reading it? I have catalogs of all the books in both the temple and castle book rooms, in addition to the ones in my father's estate. It was necessary for the creation of the Rozemyne Decimal System, after all."

As I proudly puffed out my chest, Wilfried shook his head in disbelief. "Have you really been asleep for two years? You weren't sneaking out to read, were you?" he muttered.

*Oh, how blissful it would have been if those two years had actually been spent reading in secret. If only reality weren't so harsh...*

"In any case, let us work to ensure all the first-years pass before we must register at the library four days from now," I said.

"...Right."

Cornelius later told me that the older students had all watched the desperately studying first-years with pity in their eyes, while Angelica had even begun praying to the gods, thanking them that she wasn't in the same year as me.

That night, we studied until seventh bell, then did some last checks over breakfast before heading to our exams. The dead-eyed, somewhat sleep-deprived first-years were muttering the names of various kings and duchies as we walked. The older students said they looked less like they were preparing for their first class in a subject, and more like they were psyching themselves up for the final exam that would determine whether they passed or failed. This was only made even more apparent when we started seeing the students from other duchies, most of whom were simply excited about starting their first year of school.

“Today begins the true final battle,” I declared. “Everyone, you have put your all into your studies. I am sure we can succeed.”

If they passed their history and geography exams, all that remained was an easy magecraft exam covering feystone elements and their respective colors. I couldn’t see that being a problem in the slightest.

“Right. We’ll do our best.”

The history exams were set in front of us, and with our magic pens in hand, the battle for our fates began. I was going to be handing the papers in once we were all done, but Philine and Roderick were taking quite a bit longer to finish. It seemed there was a particular question they were struggling with.

“I-I’ll go with this one!” Philine stammered nervously. The exam was almost over by the time she finally settled on an answer, but there were still plenty more laynobles from other duchies agonizing over their tests, so she wasn’t much of an outlier.

“Philine of the Thirteenth, please come forward,” the professor called through his voice-amplifying magic tool.

Philine did as she was instructed, completely pale in the face about having been singled out. I couldn’t hear her conversation with the professor, though I did see her shake her head a few times.

“What happened?” I asked, looking at Wilfried.

“Dunno...”

The both of us watched on with worry until Philine eventually returned. She was resting a hand on her chest and looked notably relieved.

“Philine, what did the professor say?”

“It is embarrassing to admit, but I was a single point away from failing the exam,” she explained. “The professor suggested that I retake it after attending lessons. I told him that I appreciated his concern, but that I wished to be passed anyway, since I needed to have passed in time for the library registrations three days from now.”

It seemed that the professor had noticed how desperate Philine looked and

determined that there were some extenuating circumstances at work. He had allowed her to pass, but told her that she was free to attend classes anyway.

“I truly am glad to have passed,” Philine said, and that was when the professor’s voice echoed through the auditorium again.

“All passing grades for Ehrenfest.”

A stir ran through the other students. Our results in the math and theology exams hadn’t been surprising since everyone in Ehrenfest had been passing those for years, plus the other duchies had pretty high passing rates as well. History and geography, however, were subjects that mednobles and laynobles infamously struggled with, such that many failed each year. It wouldn’t have been an exaggeration to say that the classes existed almost entirely for the sake of teaching these students, but even all the Ehrenfest laynobles had passed their history exams on day one. It was no wonder that we were the center of attention.

“We sure are standing out...” Wilfried muttered.

“That was not my intention, but the library demands sacrifice,” I replied. “We must accept these stares with pride. Next is geography. Everything has gone well so far, and we need only keep up the good work.”

Roderick anxiously chewed on his lip as he read over his notes, having particularly struggled at geography.

“I can’t believe how obsessed you are with this library...” Wilfried said.

“Hm? I mean, what else could be more important right now?”

I had never gone to the Royal Academy’s library before, and it was said to have more reading material than any other library in the country bar one. There was nothing more important to me at the moment than going through every single book it had to offer.

“So this is what Uncle meant when he said the library would serve as both medicine and a deadly poison...”

“What nonsense has Ferdinand filled your head with this time?”

“He said that using the library to control you would be as difficult as

administering the right amount of a potion. ‘An incompetent fool handling it carelessly will only end in disaster’—those were his exact words, and only now do I understand just how right he was,” Wilfried said, his respect for Ferdinand clear in his voice.

I pursed my lips. “And what do you mean by that, dear brother? We have all passed every exam so far. How is this a disaster? In fact, is it not the best outcome? It sounds to me like you’re just being rude.”

“How is it not a disaster...? You should reflect on all this, just as I am. Your weird priorities always lead to you having dumb misunderstandings.”

Dumb misunderstandings or not, everyone’s dedication to working themselves to the bone soon paid off again. Ehrenfest received passing marks across the board in the geography exam as well, though Roderick had just barely scraped by and ended up having the same exchange with the professor as Philine.

Our last exam was for magecraft, and it wasn’t long before we heard what was now a familiar announcement from the professor.

“All passing grades for Ehrenfest.”

With that, we Ehrenfest first-years had passed all of our written lessons on the first day. Everyone from the other duchies stared at us with shock as we rejoiced and collectively fist-pumped.

“I can already feel my appetite returning!” Roderick said, his fists happily clenched over having managed to conquer his weakest subject. I shuddered to think how painful his life here in the Royal Academy would have been had he been the only one to fail, especially considering that he was from the former Veronica faction.

“In celebration of your efforts, I will instruct my chefs to make desserts for all of the Ehrenfest first-years tonight,” I announced.

“Truly, Lady Rozemyne?!” came excited cries from among the students.

“Indeed. After all, it is thanks to you that the library is now finally within reach.”

It was true that I had put my all into this and pushed the first-years to work as hard as possible, but I hadn't actually expected everyone to pass on the first go. My assumption had been that the laynobles would need at least one more try to make it, but they had surpassed my expectations. If a dessert was enough to make their hard work feel worthwhile, then I would spare no expense.

"We passed! We all passed!" the first-years proudly told the older students when we returned to the dormitory for lunch. The fact we had all passed our written lessons meant the first-years were now locked in place as the fastest team, but none of the other teams seemed particularly envious; instead, they all just praised our efforts.

"Congratulations," said one of the seniors. "All of you really did work hard."

"I'm so glad to hear it all went well," another added. "I feel moved just to have witnessed it happen."

"I suppose we'll need to work twice as hard so as to not be shown up," a third chimed in.

Hearing so much praise from the senior teams despite them being our opponents honestly made me feel a little moved myself.

After lunch was our first practical music lesson. Nobody was particularly worried—in part because harspiel lessons were a standard part of the winter playroom, but mostly because everyone was still so happy about having passed their written lessons. The first-years all wore beaming smiles as they ate their lunch.

"You mustn't let your guard down too much, Philine; there are still practical lessons for us to conquer."

"Yes, Lady Rozemyne."

"Music, hm?" Hartmut mused. "Lady Rozemyne, you've already shocked all the other duchies by having every first-year pass their written lessons. You should land the final blow by giving a blessing alongside your harspiel performance in music class. Everyone will instantly recognize you as a saint," he said, his orange eyes sparkling with excitement.

"I refuse. There is an enormous difference between us improving Ehrenfest's

reputation and me causing disturbances entirely on my own. I will not pray to the gods during my performance."

"It truly is unfortunate that we don't see eye to eye here. This is such an excellent opportunity too..."

I didn't yet understand how much mana I had, nor was I able to properly control it, so who knew what could result from me giving a blessing? Just thinking about it was way too scary, so I rejected Hartmut's repeated badgering until it was finally time to go to the music hall.

Much like practical magecraft lessons, practical music lessons were held according to status. It would be difficult to have too many students in one class, and there was a blatant difference in both instrument and teacher quality between those of each status rank.

"I would like to judge your individual abilities, so I want to begin by having each of you play the song you are best at," the professor said.

The students played their songs one by one in order of their duchy ranking. Those of similar skill levels tended to choose the same songs, so it was hard not to compare people. As I watched the performances, I decided it would probably be best to pick a song that not many people knew, so as to give the professor something more refreshing to listen to.

*Geez, Ferdinand. Your training is brutal. Just how far ahead did you push me?!*

Ferdinand and Sylvester were both great at the harspiel, and even gray shrine maidens like Rosina and Wilma had played with ease, saying it was only natural to appreciate the arts. I had assumed they were about average for nobles and set my standards accordingly, training my hardest to reach their level, but now I knew they weren't average at all.

Ferdinand was naturally on a level of his own, able to play and sing so well that he actually caused women to pass out, and the fact that Sylvester sounded only marginally worse showed that he was insanely good too. Christine's obsession with art was abnormal enough that some still referred to her as "the artistic shrine maiden," and this obsession had led to her favored shrine maidens Rosina and Wilma becoming unusually skilled as well.

*I should have noticed that Sylvester and Rosina were abnormally good the second they showed they could play on equal terms with Ferdinand, of all people! How did I not realize this sooner?! How?!*

My unexpected two-year coma meant that my going above and beyond had ultimately paid off, and I truly did appreciate that. *However*, the realization that I could have had more reading time instead was more painful than I could bear.

*Ngh! I could have slacked off so much!*

As I despaired over how much more skilled my musical role models had been than anyone else, it came time for Ehrenfest to play, starting with our archnobles.

"I'll go first. You go last," Wilfried said tersely as he stood. I nodded, having no reason to argue, and watched as he went up to play. Once he started, I took my harspiel and sat in the nearby seat for the next performer.

"Hey, isn't that the girl who can't control her mana?" came a whisper from the Ahrensbach corner. "Do you think she even knows how to play properly?"

"You shouldn't say that," another voice replied. "She spent two years sleeping in a jureve, so we need to be supportive. We can't expect her to play any better than her appearance would suggest."

It might have seemed like the second voice was trying to defend me, but they might as well have said, *"She's as immature on the inside as she is on the outside, so don't expect anything from her."*

*I don't really care what people have to say about me, but I do wonder how they know about that... Has Detlinde told all the first-years about what happened?*

As I fruitlessly pondered Detlinde's goals, it came time for me to perform. I had decided to play the song I was most familiar with and that not many other people knew—the anime song that Ferdinand had arranged for me. I had initially taught it to him so that I could laugh at his expense, but I had played it so many times by this point that it was like a brother-in-arms to me.

*It's fine. Nobody's going to laugh. It's not like they know where the song is from, plus the arrangement almost makes it sound completely original.*

I was thankfully able to finish my performance without issue, having taken care not to accidentally give a blessing midway through.

“I am told you were asleep for the past two years, but your performance far exceeded my expectations,” the professor said. “If you continue to practice, you will surely become a master harspiel player.”

“Thank you,” I replied with a smile, though I had no intention of ever becoming a master harspiel player, and I only showed so much promise because my standards had been skewed by the unreasonably talented pros who had surrounded me back in Ehrenfest.

I tried going back to my seat, but the professor stopped me before I could. “Lady Rozemyne, I have served as a music professor in the Royal Academy for almost twenty years now, but I have never before heard that song. What in the world is it called?”

“It’s a summer song dedicated to Leidenschaft, and... it has no name,” I began. My intention was to claim it had been composed by an unnamed musician, but Wilfried interrupted me with a sly grin.

“The Saint of Ehrenfest composed this song to express her gratitude to Leidenschaft. She has made many original songs dedicated to the gods, several of which I know myself.”

*Nooo! A surprise ambush, and from the person I least expected!*

As I blinked in shock at the unexpected attack, the professor looked at me with gleaming anticipation. “I certainly would like to hear these other songs.”

“P-Perhaps one day, if Dregarnuhr the Goddess of Time ever weaves our threads together...”

*Wilfried! You’re such a big, stupid dummy!*

# Mana Compression and Creating a Highbeast

Written lessons ended midway through the morning. I wanted to spend my free time in the library, but my meeting with Solange was still days away. It was at times like this that I truly hated how everything in the Academy was done based on grades and influence; I yearned for the library more than anyone else, but my love was being denied.

*Two whole days to go... I'm going to die! Someone, give me booooooks!*

As I wailed in silent agony, I called over the first-years and had them start working on study guides for next year. Everyone leapt at the chance to help, especially when I mentioned that putting the work in now would make studying a lot less of a struggle for them in the future.

"Make sure to properly organize your notes, everyone. I will buy all those of a sufficiently high quality."

"Understood!" the mednobles and laynobles enthusiastically replied. The archnoble, however, didn't seem too invested.

"I am willing to help since you made the request, Lady Rozemyne, but I would like you to know that I am not fond of working for money like a laynoble."

*Oho, what's this? Is working for money considered a laynoble thing? Are archnobles too proud to do it themselves?*

"Are you unaware that I, the archduke's adopted daughter, earn my own money?"

"...Ah."

"Without the funds I made through my own hard work, I would not have been able to provide sweets as rewards or print so many educational books to be sold in the winter playroom. Am I right to assume you are used to spending your parents' money and know not how to earn your own? I would advise you to learn a bit more about how income really works."

“My apologies,” the archnoble replied, though I could tell from the look in his eyes that he still wasn’t convinced. There were no doubt many others who shared this view as well.

I glanced over at Wilfried. “Dear brother, do all archnobles think like this?”

“Yeah, pretty much. They live off the income from their land and annual salaries from the archduke, so the whole concept of working for money is completely alien to them. I get income too, and Oswald tells me where it all goes as my head attendant, but I don’t think I would’ve noticed you were earning money on your own had I not managed the winter playroom in your place.”

The money Wilfried received hadn’t been enough to continuously prepare sweets for the winter playroom, so he had apparently gone to Ferdinand, the manager of my funds, for financial assistance. While there, he was surprised to learn that my income was steadily increasing even as I slept. He had never even considered making money himself.

“It is unsightly for an archnoble to scramble to earn their own money,” the archnoble student said.

“So you say, but Giebe Haldenzel is an archnoble, and he is currently spreading my printing and paper-making industries through the duchy to earn a profit. Were you unaware of this also?”

“Giebe Haldenzel?!”

Elvira came from a family of archnobles, and it was only natural that this student would know about them. I nodded as he gawked with widened eyes.

“To rule land is to have commoners earn money for your benefit, so you will never be an astute and wise ruler if you deny the very concept of earning money. You must simply learn ways to generate income that are befitting of an archnoble.”

“You mean having other people work, instead of doing it myself...?”

“Yes. As you know, I am not personally responsible for the production of the products I sell. The ink, picture books, karuta, playing cards, and pumps are all made by workshops, but when they are sold, I am the one who profits. This

allowed me to earn money even while I was asleep, and it is the very reason I am able to afford sweets for everyone, buy information, and have you all transcribe books for me."

I was using the promise of payment to have the students feed me information and transcribe books, but considering how reluctant the archnobles were, it would be hard to gather anything from them. I didn't want them refusing to transcribe books or gather information—after all, the more people helping me, the better—so I needed to change their minds and get them invested in making as much money as possible.

*I need to make the archnobles understand the importance of earning money...*

This realization played on my mind as I poured my energy into making the study guides. Fourth bell rang as I was busy putting everything together, at which point the senior students started returning to the dormitory.

*Hm... I want the seniors transcribing books too, not just the first-years.*

The other seven first-years and I were the only ones transcribing books at the moment, but it would be much more efficient to have all sixty-plus students involved. I wanted the archnobles to work alongside the laynobles, if possible, but to achieve this I would need to prove that there was value in earning money for oneself. I needed a product that the archnobles would want to buy—something so enticing that they would even be willing to work to afford it.

"What seems to be worrying you, milady?" Rihyarda asked.

"Can you think of anything I own that an archnoble would desperately want for themselves?"

"I would say your mana compression method. The results are already more than apparent: Damuel developed enough mana to propose to Brigitte, a mednoble; Angelica was able to master physical enhancements and is now Lord Bonifatius's favorite disciple; and while Cornelius is not yet as good of a fighter as Lord Karstedt, he has already matched his mana capacity. I would say that any student of the Royal Academy is desperate to gain such knowledge."

I was already well aware that my method increased one's mana capacity, but I hadn't realized just how effective it was proving to be. It seemed it would serve

as excellent bait after all.

Once everyone had sat down for lunch, I revealed that I had an important announcement to make, drawing all eyes to me. “I have decided that those who wish to learn my mana compression method must pay the fee using money they have earned themselves, even archnobles and archduke candidates.”

Upon hearing this news, first Wilfried, then the archnobles of the same faction who had expected to learn my method with ease all froze in shock.

“There are many ways to earn money here in the Royal Academy,” I continued, “whether that be gathering information, transcribing books, or selling feystones and other materials. My plan is to charge archnobles two large golds, mednobles eight small golds, and laynobles two small golds to learn my compression method. This price will be halved for family members of those who have already bought it, and I will allow parents to contribute toward that halved price for their children.”

“Is that not being too harsh on archnobles?!” came a cry from among the students. I could see the archnobles looking around with panicked expressions.

“Archnobles already have an advantage in both practical and written lessons due to their plentiful mana and skilled tutors,” I replied. “Does the former not also make it easier for them to defeat feybeasts and acquire their feystones? Considering that laynobles have to work just to be able to afford the library registration fee, I think this pricing is more than fair.”

As the students paled at my sudden declaration, Cornelius—having already learned the compression method himself—looked at me in confusion. “Where is this coming from, Lady Rozemyne?” he asked quietly. “Did something happen this morning?”

“It seems the archnobles do not understand just how difficult it is to earn money, so I wish for them to learn. This is certainly not because I became irritated with an ignorant archnoble who described earning money as unsightly behavior.”

As Cornelius began scanning the crowd, hunting for the culprit, I suggested that the fretting students transcribe books to make the money they needed. “Is it not wise and very archnoble-like to earn money through writing books?” I

asked.

Sensing that I had no intention of changing my mind, Hartmut shrugged. “Even the archnobles will be spurred into action with you dangling the mana compression method in front of them. This allows you to spite the fool who misspoke, alter how archnobles perceive money, *and* secure new books all at the same time. Truly an outstanding move, Lady Rozemyne—you can obtain all you want without so much as lifting a finger.”

My plot here would provide me with many more books and for much cheaper than usual, since I could cut costs by using plant paper and its corresponding ink instead of parchment, all while using my mana compression method as bait to get students to transcribe material en masse.

Hartmut gave an amused grin. “I suppose I shall show my loyalty here by gathering up information and transcribed books for you as well, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Are you not morally opposed to working for money?”

“I view this less as working for money, and more as receiving the proper compensation for what I normally do anyway. I have already been running around gathering information on what concerns me as an archnoble, so I will simply be hiring others to transcribe the books for me. I won’t be desperately working for money myself—after all, archnobles need only earn money in archnoble-like ways.”

Nobody could protest my decision after hearing that.

During the afternoon, we had practical lessons on creating highbeasts. Women needed to wear special riding clothes before they could straddle their highbeasts, so Rihyarda and Lieseleta helped me get changed. This was my first time wearing them, and the long, frilly-hemmed culottes looked a lot like a skirt when I stood normally.

“You don’t usually need to wear riding clothes because of the nature of your highbeast, milady, but since you need them for your lessons here, we had some made anyway.”

“I suppose I can’t be the only one wearing a skirt while everyone else is

changed...”

Once I was dressed and the metal cage containing my highbeast feystone was secured on the belt around my culottes, I started making my way to the practical lessons. Philine and I were going to be attending classes in different rooms, but as a fellow first-year, she was wearing riding clothes as well. There was a pouch containing a feystone dangling from her hip, which she stroked from above with delicate care.

“It must have been hard work for you to dye your feystone,” I mused aloud, thinking back to how much mana the feystone had sucked out of me at once when I made my own highbeast. I could only imagine how arduous this process must have been for a laynoble like her who had never compressed their mana before.

Much to my surprise, however, Philine tilted her head in confusion. “Why would it have been hard work?” she asked. “I had been storing mana for it since birth using magic tools.”

Nobles were apparently given magic tools when they were born that would suck out their mana, and feystones for storing mana that would then automatically be filled. The magic tool would only extract from the person registered to it so that the mana would remain pure, meaning it would not extract from siblings, parents, and attendants. This allowed children to slowly save up more and more mana whenever it started to overflow, then use the feystones during Royal Academy lessons.

*They need a magic tool for each child, and enough feystones to store ten whole years’ worth of mana... That must cost a lot of money.*

I was aware that noble children weren’t taught to compress their mana until they were old enough to attend the Royal Academy, and they weren’t given rings until their baptism ceremony, but only now was I finding out what they did with all the mana that built up over the years. It explained why nobles who couldn’t afford magic tools sent their children to the temple.

“Did you not do the same, Lady Rozemyne?”

“Erm, well... I was raised in the temple, so I generally just offered my mana to the gods.”

“Oh? Then how did you prepare your highbeast feystone?” Philine asked, her eyes widening as she recalled that I had indeed been raised in the temple up until my baptism.

“I dyed a feystone that Ferdinand gave to me all at once by directly pouring my mana into it.”

“Ah. You were capable of such a feat because of your mana capacity, so tremendous that it earned you a place in the archducal family. I could not do the same.”

*Right, right... There are so many basic things about noble life that I’m still clueless about, huh? I should probably keep my mouth shut as much as possible.*

I parted ways with Philine and the other lower-status nobles, then arrived at the hall where my lesson was going to be held. Rihyarda warned me to wait until someone came to get us, as per usual, then allowed Wilfried, me, and the single Ehrenfest archnoble in our class to enter. Inside the hall, everyone took out their dyed feystones and proudly showed them off—Wilfried included.

“Your feystone’s light yellow, Rozemyne, but mine’s light green.”

“Wow. So it is.”

The color of one’s mana largely depended on its elemental affinity. Mine was somewhere between yellow and gold, which meant my strongest element was probably either Wind or Light. Wilfried, meanwhile, had a mana color that suggested his strongest element was Water.

The more elements one had, the fainter their color became. I had seven elements, so my yellow was rather light, while Wilfried only had six, so his green was slightly darker. The only element Damuel had was Wind, and I remembered his feystone being dark yellow as a result.

“Yes, yes. Quiet down, everyone!”

We were being taught by Professor Fraularm, a woman who looked to be in her mid-forties. She had a distinctive high-pitched voice and wore a prideful expression that matched the sharp, prickly aura she exuded. I had heard that she was the dormitory supervisor for Ahrensbach, and this was very quickly proven—she directed curt, forced smiles to the Ahrensbach students, but

everyone else she more or less ignored.

“Today you will practice pouring mana into and changing the shape of your feystones. Please begin by increasing their size,” she instructed.

It seemed our class was starting in the same way as my lessons with Ferdinand. This much was easy, since I already used my highbeast feystone all the time, but I wanted to use this opportunity to practice controlling my mana. I stealthily removed the magic tool from my left arm, then started pouring mana into the feystone while trying to change its shape. The hardest part was trying to properly restrict the flow.

*I just need to imagine the process as similar to using faucets, rather than pouring water from a bucket.*

And so I visualized my fingertips as faucets as I practiced adjusting the amount of mana I poured into the feystone at once. I was used to offering up my mana, but I wasn’t used to withdrawing it again, so I also used this opportunity to practice that. In the end, while everyone else was busy changing the size of their feystones, I put my all into controlling my mana as a whole.

“Those who are confident in their ability to control the size of their feystone should now move on to shaping it into a highbeast,” Fraularm said. “Many choose the animal used in their family crest, while many others go with horses as they are comfortable to ride.”

Several students immediately began working to shape their feystones. Wilfried had gotten quite used to controlling his mana over the past two years, so he always blasted through the mana-related practical lessons.

“I’m going to make my highbeast a lion, since I’m the archduke’s son. Though I do kind of want a soft highbeast like yours, Rozemyne...” Wilfried furrowed his brow in thought for a moment, then started pouring mana into his feystone. It took him an extraordinarily long time, but it eventually ended up in the shape of a lion.

“That looks a lot like Ferdinand’s highbeast,” I observed.

“It’d need to have three heads for me to copy Father’s. It was easiest for me to just base it on the one Uncle has.”

“Now that you mention it, I did see Sylvester’s three-headed lion once. It certainly is quite a strange highbeast, is it not?”

“Were Father here, I’m sure he’d yell that you’re the last person he’d want to hear that from.”

Wilfried was right that my Pandabus was perhaps a teensy bit strange when compared to regular highbeasts, but Lessy was cute, convenient, and better than any other style in my opinion.

“Thirteens! Be silent and focus on forming your highbeasts!” Professor Fraularm shrieked in her sharp, high-pitched voice.

I obeyed and went back to looking at my feystone, now deep in thought. Would it really be acceptable for me to pop out my highbeast here considering how weird everyone thought it was? Fraularm must have interpreted my internal debate as laziness, because she briskly strode over and sharply jutted out her chin.

“Highbeast. Now!”

I gave a shrug and summoned my one-person Pandabus, just as I always did. The students from other duchies immediately balked at the sight, then began to laugh.

“The heck is that?” one person sneered.

“That thing’s way too tall for her to climb on top of,” added another. “How does she expect to ride it?”

“What a strange highbeast...”

“Oh, but it is quite cute. A shame it seems so impractical.”

They were laughing at Lessy for being weird, but while they were all commenting on his shape, none of them compared him to a grun as Ferdinand and the knights had. Nobody was asking why I had shaped my highbeast after a feybeast.

“Weird...” I murmured. “Everyone kept calling him a feybeast before.”

“I’m guessing first-years just don’t know what gruns are called, since they likely won’t have hunted any before,” Wilfried said. “I don’t know all that many

feybeast names myself.”

As I mulled over his observation, Fraularm alone paled and uttered, “A grun...” under her breath. She was a professor, so it didn’t come as much of a surprise that she recognized the feybeast.

“Lady Rozemyne!” she shrieked. “Highbeasts are *not* meant to be played around with. Take this seriously!”

I couldn’t help but grimace. What had I done to deserve this scolding? I wasn’t playing around in the slightest.

“But I am taking this seriously.”

“How is *this* serious?” Fraularm snapped, angrily gesturing at Lessy. “The moment you made a *grun* as your highbeast, you forfeited all right to use that excuse. I will *not* accept a highbeast like this. Change it at once.”

Her insistence on getting rid of my Pandabus annoyed me. Sure, it wasn’t a traditional shape, but I had made a highbeast as instructed. Lessy was amazing as is, so I had absolutely no intention of changing him.

“Professor Fraularm, please excuse my curtness, but I will not change my highbeast. I can say with the utmost confidence that it is far superior to any other.”

“How is a highbeast modeled after a feybeast superior to anything?!”

“I can ride it without changing into riding clothes, and multiple people can fit inside at once,” I explained as I enlarged the one-person Pandabus enough to accommodate more passengers.

Everyone gawked at how Lessy had so suddenly grown in size, including Wilfried and the Ehrenfest archnoble. Now that I thought about it, those in the castle and dormitory had often seen me riding my one-person Pandabus, but I couldn’t remember ever showing them its larger form.

“I can freely change the size of my highbeast,” I said, using my excess mana to make Lessy shrink and then grow again. Fraularm stared at me in silent shock all the while, then snarled slightly when I puffed out my chest with pride.

“But this highbeast cannot even fly! It has no wings!”

“My dear Lessy can fly with ease,” I said, shrinking him back to one-person size before getting inside. I then flew up above the hall and spun circles around the onlookers as they gasped in disbelief.

“Th-That is simply not right!” Fraularm screamed, spit flying from her mouth. She collapsed in shock not even a moment later, which brought our highbeast class to an abrupt end.

Fraularm was carried out by two knights while Hirschur was called to replace her. She narrowed her eyes in displeasure when she arrived, then announced that today’s lesson would be continued at a later date.

As the students shuffled out of the hall, Hirschur called me over. She reassured the worried-looking Wilfried that she would just be asking me for the details of what had happened, and once he was gone, she turned to look at me.

“Now then... I wish to see this unnatural highbeast for myself—the one that shocked Fraularm unconscious. The potion I was in the middle of brewing was ruined due to my being summoned midway through my stirring it, so you owe me this at the very least.”

“S-Sure. I don’t mind,” I stammered as Hirschur gave me a sickly sweet smile. Her expression made her look like Ferdinand to a T, and it was in that moment I realized that she truly was his teacher.

We had mana compression lessons the next evening. Many professors were mobilized in preparation, so we first-years were divided into two groups, with half of us learning court etiquette while the other half were taught mana compression. I was in the latter group, while Philine was in the former.

Around ten professors were lined up in the mana compression classroom. Among them were Fraularm, who had now recovered from yesterday, and Hirschur.

“Your mana capacity grows along with the growth of your body, as your mana-containing vessel naturally changes in size as well. You can stimulate the growth of said vessel by storing as much mana in it as possible, and since you are all still in your growth period, it is important that you start doing this now,” Hirschur explained. Once she was done, Fraularm stepped forward.

“Mana capacity is more important than anything to a noble, so you must increase it as much as possible before you stop growing. There is only a particular window during which mana compression has a significant impact, so you *must* take this seriously!” she declared shrilly.

A third professor raised a magic tool up high for all of us to see. “We will first use these magic tools to measure the density of your mana. Once we have put it on your wrist and gotten a measurement, you will attempt to compress your mana. We will then measure your mana again, and if you have compressed it even the slightest amount, you will have completed the lesson. You will need to find methods that work for you on an individual basis and dedicate yourself to them. All we can teach you are the starting steps.”

*So in other words, I have to compress my mana even more? Nooo...*

As I cradled my head in despair, the professors each began explaining the particular way in which they compressed their mana. “I visualize it as removing the unnecessary components from your mana, like removing the water from fruit juice,” one said.

“I picture the misty mana within me gathering at my core,” noted another.

“Mana compression is much like boiling down a potion.”

“Just push, push, and keep pushing.”

The professors listed their methods one after another, but they were providing so many contrasting suggestions that they would surely only breed confusion. A quick look at the students around me confirmed that this was indeed the case.

“The most important thing to remember is to not push yourself too hard, under any circumstances,” one of the professors warned. “It could put your life in danger.”

“That said, you do need to push yourself to some degree if you wish to compress your mana. You have to overpower the mana within you,” added another.

Wilfried furrowed his brow in bemusement. “Aren’t these explanations kind of a mess? What exactly am I supposed to be doing here?”

“It sounds like a mess, but nothing they’ve said so far has been incorrect. The most efficient way to compress your mana is by finding a method that works for you, and your mana won’t compress unless you pump yourself up and really forcibly squeeze it,” I explained. “As the professors said, however, if you push yourself harder than your body can handle, compression can actually kill you. Ferdinand said there are several teachers per student here to reduce the risk even just a little.”

Wilfried paused, tightly clenched his fists, then gave me a serious look. “How do you do it?”

“Well, I suppose I can tell you the first step of the process. You have a vessel for containing mana within your body. Envision that vessel as a box, pack so much mana inside that you really struggle to close it, then force it shut anyway and lock it so the mana doesn’t come out. Anything beyond that is part of the secret Rozemyne method,” I said with a smirk.

Wilfried balked. “Just how many steps are there?”

“Three. Ferdinand took on the third step and ended up sick enough that even he couldn’t hide it.”

“*The* Ferdinand?” Wilfried asked, his expression suddenly turning stiff. “*He* got sick?”

It was at that moment we were called to the front.

# The Fourth Step of Mana Compression

"Lord Wilfried and Lady Rozemyne of the Thirteenth, please step forward."

Wilfried and I stood, then walked over to where the professors were all lined up. We archduke candidates were being called up in order of duchy rank, with the ten professors split into groups of two. The candidates of greater duchies seemed to be a bit used to controlling their mana, and so they learned to compress it quickly.

The two ahead of us returned to their seats, frowning in concentration as they worked to compress their mana as much as possible. When I looked around, there were three other archduke candidates furrowing their brows, surrounded by professors as they tried compressing their mana. One of the professors was holding a magic tool while carefully watching the students, while another was instead closely observing a magic bracelet on his wrist.

I continued scanning the room to see that Fraularm was observing a very similar-looking bracelet. In all honesty, I still felt a little embarrassed about having made her pass out the day before, so I quietly thanked the gods that she wasn't the one observing me today.

*Okay... What should I do about this compression?*

If my aim was to compress my mana even more than I already was, I would need to think up a fourth step of some kind to my compression method. I really wasn't sure what I could do to further compress my mana though.

*Maybe I could visualize a machine crushing it...?*

Machine compression immediately brought to mind images of aluminum cans being crushed flat. This technique would almost certainly compress my mana, but I couldn't say whether I would be able to decompress it again when I needed it. To make matters worse, I knew from experience that the second I lost confidence was the second it became impossible. Hardening my mana so much that I couldn't even use it myself ran the risk of creating another situation

where I would need to use a jureve to dissolve the blockages.

*Please, no! I don't want to time travel again!*

I wondered what else I could use for inspiration, thinking back to the various examples the professors had given just moments ago. I was already using the "misty mana gathering at my core" and "push, push" approaches, which left me with removing water from fruit juice and boiling down a potion.

*Hm... Maybe I can imagine boiling down soup in the same way Professor Hirschur boils down her potions?*

Boiling down soup caused the water inside to evaporate, leaving behind a thick and concentrated broth. I wondered what would happen if I added that boiling technique to the first step of my mana compression method.

*Okay, let's try it. I'm going to pass this lesson without killing myself.*

I pumped myself up, then stood in front of the professors. Hirschur was there with a muscular-looking man who probably taught the apprentice knights. I heard him mutter that I was somehow even tinier than the rumors had led him to believe.

"Rauffen and I will assist you with your mana compression, Lady Rozemyne."

Rauffen nodded. "You've got nothing to worry about with me around. Compression's easy if you just push, push, and push your mana down hard. Let's get this done," he said with a charming smile, but I already had him pinned as one of those hot-blooded gym teacher types I really didn't care for. They had tormented me countless times in my Urano days by dragging me outside during lunch breaks, tearing me away from my books to exercise, and I would probably never forgive them for that.

"Now, Lady Rozemyne, hold out your left wrist. I will be attaching the magic tool," Hirschur said.

I pulled my sleeve back until my wrist was visible, then held it out for Hirschur to attach the magic tool. It looked like a big bumpy wristwatch at first, but it soon shrunk to the size of a wristband and wrapped tightly around my wrist.

*It's so heavy!*

Hirschur held up my arm to stop it from drooping beneath the weight, then eyed the tool carefully. “Everything is ready. Lady Rozemyne, please compress your mana.”

“Here we go! Pump yourself up and start compressing! Beat that mana and squeeze it aaall the way down!” Rauffen cheered in an annoyingly loud voice. I nodded with a polite smile before closing my eyes, focusing on the source of the heat within me and the way it moved.

My plan was to compress my mana by boiling it, but I would first need to release it all. This was only possible thanks to all the magic tools Ferdinand had given me.

“Good! Good!” Rauffen shouted. “Can you feel the flow of your mana?!”

*Please shut up. I’m trying to focus...* I thought while opening the box my mana was packed into and letting it all out at once. I then started steadily pouring it into the charms I was borrowing and the enhancement tools on my limbs. Once I had finished packing as much mana into them as possible, my body felt incredibly light—so much so that I thought a single jump might send me floating up into the air.

*In this moment and this moment alone, I am stronger than even Grandfather.*

I slowly opened my eyes. My vision was augmented to such a degree that I could clearly see the faces of students standing far away from me, and my hearing was enhanced enough that the chatter and bustle in the room was unbearably loud.

“That’s the spirit! Your mana sure is moving around a lot!” Rauffen exclaimed. “Just keep pushing! You can do this!”

Since I had poured a ton of mana into the charms Ferdinand had given me on top of pouring mana into the enhancers, the mana that remained in my body was much lighter than usual. I would be trying out my new compression ideas on this mana, so I visualized a pot, poured mana into it, then lit the fire underneath.

*Okay... Time to boil down the mana until it takes up about half as much space.*

In the back of my mind, music was playing from a cooking show my mom back

on Earth always used to watch. I was certain I could even hear a peppy announcer say, *“And here we have freshly boiled mana!”*

Once I had finished boiling my mana into a more concentrated form, I simply needed to begin my usual compression process. I folded my mana carefully and then stuffed it into the box without leaving any space whatsoever. When that was done, I used my body weight to crush it down even further, flattening it completely.

With my mana back in the box, I started withdrawing the mana from the enhancers back into my body. I was used to pouring out my mana, but sucking it back in was still new to me. It took some time, but I successfully regained some of my mana from the magic tools, then compressed it the same way.

As I was focusing on compression with my eyes closed, I heard Wilfried—who was doing the same with two professors nearby—get a passing grade.

“You have talent, Lord Wilfried. Be sure to frequently compress your mana from now on.”

“Understood,” Wilfried said proudly.

*I need to blast through this too.*

I tensed my muscles and started compressing my mana as tightly as I could. The boiling stage was the only part I was unfamiliar with, so the overall process wasn’t taking me too much longer than usual. Speeding up the boiling would need to be my homework for a while.

Once all of my mana was compressed, I let out a long sigh and opened my eyes. Hirschur was glaring at the magic tool on my wrist with narrowed eyes and a difficult frown.

“Was that enough? I think I was able to make my mana more compressed than it was before,” I said excitedly, carefully watching to gauge her reaction.

Hirschur eventually tore her eyes from the magic tool and exhaled slowly. Rauffen, meanwhile, was rubbing his chin, most likely surprised that she hadn’t yet said I had passed.

“Do we need to start over?” he asked.

“No, everything is fine. Quite fine. You pass, Lady Rozemyne,” Hirschur announced, her voice trembling slightly as she removed the magic tool from my wrist. She then quietly murmured, “I can tell you worked exceptionally hard,” though it was almost entirely drowned out by Rauffen’s congratulatory cheers.

“Alriiight!” he exclaimed enthusiastically. “You’ve just gotta keep building up your mana capacity like that. You’re a tiny girl, so it’s probably gonna grow more than anyone else’s. Just gotta put in the work. Compress your mana a little each day. Don’t do it all at once, otherwise you’ll get sick.”

“I will do my best. And thank you for your help, Professor Hirschur.” By the time I turned back to thank her, however, she was already facing away from me, stroking the magic tool. She was most likely preparing for the next student, since there were still plenty of people coming up after me. I went back to my seat so as to not get in their way.

“They said I had talent,” Wilfried said smugly as I sat back down. When I looked at him a little closer, I noticed his body was tensed up in a bunch of weird places. He was probably stealthily compressing his mana even as we spoke.

“Don’t overdo it,” I warned him. “If you compress your mana too much, you’ll end up with a mana hangover and start feeling sick like Ferdinand.”

“But I finally learned how to do it. How could I not want to compress the heck out of my mana?”

“I understand how you feel, but there are students each year who adopt that mindset and then end up with terrible mana hangovers. This is why there are professors watching over those who’ve passed. It would be supremely embarrassing if you ignored their warnings, continued to compress your mana in secret, then got sick and collapsed in front of everyone,” I noted, gesturing with my eyes toward the professors watching us. Wilfried jerked in fear, as did some of the archduke candidates from other duchies who were sitting in earshot, causing the observing teachers to chuckle.

Once the archduke candidates had all been reviewed, the archnobles began trying their hand at mana compression. It was then that students started collapsing all over the place.

“Rauffen, carry this one back to his seat,” Hirschur said, indicating a student who had fallen to their knees. The energetic professor promptly did as instructed.

“This one’s mana is on a rampage!” Fraularm yelled from elsewhere in the room. “Bring a magic tool over! Hurry!”

Another professor rushed over at once with a magic tool. They pressed it against the neck of the student in question, who then collapsed to the floor.

“Is this normal...?” I asked. It hadn’t occurred to me that mana compression could be so serious, since all the archduke candidates had learned it so quickly, but the archnobles were evidently struggling a great deal. It seemed more unusual for them to succeed with their mana compression than not.

As I worriedly glanced around the room, Wilfried crossed his arms in thought. “Eh... I’m guessing what makes this process so much more manageable for us archduke candidates is that we’ve performed Mana Replenishment on the foundational magic and are used to moving our mana.”

Now that he mentioned it, I had also ended up collapsing and losing the ability to move the first time I offered up my mana. Skipping lunch obviously hadn’t helped, but Wilfried had fallen to his knees and been rendered immobile for a short period as well.

“They should recover after some rest,” Wilfried said. “Charlotte and I got better in no time.”

“But with the state the archnobles are in, I’m starting to worry about the laynobles.”

“Oswald said mana compression is easier for laynobles. The more mana you have, the heavier the load is before you get used to it.”

“I see... I’m surprised you know that, Wilfried.”

Wilfried looked at me with a bemused frown. “I’m surprised you’re unaware of such basic facts when you seem to know everything. Two years is a surprisingly long time, huh?”

“I only know the information I can get from books; the stuff you’re supposed

to learn naturally through living is pretty much a mystery to me. It doesn't help that I was raised in the temple until my baptism, unlike most nobles."

The fact that I hadn't even lived two full years as a noble meant I had yet to encounter a lot of the things other nobles considered to be common sense.

"Yeah, I worked pretty hard over the past two years. I wanted to be capable enough to help you, even if just a little bit."

"I appreciate your efforts."

Our class eventually came to an end with over half of the archnobles having failed to pass; they would probably need to take their time getting used to moving the mana around inside them. The professors dismissed the class, and with that, we returned to our respective dormitories.

Since I had completed everything else I needed to do today, I immediately got to work making study guides, all while the mednoble and laynoble first-years told me about their practical court etiquette lessons. In return, I described the first step of the mana compression method to them, then mentioned that the archnobles who weren't used to moving their mana had dropped like flies.

"That sounds like quite an exciting time," one student said.

I nodded. "Though Wilfried did mention that those with less mana find their first mana compression easier than those with more."

"That just means we'll have a harder time increasing our capacities though, right?"

"Correct. Only by dancing on the verge of death is one able to noticeably expand their mana capacity."

Following that remark, a few people started whispering about how scary the prospect of risking their lives for more mana sounded. Everyone ultimately agreed not to push themselves too hard, and that was when Hirschur burst into the common room. She threw the doors open, scanned the room with an unmistakable glint in her purple eyes, then locked her sights on me.

"What? Professor Hirschur?!"

"Did something happen?!"

A stir immediately ran through the common room. Under normal circumstances, there was nothing unusual about seeing one's dormitory supervisor actually inside the dormitory, but here in the Ehrenfest Dormitory, that could not have been further from the case.

Hirschur looked straight at me before striding over at once, her steps graceful and silent yet also incredibly quick. She ignored every single student who attempted to question her along the way, such that I started to wonder whether she even acknowledged they were there.

Due to either the speed at which Hirschur approached or the sharp gleam in her eyes, Leonore instinctively whipped out her schtappe, while Cornelius quickly stood in front of me. Angelica wore an excited expression as she placed a hand on Stenluke's hilt and skipped over to protect me, while Judithe and Traugott—young students not quite used to serving as guard knights yet—raced over only upon snapping back to their senses.

"Lady Rozemyne. You have quite a skilled set of retainers," Hirschur said with a chuckle as she looked over my guard knights. "I have urgent business with you. May we speak in your quarters?" She wore a pleasant smile, but the sharp look in her eyes hadn't softened in the slightest.

"Of course," I said with a nod, having no way to refuse. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw both Rihyarda and Lieseleta instantly spin around to go prepare my room for a visitor. Brunhilde, my remaining apprentice attendant, pulled my chair back so that I could stand up.

In an attempt to buy Rihyarda and Lieseleta some time, I stood up slowly and took a moment to look over the common room, which was now unusually tense.

"Hartmut, Philine—continue making study guides," I instructed. "As for my guard knights, I will need only girls to accompany me, since boys cannot go to the third floor." My mind was racing despite the graceful smile on my face.

*It feels like she's going to yell at me. Why? What have I done? Is this about me knocking Fraularm unconscious yesterday? No, that can't be it... I thought I avoided a lecture on that when Hirschur went nuts over Lessy and started gushing about how great he is. Maybe Fraularm complained to her after getting*

*better, or something... This is terrifying beyond words. We're talking about Ferdinand's teacher here... Just what are her lectures going to be like?*

I took my female guard knights and went to my quarters, with Brunhilde at the lead. The stress of the situation was causing my stomach to churn, but Rihyarda and Lieseleta having returned before us meant my room was at least ready for a visitor.

Rihyarda poured tea for us both. I sipped from my cup and took a small bite of a sweet, then encouraged Hirschur to do the same. She took a bite herself, then widened her eyes.

"...What manner of sweet is this?"

"It's called a pound cake. They've recently become quite popular in Ehrenfest."

"Oh my... New sweets, I see."

Relieved to see that Hirschur's sharp eyes were starting to soften, I asked the question on everyone's minds. "What urgent business were you referring to...?"

"I wish to discuss what occurred during today's mana compression lesson. Please clear the room."

When it came to mana compression, there were many things I needed to keep secret. I nodded and waved a hand, at which my retainers swiftly exited the room. Once Hirschur had confirmed that they were all gone, she set a sound-blocking magic tool in front of me.

"This is a magic tool for blocking sound," she explained.

"I am aware. Ferdinand uses them often."

"Oh my. So you are close enough to *the* Ferdinand to warrant engaging in such private talks?" she asked teasingly before letting out a sigh and shrugging her shoulders. "I imagine he uses them for the same reason I am using them now, but in any case... Please explain to me what you did in class today."

"I mean... I simply compressed my mana. What would you like me to explain?"

She was leaning forward expectantly, but I really didn't know what to tell her.

I hadn't done anything aside from compressing my mana, so as far as I was concerned, there was nothing to explain.

Hirschur shut her eyes tightly. "Does she simply lack self-awareness...?" she muttered to herself.

"Um... I did pass the lesson, right? Was I lacking in some area?"

"Oh, no. Quite the opposite. I am here because of just how much you *exceeded* my expectations. I have never encountered such an abnormality in all my years of teaching, and I merely wish to understand what happened."

"An abnormality...?" I repeated. I knew that she wanted me to explain something to her, but I couldn't remember anything happening that seemed out of the ordinary. "What do you mean exactly? I imagine you're saying that I did something unusual, but I'm not entirely sure what that might be."

Hirschur's eyes widened in surprise; then she detached something hanging from her belt and set it down in front of me. It was the magic tool she had put on my wrist during the lesson, and at the moment, the needle on the meter-esque protrusion was resting right in the middle.

"This is a magic tool for measuring the density of one's mana," she explained. "By placing it on a person's wrist, we can measure their current density. We consider this a baseline, which allows us to measure how their mana is compressed from that point onward. The needle moves to the right when the compression is successful and the mana becomes more dense. A student is expected to show a gradual amount of growth over time once they've learned the basic principle behind compression, so in most cases, the needle moves only slightly to the right before we pass them."

It seemed they didn't measure the density or amount of one's mana with numbers, but rather checked to see whether the needle moved at all. Once a student successfully managed to compress their mana, it was up to them to work out what the most efficient method was and then use that to compress larger and larger amounts. Professors did not involve themselves in this part of the process.

"This is a special magic tool unlike the others—one I made to measure Ferdinand's mana density in particular," she continued. I could guess that

Ferdinand had compressed his mana to such an extent during his school days that the needle had immediately slammed all the way to the right, necessitating the creation of a measuring tool able to measure a broader range of mana compression. “I elected to use the tool I made for Ferdinand on you, Lady Rozemyne, just to be safe. You had caused Fraularm to pass out with your highbeast the day before, so I had no way of knowing what might happen today.”

*S-Sorry.*

“And then, just as expected—or perhaps not as expected, seeing as you surpassed my expectations—something happened. When I instructed you to begin compressing your mana, the needle immediately went all the way to the left. It was the first time I have even seen someone lower their mana density enough to reach the limits of the magic tool I made for Ferdinand. No matter how I approach the situation, there is no way a child should be capable of compressing their mana to such a degree.”

*Oh, right... My mana density must have dropped so much because I undid the compression at the start.*

“The needle then returned to the center, entirely as if you are used to compressing your mana, before shooting to the rightmost side,” Hirschur concluded.

“So what you’re saying is... my mana ended up more dense than it was originally? There’s no mistaking that I successfully compressed my mana?”

“Correct.”

*Whew...* It was my first time trying out the new technique, but it seemed the new four-step Rozemyne Compression Method had ended up a success. But as I cheered on the inside, Hirschur shook her head and muttered in exasperation.

“I should have expected nothing less from Ferdinand’s disciple...” She sighed quietly, then looked straight at me. “Now, Lady Rozemyne. Please explain to me exactly what you did.”

“Okay. At the start of the lesson, you said that the density of our mana was going to be measured and that we needed to compress it more to pass. I

assumed that meant I needed to compress my mana even more than I was already, so I decompressed it all at the start of my turn, then recompressed it using a new technique to make it denser than before. Oh, and your advice really helped with that, Professor Hirschur."

Hirschur quizzically tilted her head to one side. "While I am glad to hear that, it was not necessary. You could have simply decompressed your mana before the tool was attached and then recompressed it as usual. No normal person would think to compress their mana even further."

*Eep. I didn't think of that...*

"Sorry. That thought hadn't occurred to me..."

Hirschur looked at me with an exhausted expression. "Well, I now understand that you truly are Ferdinand's prized disciple. I do not know whether I should say you surpassed my expectations or surpassed normality itself, but either way, it seems the time for Ehrenfest to rise has come again. That said, you will certainly be even more of a handful than Ferdinand was, since you clearly have no self-awareness whatsoever..."

She trailed off, realizing she had gone on somewhat of a tangent, then raised her head to look at me. Her eyes were sparkling with interest.

"Now then, Lady Rozemyne. You said that you learned from my compression method, yes? In that case, I would like to learn from your method in turn."

"...Do forgive me, but my compression method is a confidential Ehrenfest secret. I cannot tell anyone without permission from its six leaders."

"Oh my, that is unfortunate... And who might those six leaders be?" Hirschur asked. She was completely undeterred, no doubt already plotting out how to get her hands on my technique. "I assume the archducal couple, plus the knight commander and his wife? Ferdinand is also likely included, since he is your guardian, but who is the last person, I wonder...? Rihyarda, since she was previously Sylvester's head attendant? Or Lord Bonifatius, member of the archducal family?"

Hirschur was familiar with Ehrenfest's internal affairs, given that she had been born there. I broke out into a cold sweat as she continued.

“I won’t have any trouble wrenching permission from the archducal couple, and with how many favors Karstedt and Elvira owe me, conquering them should be just as trivial. Who is this last person though...?” she asked again, her lips curving into a grin as she stared me down.

*Gaaah! Professor Hirschur has Ehrenfest’s leaders under her thumb! She knows all their secrets and weaknesses! HELP ME, FERDINAAAND!*

I shrunk in fear, feeling like a mouse backed into a corner by a hungry snake, at which point Hirschur stood up with a chuckle. “A new highbeast, a new mana compression method, and these new sweets... I am quite looking forward to seeing what new changes you bring to the Academy, Lady Rozemyne.”

# Registering at the Library

“Tralala! Lalalala!”

I was so overjoyed in the morning that all my retainers looked at me like I was crazy, but what did they expect? I would be going to the Royal Academy’s library for the first time this afternoon to get registered. The truth was, I had been shaking with excitement even since getting into bed last night.

Lieseleta had been there as I restlessly tossed and turned. As we sat at the breakfast table, she looked at my other retainers with a bemused smile before turning back to me. “Lady Rozemyne, you must truly be excited for the library to have lost sleep over it,” she said, indirectly updating my male retainers on my nighttime antics. “My older sister has never once set foot in the library, and I must say that your interests could not differ more from hers.”

Angelica puffed out her chest with pride. “Right. As the commander said, a servant should make up for the weaknesses of those they serve, and vice versa. This means Lady Rozemyne and I are perfect for each other—she’s good at studying and bad at physical stuff, while I’m bad at studying and good at physical stuff.”

“Are you sure you should be saying that, Sister? When Lady Rozemyne masters the art of physical enhancement and can move again, you will need to learn to study in order to match her once again,” Lieseleta said with a refined giggle.

Angelica widened her eyes with shock at the realization that she once again could not escape her studies, and breakfast came to a pleasant end with everyone laughing at her despair.

All of a sudden, Brunhilde’s head shot up. “Lady Rozemyne, I forgot to mention this due to Professor Hirschur’s sudden arrival yesterday, but the music professors have invited you to a tea party,” she said, causing the senior students to whistle with surprise. They seemed excited about it for some reason, but we first-and second-years didn’t quite get the significance.

“The third-years had practical music lessons yesterday afternoon...” Brunhilde began.

Lessons were held separately by status, and as it turned out, the professors in the archnoble, mednoble, and laynoble classes had all mentioned the new song I had played during the practical lesson for first-years and asked the students to play my other songs as well. They had apparently become fairly popular throughout Ehrenfest over the past two years due to the infamous Ferdinand concert and the sheet music having been sold so freely. The students who had purchased the sheet music two years ago had practiced the songs plenty, such that they could now play them at will.

The third-years had played songs for the professors according to their preference and abilities, thereby making it known throughout the Royal Academy that I had composed many original songs. It was known that Brunhilde was serving as my apprentice attendant, so she had been called over after class and asked whether I had time for a tea party one morning, given that the Ehrenfest first-years had now finished their written lessons.

“Culture from all duchies comes together in the Royal Academy, and yet the songs were overflowing with individuality unlike anything they had ever heard before. All of the music professors were quite drawn to them,” Brunhilde explained.

“Has not a single student played one of my songs here in the two years since we first started selling the sheet music?” I asked.

“It was the will of Aub Ehrenfest that all of your inventions be spread slowly through the Academy only after you awoke and began attending yourself, Lady Rozemyne.”

Pretty much all of my inventions were made in the temple and the lower city, and scholars in the castle had zero involvement in the day-to-day affairs of either. Even Ferdinand only received reports on finished products and total sales. As such, nobody knew the fine details of my business, and Sylvester had likely put out his gag order to avoid Ehrenfest being shamed in the event of someone at the Archduke Conference asking questions nobody could answer.

“Can you accompany me to that tea party, Brunhilde?” I asked, too scared to

go alone. Her amber eyes began to sparkle at once, and she gave a firm nod.

“Of course. I shall accompany you as an apprentice attendant. An invitation from the professors can be interpreted as the Sovereignty expressing interest in Ehrenfest culture, so I must say, I am exceptionally honored to be afforded the chance to attend such a tea party.”

Being invited to a tea party by the professors was a great honor, and nobody in Ehrenfest had received such an invitation for as long as Brunhilde remembered. This explained why the senior students had been so surprised and excited.

“This is my first time attending a tea party at the Royal Academy, so I shall trust you to prepare everything I need and deal with the professors,” I said to Brunhilde. “Have they given us a date?”

“Not as of yet. I was not expected to give an answer before first discussing the matter with you. It will be a few more days before I finish my own written lessons, so may I suggest your reply be that you will think the matter over with your attendants once they send an official letter of invitation?”

Brunhilde seemed set on finishing her written lessons before the tea party. I couldn’t help but respect people who charged straight toward their goals, so she had my total support.

“That answer is fine with me. I imagine preparing for a tea party with the professors immediately after you finish your written lessons will not be easy, but I am certain you will manage it with aplomb.”

“You can count on me. I must ensure clothes, hair ornaments, music, and gifts are prepared to an impeccable standard in time for the tea party—a worthy test of my skills indeed,” Brunhilde said, counting everything she needed to do on her fingers. “The date has not yet been decided, but please have your musician start practicing as soon as possible. If you can, I believe it would be wise if you include original compositions.”

As my personal musician, we would naturally be bringing Rosina with us.

“Original compositions... I shall discuss this with Rosina. I am perfectly able to create music, but reaching a point where I can perform the song myself requires

some time," I said. The most I could usually do was hum the tune; it was the job of my personal musician to arrange the notes and create sheet music that could be played on the harspiel. "I intend to leave for the library this afternoon, so do try to return from your morning lessons as soon as possible."

I saw my older retainers off with a smile, then started discussing new songs with Rosina while the first-years were working on study guides. She was overjoyed to have the opportunity to arrange new songs again, and in no time at all, she had her harspiel, a pen, and some white paper at the ready.

"Lady Rozemyne, you may begin humming at any time."

I hummed a song melody while Rosina played it back to me on her harspiel and wrote down the notes measure by measure. Since we were going to be performing this one to teachers, I chose a classical song that wasn't too lengthy.

"What god is this song dedicated to?" Rosina asked.

"To celebrate my first-ever visit to the library, I shall dedicate it to Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom."

The first-years continued with their work, but I could see them glancing up with great interest as Rosina put together the melody and began arranging the song.

After Wilfried and I finished lunch, we gathered all the first-years and our retainers and prepared to leave for the library. Rihyarda had the money to cover our fees, and Oswald was joining us as the adult attendant Wilfried had brought to the Academy. I could feel myself getting more and more excited as our retainers checked to make sure everyone was present at the entrance hall.

"The library! Ohh, the library! What a wonderful place! So many books to read at one's own pace! Tralala! Tralalala!" I sang enthusiastically, the music we had been composing all morning still stuck in my head.

"Lady Rozemyne, is that the song you were just composing?" Hartmut asked, clearly surprised. "Have you already written the lyrics?"

I nodded with a big smile. "Yes, I thought of them just now. How does the name 'A Paradise Gifted Unto Us by the Gods' sound to you?"

“Hold it, Rozemyne,” Wilfried interjected with an exasperated tone. “No way are you going to impress the professors with lyrics like those. I thought this was a song dedicated to Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom, not the library.”

A few sensible chuckles could be heard throughout the hall.

Rihyarda sighed, seeming to be just as exasperated, then promptly put a stop to my enthusiasm. “Milady, might I remind you once again that we are simply registering with the library today. You have court etiquette lessons this afternoon, so there is no time for any reading.”

I had naturally been told several times this morning that I wouldn’t be able to enter the library freely until after I passed the exams for all my practical lessons as well, so I had absolutely no intention of skipping class. That didn’t mean I wasn’t excited about visiting my first-ever library in this world though.

“I am aware, but I will be allowed to walk through the library’s reading room, yes?”

*And while I’m there, I’ll surely be allowed to take just a quick peek at the books... It’s important. Like taste-testing food as a chef.*

Rihyarda narrowed her dark-brown eyes at me. “Milady, I shall say this as many times as it takes: you will not be allowed to read.”

“Of course. Of course.”

The other first-years let out dry laughs at just how many times this exchange had taken place between Rihyarda and me.

“Everyone is ready. Shall we go?”

We exited the dormitory and entered the hallway outside the auditorium. Once we had passed by the halls used for practical lessons, we were in an area that was entirely new to me. Next were the larger halls for mednoble and laynoble practical lessons, then the central building with its own auditorium and classrooms. We eventually turned south and reached a T-junction. Halls extended to both the left and right, each with large doors at the end.

“The left door leads to the branch for apprentice scholars, while the right leads to the branch for apprentice attendants,” Cornelius explained.

“Where is the building for apprentice knights?” I asked, tilting my head.

“At the north side of the central building, which makes it farther from the library than any of the other specialty branches. They must not expect apprentice knights to use the library very much,” he replied, shooting Angelica a glance.

In a shocking twist, despite being a student of the oldest grade, Angelica still hadn’t registered in the library yet. She maintained that she had no business there and didn’t want to waste money on a registration after all this time, but Stenluke had managed to talk her into it—namely by barking, “Master, what manner of guard knight are you?! Your charge shall inevitably be going to the library, so what will you do when you cannot follow her inside?!”

*Honestly, I can’t believe she hasn’t stepped into the library a single time over all these years...*

“The library is behind this door,” Cornelius said. The older students who were already registered could enter, but without Solange the librarian, we unregistered students had to wait. “Lady Rozemyne, please put the wooden board that Professor Solange gave you in here.”

He was pointing at an opening in the door that looked a lot like a mail slot. Putting the wooden board in would apparently inform Professor Solange of our arrival, so I did just that. A few seconds later, the door opened on its own. On the other side was a bright hallway illuminated by the sunlight beaming through the windows, at the end of which was another door.

Behind the second door was a refined-looking older lady with blue eyes and light-purple hair, wearing a peaceful smile on her face. She was a little chubby, and I could guess she was the pleasant librarian of the Academy.

“Lord Wilfried, Lady Rozemyne—this is Professor Solange,” Cornelius said.

“Welcome to the library, students of Ehrenfest. My name is Solange. I have heard much about the exploits of this year’s new students. I truly am surprised that you all finished your written lessons before even registering here at the library,” Solange said calmly and with an unfaltering smile before gesturing deliberately to the door behind her. “This door leads to the reading room, the heart of our library.”

It seemed that getting to the library was as simple as leaving the central building and going directly south. This was good—it meant there was no chance of me getting lost. I instinctively started walking toward the reading room, only for Cornelius to grab my shoulder and forcibly turn me to the right instead, just as Solange turned in that direction.

“Please follow me so that we may begin your registrations,” she said.

*Nooo! The reading room is calling for me!*

I reluctantly turned, feeling as though I were being dragged by the ear, and followed after Solange. A door to a room fairly close to the reading room was open, and I soon learned that beyond it were Solange’s reception area and office.

The office itself was fairly large, since it was built to hold many students at once during registrations. It was a long room with tall, slender windows spaced out evenly along the walls, letting light flow in toward the back.

The space for guests was right by the entrance. There were chairs and other places to sit placed in the sunlight, as well as a table with a pen holder full of mana-using magic pens resting atop it. Along the wall were a series of single-person chairs and wooden boxes large enough to be used as seats, which we were told to sit on as we waited our turn. Wilfried and I sat on the chairs along with the single archnoble among us, while the mednobles and laynobles sat on the boxes. To be clear though, the boxes were ornately carved as well, and they had cloth covering them just like any fancy seat.

There was a desk at the back end of the room, positioned near the windows so that one could work in the sunlight. Standing near it were bookshelves and several boxes of what I assumed were books, but they were all tightly locked, such that I couldn’t even see a single cover. It was fun just trying to imagine what works must have been hidden inside them. Further behind the desk was a folding screen, behind which I assumed was Solange’s private space, if my own room was anything to go by.

Sitting atop one of the bookshelves were two stuffed rabbits—one black and one white—both about my height and dressed in clothes. Despite them looking like plush toys, they weren’t the cartoonish rabbits I was familiar with from my

Urano days; rather, they looked very real. I smiled at the thought of old Solange tenderly caring for them like they were living things.

While I was looking around the room, Solange took several sheets of parchment from her desk and brought them over. She set them down on the table in the guest area, then stood in front of us all.

“The library is replete with the precious gems of knowledge given to us by Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom. Only those who swear by her name that they will treat its books with care are allowed inside,” she said.

“I couldn’t agree more, Professor Solange. The library is a paradise gifted unto us by the gods. Reading books is a joy they have blessed us with,” I said, causing Solange to break into a genuine smile and nod repeatedly. Her agreement confirmed that she loved books perhaps just as much as I did. This was surely the beginning of a long and beautiful friendship.

“Do you have the fees prepared?” Solange asked, then accepting the bag of money that Rihyarda held out to her. She checked its contents before tilting her head in confusion. “I believe there are only eight Ehrenfest first-years, but here you are providing enough for nine.” She counted the people seated in the room, then her eyes eventually fell on Angelica. “I see. So a senior is registering as well. How delightful! It is exceedingly rare for a student who did not register during their first year to return at all.”

The registration fee meant that some couldn’t afford to use the library in their first year, and it was apparently common for such students to ultimately graduate without ever registering.

Once Solange had finished checking the money, she started explaining how to use the library. “The first floor largely contains reference documents for written classes. You may take them wherever you like in the reading room for all your reading and transcribing needs, but if you wish to take them outside the reading room, there is paperwork that must be filled out and a deposit that must be paid.”

Students would need to offer up an amount equal to the book’s value for insurance purposes. It was also mandatory that they return any borrowed material before they graduated, though this seemed to be the only deadline—

students were allowed to keep whatever books they wanted for a reasonably long time.

“On the second floor are valuable chained books not used in Royal Academy lessons. You are only allowed to read them where they are chained, meaning you cannot borrow them or even undo their chains to take them to the reading room,” Solange continued. She then began listing off a few smaller details—that no eating or drinking was allowed in the library, that opening time was at second-and-a-half bell, that closing time was at sixth bell, and so on. “Only those who swear to follow these rules and treat the books well will be allowed to register.”

“I swear!” I shouted, shooting my hand up at once.

Solange’s blue eyes wrinkled as she smiled. “Then let us begin with your registration, Lady Rozemyne,” she said, gesturing me over to the table by the windows. Just to be safe, I checked with Wilfried that it was okay for me to get registered first, but he merely shrugged and waved me away. He really wasn’t bothered.

“Tralala. Tralalalala.”

Once I was standing at the opposite side of the table from Solange, she pushed a blank sheet of parchment over to me and gave me a mana pen. “Now then, write your respects to Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom, then your vow that you will obey the rules of the library and treat its books with respect,” she said.

I did as instructed, then Solange told me to write out my name. She checked to make sure everything was satisfactory, then added her confirmation signature, which caused the paper to burn up in golden flames. It had been a magic contract with the library, and with that, my mana registration was complete.

“Okay. Who is next?” Solange asked.

“Me,” Wilfried said, raising a hand. We switched places, with me returning to my chair to wait for everyone to finish. Only once they had all been registered did I stand up with a broad smile.

“Okay! Shall we go to the reading room then?”

“Milady, there will be no reading today. We are purely here for the registrations. Have I not made myself clear?” Rihyarda asked, wearing an especially dark expression. At this rate, I wouldn’t get to see the library at all before being dragged back to the dormitory.

My dream of walking through the reading room was being torn to shreds right before my eyes. Once again, I was being presented with paradise, only for it to be taken away...

*No! I won’t allow it! Never again!*

I had been so eagerly looking forward to today that Lieseleta had been giving me bemused looks since last night. My heart ached and ached to see the library, which boasted the second-largest book collection in the country. Had the registration taken place at a counter in the library reading room, then I would have been satisfied, but this was simply too much. Not once had it crossed my mind that I would be forced to leave the library without even seeing the inside.

“I’m only asking to see the book room, Rihyarda! Nothing more! I just want to smell all the books on the bookshelves! Please! Please let me in the library! My precious, precious library!”

“You will not leave once you go in, milady, and it takes a great deal of physical strength to pull you away from your books,” Rihyarda said. “I cannot take such a risk when practical lessons are beginning so soon.”

“M-My library...” I choked out. Tears welled up in my eyes, then burst forth like a dam had suddenly broken. It had been beaten into me that noble girls were never to cry in public, but the sheer despair of my situation had temporarily wiped every single lesson from my mind. Everyone flew into a panic as I collapsed onto the floor and sobbed, “My library... My library...” over and over.

“Rihyarda... Rozemyne really did put her all into making sure the first-years passed, all so she could visit the library,” Wilfried said. “Don’t you, er... Don’t you think you could let her look around just a little bit?”

“With this many people, we shouldn’t have any trouble peeling Lady

Rozemyne away from her books and dragging her to her next lesson if need be," Cornelius added. The first-years, who had gone through hell for this explicit purpose, also threw in a few words of support.

When faced with so many pleas, Rihyarda couldn't help but give in. "If you all insist..." she said with a bemused smile, but then she shot me a deathly serious glare. "However, milady, there will be *no* reading today. Is that clear?"

"Yes, ma'am! I thank you ever so much, everyone..." I went to rub my eyes, but Lieseleta caught my hand before I could and wiped my tears for me with a handkerchief.

Solange gave a refined chuckle, having watched the whole exchange. "I shall take this opportunity to personally guide you all. It certainly is rare for a student to be so excited about the library. I must say, it is quite heartwarming to see."

"Thank you ever so much, Professor Solange. I am truly, truly glad—beyond words, even—to have been blessed with entering this paradise given to us by the gods. Let us pray to Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom in thanks for this meeting with the Royal Academy! Praise be to the gods!"

After all this time, I was finally going to be inside a library. My spirits had plummeted at Rihyarda's rejection, but now, I was so immensely excited that I threw both my arms into the air and raised my left leg. I was so overjoyed that I gave a genuine prayer of gratitude to the gods, causing a burst of mana to shoot out of my ring. The light was yellow because I had prayed to Mestionora, and it soon spread through the room.

*Oopsie.*

Solange watched the light of the blessing in a wide-eyed daze; Wilfried muttered, "I figured this would happen," with a drawn-out sigh; and Hartmut said, "That's our Lady Rozemyne. To think she would create a new legend all on her own..." while smiling in amusement.

I quickly averted my gaze by looking to the back of the room, and that was when I saw the black and white rabbits hop up by the partitioning screen. I had assumed they were nothing more than large stuffed animals, but they actually started walking in our direction.

“Wha...? The (rabbits) are moving.”

“O-Oh my! Schwartz and Weiss!” Solange cried. Her widened eyes and the emotion in her voice made it clear she was close to the two rabbits, but the two of them—both tall enough to reach my shoulders—walked right past her to stand in front of me.

“Milady? What do you need?”

“Work? Work?”

The rabbits stared up at me with round, golden eyes that matched the golden feystones embedded in their foreheads. I blinked in confusion, then looked to Solange for help.

“Professor Solange... what’s going on?”

“They are magic tools that regularly assisted with library work back in the days when multiple archnobles served as librarians. They are dolls that, while filled with mana, help their master with whatever they need. As they regained the ability to move when blessed with your mana, Lady Rozemyne, they currently consider you their master. I truly believed I would never get to see them move again...” Solange said with tearful eyes. As a mednoble, it seemed she lacked the mana required to support them.



“Right. Schwartz and Weiss, I instruct you to assist Professor Solange with her work,” I said. Since they were library assistants, I decided it would probably be best to have them continue helping out here.

The two rabbits nodded. “Okay. We’ll help Solange,” one said.

“What do we do, Solange?” asked the other.

I could see Solange’s eyes brimming with nostalgic tears as she looked down at Schwartz and Weiss. “First, let us guide Lady Rozemyne to the library.”

## Schwartz and Weiss

“Let’s go, milady. The reading room.”

“We’ll take you.”

The two rabbits spoke again, then they promptly started walking to the back end of the office. It was clear that they wanted us to follow them, but those of us from Ehrenfest merely exchanged glances; as students, we weren’t sure whether we were allowed to go where they were leading us. Thankfully, Solange intervened.

“Schwartz. Weiss. That is not the door for visitors,” she said with a small smile. “Your new lady is not a librarian, so please treat her as you would any other guest.”

I could infer from her words that there was a door farther inside the office that led directly into the library’s work space.

Schwartz and Weiss turned around and instead started shuffling to the entrance we had come in through. When they reached the door, they held it wide open for us.

“This way.”

“Milady is a visitor.”

I noticed that the rabbits were wearing short-sleeved dresses, likely because they had been made to move around and work. The black rabbit Schwartz wore a white dress, while the white rabbit Weiss wore a black one, so both their outfits contrasted with their fur. Over their dresses they wore vests decorated with a variety of colorful embroidery. The gleaming stones that served as buttons looked a lot like feystones, so I could guess that their clothes were very expensive.

Never before had I seen walking magic tools like these, so I couldn’t help but assume Schwartz and Weiss were pretty rare and valuable.

“Professor Solange, is there any danger of Schwartz and Weiss being abruptly kidnapped, or stripped of all their clothing?” I asked. “I must say, I am quite worried about them...”

“Schwartz and Weiss were built for working in the library, so they cannot operate outside it, aside from when accompanying their master. Furthermore, while I am not too well-informed on this myself, many of their previous masters throughout history held similar concerns, and so they covered them with various protective charms to prevent any kidnappings. They are safe as long as they are in the library.”

“That is reassuring to hear.” I admittedly still felt somewhat uneasy, but I followed Schwartz and Weiss out of Solange’s office nonetheless.

“Milady. This way.”

The two rabbits guided our party down the hall. It was exceedingly adorable how their heads and ears bobbed as they shuffled around. I wasn’t sure who had made them, but our tastes in cute things seemed to align perfectly.

Just as that thought crossed my mind, I heard a dreamy sigh come from behind me. “Aah... How lovely they are...” someone said.

I turned to see Lieseleta gazing at Schwartz and Weiss, her green eyes sparkling with life. It was a rare sight, considering that she usually acted extremely calm for her age. She came back to her senses the moment she realized she had caught my attention, returning to her usual neutral smile, but I could tell she was completely smitten with the rabbits; the fact she kept stealthily glancing at them was a clear giveaway.

“I am glad to see you have also taken a liking to Schwartz and Weiss, Lieseleta.”

“Erm, well... I raise shumils at home, and this is my first time seeing ones that are this large and capable of speech, magic tools or otherwise. I can’t quite contain my excitement,” Lieseleta replied, a relieved smile playing on her lips as she let her eyes wander back to the rabbits. Her gaze was overflowing with hopeless adoration. It was cute to see her so enamored, but there was something she had said that caught my attention.

“...Shumils, you say?”

I carefully eyed Schwartz and Weiss while digging through my memory, trying to remember where I had heard the term before. It was on the tip of my tongue, and as I continued racking my brain, Lieseleta began a happy speech about shumils.

“Actual shumils are feybeasts no taller than my knees, and they are often raised by nobles as pets. They naturally cannot speak like these magic dolls can, instead communicating with chirps that sound a bit like ‘pooey.’ Have you never seen one before, Lady Rozemyne? They love rutrebs, and they are especially cute when they start vigorously chewing away at one.”

*They chirp? Like “pooey”?*

The realization suddenly hit me, and I grimaced as memories of my not-so-pleasant first meeting with Sylvester flooded back into my mind.

“I cannot say by whom exactly, but I was once told that I resemble a shumil...”

“Oh my. Now that you mention it, your golden eyes are quite similar, and your dark, silky hair is much like the fur of many shumils I’ve seen. Whoever made this observation was almost certainly praising your cuteness.”

*Yeah, I don’t think so. He poked my cheek and forced me to say “pooey.” That doesn’t seem very praise-like to me.*

I also recalled that Ferdinand had told me to make my highbeast a shumil the first time he had seen Lessy. I actually might have followed his advice had I known they were rabbit-like feybeasts, but by this point my mental image of highbeasts was locked in on the Pandabus. It wouldn’t be easy to change now, and I didn’t want to anyway.

“Here, milady. The reading room,” Schwartz and Weiss said as they opened the thick double doors. Beyond them I could see rows upon rows of wooden bookshelves standing some distance away from the walls, closer to the center of the room. There were way, *way* more than in any of the book rooms I had seen in Ehrenfest.

*Aah! So many books! So, so many books! I’ve never been so happy! I’m actually on the verge of tears!*

There were as many bookshelves here as there were in some small city libraries I had visited back in my Urano days, or perhaps as many as there were in a side building attached to a huge public library. This was my first time ever seeing somewhere with enough books to be called a library in this world, and my heart was fluttering with joy.

"This is simply splendid," I proclaimed. "I'm so happy, I could cry. I must praise the gods..."

"You haven't even gone inside yet!" Wilfried cried out in surprise.

Cornelius rested a hand on my shoulder and warned me not to give any blessings, while Rihyarda once again repeated that I was not allowed to read any of the books. Had she not said that, there was no doubt in my mind that I would have rushed to the nearest bookcase and immediately started rifling through its treasures.

Schwartz and Weiss looked up at me with wide eyes, watching our back-and-forth by the doors. "Milady? Inside?"

"Yes. Right. Here we go."

My heart pounded as I took my first step inside and started looking around. The right-hand side of the library had a section without windows, as well as a counter for official business. There were a few doors along the wall, one of which I could guess led into Solange's office, presumably so the librarians could more conveniently enter and leave the library.

Ornately carved wooden partitions snaked around the reading room, tall enough that they seemed to reach up to my shoulders and everyone else's waists. The walls, which were made of the same ivory material as the castle and the Ehrenfest Dormitory, were lined with thick, massive pillars, evenly spaced out between tall windows. The sunlight that streamed into the room reflected off the radiant walls, making the library interior look especially bright. There truly was an abundance of white, but the pillars and walls were adorned with enough engravings that the decoration didn't seem too plain.

*It looks a little bit like the temple, in a sense.*

At the center of the library was an atrium where more light poured in through

a ceiling window, and on the left-hand side was a broad staircase leading up to the second floor. There were bound to be even more books waiting for me up there.

*Aah! A library with two whole floors! Be still, my beating heart!*

I wanted to start reading straight away—everything from the smallest scrap of parchment to the largest tome. My head was already swimming with questions. Where would the best reading spot be? Where was it brightest in this electricity-free library? Which spot was closest to the bookshelves? In the first place, were there any spots set aside specifically for reading? I eagerly scanned the reading room in search of answers.

“Milady. Are you searching?”

“Questions?”

Schwartz and Weiss called out to me as I glanced around.

“Where should I read, I wonder? Is there a good place just for reading books?” I asked.

“Yes. Over here.”

The two shumils cut straight through the library, heading from where we had stood at the door to the very back. I followed after them, all the while eyeing the books on the bookshelves. They weren’t the sort with elegant leather covers that I was used to seeing in the castle, but rather thin boards held together with string. I had assumed there would be a plethora of thick, fancy-looking books here, what with this being the Royal Academy library, but that didn’t seem to be the case; in fact, the books here were a lot more like documents. Tags hung from the documents to indicate the school years and subjects of their contents.

“These are fairly simple covers. Are these books the bulk of what you keep on the shelves?” I asked.

“The books available on the first floor are all study guides written by students,” Solange answered. It seemed that the library purchased them from those with high grades and neat handwriting to aid the poorer nobles. Giving the books all fancy leather covers simply wasn’t feasible, as not only did the

library buy so many books, but they also had to source replacements for those that were damaged or went missing.

I gazed across the shelves and gave an understanding nod. The books I had made in Ehrenfest would fit right in so long as I slapped some wooden covers on them.

*Covers or no covers, the smell is heavenly. Nothing serves as a more pleasant reminder that I'm completely surrounded by books.*

I deeply inhaled as we reached the back wall of the library. There were square pillars so thick I would just be able to barely touch both sides of one if I stretched out my arms all the way. A number of equally tall windows lined the walls between them, in front of which were a few simple wooden desks and chairs, most likely to make use of the sunlight.

Upon closer inspection, the wooden partitions I had seen from way back at the entrance were actually little doors. They seemed to be locked, so I could guess the students weren't allowed to access them freely.

"These are carrels. We have the keys. We lend them out."

*Eeee! They even have carrels!*

The gaps between the pillars, which each seemed to be roughly one square meter each, were being used as reading spaces with partitioned-off desks known as carrels. It seemed they were basically treated as private rooms, and just seeing them was enough to send my excitement through the roof. The desk immediately in front of us wasn't currently being used, but there were still books, boards, and some ink stacked atop it.

"You can study. You can read. You can sleep too. Many people sleep."

*I can imagine. Having the warm sunlight shining down on you would be enough to make anyone sleepy, especially right after lunch...*

I looked around to see if anyone here was taking a nap, but the reading room was near enough empty. There were a few people sitting in the carrels, but I couldn't see anyone walking around. It was such a waste having so many books and desks going completely unused.

“I see not many people use the library...” I commented.

“That’s not true, milady.”

“It’s only true now.”

Schwartz and Weiss always spoke with excessive brevity, so Solange took it upon herself to elaborate.

“Few senior students pass their written classes straight away, and most of the first-years who passed on their first day have not yet been registered, so this is when the library is at its quietest. Once we reach the midpoint of winter, however, there will be so many students here that we won’t have enough carrels for them all. We’re always at our busiest right before final exams.”

It turned out that archnobles preferred to pay the deposit on books they needed to study and then take them to their rooms rather than use the cramped carrels. Laynobles and mednobles could rarely afford this option, and so they were the ones to stay in the library. It thus came to pass that students tried to barricade themselves in carrels between classes, even treating them like their own rooms.

“As a mednoble, I myself struggled with studying back in the day, so I understand how they feel...” Solange began with a smile. “However, I still find it rather troubling when students leave their books in their carrels. They simply expect to keep their places until they’ve finished transcribing what they need.”

The carrels at the south end of the library were the most popular study spots, since they received the most sun from the windows. Those on the west side and near the hall, meanwhile, were fairly unpopular, since they didn’t get as much light. This was especially the case for the west side, where the sun was only seen when it was already starting to descend.

Status played a key role in the battle for carrels, and it seemed the laynobles of lesser duchies tended to get stuck with the least desirable locations on the west side and near the entrance.

*I want a carrel too...*

There truly was nothing more wonderful than having a space near the bookshelves where one could sit and read at their own leisure. I resolved to

claim one of the carrels as my own the moment I conquered all of my practical lessons.

Schwartz and Weiss began heading to the counter where work was done. Those sitting in the nearby carrels looked up as they heard us pass, then blinked in surprise upon seeing the shumils. I could assume that someone would need to be about as old as Ferdinand to recognize them, considering that the last time the two had been helping with library business was before the civil war. Interestingly enough though, the surprise of the students seemed to suggest that walking magic tools weren't particularly commonplace or normal to see.

"Professor Solange, I haven't seen any moving magic tools like Schwartz and Weiss before, but are they actually common here at the Royal Academy?"

"No, no. They are quite rare. It is standard to hide the results of one's research, and my predecessor said that the method used to create them has been lost entirely. I am told they were made by a princess of the past, and so they always address their masters as female. They're all 'milady' to them."

It seemed that even men were addressed as such. I could hear a few of the other Ehrenfest students quietly chuckling to themselves as they imagined male librarians having to endure the name with embarrassed grimaces.

"Professor Solange, how are the books organized on your shelves? If you have a categorization system, I would very much like to hear about it."

"Our books are organized according to when we acquire them. Everyone prefers the newest ones, after all."

That made sense, what with the books on the first floor all being study documents. The older students would apparently scramble to get these new books when the library opened on the first day of written lessons, and as expected, the archduke candidates and archnobles would always leave with the very best ones. Many didn't even return them, deciding to instead relinquish their deposits, which made things a lot harder for Solange.

"They don't even bring back the books...?" I asked, completely taken aback. "Could you not demand their return via an ordonnanz?"

"This approach worked when we had archnoble librarians among our staff,

but I am just a mednoble, you see... All of my complaints are simply ignored."

The archduke candidates and archnobles rich enough to leave their deposits behind were of a high enough status that they could completely ignore Solange without any repercussions. It must have been a massive inconvenience for her.

"Where did all the archnoble librarians go?"

"They were... reassigned to other positions after the civil war. My predecessors entrusted me with Schwartz and Weiss, saying that I would manage with their assistance, but my mana alone was not enough for them. I could not make them move by myself."

It seemed it was the shumils' job to handle the carrels, as well as the lending out and returning of reading material. The mana from Solange's predecessors had allowed them to continue moving for about a year after they were reassigned, but then Schwartz and Weiss had stopped moving entirely. Solange had mournfully set them on one of the bookshelves in her office, having no choice but to continue her work alone.

"Here we lend."

"Here you return."

Once we arrived at the work space, Schwartz and Weiss fought to climb up onto two nearby chairs as quickly as possible. It seemed this was actually a regular desk rather than a counter, but it was apparently where the library's paperwork was done. The two shumils slapped their paws on the tabletop, then began their explanation.

There were several bookshelves around the desk, lined with documents and tools for work. The sight sent a wave of nostalgia rushing through me as I remembered my time spent in my school's library committee back in my Urano days, and the part-time library jobs I had worked.

"Speaking of which, I don't see any other librarians here..." I noted as I continued looking around.

Solange's expression clouded over. "We are suffering such a lack of personnel that I doubt they will ever spare me any scholars."

As it turned out, she was running the library entirely by herself. Her higher-ups assumed that her job was as simple as handling registrations, but there was much, much more to being a librarian than they realized.

“Surely you have a lot more work to do than everyone expects. How are you finding the time to do everything?” I asked.

“The semester is usually over by the time I have finished managing the books and registering and deregistering the students, so I do all my other work from spring to autumn, when there are fewer students here.”

*How awful...*

The thought alone was enough to make my head spin.

*...Ah! Could this be my time to shine?! Things definitely won’t be the same here, but I’ve spent more than enough time working in libraries. This place is absolutely wonderful, and I want to do everything I can to ensure it runs smoothly. If students can’t become librarians, maybe I can at least form a library committee? I mean, this is a school, and every school needs a library committee! Okay. Perfect!*

“Professor Solange. I wish to—”

I had intended to say, “establish a library committee to help you with your work,” but before I could finish, blue and red lights shone down on the library. I glanced up in surprise, expecting to see massive stained-glass windows overhead, but there was nothing of the sort; in fact, there didn’t seem to be any explanation for the multicolor lights whatsoever.

The lights disappeared after a few seconds, at which point the few people using the library closed their books and stood up in unison.

“What were those lights?” I asked.

“An announcement to leave for afternoon classes,” Solange explained. “Some students become so immersed in their studies that they do not hear the bells, but even they notice when the light shining on their books changes colors. That is why we use them here in the library to signal when the bell is about to ring.”

I nodded gravely, understanding just how easy it was to become so absorbed

in a book that you stopped paying attention to all the noise around you. From behind me, I could hear Rihyarda mutter, “That is good to know.”

“Professor Solange,” one student said. “Here is the key to my carrel.”

“Yes, yes. You have practical lessons this afternoon, correct? Good luck.”

One by one, the students handed Solange their keys and hurriedly exited the reading room, still curiously eyeing Schwartz and Weiss. Rihyarda watched them go with a smile, then pointed at the door.

“Well then, milady. Now seems as good a time as any for us to leave for your practical lessons as well.”

“All you wanted was to enter the reading room, yeah? Save the rest for when you’ve passed your classes,” Wilfried added.

“We’re going to be late if we do not leave soon,” Cornelius agreed.

I looked up at the second floor and sighed, having not had enough time to see what was up there. It was tragic that I hadn’t gotten to read a single book either, but my hands were tied here. On the bright side, I was more motivated than ever before; I had seen more reading material than I could wish for, inhaled that sweet book scent, and spoken to Solange about all manner of things. My lust for coming back to the library was burning hotter than the sun.

*I’ll pass all my classes as soon as possible, then hole up in here twenty-four seven!*

My fists were clenched with resolve as I made my way out of the reading room. Schwartz and Weiss followed closely behind to see us off, but when we arrived at the door, they reached out and tugged on my sleeve.

“We did our job.”

“Milady. Praise us.”

Schwartz and Weiss were standing before me with their eyes closed. I glanced over at Solange, unsure what they were expecting me to do.

“Lady Rozemyne, stroke the feystones on their foreheads and pour some mana into them. That will allow Schwartz and Weiss to continue their work with renewed vigor,” she explained.

I naturally wanted the two shumils to stay functional while I was busy passing all of my remaining exams, so I poured some mana into their feystones as instructed.

“Schwartz, Weiss. Thank you for the tour. Please listen to what Professor Solange says and continue to assist her with her work,” I said.

“Okay. We’ll help Solange.”

“New clothes then?”

Schwartz agreed at once, but Weiss’s request was so truncated that I once again had to tilt my head in confusion. Solange turned her gaze to the ceiling as she dug through ancient memories, then she suddenly clapped her hands together.

“It is customary for Schwartz and Weiss to receive new clothes when their master changes. They want you to give them new clothes as well, Lady Rozemyne.”

“...I imagine those will take around a year to prepare, since I have no seamstresses here in the Academy, nor any cloth prepared. Is that acceptable?”

Getting clothes for the both of them would take some time, and it definitely wasn’t something I could have finished by the end of winter.

Schwartz and Weiss nodded.

“New clothes take time.”

“We know.”

It seemed they were happy to wait, which meant I would have plenty of time to make cute clothes for them.

“Speaking of which, Professor Solange... Are Schwartz and Weiss boys or girls?”

“My my, Lady Rozemyne. Magic tools have no gender. They care less about the style of the clothes they wear, and more about the fact they come from their master.”

The magic tools were shaped after living creatures, and yet it turned out they

were completely genderless. There had apparently been some generations when Schwartz and Weiss were dressed as girls, some when they were dressed as boys, and some when they were dressed as neither.

*What should I have them wear? Hm... Whatever clothes I pick, they'll need a library committee armband, for sure. And if they're getting armbands, then I want one as well. I'll ask Tuuli to make them when I get back to Ehrenfest.*

"Well then, I shall finish my classes as soon as possible and return to the library. Please contact me at once if Schwartz and Weiss are ever in need of more mana," I said to Solange before finally leaving the library. Schwartz and Weiss stood at the door, waving me goodbye as I went.

*Okay! Time to blast through my practical lessons too!*

# Court Etiquette and Hirschur's Visit

We exited the library and stepped into the hallway, which connected to the buildings for scholars and attendants. Wilfried and I instructed the apprentice scholars and attendants serving as our retainers to go to their respective buildings, while we returned to the central building with our apprentice knights and the first-and second-years.

When we got back, Judithe and the second-years headed for the auditorium, Philine and her group went to the laynoble classrooms, and then Roderick and his group went to the classroom for mednobles. We archduke candidates went to the same hall as usual, but proper court etiquette was extremely nuanced and changed in subtle ways depending on one's status, so a separate classroom was being used for archnobles.

Once we arrived, our adult retainers said they would return for us later, then left.

"You sure look motivated, Rozemyne," Wilfried noted as we headed inside.

"But of course. My grand return to the library relies on me passing these classes as soon as possible. I intend to have my court etiquette studies over and done with by the end of the day."

Despite all my efforts so far, the closest I had gotten to my dream was touring the first floor of the library. I hadn't even been able to read a single book! I was going to pass these practical lessons and then hole up among the bookshelves, no matter what it took.

"I'd even give up my life if it meant finally gaining complete access to the library..." I added.

"Er, well... It's good that you're motivated," Wilfried said, sitting on one of the seats labeled "thirteen" before muttering something about how things probably wouldn't go as well as I was expecting.

"First-years are expected to know court etiquette for greetings and the

proper way to behave at tea parties," our professor—a woman called Primevere—began. "As I'm sure you're all aware, once your lessons are over, tea parties between duchies will be held for diplomatic and social purposes. A common and shared understanding of etiquette is necessary so that you do not displease each other at these gatherings. You have all been educated in the basics, but there is a tendency for archduke candidates to become slack over time, and their status as the highest authorities in their home duchies often makes them inexperienced at maintaining a polite form. To that end, we will be holding a faux tea party here in class, with the idea being that a member of the royal family has invited you. We will see how your court etiquette withstands a meeting with an individual of such superior status, and I am sure the experience will serve as a useful reference for you all moving forward."

In our mock tea party, Professor Primevere would be posing as the theoretical royal in question, while three assistant professors would observe our etiquette and mark us based on the contents of our conversations, our expressions, the manner in which we ate and drank, and so on. Due to how thorough these checks were going to be, we were divided into two groups: archduke candidates from the first to tenth duchies, and candidates from the eleventh to the bottom duchy.

"We shall begin with the higher-ranked archduke candidates," Primevere announced, prompting the higher-ranking archduke candidates to stand. Their first task was to greet the royal who had invited them to the tea party, starting with the highest-ranked student.

It was clear from the way the highest-ranking candidates held themselves that they had plenty of prior experience to work with; they lined up smoothly, then started the greetings without hesitation. Philine had mentioned that court etiquette teachers tended to be gentle and overall quite relaxed in nature, and that few students ever failed, so I initially watched the proceedings without much interest.

"Please try again from the very beginning."

"...What?"

Much to my surprise, however, one student after another received a failing

mark at the very first stage. Primevere merely shook her head at them, wearing a calm smile that left no room for debate.

“That is simply not good enough for a tea party with royalty. Archduke candidates must be better,” she said. “Future archdukes will invariably have meetings and tea parties with the royal family at the Archduke Conference, so it will do you well to focus as much as possible.”

It seemed that passing this class right away was going to be harder than I thought. I straightened my back and watched as the higher-ranking archduke candidates all steeled themselves. No matter how closely I examined them, however, I couldn’t figure out what was wrong with their greetings—they all seemed very much by the book. Each student was made to repeat themselves at least once, and thus began a somewhat awkward tea party.

*The way Primevere’s staring them down and making them repeat themselves over and over... it feels like one of those job interviews where the interviewer is deliberately trying to psych you out. Is she just seeing how they react to being bossed around unfairly, since archduke candidates are used to being of a higher status than those around them?*

The others and I were watching from a considerable distance away, so we couldn’t hear the exact contents of their conversations. I could, however, tell that some of the students had already wilted under the pressure of being made to repeat themselves again and again. They began each attempt with nervously wavering eyes, desperately trying to ensure they weren’t doing anything wrong to avoid being failed again.

“This seems even harder than expected...” Wilfried muttered to me under his breath. Primevere wasn’t making the students repeat themselves anymore, but those serving as attendants behind her and the other professors were now writing on their boards. It would probably be wise to consider them part of the “interview” as well.

“It seems Dregarnuhr the Goddess of Time has woven today’s threads with exceptional speed and grace,” Primevere intoned. It was a euphemism that pretty much meant, *“Time flies when you’re having fun.”*

With that, the faux tea party came to a close. The higher-ranking archduke

candidates said their farewells before going back to their seats, while those playing the roles of attendants cleaned up after them, then began replacing the tea and sweets for us lower-ranking archduke candidates. Meanwhile, the professors looked at the boards they had been writing on and started announcing the results.

“Ninth, you must take care to remain graceful. Pay more attention to how you move your fingers.”

“My apologies.”

“Third, do not speak only of yourself; also listen to those around you.”

“Second, you are an archduke candidate of a greater duchy. Act confidently and carry yourself with more dignity.”

“Seventh...”

Judging by the professors’ feedback, the most important thing to remember was to keep one’s composure no matter how tense the situation became. One needed to wear a confident smile at all times and refrain from ever looking down at the floor—the very same rules that had constantly been drilled into me since I started my life as a noble.

*Remain graceful. Watch your surroundings. I should be fine as long as I follow Mother’s teachings.*

“Lord Wilfried and Lady Rozemyne of the Thirteenth. Please enter.”

The exam was already well underway by the time we were called. We had been told ahead of time that it included waiting elsewhere and arriving at the tea party, so I straightened my back as elegantly as possible before extending a hand to Wilfried with a pleasant smile. He blinked in surprise, having not expected my request for him to escort me, then took my hand at once. It would have been difficult—if not impossible—for me to gracefully stand up from my seat without his help.

When the two of us arrived before Primevere, Wilfried greeted her first. He knelt, crossed his arms in front of his chest, and bowed his head. “May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?”

“Try again.”

Wilfried momentarily lowered his eyes, having expected that response, then repeated the greeting as instructed. Primevere made him do it twice more, watching him quietly all the while. I could see that he was gritting his teeth in frustration.

“That is enough, Lord Wilfried,” Primevere eventually said with a small sigh, waving a hand to dismiss him. He stood up and silently left.

It was my turn to step forward next. I met Primevere’s watchful gaze, smiled once, then knelt gracefully before crossing both arms in front of my chest. “May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?”

“Try again.”

“As you wish.” I deepened my business smile, then gave the greeting again, this time speaking even more politely than before.

“You may.”

I was able to secure passing marks on my second try. As I moved to my seat at the tea party table, Wilfried, who had been waiting to escort me, muttered a frustrated, “You managed it after a single repeat, huh?”

“The trick is to imagine her not as a professor, but as true royalty,” I advised, all the while maintaining my polite smile and continuing to face forward.

“I did,” Wilfried replied, though I could tell he wasn’t truly aware of what I meant. He had barely ever interacted with people of a higher status than himself, so even though he thought he understood how to treat Primevere as royalty, he didn’t get it in the slightest.

“Lord Wilfried. Here is your seat,” said one of the professors.

Wilfried instinctively moved in the direction indicated to him, forcing me to pinch his arm and smile harder. That seemed to get the message across, as he immediately turned and started guiding me to my seat instead. I made sure to courteously raise a hand to the professor along the way.

I clearly needed to give Wilfried some advice, but we naturally couldn’t

exchange many words with the professors and those playing the roles of attendants watching our every move. Brevity was crucial.

Unlike the archduke candidates of the higher-ranking duchies, who had truly never had anyone they needed to bow their heads to, Wilfried was no stranger to being reprimanded for his mistakes. This was partly the reason he had ultimately grown used to bowing his head to Ferdinand, someone he had once hated. So long as he used these experiences to his advantage, this lesson would surely be easy for him.

“Wilfried,” I whispered, “Ferdinand is here watching us.”

Upon hearing those words, Wilfried straightened his back in an instant. He was still facing forward with a smile, but his eyes had started to wander nervously. It seemed my message had proven effective.

“This is my seat. Thank you ever so much, Wilfried.” I expressed my gratitude with an encouraging smile once he had escorted me to my chair. Wilfried returned a smile brimming with newfound confidence, then went to his own seat.

“Lady Rozemyne,” one of the attendants said while pulling back my chair for me. It was much higher than I had expected, causing me to blink in surprise.

Climbing up onto the chair was certainly an option, but doing so would hardly be graceful. I gazed up at the attendant and placed a hand on my cheek in a textbook gesture of worry. It had worked on Fran and many others, so it would surely work on someone trained to be an attendant...

Or so I thought. The attendant merely blinked back at me in confusion, not even attempting to lift me onto the chair.

*Is this part of the exam?* I wondered, still maintaining the worried pose. *What’s the best move I can make here?*

The ideal situation would have been for the attendant to lift me up right away, but it seemed they were testing me to see what I did with an attendant who was slow on the uptake. It was clearly unacceptable for me to climb onto the chair myself, and asking for her to pick me up directly was far too demeaning for the daughter of an archduke. I could never, ever admit weakness

like that.

*Is the right answer to find a way to overcome my weakness, or to complain about the attendant? Hm... I'm theoretically dealing with royalty here, so...*

The attendant and I stared each other down, and soon enough, I realized that I was the only one who hadn't yet taken my seat. I could tell that I was being watched not only by the archduke candidates attending the mock tea party, but also by the higher-ranking archduke candidates who had already finished theirs.

"Is something the matter, Lady Rozemyne?" Primevere asked.

I turned to face her, my hand still on my cheek. "Professor Primevere, we are to act as though this is a tea party being hosted by royalty, correct?"

"Yes, that is certainly correct," Primevere replied, an interested smile playing on her lips. This was probably the most important part of the exam for me, in which case it was crucial that I maintain my noble air and not break my poise. I was a guest invited to a tea party by royalty; there was no need for me to cover for a mere attendant.

"Professor Primevere, is this attendant a recent hire? I am rather surprised they would make a mistake such as this, but please do not scold them too much," I said.

It was exceedingly rude for a host to not understand the circumstances of their guests. Each time Elvira had arranged a tea party, she had made sure to stress to me the importance of catering to those you invited, whether that be meeting their preferences, adjusting their seating arrangements, or managing any personal treatment they required. In this regard, it was important to inform the on-duty attendants what would need to be prepared and what would need to be done on the day of. The rudeness of an attendant was, by extension, the rudeness of whomever they served.

In the case of this tea party, the host was expected to know I was smaller than average and would thus struggle to sit down on my own. Preparations should have been made to ensure I was not inconvenienced, so by asking whether the attendant was a recent hire, I was indirectly pointing out that the host had neglected to gather information properly, inform their attendant of what to do, or adequately train them in the first place. In a sense, I was accusing them of

minor laziness.

“Oh my. What a disaster,” Primevere exclaimed. She rang a bell while directing the attendant behind me to step down, and in an instant, another attendant arrived to help me onto my chair. The fact that everything had been settled with a single ring of a bell suggested she had indeed gathered information in advance and informed her attendants about my issue, so in this case, the problem was nothing more than a single incompetent attendant.

“I do apologize for the inexperienced attendant, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Think nothing of it. It has been difficult to acquire high-quality attendants as of late,” I replied with a graceful smile, now sitting on my chair. It was then that I noticed the attendant standing behind Primevere write something down.

With that, the tea party truly began. I treated it like a group discussion with food and drinks included, throwing harmless softballs to the kids who were silently nursing their tea to get them involved, pretending to listen to those raving passionately about one thing or another, and flattering the host by praising the tea and sweets she served.

All in all, I worked pretty hard. A few problems arose in the form of clearly manufactured accidents, no doubt to see how we would react in the moment, and I made my decisions while looking around to see what the others were doing.

There were a few instances where Wilfried was goaded slightly, much like he had been when we initially greeted Primevere, but he handled it much more smoothly and with a courteous smile. My warning that Ferdinand was watching really had worked.

“Lord Wilfried and Lady Rozemyne of the Thirteenth have passed,” Primevere soon announced. “They would do fine at any tea party held in the Royal Academy.”

In the end, Wilfried and I were the only ones to pass court etiquette on our first day. I contained the joy swelling within me, doing my best to keep my smile elegant.

“I am honored,” I replied.

The faux tea party was over, but I could still feel Primevere's eyes on me. I made a mental note to save my excitement for when I was back at the dormitory, and so I continued acting with grace even after leaving the classroom.

"I PASSED COURT ETIQUETTE!" I yelled to Rihyarda with a beaming smile the very second the dormitory door shut behind me. The sudden outburst was enough to shock my gathered retainers, while Wilfried's retainers looked at their charge with worry.

"And you, Lord Wilfried...?"

"I passed too, but only thanks to Rozemyne. Her words really did work wonders," Wilfried noted, making his gratitude more than apparent.

Rihyarda blinked, her curiosity quite evidently piqued. "Wilfried, my boy... what did she say to you?"

"I simply told him that Ferdinand was watching us," I said.

While I was asleep, Wilfried had not only led the playroom, but also performed both Spring Prayer and the Harvest Festival in my place. This had meant spending time with Ferdinand whether he liked it or not, and since Rihyarda knew this all too well, the revelation of my warning made her cackle.

"Bwahaha! I said it would all pay off one day, my boy, and it seems that day came a lot sooner than we expected!"

"Yup."

I went to the common room after getting changed into new clothes, where I observed the others making study documents and purchasing information. I was trying to refrain from making any study documents myself, since that would mean stealing work from the laynobles. Instead, I simply pointed out when their handwriting wasn't good enough, or when their grammar was poor.

While everyone was using trial and error to figure out the best way to make money, I planned ahead for my next class. What could I do to hasten my grand return to the library? I had passed court etiquette, which meant I now needed to focus on my dedication whirl, music, highbeast, and schtappe acquisition practical lessons.

We were just practicing the dedication whirl this year, so I really doubted the professors would expect much from us. I decided to simply focus on the fundamentals; the most important thing for me was ensuring I didn't accidentally pray to the gods and cause any unnecessary problems.

When it came to music, I had already been invited to a tea party by the professors, which surely meant I was above average. I just needed to negotiate a passing grade in exchange for publicizing a new song or two.

My first highbeast class had been suspended after Fraularm collapsed, but things would most likely continue from where they had left off. According to Hirschur, a passing grade would be awarded once a student could take their highbeast outside and fly one loop around the Academy grounds, so I had nothing to worry about.

*As long as Professor Fraularm doesn't collapse again, that is...*

I was sure I could avoid any trouble by getting Hirschur to assist Fraularm next time, but I really doubted she would ever interrupt her research to take on extra, unnecessary work. The only way I could secure her help was by making it somehow worth her while.

*And tomorrow is schtappe acquisition...*

The first-years would all enter a place known as the Farthest Hall to gather feystones known as the Divine Will, which served as the main building block for schtappes. I was worried that I would be unable to properly gather one, but Cornelius assured me that everything would be fine; I would apparently understand why the moment I got there.

That said, there was more to the lesson than simply acquiring the feystone—I would also need to build a schtappe and learn the basics of using it.

"Where is Lady Rozemyne?" came Hirschur's voice. She had rushed into the common room right as I was summarizing my thoughts on how to pass my lessons. I blinked at her in surprise. For someone the older students had said only came to the dormitory on the first and final days of each semester, she sure was appearing a lot.

"What do you need today?" I asked, drawing her attention to me.

“I just heard from a student that the library’s magic tools were revived,” she said, striding over with a fervent look of excitement on her face. “How did you manage it? I am certain they were surrounded by a protective magic circle that prevented anyone but their master from touching them.”

In the past, those who had touched Schwartz and Weiss unprompted were apparently thrown back, which told me a bit about what crazy things protective charms could do. How had she figured out I was the one responsible though? It could have been any one of the Ehrenfest students in the reading room.

“Why do you think I am the one who revived them?” I asked.

Hirschur rolled her eyes. “Because the Ehrenfest first-years were seen touring the library with two large shumils, one black and one white. It does not take a genius to deduce who among them was responsible. You, Lady Rozemyne, are the only person who continually commits such unprecedented acts, and you failed to inform me of this one.”

“I didn’t think activating Schwartz and Weiss was something that demanded your attention, especially considering how busy you are,” I replied.

Judging by the excitement lurking in Hirschur’s eyes, I could guess she cared less about being kept up to date as our dorm supervisor, and more about experimenting on Schwartz and Weiss. As their new master, I had to protect them from her.

“Schwartz and Weiss cannot leave the library.”

“...I believe they can, if you are with them.”

“I will not let you disassemble them,” I said with a glare.

“Goodness me. I would never do such a thing. I simply want to remove their clothes.”

“...Do you have a thing for removing the clothes of magic tools, Professor Hirschur?” I asked, getting on the defensive in case she was even more of a weirdo than I thought.

“I am a professor specializing in the creation of magic tools,” she shot back with a wry smile. “It is only natural that I would want to learn more about two

special magic tools, the designs of which remain a mystery to the world. As far as I know, the parts of their bodies hidden by their clothing offer clues as to how they were created. I simply wish to see those parts for myself." There was no mistaking the scholarly look in her eyes, but she still wanted to see them without their clothes on; my fears were more than justified.

"As their new master, it is my duty to protect Schwartz and Weiss. There is too much work at the library for Professor Solange to reasonably handle alone," I said.

Hirschur knitted her slender brows together as she pondered the situation, then began tapping her temple with a finger, just as Ferdinand always did when he thought things over.

*Oh my gosh. Ferdinand really did get a bunch of his quirks from Professor Hirschur.*

As I cackled on the inside, Hirschur seemed to have a sudden epiphany. Her head shot up, her lips curved into a grin, and the eye behind her monocle glimmered with interest. "As I recall, Lady Rozemyne... it is tradition for Schwartz and Weiss's master to award them with new clothes, correct?"

"...Is that so?" I replied, doing my best to play dumb. Hirschur had been in the Royal Academy for a very long time, but I had no idea how much she knew about the subject. It seemed that my momentary hesitation was all she needed to confirm her suspicions, however, as her smile immediately broadened.

"Do allow me to accompany you while you are measuring them and changing their clothes," she said. "Naturally, I will not touch them, nor remove the clothes myself."

As far as I was concerned, that excuse was no better than saying something like, *"Just let me follow you into the shower. Don't worry though, I won't strip you myself."*

Before I could protest, however, Hirschur continued. "If you allow this, I will serve as the presiding professor for your remaining magecraft lessons. You are not allowed to enter the library until you have passed all of your classes, correct? I assure you, it will take you a very long time to secure a passing grade in your highbeast lessons with how much Fraularm currently resents you."

*She’s... She’s a demon! Hirschur is a demon seducing her students to the dark side!*

After an intense battle of wits, I ultimately succumbed to the whispers of a demon who would make my life easier all the way to graduation.

# Schtappe Acquisition

I spent the morning working on study documents and practicing the harspiel. Rosina had instructed me to practice from breakfast to third bell, just like I would in the temple, and everyone else had ended up following suit. As a result, we all gathered in the common room and played together. I was preparing for my tea party with the professors, while everyone else was practicing at their respective skill levels.

More and more students from the other grades were finishing their written lessons as well, and it wasn't long before near enough everyone was practicing together. Some people tried studying in their rooms, but the noise must have been too much, as they usually came back a short while later with their harspiels in hand.

"I've been practicing a lot less recently, since I haven't been able to secure regular practice time in the dormitory," one student said. "With each year I advance, I get less praise from my music teachers in class."

"Then perhaps it would be wise to permanently establish this period as harspiel practice time," I replied.

While I was practicing the songs I planned to debut at the tea party, Rosina started mercilessly purging the lyrics I had come up with myself.

"Lady Rozemyne, as this is a song dedicated to Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom, might I suggest praising the Grutrissheit instead of the library?"

She went on to explain that the Grutrissheit was the original bible, owned by Mestionora herself. The first king of the country had been chosen by the gods and permitted to transcribe a copy. I decided it was best to leave the lyrics to Rosina, and soon enough, my passionate lines about the library were reworked into verses admiring Mestionora, peppered with all sorts of theological references.

*But, well... I guess this is okay. I'd rather this than everyone getting even more*

*weirded out about my love of the library, plus it greatly reduces the risk of me accidentally blessing everyone while I sing...*

"Actually, Rosina, would you mind completely rewriting the song? I've got a feeling that my lyrics about the library are going to result in me giving a blessing during my performance."

"Oh my, but what is wrong with giving a blessing while praying to the gods and singing a song in their honor?" she replied. It seemed that her understanding of things was somewhat distorted, which was honestly to be expected when she had been raised in the temple—the house of the gods—beneath an art-loving shrine maiden. I doubted she realized that giving such a blessing at the Royal Academy would cause quite the stir.

"I am doing my best to give as few blessings as possible," I explained.

"...If you insist, Lady Rozemyne. I will refrain from using any lyrics related to the library."

Harspiel practice came to an end at third bell, at which point I started helping Hartmut with his scholar study guides while simultaneously learning more about the scholar course itself.

"Lady Rozemyne, are you also intending to take the scholar course?" he asked.

"Indeed. I intend to become a librarian, so I shall be taking the scholar course alongside the archduke candidate course. I have already discussed this matter with Ferdinand," I replied while reading about the coursework for third-years.

"Are you not aiming to become Aub Ehrenfest?"

"Not once have I ever even considered it. As I said, I wish to become a librarian, so that role would do nothing but waste my time and effort. My current dream is to use my position as the Saint of Ehrenfest to conquer the temple's book room, or alternatively conquer the castle's book room while assisting the archduke. My ambition burns for nothing else."

My ultimate goal was to marry whoever owned the largest library and then sit among its bookshelves forevermore, but I naturally couldn't say that to my retainer.

“With this in mind, if you ever come to realize that serving me will only be a dead end for your career, please do tell me,” I continued. “I will allow you to leave without any hard feelings.”

My schtappe acquisition lesson was being held in the afternoon. Schtappes were the perfect tool for efficiently and accurately wielding the mana within oneself, and only once I had my own could I become an official noble. Ferdinand had mentioned that several researchers had attempted to make tools even more effective than schtappes in the past, but none had succeeded; the quality of the material that went into making schtappes was just on an entirely different level.

Schtappe acquisition had initially taken place when third-years were being split into their specialized courses, but around ten years ago, the current king had changed things so that they would be acquired as soon as new students entered the Academy. As far as he was concerned, the faster one learned to use their schtappe, the better.

From what I had been told, schtappe acquisition consisted of acquiring the Divine Will that served as the raw material for one’s schtappe and then returning with it. That was the entire class, but it was an important event for becoming an adult noble. The first-years all looked pretty excited on their way to the auditorium, while the older students on their way to their own lessons cheerfully urged them to calm down with nostalgic expressions.

“Were there always this many first-years?” I mused aloud, blinking in surprise. The entire grade was gathered in the auditorium for the schtappe acquisition.

“It only feels that way because you no longer have any written classes,” Philine replied with a small smile. The sight didn’t come as much of a shock to her because she was still attending geography and history classes, but as someone who hadn’t gone to one since passing my exams, this was my first time seeing so many first-years gathered in one place in quite a while.

The busy auditorium fell silent the moment the professors appeared. Primevere stepped forward, then looked across the gathered students.

“Everyone is here, I see. I will soon be guiding everyone to the Farthest Hall, starting with the archduke candidates, but first, there is one rule you must all

obey under any circumstances: do not touch anyone after you have gathered your Divine Will. It must be dyed with your mana and your mana alone in order to produce a high-quality schtappe. Space yourselves out such that you do not bump into anyone on the way back, and spend Earthday tomorrow filling the Divine Will with mana."

Once all the archduke candidates were lined up, Primevere took the lead. There was a door at the back of the auditorium which led into another room.

*Wow! There's a chapel here?!*

It was a pure-white room, with circular pillars spaced out at equal distances on either side of us. The farthest wall had a multicolored mosaic built into it from the ceiling to the floor, and in the middle of the room was a forty-some step staircase going up three stories high, on which were offerings for and statues of the gods. At the very top were the King and Queen gods; on a lower step was the Goddess of Earth, who was holding a chalice; then on an even lower step were the Goddess of Water, God of Fire, Goddess of Wind, and God of Life, all positioned in a line.

*I wonder what my attendants back at the temple are doing...* I thought to myself, the familiar sight of the shrine having made me feel somewhat nostalgic. I knew they were most likely doing well, since they had managed just fine without me for two whole years, but I couldn't suppress my sudden urge to see Fran and the others.

It seemed I was the only one who felt homesick upon seeing the altar; everyone else was too busy gasping in awe.

"This is the Farthest Hall, the place closest to the gods," Primevere explained. "Everyone here shall only be given one opportunity to gather their Divine Will. As mentioned, take an exceptional amount of care not to bump into anyone else once you have yours. There are two paths—one for those entering and one for those exiting—so make sure to take the left path on your way back, no matter what."

With that, Primevere reached out to a feystone. An instant later, the shrine's staircase began rumbling as it moved slowly to one side, revealing a gaping square hole that led deeper into the shrine.

“May you have the gods’ protection and guidance.”

At Primevere’s encouragement, the first archduke candidates stepped into the hole, their expressions tense. Wilfried and I followed after them. The shrine was made out of the same ivory stone as the Royal Academy and the dormitory, and even the hole was perfectly paved on all sides.

Our footsteps echoed as we pressed onward. The path wasn’t particularly narrow, and there was enough space for three people to walk next to each other.

About five meters in, the square hallway suddenly became less uniform. The floor continued on, providing an ivory path for us to walk on, but the walls and ceiling were now made of crude rock. The hole had brought us into a natural cave. The only light source was the ivory path that glowed underfoot, which would guide us to the exit on our way back.

“Who knew a place like this would be behind a chapel shrine...?” I mumbled, looking around a little before continuing on. The ivory path snaked through the wide curves of the cave, and it seemed we were going ever upward. There were several staircases along the way, with another one popping up after a short walk. After a while, I could almost feel how much higher up we were.

*I’ve been power walking for so long... I’m going to lose my breath any moment now...*

Even with all the enhancers on me, I was only as strong as an average person. And when combined with my short stature, I was getting steadily farther away from the front.

“Go on ahead,” I eventually said to the other candidates. “As you can see, I am shorter than you all, so it is hard for me to match your pace.”

I moved to the side to let an archduke candidate get by me. Wilfried immediately offered to accompany me, but I turned him down.

“You go on ahead, Wilfried. We won’t be able to return together anyway. But when you pass me on the way back, please do tell me how much farther I have to walk.”

“...Alright.”

Wilfried didn't look very convinced, but he walked on with the other candidates nonetheless, repeatedly turning back to check on me.

I sighed, now walking at my own pace. I was sure I could have kept up with the others for a while longer, but it was getting harder to maintain an air of grace while constantly power walking down this seemingly endless road.

A short while after the archduke candidates had disappeared up ahead, I heard some footsteps coming from behind me. It was the archnobles. Their eyes wavered as they debated whether they should say anything to the lone candidate walking all on her own, so I told them what I had told the others and sent them on their way. Ehrenfest's archnoble student looked back at me over and over again with a worried expression as he walked on, much like Wilfried had done.

I continued along at my own pace, and next came the mednobles. They gave me bizarre looks, which I simply ignored as I told them to go on without me.

"Lady Rozemyne?" came a voice.

"Oh. Hello, Roderick. You may go on ahead as well."

I was partway through giving him the explanation I had repeated several times now when a mednoble from another duchy walking at the front of the group suddenly shouted, "Ah! There it is!"

"Hm? What?"

I turned my gaze to where the boy was focused, but I wasn't at all sure what he had found. To me, he seemed to be staring at the plain rock wall; there was nothing special there that I could see. His eyes, however, were locked on one spot in particular. He stepped off the ivory road toward it, then reached out a hand. I could tell from how assured his movements were that he was definitely seeing something, and when he turned around again, his fingers were curled as though he were holding an invisible tube of some kind.

"Sorry, but could you make way?" the boy asked with a pleased smile. He cut through the group, then sped along the path back to the entrance, his eyes remaining locked on whatever was in his hands.

"Did he find something?" Roderick asked. "Did you see it, Lady Rozemyne?"

“No, it looked like he was holding nothing but air...”

Everyone who had seen the first person to find their Divine Will was immediately overcome with intrigue, and they slowed down to watch the cave walls more carefully. They were now moving at a pace I could comfortably keep up with, at which point Roderick and I started talking about the Divine Will and what kind of feystone it might be.

It wasn’t long before another person cried out—this time a girl. “I found it!” she shouted in a lively voice. Meanwhile, I could see another boy at the front of the group stray from the path and head over to the wall. Everyone who claimed to find their Divine Will knew exactly where to go, so there was no denying that they were actually there.

Roderick started looking around as well, driven by how many others were finding their Divine Will. It was clear from his expression how much he wanted to spot his.

“Ah!” he cried, his gaze suddenly focusing on a point farther ahead on the path.

“Did you find yours?” I asked.

“Yes! It’s shining beautifully!”

I couldn’t see what Roderick was looking at, as expected, but there was evidently something there. He smiled proudly and raced down the path, then reached toward the wall. I could tell he had touched something because his eyes widened in surprise, then he hugged the feystone I couldn’t see to his chest.

“Lady Rozemyne. If you will excuse me.”

“Take care not to drop it or bump into anyone,” I noted.

Roderick started making his way back, while I continued walking in the opposite direction. As everyone else was finding their feystones, some of the archnobles from earlier started walking back past us. They had evidently found theirs somewhere up ahead, and I could guess that my feystone was going to be even deeper in the cave.

*I'm going to have to go all the way to the back of this cave, aren't I...? I'm exhausted already...*

I walked on at my own leisurely pace as fewer and fewer people surrounded me. Those who remained were steadily leaving the path to grab their feystones, so it was becoming both easier to walk and easier to see ahead. It was kind of sad seeing everyone leave one after another though.

Determined to continue, I walked, climbed stairs, and walked some more. It wasn't long before there was nobody else with me, and the only people I saw were those coming back. An odd-looking line had formed, since the students were all trying to keep a fair distance away from each other, so as to avoid accidentally bumping into one another. Given that this was around where the mednobles had found most of their Divine Wills, I could guess that the archnobles were returning from much farther ahead.

Eventually, some archduke candidates started getting mixed in with the returning archnobles. I recognized everyone from my practical lessons, and soon enough, I saw Wilfried coming back among them.

"You're still all the way back here?" he asked with widened eyes. "The archduke candidate feystones are way deeper inside." He was cradling something in his hands as well, which encouraged me to pour some more mana into my enhancers. Doing this would make walking considerably easier, but I had to be careful about how much mana I used—if I used too much, my muscles would ache so badly tomorrow that I wouldn't even be able to move.

I slowly increased my pace, aiming for the farthest point of the cave. Soon enough, there weren't even any candidates walking back. I truly was alone, the only noise being the light patter of my echoing footsteps. I climbed more stairs, found nothing on the walls, and then climbed yet more stairs. The lack of people and repetitive scenery was boring to say the least.

"Where are youuu, my precious little feystone? I'm so tiiired..."

Of course, there was no response; my words merely echoed through the cave. The ivory path led to yet another staircase, but this one was unique—while the others had contained reasonably few steps, this was a spiral staircase that seemed to go up an entire story.

“Guuuh... Another staircase. Seriously, how far am I gonna have to walk?” I grumbled while starting to climb the white spiral staircase. My surroundings got brighter the higher I climbed, until eventually...

“Wooow.”

I exited into a white plaza. It seemed to be a dead end, since there was no longer a path going forward. The ivory floor was now circular, and in the middle was a large sculpture of a tree that seemed to be made of the same ivory substance as everything else. Its white branches covered in equally white leaves extended outward, stretching up to a large hole in the middle of the ceiling through which light was streaming down.



At the base of the tree was a feystone glowing a rainbow of colors. It was sticking straight up out of the ground and looked a lot like a vertical crystal hexagon. It stretched all the way up to my stomach.

*Aah. This is it. This is my stone.*

Just as everyone had said, I recognized the feystone in an instant. The sunlight streaming through the tree branches made it turn all sorts of different colors. It was like a dream, and with a sense of reverence in my heart, I started making my way toward the stone. It gleamed as I came closer.

“I’ll be taking this...”

I knelt in front of the Divine Will and reached my hands out. The second I touched its surface, it slid up out of the ground and started floating in front of me, as if asking me to take it. I hugged the Divine Will to my chest as it shone a variety of colors, then let out a pleased sigh.

“Okay. Time to go back.”

I would need to take the Divine Will all the way back to the entrance of the tunnel, and so with it firmly secured in my arms, I tried pouring more mana into my enhancers.

“Wha...?”

Any mana I tried pouring into the enhancers was immediately sucked up by my feystone. I wouldn’t be able to physically enhance myself any more than I was already, so it seemed I would need to get back in my current state. Just thinking about the long road ahead was enough to make me slump my shoulders.

Standing in place wouldn’t do me any good, so I turned my back to the massive ivory tree and started my journey back to the chapel. This time, I would be alone from start to finish.

I fearfully climbed down the spiral staircase, cradling the feystone in both arms all the while. Once again, the only noise was the echo of my footsteps. The way back was certainly easier, since I was going down rather than up, but my lack of stamina was really starting to show.

“Okay, okay. I need a break,” I said to myself. “Even with the enhancers, this is exhausting...”

Somewhere along the way back, I sat down on a set of stairs to rest with the feystone still in my arms. Everything looked so identical that I had no idea how much farther I needed to go. I leaned against the wall and let out a heavy sigh, praying that the exit was nearby, and it was then that the exhaustion hit me like a strong wave. I could feel my eyelids starting to droop, and soon enough, no matter how hard I tried to fight it, my consciousness slipped away.

“DON’T GO TO SLEEP! YOU’LL DIE IF YOU DO!” came a sudden roar. “WAKE UP! STAND! YOUR LIFE HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN!”

“Bwuh?!”

The voice echoed through the cave like thunder, making my ears ring. I shot up at once, only to see Rauffen waiting nearby, his fists tightly clenched with determination as he continued calling out to me.

“Whew! Good to see you’re back on your feet,” he said, stepping back a little to reveal the other professors standing behind him. Hirschur came forward to take his place, then explained the circumstances to me. It seemed that I had taken so very long to return that they had thought it necessary to send out a search party for me.

Hirschur had initially gone alone. She had been certain that I hadn’t gotten lost, given that this was a linear pathway, and she soon found me passed out against the wall. Since I already had my Divine Will, however, she wasn’t able to touch me. She had no choice but to try calling out to me, but I didn’t respond no matter how hard she tried.

In a panic, Hirschur had rushed back to the chapel, then returned with several other professors. Only when Rauffen, the loudest of them all, shouted at me did I finally wake up again.

“I had heard you were in poor health, and for a moment there, I was truly worried you had died,” Hirschur said.

“My apologies...”

“Ferdinand had told me you were not fully healthy again, but you seemed to

be doing just fine in the Royal Academy, so I ended up letting my guard down," she admitted while gesturing for me to follow her out.

And that was how the Saint of Ehrenfest nearly climbed the towering stairway on her journey to acquire her Divine Will. It hadn't been my intention, but I was now the focus of yet another new legend in Royal Academy history.

# My First Earthday

When I eventually made it back to my own room, Rihyarda instructed me to put my Divine Will on the bed. “I don’t really want to do this, since it might impact the feystone, but...” She trailed off with a sigh, then started peeling off my clothes while wearing mana-blocking gloves.

One would normally only bathe after filling their Divine Will with mana, but after falling asleep against exposed rock, I wasn’t nearly clean enough to get in bed. Rihyarda had said that I wouldn’t be able to get into a proper bath, but she was at least able to wipe me down with wet towels. It made me feel a lot better.

“Drink this and rest well, milady.”

After preparing one of Ferdinand’s special, awful-tasting potions for me, Rihyarda stepped back and silently waited for me to drink it. I could still move a little thanks to my enhancers, but my head was spinning and the chills were unbearable. There was no denying that I’d developed an intense fever, but I couldn’t help looking between Rihyarda and the oh-so terrible potion.

*I might be sick, but I still don’t want to drink that mercilessly nasty thing...*

As I shrunk back in fear, Rihyarda somehow managed to give me a judgmental look while still maintaining her smile. It was quite impressive, all things considered.

“To think you were asleep in the Farthest Hall, in this season... Even a normal child would catch a cold, or if worst came to worst, climb the towering stairway! Is it not a miracle you are even alive right now?!”

“I’m sorry for worrying you...”

Rihyarda had always been the one to panic most over my ill health back in the castle, so it was no surprise that she had started to worry when I hadn’t come back from the cave. She revealed first to Hirschur and then to all the other professors just how many incidents my poor health had caused in the past,

which had made the other professors realize that I wasn't just an unfit student who had gotten tired while getting my Divine Will; rather, I was so sickly that I had collapsed and almost died.

"Drink it all. Now, milady."

"Okay..."

I picked up the vial and chugged the goopy green liquid that was inside. There was no point in hesitating—trying to drink it slowly would only prolong the suffering.

"Nghhh!"

It had been such a long time since I last drank one of these vile potions that I immediately had to clap a hand over my mouth to avoid throwing up. But as I rolled around on my bed, tears welling up in my eyes, I started feeling better and better. The potion really did work; it was just the drinking it part that made me feel as though my soul were being torn from my body and dragged down into hell.

"Enjoy your rest, milady."

After confirming that the potion was gone, Rihyarda finished cleaning up my room, then swiftly exited.

"It sure has gotten smaller..." I mused while lying on my bed, looking at the Divine Will. It had shrunk enough that I could now hold it in one hand. I squeezed it tightly, and the more mana I poured into it, the smaller it got. It seemed I was absorbing it into my body as it fused with my mana.

When I had woken up after falling asleep in the Farthest Hall, my Divine Will had shrunk so much that it initially took me by surprise. Hirschur had thankfully explained that this was simply how it worked, and she had noted that I should keep pouring my mana into it until it became one with me.

Absorbing the Divine Will into oneself could only be done by cradling it, almost like a mother hen warming her egg. Completing the process would require hugging it for an entire day and night while pouring mana into it, so it was tradition for schtappe acquisition to take place on a Fruitday. This way, students could dedicate the subsequent Earthday to their Divine Will.

“Either way, I’m just glad I got back safely,” I said with a sigh, thinking back to all the fuss I had caused. Rauffen had managed to wake me up with an especially loud shout, and everything after that had been terrible...

The mana levels in my enhancers had gone back to normal while I slept, and my muscles had already started to ache, so my legs were wobbling from the moment I stood up. I had also caught a cold; my head throbbed, and while I had the chills, my body also felt burning hot at the same time. The professors couldn’t touch me, so they anxiously watched on as I hobbled down the tunnel.

“Professor Hirschur, can I ride my highbeast back to the dorm? Please. Just for today,” I begged.

Sylvester, as Aub Ehrenfest, allowed me to ride my highbeast inside the castle, and since he also owned the Ehrenfest Dormitory, this permission applied there as well. The Royal Academy itself, however, was an institution run by the royal family; I would need permission from those invested with their authority to ride my highbeast inside. It was for that reason that I glanced between the professors, hoping they would allow it.

Primevere furrowed her shapely brow and shook her head. “I can grant you permission, but you will not be capable of creating your highbeast while holding your Divine Will,” she said.

That reminded me—all the mana I had tried pouring into my enhancers had gone straight into the Divine Will instead. Even so, I was sure I could forcibly pour mana into my highbeast feystone; I just needed to hold it in my hand and focus.

“I’ll at least give it a go,” I said, then I gripped my highbeast feystone and started pouring in my mana. Half was sucked into the Divine Will, but I somehow managed to use the rest to make a one-person Pandabus. I uneasily climbed inside, then set the Divine Will down by my feet and put my hands on the steering wheel.

I could guess that the Divine Will was sucking out my mana through Lessy, and the fuzziness in my head was making my mana flow strangely. My trusty Pandabus drove on nonetheless. He was going much slower than usual, but still

fast enough that we were making decent progress, which the professors were all relieved to see. They started offering their commentary while walking around me.

“So this is the rumored highbeast...?” one said.

“Oho. So this is what knocked Fraularm unconscious,” Rauffen remarked. “It sure looks tough.”

*Lessy’s not tough! He’s cute, and adorable!*

I wanted to protest Rauffen’s praise, but I could barely even manage to open my mouth. In the end, I resorted to a simple pout and an annoyed glare.

“Isn’t it spectacular that she can ride it even while wearing a skirt?” Hirschur added. “I have decided to try making such a highbeast myself, to see what it is like.”

This declaration seemed to interest Primevere in particular. “Oh my. Now that you mention it, she can indeed ride it with a skirt on. The design of the highbeast seems to be fairly complex, though.”

As expected, having to change into riding clothes every time they wanted to ride a highbeast was not something the women liked very much at all.

“Even after receiving an explanation from Lady Rozemyne herself, I struggled to conceptualize the ‘steering wheel’ and ‘accelerator’ of which she spoke,” Hirschur said. “My current plan is thus to copy the overall structure while using reins like any other highbeast on the inside.”

Fraularm had screeched about how unnatural it was for a highbeast without wings to fly, but according to Hirschur, it could almost certainly be reproduced now that it was proven to be possible. It was the confirmation and mindset that mattered most.

“Fraularm is rather hardheaded, you see. What could possibly be wrong with caring more about the utility of a highbeast than its beauty?” Hirschur had said. “Being able to carry luggage in your highbeast is simply marvelous, if you ask me.”

The way she had insulted Lessy’s appearance and treated him like an object

while simultaneously praising his ability to carry my luggage reminded me a lot of Ferdinand.

*Like teacher, like student, I suppose...*

And so, I spent the rest of the journey with curious professors peering into my highbeast. Being inside Lessy meant I was moving much faster than I could have on foot, and once we were safely back in the chapel, everyone let out such blatantly relieved sighs that they kind of stuck in my mind.

Rihyarda and Wilfried wept at my safe return, having been worried sick while waiting at the entrance. Hirschur had then walked me back to the dormitory, making the excuse that she could hardly focus on her research knowing that I could die in class at any moment.

It was now Earthday morning—my first day off since coming to the Royal Academy. We first-years didn't get to enjoy this sacred day, however; instead, we had to carry around our Divine Wills like chicken eggs while filling them with our mana. Since the mana of others would reduce the quality of our schtappes, we had our attendants bring our breakfasts to our rooms, where we would then eat alone.

"Rihyarda, how do the older students spend their free days?" I asked when she came in with my food. From what I had seen, they normally did whatever suited their tastes, whether that be going to the library to study, having tea parties with their friends from other duchies, gathering information, or participating in apprentice knight training sessions. "I was hoping to go to the library."

"That will need to wait until you are better again and have passed your classes."

"I'm fine. I drank the potion, remember? And my Divine Will is really small now."

"Yes, yes. Either way, you are still spending today in bed," Rihyarda said incontestably, producing one of the improved-flavor potions. No sooner had I downed it than I was immediately chased back into bed.

“Rihyarda, could you at least bring me a book?”

“You must focus on your Divine Will today, milady.”

Reading evidently wasn’t an option. I sadly listened to Rihyarda’s retreating footsteps, then picked up my Divine Will, which was now small enough to fit comfortably on my palm. It was then that I suddenly realized something.

“Won’t this whole process go a lot quicker without my enhancers on?” I wondered aloud. I experimentally moved the Divine Will to my left hand and removed the enhancer on my left arm, and just as I theorized, the feystone started to shrink before my eyes. Soon, it was gone entirely.

*Gaaah! Why didn’t I think of this sooner?!*

I stared at my now-empty hand in a daze, let out a heavy sigh, then started putting the enhancer back on, all the while telling myself that the fever was to blame for my not noticing sooner. The Divine Will had seemingly been absorbed into me, but I didn’t feel any different.

“Mm... Does this mean I can actually make a schtappe now?”

I thought back to the shape of the schtappes I had seen all the adults use, then visualized holding one in my right, dominant hand. In an instant, a familiar-looking shining wand appeared.

“Wow! I actually made one! Holy cow! I’m like an actual magician!”

Brimming with excitement, I swung the wand-shaped schtappe around while lying in bed.

“I wonder... Could I turn it into another shape? Like a mage’s staff, maybe?”

I decided that a long and bumpy staff was ideal, like Flutrane’s from the temple, so that was what I visualized as I started to remake my schtappe.

“Aah! It worked!”

I tried swinging the staff around like a wand, and that was when it hit me—using such a huge staff was really inconvenient. The wand-shaped schtappe I saw most often was the perfect length to tap a feystone, pour mana into it, and create an ordonnanz; doing this with a staff would no doubt be much harder.

“Mm... I guess schtappes are so short for a reason.”

I spent some time playing around with my schtappe, turning it into swords, hammers, and even books and pens, but these designs were all pretty unwieldy. In the end, I discovered that I needed a clear image in my head to change the schtappe’s shape or add decoration, which meant each incarnation was slightly different. It also always disappeared when I kept it out for too long.

The thought of a book or pen schtappe had set my heart aflutter, but it wasn’t easy to tap a feystone with them, or morph them into different objects to, for example, hit Sylvester over the head as Ferdinand once had. Neither option seemed feasible, so I ultimately settled with a wand just like the ones adults used.

“I hope there’s at least one way I can use them for fun...” I murmured. But in any case, I would be learning to use the schtappe at my next practical lesson: schtappe fundamentals. I was seriously looking forward to it.

“I brought your lunch, milady.”

After my meal, Rihyarda reminded me not to leave my room or needlessly walk around. She offered no mercy whatsoever, even though my fever was gone and I had already absorbed my Divine Will.

“If you behave until dinner, I will allow you to eat in the dining hall,” she said as she collected my plates and exited the room.

I watched her leave, then slid out of bed the moment I could confirm she was gone. A whole day without reading was a surefire way to die of boredom, so I stealthily plucked a book from my desk drawer and dove back under the covers.

“It’s reading time. Eheheh...”

Not long after I started to read, Rihyarda returned, having finished putting away the dishes. Her eyebrows shot up in anger the moment she saw me holding a book.

“Milady! I told you to rest today!”

“But I am. This is my way of resting.”

“Good gracious! When it comes to books, you simply never learn! You’re just

as stubborn as Lord Sylvester and Lord Ferdinand!” Rihyarda huffed while snatching the book away. “If you are well enough to read, then you are well enough to talk. You don’t intend to become Aub Ehrenfest, do you?”

I tilted my head in confusion; I was sure someone else had asked me that question just yesterday. “Why do you ask?”

“As the formally adopted daughter of the archducal couple, your claim to the seat of Aub Ehrenfest is equal to that of the other candidates,” Rihyarda explained. “Unlike before when Lord Wilfried was decreed to be Lord Sylvester’s successor, you could now potentially become the archduke yourself, if you so wish. There is no problem with your bloodline either, as Karstedt has the blood of the archduke from two generations ago.”

*Oh boy. There are some serious political problems with my bloodline, I assure you.*

“The archduke seat is best taken by the most powerful candidate,” she continued. “Men are generally preferred over women, as the term suggests, but you have your status as the Saint of Ehrenfest to overcome that. As such, some of your retainers are working under the assumption that you may become the archduchess in the future. I would like to confirm your thoughts on the matter before you are led down this path.”

*Aah. Hartmut must have said something...*

It seemed that Hartmut had been acting in the shadows over the past few days, working toward some mysterious goal. I could imagine he was trying to further accelerate my saint legend.

“I have absolutely no interest in becoming the next Aub Ehrenfest. I intend to focus my efforts on managing a book room while supporting whoever takes the position.”

“That is very much like you,” Rihyarda said with a chuckle, relaxing her shoulders. “As you have no intention of becoming the next aub, milady, I will stop these troublemakers from getting in your way.”

Rihyarda exited the room with a notably serene expression; she would probably block my retainers from trying to push me toward the archduke seat.

Once her footsteps had grown distant, I grabbed a book from another hiding spot and snuck back into bed.

"Milady!"

My plan had been to hide my book under my covers before Rihyarda got back, but I had ended up falling asleep partway through reading it, so she caught me in the act.

*Whoops, whoops.*

Still, I managed to get plenty of rest and woke up feeling completely refreshed. Rihyarda changed my clothes, grumbling that my secret reading time would have been better spent socializing in the dining hall; then together we exited my room.

My two-year slumber meant I was woefully lacking in social connections within my own duchy, to say nothing of within other duchies. I had bonded somewhat with the first-years through the trials and tribulations we had faced passing all our written exams on the first day, but the older students were still pretty much strangers to me. In all honesty, I had barely even spoken with my own retainers.

I climbed into Lessy, my muscles still aching all over, then started making my way to the common room. Angelica accompanied me, having been guarding my door from the outside. It was almost time for dinner, so the students who had been out and about were slowly trickling back into the dormitory and relaxing as they pleased.

"What did you do today, Angelica?" I asked.

"This morning Cornelius, Leonore, and Traugott invited me to practice ditter. Judithe wanted to join us, but she had guard duty, so she wasn't able to take part this time."

We soon reached the second floor where Traugott was waiting for me. We met up, then continued going down the stairs.

"Ditter is a kind of sport, right? How do you play?" I asked. Eckhart had mentioned it a very long time ago, but he had only described it as a game that

apprentice knights often played at the Royal Academy.

“You hunt feybeasts,” Angelica replied, giving me the briefest possible answer.

“Angelica, that really doesn’t explain things...” Traugott said with a grimace, then turned to me to elaborate. “There are many different kinds of ditter. Participants compete by comparing things like the strength and speed of the hunted feybeasts, as well as the total number caught. The victory conditions depend on the type of ditter.”

The largest-scale form of ditter was apparently something called treasure-stealing ditter. Each duchy would have its own group of apprentice knights, and these groups would form bases near their respective dormitory buildings. The aim was for each duchy to hunt and capture a feybeast, which then served as a treasure to be guarded from the other duchies. It was crucial to weaken the feybeast first, but not so much that it turned into a feystone.

Each group would protect its captured feybeast from the attacks of other groups, all the while attempting to take feybeasts from other duchies. Incidentally, it was totally okay to turn opponents’ feybeasts into feystones to make stealing them easier, though direct conflict between groups was not allowed.

“In the past, treasure-stealing ditter was the heart of the Interduchy Tournament, but the overall population has dropped so low that playing is hardly feasible anymore,” Traugott continued. “It’s currently more popular to play the kind of ditter during which teams race to hunt training feybeasts created by the professors.”

“I see. In that case, I look forward to the Interduchy Tournament,” I said.

“I shall train hard to honor your name, Lady Rozemyne.”

It was hard to imagine exactly what the Interduchy Tournament was going to be like, but I was excited for it nonetheless. I still hadn’t seen Angelica and Cornelius fight in their newly powered-up forms.

“With Angelica and Cornelius on our side this year, I think we might do well,” Traugott noted, though despite his words, his voice was dark and he looked

notably frustrated.

“You do not seem very happy about the prospect of us doing well.”

“To speak honestly, I am very jealous. I hope to learn your compression method next year and increase my own mana capacity before I participate again.”

When we arrived at the common room, a bunch of girls—Lieseleta and Brunhilde included—were gathered in a circle. They seemed to be writing something.

“What are you all doing?” I asked, causing them to let out startled shrieks and hurriedly hide the sheet of paper between them all. I tilted my head. “Is it something you do not want me to see?”

Brunhilde shook her head at once, wearing a troubled smile. “No, Lady Rozemyne. We, erm... We just feel a bit uncomfortable about having gotten so festive without you. There is not much more to it than that.”

Lieseleta bobbed her head in agreement, as did the other girls. “Schwartz and Weiss are simply too adorable... We began discussing what fashion of clothing you might prepare for them. Do forgive us for getting ahead of ourselves in your absence.”

“I do not mind in the least. May I see what ideas you came up with?”

I excitedly reached out a hand, at which point Lieseleta passed me the sheet of paper. On it was an impressively well-drawn illustration of Schwartz and Weiss done in black ink. Rather than having the two shumils wear dresses of contrasting colors as they did now, the girls had envisioned dressing one in male clothes.

“It would be ideal for them to have flower hairpins, and if possible, I believe it would look truly excellent if you dressed them as different genders...” Lieseleta said. “Though this is just my opinion, of course.”

I looked over the various illustrations and design ideas. In them, Weiss was dressed in frilly lace, while Schwartz wore a cool, sharp uniform. When it came to the flower hairpins, there were quite detailed descriptions explaining how large they should be, and where they should be placed.

“The skirt of the outfit you wore during this year’s winter feast was exceptionally cute, Lady Rozemyne, so we thought it would be wise to take inspiration from it,” Lieseleta said with sparkling eyes.

She was referring to the bubble skirt I had gotten made to avoid the outfit looking too big for me. At the time, I hadn’t heard much about what others thought about it, but it turned out they saw it as cute and well-made. People were impressed that I was creating new styles for my own clothes, on top of the dress I had designed for Brigitte two years prior.

*The more you know.*

Angelica smiled, amused to see Lieseleta being far more talkative than usual. “Lieseleta has always loved cute things to death,” she said. “She even dresses up our pet shumils at home with clothes that she makes herself.”

“Sister!” Lieseleta exclaimed, unhappily puffing out her cheeks at Angelica’s revelation. She was finally starting to look her age.

“...I will only be able to enter the library once I have passed my classes,” I said. “Lieseleta, if you have finished your written classes by then, I would not mind you coming with me to measure Schwartz and Weiss.”

“Truly, Lady Rozemyne?!”

“It will be much more enjoyable if we all think of designs together. Would anyone else like to join us?” I asked, looking around as Lieseleta broke into a happy smile.

The girls who hadn’t come on our group trip to the library promptly started expressing their interest. “I would like to see Schwartz and Weiss as well,” one said.

“It will certainly be easier to tell what outfits will suit them once we’ve actually measured them ourselves,” added another. “I cannot wait.”

“In that case, I recommend you all finish your written lessons before my practical lessons conclude,” I said. “It is always hard to focus on your studying when there are more exciting matters to tempt you.”

“Indeed! We shall do our best!”

I could feel a smile touch my lips as the girls pumped themselves up, determined to finish their written lessons as soon as possible. Bringing a bunch of people with me would be the best way to protect my cute little Schwartz and Weiss from Hirschur, especially when said people adored the two shumils as well.

*I don't know how to measure large shumils like that myself, and the more people I have to stop Professor Hirschur before she goes on a research-induced rampage, the better. I couldn't handle her on my own. I'm just glad I found so many willing helpers!*

# Dedication Whirl

There were a few first-years who didn't show up for breakfast, but by lunch, we were all gathered together. It seemed that everyone had safely absorbed their Divine Wills into themselves.

"I was starting to worry I wouldn't be done in time for lunch," Wilfried said with a bright grin as we headed with our retainers to dedication whirl practice.

All archduke candidates had dedication whirl practice, while apprentice archknights had sword dance practice. Everyone else would be practicing music. It wasn't feasible for everyone to play the harspiel at once, so they would also be practicing other instruments that resembled flutes and drums, among other things.

"You have sword dance practice as well, right, Angelica? Even though you're an apprentice medknight."

"Right. Professor Rauffen recommended me for it. I'm glad everything worked out, because I'm really bad at music."

When I stealthily asked Cornelius for more details later on, it turned out there had been a good number of reasons for Rauffen's recommendation: Angelica's mana capacity was now great enough to rival those of some archnobles; she had amazing potential, since sword dancing involved so much movement; beautiful young women added even more grace to the dance; and not only did she not care in the least about learning to play an instrument, she didn't get any better no matter how much they tried to force her to play.

"You say that, but have you not had harspiel lessons?"

"Oh, I'd practiced the harspiel since I was little. Plus, when I was a second-year, I practiced so hard to get permission to start raising my manablade that I almost died. I haven't gotten any better since then, but I'm getting by."

It seemed Angelica had argued with her parents over what course she would take in the Academy, and it was only after a great deal of work that they

accepted her as a manablade-wielding knight. Angelica always worked her hardest when she had a goal in mind that she actually wanted to accomplish—something I could very much relate to.

"I see... It's nice that you had a professor to vouch for you."

"Right. Sword dancing is really fun, so I'm glad it worked out too."

I was fine with all that, since Angelica's motivation was a precious thing indeed, but little did I know that Judithe was about to drop a complete bombshell on me.

"Angelica really is on a whole nother level," she said to me, her violet eyes sparkling as she proudly puffed out her chest. "Most archnobles don't even get picked to sword dance, since it's a country-wide thing. If you look at Ehrenfest in particular, you won't find many archnoble graduates who were chosen for it in all of history. It's, like, really crazy and beyond amazing that Angelica got picked despite being a mednoble."

It turned out that sword dancers and dedication whirlers were selected out of all the fifth-years at the end of the semester. Ernesta, one of Charlotte's guard knights, had apparently learned my compression method before starting her fifth year, but she hadn't managed to develop her capacity quickly enough to be chosen. She had more than enough mana by the time she started her final year, which ended up killing her inside.

"I'm just a mednoble myself, and I'm not nearly as strong as Angelica, so I'll never get picked," Judithe continued. "Leonore and Traugott have a chance, though!"

Both Leonore and Traugott were archnobles, so if they learned my mana compression method at the end of winter and developed their mana capacities in time for the selection, there was certainly a chance they would be chosen.

"I wish to learn your compression method so that I might be selected to sword dance, just as Angelica was," Traugott said, his exceptionally blue eyes gleaming with hope.

"I certainly appreciate my guard knights being selected for such an honor," I said. "Please do your best."

“Now then, milady, I advise that both Lord Wilfried and you focus on practice today. Students of all years are going to be gathered here,” Rihyarda said, earning solemn nods from Wilfried and me.

Every archduke candidate regardless of school year was practicing in the same hall, from us first-years to the sixth-years. I was rather nervous, since this was going to be my first time seeing the older students from the other duchies since the fellowship gatherings.

“First-years, please watch the older students carefully; you are to spend the first half of class learning by example,” a professor announced. “You shall whirl yourselves during the second half, which is your opportunity to show us all just how skilled you are.”

The other first-year candidates and I sat in the lined-up chairs provided, then I gazed around the hall as those from each grade whirled together. This was the first practice of the semester, to see how much better everyone had gotten between spring and autumn.

As far as I could tell, the second-years were all of a similar skill level, but this certainly wasn’t the case among the older students. There were several people in particular who caught my eye due to the undeniable grace with which they spun and flicked their wrists while artfully moving their fingers. The sixth-years were the smallest group of all, since their whirlers had already been selected; there were three boys and four girls in total, all dressed in their respective divine colors as they prepared to begin practice. They wore thin veils over their faces, as well as silver sashes. They would apparently wear golden sashes when celebrating their coming of age ceremonies.

*Those designs look a lot like the temple’s ceremonial robes.*

Unlike those ceremonial robes, however, the clothes these students wore were mostly transparent and made of a light enough material that they majestically floated through the air with each spin. There were several incisions running from the waist down to the hem, probably to make the clothes easier to move around in and to ensure they ballooned out as intended.

And so, the sixth-years began their practice. Once the girls had their outfits

on, they spread their arms out and spun, causing their wide sleeves to open up while the hems softly fluttered around them.

As I watched the sixth-years, I noticed there were seven boys and girls waiting nearby without any special clothes on. They were probably the back-up whirlers, judging by the way they were enviously eyeing the twirling dancers.

“I am one who offers prayer and gratitude to the gods who have created the world,” began the familiar prayer. The dancers’ seven voices echoed throughout the hall as they celebrated the end of the harsh winter, hoped for spring to bear new life, thanked the gods for all the protection they had given up until their coming of age ceremonies, and asked for protection moving forward as well.

My eyes widened in surprise. Back in Ehrenfest, my lack of time meant I had only practiced the whirling itself, so this was my first time hearing the prayer at the start. It was so unusual watching a prayer from the bible being spoken by nobles rather than by priests, especially considering that nobles often looked down on the temple. It seemed that the religious leaders of the past had once been equivalent to royalty, but the temple’s reputation must have plummeted at some point across its long history.

“Praise be to the gods!” they declared, raising their arms and their left legs before beginning the dedication whirl.

My whirl instructor back in Ehrenfest had said it was hard to maintain one’s balance in such a pose, but I was used to balancing on one leg from all the praying I had to do, so my focus had simply been on learning the choreography. It hadn’t occurred to me at the time, but now that I was seeing how an actual dedication whirl was performed, I was even more convinced that the temple of the past had been a lot stronger than it was now.

The sleeves of seven differently colored outfits fluttered in time with the dancers’ gentle movements. It was only a practice session, but they were moving with such grace that it reminded me of a traditional Japanese dance.

*Anyway... I see that Prince Anastasius was selected to pray to the God of Darkness. I assume the duchy rankings play a considerable part in who’s chosen for that role*.

As I watched Anastasius whirl, I noticed his dancing was clearly inferior to that of the girl praying to the Goddess of Light. They were supposed to be a pair, praying to the King and Queen gods respectively, but the skill gap was more than noticeable.

*Not that I can blame him; anyone would look bad whirling next to her. It can't be good to show up a prince though.*

The girl praying to the Goddess of Light was completely unrivaled in her dancing ability. Even the smallest details like her finger movements and the direction in which she gazed were refined to perfection, and she was so beautifully elegant I simply couldn't look away.

"Oh my. Hello there, Wilfried."

"Lady Detlinde..."

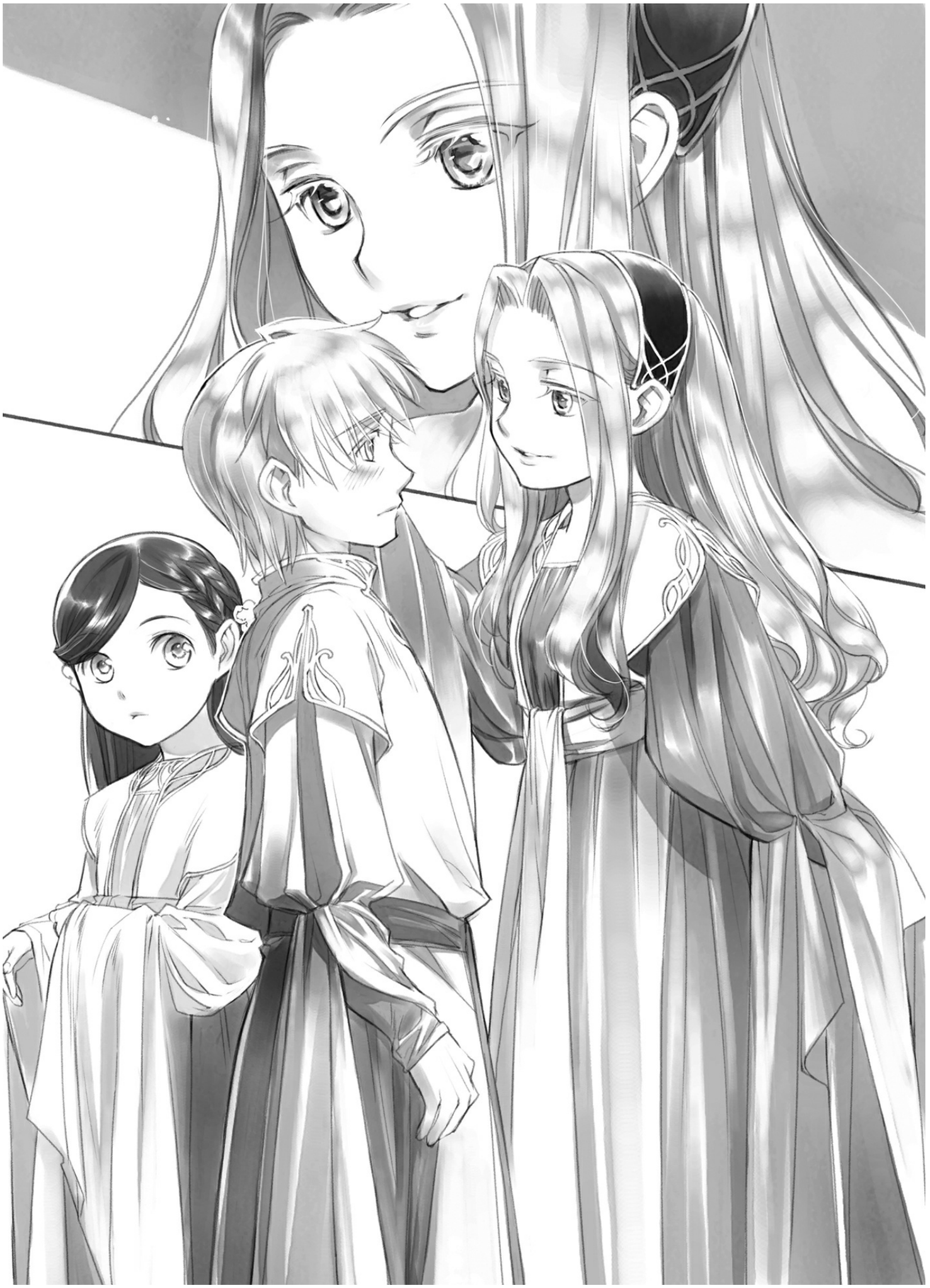
As soon as the older students took a short break, Detlinde—an Ahrensbach archduke candidate—strode over to us with a smile. She brushed back the gorgeous blonde tresses that had settled over her shoulder, looking at Wilfried with eyes that were just as green as his.

"I have heard much about your efforts, Wilfried. Few have ever managed to lead an entire duchy to pass their written classes on the first day. I truly am proud to be your cousin."

"Thank you for your praise, but it was Rozemyne who—"

"My my. There is no point trying to give someone else the credit when everyone already knows the truth. That will only further emphasize your humility."

"No, that's not—" Wilfried began, only to be interrupted as Detlinde reached out her slender, white fingers and stroked his forehead with an amused smile.



“You have done well, Wilfried. You are my pride and joy,” she said with a calming smile; then she tilted her head ever so slightly as Wilfried widened his eyes in shock. “Is something the matter?”

“Erm... No, it’s nothing...” Wilfried replied, lowering his gaze and shaking his head. It was clear from his expression that the touch hadn’t bothered him in the least; in fact, a wistful smile was creeping onto his face.

“Wilfried, oh Wilfried... We are afforded far too few opportunities to meet like this. I want nothing more than for us to settle down and have a nice, thorough talk, as cousins. May I invite you to a tea party?” she asked, shooting me a single glance.

Given that she had explicitly emphasized their relationship as cousins, I could guess that I wasn’t invited, but I wasn’t about to back down here. It was my job to watch over Wilfried, even if doing so made me look socially incompetent.

*You’ll have to forgive me for not wanting to deal with another disinheritance incident...*

“Oh my, a tea party?” I interjected. “Wilfried, isn’t that exciting?”

“My apologies, but I see I must make this clear—you and I are *not* cousins,” Detlinde said, rejecting me flat-out when I pretended not to notice her intentions. It seemed she likewise wasn’t willing to back down.

“I am officially recognized as the daughter of Aub Ehrenfest, am I not?”

“Officially, yes, but this is a personal tea party. Please be a dear and excuse yourself.”

Detlinde and I glared at one another behind false smiles, both hunting for the next move to make. Before I could say anything else, however, an extra-tall Wilfried slid in between us. I say an extra-tall Wilfried because the resemblance truly was uncanny, but it was actually Rudiger from Frenbeltag.

“May I come as well then, Lady Detlinde?” he asked. “I am your cousin too.”

Detlinde fell silent for a few seconds. There was no knowing what had gone through her mind, but a smile returned to her face once more. “Very well, Rudiger. You are indeed my cousin,” she said, then glancing back at me with a

victorious grin. “I am afraid things are what they are, Lady Rozemyne. My apologies, but I must again ask you to excuse yourself.”

With that, Detlinde turned away to begin planning the meeting with the two Wilfrieds. I had wormed my way into the conversation for as long as possible, but there was no getting around the fact I wasn’t a blood relative. She had flatly refused me, so there was nothing I could do from here but trust in Wilfried.

I moved some distance away from the three and started looking around the hall. As everyone chatted and enjoyed their break, only one person continued to practice—the sixth-year girl, clad in the color of the Goddess of Light. Her expression was so lively and pleasant that I found myself enraptured, and I wandered over to sit a safe distance away. I watched for a while, completely absorbed in her dance, until someone called out to me from behind.

“You there. The tiny one from Ehrenfest.”

A stir immediately ran through the hall. It was about as rude of a greeting as one could give, but the person who had spoken had no obligation to be polite. To make matters worse, it was wholly unacceptable to ignore a direct address from a member of royalty. I tore my eyes from the girl, then plastered on the same fake smile I had worn in court etiquette class before turning around.

“I am honored beyond words that you would grace me with your presence, Prince Anastasius.”

“I hear you’ve been up to some pretty interesting stuff. Come here. I want to know more about it.”

I did as instructed, walking over to where Anastasius was, but I hadn’t a clue what he was referring to. I hadn’t done anything particularly interesting as far as I knew, so I had no idea what he had heard, who had told him, or what he thought about it.

“May I ask what rumor has reached your ears, Prince Anastasius?” I asked, kneeling down the moment I reached him. “I must admit, I have no recollection of doing anything considered worthy of your attention.”

Anastasius, who had quite a few female students surrounding him, raised an eyebrow. “Did you not attack Fraularm with some bizarrely shaped highbeast?”

I couldn’t believe my ears. The rumor made me sound like some kind of psycho. I needed to clear things up at once, which meant speaking a little more directly; being vague was as good as confirming it was true.

“I swear to the gods that I have not attacked any professors. It is true, however, that my highbeast is somewhat abnormal compared to most.”

Anastasius narrowed his eyes slightly, quite clearly doubting my words. He thought things over for a moment while looking down at me.

“Hm... How am I supposed to know the truth when some say otherwise? Very well. I will allow you to show me your highbeast. Then I shall determine whether it is dangerous for myself.”

*No, thank you... You’re not even a teacher. I don’t want your judgment.*

I stifled my inner voice and maintained a courteous smile, crossing my arms with a polite, “As you wish.”

“Follow me,” Anastasius said curtly, standing up at once. I was completely flabbergasted. Leaving with him was the last thing I wanted to do. Not only would it make me stand out like nothing else, but I’d also be the only one who got in trouble if we returned late; there was no way the professors were going to yell at the friggin’ prince.

“...Prince Anastasius, may I show you after dedication whirl practice is over? I believe your practice is far more important than my humble highbeast,” I replied. I wanted to pass this subject as quickly as possible, so skipping my first class just wasn’t an option.

Anastasius, seeing that the professors were returning and that break time was almost over, merely shrugged. “Very well, then. Later. Hm... You are tiny, but quite the tactician. You will need better bait than a strange highbeast to entice me.”

“‘Bait’...?”

*Now, I don’t have the best memory in the world, but I’m pretty sure he’s the one who ordered me to show my highbeast. Why is he acting like I made the first move here?*

I wasn't following his logic in the least, but I decided to firmly reject the idea anyway. I couldn't risk being vague in case people started to assume I was a cocky first-year trying to score points with royalty.

"Worry not, Prince Anastasius; I will never make any attempt to entice you or invite you anywhere. I will show you my highbeast, as I have promised, but I swear to never approach you on my own henceforth."

"I... see?"

Anastasius looked positively baffled, but that was better than him having any weird misunderstandings. The older girls surrounding him were still giving me some pretty murderous looks though. I could guess these fine ladies were caught up in a cutthroat battle to be the one to escort the prince during their graduation. It was so intense that they even viewed me with hostility, despite the fact I was far too young to escort him.

*Talk about scary...*

By the time Anastasius had permitted me to leave his presence, the professors were calling for class to resume. Wilfried was waiting for me with a worried expression, so I reported to him that I had promised to show Anastasius my highbeast after practice.

"Don't mess this up, Rozemyne. Seriously. Don't."

Wilfried was looking far more sick and nervous than I was. I attempted to reassure him with a nod, at which point the second half of class began.

"Now then, everyone—it is time to show us how much you have practiced," one of the professors said. Their priority was teaching the sixth-years, so the rest of us were to practice with the others in our duchies. We first-years simply needed to prove that we were above the passing line, then we would be done; the teachers just wanted to see how much work we had put in before we became second-years.

*I'm going to pass this class today, no matter what.*

Everyone lined up and started to whirl just as they had learned in their respective duchies. I thought back to the girl who had been praying to the Goddess of Light and spun more gracefully than I ever had before, trying to

match the delicacy with which she had moved as best I could.

*The library is waiting for me! The library! Oh, the library!*

Pouring my heart and soul into the dedication whirl paid off, as I ultimately managed to pass; the professor had given me a smile and praised my efforts as "very, very good." Now I wouldn't need to practice dedication whirling this year, and this seemed to be the case for all the other first-years as well.

"You are free to come and watch during class hours to learn more. Just watching the older students whirl can be quite an enlightening experience," the professor said, but the library was much higher up on my priority list. I didn't plan to waste any of my time here.

*All that remain now are my highbeast and schtappe classes. I'm almost there! Yes, yes, yes!*

I had already struck an illicit deal with Hirschur to secure a passing grade in highbeast creation, and I doubted I would have any trouble using my schtappe properly, considering how much progress I had made with it while messing around on Earthday.

*Just a tiny bit longer before I can go to the library...*

I was so excited about passing whirling class that I unconsciously headed for the door to return to the dormitory. Thankfully, I only got a few steps before a sick-looking Wilfried grabbed the back of my shirt and angrily whispered into my ear.

"Rozemyne! Are you forgetting your promise to Prince Anastasius?"

"Oh... So I am."

"Are you for real...?" Wilfried murmured, cradling his head. He told me to wait outside the door to the hall with Rihyarda, then swiftly exited; he hadn't received an invitation from the prince, so he wasn't able to stay with me.

*Whew. That was close...*

Breaking out in a cold sweat, I waited outside the door for Anastasius. He finally came out with a bunch of girls surrounding him, looked my way with a smirk, then scoffed. "What, this is where you were waiting? Sorry, but

something more pressing came up. I don't have the time to spare for you."

"Prince Anastasius will be coming with us. Apologies," the girls said with a boastful giggle. I could feel the clear hostility radiating from them, and since I didn't really want to get wrapped up in the battle for the prince's affection, I moved aside for them at once.

"There is absolutely no need to apologize; it is well within my knowledge that members of royalty are quite busy. Now, Rihyarda—shall we return to the dormitory?" I asked, turning to my adult attendant who looked a little more stone-faced than usual. She was probably mad about how rude Anastasius was being to me. "I would like to continue reading the book I started this morning."

Rihyarda nodded, then briskly started walking off. I stayed close behind, but as I dared not look back in fear of making eye contact with the scary girls, I never saw the expression on Anastasius's face.

# Passing Highbeast Creation

I asked to go to the library, since I didn't have any more classes to attend that day, but Rihyarda refused. That much was to be expected, so I dedicated my time to making manuscripts to be printed. I started fixing up the stories that had been written in childish language, which would give us plenty to work with once spring came around.

The next day, I had practical music lessons in the afternoon. The professor had given me a song to learn, which I simply needed to play in order to pass. It was actually one of the songs that Ferdinand had given me to learn in the past, so after practicing just a few times, I played in front of the professor and instantly got a passing grade.

The professor gave an approving nod. "You have learned songs other than the ones you composed yourself, I see."

"I simply practice as my personal musician instructs."

"Well, I very much hope you are bringing this musician with you to the tea party. I am ever so looking forward to it."

"I am as well. Being invited to a tea party by a professor is such an honor that my musician and I have hardly been able to sleep."

"Oh my, what an exaggeration..."

When our conversation was over, the lesson came to an end. Believe it or not, my statement hadn't been a complete exaggeration. Rosina had actually been losing sleep lately, though not due to stress—she was dedicating her time to arranging the songs and writing up lyrics to accompany them. She was genuinely excited for the tea party, so much so that the enthusiastic smile on her face hadn't so much as faltered in days.

"You learned that pretty fast, Rozemyne," Wilfried said. He was faced with a song that he hadn't played before, and he seemed to be struggling with it. He stared down the sheet of music while putting his all into his practice.

I sat down in my seat and merely shrugged in response, having already seized victory at the very first opportunity.

“You can play any song without much effort,” Wilfried continued. “You must have a natural talent for the harspiel.”

“Not true. Ferdinand just kept giving me harder and harder songs to learn. I even practiced this particular song right after my debut.”

“After your debut?” he asked in surprise. Naturally, the song he had played back then was one suited for children of debuting age, not one usually given to a ten-year-old. He frowned, realizing that this gap between us had existed even that long ago.

“If you wish to become a master harspiel player as well, might I suggest taking Ferdinand’s lessons with me?” I suggested. “He gives me five or six songs to learn each season, though since I never know when he might ask me to play them, I need to work my fingers to the bone with Rosina to master them as soon as possible.”

I thought back to how Ferdinand would tell me to bring my harspiel at a seemingly random point toward the end of each season. My heart had pounded nervously in my chest with each practice session. Not meeting his expectations would earn me a drawn-out scolding about how I hadn’t worked hard enough, then he’d go on to list every single way in which I had messed up. When I passed, he would simply give me far more difficult songs to learn before kicking me out, thus starting the cycle all over again.

Upon hearing my explanation, Wilfried closed his eyes in disbelief, then shook his head. “You’re the only one who can easily keep up with Uncle’s demands and expectations, Rozemyne. Mana and magic tools are about my limit; I don’t want to learn music under him too. I’m fine with things the way they are.”

“Just to clarify, I wouldn’t say I’m *easily* keeping up with them...”

Another day passed, and I was speedily working my way through making the study guides and such for the second-years. The process thankfully didn’t take much time, since I was just organizing Eckhart’s and Ferdinand’s notes, the study documents those who went to the library had borrowed for me, and the

information that had already been gathered for me the year before.

“Now that I look at them properly, quite a few classes have changed considerably since Ferdinand and Eckhart were here,” I observed. It hadn’t really hit me before then, since I had only looked at the notes for classes in the apprentice knight course when working as part of the Raise Angelica’s Grades Squadron, but it was a lot more apparent now that I was looking at the notes for the first-and second-year classes.

Philine gave a small shrug as I compared the documents everyone had put together. “The majority of the professors were changed after the civil war, so it is only natural that the course material would change as well,” she said.

It turned out that most professors had assistants, and when a professor died or retired, these assistants would take their places and teach in a similar fashion. This system was completely upturned, however, by the mass purging that followed the civil war; since most professors and their assistants belonged to the same faction, they were all relieved of duty. There were some instances of classes being changed entirely as a result.

“Why couldn’t the new teachers just check the study documents in the library to see what was covered in previous years...?” I pondered.

“The professors have their pride as researchers to consider. They were probably looking to distinguish themselves from the professors who had just gotten fired,” Wilfried interjected while looking over the documents himself. I certainly understood that, but I would have much preferred them to prioritize the learning of their students.

“Doesn’t that mean the older study guides won’t be useful in the slightest?” I asked. There was nothing more annoying for a student like me trying to pass on the first day having to root through old study guides and resources that were completely outdated. I pursed my lips, annoyed that my time in the library was getting delayed once again.

Philine giggled. “Will it soothe your frustrations to think that your study resources covering the new lessons will soon refill the library, Lady Rozemyne?”

“...You are a wise one, Philine. I must admit, now I feel ever so slightly grateful for the war.”

“It all depends on perspective,” Wilfried agreed with a nod.

“In any case, we have almost finished putting together our study resources. What will you do when we are done, Philine?” I asked.

“A tea party is planned for all the laynobles who wish to become apprentice scholars.”

It seemed that, once the study resources were done, Philine would be putting her time into associating with laynobles from other duchies. She mentioned that she wanted to make at least some headway with entering society so that she could find more valuable information for me.

“I am still nervous about joining a tea party with older students, so we thought we would first practice with each other,” she continued. “So, erm... is there anything in particular I should or should not bring up during the tea party?”

“A tea party, hm? I suppose that is something I should consider doing myself...”

Wilfried nodded. “Yeah, and I’ve got that tea party with my cousins. We should get the older students together and discuss what we should and shouldn’t reveal at these kinds of gatherings,” he suggested.

As we thought it over, Hartmut decided to give us some advice. He had passed his class that morning and was visiting the common room to kill some time.

“You should know, Philine, they’re absolutely going to ask you about Ehrenfest’s rising grades. I’m not even a first-year and people are asking me all kinds of questions.”

The efforts of the Better Grades Committee had ultimately paid off, and with students of all years easily passing their written lessons, plus all our first-years having passed our written lessons on the first day, Ehrenfest had apparently become a hot topic of conversation throughout the Academy.

“Lord Wilfried is standing out due to his excellent grades, but you are garnering a reputation for many more reasons, Lady Rozemyne,” Hartmut continued.

“Oh yes, I certainly am. I was the last one to pass my mana control class because I turned so many feystones to dust; I apparently attacked a professor with a feybeast-shaped highbeast; and I collapsed in the Farthest Hall. Truly I am making an excellent impression,” I said, glum about having stood out in all the worst ways. “What do you say when they ask about Ehrenfest, anyway?”

“I tell them that our grades are rising thanks to the Saint of Ehrenfest, and that next year will come as even more of a surprise.”

“Hartmut?!”

“Is that not the truth? The Better Grades Committee was your idea, Lady Rozemyne, and the first-years passing all their classes was a result of your passion for the library. Those who have learned your mana compression method will show excellent results in their practical lessons next year, and so I have not lied whatsoever. You seem to be unaware, Lady Rozemyne, but you are not standing out in exclusively unfavorable ways; in fact, your reputation has made you quite enviable as well, with many being well aware that you created original compositions, passed your written lessons with almost perfect marks, and passed court etiquette in a single try.”

Hartmut gave a bright smile, then turned to Philine and continued. “There is no need to inform those from other duchies of the details. Keep the information you disclose vague, but under no circumstances are you to lie. You must first earn the trust of your enemies before you can deceive and betray them.”

“I understand,” Philine said with a nod, looking at Hartmut with a gaze that made her respect for him all too clear.

“Oh my goodness...” I said, having had a sudden epiphany. “It’s your fault, Hartmut. You’re the reason all the rumors about me are getting exaggerated in weird ways!”

“Lady Rozemyne, that is a misunderstanding... I am not the only one to blame; everyone from our duchy is working together to spread the glory of the Saint of Ehrenfest.”

“That’s even worse! At the very least, dedicate that energy to elevating Wilfried, since he’s likely to become the next archduke. I’m just a humble,

everyday student planning to spend most of my time in the library," I protested.

Much to my displeasure, Hartmut, as well as everyone else in the common room, said it was already much too late for that. "In the first place, Lady Rozemyne, it will not be good for Lord Wilfried to grow accustomed to receiving credit for your actions."

"Right. I want to do what I can on my own," Wilfried said.

I had no choice but to agree with them, and it was beyond me to realize that my doing so would cause the legend of the Saint of Ehrenfest to accelerate even further.

We had our practical highbeast creation lesson in the afternoon. Our previous lesson had been cut short when Professor Fraularm, the dormitory supervisor for Ahrensbach, passed out upon seeing my highbeast, and she was evidently mad enough about it to claim that I had attacked her.

*I don't really care about her holding a grudge, but I don't want her to keep me from passing out of spite...*

I was sure there was nothing to worry about thanks to my illicit deal with Hirschur, but from what I knew about her, there was always a chance she might forget about it entirely and not come to the class. She seemed to be the kind of person to forget promises when absorbed in her research, and it was hard to trust someone who seemed to be even more of a mad scientist than Ferdinand.

In the end, however, my fears were unfounded. Hirschur came to the class, along with many other professors whom I didn't recognize.

"Oh my. Professors. What brings you all here today?" Fraularm asked.

"Do you not remember? Your passing out last time interrupted my brewing. I would not like for that to happen again, and so I have decided to observe today's lesson in its entirety," Hirschur said with a chuckle, a noticeable glint in her purple eyes. "Incidentally, I will not bear a grudge for the materials wasted in that failure. As long as you pay for them, that is."

"W-Well... I advise you seek recompense from the dangerous student who attacked me with her feybeast."

“I wanted to question that, actually. As far as I can tell, the highbeast was not one particularly suited to attacking others. Are you not just exaggerating the incident to avoid accepting blame?”

“Wh-What was that?!” Fraularm stood up abruptly, only for a sharp-eyed older man to step between them, the smile plastered across his face being the only peaceful thing about him.

“I cannot speak for all this exaggeration business, but with rumors of a student attacking a professor with a feybeast-shaped highbeast going around, it would be better for everyone to have other professors observe your class. It should prove whether or not what you have said is the truth,” the older man said, using security and confirmations to justify his and the other professors’ attendance.

Fraularm had no choice but to accept, since she was the one spreading rumors about me being unsafe in the first place. “Very well. You can all see for yourselves how dangerous her highbeast is,” she said, speaking in a tone befitting a sore loser before moving to stand at the center of all the students and instructing us to take out our highbeast feystones.

The other professors wasted no time in positioning themselves around me, seeming to be preparing for the worst. I bemoaned their lack of trust in me, which only made Hirschur break into a smile.

“Lady Rozemyne, everyone here is interested in your highbeast. They are all passionate researchers with enough interest in new things to have warranted me calling upon them,” she explained.

In other words, they weren’t actually on guard—they were looking at me with the intrigued looks one would give a research subject. I decided it was probably best for me to obediently show them Lessy and put on a show to prove he wasn’t dangerous.

*I can endure it for the sake of a passing grade...*

According to Hirschur, the professors who had seen my Pandabus after I collapsed in the Farthest Hall had told the others that it was very unusual, and that its clunky movements were very unlike those of a grun. This had caught the interest of several other teachers.

“I would also like to get a closer look at you making your drivable highbeast,” Hirschur continued, holding a feystone for her own purposes. It seemed she was preparing to make a drivable highbeast herself.

“Those of you who can form highbeasts, do so now,” Fraularm instructed. The gathered professors urged me on as I begrudgingly created my one-person Pandabus.

“Oho. I see... It has something of a flat face, but this certainly is a grun,” one said.

“There’s a seat, but how in the world does one get inside?” asked another. The professors had closed in on Lessy almost immediately to touch and examine him, so I hadn’t been able to take a step forward myself.

“Lady Rozemyne, you mentioned that you can change the size of your highbeast, correct?” Hirschur asked.

I grew Lessy into the size of a large family van, and no sooner had I opened a door than Hirschur gleefully climbed inside and started touching the inner walls. She had done exactly the same thing the last time she saw my Pandabus, so she acted without an ounce of hesitation.

“Aha, I see. So this is how you ride it,” one of the professors said. There was no mistaking that they were researchers who loved discovering new things, and they all went into Lessy one after another to look around.

“Lady Rozemyne, what is this? How does it move?” one asked.

“Aah. This is quite comfortable...” a second professor sighed.

The nearby students watched in a daze as the professors, who were supposed to be here to determine whether my feybeast-shaped highbeast posed a threat of any kind, instead examined it with excitement.

“Look, everyone! Professor Hirschur can ride it even while wearing a skirt!” one of the girls exclaimed.

“Now that you mention it, I did hear that one could ride such a highbeast without changing into riding clothes...” another murmured.

“Such a highbeast would actually be cute if made as a shumil,” said a third.

The female students were starting to approach as they talked, their interest having clearly been caught. Everyone said that the Pandabus looked like a grun, but the first-years who weren't familiar with such feybeasts didn't seem to find it scary in the slightest.

"Watch yourselves! That thing is abnormal and dangerous!" Fraularm shrieked desperately, but everyone could clearly tell from the other professors' complete lack of concern that nothing dangerous was going to happen.

"I believe I shall use Lady Rozemyne's highbeast as a reference and make one of my own," Hirschur announced. "I have always thought it would be convenient to have a highbeast for carrying around tools and materials."

"Professor Hirschur, is making a new highbeast really that easy?" I asked. "My guard knights have led me to believe it would be impossible to handle two."

"It might be a challenge for knights, considering that they need to make split-second decisions, but if one has ample time to think, it is quite easy to change the focus of one's mind. Furthermore, making another highbeast is no problem for me, since I am quite fine abandoning my original one."

Hirschur took her feystone in hand and started making her new highbeast, all the while focusing her eyes on my Pandabus. Perhaps due to how much she was used to controlling her mana, she was able to complete the process with surprising speed and noticeable ease.

"Wooow!" A cheer arose from the students as Hirschur finished making her highbeast. Beside Lessy there was now a one-person highbeast with the head of a shumil. It had reins in the place of a steering wheel, and there was only one seat, indicating that she didn't plan on having other people ride with her. There was, however, a considerable amount of space in the back for luggage. It truly was a highbeast made just for her.

Hirschur flicked her wrist, and much like with Lessy, a door opened in the side of the highbeast. She climbed inside, still wearing her skirt, then sat down in a seat that looked very similar to mine, gripped the reins, and started pouring mana into the shumil. Soon enough, it started to move around, then soared above the hall with very little effort. This meant she was already able to perfectly visualize something flying without wings.

*Wowee... She might be even more open to new ideas than Ferdinand. Talk about being open-minded.*

"It seems that reins can control it just fine," Hirschur commented, climbing out of her shumil highbeast with an exceptionally content smile. "It moves and flies just like my previous highbeast, and given that I can leisurely relax in the chair, it feels even more graceful than riding a normal highbeast."

"Professor Hirschur, could you teach us to make a highbeast like that too?" one female student asked.

"I would like to know as well," added a second.

The girls all wanted to copy Hirschur's highbeast, since shumils were considered much more acceptable, and the students were more familiar with using reins. She was a star among the girls in an instant, but nobody came to look at my Pandabus.

"Lessy is cute too...!" I protested.

"That's where you're mistaken, little one. He is certainly interesting though," the older man said, perhaps trying to comfort me. He then went to leave the class with the others, saying that his time here had been quite productive indeed.

"All those who have created their highbeast shall pass upon flying it once in a circle above the Academy," Hirschur announced, proactively striding outside. It was getting more and more cramped in the hall due to all the highbeasts, so the students who were already confident in their riding ability turned their highbeasts back into feystones and followed after her.

The moment the cold outside air hit me, my body tensed up so much that I could practically feel myself shrinking. I hurriedly brought out and climbed into Lessy, then gripped on to the steering wheel. My highbeast was a lot warmer inside, since the walls blocked the icy winds.

*On the bright side, the Royal Academy isn't quite as cold as Ehrenfest.*

It was still cold since it was winter, but Ehrenfest was even colder, and the snow there was much worse. It was this slight change in climate that reminded me I wasn't in Ehrenfest anymore; I was at the center of the country, far away

from home.

"Shall we go?" Hirschur asked. She took the lead, going up into the air in her shumil while I stayed close behind. Fraularm had remained indoors to aid those who were still struggling to create their highbeasts.

We lined up our highbeasts in the air and then flew over the Royal Academy, which was my first time seeing the entire grounds. Before this point, I had simply teleported inside and then used the dormitory entrance to go straight into the hallway by the auditorium; not once had I gotten a look of the Academy exterior or the dormitory from the outside.

The Royal Academy was located atop a sizable hill, the slopes of which were covered with thick conifer forests on all sides. The trees were evergreen, meaning they kept their leaves even in winter, and the coating of snow that topped them made the entire world appear white. The grounds themselves were so sprawling that they actually took me by surprise.

Directly beneath us was the massive primary building of the Academy, surrounded by ivory buildings placed on top of smaller hills nearby. The ivory structures dotting the forest were probably the dormitory buildings; I saw several as we circled the grounds, but in all honesty, I couldn't tell which belonged to Ehrenfest. Rihyarda had been right when she said that each dorm was built in a unique architectural style, though, and it was fascinating to see all the variety.

*Let's see... Are there any buildings here that look like Ehrenfest's castle? I guess it'd be that one over there. Or maybe that one.*

Not only was the Royal Academy surrounded by slopes and thick forests, the area around was covered with a sea of clouds that hid everything beneath it. Maybe I would have seen more had the weather been better, but as far as I could tell from my aerial view, the only things here were the dormitories and the Academy itself. At the very least, I didn't see any commoner cities attached to it like the lower city in Ehrenfest, nor did I see any crop-covered fields. It was entirely as though the Academy was just a massive temple.

Perhaps this was where the gods had descended upon the country and given the king the power to rule over the people, as described in the bible. This

thought ran through my mind as I gazed across the Academy's grounds. When covered with such a delicate blanket of snow like this, it was certainly a fantastical enough location for the gods to descend and make their presence known.

"All of you pass highbeast creation," Hirschur announced, signaling my completion of yet another class. Thanks to her, drivable highbeasts became a popular trend among the female students throughout the Academy.

# Schtappe Fundamentals

There were still a number of days left before it was time for my schtappe usage lesson, so I spent the time making picture book manuscripts and studying for my upcoming second year. Once I mastered using my schtappe, there would be no more barriers between me and the library, so I was practically counting down the days until class began.

One girl sighed. “It is only at times like this that I find your talents vexatious, Lady Rozemyne.”

The girls were all studying blisteringly hard to pass their written lessons, eager to accompany me to the library for Schwartz and Weiss’s measuring session. Brunhilde was being especially industrious, as she also wanted to schedule the tea party with the music professors as soon as possible.

“Lady Rozemyne, you do not need to rush passing your lessons,” another girl added.

“At this rate, we may not be able to attend when Schwartz and Weiss are measured,” noted a third.

The girls were working with the same fervent, desperate expressions the first-years had worn when aiming to pass all their written classes in one go. It seemed their passion was at least somewhat contagious, as the boys who still had written lessons left were putting their all into studying as well. I gazed around the common room with a smile, then shook my head at all the pleading eyes; I had already waited long enough.

“I will pass my schtappe lesson as soon as possible and then go straight to the library,” I declared. “Far from slowing down, I would rather the class begin right away, so that I may be done with it immediately!”

Hartmut chuckled. “Learning how to use your schtappe is not so easy, Lady Rozemyne; laynobles have to spend almost the entire semester learning to use theirs. Even archduke candidates struggle to pass on their first day. I’m afraid

you will simply need to give up on this one."

His doubts only made me want to pass even more. "I will do everything in my power to ensure that I pass," I replied. "No effort will be spared in my struggle to reach the library."

"Indeed, Hartmut," Brunhilde added coolly as she continued focusing on her studies. "There is nothing that can stop Lady Rozemyne's surge toward the library. If she intends to pass right away, then we as her retainers must assume it will happen. I am already struggling to plan the upcoming tea party, considering her desperation to do nothing but hole up in the library."

It seemed that Brunhilde had made much progress herself—she only had one more class to finish before she had passed them all.

"I see. So are you saying Lady Rozemyne will hold nothing back for the sake of the library? That she will throw her absolute all into this endeavor?"

"Exactly."

"In that case, I look forward to witnessing you give rise to a new legend, Lady Rozemyne."

*Urk... Do I really have to choose between gaining access to the library and avoiding a new legend...? This is rough... I really don't want to stand out any more than I do already—after all, obscurity is essential to a quiet, peaceful life. Then again, I won't truly be at peace until the library is mine to explore. What should I do? This truly is a philosophical dilemma for the ages...*

*Or is it...? Could I ever pick anything other than the library?*

No. No, I could not.

"Lady Rozemyne, if you wish not to stand out, we suggest you hold off on immediately passing at least one of your classes," my retainers noted as I exited the dormitory to go to my schtappe class.

Wilfried and I gathered in the usual hall along with the archnobles and such. Hirschur and Rauffen entered soon after; they were evidently our professors for the day.

“Schtappes can only be used by nobles,” Rauffen began, clenching one hand into a determined fist. “If you don’t have a schtappe, you’re not a noble.”

To be recognized as a noble, one needed to possess enough mana to recover their Divine Will. The mana measuring done at baptisms was for this purpose.

A schtappe was apparently one of the things that the first-ever king had been given by the gods. He had up to that point possessed more mana than he could ever use, and the schtappe he was granted allowed him to freely use it all... or so the bible said, anyway. I wasn’t sure whether everything in the bible was completely true, but after all my experiences in this world, I imagined something similar had actually happened. There was surely some base for the legend to have been formed upon.

“We shall begin by forming the schtappe,” Hirschur said. “Everyone, please create a schtappe in a form that you find easy to use. Once you have done so, please come to me. We will ask you to create and dispel the schtappe three times in quick succession, to confirm that you are comfortable with the technique.”

“Right. I’m gonna make an amazing schtappe,” Wilfried said.

Everyone probably had the same idea; they started forming their schtappes, focusing on the shape and size. The archduke candidates were used to controlling their mana, so they were putting their absolute all into producing magnificent creations worthy of their status. The archnobles, on the other hand, were less used to controlling their mana. Most were struggling to create a schtappe at all.

“Mine’s going to look so cool. What’re you gonna make, Rozemyne?” Wilfried asked, his dark-green eyes sparkling with excitement as he glanced my way. Little did he know, I had already spent an entire day playing around with my schtappe before eventually coming to the conclusion that simple is best.

“I intend to make a simple schtappe like the one most adults use,” I replied.

“Aw, what? That’s so boring though. Why not put a little more effort into it? Your highbeast is already weird enough, so nobody’s going to be surprised if your schtappe is weird too.”

Lessy wasn't weird—his focus on practicality simply meant he was a little different from other highbeasts. It wasn't as though I had deliberately made him unique, either; standing out for the sake of standing out wasn't important to me.

"Highbeasts I can understand, but I don't see the need to obsess over schtappes too much," I explained. *You can just keep messing around with yours until you realize I'm right*, I silently added as I walked over to Hirschur.

"Oh my. Lady Rozemyne," the professor said. "How can I help?"

"I can make my schtappe. Can I do the test now?"

"...You practiced on your own, didn't you?" she asked, looking at me like I was some kind of problem child before encouraging me to demonstrate.

I worked my mana and made a schtappe of the same shape and size three times in quick succession. Hirschur blinked in surprise, then sighed.

"You have excellent control of your schtappe; there should be no issue with you moving forward to the next step. You will now need to use your schtappe to fill a magic tool with mana. Rauffen, are the feystones ready?"

"Yep. All ready," Rauffen replied, patting a bag on his hip. Hirschur watched as he started walking over to the side of the hall, away from the other students.

"Lady Rozemyne, you will follow Rauffen and learn to make an ordonnanz. Attempt to have it fly over to me," she said. I nodded in response, spurring her to lean forward with a grin. "Ordonnanzes are used in this introductory class because they can be created from the smallest drop of mana," she added in a hushed voice. "Do try to restrain yourself."

"Okay."

I had previously learned for my magecraft test that the feystones used for making ordonnanzes were no normal feystones—they were specially crafted for a specific and limited purpose. Everyone called them feystones because they looked very similar, but in reality, they were a kind of magic tool.

Green feystones were likewise crafted for a particular purpose, and they were oft used in daily life. Attendants in particular found them useful, since they

allowed for a source of water to be linked with a pitcher. The feystone embedded in the bottom of the pitcher could be activated with a tap of one's schtappe, causing water to endlessly flow from inside. These feystones were primarily used to fill tubs with water for baths.

When I caught up with Rauffen, he gave me an all-too-familiar yellow feystone. I looked it over while he explained what to do.

"You'll struggle to communicate with people if you don't learn how to make ordonnanzes right. This is something everyone in every course will use, so if you don't master it, you won't even be able to take on apprentice work. Got that?"

"Yes."

"I can't hear you!"

"YES!" I replied more forcefully, earning me a grin and an approving nod. I was getting a little worried about how much longer I could keep up with Rauffen's passionate teaching style; having enough mana for the task wouldn't matter if I ended up dying from exhaustion before it even began.

"First, lightly tap the feystone with your schtappe while pouring mana into it," he explained, demonstrating the process. I placed the feystone on the palm of my left hand, then whipped out my schtappe with my right. Keeping Hirschur's warning in mind, I made sure to pour in as little mana as possible.

*Ooh... Wow.*

As it turned out, schtappes did indeed allow one to use their mana more efficiently. While using my mana had previously felt like water pouring from a bucket, it was now like a water faucet I could adjust at will. I tapped the yellow feystone lightly, then watched in wide-eyed amazement as it turned into a familiar white bird. It spread its wings, then dug into my arm and folded them back down. It was practically weightless.

*Wowee. Now I'm really like a wizard.*

I could summon a tool for better controlling my mana at will, then tap a yellow stone to turn it into a white bird. At some point, I had turned into a fully-fledged denizen of fantasy.

“Oh, not bad!” Rauffen exclaimed. “Now, once the ordonnanz opens its mouth, put your voice into it.”

The ordonnanz promptly opened its mouth, so I spoke my message. “This is Rozemyne. Professor Hirschur, I’ve finished making the ordonnanz,” I said. When I fell silent, the bird closed its mouth.

I was about to move my schtappe to send the ordonnanz off to Hirschur, but Rauffen stopped me. He then swung his own schtappe like a conductor’s baton.

“If you have anything else to say, tap the ordonnanz’s beak with your schtappe again and it’ll open,” he noted.

*The more you know...*

I nodded, intrigued, and tried tapping the ordonnanz on its beak. Just as Rauffen had said, it opened its mouth again.

“How do you make the ordonnanz close it?”

“All you have to do is speak. See?” he said, gesturing toward the ordonnanz that had now closed its mouth again.

“Wait, what? H-How do I erase the message?!” I yelped. I didn’t want my first ordonnanz to carry such a dumb exchange.

Rauffen laughed, then explained that I simply needed to suck the mana from the ordonnanz with my schtappe and return it to its feystone form. I did just that, then re-recorded my message.

“Once you’ve said your piece, picture the ordonnanz flying to Hirschur, then swing your schtappe while pushing out your mana. And put some real oomph into it!” Rauffen declared. Given how much mana I had though, I felt that wantonly giving it my all wasn’t a good idea—especially considering that I was only sending the ordonnanz to Hirschur a short distance away.

I swung my schtappe, ever so gently sending out some mana, then watched as the ordonnanz flew over to Hirschur. It repeated its message three times, just as I was used to, before returning with a message for me.

“Well done,” the ordonnanz said in Hirschur’s voice. “You may now move on to the next step.” It repeated this thrice before returning to the form of a

yellow feystone, which I then handed to Rauffen.



“What are we doing next?” I asked.

“Shooting mana out of your schtappe,” Rauffen explained. “This’ll allow you to use simple mana attacks, but for now, you’ll be focusing on shooting up a rott—a red light used to call for aid. Once you’ve learned this, you’ll be able to request help whenever something happens. Knights will come rushing to your position in an instant.”

With that, Rauffen took out his own schtappe and started to demonstrate. “Build up the mana in the tip of your schtappe like this, then push it right outta your body,” he said. A fist-sized ball of light started to form at the tip of his schtappe, crackling and sparking like electricity.

“*Rott*!” he suddenly yelled. Just as he swung his schtappe high into the air, a beam of red light shot up and collided with the ceiling before fading away. Despite the impact, it didn’t appear to leave any marks behind. “Mana can’t damage buildings made with creation magic, and a rott will never pierce through one. You can go all out and use as much force as you want.”

“Going all out is fine with me, but before I do—is this the last part of the lesson?” I asked. I didn’t want to expend all of my mana and then have nothing left for the rest of the class.

Rauffen did a double take, then blinked at me in surprise. “There’s still another part. What, are you planning to finish the whole class in one day?”

“Yes. Is there a problem with that?”

“Er... I was just thinking that you might wanna save some of your mana.”

“I’ll hold back when casting rott, then. Is that acceptable?”

“Y-Yeah. I, er... Yeah. Go all out, but don’t put your all into it.”

*I don’t think that makes much sense... Can you really call it “going all out” if you’re not putting your all into it?*

The main thing I was learning in class today was the importance of ignoring Rauffen and instead preserving my mana. I started to build up some mana in the tip of my schtappe, and soon enough, a fist-sized ball was sitting at the end. It was steadily growing in size as more mana gathered there.

“Right! Perfect! That’s what I’m talking about! Now make it even bigger! Keep on pouring mana into your schtappe!” Rauffen yelled. I made sure to put my newfound knowledge to use and ignore him.

*This schtappe really is something else, huh?*

People hadn’t been exaggerating when they said it was by far the most efficient tool for controlling one’s mana. Using my mana precisely hadn’t been easy due to how unstable it was, but now I could manipulate it as easily as I had been able to before sleeping in the jureve.

“Now, let it out!” Rauffen roared. “Scream ‘rott’ and blast your mana up into the sky as hard as you can!”

*I think you mean “into the ceiling”...*

I raised my right hand into the air, then pointed the schtappe up with a calmly stated “*Rott*.” It seemed that I had managed my mana rather well, as a beam of red light shot directly up to the ceiling. I sighed in relief, glad to have finished the task without issue.

“Alright. You pass. That said... Are you sure you’re not running out of mana by now?” Rauffen asked, his concern clear on his face as he glanced around the room.

I followed his gaze and noticed that the archnobles were already exhausted just from having used their mana to make schtappes. They weren’t the only ones either; the archduke candidates who had been focused on making the coolest schtappes had wasted a ton of mana and were now sitting on the floor in exhaustion. Wilfried must have put an especially great deal of effort into his —he looked absolutely drained, having not moved even an inch since I spoke to him last.

It seemed the only students who were now working on the ordonnanz step were those who hadn’t tried to make excessively unique schtappes. Even they seemed pretty tired though; some had to stop before they could finish, while others dropped down to the floor moments after transforming the feystone.

*Okay... My mana capacity really is abnormal, huh?*

I closed my eyes to check how much mana I had left and found that there was

still plenty in me.

“So? Think you can handle the next step?” Rauffen asked.

Two choices flashed through my mind: I could pretend to be exhausted to avoid standing out, or I could embrace looking abnormal to all those around me for the sake of the library. I was ashamed to have even debated my next move.

“Yeah. I can handle it.”

Rauffen looked at me in momentary surprise, then he gave a firm nod. “Alright! Being able to push your limits is an important life skill. Let’s do this!” he declared, his eyes blazing with passion. “This is the last part. You need to change your schtappe into a usable mana-filled tool.”

I was immediately reminded of the knights turning their schtappes into weapons during combat, but first-years apparently only needed to turn theirs into knives, pens, or mixing sticks. I nodded with interest as I continued to listen, then I noticed that Hirschur was coming our way. It seemed that all the students who had come to her had since given up.

Hirschur looked around at all the exhausted students before making an announcement. “It is exceptionally important that you practice morphing your schtappes. You will learn the fundamentals of magic tool brewing next year, and if you are unable to create a knife, pen, and mixing stick by then, your ability to brew will be significantly diminished.”

Crafting magic tools was her specialty as a professor, and upon hearing her message, all the students tightened their expressions. It seemed that the process of making magic tools included cutting the ingredients with a knife, drawing a magic circle with a pen, then mixing everything together with mana in a cauldron using a mixing stick. I had already made a jureve under Ferdinand’s direction, however, so I knew it was possible to brew without a schtappe by using magic tools.

“How do you morph a schtappe?” I asked.

“First, begin by trying to make a knife,” Hirschur instructed. “Take your schtappe, and clearly visualize what you want to morph it into.”

I did as she instructed and took out my schtappe, then visualized the knife

Ferdinand had used while brewing. Hirschur said “messer” aloud, so I promptly followed suit. I watched as the schtappe morphed into a knife in my hand; then I looked at Hirschur, who was holding a very similar-looking knife as well.

“Very well done. Now say ‘rucken’ to revert its shape.”

I did as instructed, and just as expected, the knife turned back into a regular schtappe. Those around me let out awed noises.

“Now repeat that process, but this time focus on making a pen and then a stirring stick,” Hirschur said. I ultimately had to say “stylo” to turn my schtappe into a pen, then “beimen” to turn it into a mixing stick.

“I never expected you to pass all the tasks on your first day... Ferdinand was the last person to have actually achieved such a feat. I suppose I should have expected nothing less from his prized disciple,” Hirschur said with an exasperated sigh.

The other students exchanged looks of complete astonishment; then they began to whisper among themselves.

“Lord Ferdinand from Ehrenfest... Does she mean *that* Lord Ferdinand...?” one asked.

“Yeah. He was a famous treasure-stealing ditter player, you know. I hear his tactics were insane. Apparently our duchy only ever lost during the years he was here. The adults say we’re lucky we won’t have to deal with him,” another replied.

“Nah, he was good at more than just ditter. I’m pretty sure he was the genius who invented magic tool after magic tool. I know this because my uncle bought loads from him,” a third chimed in, encouraging the others to bring up yet more rumors.

“Hold on, wasn’t Lord Ferdinand the battle maniac who slaughtered countless feybeasts for their materials? I heard that he demolished the high-quality stuff in the Royal Academy and then took everything left with him.”

“You guys must be nuts. My aunt said he was a harspiel player, and an amazing one at that.”

“Well, which one’s right?!”

*All of them, probably... I heard he was an archduke candidate, an apprentice knight, and an apprentice scholar, with excellent marks in every course.*

I couldn’t help but blink in surprise as students from other duchies all shared stories about Ferdinand’s impressive feats at the Academy. It seemed his superhuman reputation wasn’t unfounded after all.

“Makes sense that Ehrenfest’s grades are shooting up if they have his disciple here as an archduke candidate,” one student noted. “I heard that Lord Ferdinand did multiple courses while he was here, and he got the highest grades in every single one of them.”

Everyone was now sharing all the legends they knew about Ferdinand, but there were so many covering such a wide range of achievements that I had to imagine some were being misattributed. Either way, it wasn’t long before people stopped paying any attention to me at all.

*Whew. It looks like Ferdinand was so freakishly abnormal that I’m standing out less in comparison.*

As the topic shifted from Ferdinand to other legendary students of the past, Hirschur bent over and whispered to me. “You pass, Lady Rozemyne. However, please practice morphing your schtappe simply by chanting the word, rather than having to pause and close your eyes to visualize the form.”

“Understood,” I replied, wearing the dignified smile of a noblewoman. Inside, however, I was much less composed.

*YES! YESSS! I DID IT! I passed all my classes! I can go to the library! I can start going to the library tomorrow! Bwahahaha! I can lock myself away in the library and read until it kills me! Praise be to the gods!*

# Epilogue

No sooner had Rozemyne departed for the Royal Academy than Sylvester started getting a series of unsettling and downright baffling reports. In previous years, Hirschur had only ever mentioned the bare minimum, usually stating that there was nothing special to report...

This year, however, was very different.

*I haven't had this bad of a headache since my first Archduke Conference! Curse that little problem child!*

The first report from the Academy came on an Earthday, before the advancement ceremony had even begun. It was from Wilfried, listing Rozemyne's newly picked retainers.

Given the growth and diligence Wilfried had shown over the past two years, in addition to the current power balance between factions, Sylvester still wanted him to become the next archduke. To that end, he had entrusted him with leading the Ehrenfest Dormitory, telling him to secure as powerful a position as possible before Charlotte arrived. That likely wouldn't be too much of a challenge, assuming he cooperated with Rozemyne.

*Hm. Looks like he's certainly working hard...*

Sylvester glanced over the first report. There were a few points where Wilfried had expressed his thoughts perhaps too directly, but nothing he had written was hard to understand. Florencia and Elvira had been discussing who Rozemyne should take as her retainers ever since being told she had started to wake up, and excluding Judithe the apprentice medknight and Philine the apprentice layscholar, it seemed she had followed their recommendations to a T.

"Charlotte, do you know Judithe or Philine, Rozemyne's new retainers?" Sylvester asked at dinner, partly because his daughter so desperately wanted to hear how her siblings were doing in the Royal Academy. She had dedicated

herself to leading the winter playroom, so it was likely she knew at least something about them.

"Judithe is an apprentice knight who reveres Angelica. She declined to be my guard knight so that she could join her in serving Rozemyne. I am glad her dream came true," Charlotte said with a smile.

This was not the reaction one would expect from a member of the archducal family after being turned down by a mednoble, but after relying on Rozemyne to save her from a kidnapper, Charlotte's spirit was completely shattered. She had utterly failed to fill the hole her big sister left behind without outside help, and now she was borderline obsessed with Rozemyne, if not also a little delusional. Sylvester was a little worried that this obsession might lead her to go off the deep end at some point in the future.

"As for Philine, she adored my sister more than anyone in the winter playroom, and put her all into collecting stories as an apprentice scholar while awaiting her return. She swore her fealty to Rozemyne the very moment she could this winter. Few viewed that favorably, assuming she would not be taken as a retainer, but it seems they were wrong."

*In other words, they're both plenty loyal to Rozemyne. Good.*

Sylvester was relieved, but that feeling didn't last very long at all. A week later, once again on Earthday, Hirschur's regular report was filled with brief and baffling messages.

*"The girls of Ehrenfest had shockingly glossy hair at the advancement ceremony, and Lady Rozemyne drew much attention due to her unique hair stick and youthful appearance."*

*"All first-years passed their written classes on the first day. The professors are discussing what manner of studying might have caught on in Ehrenfest."*

*"Lady Rozemyne's original compositions caught the eye of the music professors, and they have invited her to a tea party."*

*"The professor leading highbeast creation claimed she was attacked by Rozemyne's highbeast, no doubt due to its grun-like appearance."*

*"Please do teach me Lady Rozemyne's mana compression method."*

*“I do not know how, but Lady Rozemyne is now the active master of Schwartz and Weiss, the library’s magic tools. It seems to be the work of the gods.”*

*“Lady Rozemyne collapsed in the Farthest Hall, resulting in a squad of professors having to rescue her.”*

Sylvester was both impressed to see Hirschur write a report consisting of more than just a single sentence, and absolutely horrified by what he was reading.

*This is all about Rozemyne! What’s that little gremlin doing over there?!*

For the most part, he thought the events detailed in the report were understandable enough—his planned steps to boost Ehrenfest’s grades and increase its influence in the Royal Academy had no doubt played some role, and Rozemyne couldn’t be blamed for whichever professor had been shocked by her highbeast. Hirschur had probably covered for her letting the mana compression method slip, and given how Rozemyne had just awoken from the jureve, it was easy to see why she would collapse in the Farthest Hall...

But the gods guiding her to become the master of some magic tools in the library... That just boggled the mind.

*What in the friggin’ world...?!*

“Ferdinand, look at these reports from the Royal Academy,” Sylvester said, holding out the various boards he had received. “Any thoughts?”

He had summoned Ferdinand in hope that the reports were a coded message or something that only Hirschur’s former disciple was able to understand. His half-brother skimmed them, then gave a polite smile.

“These reports are quite brief. Even the ones I receive from Wilfried contain more detail.”

“Wilfried sends you reports?!” Sylvester exclaimed. “Why haven’t I heard about this?!”

“They were questions directed to me personally, and I did not believe they were worth the aub’s time,” Ferdinand replied. He was speaking formally, since

they were presently before the scholars, but he made his intentions perfectly clear through indirect means.

Sylvester smacked the table, trapped between uncertainty and frustration. “Everyone except Ferdinand and Karstedt leave the room,” he ordered.

The very moment the three of them were alone, Sylvester glared at Ferdinand, who in return dropped his formal smile and raised an eyebrow. Sylvester couldn’t say he was particularly fond of the way his half-brother was so intent on keeping everything a secret.

“Wilfried has been sending me deeply flawed reports that also serve as questions on how to deal with Rozemyne. I was annoyed at having to continue my days off correcting his language, but it is good to know that even still, they are better than those you receive from Hirschur.”

Ferdinand proceeded to leave Sylvester’s office and return with transcribed copies of said reports. As Sylvester read them, his hand found its way to his forehead. The only thing Wilfried said about the incident was that Rozemyne had become the master of two magic tools made by royalty, but that didn’t explain things any better. Still, he could tell that Wilfried had put his all into asking Ferdinand important, relevant questions. Ferdinand had sent back harsh corrections, but Wilfried was staying strong and keeping at it nonetheless.

One thing the reports did elaborate on, however, was how the Ehrenfest first-years had passed all their classes in one go—Rozemyne had apparently gone on an absolute rampage after being baited with the library. Sylvester once again glared at Ferdinand for having hidden this information from him, but even the scowl of an aub earned no more than a scoff.

“Is it not blindingly obvious that this is what happens when one foolishly puts other people between Rozemyne and the library? Understand that I proposed forbidding her from entering the library until she passed all her classes to ensure she would be finished in time for the Dedication Ritual. Wilfried was a fool for not realizing this and stupidly adding on the condition that all the other first-years had to pass their classes as well,” Ferdinand said, wearing a cold expression as he verbally tore Wilfried apart.

“And to be clear, it is not easy to control Rozemyne,” he continued. “Recall

that, despite entering the temple for the first time at her baptism, she charged blindly ahead to Bezewanst and offered an entire large gold for him to take her as a shrine maiden, all so that she could enter the temple book room. With the Royal Academy's library now within reach, there is obviously nothing that could stop her."

"Now that you mention it, I do remember hearing about that... Guess it really wasn't an exaggeration after all. Karstedt, does that mean you weren't joking when you said Rozemyne rolled out of bed while sick and literally crawled down your halls in an attempt to reach your mansion's book room?"

"Ah. The day after she was so excited about the book room that she fell unconscious in the hall. That absolutely happened," Karstedt noted, then shot Ferdinand a glance. "A wise man advised me to keep a book on the table beside her bed to keep her contained."

Sylvester had originally dismissed the story as a comical exaggeration, but as it turned out, it had been completely true. She was now going on a similar rampage in the Royal Academy. He didn't even want to consider what nobles from the other duchies were thinking about the matter.

"The first-years wrapped up in her chaos have my sympathy, but Wilfried is to blame for involving them in the first place," Ferdinand said. "It is too late to back down now. I advised him to offer them his sincerest apologies."

*G-Good luck, Wilfried... Your father's on your side!*

After his silent proclamation, Sylvester pointed to the most confusing board of all. "But yeah, what's all this about her becoming the master of magic tools when she was registering at the library? Neither report tells me anything. Does the library have some kind of special magic tools or something?"

Unlike Rozemyne, Sylvester did not have an abnormal obsession with the library. To him, it was nothing more than a place where documents were stored. He had never gone there himself, since he could just have scholars bring him whatever he needed, so he wasn't aware of any magic tools being kept there. Ferdinand, however, had often gone to the library when serving as Hirschur's assistant.

"The tools in question are Schwartz and Weiss," Ferdinand said, tapping his

temple. “My understanding is that they once served archnobles assigned there by the Sovereignty, so why Rozemyne became their master, I do not know. Did she steal them through sheer force of mana? I cannot imagine so. From what I am aware, they are covered in protective charms to prevent anyone but their master from even touching them.”

“In other words, we’re completely in the dark here,” Karstedt mused. He was at as much of a loss as Sylvester.

Ferdinand alone gave an amused grin. “The work of the gods, hm? Blessings might be involved here. I cannot say for sure, and I do not know why it would work if such is indeed the case, but her becoming their master means I may now have the chance to study them. One more reason to look forward to Rozemyne’s return.”

*Like teacher, like student... What a bunch of research-obsessed weirdos.*

“The first-years have passed their written classes, and now all she needs to do is dedicate herself to finishing her practical classes,” Ferdinand continued. “I imagine she is going to hide away in the library once she is done, at which point she will have little opportunity to cause problems.”

That seemed likely. There were some causes for concern, but when looking at the reports as a whole, it was safe to say that Ehrenfest’s grades were rising and new trends were being started. Sylvester decided not to think too hard about the rest.

Another week passed, and Sylvester received yet more headache-inducing reports from Hirschur.

*“Lady Rozemyne made contact with the second prince during her dedication whirl class. It seems the prince is on guard around her, due to her reputation as a saint.”*

*“In order to dispel the negative rumors forming around Lady Rozemyne’s highbeast, I am now overseeing her highbeast class.”*

Sylvester exchanged a look with Karstedt, then immediately summoned Ferdinand before once again clearing the room. He had a feeling that Rozemyne

having any contact with royalty was exceedingly dangerous.

"I'd assumed there was nothing for us to worry about, since the prince is only there for one more year and there's only one class he shares with Rozemyne, but it looks like we weren't so lucky," Sylvester said, sliding the reports over to Ferdinand. "What's the plan?"

Ferdinand crossed his arms with an exasperated expression. "There is no plan; the prince was simply interested in Rozemyne's highbeast. He ultimately prioritized other engagements over her, and now that Rozemyne has passed her dedication whirl class, they will no longer have any point of contact. Our main concern here is that Rozemyne has such a stunning lack of awareness that she forgot her promise to the prince."

"SHE DID WHAT?!" Sylvester and Karstedt balked, their eyes bulging as Ferdinand slid over copies of the reports he had received from Wilfried. As it turned out, had it not been for Wilfried, she would have rushed straight back to the dormitory, leaving the prince in the dust. They couldn't believe it; her priorities made no sense whatsoever.



“There is no use agonizing over it; Rozemyne’s obsession with the library cannot be fixed,” Ferdinand continued. “It would be a more valuable use of your time to consider how to manipulate those around her in the Royal Academy, but even that is not likely to go well. In any case, we have another matter to discuss—Wilfried is due to attend an Ahrensbach tea party.”

“Come again?! I wasn’t informed of that!” Sylvester exclaimed, lurching forward and snatching the report Ferdinand was holding out. A tea party like that was incredibly important, yet it hadn’t received so much as a passing mention in Hirschur’s reports. “A tea party between cousins... with Frenbeltag’s candidate joining in too?”

“Rozemyne’s attempt to join was rebuffed, since she is not a blood relative. For now, I advised Wilfried to carefully consider what topics might be brought up and discuss how to respond to them with Rozemyne.”

Sylvester’s breath caught in his throat. Wilfried had somehow managed winter socializing by learning how to specifically deal with members of the former Veronica faction, but who knew how he would deal with those of a higher status than him?

“Proper socializing in the Royal Academy starts once all the archduke candidates and archnobles have finished their lessons, right? Is it really safe for Wilfried to go to a tea party while Rozemyne is back in Ehrenfest for the Dedication Ritual...?” Sylvester asked, earning him a dismissive look from Ferdinand.

“If your son is such a buffoon that he cannot handle a tea party with his own cousins, he would never survive as an archduke. He has plenty of time to prepare; do not interfere unless he comes seeking your counsel himself. Remember that duchies are largely forbidden from interfering in the Academy’s affairs.”

That was the last thing Sylvester wanted to hear from the guy who was secretly responding to reports from Wilfried. His lips curved into a frown, at which point Karstedt gave him a few supportive pats on the shoulder.

“Your boy’s growing up just fine; in fact, he’s more reliable than you were at his age. He won’t have any problems so long as he’s willing to ask for advice and

actually listens to it.”

To Sylvester, the Royal Academy had been a fun playground where adults could no longer disturb him. It had never occurred to him how much his parents must have been agonizing back home, and now, as a parent himself, he was experiencing that same worry firsthand. He clenched his fists and put his heart into one single prayer.

*Please don’t cause any more problems than you already have...*

Of course, his prayers went unanswered.

# A Productive Earthday

The sound of a bell rang through the darkness.

Without missing a beat, I sat up and pulled aside my bed curtains. I had been waking up at first bell ever since beginning my apprentice attendant training at another house, so it came almost naturally to me now.

My older sister, however, was another story. She never woke up on her own, under any circumstances, and today was no exception; she showed absolutely no sign of getting up anytime soon.

After watching her sleeping form for a moment, I stood up and activated the light-creating magic tool on my bedside table, illuminating the dark room. I then lit the fire in the hearth so that it wouldn't be cold come changing time and climbed back into bed. My attendant Emerika and my sister's attendant Friedel would come to wake us up soon enough. They were both older female relatives who had finished raising their children, which made them very comfortable to be around.

"Lady Lieseleta, am I correct that you have no apprentice attendant duties today?" Emerika asked, using a green feystone pitcher to prepare a small tub of water for me to wash my face with.

I nodded. Attendants normally still worked on Earthdays even though there were no classes, but Lady Rozemyne was going to be staying in her room to nurture her Divine Will, so I was getting a day to myself.

"Friedel, I would like to wear not my work clothes or my black clothes today, but rather something normal," I said.

"You wish to wear clothes for rest, while Lady Angelica will be wearing light armor to motivate her studies, correct? That is quite standard," she replied, preparing the outfits. We did not have a room dedicated to clothing like Lady Rozemyne, so our clothes were all either in a closet placed in our room or in boxes.

“I was truly worried when you were taken as her retainer...” Emerika admitted while combing my hair. “It was an immense relief to learn there was a double bedroom for retainers.”

I agreed with a smile. Archduke candidates could leave all the menial labor to others, and archnobles did largely the same—albeit with fewer retainers than they might be used to. Mednoble and laynoble students, however, could only afford to pay their servants so much. As a result, we had to sleep in shared bedrooms to minimize the amount of cleaning and bathwater required, allowing us to survive with fewer attendants between us doing less work.

My older sister had been Lady Rozemyne’s retainer since before Lady Rozemyne arrived at the dormitory and announced her retainers. I was a more recent addition, meaning I had not been prepared to shoulder the costs of staying in a retainer’s room by myself. After thinking about how to best save money and lessen the load on my attendant, I decided to room with my sister.

Judithe and Philine were currently sharing a two-person room for the same reason. Brunhilde and Leonore had been shocked to see us not using our right as retainers to secure individual rooms, but archnobles were given individual rooms whether they were retainers or not, so we weren’t in similar positions whatsoever. It wasn’t that our family was too poor to afford single rooms for the both of us, but we would have needed time to make preparations.

“I suppose I am going to have my own room regardless after Angelica graduates this year...”

“You will do just fine in your own room, Lady Lieseleta. You are an excellent retainer who any archduke candidate would wish to have. Lady Angelica often fails to properly communicate with her attendants, and I was quite fearful of serving here alone. It truly is a relief that you are here with her, my lady.”

I could not help but smile. Attendants could not do their job unless they were kept up to date, and Friedel was informed of Angelica’s plans only when I conveyed Rihyarda’s and Cornelius’s reports to her. She surely would have been thought of as incompetent among the attendants had I not elected to live with my sister.

“I still cannot believe Lady Rozemyne values Lady Angelica so much as a

retainer...” Friedel mused aloud. Emerika nodded firmly in agreement, then held out a hand to help me stand up. My chair was repositioned and my socks prepared, and it was as I was putting them on that I recalled the fuss my parents had made.

“There was quite a stir when my sister was chosen to serve as Lady Rozemyne’s apprentice knight, wasn’t there?”

“Of course there was,” Friedel replied. “Lady Angelica is hardly considerate of anyone else, and so she chose to be a knight, not an attendant. Who ever would have thought she would be capable of serving the archducal family without causing any problems?”

It was not unusual for female attendants to be replaced after giving birth, which meant it was inevitable that Lady Florencia—who had taken only female attendants—would need to take on someone new. When the time came, she had wished to avoid taking any retainers with close bonds to Lady Veronica, and so she invited my mother to serve her. It had been very significant that she kept her distance from Lady Veronica somewhat while my father served the previous aub.

Lord Karstedt, impressed with the diligence of my parents, had taken Angelica to serve as Lady Rozemyne’s apprentice guard knight. My parents surely would have indirectly refused had they been consulted on the matter in advance, but he had gone straight to Angelica, who had then agreed on the spot.

“I thought everything was over when Lady Angelica failed her final exams and was told to take supplementary lessons,” Friedel continued while shaking her head.

Needing supplementary lessons was in itself cause for one to become a laughingstock in noble society, and if Angelica had been relieved of guard duty as well, she surely would have lost all hope of ever finding a proper partner. What’s more, she had only been selected to serve as an apprentice guard knight due to the trust my parents had earned themselves; her being relieved of duty would suggest that the archducal couple and the knight commander had misplaced their trust in our family. No one of any notable status would want us as retainers, and we would all most likely struggle to find employment and get

married. It truly was a frightening time for us.

Angelica, meanwhile, showed no concern over being required to take supplementary lessons; in fact, at one point, it seemed as though she might fail to graduate entirely. Those who failed to graduate from the Royal Academy were not considered nobles in the eyes of society, meaning her schtappe would have been sealed and she would have been reduced to serving our family as a lowly servant.

Even so, Lady Rozemyne kept her as a retainer, and even helped organize a study group to ensure she passed her supplementary classes. She had saved not only my sister, but our entire family. There truly was no end to the gratitude I felt for her.

“Even my sister is motivated to study with Lady Rozemyne here at the Royal Academy. She is not the same woman she was last year,” I noted.

Emerika nodded. “She must be glad to have been afforded this opportunity in her final year.”

“If only she and Lady Rozemyne had been in the same grade from the start...” Friedel said with a wistful sigh. “We all would have had a much easier time.”

I adjusted my skirt while the two attendants shared a laugh. Once I was ready, it was time for my sister to wake up. Friedel was the first to act.

“Do wake up, Lady Angelica. Lady Lieseleta has finished getting ready.”

“Mnn... But there aren’t any classes to go to, and we’ve got no work today...” Angelica murmured, hugging her blanket and turning away, her silky blue hair flowing behind her. She was just as beautiful and enchanting as ever, but also just as unladylike. Friedel sighed with exasperation as I stepped forward to try next.

“Sister, you have ditter practice in the morning even on your days off, do you not? Please remember that Cornelius has said you cannot participate in practice if you do not finish your studying first. I understand that you are finding it a struggle, but Lady Rozemyne will be disappointed if you do not try your best nonetheless.”

“Oh, right... I have to study in the morning... I have to study even though I

don’t have class...” Angelica groaned in a sleepy voice as she started to move. It took her some time to get moving at first, but once she was up and moving around, things went a lot quicker. She would manage just fine without me now.

“Lieseleta,” she said, rubbing the sleep from her blue eyes. “I’ll get changed and study, so you go ask Rihyarda how Lady Rozemyne is doing.”

It still came as somewhat of a surprise that “study” and “Lady Rozemyne” were among Angelica’s first words upon waking up. Last year, she had studied only when Cornelius cornered her in the common room, but now she would study alone in her room. That said, this willingness likely only stemmed from the fact she was forbidden from serving as a guard until she passed her written classes.

*Lady Rozemyne’s presence truly does make an enormous difference...*

“Certainly,” I replied. “May our parting be brief.”

I exited the room, entrusting Angelica’s morning preparation to Friedel and Emerika. I cut down the hallway, knocked lightly on the door where the other retainers were gathered, then opened it as silently as possible.

“Good morning, Rihyarda. How is Lady Rozemyne?” I asked.

Rihyarda paused midway through refilling some tea leaves and looked at the door leading to Rozemyne’s room. “I checked up on her a moment ago, and it seems the potion she drank last night has made her all the better. She should be right as rain after a full day spent resting in bed.”

Yesterday, Lady Rozemyne had gone to the Farthest Hall to gather her Divine Will, only to fall unconscious on her way back. She had returned in her highbeast, moving much slower than usual, and was then left exclusively in Rihyarda’s care to minimize the risk of the Divine Will being contaminated. We were all strictly forbidden from going near Lady Rozemyne until she had finished absorbing the Divine Will into her.

“I was just so worried, since I had never heard of anyone losing consciousness in the Farthest Hall before... Cornelius and Hartmut were particularly concerned at dinner last night, as neither of them are allowed up to the third floor. Even my sister mentioned Lady Rozemyne almost immediately after she awoke.”

“Inform them about her recovery at breakfast. I have work to do here while Lady Rozemyne is absorbing her Divine Will.”

I returned to my room and studied with Angelica until second bell, then left for breakfast. Angelica had somehow managed to finish everything she needed to do before practice, so she stepped into the hallway with a lively expression. Ahead of us we could see Judithe, her fluffy orange hair bouncing as she walked.

“Good morning, Judithe. How is Philine?” I asked.

“Good morning to you both. Philine is still stuck in her room to prevent anyone from touching her. I understand how important it is, but I still felt lonely this morning without anyone to talk to. I couldn’t wait for second bell.”

Judithe had been raised alongside several brothers, so she was used to every morning being busy. We chatted as we entered the dining hall, where Hartmut greeted us with a soft smile.

“Lieseleta. How is Lady Rozemyne doing?”

“She is feeling much better now. I am told she will be fine after a day of rest.”

“Good to hear. I really wasn’t sure what to think; I’ve never heard of anyone collapsing in the Farthest Hall before. Hopefully it doesn’t mess with her schtappe...”

Both Cornelius and Hartmut sighed with relief when I relayed Rihyarda’s message. Cornelius was Rozemyne’s blood-related older brother, so it was only natural that he would be so visibly distraught even in the dining hall. Hartmut, meanwhile, had only become her retainer after she entered the Royal Academy, yet his dedication to Lady Rozemyne as an individual far surpassed almost anyone else’s.

*I am grateful for Lady Rozemyne saving my sister and family, but what drives Hartmut’s abnormal dedication, I wonder? He says that anyone would feel the same if they understood the glory of the Saint of Ehrenfest, but I am afraid to say I don’t quite understand at all...*

“Rozemyne once collapsed just from walking through our estate to get to the book room,” Cornelius said. “As retainers, we should have been more worried

about the Farthest Hall, since everyone has to walk all the way back on their own."

His wisdom was well and true. I needed to be more careful with Lady Rozemyne as well.

"My my..." Brunhilde said, entering the dining hall with Leonore and sitting down with us. "It seems you have all already been updated on Lady Rozemyne." I could guess they had just gone to the room for retainers and spoken to Rihyarda as well.

With all of the retainers now gathered, our food was served.

"So, seeing as we all have today off, what are everyone's plans?" Cornelius asked. We took turns giving our answers.

"I am attending a tea party this morning to exchange information," Brunhilde said. "We are all relatively in the dark about the first-year archduke candidates of other duchies, are we not? Thankfully, the apprentice archattendants who serve them are also going to be present. I have been instructed to attend with Isidore, one of Lord Wilfried's apprentice attendants."

"Ah, yeah. I've got a gathering of apprentice archscholars to attend. Do the guard knights have anything like that?" Hartmut asked. He and Brunhilde were going to be fulfilling their roles as archnobles by exchanging information with those of other duchies.

Cornelius answered on behalf of the guard knights. "We have ditter practice this morning. There won't be many opportunities for us to practice once Rozemyne starts holing up in the library, since one of us is going to be stuck in there accompanying her. So, Angelica—did you finish in time?"

"I did everything you told me to, Cornelius. I can come," she replied.

Cornelius looked my way for confirmation. I nodded, having observed her valiant efforts before breakfast.

"Alright," Cornelius said. "Looks like Angelica, Leonore, Traugott, and I will be practicing today."

"Wait a second, Cornelius! I want to join in too!" Judithe declared, launching a

fist into the air, but Cornelius merely crossed his arms and frowned.

“You’re not in the knight course yet, remember? You’re a second-year. Plus, you haven’t finished most of your classes, since you’re focusing on getting the highest grades you can. You should use this time to study instead.”

“Ngh... But I can’t practice most days because of classes. I want to join you guys at least once. I’ll get all stiff otherwise.”

Judithe had trained with the knights almost every day in her home province of Kirnberger, but as a second-year, her time was spent attending common classes. Compared to the third-years and above who specialized in the knight course, she had overwhelmingly less training and experience.

“I understand how you feel, but as an archduke candidate’s retainer, it’s more important for your future to pass with excellent grades than to pass with the bare minimum,” Leonore explained, brushing her magenta hair from her shoulders and regarding Judithe with intelligent blue eyes.

“This isn’t so much the case for archnobles, but mednobles and laynobles must face the jealousy of all those who would hope to take their position,” she continued. “Securing high grades is essential to avoid and lessen that jealousy. The only way to protect your position is to make those around you understand that you were selected out of all the other mednobles for a good reason.”

Her explanation complete, Leonore then turned to me, no doubt signaling that as a mednoble, the same held true for me. She was correct, but there were a few rare exceptions—in Angelica’s case, she had secured her position not through good grades, but by surviving Lord Bonifatius’s training and accomplishing the awe-inspiring feat of earning his respect.

“Um, if we need high grades to protect ourselves... what does that mean for Philine? She’s a laynoble and she just barely passed history and geography,” Judithe asked, her eyes wavering with concern.

“It is unfortunate, but I imagine she will struggle greatly whenever she is not in Lady Rozemyne’s sight,” Leonore replied coldly. “I understand that she had no choice as a laynoble—if she had elected to fail the exams to achieve better grades, not only would she have earned the ire of all the other first-years in the dormitory, but she would have also delayed Lady Rozemyne’s entry to the

library. The adults in Ehrenfest will care not for such details, however."

Leonore sighed, then glanced over at the table where Wilfried's attendants were eating. Wilfried himself was not there, but a mutter directed at him escaped her nonetheless. "What were you thinking? Do you even realize what you've done?"

"I thank you ever so much for the advice, Leonore. I will try to earn the best grades I possibly can," Judithe said, understanding Leonore's point and resolving to study even harder.

"And how will you be spending the day?" Brunhilde asked, glancing my way.

"I believe I will take Judithe's lead and study, so that I might pass my classes as soon as possible with the best possible grades. We will need many retainers on standby to accommodate Lady Rozemyne's library needs, no?"

Once breakfast was over, we saw off the apprentice knights, then headed to the common room to study. Thanks to Lady Rozemyne having established the Better Grades Committee—an organization which split everyone according to their courses and enforced the sharing of study materials—I now had more people to study with, and it was easier to ask others for help. I saw Judithe leave for another table, likely to study with other second-years. In my opinion, it was truly admirable that Lady Rozemyne had created a situation where we could all work together, regardless of our factions.

"Lieseleta, you certainly are throwing yourself at your studies today. Is today not your one and only day off, while Lady Rozemyne is absorbing her stone?" Kathrein asked. She was a third-year apprentice attendant set to serve Lady Charlotte, and she had been practicing in the home of an attendant who previously served Lady Florencia until the end of autumn.

"It is, Kathrein, but I cannot risk getting grades unbefitting one chosen to be Lady Rozemyne's retainer. I also hope to finish my written lessons as soon as reasonably possible so that I can accompany her to the library."

"Lady Rozemyne certainly was more forceful than I anticipated—even Traugott is taken aback. I simply cannot believe how she treated the first-years. Had the one I served likewise ordered me to pass my classes on the first day no matter what, I surely would have frozen in shock and failed to achieve anything

at all.”

The fearsome might Lady Rozemyne had unleashed upon the first-years while driving them to pass came as a massive surprise to those who had seen her in the winter playroom. There, she had simply read thick books to herself, read aloud from picture books, and asked everyone to work together despite their factions. There were more than a few students who took this sudden change as her abusing her authority as an archduke candidate to act like a tyrant.

“Well, using the library was one of the main reasons Lady Rozemyne came to the Royal Academy. I must say, though... I am quite looking forward to accompanying her there,” I said furtively, lowering my voice a little.

Kathrein’s eyes widened. “You never seemed interested in the library before, Lieseleta,” she replied, eyeing me carefully.

“After accompanying Lady Rozemyne there for the registration process, I know exactly what awaits me,” I said, giggling to myself as I recalled the shumils. My words caught the attention of not just Kathrein, but the other nearby apprentice attendants as well. “Do you recall my mentioning that there are two large shumils—that is to say, two large magic tools—in the library, and that Lady Rozemyne became their master? They are named Schwartz and Weiss, and once I have finished my written lessons, I plan to begin designing outfits for them.”

“Outfits for the shumils...?”

“Indeed. Lady Rozemyne was told that, as their new master, it was her duty to award them with new clothes. I want nothing more than to help with that process,” I said.

The shumils we raised at home could neither walk nor talk, but the two large ones helping Professor Solange in the library not only spoke, but they also walked on two legs. One was black, the other was white, and they were both much too cute.

“Goodness... Seeing Schwartz and Weiss give their tour while wearing matching outfits was just... Ah, so adorable!” I gushed.

“I would like to see these library shumils,” Kathrein said. “I raise shumils of my

own back home. Just how large are they?”

“They aren’t quite as tall as Lady Rozemyne, but they do come close if you count their ears. They act according to Lady Rozemyne’s instructions, and they are capable of speech as well. It is quite stilted speech, mind you, but that just makes them even cuter in my eyes.”

As I spoke at length about Schwartz and Weiss, I noticed the other girls who raised shumils at home start exchanging glances.

“I think I might wish to visit the library as well...” Kathrein murmured, drawing everyone’s attention. “To, erm... To secure study materials, of course. There are less resources for the attendant course than for the knight course, you see...” She looked around with worry, attempting to recover the situation with a polite laugh, but it seemed everyone else was just as eager.

“You are quite right, Kathrein,” one girl noted. “Do take me with you when you go to the library; I would like to see these other resources myself.”

“I wish to accompany you as well,” added another. “I too must search for new resources.”

“It seems that Lady Rozemyne is already working with the first-years to make study resources for next year. As her retainer, I believe it necessary that I follow her example,” I said.

With that, we headed to the library to see the shumils—or rather, to search for resources for the attendant course. We found the two shumils organizing the bookshelves, their heads swaying from side to side as they moved around.

“O-Oh my...” one girl started to stammer. “How... How...”

I chuckled at her reaction. “Adorable, are they not? Do you not wish to help make new clothes for them?”

“How shall we dress them? I imagine another matching set would look lovely.”

“Stay strong, everyone. We came here for study resources, remember?” Kathrein whispered, stopping us in our tracks. “You said that the magic tools help with library work, correct? I suggest we ask them where we might find

resources for the attendant course. There is nothing wrong with us approaching them to that end."

"Brilliant, Kathrein!"

We approached Schwartz, asked where the attendant course resources were, then ogled the two shumils as they began looking for books. From a distance, we could see there were a few professors in the reading room, seemingly asking Professor Solange about the circumstances behind Schwartz and Weiss moving again.

"I see the professors are interested in Schwartz and Weiss as well," Kathrein said.

"Professor Hirschur raced over as soon as she heard the news," I replied. "I believe she said something about magic tools that can walk and talk on their own being extremely rare."

We took our time picking out resources, all the while watching Schwartz and Weiss, and it was only when the light signaling for us to leave the library snapped us back to our senses that we realized none of us had actually brought deposits with us to take out any books.

Fourth bell rang a moment later, and we all returned to the dormitory. It was unfortunate that we had been unable to borrow any resources, but we used the walk back to discuss just how cute Schwartz and Weiss were, and what manner of clothes we could dress them in.

"I thought about it over lunch, and... I am convinced that dressing them in separate colors is for the best," Kathrein declared immediately after lunch. She had drawn up an illustration detailing her ideal outfits for the shumils, which caused our enthusiasm to spread throughout the common room.

"Should their clothes not be black, considering that they work within the Royal Academy?" I asked.

"Surely you recall that the black shumil wore a white dress. Any color must be fine."

Even girls who hadn't been in the common room that morning soon became

interested in our discussion. “What are these?” one asked, gesturing toward the illustration.

Those who had already visited the library told the unaware girls about the two shumils, explained that they were magic tools, then expounded on their almost indescribable cuteness.

“...And so, we are in the middle of designing new outfits for them,” I concluded. “Do you have any ideas?”

Soon enough, we were pondering the issue alongside even girls of other factions. At some point, a few apprentice scholars joined the mix as well.

“It is nice to see you all so enthusiastic, but is it not Lady Rozemyne’s job to prepare clothes for Schwartz and Weiss? Is it truly acceptable to advance this discussion without her?” Brunhilde asked out of nowhere. Everyone immediately fell silent, the laughter dying away on our lips as we looked in her direction.

I attempted to break the uncomfortable air with a smile. “We know, Brunhilde, but Lady Rozemyne is absent today. Can we not have a single day to discuss what clothes would suit Schwartz and Weiss, and what we would like to make for them? Please do keep this a secret from her.”

Brunhilde fell into thought for a moment, looking over me and everyone else, then smiled and tapped a finger to Kathrein’s illustration. “Their new master is an archduke candidate from Ehrenfest, you know. Shall we adorn them with the flowers used to decorate hairpins?” she suggested, contributing to the discussion rather than instructing us to disperse.

We all exchanged smiles of mutual agreement; introducing to their clothing the Ehrenfest fashion trends Lady Rozemyne had invented was a truly splendid idea. We soon had an abundance of amazing suggestions.

“If we are to use flower decorations, perhaps we should also copy Lady Rozemyne’s skirt?”

“Rather than having them both dressed as girls, would it not be wonderful to have one wear boys’ clothing? The white shumil can be adorned with cute lace, while the black one can wear a sharp, cool-looking uniform.”

“I think we should make their clothes match Lady Rozemyne’s outfit.”

Brunhilde’s dramatic arrival had only accelerated the discussion. Ideas were spreading around the group like wildfire, and each one improved upon the last. In the end, however, we ended up too absorbed in our conversation. Not one of us noticed when Lady Rozemyne entered the common room, so when she suddenly asked what we were all doing, it shocked me so much that I almost jumped out of my skin. I scrambled to flip the illustration so that Lady Rozemyne would not see it.

“Is it something you do not want me to see?” she asked.

“No, Lady Rozemyne. We, erm... We just feel a bit uncomfortable about having gotten so festive without you. There is not much more to it than that,” Brunhilde said with a troubled smile.

“Schwartz and Weiss are simply too adorable... We began discussing what fashion of clothing you might prepare for them. Do forgive us for getting ahead of ourselves in your absence,” I added.

Brunhilde and I stepped forward, taking full responsibility as retainers so that the others would not be blamed. Lady Rozemyne then asked to see the designs we had come up with, and the hopeful glint in her eyes precluded any refusal. I showed her the finalized illustration Kathrein had drawn while explaining our thought process.

It wasn’t long before Angelica, who had arrived with Lady Rozemyne, chimed in as well. “Lieseleta has always loved cute things to death. She even dresses up our pet shumils at home with clothes that she makes herself.”

“Sister!” I exclaimed. It was true that I had put more enthusiasm than was perhaps necessary into my explanation, since Lady Rozemyne seemed to be enjoying it, but I did not believe it was proper to disclose such personal details about a retainer in front of the one they served.

As an attendant, I needed to remain clearheaded at all times, and yet I had been so absorbed in our conversation that I had not even noticed Lady Rozemyne enter. To make matters worse, I had also failed to include her in the discussion even though she was the master of the two shumils in the first place. I could feel the blood drain from my face. If these transgressions resulted in me

being relieved of duty, my family would surely be wailing in agony once again.

*Mother, Father... Please forgive me!*

As I silently begged my parents for forgiveness, Lady Rozemyne curiously tilted her head at me. I remembered her mentioning that someone had once praised her as looking like an adorable shumil, and with her golden eyes and flowing dark-blue hair reminding me of the ones I raised back home, I wholeheartedly agreed.

"...I will only be able to enter the library once I have passed my classes. Lieseleta, if you have finished your written classes by then, I would not mind you coming with me to measure Schwartz and Weiss."

"Truly, Lady Rozemyne?!"

"It will be much more enjoyable if we all think of designs together. Would anyone else like to join us?"

Everyone who had been working with us for the designs agreed to come with us. Those who hadn't gone to the library in the morning looked like they were dying with excitement to go.

"In that case, I recommend you all finish your written lessons before my practical lessons conclude. It is always hard to focus on your studying when there are more exciting matters to tempt you," Lady Rozemyne said.

"Indeed! We shall do our best!"

We had finalized our own ideas for the designs, and from this point onward, we would be prioritizing Lady Rozemyne's views. It was a perfect opportunity to shift our excitement from clothing to studying.

"Lady Rozemyne is passing lesson after lesson with tremendous speed. We will not finish our own in time without serious effort. First-years have only a few classes, but we seniors have many more."

"Indeed. Let us do all we can. I want nothing more than for us all to measure the shumils together."

And so, we Ehrenfest girls all started studying together, our hearts and souls united with the desire to measure Schwartz and Weiss. I looked around the

common room, which was now much quieter as everyone threw themselves into their studies, and found myself moved by how much more focused people were.

*Lady Rozemyne truly does excel at driving us to study.*

# Myne Awakes

“Whew. That was heavy...” Kamil said, setting his carrying basket down on the table with a thump. Today was market day, and we had gone to buy meat for winter preparations. I set the things I had bought onto the table as well, then looked at my son, who was now resting on the floor.

“Time for the next step. Kamil, could you fetch the salt for me?” I asked. We needed to get the base preparations done, since pig-killing day was coming fast. Kamil frowned and grumbled about being tired, but he stood right up and went to the storage room. I chuckled to myself as he went.

*At this rate, he’ll be ready to go by spring.*

Kamil had been begging me to let him go to the forest, most likely because there were so many other kids his age going there for winter preparations, but I feared he didn’t have the stamina to handle the trip, or the strength to make it back with the older kids before the gate closed. Right now, I was testing him by sending him to the market and on errands to the east gate where Gunther worked.

“Okay!” I took out a somewhat large board, covered it with cloth, and started setting some meat atop it while Kamil came back in with a bag full of salt. The sight reminded me of the time Myne had found the salt much too heavy to carry. She had ended up crying to Tuuli, asking her to help with tearful eyes. Kamil didn’t really look like Myne, but his similarly colored hair and eyes meant I often thought about her when I looked at him.

*Has Myne woken up yet, I wonder...?*

We were currently keeping ourselves going by believing in the letters Lutz occasionally brought to us, which said she was still alive. We had gone quite a while without any updates, until we finally received good news in the middle of autumn. It was around the time Lutz had gotten back from a trip to some distant city.

“Looks like there are some signs of change popping up. It’ll still be some time before she wakes up, but it’s progress,” he had said. That good news had warmed my heart amid all the business bearing down on me, but then a whole month passed. Before I knew it, the end of autumn was on the horizon. It had been almost two years since the winter Myne was poisoned.

*I hate the winter... The more blizzards keep me stuck inside, the more bad thoughts I have. I can’t believe it’s this time again already...*

I played back the memory of when Lutz had read that terrible letter aloud, and my heart twinged with the same pain that had washed over me when I was told Myne had been poisoned.

“I just hope she wakes up before winter...” I muttered to myself with a sigh.

“Huh? Mom? Did you say something?” Kamil asked, looking up at me. I smiled and held out the water jug.

“It’s nothing. Go wash your hands. We need to start rubbing salt on the meat.”

“Okay! I’m excited for pig day!”

Pig-killing day was something of a small festival. All the kids looked forward to it, mostly because we got so much food. Myne had always gotten sick around this time of year, and she would pull a face whenever the occasion was mentioned, but Kamil would immediately gaze up with renewed enthusiasm, even when he had just complained about being tired.

We bundled up the salted meat, took it to the winter storage closet in our storage room, then started preparing dinner. Gunther was on afternoon duty today, so he wouldn’t be getting back until after the gates closed.

“Are we steaming the bird with wine?” Kamil asked. “Dad said that’s his favorite.”

“No, we’re cooking it with herbs this time. The salt needs to rest a day before we can steam the bird with wine,” I replied while preparing the herbs. It was then that someone suddenly started pounding on the front door. No sooner had Kamil and I exchanged worried glances than we heard a familiar voice from the other side.

“Mom! Kamil! Open the door! It’s me, Tuuli!”

“What? Tuuli...?” I asked aloud. She usually only came home on Fruitday afternoons or Earthday mornings. On top of that, she had completely mastered the etiquette the Gilberta Company was teaching her, such that she always acted graceful and polite even when at home with us. She never pounded on the door or yelled.

I opened the door in confusion, and in raced not just Tuuli, but Lutz as well. Given how much they were gasping for air, I could guess they had sprinted all the way up the stairs.

“What happened, you two?” I asked. “Don’t you have work today?”

“We do, but Lutz came to see me, and they said I could go home for today. Lutz can tell you why. Haah... I can barely breathe...” Tuuli gasped.

Kamil rushed over and gave her a cup of water as she rubbed her throat. She gulped it all down before casually wiping her mouth; her usual elegance was absolutely nowhere to be seen.

“Thanks, Kamil. Give some to Lutz as well.”

“Okay. Here you go, Lutz.”

Lutz accepted the cup with a thank-you, gave Kamil’s dark-blue hair a quick tousle, then downed the drink in one go. Kamil responded with a broad smile. He liked Lutz a lot, since Lutz was always the one who brought him new picture books.

“So, what happened then?” I asked while watching Kamil celebrate. Lutz looked at me with a wide grin.

“Myne woke up yesterday!” he announced.

My eyes widened; this was the very news I had been hoping to receive for quite some time now. Tuuli, meanwhile, clapped her hands together in excitement.

“I knew it was going to happen sooner or later!” she said, but something about the whole situation just didn’t feel real to me. I had been hoping that she would wake up before winter, but not once had I thought it might actually

happen.

*Hold on... Maybe I'm asleep, and this is just a dream...*

I couldn't help my skepticism. I mean, I had already witnessed countless dreams in which Myne woke up—happy dreams where the whole family jumped for joy at Lutz's message. The fact that Gunther wasn't back and things weren't as good as they could have been made it feel more realistic, at least.

As I wavered between thinking this was a dream and accepting it as reality, Tuuli and Lutz excitedly talked among themselves.

"Lutz, when are you going to go see Myne?" Tuuli asked, a noticeable glimmer in her blue eyes.

Lutz rubbed his nose with a proud smile. "I got word from Gil this morning and we had a meeting this afternoon."

"Huh? You've already seen her, Lutz?! No fair! I thought we all found out together!" Tuuli complained, puffing out her cheeks. Lutz shrugged at her, but there was still an overjoyed smile spread across his face.

"Hey, it caught me off guard too. Seems like she's moving to the Noble's Quarter tomorrow or the day after, and they wanted to have a work meeting before that happened."

*Lutz met her...? Myne?*

I was still struggling to process their conversation, and for some reason, my heart was pounding harder than ever. It felt like things were gradually snapping into place, and the dream was becoming reality.

"Was Myne okay?" Tuuli asked. "Remember how we talked about how crazy it would be if she got super tall while she was asleep and came out looking like a totally different person? Did that happen?"

Lutz laughed and shook his head. "Not at all. She's better now, but she looks and acts exactly the same. I kinda couldn't believe how tiny she is, but she certainly seemed to be self-conscious about it. She cried about how she wanted to get tall."

*Myne cried...?*

Myne had never cried in any of my dreams; she always wore pleasant smiles and waved, apologizing for worrying us but being happy to be healthy again.

“Oh... Well, Myne’s always been uncomfortable about how tiny she is, and I hate to say this knowing she cried about it, but I’m super relieved to hear she’s the same Myne I remember.”

*I feel the same way...*

I agreed with Tuuli without voicing it. I was very glad that my daughter was the same as I remembered.

“So, Lutz... Do you think she’ll order a new hair stick?” Tuuli asked.

“Who knows? But I’ve got plant paper, ink, and new stationery ready. No matter what she needs, I’m prepared.”

“Act as smug as you want; it doesn’t bother me at all. I mean, I’ve made *so* many hair sticks for Myne over the past year in preparation for when she wakes up,” Tuuli said, puffing out her chest. Lutz grinned at her, and she smiled back in turn.

*This never happened in any of my dreams...*

My dreams always ended not long after the news came; I would always wake up in the dark and sigh to myself. But now, it was progressing beyond Lutz and Tuuli’s initial celebration, and they started talking about the future—about more practical things. It was then that I finally accepted this was real—that Myne really had woken up—and tears began welling up in my eyes.

“I’m so glad... This isn’t a dream... Myne really did wake up...” I said aloud.

“Mom...”

It had been a long two years... A very, very long two years. Sometimes I had worried that she would never wake up; other times I wondered whether the nobles were just hiding the fact she had died. But my fears were unfounded. Myne had woken up. The strength drained from my body, replaced with joy and relief.

*Thank goodness, Myne... Thank goodness.*



Kamil blinked his golden-brown eyes and looked around at us, confused to see our tears. He then asked a question that pulled me back to my senses like being doused with cold water.

“Who’s Myne?”

Tuuli, Lutz, and I all frowned at each other. We hadn’t been talking about Myne much so that our neighbors wouldn’t press for details, and we didn’t really talk about her being asleep since it would always just make us depressed, but the fact that Kamil outright didn’t know who she was blew me away.

*How should we explain this to him...?*

Kamil would turn four when spring came. He was at the age where he would tell people everything he knew, and ask everyone about everything they knew. We couldn’t risk him talking about Myne to the neighbors. I wiped my tears away and started to think things over. I would need to speak to Gunther about what we’d say to him.

“We can talk about this after dinner, once Gunther gets back. Tuuli, you’re happy to help with dinner, right? Could you and Kamil get the potatoffels and rannyehs from the storage room? Let’s make this fancy, since you’re back. And Lutz, thanks for coming all this way for us.”

I plucked my purse off the shelf as I walked Lutz to the door. Then, once I had confirmed that Tuuli and Kamil were gone, I slipped a small silver into Lutz’s hand.

“I’m really sorry about this, but could you go ask Gunther to stay out drinking until the time Kamil usually falls asleep?” I asked.

Lutz shot an awkward glance at the storage room. “Sorry, Mrs. Effa. I just...”

“Don’t apologize. I’m very thankful you came to tell us this, and it’s our fault for not thinking about Kamil properly. You can tell Gunther the news.”

Lutz nodded, then turned around and hurried down the stairs.

“Is Dad not back yet?” Kamil asked. “I hope he gets back soon.”

“Why don’t we just go ahead and eat now?” Tuuli asked. “I’m starving here,

and Dad's like, super late."

"Agreed," I said. "He's probably at the bar, and I can't wait any longer. Let's start without him. Tuuli, how has work been lately?"

We finished preparing for dinner while blatantly avoiding talking about Myne, then started eating. Kamil sadly looked over at the door before joining us. He was hungry too, and it wasn't rare for Gunther to come home late after drinking.

Once we had finished dinner, Kamil leapt into bed, excited to sleep next to Tuuli for the first time in a while. They chatted for a short while beneath the covers, but it wasn't long before Kamil was fast asleep. In all honesty, I was relieved that he had fallen asleep before Gunther got back. It probably helped that he was tired from walking to the market, carrying things about, and preparing for pig-killing day.

At seventh bell, the front door quietly opened. Gunther was back.

"Welcome home, dear."

"I heard it all from Lutz... About Myne and Kamil."

Gunther removed his coat and put it aside while Tuuli poured tea for everyone. We picked up our cups, then collectively sighed.

"As his father, I want to tell him the truth... but how would we even do that?" Gunther asked with a sigh after drinking some tea.

"I can't believe Kamil still doesn't know Myne," I said. "I want to tell him who she is, since they're family, but the story is that nobles took her away and she died. Wouldn't he just get confused if we told him the truth and called it a family secret?"

"I'm less worried about him being confused and more worried about him telling everyone what he heard without really getting why it's important," Tuuli replied, turning her blue eyes to Gunther. "I'm absolutely against telling Kamil the truth; we don't know what he'll do. Our best option here is to tell him what everyone else knows."

My eyes fell to my cup. Tuuli had a point, but the hardness in her voice made

it seem like she really didn't care about Kamil in this situation.

"You and Lutz kept secrets when you were just old enough to be baptized, didn't you?" Gunther asked. "We don't have to tell him right away. We can wait until after he's been baptized. He'll surely understand then. He wouldn't just tell people our family secrets."

Tuuli pursed her lips, then shook her head, rejecting Gunther's compromise. "No, Dad. Words won't be enough to explain how dangerous Myne's situation is, and why we can't tell people about her no matter what. He won't ever get it."

"Tuuli...?" I asked. She was being strangely obstinate for some reason. Before I knew it, she lowered her head; tears were welling up in her eyes and dripping down onto the table.

"She told me not to come to the temple because it was dangerous, but I didn't get it... I didn't understand..." she sobbed. "I thought I needed to protect her, since she's my little sister... I thought I was supposed to protect her from danger, and... It's my fault she's stuck where she is now..."

"No, Tuuli..." Gunther said, trying to comfort her. "That wasn't your fault. How many times have I told you this?"

He had said it more times than I could remember, but Tuuli never seemed to agree with him. There had been times when it seemed like he had gotten through to her, but in the end, the regret still weighed on her heart.

Gunther and I glanced at each other, at which point Tuuli wiped away her tears and looked up at us.

"I just wanted to protect Myne," she said, "but all I ended up doing was making things worse for her. It was because we were there—because our own actions caused this much damage—that Lutz and I know how important secrets are. Kamil won't understand. He hasn't gone through that. And even if we do explain this all to him, how can we be sure he'll grasp how serious it is? He's family, but that doesn't fix the problem."

Tuuli's words had weight to them, but above all else, she was right. She and Lutz hadn't known to keep secrets just because they were old enough to have

been baptized; they knew from experience, keeping secrets whether they liked it or not because they knew they had to.

“You’re right, Tuuli. Kamil doesn’t have the context or the life experience he needs to understand the situation, so he could put us all in danger,” I said. “And Myne would desperately try to save us, wouldn’t she?”

Gunther nodded. “Yeah. Myne put her all into protecting Hasse and the gray priests. If anything happened, she’d do everything in her power to try and save us.”

Myne would try to save us no matter what, even if doing so put her in a bad situation or meant breaking the contract that stopped us from calling each other family. Considering that she wanted to stay connected with us in any way she could, even after becoming a noble to save our lives, it wasn’t hard to see what lengths she would go to.

“We can’t put Myne in danger when she’d do anything to protect us. We have to wait until Kamil comes of age... No, until Kamil figures things out on his own,” Gunther decided, earning him an agreeing nod from Tuuli.

“That’s fine with me, but how do we explain Tuuli and Lutz being so overjoyed earlier today?” I asked.

“It’ll depend on how much Kamil remembers, but we can just frame it as part of the story about Myne getting killed by nobles. Let’s say... Lutz and Tuuli were happy because they found something of Myne’s she left at the Gilberta Company,” Gunther suggested, pulling an old but familiar-looking hair stick out from his pocket. The yellow flowers were rather dirty from being handled so much, and the red flowers were faded.

“I remember that one... It’s the hair stick I made right after Myne became a noble. I based it on the design Myne described in a letter she wrote and slipped into a book she printed...” Tuuli said, her eyes watering as she poked at the hair stick. It was completely different from the more complex ones she made now, serving as a reminder that she really had gotten a lot better.

“Lutz got it from Otto. They were keeping it in their workshop to use as an example, but they’ve got so many experts now that they don’t need it anymore. Should be perfect for the whole Kamil situation.”

“It’s old and dried up now that it’s been used as an example for years. It’s perfect to say Myne used to own it,” Tuuli said, glancing over at the bedroom where Kamil was asleep with a tearful smile. Gunther looked over as well, his eyes just as watery, then I did the same. We were making a big secret in our family, and I couldn’t help but feel terrible.

“I suppose we can’t talk about Myne anymore, even at home...” I whispered.

Tuuli spun back around to look at me, her face scrunched up in pain... but after a moment, she nodded too.

# Afterword

Hello again, it's Miya Kazuki. Thank you very much for reading *Ascendance of a Bookworm: Part 4 Volume 1*.

A new chapter of the story has begun. Rozemyne awoke from her coma to find herself two years in the future. She's had much to worry about, but she's still charging at full speed toward the Royal Academy's library.

The Royal Academy is a school for teaching the children of nobles to become proper nobles themselves. They learn about things like magecraft and brewing magic tools from a variety of rather colorful professors and grow alongside the children of other duchies on their way to becoming Yurgenschmidt nobles, while archduke candidates also learn the magic necessary to rule their duchies.

It's probably hard to tell from Rozemyne's perspective, since royalty and the other archduke candidates are blown to the wayside in her quest for the library, but the Academy is supposed to be a place where you make friends, establish connections to other duchies, and look for a future significant other, much like Damuel did in the past.

Rozemyne is a former commoner turned archduke candidate, which means she is more annoyed than anything by the flock of retainers who follow her by necessity, and she yearns for nothing more than to be surrounded by books. To be honest, she's something of a problem child who would vanish into the library forever if she could.

Some people are troubled by this abnormal archduke candidate, but her guardians acknowledge that she hasn't yet recovered from her long sleep and still lacks the common sense of a noble, so they don't mind too much as long as she doesn't actively cause any problems. Unfortunately for them, all sorts of problems are going to spring up in the next volume. (Hahaha.)

Of course, a new part also means a lot of new characters. Rozemyne has a bunch of retainers going with her to the Royal Academy. It may be hard to remember them all, since so many were introduced at once, but just do your

best and start with those who interact with Rozemyne the most. Don't worry, she's just as confused as all of you are!

For this volume, we prioritized giving illustrations to the attendants who are going to be looking after Rozemyne. Among them we have Lieseleta, Angelica's little sister and a lover of cute things, and Brunhilde, the trendy daughter of Count Groschel with a keen sense for fashion. There's also Professor Hirschur, Ferdinand's former teacher and the ever-absent supervisor of the Ehrenfest Dormitory. Maybe the next volume will show the guard knights?

This volume's short stories are from Lieseleta's and Effa's perspectives.

In Lieseleta's story, I hoped to portray what Royal Academy life is like from the perspective of another noble. It contains all sorts of things you don't see in the main story, like how other nobles have to ask their parents for attendants to support them, how they share rooms to save on money and minimize labor, how retainers talk when the person they serve isn't around, how they have fun with their friends, and so on...

Effa's story shows us how the lower city reacted to Myne waking up. Tuuli and Lutz rushed home as soon as they got the news, Effa listened with tearful eyes... but Kamil alone had no idea what was going on. Nobody wants to keep a secret in the family, but how much can he really be told...? They're ultimately forced to make a tough decision...

Since Part 4 takes place in the Royal Academy, I've included in this volume a map of Yurgenschmidt, as was often requested in the web novel. It's a map I drew myself, so please be gentle. My hope is that it at least gives you a gist of where all the duchies are. Try to think of it as a mood setter more than anything else.

We're also announcing the results of the second popularity poll that was held online. The results surprised me once again, and I hope you enjoy seeing them.

Incidentally, TO Books has announced the sale of the second fanbook. This one will contain the store-exclusive short stories I've written in the year since the first one, in addition to a report on the recording for the drama CDs, newly written short stories, another Q&A, original manga from Suzuka-sama, and four-panel comics from Shiina-sama. There really is so much packed into it!

Also, *Ascendance of a Bookworm* won first place in the tankobon category of *This Light Novel is Amazing! 2018*. It's all thanks to your passionate support as readers. Truly, thank you.

There's also new merchandise being released. This includes metal bookmarks; five different acrylic keyholders with art from Suzuka-sama, the manga artist; a letter set made of parchment; and five kinds of postcards.

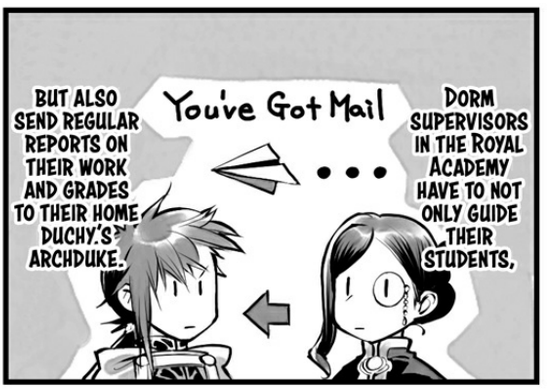
This volume's cover art has Rozemyne in her new Royal Academy clothes, as well as Schwartz and Weiss, the library's magic tools. Don't you think it's the perfect illustration to show her beginning as the founder of the Royal Academy's so-called Library Committee? The color illustration is filled with new characters, and there are still a bunch who haven't shown up yet. I can imagine that giving them all proper designs will be quite the task... Shiina You-sama, thank you very much.

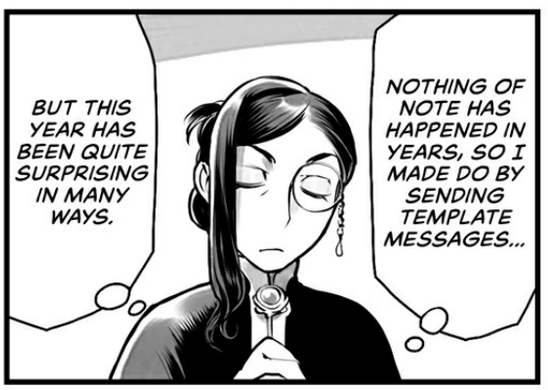
And finally, I offer up my highest thanks to everyone who read this book. May we meet again in Part 4 Volume 2.

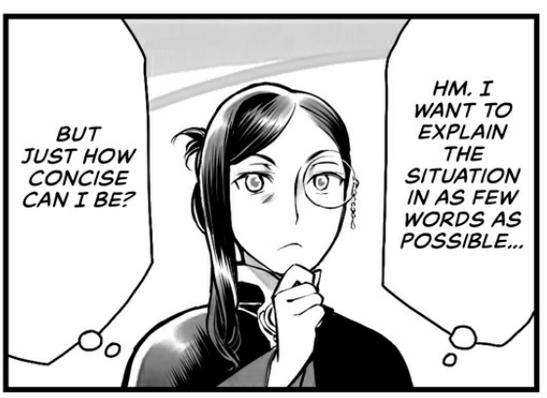
October 2017, Miya Kazuki


THE NOW FAMILIAR...
END OF VOLUME BONUSES!
A COMFY LIFE WITH MY FAMILY
Art by You Shiina
HYAAAAH!
110%
LET'S DO THIS! PASS IN ONE GO!
Eep! R-Right!
DRINK MILK EVERY DAY
SERIOUS
I WILL PROTECT YOU NO MATTER WHAT!
SISTER! THIS TIME WILL BE DIFFERENT!
DETERMINED
YOU'RE MY LITTLE SISTER! I'M GOING TO PROTECT YOU!
NO! THAT'S NOT HOW IT GOES!
BA-DUM♡
SO CUTE!♥
Sigh~
NGHHH! CALCIUM! I NEED MORE CALCIUM!

## REGULAR REPORTS



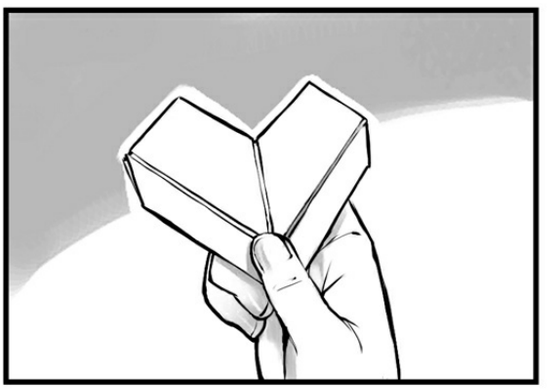



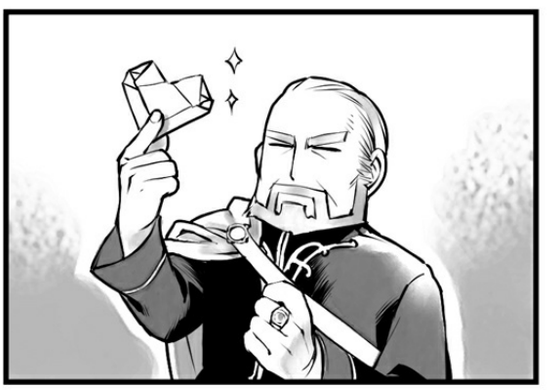


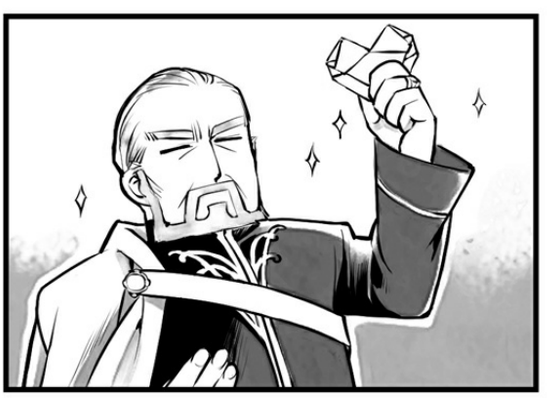


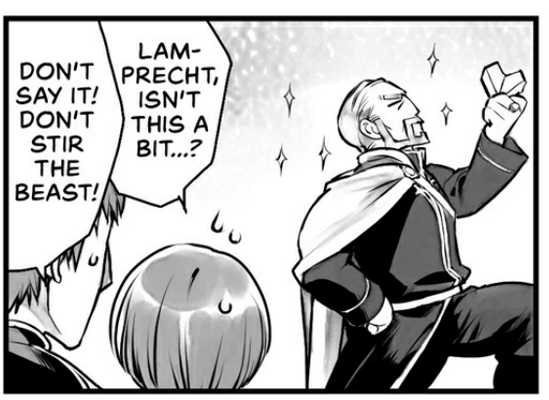
*NOT GOOD

## THE SHAPE OF A HEART









# The 2nd ASCENDANCE OF A BOOKWORM Character Poll!



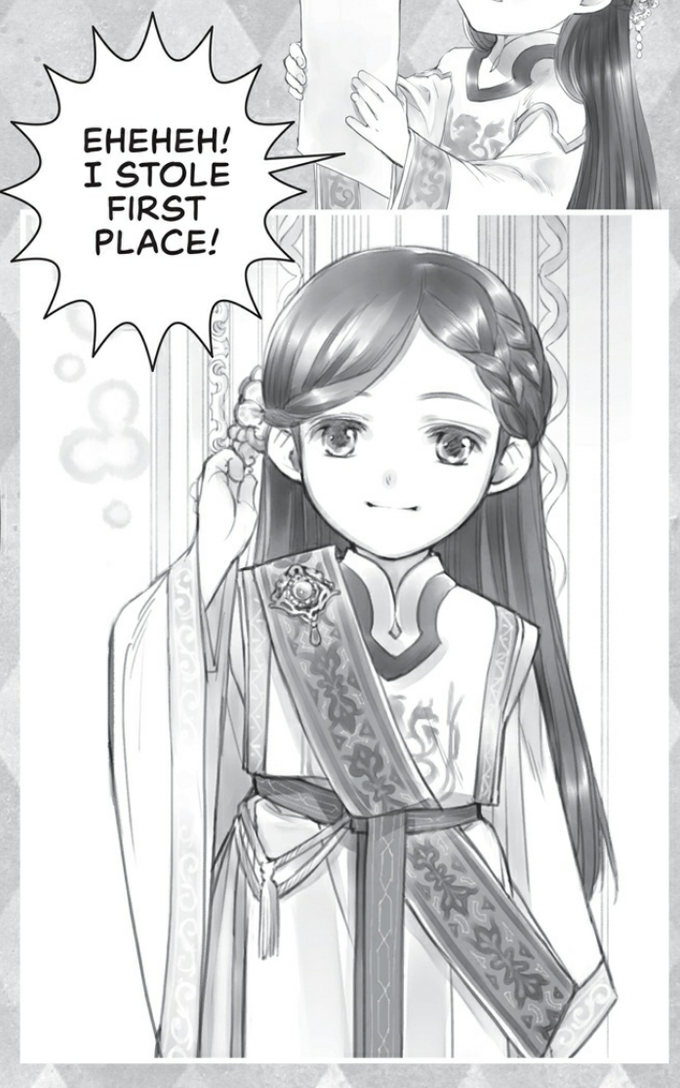

Part 4 has begun, and we're celebrating with another poll. The previous one received 12,118 votes, and this time there are more than double that amount! Here are the twenty characters who rose to the top of the free-for-all. Behold the results that shocked even Kazuki-sensei!

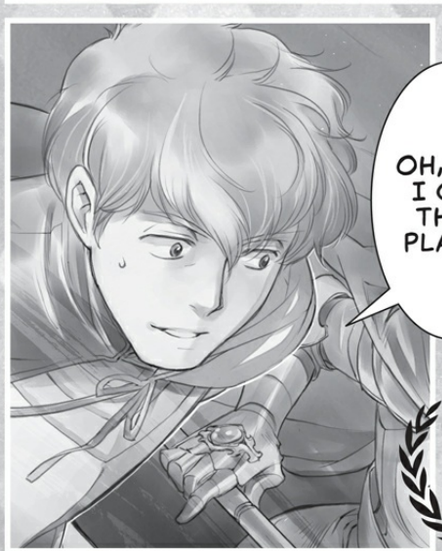
*This poll was held from September 8th to October 8th of 2017 on TO Books' official *Bookworm* home page.

## 2nd Ferdinand the High Priest
5,270 votes

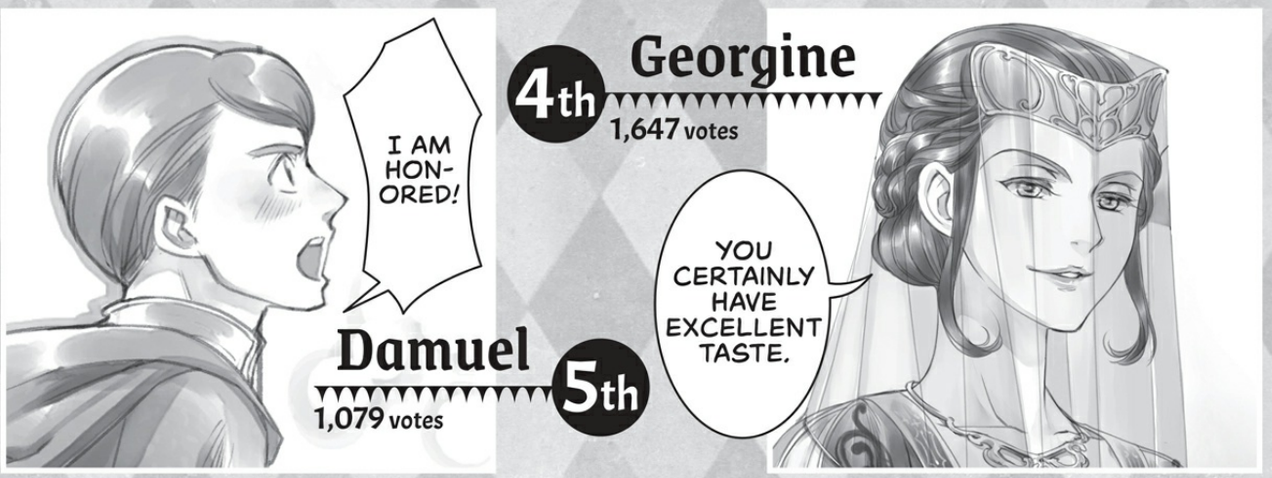



## 1st Myne
7,086 votes




## 3rd Justus 2,267 votes




**4th** Georgine — 1,647 votes

**5th** Damuel — 1,079 votes



**8th** Tuuli — 685 votes



**7th** Angelica — 789 votes

Now Printing

**6th** Hartmut — 971 votes



**10th** Fran — 620 votes



**9th** Lutz — 666 votes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 11th | Wilfried | 529 votes |
| 12th | Sylvester | 528 votes |
| 13th | Benno | 524 votes |
| 14th | Cornelius | 439 votes |
| 15th | Bonifatius | 301 votes |
| 16th | Elvira | 258 votes |
| 17th | Charlotte | 224 votes |
| 18th | Mark | 82 votes |
| 19th | Gil | 78 votes |
| 20th | Brigitte | 70 votes |

## Comment from Miya Kazuki

Thanks to all your passionate support, the second popularity poll was a big success. The results were just as surprising too! It caught me off guard how high Damuel placed last time, but now I'm totally speechless. Rozemyne beat out Ferdinand for first place! I was wondering who would end up on top when the votes were being cast, and it seems she managed to pull through. Good for her!

Still, I'm stunned that Justus got third place and Georgine got fourth—it seems they have more passionate fans than I ever expected. There's also Hartmut managing sixth place. He hasn't appeared visually in the books yet—in fact, he was probably only mentioned once or twice—but these results show just how much the web novel readers have been waiting to see him. Look forward to watching him blossom in Part 4.

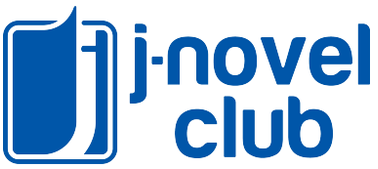
## Message From You Shiina

Why is it that the third-place winner is just as surprising as it was last time? Not that I'm upset, of course; I adore absolute weirdos like Justus. And in the midst of all these new characters, Damuel remains a strong contender. Readers sure do love him!

# Thank you all for reading!







Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters (like Part 4 Vol. 2 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

J-Novel Club Membership

# Copyright

Ascendance of a Bookworm: Part 4 Founder of the Royal Academy's So-Called Library Committee Volume 1

by Miya Kazuki

Translated by quof Edited by Kieran Redgewell

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2017 Miya Kazuki Illustrations by You Shiina

Cover illustration by You Shiina

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2017 by TO Books, Tokyo.

This English edition is published by arrangement with TO Books, Tokyo English translation © 2021 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: June 2021