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LIGHT MAGIC
OR DIE TRYING
AUTHOR: GENKOTSU KUMANO
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Happiness is being able to live a normal life, I thought, as a wave of unending pain gripped my body.

Chapter One: A Ray of Hope

“At most, you’ve got six months. It would be a miracle for you to live any longer,” my doctor said, bearing the grim news of my life expectancy.

“I see,” I murmured, slumping my shoulders. I’d expected as much, but it was still difficult to hear. I didn’t even have a year of life left in me.

“If you’ll excuse me. I’m truly sorry that I couldn’t be of any help to you.”

“Please don’t apologize. I’m grateful that you took time out of your busy day to treat me.”

I bowed my head, and the doctor left the room. A few seconds after I sent him off, a series of painful spasms assaulted my body.

“Ngh… O-Owww,” I groaned. It felt as though needles were stabbing every pore in my body, and the deafening ring of a bell echoed in my skull. My consciousness and heart were being torn apart. I felt nauseous from the pain, but my empty stomach had nothing to cough up.

Such was my daily suffering as Callus Leditzweissen, third prince of Ledyvia.

I should have been able to live in luxury, or at the very least in some form of normalcy. But I was born cursed, a Taboo Being afflicted by constant agony that spread across my entire body. I was barely able to walk, much less do rough exercises, and I’d only been outside a handful of times. The pain made it difficult even to sleep, and so the dark circles under my eyes had become permanent.

“Are you all right, Prince Callus?! A magician will be here soon, so please bear with the pain for a little while longer!” my maid Shizuku said, squeezing my hand. She looked as though she could burst into tears at any moment. I was touched by her kindness.

A sense of guilt had plagued my mind, ashamed that Shizuku had to serve a useless dud such as myself. *I’m sorry that I’m so weak,* I thought.

Lying on the bed, I looked down at myself. I appeared horribly

malnourished, and a black stain that resembled a tattoo spread from my heart. This was my curse, the cause and reasoning behind it unknown.

Numerous doctors and magicians had inspected my body and tried to treat me, but the most they could do was temporarily suppress the pain. I had been able to live past my tenth birthday thanks to my family and Shizuku doing whatever they could, but it seemed my body had truly reached its limit. I only had half a year left.

“Prince Callus, a sage has arrived!” Shizuku called out to me.

An old man with a magnificent beard entered my room. He carefully inspected my body before meeting my gaze.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Your Highness. My name is Gourley. Please excuse me, but I’ll be touching your body for a bit,” the old man said in a kind voice. He proceeded to put his hand over my left chest, where the curse had left its mark.

“I sense strong, dark magic from this area. This curse…it is a very powerful one, indeed. It must be very painful for you. I commend your strength for enduring such suffering with your small body.”

With a serious expression, he clasped his hands together in front of me.

“*Ra Heal*.”

The moment the incantation left his lips, a brilliant light shone from his hands and poured into the curse’s mark. In an instant, the writhing inside my body disappeared.

“Impossible,” I gasped. I’d tried countless medicines and magic in the past, but none had brought me such comfort. Tears welled up from within me as I learned the joy of being able to move my body normally. “What exactly did you do?”



“This is known as light magic, Your Highness. It may be the only type of magic that can dispel the darkness and alleviate your curse.”

“Light magic…”

Even as we spoke, I could feel the curse that had always gnawed at my body begin to recede, until I stopped feeling any sort of pain altogether. I’d never thought that such wonderful magic existed!

“Phew. Shall we wait for a bit and see how things progress?” he asked, and turned to my maid. “Miss, I’ve brought some tea leaves from plants that were raised with light magic. Please brew a pot of tea for His Highness. I’m sure it’ll help him to get a good night’s sleep.”

“Th-Thank you so much! However can we repay you?” Shizuku said.

The old man chuckled. “Oh ho ho. How could I decline a request from His Majesty, the king? But let us continue on tomorrow. I’d like to rest for today.”

“Of course! We’ve prepared a guest room near here, so I shall guide you.”

The two left my room. Now alone, I put my hand over my left breast. I could still feel the kind, faint warmth emanating from there. It was an odd sensation. I’d always thought of magic as a tool for fighting and combat, and never imagined that such a gentle magic existed in this world.

“Light magic…” I repeated.

I couldn’t help but be drawn to this newfound art. Until now, I’d never wanted to learn or acquire knowledge about anything before. I’d only thought about death.

“Amazing.”

This was how I was introduced to light magic. I would’ve never dreamed that I’d spend the rest of my life learning about it.

***

The next day, I woke up feeling refreshed. I hadn’t gotten a good night’s sleep in years, and my mornings always started with a head-splitting migraine. But today was different. It was a good morning, and I had no pain in my body.

How lovely!

“Good morning, Your Highness. How are you feeling?” Gourley

said, sitting by my bed.

How long has he been here? I wondered. “Good morning, Gourley. Thanks to you, I feel wonderful.”

“That’s great to hear. Would you like some breakfast?”

“Food? Hmmm, probably,” I replied, putting a hand over my stomach. I usually had such an awful headache that I’d lose my appetite. Once again, today was different.

“Then please have some porridge. This was made from water infused with light magic. I’ve asked your maid to prepare this for you.”

“Shizuku made this? Then I’m sure it’ll taste great.”

Shizuku was extremely proficient at all kinds of housework, including cooking. She was an excellent maid. She might have come off as nonchalant and cold at times, but whenever I was writhing in pain, she would hold my hand and support me. I knew that she was a kind woman.

I took a bite of the porridge, and felt it warm my body from the inside out. “This is delicious.”

So this *is the power of light magic. It’s amazing! I feel like a normal person!*

I quickly finished off my bowl of porridge and turned to Gourley. No one else was in the room with us, and this seemed like a good opportunity to ask a few questions.

“Um, Gourley… May I ask something?”

“Of course, Your Highness. Ask away.”

“A doctor told me that I only have about six months left to live. Is it possible to live longer using this light magic?”

His calm demeanor suddenly became severe. *Does this mean…*

“Your Highness, you are bright beyond your years, so I’ll be frank. My light magic wasn’t enough to completely cure you of the curse. I’m afraid your life expectancy won’t change.”

“I see…” I replied, feeling a heavy weight come over my shoulders.

I’d expected as much; my pain had receded, but the curse mark over the left side of my chest remained as prominent as ever. This black patch of skin would gradually expand across the rest of my body, and then I would take my last breath.

“Ngh,” I sniffed, unable to suppress my tears. I thought I’d steeled myself, but I couldn’t stop my sobbing.

I wanted to live longer.

I wanted to repay my precious family.

But even these wishes wouldn't be granted.

"I believe it's possible to extend your life span with light magic, but I think that would only prolong your suffering," Gourley said. "It may be a different matter if I could stay by your side at all times and continuously cast it upon you, but that simply isn't feasible. I am an old man, after all, and I don't think I could hold back your curse should it continue to grow larger."

He was right. An excellent magician like him with the title of sage must have more important matters to attend to. I couldn't keep him here forever just to delay the inevitable.

"If only I was skilled enough to fully cure you. I'm terribly sorry for my lack of ability," he said.

"Please, don't apologize. I'm grateful just to be able to talk like this." What I said came from the bottom of my heart. It was wonderful to spend time without being plagued by constant pain. I'd never imagined that I could be freed from this suffering before my death.

"I do wish that I was able to do more. I've always wanted to attend school and study, like a normal child. Learning magic seems like fun too..." I trailed off, considering what I'd just said. I felt like I was on the verge of a great idea. "School? No... Studies?"

No, not that either.

I continued to mumble to myself, until realizing that my mind had been stuck on the word "magic."

Learning magic. That's it!

"I just need to learn light magic," I said. The fog over my head lifted as I had an epiphany. "Right! That's it! If I learn light magic, I can suppress my curse on my own! Then I'd just need to find a way to lift the curse while I suppress it!"

I knew that this wasn't an easy path to take, but the only alternative I had was death. *I should live my life without any regrets.*

"Please, Gourley! Please teach me light magic! You can just teach me during your stay here, that's all!" I prostrated myself on my bed, bowing deeply.

"Hm, well, you see..." Gourley said, looking a little troubled. Intending to dissuade me gently, he continued. "Light magic is so rare that it's been called the magic of miracles. Only a select few can use it at all. And I'm only staying here for two weeks. Even if you did have potential, Your Highness, the probability of

learning it within this short period of time is close to zero. Do you still want to try?"

I stared into his eyes before bowing my head once more. "I do. It's much better than staying here and waiting for my death."

After a moment of hesitation, he spoke. "I understand. There isn't much hope, but I'll do what I can."

"Really?! Thank you so much!"

"I'll warn you now, but since I'll become your teacher, I won't be lax about it. I shall be rather strict with you."

"I don't mind. Please be as strict as you can."

"Oh ho ho, how promising. Then I shall send word to your father, His Majesty. We'll begin our lesson at dusk. Do rest well until then."

"Okay, I understand."

And just like that, I became Gourley's apprentice. My goal was to learn light magic so that I could suppress my curse. I only had two weeks, but I was determined.

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Dusk arrived, and my first lesson with Gourley started. I was worried that my father would be against this idea, but he seemed to want me to learn magic as well. I was grateful to have such kind parents and siblings, but I couldn't rely on them forever. I wanted to get rid of this curse so that I could repay them.

"I'll be in your care, Gourley," I said.

"The same goes for me, Your Highness. But before we begin, I'd like you to make two promises with me," he said.

"Promises?"

"Indeed. First, I don't want you to use any magic that I haven't approved of. There are many dangerous types of magic, and with a body as frail as yours, even small mistakes could endanger your life."

I was silent for a moment as I considered his words. "I understand. I'll keep that in mind."

Gourley nodded with satisfaction. I was a complete beginner, so I had no qualms in listening to the requests of a sage.

"Second, you must call me 'Master' and listen to my orders. Our social standings may differ greatly, but if you become my apprentice, you must do as I say while you are learning. Since we

especially don’t have time to spare, please forgive me if I speak a bit out of line.”

“Well noted, Gourley—I mean, Master. I’ve never considered myself superior to you, so you don’t have to worry. I promise to listen to you and never do anything unnecessary.”

I was of royal blood, but I wasn’t fit to be above others. I only caused trouble, while my master had used his light magic to save numerous people. He was of much greater importance than me.

“Master, will you then call me ‘Callus’? It would feel awkward to be called ‘Your Highness,’ and I believe we should speak more plainly,” I said.

“Well, you’re not wrong, but…” Master hesitated, seeming to have some reservations.

“Please. I’d like for you to be as strict as possible, and you don’t have to be so polite with me.” I said, bowing my head.

He thought it over for a while, then said, “Understood. If you say so, I won’t hold back on you, Callus.”

“Th-Thank you!”

My master stopped treating me like a prince and more like an apprentice. That said, I technically wasn’t a prince at all. Since I was a Taboo Being born with a curse, the official records were made to state that I was never born, and the general public was told that the queen suffered from a miscarriage. Only the servants in this mansion, a few high-ranking officials, and my own family knew of my existence.

It might have seemed cruel, but it was a necessary measure. A Taboo Being was said to bring misfortune. If word got out that my father was raising me in secret, it would threaten his position. Thus, my existence was kept highly confidential. Since my master knew about my identity, he must have been well trusted by my father; not even the doctors and magicians who came to treat me were allowed to know who I truly was. Since I technically didn’t exist, I obviously had no claim to the throne. I had no right to be called “Your Highness.” Besides, there was no need to speak politely to me since I’d only ever been a burden.

“Let’s begin then, shall we, Callus?” my master said, while I was having such harsh thoughts.

Right! I have to focus on what’s in front of me!

“Go ahead and take this,” he said, handing me a red leaf. It looked like a normal leaf, around the size of my palm.

What is *this?*

"This is a special leaf taken from a plant called 'bethlem.' If you tightly squeeze the base of this leaf, it can sense your magical capacity—how much magic energy you have—and transforms accordingly."

Huh, I didn't think something like this existed. Interesting. Well, I'm sure the outside world is filled with things that I've never seen before.

"In short, it's a magical leaf that can measure your magic energy. I can't start my lesson if I don't know how much magic you even have. Come on, now, give it a squeeze," he said.

"O-Okay." I grabbed the base of the leaf and squeezed tightly.

The red leaf suddenly turned black and disintegrated into ashes as though it had been enveloped in fire. *What…does this mean?* I looked at my master in confusion, but he simply stared back, wide-eyed.

"Impossible," he murmured.

What's going on?

"Master?" I asked.

"S-Sorry, I was just deep in thought."

"What does this mean?"

"Er, right, your results. It means…you're fine."

What does that *mean? Does he not want to explain?* I wanted to know if this was good or bad, but my master didn't elaborate further. Since I'd just promised that I wouldn't do anything unnecessary, I decided to hold off on pressing for an answer.

"Callus, I must ask, you've never used magic before, correct?"

"That's right. I've always been on the verge of death in bed. I've never had any strength to use magic."

"Hm, so that must mean… Huh? Wait, there could be a possibility…" My master mumbled to himself before coming to a conclusion that seemed to satisfy him.

Hmmm, now I'm more curious than ever.

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Bethlem was different from other plants because it stored its seeds in its leaves. If it sensed strong magic nearby, it would feel endangered and split its leaves in an attempt to spread those seeds. Using this trait, the plant was used to measure magical capabilities.

The leaf wouldn't react to the presence of those with no magic or a weak monster like a slime. But if a person with magic squeezed this leaf, it would split down the middle. In addition, the more magical energy a person had, the more tears would appear on the leaf. One tear implied that the person had some magical capabilities. Two tears meant that the person had some talent. Three tears were a sign that the person would become a prodigy.

I don't mean to brag, but when I was young, my leaf split into three and I was regarded as a genius. However, Callus's leaf showed something completely different. I'd only seen this phenomenon once in the past. When I was fighting one of the most famous and powerful of monsters—the dragon—the leaves in my bag had all been affected by its terrifying magical energy. They had all turned black and been reduced to ashes, meaning that overwhelming magic could turn them into dust. In other words, this boy before my eyes had magic power that rivaled a dragon's.

"Impossible," I murmured.

This was simply unheard of. A boy who'd never used magic before in his life couldn't possibly wield such power. The royal family was famous for having more magical energy than others, but this was completely abnormal.

"Master?" the boy called to me.

I looked up and saw Callus's worried face. *No good, I must stay firm*. "S-Sorry. I was just deep in thought."

"What does this mean?"

"Er, right, your results. It means...you're fine."

He had a puzzled look on his face, but he didn't pry further. It seemed he was keeping the promise that we just made. *Smart kid. In any case, why does this child have this much magic?*

Depending on the reason, I'd need to change our manner of training. "Callus, I must ask, you've never used magic before, correct?" I said.

"That's right. I've always been on the verge of death in bed. I've never had any strength to use magic."

"Hm, so that must mean... Huh? Wait, there could be a possibility..."

He was always on the verge of death. This sparked a memory—a story about those who returned from the abyss of death with greatly increased magical capabilities. There was no logic to this,

and many regarded it as a superstition. However, there were indeed stories about magicians who had achieved greatness after a near-death experience.

Among the sages that I knew, there was one who claimed to have awoken to their talents after surviving a serious injury. I took these assertions with a grain of salt, but if they were true, it would explain why a mere child who was constantly fighting off death had such immense magical energy.

It was often said that blessings and curses were two sides of the same coin. Ironically, the curse that was tormenting this boy had blessed him with magical energy.

I gulped, almost unable to contain myself. I felt a sense of guilt, but couldn't suppress the excitement rising in my chest. In the past, I'd raised a child prodigy with great magical talent, but Callus's magical capabilities far surpassed even theirs. Just imagining the potential of this boy, and how he could possibly grow up to wield great power, exhilarated me. I chuckled to myself.

I suppose I'm still a bit inexperienced.

I debated about whether to tell him the truth, but decided to not hide anything from the boy. He was sure to find out soon anyways, as bright as he was. "Callus, you have much more magic than a normal person."

"Oh. Really?" he replied.

"I suspect that your curse could be the cause. I've heard that some people's magical capabilities greatly increase when they're on the brink of death. I can't say for sure, though."

"I see. That sounds complicated, but I'm glad to hear it."

"I guess we don't have to worry about if you have the potential for magic. Shall we start our lesson?"

There was only one thing to do. I would teach this boy how to control his immense power, and make sure he stayed on the right path. I decided that, in my old age, this would be my final mission.

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"Let's start our lesson. Firstly, Callus, do you know how and why magic occurs?" my master asked.

"The reason behind magic? Hmmm..." I took a moment to think. Magic was so familiar to us that it was a necessity in our

daily lives. It felt so essential to me that I never questioned the way it actually worked. “I think it’s something like using the magical energy within your body to create magic.”

“Hm. You’re not wrong, but you’re not hitting the true nature of this phenomenon.”

With a “hm,” Master lit the end of a quill and glided it across the air. Glowing words started to appear and float in front of me. *We don’t need chalkboards. Amazing.*

“Listen well. This world is filled with invisible beings called spirits. Magic is the act of borrowing power from these spirits. Fire magic would require fire spirits, and light magic would require light spirits to activate,” he said.

“Then when is magical energy used? Is it when we ask the spirits for their aid?”

“That’s a bit different. Magical energy is a form of compensation. It’s said that spirits favor magical energy created by humans. So we use it as a sort of currency in exchange for their power, allowing us to use magic.”

This was completely different from what I’d imagined. I thought that magic was omnipotent, allowing the user to do whatever they pleased by themselves. I never expected to learn that we needed to bargain with spirits.

“Magical energy, such as the amount and the quality, greatly differs from person to person. It’s said that those with higher quality magic can attract stronger spirits,” Master continued.

“Huh, that’s interesting. Are we truly unable to see these spirits at all?”

What do they look like? Are they like humans? Or do they look more like animals or monsters? A slime-shaped spirit sounds cool.

“Unfortunately, even I cannot. A long time ago, when gods were roaming our lands, it was said that humans could see spirits. As proof, ancient murals have a few drawings depicting spirit-like beings.”

According to the legend, gods ruled over fire, water, and the other elements long ago. They had been kind watchers over humans as well, but one day, they suddenly began to fight each other, destroying the land in their conflict. The aftermath of this War of the Six Gods could still be seen.

“The age of gods was about 1,500 years ago, right? I can’t even imagine,” I said.

“We humans can’t see spirits anymore. Thus, fewer and fewer

people believe in their existence. We went on a little tangent there. In any case, remember that magic and spirits go hand in hand; they can never be separated."

"I understand."

A pity. I wish I could see them one day; it'd be wonderful if I could become friends with them.

"Normally, before someone can start to learn magic, they'd use a special type of paper called a magic sheet. It allows the user to understand which element they're most inclined towards. But since you're set on learning light magic, we'll skip this step."

"Is that okay? It sounds like we're not doing things properly," I said.

"As you say, this most certainly is the incorrect way of proceeding. However, once you find the element that you favor, you'll be drawn towards it. Spirits get jealous quite easily, and it's said that their temper can turn foul if a human they favor begins to use a different element."

I never knew about this, and I never even imagined that not having the opportunity to learn magic until this point had actually worked in my favor.

"For example, if we find out that you favor water magic, it'll then become more difficult for you to use other elements. It's said that this is because the water spirits would become fixated on you. Once spirits choose a human, they'll fend off the others in hopes of monopolizing them. As such, the very first bit of magic that a human uses is extremely important."

"I-I think I sort of understand now."

I found it strange that spirits would claim a human so easily. I'd have assumed that some sort of official contract needed to be made. I was especially interested in how, once spirits possessed a human, they would fend off others. *Do they have such a strong desire to possess us exclusively?*

"All right, then what should I do first?" I asked.

"You must talk to spirits in an arcane language. These incantations are called spells, and each one has a special meaning. I'm sure that with time, you'll remember them." My master scribbled some bright letters in the air. "The first word you'll be taught is *'Rai.'* It's the magical word for 'light.' You must roll your tongue a little and pronounce it clearly, or the spirits won't be able to understand."

He proceeded to demonstrate how the word was pronounced.

“Here, now you give it a try.”

A-All right!

“*R-Rai*!” I said, my voice a bit shaky.

Nothing happened. No part of my body started to glow. *Did I mess up?*

Master chuckled. “No one can use magic right off the bat. You have to practice tens, even hundreds of times, and slowly get the hang of it. Ah, but you don’t have much time, so here’s a little hint.”

Pointing with his index finger, he chanted, “*Rai*.” The tip of his finger started to glow. “Try touching it.”

“O-Okay.” The light felt slightly warm to the touch, and gave me a sense of ease. It was completely different from a fire on a candle or a magical stone lamp. It was an odd type of light. *So this must be what the spirits can create.*

“Let your body remember the feeling of this light. Magic and imagination go hand in hand, after all. Once you’ve got a clear idea of your intention, ask the spirits once more before you forget. You can vocalize your request, or just say it in your head. Spirits see through everything.”

“I understand. I’ll try my best.” I took a deep breath and focused intently.

Remember the light that Master just created. Create an image of it in your head. Think about the light that could suppress the curse.

I raised my right arm in front and talked to the invisible spirits around me. “*Rai*.”

I felt my heart skip a beat, and my blood started to rush. My sight, hearing, and touch all seemed to be heightened and dulled at the same time. From the depths of my body, I felt something heavy, like a large door slowly creaking open. I felt something awaken from within me. But…

“Nothing’s happened.” My hand wasn’t filled with the light from the spirits. *Hmmm, I’m sure I felt something, but was that just my imagination?*

“Not to worry. This is completely normal. Even prodigies require about a week to use magic with this method. Take some time to face your inner self,” my master said.

“Okay, I got it.”

“Good answer. It’s gotten late, so we’ll continue our training tomorrow. Show me your chest so that I can recast that spell on you.” He put his hand over the mark. “*Ra Heal.*”

A pale vortex of light melted into my curse. I'd seen it before, but I couldn't stop staring in awe at its beauty.

"This should suppress the curse until noon tomorrow. If you feel any pain, come to my room," he said.

"Okay. Thank you very much." I bowed my head, and he began to leave my room. Only then did I notice it was already pitch black outside. *Time flies when I'm so focused.*

"Good night, Callus. Don't stay up too late."

"Okay. Good night, Master."

Once he had left, I turned off the light and headed to bed. *I should hurry and sleep so that I can stay focused tomorrow.*

I yawned. "I'm so tired… Wait, huh?"

As I tried to fall asleep, I noticed a faint light glowing in the corner of my dark room. *There's only one light switch. What* is *this?* I glanced around, but couldn't find its source.

"What's this about?" I cocked my head to one side and stared at the trail of light. I continued to follow the trail with my eyes and ended up staring on top of my bed; my left hand was illuminating the room. "No way…"

The light was so faint that it couldn't be seen unless the room was completely dark. It was small and unreliable, but it was undeniable proof that the spirits had blessed my left hand.

***

The next day, my master couldn't hide his shock when he entered the room to find my left hand faintly glowing.

"Now, *this* is a surprise!" he said. "I've had many apprentices in the past, but no one has been able to use magic this quickly. It seems spirits are inclined to like you."

"Spirits tend to like me?"

"Indeed. Spirits are fickle creatures with strong likes and dislikes. Even if you have a lot of magic, if its quality isn't favored by spirits, they won't bless you with their power, and you won't be able to use magic. Well, it seems like your amount and quality are both good."

I couldn't see them, but I was happy to think that some spirits out there liked me. I didn't know if they'd understand my gratitude, but I gently stroked my left hand with my right. For a brief second, I thought that I saw the light flicker.

"I planned to mainly give you some lectures today, but it

seems like it'd be better if we moved on to the next stage of practice. You should be happy, Callus. You might be able to learn healing magic within two weeks."

"R-Really?! I'll try my best!"

I couldn't rest easy just yet, but I was beginning to see a glimmer of hope. *I want to live. I want to live like everyone else. I'll do anything, no matter how tough it might be.*

"All right, let's move on to stage two. You've communicated with the spirits and revealed your power. Next, you must separate that power from yourself."

"Separate?" *What does that mean? I don't quite get it.*

"Indeed. First, watch me. *Rai Lo*."

My master chanted, and the light from his right hand started to float in the air. He guided the ball towards me, and freely moved it about in front of my eyes. The ball jumped to the left, then to the right.

"This is the second step: to control the magic that you've created. If you can't do this, you won't be able to use healing magic."

"I see. This does look a bit trickier..."

It was completely different from simply creating light. It was hard enough to gather light onto the fingertips of my left hand, and I was at a loss to learn how to detach this light from my body.

"It may be easier to gather light onto your hand while saying '*Rai*' and then release it when you say '*Lo*.' It'll take time to learn, so be patient while we go through some lectures."

"I understand." I tried to detach the light from my body while I listened to him speak. "Humph!" As I thought, I couldn't do it. But I knew that this was tricky.

"To grasp the feeling of separating light from your body, you can first try to transfer your magic into an item. Here, try lighting up this pen."

"O-Okay."

I took the pen with my glowing hand. I focused, trying to imagine my light moving into the pen. Slowly, it started to wrap around the object.

"Whoa. I did it."

I couldn't completely detach the light from my body, but I was able to transfer my magic onto whatever I was holding. When I released the pen from my grasp, it immediately stopped

glowing. *Hmmm, I guess it'll take some time for me to get the hang of this.*

"Now, let's start our lecture," he said.

"Y-Yessir!"

I learned all sorts of things about magic from my master—from its history to its various types to practical uses, I was taught everything related to it. It was a wonderful and exciting time for me, since I had never been able to receive a proper education.

"But I'm a bit tired from all this," I mumbled to myself.

The lectures continued from morning until dusk with no breaks. I was having so much fun that I lost my sense of time, and before I knew it, the sun had already set. I was surprised when I realized that it was dark outside. "I feel like I'm in a daze."

My master had left, and I was alone in my room. I was tired but happy, and gave a satisfied yawn as my eyelids started to droop. I had almost fallen asleep when I heard someone knock on the door.

"Excuse me." Shizuku entered the room. Her beautiful, long black hair fluttered behind her as she brought a tray and put it on the table.

"Prince Callus, I've baked some scones. Would you like some? I've also prepared some tea."

"Oh, so you made them? Yes! I'll totally have some!"

Shizuku was extremely skilled at cooking, on par with the head chef, even. She could make a wide variety of food, but her baked goods were especially delicious. Even when I'd lost my appetite because of the curse, I was still able to eat Shizuku's snacks.

"I know you've been working very hard, so I put my all into these. I've made plenty, so eat to your heart's content."

"Thank you! I'll dig right in!"

I put plenty of Shizuku's homemade jam onto the scone, and stuffed my cheeks while it was still steaming hot. *Mmm, it's so good! It's so moist, how I like them!* The jam was sweet but also a little sour, added in a way where I wouldn't get tired of its flavor. Perhaps because my body was healthy, the scone was more delicious than usual.

Shizuku chuckled. "You don't have to rush. No one's taking this from you."

"But," I said between chews, "it's so...nom nom...delicious!"

Because I'd used my brain a lot, I was craving something

sweet that I could eat a ton of. In the end, most of the scones disappeared into my stomach. I'd never been able to eat this much before.

"Whew! I'm full. It was delicious! Thank you!"

"I'm happy that you seem satisfied. I've got seconds of tea, so please don't hesitate to ask for more."

"Okay."

I gulped down the delicious tea while she swiftly cleaned up the dishes. Shizuku was much too good for a failure of a prince like myself. I felt like if she left my side, she could become the chief maid of this entire castle. She was skilled, athletic, and smart. And this was my personal opinion, but she also had a pretty face. I was sure that aristocrats would be all over her, but for whatever reason, she continued to stay by my side.

I once asked her why, but she simply replied, "Because I love you, Prince Callus," and evaded the question. *I wonder if she'll tell me the truth one day.*

"Oh, by the way, you can use magic, can't you, Shizuku? What kind of magic can you use?" I asked.

Around sixty percent of people could use magic, so it wasn't a rare ability. However, the number of people who could use it for combat were far fewer. Recently, academies that taught magic had begun to crop up, gradually increasing the number of people who could use it for battles.

"I can use ice magic," she replied. "But I'm not good at it, and I can only use a few spells."

If I remembered correctly, ice magic was a derivative of water magic. I thought it was perfect for a serene woman like Shizuku.

"Wow—ice magic! If you don't mind, could you show me something?"

"I can't do much, but if that's your wish." She placed her right hand in front of me and chanted, "*Le Fule*."

A cold gust of wind blew in the room, and a chunk of ice appeared in her hand. With a crackle, the chunk slowly grew larger and bloomed into a beautiful flower shape. It turned into a round crystalline blue flower with the petals turning downwards.

"Please accept this," she said, handing it to me.

Like a piece of glass, the transparent flower was so delicate and beautiful that I couldn't believe it had been created in an instant.

“Amazing! You’re good at magic too, Shizuku!”

“Oh, this is nothing special. I’m sure you’ll learn how to do magic of this degree soon, Prince Callus.”

“You think so?”

Her ice flower was so gorgeous, it was like a piece of art. It seemed a waste to watch it melt away.

“This part where the petals are layered on top of each other looks complicated. I don’t think I could ever make something this delicate,” I said.

“Indeed. If you try to make this flower from scratch, it would require incredible precision and technique. However, I haven’t done anything of the sort. I simply thought to myself that I wanted to create my favorite flower.”

“Huh?”

I couldn’t let that comment slide past me. *Is magic not done all by yourself?*

“Wait, maybe…” I continued to mumble to myself.

My master had said that magic was the act of borrowing power from spirits. If so, I should trust the spirits to some extent if I were to use it. I was failing because I was trying to do everything myself. *Me and the spirits. We need to work together to activate magic.*

“I’m sorry. Let’s try together next time,” I said to the invisible spirits around me.

I concentrated once more. *Relax. Relax your shoulders, and trust them.* Because I stopped tensing up, I could feel the magic flow within me. I tried to gather it towards my right hand, and I talked to the spirits. “*Rai*.”

A pale light glowed in my right hand. *Okay, so far so good. This is where it gets tricky. Focus on your right hand. Don’t tense up, and trust the spirits to an extent.*

“Hm, this is hard. I can’t help myself. I keep stiffening up.”

“Prince Callus,” Shizuku said with a concerned look.

I always made her worry, and I truly felt bad. I didn’t want her to look so sad, and I knew I had to keep trying. I wanted to tell everyone that I was okay, and could do things by myself. *I need to get stronger! So…*

“*Rai Lo*,” I muttered. *Please, spirits, lend me your strength!* I jolted in surprise as I felt my magic being sucked away the moment the chant left my lips. Strength left my body, and I felt dizzy. *That was close. I was about to faint.*

“Gh…” I grunted. I almost stopped giving out magical energy, but I continued to put strength into my body. I felt like I needed to overcome this feeling. “You can take as much as you like. In exchange, please lend me your strength!”

I offered all the magical energy that I possibly could. I gave it my all until I thought my body couldn’t tolerate it anymore. Once almost all my magical power was sucked dry, the sensation stopped. Exhausted, I gasped for air and looked in front of me. A small ball of light was floating in the air.

“I-I did it…”

The light looked small and unreliable, but this was a huge step forward. I had been able to detach some magic from my body.

“Prince Callus!” Shizuku cried as she hugged me tightly. She was so happy that it sounded as though she was praising herself.

“Whoa!”

Her large breasts covered my face, suffocating me.

“Ugh… Gah…” *They’re so soft… I mean, I can’t breathe!* I flailed my arms and legs, but the magic I’d just performed had taken all my strength and I couldn’t shake her off. *Also, she’s so strong! Ugh…*



“You did it, Prince Callus! I knew you could do it!” Shizuku exclaimed.

“Sh-Shizuku…I can’t breathe…”

“Huh? A-Ah, my apologies!”

She quickly let me go after noticing my pale face.

Phew, I can finally breathe again.

“A-Are you okay?! I’m so terribly sorry.”

“Ha ha ha! It’s okay. See? I’m still as lively as ever,” I said, proudly moving around.

She breathed a sigh of relief. *I should be careful not to get caught by her again.*

“I’d like to formally congratulate you once more. Now you can move on to the next step of your training,” she said.

“Yep! Well, I’ve got some time until tomorrow’s lesson, so I should practice a bit more. I want to surprise my master too.”

“Just don’t push yourself too much. You have a habit of going overboard sometimes, Prince Callus.”

“Ha ha, I’m sorry for always making you worry.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” she said with a smile.

Once again, I felt like someone as wonderful as Shizuku was wasted on a burden like myself.

***

When it came to learning magic, the trickiest step was the one Callus was currently at: learning how to detach it from one’s body. Should one have sufficient magical energy, it wasn’t difficult to use, but separation was where many failed. I’d thought that it would take quite a bit of time for Callus to master it.

“Just what is going on here?” I asked.

I’d entered the room to find countless balls of light floating in the air. But that wasn’t all. Each of the balls varied in size and brightness. From small to large, bright to dull, and stationary to moving, light filled the entire room. I didn’t even remember teaching the boy how to move these spheres around.

“Ah, Master! Good morning! Look, I managed to make eight balls! If I try a bit more, I’m sure I could make ten, but I was worried I’d lose control, so I stopped at eight!” Callus said.

“I-I see.” *Even eight is more than enough.*

I clamped my mouth shut, suppressing the urge to vocalize

my thoughts. It wasn't normal for someone to be able to move various objects at once without proper training. It was like learning how to draw different pictures with each hand at the same time. Controlling three to four items would be like attempting to use one's feet as well, and even veteran magicians struggled with numbers beyond that.

"To think you could control this many so easily."

Even I, the renowned "Sage Gourley," had needed time to clear this step in my youth, and I remembered it being quite the struggle. Light magic was always said to be much more difficult to learn than the other elements. There were numerous theories for this, but I personally believed that it was due to the fickle and whimsical nature of most light spirits. Whenever I felt like I couldn't use my magic well, I would praise the spirits, and I would immediately be able to use magic smoothly again.

I chuckled to myself. "He's certainly exceeded my expectations."

It wasn't as though I had assumed Callus lacked talent, but even so, he had completely blown away my estimations. I could feel my heart pounding, unbefitting for an old man such as myself. It may have been unwise, but I couldn't help but hold high expectations for him. He might be able to become a sage, or someone even greater still.

"All right. For today, let's practice trying to control ten balls at once. I'm going to be strict with you."

"Yessir! Please!"

Callus, who'd been studying by himself, was improving right in front of my eyes after being given some pointers. This child was like a sponge, quick to learn and eager to absorb any knowledge he could get his hands on. *Some of his enthusiasm obviously comes from needing to learn this magic to stay alive, but I also think he's having fun. Above all, he's enjoying the learning process.*

Those blessed with exceptional talents from the start would usually become lazy and end up loafing around, but this child had none of that attitude. Callus was straightforward and earnest, and I believed that this would be his greatest strength as a magician.

"Oh dear. I feel like the teacher is also being tested here," I whispered to no one in particular. I was determined to carefully polish this gemstone without breaking it.

***

It had already been four days since my master came to this manor. He was a busy man and had to get back to work, so I only had ten more days with him. In other words, I only had ten days to learn the healing spell *Ra Heal*. He told me that I was a quick study, but it would still be difficult for me to learn the spell within that time.

I'll work hard today too, I thought to myself.

But Shizuku brought me some unexpected news.

"Prince Callus? After lunch, Prince Damien shall be here," she said.

"Wait, my brother?! Isn't that out of the blue?"

Damien, the first prince, was the primary candidate for the throne in our Kingdom of Ledyvia. Unlike my frail self, he was strong and rushed headfirst into battle without fear. Our soldiers were fiercely loyal to him, and even other countries had praised his success. He was an older brother that I could be proud of.

"He usually tells me about three days in advance. I wonder if something happened," I said.

"Indeed, it's a bit odd. Is something wrong?"

My brother was a very busy man, and he normally stayed holed up within the royal capital. The manor that I lived in was away from the capital, about half a day's trip by carriage. Just coming here was a hassle, and I couldn't even remember the last time my entire family had gathered together.

"I hope nothing bad happened..."

Feeling anxious, I decided to distract myself with my magical training.

***

I was training with my master in the afternoon like usual, when the door suddenly slammed open and a large man entered my room.

"I'm coming in, Callus," he said.

This large, muscular man was my older brother and the first prince of the Ledyvia Kingdom, Damien Lionel Leditzweissen. His flaming red hair had earned him the nickname "The Flaming Lion." *So cool!* His golden eyes pointed at me before he looked to my master.

“You must be the sage, Sir Gourley. I’ve heard much about your accomplishments, and I’m honored to meet you,” he said in a deep voice that echoed throughout the room.

“Thank you for your kind praise, Your Highness. I’ve heard about your achievements on the battlefield as well,” my master replied.

The two shook hands after exchanging short greetings.

“A chance to talk with a sage is a rare one. I’d love to speak at length with you, but I must talk with my brother right now. I’m sorry, but would you kindly leave me alone with him?”

My master looked at me questioningly. It seemed he was worried about leaving me alone in the room with my brother. *Damien does look scary, after all.*

“I’ll be fine, Master. Please have a rest,” I said.

“If you say so,” he replied. He made his exit with some hesitation.

When Shizuku left as well, only Damien and I remained. He sharply gazed at me for a while in silence before finally speaking.

“Callus, it seems like you’ve gotten a bit better.”

“I have, thank you. Recently, I’ve been able to eat properly too.”

“I see.” He crouched down to my eye level, and suddenly clasped my shoulders with both of his hands. “That’s absolutely wonderful! I heard that you’d recovered, and I couldn’t bear to leave you be! I just had to come over and see for myself! Oh, I’ve brought so many gifts for you today! Do you want some food?! I’ve got books too! Tell me whatever you’d like!”

“C-Calm down! Speak slower or I won’t understand!” I tried to rein in my brother, who continued to talk excitedly.

Though Damien looked terrifying, he was surprisingly affectionate towards me and was a good brother. When I was younger, I was sickly and couldn’t go outside, so he’d tell me all sorts of stories that he learned. He was always busy and barely had any days off, but he’d use any spare time to research items that might be effective against my curse, and would personally deliver any medicine he bought. Considering how much other work he must have, I couldn’t be more grateful.

“Anyways, I’m really surprised. I haven’t seen you look this healthy in a while. I must thank Sir Gourley again later.” He laughed, but his expression quickly turned serious. “Is there anything you’d like for me to do? My work’s been taken care of,

so I have some time. I'd be able to visit this place more often, so tell me anything you'd like."

"Something for you to do?" *Hmmm... Have I got anything? My master's teaching me magic so... Ah!* "I know! I want you to train me. Is that okay?"

"Train you?" He cocked his head to the side. "Isn't that what Sir Gourley's doing? And I can only use fire magic."

I should rephrase that. "Not magical training, but physical training. I'm a bit too thin."

"Ah, so that's what you meant."

I'd been bedridden my entire life, so I was skinny and frail. Thanks to my master, I'd been able to eat proper meals for the past few days, but I was still far from having a healthy body. Even my master, who was much older, looked better built than me.

"I know that you need stamina to use magic, so I'd like to at least have as much stamina as an average person. I'll squeeze some time in between my magical training, so I don't think it'd take up too much of yours. Will you help me out?"

"Hey, buddy, of course! If you're fine with it, I'll give you as much support as you need! You'll be strong enough to become a knight in no time!"

"Uh, you don't have to go *that* far..."

I'd heard that the Royal Knights were elite soldiers, and I didn't think I'd be able to join no matter how much I tried. *The training alone would kill me.*

"I've got magical training too, so let's take it down a few notches, okay?" I said.

"Are you sure? Well, if that's what you want."

My brother reluctantly complied. I was glad I convinced him. Knowing my brother, I knew he'd get too passionate with my training anyways. *It'll get tough, but I gotta give it my all!*

***

"Ugh, my entire body's sore," I mumbled, rubbing my aching muscles as I climbed into bed. Damien's training was as tough as I'd expected, and he'd worn me out. He had ample experience as a soldier; he carefully analyzed the limits of my body, and used as much of my stamina as possible. I felt like I'd get stronger in no time.

I yawned. "I think I'll sleep well tonight."

Drained of both magical and physical energy, I was comfortably fatigued and fell into a deep sleep.

"Zzz... Zzz... Hm?" I woke up to an odd feeling. Moonlight dimly illuminated my room. "Ugh, I'm so sleepy."

Half asleep, I rubbed my eyes and slowly sat up, when I noticed a ball of light floating in front of me. "Huh? Why?" The ball looked exactly like *Rai Lo*, but I hadn't used any magic. I glanced around, but my master was nowhere to be seen. *So then, who made this light?*

I nervously inspected the ball. It slowly floated around me, as though it were analyzing me in return. The ball, perhaps satisfied, finally came to a stop in front of me once more. It let off a bright glow and suddenly expanded into the shape of a human.

"Greetings. Can you see me?" it said.

Shocked, I lost my words and could only sit there gaping like a fish. The mysterious figure smiled. "Thank goodness. It seems like you *can* see me."

The figure was a beautiful woman with striking, glittering blonde hair. She seemed a bit older than me, and I guessed that she was in her late teens. She was floating in the air and kept staring at my face.

Wh-Who is she?! "Excuse me, who are you?" I asked.

"Oh, sorry. You must've been surprised because I appeared so suddenly," she replied. "My name is Selena. I'm the light spirit that possesses you."

"Huh?! B-By spirit, do you mean..."

I couldn't help but stammer back at her words. *I-I thought nobody could see spirits, so why can I see her so clearly? I'm even talking with her.* I felt like I had gone crazy, and I couldn't trust her just yet, but it didn't look like she was lying. I needed to know more about her first.

"Um, my name is Callus."

"I know. I've been by your side ever since you first used magic," she said with a giggle.

Her story checks out if she's really a spirit. But isn't this a bit embarrassing? Is she with me when I take a bath too?

"Don't worry. I close my eyes when you're taking a bath," she said.

"Oh, but you still tag along." It seemed like I still had plenty to

worry about.

Now's not the time. I have so many questions for her.

"I can tell from a glance that you're not a normal human," I said. "I can also sense an odd power from you, similar to what I feel when I use magic, so I can buy that you're a spirit." This much, I was able to understand. "But if you're a spirit, then how am I able to see you? I thought they couldn't be seen by humans."

"That's simple. It's because you've received a blessing." She pointed to the left side of my chest. It was clear what she was pointing at, but I had no idea why she'd refer to it as a blessing.

"You're talking about this curse, aren't you?"

"Yep. I'm not sure about the details, but humans born with that blessing can see spirits. I've only heard about it and never actually seen it for myself. I had some doubts, but I guess the stories are true."

"I see..."

I had no idea, but I didn't think any human knew about this tidbit. Those born with my curse were called Taboo Beings, and as they were plagued by pain, a vast majority died while they were kids. Even if they claimed they could see spirits, many of these claims were most likely disregarded as hallucinations or a child's delusions.

At the very least, Taboo Beings weren't recorded often, and they were often seen as fairytale-like creatures. My father didn't believe they even existed until I was born. I didn't think this would allow me to see spirits, but if I told my master, I was sure he'd be surprised.

"Why did you appear in front of me, Miss Selena?" I asked.

"Just call me Selena. Magicians and spirits must be closely linked, so we should be friendlier with each other, Callus."

"G-Got it...Selena." I decided to address her more casually, though I felt slightly embarrassed about it.

She giggled with satisfaction. "What's up, Callus? I'll answer any questions that you might have. ♪" She proudly puffed out her chest.

Are all spirits this friendly? "Um, why did you appear in front of me? You've been by my side ever since I used light magic, right?"

"I was, but it seems like you couldn't see me back then. I'm surprised too, you know. I didn't think you'd actually be able to see me."

It seemed like I was the one who changed. *Is it because my body got used to magic?* I continued to theorize as Selena asked a question.

"Hey, can you see other spirits?"

"Huh? No, I can only see you for now." I glanced around the room, but saw nothing else. If there were other spirits around, I couldn't see them.

"Hm, okay. I guess that's because I'm possessing you."

"So that means there *are* other spirits in this room, aren't there? What do they look like?"

"Who cares? You've got me, after all."

"Huh? Uh, okay." I felt a shiver crawl up my spine, and closed my mouth on instinct. I remembered my master saying how light spirits got jealous easily and would try to tie me down. *I guess that part's true.*

"I showed myself partly because I wanted to express my gratitude. Thank you for always providing me with rich and delicious magical energy!"

"I didn't know it had taste."

"Of course it does. If you only have a lot of it, you'll attract a bunch of low-level spirits. But you're different. I don't know any spirit that wouldn't want *your* magical power. It's rich and mellow, yet thick and velvety. After a taste of your magic, I couldn't possibly eat anything else."

She rambled on about my magical power, spellbound by its taste. It sounded like my power was truly delicious, and though it was difficult for me to wrap my head around, I knew that this was a good thing.

"Um, I know that this might be rude to ask, but are you an amazing spirit, Selena? You just mentioned something about low-level ones."

"Are you asking if I'm special? Heh heh, of course I am! Did you know that light spirits are special just for existing? I'm special even among my species, since I'm the princess of the light spirits! That's why I was able to kick out the others and possess you!"

"Princess of the spirits?"

"Yep. Among the countless number of spirits, the special ones are called princesses of the spirits. You humans call the daughter of your king a princess, but we use the word a little differently. We live very freely, so we don't have a king," Selena prattled on

with a smirk.

I didn't understand what this princess of the spirits meant, but I got that she was a special existence. *Does this affect my magic?*

"So spirits really do exist. Is it okay if I tell others about you?"

"Hmmm. Well, I personally don't mind, but it might be wise to choose who you talk to. There aren't many humans who can talk with spirits, so you might get wrapped up in something weird."

"You're right. I guess I should only tell my master about you."

"Do you mean that white-haired grandpa? Yeah, I think that's fine, since he's a light magician too."

It came as no surprise that Selena knew about my master as well. It was reassuring to know that she was by my side, but I felt a bit nervous when I thought about how she had always been watching me. I wouldn't have minded as much had she been an animal, but Selena looked like a beautiful woman.

"Hey. Tell me about yourself. What other spirits are out there? How did you come to possess me?" I asked curiously.

Selena huffed happily. "It's good to see that you're interested in spirits. I guess I can specially tell you a few things."

"Hooray!"

I was tired and had gone to bed early, but due to this sudden encounter, I spent the rest of my night talking with Selena. I was so wrapped up in our conversation that I only noticed time had passed when I saw rays from the early morning sun peeking through the curtains.

"Oh, shoot! I should go to sleep!" I said.

"You humans are such a pain, needing so much sleep. Good night, Callus. Let's be good partners from now on," Selena said, her hand outstretched.

"Mhm. I'll be in your care."

We couldn't touch each other, but as our hands got close, I could feel a definite warmth.

***

The day after I met Selena, I trained with my master as usual.

"First, let's try using *Rai Lo*," he said.

"Yessir!" I focused my magical power into my right hand and prepared to cast the spell.

Suddenly, Selena appeared and floated close to me. I could see her in the corner of my eye, but thinking I'd get distracted, I decided to focus on my magic. *Master can't see her, and it'd be weird if I reacted to her presence.* I once again sharpened my focus.

"*Rai Lo*," I said.

The moment the words left my lips, she put both hands over my right hand, which had stored my magical power. She took a deep breath, sucked up my magical power, summoned a ball of light at her fingertips, and placed it in front of my right hand. *Oh, so that's how they help us use magic. I wasn't able to see it before.*

"Hm? What's wrong, Callus? You seem out of it," my master said.

"Ah, I'm sorry! I'll concentrate!"

"All right. Try moving the ball of light now."

I followed his orders and moved my light. Magic required the magician and the spirits to work together. The magician would have intentions in their head which the spirits would read and then express in the form of magic. However, thoughts were a bit too vague, so spells were chanted to make the intentions more clear. Simply moving my magic was easy enough to command by thought, but it was better to vocalize more detailed and precise instructions.

"*Blank*," I said.

The ball of light split into two.

"*Turn. Grow.*"

One ball of light started to spin while the other ball slowly grew larger. *Great. I can move these how I wish.*

My master, who also seemed satisfied, nodded and clapped his hands to signal the end of this exercise.

"Very good. It seems like you can use *Rai Lo* quite well now. I don't think there's anyone your age who can use this spell so skillfully," he said.

"Thank you very much!"

Even if he was just being polite, receiving such high praise made me happy. I hoped I could meet a magician close to my age one day.

"The next spell I'll be teaching you is '*Ra Edge*.' In human words, it translates to 'blade of light.' You'll create a small blade out of light, used for attacking. It's one of the beginner combat spells. Try it out."

“Okay! Uh… *Ra Edge*!” *Gather the balls of light to create a knife and… Oh, I was close, but it fizzled out.* “Huh?”

He chuckled. “You wouldn’t need me if you could do it in one go, would you? Magic becomes all the more difficult based on how complex the shapes and effects are. Making a blade is much more complicated than creating simple balls, so it’ll obviously be harder to learn too.”

“Hmmm, this will take some time.”

While I was thinking of a method, Selena drifted over to me and spoke—in a voice that only I could hear.

“Hey, you. I don’t mind making a knife, but if you don’t have a shape in mind, I can’t do much.”

“Huh? Right, okay.” I’d imagined the rough shape of a knife, but it was too vague for her to understand, which caused the spell to fail. “But I’m not too well versed in knives. What should I do?”

“Do you not have an example or a visual aid or something? If you show me, I could match that shape.”

I looked at her with surprise. “Is that all you need?”

“Isn’t that the quickest way?”

She was right, but I didn’t think it’d be so easy. *Let’s see, a knife… I think I had one in my desk. Found it!* I took out a knife that my brother had bought for me as a souvenir a few years ago. It was a blade from a different country and made with a special type of metal, but it looked like a normal knife. I felt like this would be easy to copy.

“Okay, Selena. Could I ask you to copy this?” I asked.

“Okay. Visualize this item in your head, got it?” she replied.

I touched the knife, trying to get a grasp of its size, and envisioned the weapon in my mind. After I had a solid image of it, I chanted, “*Ra Edge*.”

Beads of light scattered from my hand and gathered into the shape of a proper knife. The details still looked a little rough, but the blade was sharp, and I felt like I could actually use this for combat.



“Look, Master! I just made a— Oops.” I crowed with delight before catching my words.

My master was looking at me with suspicion. *That makes sense. To him, it just looked like I suddenly started talking to myself.*

“Are you all right, Callus? Did you eat something weird, perhaps? Were you poisoned and now see hallucinations?” he asked.

“I-I’m fine! I can explain!” I tried to reason with him, but he wasn’t listening to me at all. *I wanted to tell him only after I learned a bit more about spirits, but I guess I’ve got no choice.* “I’m sorry, Master! I was keeping quiet about this, but actually, I’m able to see spirits!”

“What are you talking about? Has fatigue brought on some strange visions?”

“No!”

He continued to look at me with doubt. *He’s definitely suspicious about me. I guess he won’t believe me if I say it out of the blue.*

“There’s really a spirit right here!” I said.

“Oh, so you’re still going to keep going? Then can you see the spirit that possesses me too?”

“Um, I can’t, but…” I turned to my spirit. “Oh, can *you* see the spirit that possesses him, Selena?”

“Huh? The grandpa? Sure I can. It’s a golden hawk,” she replied.

“A golden hawk? Hm, I feel like that description alone won’t be so convincing.”

My master couldn’t see his spirit, so there was no way of proving if I was correct. But my master, who’d heard my conversation, couldn’t hide his shock. He stared at me wide-eyed.

“Did you just say ‘golden hawk’? How could this be?”

What’s gotten into him?

“Callus, do you know the name of this hawk?” he asked.

Selena told me its name. “Ummm, it seems like it’s Yenia. Is something wrong?”

“I see…” My master sat back down and was silent for a while before speaking again. “Yenia is the name of a hawk I spent time with when I was young, but it died many years ago. I didn’t think you’d always be by my side, Yenia.”

I was stunned when I heard his words. *His spirit is a bird that*

he was friends with? Is that even possible?

"Selena, aren't spirits born as spirits?" I asked.

"If an animal passes away with a strong bond, it's not unusual for it to become a spirit. Of course, there are some that are just born spirits as well."

"I see."

"But it's rare to see a spirit possess a human for this long, even if they were close when they were alive. The two must have a very deep bond." She had a kind expression as she looked into space, where I assumed Yenia was.

I hope I can be close friends with Selena.

As I was caught in my own thoughts, my master, who'd been staring down, looked up.

"Callus, could you ask if Yenia's saying anything?" he requested.

"Huh? Um, okay. Erm, Selena, could I ask you?"

Through Selena, I told my master the bird's words. My spirit had the most difficult task, as she was the only one who could understand both sides. She had to translate Yenia's words to our language as well. According to her, only a select few spirits could speak the human language. *Can she talk to me because she's the princess of the spirits?*

"Ummm, it's saying, 'I'm happy you noticed my presence. You used to be a crybaby, but you've become a wonderful magician. I'm proud of you, and I'll continue to be in your care,'" I said.

"Hmph, I'm the one who should be grateful," he said gruffly, tears welling in his eyes. "If you're fine with a hobbling old man like me, please continue to watch over me, my wings of guidance."

He proceeded to pet the air. There was nothing there, but I felt like I could see a golden hawk floating about.

"When I was a child, I was very sickly just like you. I couldn't leave my room at all," my master suddenly said after a long silence.

I didn't know he used to be like me..

"Gazing through the window was one of my favorite pastimes. One day, I noticed a baby bird struggling to walk on the ground. I felt that we were similar, and so I decided to raise it."

"That must've been Yenia," I said.

"Indeed. Yenia was my very first friend. We spent time

together, and though we were of different species, we nurtured a deep bond. But just before my health improved, I lost Yenia to an illness. Thus, the moment I learned that I had a talent for light magic, I decided to use it to help sickly people."

"I had no idea..."

"It's such an old, old memory from my distant past. It's so old that I couldn't remember this story until I heard my bird's name, but Yenia's still by my side. I couldn't be happier."

It was an amazing story. My master had been using magic for over fifty years, and Yenia had always been there for him, supporting him from the shadows, understanding that my master might never have known. They may not have spent much time together while it was alive, but the bond was real. Master looked at me, and grasped my hand with both of his wrinkly palms.

"Thank you, Callus. Thank you for reminding me of something so important. And above all, thank you for telling me the words of my friend," he said.

"I-It's not much. I only told you what Selena said to me."

"I've never heard of anyone who could do such a thing. By the name of Sage Gourley, I swear that *you* are a very special person."

"You're exaggerating."

I'd never been told such a thing before, and hearing those words tickled my heart. I was happy, but a little embarrassed. It was an odd feeling.

"However, it's wise to be quiet about this special ability of yours. Sadly, there are many who would misuse it," he said.

"Selena, the spirit who possesses me, said the same thing. For now, I'm only planning on telling you."

"Yes, that's good. I'd like to thank you as well, Selena. Please take care of Callus." My master bowed towards the space to my right.

As a side note, Selena wasn't there. Perhaps tired from translating for us, she rested her chin on my head and relaxed. I wasn't planning on telling my master this, though.

"I've used a bit too much of your time. I'm sorry. Let's resume training. Are you okay with this, Callus and Selena?"

"Y-Yes! We're ready!"

I was drawn to mysterious spirits and magic, and the four of us continued to explore this realm until the sun set.

***

“Hmmm, this isn’t it either,” I said for the hundredth time as I returned a book to the shelf. *This is a bit tough for an old man like me.*

“Are you all right, Sir Gourley? Is there anything I could assist you with?” asked Emma Lily, a maid of the manor, in a worried tone.

She was an energetic girl with curly red hair and freckles. She worked as a live-in maid, doing household tasks like cleaning, laundry, serving, and the like. I’d had her assist me for now, since the manor’s library had always been locked, and I’d never had the opportunity to enter before.

“No need, Emma. I’m fine by myself, so you may go back to your duties if you’d like,” I replied.

“I mustn’t! I can’t neglect a person who’s been trying to heal Prince Callus!”

“Hm, I see. Then may I have a cup of tea to wake me up a little?”

“Certainly! I’m very good at pouring tea; even Shizuku has praised me for it!”

She pounded her chest with pride and swiftly left the room. *How nice to be so young. There was a time when even I would rush headfirst into whatever I could.*

“No, no, it’s an old man’s bad habit to be so quick to reminisce about the past. I suppose I’ll depend on her a little and take a break.”

I shut the book I was reading and rested my eyes. The library had numerous shelves filled with books covering a variety of topics. I didn’t quite know the exact number, but I suspected there were over ten thousand books in this collection. It was much larger than a typical private study. I’d entered the library hoping to find some more information about ways to cure the curse aside from light magic, but it seemed all my effort was for naught. *I’m sure the doctors who’d treated the boy had already read everything they could.* I hadn’t expected much in the first place.

“Sir Gourley, I’ve brought some tea!” Emma said as she returned.

“Ah, thank you. I’ll have a sip.”

I received the steaming cup of tea from her and brought it to my lips. The aroma of the young tea leaves passed through my

nose, calming my nerves. *It tastes good, and I can see why she's so confident about it.*

"This is lovely. I'm sure this would be gladly consumed at the royal capital as well," I said.

"Aw, shucks! I've still got a long way to go, heh heh," she said, but she looked proud and couldn't suppress a smile.

"You're still young. You can try out whatever you wish."

She was still in her teens, and was at an impressionable age. I'd thought that she might've been bored being holed up in a manor deep in the forest, so I was surprised by what she said next.

"Actually, I requested to work here. I've received some good offers in the past, but I've got no intentions of leaving this manor."

I was shocked by her firm response. *What causes her to be so resolute?*

"May I ask why?" I said.

"I—I mean, all twenty or so servants, including myself—chose to be here. We're all doing this for Prince Callus."

"I see..." *Interesting. I'd like to hear more about this.*

"Prince Callus is a very kind person. He not only remembers our names and faces, but our favorite foods and where we're from. Despite our vast differences in rank and title, he still treats us as equals."

"Indeed, he's kind. Not many could remain so while being in such tough circumstances."

I'd seen many people in my life. Many who were virtuous at first, but suddenly changed when they were met with difficult situations. You could only know someone's true character when circumstances were desperate.

Callus, from the moment he was born, was thrust into a tough state of affairs. Yet he never lost his humanity, and persevered without lashing out at anyone. Even I was moved by this noble sight. The other day, he had seen me rotating my arms and asked, "Would you like me to massage your shoulders?"

I chuckled to myself. *I've never heard of a magician who had a member of the royal family massage their shoulders.*

In the end, he wouldn't back down and I resigned myself to letting him help me. He didn't have much strength, but it didn't feel bad, and it was almost as if he was my grandson. I knew that this kind of thinking was unlike me.

“But that’s not all. Prince Callus saved my life once,” Emma said with a serious expression.

I have no clue what she’s talking about. “He saved you?”

“Yes. It was some time ago. My father lived in a nearby village, but he became deathly ill. It was apparently a rare disease that couldn’t be treated without an excellent physician. The medical expenses were costly, and I was at a loss for what to do.”

Doctors, of course, differed based on skill. A skilled doctor was expensive and, above all, busy. It was rare for an excellent doctor to visit a village with a small population.

“However, Prince Callus somehow heard about my troubles, and sent his personal physician to my father. I only heard about it when my father recovered.” She had tears in her eyes and her shoulders trembled. “Prince Callus must’ve been in so much pain himself, yet he endured it and sent help to someone like myself. He’s so kind and precious. Though I’m greatly indebted to him, I’m not even able to ease his pain!”

She’d seen Callus’s struggles up close, and her feelings of pain and powerlessness were surely great.

“Please, I beg you. Please save Prince Callus. I don’t want to see him suffer anymore. Please!” She bowed deeply, desperately appealing to me. These feelings were not just her own, but of all the servants who worked in this manor.

To think you’d be so adored. Callus, you’re quite the boy. Since she’s gone this far to implore me, I must become even more motivated than ever. Heh, I don’t even have the time to act weak, I suppose.

“Leave it to me. I shall definitely find a way to save your master,” I said firmly as I clasped her shoulder.

With renewed determination, I opened another book.

***

“*Ra Heal!*” I chanted.

A soft glow emanated from my right hand, but just as it was about to condense into a more refined form, it fizzled and disappeared. *How many times have I messed this up?*

“This is really difficult,” I mumbled.

Master laughed. “Healing magic requires a bit more skill than normal spells. If it could be learned so easily, people wouldn’t struggle with it. Let’s try again.”

I took up the challenge once more, trying to match Selena's rhythm. But my magic always disappeared before it took shape. I was on my sixth day of training, and since I'd already learned all the basic spells, I had moved on to *Ra Heal*, the healing incantation. Because healing magic required higher skill, many would take a few extra steps to gradually learn it. But it was an essential spell for me, so I decided to practice it right away.

"Hm, this really is a bit tough." My training had gone smoothly so far, but *Ra Heal* was more difficult than I'd expected, and I simply couldn't use the spell.

Creating a magical sword was simple enough since I had a clear image of it in my head, but I wasn't quite sure how to visualize healing.

"Selena, can you imagine what healing magic is like?" I asked.

"Sort of, since I'm a spirit. But I don't know if I could explain it well. It's like a 'fwoosh' feeling. Does that make sense?"

"A 'fwoosh' feeling?" I didn't understand at all.

She must be the type to just grasp things as they come, and is probably no good at teaching.

My master saw my troubled expression. "Light magic has the power to return things to its correct form. *Ra Heal* uses this power to the maximum, and could be considered the most important of all the light spells."

I remembered learning that bit. Elements each had unique characteristics. For example, fire magic had the power to spread while water magic had the power to dissipate. *So that's why light magic works on curses.*

"So when using this spell, you shouldn't think about healing something, but returning it to its original form. Light magic is difficult to master, but it can become a reliable asset to you," he said.

"Hmmm... 'Return to its original form.' I got it. I'll try it out," I said. *Envision my body returning to its normal, healthy state.*

"*Ra Heal.*"

Light gathered onto the palm of my hand. I tried to bring my hand towards my curse, but the light dissipated and fizzled away. This was unfortunate, but I was certain there was an improvement thanks to my master's advice. He was good at teaching.

"Good. Keep at it, Callus," he said.

Master Gourley held the title of sage, given only to a select

few magicians. I knew he had many other responsibilities, and I felt bad for keeping him here for a boy like myself. I hoped I could somehow repay this favor. While I was wrapped up in my thoughts, I heard a knock on the door.

Shizuku entered. “Pardon my intrusion, Prince Callus. Prince Sirius has arrived.”

“Oh, already?” I said.

Sirius was my other older brother. He was the second prince of this kingdom. If Damien was the brawn, then Sirius was the brain. He was always calm and collected when making decisions, and I found him very reliable. Like Damien, he was a brother I could be proud of. If I remembered correctly, he was not only smart, but skilled at magic as well. He was an amazing person whose talents were in stark contrast to a failure like me.

“Master, may I excuse myself for a few moments?” I asked.

“Of course. Spending time with your family is more precious than anything. Let’s take a break.”

“Thank you!”

I bowed my head and made my way to the entrance of the manor. Tonight, my entire family would visit this place and have dinner together. *How long has it been since the last time all of us have gathered?*

Had I lived at the royal capital, I was sure that there would have been more opportunities to meet, but from the confines of this manor, I couldn’t spend time with them very often. *I want to undo this curse as soon as I can and live a normal life,* I thought as I reached the entrance.

My brother was already there. As I approached him, he noticed my presence. “Callus, you…”

“I-It’s been a while, Sirius.”

He studied my face and rushed to my side. His cold, sharp eyes were fixed on me the entire time. Living up to his nickname, the “Blue Eagle,” Sirius’s stare bored a hole right through me. I was sure that anyone he glared at would be terrified.

Still staring at me, he grasped both of my shoulders. “Callus… Are you fine walking? I heard that you’d gotten better, but don’t push yourself. Ah, I heard Damien the idiot came by the other day. Did he do anything unpleasant to you? Let me know immediately. I shall dispose of that muscle-brained idiot in an instant!”

“I-I’m fine, Sirius! Damien hasn’t done anything bad to me!”

It was obvious, but Sirius also loved to spoil me for some reason. The two had completely different personalities, but they agreed on this point alone. *I wonder why?*

***

"Hey, Damien. You haven't pushed Callus too hard, have you? Based on your answer, I may have to cut through your needlessly thick neck."

"Huh? Are you trying to start something, Sirius? I'd never hurt Callus. I bet *you're* troubling him since you're always so clingy."

As I ate dinner with my family, the sun began to set and my brothers started to quarrel with each other. They'd always been on bad terms and would always argue when they met, but they apparently worked together well. They had opposing personalities, but it seemed they were able to support each other at work.

"Calm down, you two. You're troubling Callus," my father said.

He was an intelligent and noble man, trusted by our citizens and highly regarded by other countries. He was kind to his family, and I admired him greatly. I was proud to have him as my father.

My two headstrong brothers fell silent, unable to talk back. They continued to eat without speaking another word.

"I'm sorry, Callus. We didn't mean to ruin such a rare occasion," my father said.

"I don't mind, father. A little chaos just makes things more fun," I replied.

"Hah! You're certainly a generous boy. It might be interesting to give you the throne."

"P-Please don't say that!"

Perhaps due to the alcohol, my father started to say outrageous things. Even as a joke, there was a line that he shouldn't cross.

Look, even my brothers are disappointed...

"Callus as the next king? Hm, that's a fine idea! I'd much rather have him than someone as stubborn as Sirius!"

"That's my line, Damien. Your entire brain is nothing but muscle. If you were to take the throne, this kingdom would perish in three days. Unlike you, Callus is reliable, and I'd be more than happy to support him."

Oh my god, my brothers are no help. I must do something…

As they began bickering yet again, I continued to look for a way to defuse the situation. My mother smiled while witnessing the noisy and rowdy dinner table, a scene unfitting for a royal family.

"How long has it been since I've had such a fun and delightful meal? It's all thanks to you, Callus," she said.

"Huh? Me?" I asked.

"Yes, you. Ever since Damien and Sirius were kids, they disliked each other and would always fight."

"There doesn't seem to be much difference now."

"You're right," she said with a chuckle.

What does she mean?

"They *do* argue a lot now too, but it was much worse back then. I was so worried that they might seriously try to kill each other."

I'd never known this before, and I couldn't hide my shock. I knew that the two weren't on good terms, but I thought they at least held some respect for each other. I was confident that they would never aim for the other's life.

"Everything changed when you were born, Callus. You suffered more than anyone, but you never once complained. Seeing how kind you were, the two were embarrassed by their past actions. Ever since then, they stopped having petty arguments and worked hard to improve themselves."

"But I was just desperate. I haven't done anything."

"You may not have had those intentions, but it's true that those two changed thanks to you. Thank you, Callus. You three brothers are my pride and joy."

Feeling embarrassed, I scratched my head. If I was able to be kind, it was thanks to the kindness of the people around me. I wasn't amazing at all. Still, if a no-good person like me was able to help my brothers in any way, I was proud of that.

"You all grew up so strong, unlike a failure of a mother like myself," she whispered.

I couldn't hear her well, but she looked glum and sad. My mother was usually calm and cheery, but she would occasionally let a gloomy expression slip past. She hadn't done so when I was younger, but ever since she'd left the manor for the royal capital, she would sometimes look a bit down. I had no idea what she was worrying about, but I hoped from the bottom of my heart

that her worries would one day go away.

***

After sharing an enjoyable meal with my family, I reviewed today's lesson with my master. I couldn't find time in the afternoon, so I was making up for it now. Since my master would only be here for a bit more than a week, I had no time to waste.

"Like this, right?" I asked.

"That's no good. You have to be more careful here."

I was learning magic like usual, when I heard a knock and Shizuku appeared. *That's odd. It's so late at night. Did something happen?*

"Pardon me for coming in at this hour. There's actually a guest for you, Sir Gourley. He's waiting at the entrance, but seems to be in a hurry," she said.

"A guest for me? Who could it be?" Master asked.

"It's a young man who calls himself Macbell."

"Oh, him? I wonder what business he has."

Seems like my master knows this man. If he's in a hurry, it's best if they meet as soon as possible.

"I'll be fine here, so please go to him," I said.

"Ah, thank you. I'll take you up on that kind offer. Macbell's one of my apprentices, so it'll do you good to meet him, Callus."

"Really? Then I'll tag along."

My master and I headed towards the entrance and found a man in his twenties waiting for us. *That must be Macbell.* As Shizuku had said, he seemed to be in a hurry as he glanced around restlessly. *What's going on?*

"It's good to see you, Macbell. What business do you have with me?" my master said.

"S-Sir Gourley! I'm so glad I could see you… But now's not the time! This is an emergency!" he yelled.

"You're too loud. It's already late, so pipe down a bit."

"It's an emergency! Please head to the City of Magic immediately! You've been summoned, Sir Gourley!"

"Summoned?" Master's face grew dark.

Wh-What should I do? If my master is gone, what'll happen to my training?!

"Right now? That's surely a bit too sudden. We've got plenty of time until the ceremony. Who gave such an order?" my master

asked.

"Chairman Emilia! He said, 'Come immediately. If you refuse to comply within the time limit, I shall take away your title.' Please, head over there right now!"

The situation had taken a drastic turn. I suddenly felt my heart beat faster, and I couldn't stay silent.

"What do you mean by your title being taken away?" I managed to ask amidst the confusion.

Macbell, who had no idea who I was, looked at Master as if to ask, "Who's this kid?"

"It's fine," my master said. "Tell him."

"Sir Gourley was going to be bestowed the title of 'grand sage' at the City of Magic. This was supposed to happen two weeks from now at the Ceremony of Sages, but the schedule was suddenly pushed forward a week. If we don't leave right now, we won't make it in time!"

"Oh no..." I said.

Grand sage was a title above sage, and it was proof that a person was truly a cut above the rest. At the Ceremony of Sages, the Magical Committee celebrated the naming of new sages and grand sages. A large number of magicians gathered for this honorable occasion.

"Master, you're going to become a grand sage?"

"I suppose so. I thought I'd never become one, but it seems some oddball decided to nominate me. They seem to have judged me not by skill, but by what I've involved myself in."

He seemed a little troubled, but looked pleased at the same time. Becoming a grand sage was what magicians aimed for, so I supposed he couldn't help but feel happy about it. I was truly lucky to have such an amazing person as my master, but if he were to depart for the city right now, he wouldn't be able to look after my training. And unfortunately, my body was too frail to follow him on his trip.

"I don't think I could attend the ceremony and head back here. The Ceremony of Sages wouldn't just occur at Lazzat, the City of Magic. I'd have to go to the Sacred Land of Mahomea as well. It might take more than six months to go to all these places and return."

"That can't be!" I said.

I felt everything in front of me grow darker. *I thought that I'd just found some hope to live. I can't believe this...*

“Sir Gourley, is there any way to overturn this decision? This order sounds a bit unreasonable,” said Shizuku, who suddenly appeared near us. Her expression remained the same, but her voice carried a hint of frustration and impatience.

“It’s nothing new for the chairman to make unreasonable requests. He’s always been eccentric, and he’s been criticized for his actions in the past, but he’s never wavered. Once he decides on something, it’ll never change,” my master replied.

“No…” Shizuku was at a loss for words.

This sounded awful to me. Having power didn’t mean that they could do whatever they wished. *Is the Magical Committee actually a horrible organization?*

“Still, it’s rare even by the chairman’s standards to make such a puzzling request. Macbell, did you ask about the reason for this?”

The young man jolted, his shoulders trembling. “I-I-I-I-I’m so sorry! I tried asking, but the chairman’s intensity silenced me.”

“No need to apologize. Knowing the reason won’t change anything. In any case, hm… What shall I do…?” Master looked down with a troubled expression.

If he departed for the City of Magic, he wouldn’t be able to continue my lessons. According to him, it seemed like he couldn’t come back straight away either. With only six months left to live, the possibility of me reuniting with my master once he left was low. However, if he didn’t depart, he would not only be unable to receive the title of grand sage, but his title of sage would be stripped from him as well. As a magician, that would be the most terrifying punishment. Losing his title would mean losing his status, honor, social circle, equipment for magical research, and everything that he’d been building up for his entire life.

Once my master left, the effects of *Ra Heal* would wear off, and I’d return to my bedridden life. *I don’t want that. I don’t want to return to my former lifestyle.* I wanted to live tomorrow and the days after with enthusiasm, laughing beside the people I cared about most. I wanted to study more, move around, and go to other places. There was nothing I desired more than a normal lifestyle.

But…but… I didn’t hesitate with my decision.

“Please go, Master. I’ll be fine. I’ll be sure to master *Ra Heal* while you’re away,” I said.

“Callus, you…”

I still had half a year left. I'd be bedridden once more, but I knew that I'd still be able to practice magic.

"I even have a reliable friend called Selena. I'll be fine," I said.

Despite my words, I wasn't so confident. In fact, I was filled with anxiety. Still, I didn't want to trouble my master.

"I'll be fine, so please become a grand sage!" I turned around and ran towards my room.

"Callus! Wait!"

I heard a voice call out to me, but I didn't turn around. I felt that my resolve would waver if I ever stopped.

Breathless, I retreated into my room and locked the door. I clutched my pained chest and climbed into bed. I squeezed my eyes shut and curled into a ball, hoping to dispel my ever-growing panic. I was scared to return to my bedridden lifestyle. *I'm scared, but this is for the best. I don't want to ruin my master's life. That can't happen.*

"Goodbye, Master. I hope you stay well," I whispered, and fell into a deep sleep.

***

An old man arrived at Lazzat, the City of Magic. This city north of the Ledyvia kingdom attracted magicians from all around the world. Many were researching magic every day.

The city was filled with large buildings, but the old man stood in front of one of the largest in the area.

A tall man greeted the visitor. "Welcome, Sir Gourley. The chairman is waiting for you inside."

"Thank you."

The tall man rubbed his hands together and kept a smile plastered on his face as he greeted the guest. The old man thought that this only made him look more shady, but refused to vocalize these thoughts.

"My name is Allegro," he said. "I shall be your guide to the chairman's office."

"Understood."

The old man followed Allegro into the large building. This was the headquarters for the Magical Committee. The Committee had connections all around the continent, and Lazzat was its heart.

"I apologize for calling you so suddenly. But the chairman's

words are final," Allegro said.

"I don't mind. This is my job."

"I appreciate your understanding. By the way, my daughter is a fan of yours. May I request an autograph later, if you don't mind?"

"S-Sure. Of course," the old man said with a forced smile.

Allegro, overjoyed with the promise of an autograph, didn't seem to notice the old man's discomfort.

"Here we are. The chairman is already inside, waiting for you. I shall see you later."

The old man, left alone, hesitantly opened the door. "Excuse me."

When he entered the room, a young man was waiting for him. It would have been more accurate to call him a boy, for he looked to be in his early teens. This beautiful boy sat in a luxurious chair as he looked up at the visitor.

"You're here. I've grown tired of waiting," he said with a jovial smile. This boy's name was Emilia Licht, the chairman of the Magical Committee.

Though he looked quite young, he was easily over one hundred years old. He had mastered various forms and types of magic, and was considered the strongest magician of all. He was the very definition of a living legend.

He stared at the old man in front of him and flashed a cheeky smile. "I'm sorry for calling you in so suddenly, Gourley. I've been busy with a few things."

"It's not a problem," the old man replied curtly.

An awkward silence filled the room. Emilia continued to grin, finding some amusement in this, but it suddenly gave way to an expression of indifference, as though he had lost all interest.

"Hey, if you're gonna make an attempt, you should try harder. Things were about to become interesting, but you ruined it," the boy said.

"Wh-Whatever are you talking about?"

"Quit your poor acting. I find it offensive that he thought he could fool me with this."

Emilia snapped his fingers. As though a mirror had cracked, the old man's face suddenly crumbled away with a loud sound. Behind it was Gourley's apprentice, Macbell. The apprentice, noticing that his disguise was revealed, hastily covered his face, but it was all too late. Emilia had seen everything.

“This must be the light spell, *Ra Mirria*. Very interesting indeed. You may be able to fool a third-rate mage, but that won’t work against me,” he said.

Ra Mirria was a high-level spell that used the refraction of light to create an illusion. The spell that Gourley had cast on Macbell was so well done that any normal person would’ve been easily fooled. However, Emilia was the cream of the crop, a peerless magician. He had seen through the disguise as soon as he had noticed the magic wavering ever so slightly.

“You’re Gourley’s apprentice, aren’t you? It seems like you’ve tried to attend the ceremony in his stead, but I can’t accept that. I’ve already decided that I’d show no mercy to traitors or those who don’t listen to my orders,” Emilia said with a malicious grin.

Macbell hastily tried to offer a reason. “Ugh, b-but please listen! There’s a reason for this…”

In the next instant, an overwhelming amount of magic was expelled from Emilia’s body. Overpowered by the aura, Macbell couldn’t muster any more words. The massive difference between the two was made abundantly clear. The gap in power was so vast that any resistance the apprentice offered would’ve been destroyed without a trace.

“Now then. Let’s hear this reasoning, shall we? What did that scoundrel say when he disobeyed my summons?” The chairman was enjoying this from the bottom of his heart as he waited for an answer.

His smile soon faded when Macbell relayed the words from his master.

“Um…erm…he said, ‘Kiss my ass, you stupid old fart who fakes his youth,’ sir.”

A pulsating vein emerged on Emilia’s forehead. He looked like a young boy, though in truth he was anything but. He wasn’t an elf, or any other species blessed with longevity, but a normal human. After a hundred years, his body wouldn’t move as nimbly as he wished. As a form of resistance, he’d personally conducted methods to retain a healthy and youthful body. Age was a taboo subject in front of him, and talking about it—much less poking fun at his age—was strictly forbidden. To do so was to burn every bridge with the Magical Committee.

Macbell noticed the chairman’s menacing aura. “Um, please don’t misunderstand. These aren’t my words! I promise! Please believe…”

“Hmmm, very well.”

“Eep!”

Ominous magic filled the room. Macbell, terrified, curled up into a ball and soiled himself in sheer terror.

“How interesting. I expect no less from you, Gourley. I look forward to meeting you again,” Emilia said with an evil smile.

No one could tell if he was angry or happy.

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The next morning, I woke up earlier than usual. I would normally have fallen back asleep, but I felt restless after yesterday’s events.

“I guess I’ll go get some fresh air.”

Still in my pajamas, I went out to the garden. It seemed that there had been rain last night, as the ground was wet and the air felt cold to the touch.

“I wonder where my master is by now?” I wondered out loud. *If he’s going to the City of Magic, would he head to the royal capital beforehand?*

I’d been to the capital before, but I’d only seen it from my carriage. I remembered that it was a busy city with many people and stores.

“I heard there was a large academy at the capital too. I would’ve loved to attend.”

I imagined myself going to school with my friends, learning new things and playing around. It sounded absolutely wonderful. A lifestyle that was considered normal by others shone brilliantly in my eyes. After my master had come, I learned magic and felt myself grow every day. For a moment, I thought that my dreams would come true. *But my master isn’t here anymore. The path to my dreams hasn’t closed off completely, but it’s gotten considerably further away. But I have to try my best! I told him that I’d be fine!* As my mind raced, I heard a familiar voice call out to me.

“Callus, it’s unusual to see you here so early in the morning. Are you out on a walk?”

“Huh?!” I turned around in surprise and saw my master standing there. “Wh-Why are you…”

Impossible! He shouldn’t be here! I suppressed my overwhelming joy and tried my best to glare at him. “Why are

you here?! If you don't go to the City of Magic, you'll be stripped of your title!"

"Hmph, I know the consequences best. I thought long and hard and came to my own conclusions. That's why I'm standing here. You have no right to reprimand me."

No right?! Of course I do! I can't trouble my master like this! Even if he's thought this through, I can't just let this slide.

"Please don't underestimate me, Master," I said. "I obviously want to live and am scared of dying, but I don't want my life to come at the expense of others! If you're doing this because you have some sort of attachment towards me, then quite frankly I'm troubled by it. Please leave this manor immediately!"

It was a lie. I was very happy that he was here, and he would never be a bother. But if I didn't sound harsh, he wouldn't listen to me. I didn't want to sacrifice my master's dream. His eyes were soft and kind for a few moments before he slowly started talking.

"You're wrong. You've got it completely wrong, Callus."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't really care about becoming a grand sage. My dream is rather different, you see," he said before his next words stunned me. "My dream is you, Callus."

"Huh?"

I don't understand. What's he talking about?

"I've been polishing my skills for many years as a magician. The older I get, the more I'm painfully aware that I can no longer evolve. I've hit my limit, and becoming a grand sage won't change that."

My master was over sixty years old. Normal humans would struggle using any bit of magic at his age, and it was only natural that his strength would decrease as time progressed. However, the course of nature had made my master suffer.

"I wanted to save as many people as I could with my magic. I believed that it was what I was born to do, and I continued to polish my skills. My body doesn't have much time left, and admitting that I couldn't do as much anymore was a tough pill to swallow. My magical powers and body grew frailer by the day, and I'd lost my light. I was overcome with despair until I met you." He looked at me with a firm gaze. "Callus, you've got talent. Watching you master magic at an alarming rate, I understood that my true meaning in life is to nurture your talent and make

you into a magician. I'm confident that you could aim higher and even become a sorcerer."

"Huh? You're overestimating me."

A sorcerer was a person who stood at the top of all magicians. I felt like he'd given me way too much credit.

"That's not all, Callus. Even without your talent, I've taken a liking to you."

"Huh?" My mouth was agape at his unexpected words.

"You were born as a Taboo Being, and though you were in painful circumstances, you never gave up or showed your weak side. Even more amazing is that you didn't forget your kindness towards others. I don't know anyone as strong and kind as you."

He stared me straight in the eyes with absolute sincerity. I never expected him to think so highly of me.

"Before I knew it, I was excited by your improvements more than anyone, and took a liking to you. How could I possibly leave your side? If I can save you, I won't hesitate to throw away my title. My dream is to raise you into a full-fledged magician. That's all."

"Master..."

I felt my eyes become hot as tears trickled down my face. I couldn't hold them back, as I didn't expect to hear my master's true thoughts. He felt that I was more valuable than everything he'd done in the past. *I want to answer in kind. I'm definitely going to become stronger.*

"I'll do it, Master. I'll definitely become an amazing magician. I'll prove to everyone that you didn't make the wrong decision!" I declared, my voice trembling.

My master continued to gently rub my back.

A week later, my master was officially removed from the Magical Committee. *This is completely wrong. I'll definitely become an amazing magician and prove it to them!* I swore an oath to myself.

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"Are you sure about this?" Allegro asked. The tall man had his striking red hair gelled back. He stood before Emilia as his secretary.

"You're being rather annoying, Allegro. Don't make me repeat myself."

“Sir Gourley has the ability to become a grand sage. Not to mention, there are many who respect and admire him. Kicking him out without a suitable reason would only result in outrage.”

“Heh, I’m sure I’ll get a ton of complaints. And I’m aware of just how many magicians were raised by him. In terms of popularity, I’m sure he’s much more popular than me.”

The young boy laughed. Emilia was a powerful magician, but he was extremely unpopular and wasn’t well liked. He was immature, moody, and made outrageous requests. He wasn’t fit to stand above others, but his overwhelming power allowed him to stay on top despite his shortcomings.

“It’s not funny, sir. Besides, I’m the one that has to deal with all this, okay? How should I explain this to the people?”

“I haven’t a clue. Isn’t it your job to think about that anyways?”

“You’re much too irresponsible…”

The secretary had always received unreasonable requests, but this one was exponentially worse than the rest. First and foremost, the motive was unclear. Sir Gourley and the chairman weren’t on bad terms, so this series of events made no sense to Allegro.

“You knew that Sir Gourley had some important business to attend to, didn’t you? Why did you make an unreasonable request and call him out? I simply don’t understand. Did you intend to wipe his name from the Magical Committee from the start?” he asked.

“Don’t misunderstand. I didn’t do this on a whim.”

“Huh? Really?”

“Obviously. Who do you think I am?”

A super selfish mega devil, Allegro thought, but he didn’t dare say it out loud. The man had risen to this position by using his incredible social skills and street smarts. He wasn’t about to throw his career away over a single statement.

“Then why? Could you tell me?” he asked.

“I can, but I doubt someone like you would understand,” the chairman said. “A disruption in the flow of the world is approaching—a huge one, at that. According to my astrology, Gourley is most likely involved in this.”

“Huh? Wh-What do you mean?” Allegro looked clearly confused by this abstract explanation, but Emilia simply continued.

“I’m not even sure *what’s* about to occur. But whatever it is, it’s

so large that the City of Magic would surely be affected. At that time, Gourley shouldn't be with us. He has a different role."

"Is that why you purposefully had him cut ties with you? Why didn't you just tell him directly?"

"You simpleton. Know that you could never become a sage with that level of understanding."

The chairman's harsh words stabbed the secretary in the chest, and Allegro couldn't help crying out in surprise. This was a delicate subject that Allegro didn't want brought up.

"If I try to interfere too much, it would only lead to horrific consequences. I must guide this indirectly, and as discreetly as possible," Emilia said.

"Then what would you have done if Sir Gourley had decided to take the path of becoming a grand sage?"

"Then I would've used some of the other tricks I had up my sleeve. If he still planned on becoming a grand sage despite it all, I would've simply accepted that result. Meddling too much would've distorted the flow."

In truth, Emilia himself had never expected Gourley to leave the Committee so easily. The man had never strayed from the path of magic, and it was hard to imagine that he'd simply throw all of that away. And yet, he had. Emilia was very curious about just what could make Gourley so adamant.

"Perhaps I'll drop by and have a look in the near future. Heh, I might see something interesting," Emilia said happily.

He would only get involved in whatever fascinated him. He had no sense of right or wrong, and would seek new discoveries without regard for others.

Allegro was worried sick over the chairman's next move. "I couldn't get that autograph... I hope my daughter won't scold me."

Terminology Dictionary I

Magic

A supernatural phenomenon that occurs when a spirit is given magical energy and decides to cooperate in return. Should the user have appealing magical energy, they'll be more likely to attract spirits of higher rank, allowing them to use more powerful magic.

Even if the user has plenty of magical energy, if it's not suited to any spirit's taste, they will never be able to use magic, no matter how much effort they put in.

Spirits

Magical beings who exist in abundance around the world. They can't be seen or heard by humans, but by being offered magical energy, they'll perform magic in return.

They live by consuming magical energy, but they don't need to receive it from humans. They can survive off the energy that's created naturally, but the magical energy expelled by humans is said to taste better. Because of this, many spirits form a contract with humans. Over ninety percent of spirits were originally animals, and it's rare to see a spirit born naturally in the spirit world.

Sage

A title given to magicians whose skills stand above their peers. It's extremely difficult to be selected, and one can only be nominated after leaving results that would benefit the entirety of the magical world.

Sages receive many benefits: free access to almost all magical institutions, the ability to travel between different countries without any limits, and priority when patenting a certain type of magic or magical equipment.

This title is the dream for many magicians, and it attracts many admirers. Until recently, no one has ever willingly given up

this title.

Chapter Two: The Girl with Red Hair

My master immediately reported to my father about the chairman, as well as about losing his title. My father, in turn, filed a complaint to the Magical Committee, but the chairman's decision didn't change. Had they been able to use the excuse of saving the life of the king's son, we may have had a chance, but my existence was hidden away. We couldn't publicly declare that I was alive and required assistance.

Above all, my master stopped my father, claiming that he didn't want to cause a fuss. According to him, he wanted to take responsibility for his own decisions. I thought he was way too cool.

"The Committee are all stubborn fools! Just thinking about them makes me angry!" I said.

My master chuckled. "Let's not be too angry. The past is the past, and it'd do you no good to dwell upon it."

He was the victim in all this, but he sounded calm. Even after three days, I was still angry at the Committee. *He's been like this ever since he threw away his title. I guess this is what a mature adult is like.*

"But you're a powerful magician. Is there really any merit in removing you? I just can't seem to think of a good reason," I said.

"The Magical Committee is a hierarchical organization. An order from the top is absolute. If they had accepted my actions, the higher-ups would have lost face. In that sense, it was an easy decision to cut me off."

"Is that how things work? I don't quite understand."

"You don't have to. Just remember that there are those whose values differ from your own."

We ended our break and resumed my lessons. My master had lost his job with the Magical Committee, but my father officially hired him as my teacher. I was relieved to hear that he was being paid about the same as his previous salary.

"Listen well. Just because I can stay here now doesn't mean that you should let your guard down. Your curse is becoming larger by the day, and my *Ra Heal* won't be able to suppress it forever."

The black stain, which had only been about a few centimeters large when I was born, had grown to almost completely cover the left side of my chest. Its spread had been slowed thanks to my master, but I didn't know when I'd return to my pained, bedridden life. It was important for me to learn light magic while I was still healthy, and to ultimately find a way to completely cure this curse.

"But nothing good will come from being too hasty. Let's move forward, slowly but surely," he said.

"Yessir!"

While I continued to learn magic with more determination than ever, I was also trying to build up my body. I did some training with Shizuku, and practiced sword fighting whenever Damien was around.

As I continued my lessons, Sirius said that he'd also like to help me grow.

"I can't let that idiot of a brother train you alone, or you'll become just as stupid as him. I can teach you some subjects, Callus," he said.

"Really?! Thank you!"

"Hm? It's only natural I'd want to teach my cute little brother, isn't it?"

I was reading more books than before, but it still felt lacking. I was grateful to have the intelligent Sirius teach me.

"I've heard that you've been learning magic from Gourley, so let's focus on different topics. From culture to math to politics to aristocratic etiquette, there's no end to the subjects you can learn. Don't worry, Callus. You really take after me, so I'm sure you'll learn these in no time."

"O-Okay. I'll do my best!"

For whatever reason, he had high hopes for me. I needed to work hard to answer those expectations.

"Ah, there was one more thing I wanted to teach you," Sirius said.

"Huh? What's that?"

He flashed me a mischievous grin. "A man should prioritize learning a very important subject: how to treat and seduce a woman."

"H-Huh?!"

Satisfied by my surprised expression, my brother laughed.

H-He's just teasing me, right? "Please don't joke around with

me," I said.

"I'm not. If you recover, you'll obviously need to go out in public. There's a good chance that you'll meet a wonderful woman."

"That might be so, but I think I'm still too young for that."

"Not at all. You're already ten, aren't you, Callus? I'd already dated five ladies when I was your age."

"Really?" I was taken aback by this claim.

"Luckily, you've got a good face like mine. And with that beautiful white hair and lovely scarlet eyes, you'll become popular in no time."

"Do you really think so?"

I wasn't fond of my hair and eyes. They both used to be golden, but as I suffered from the curse, my hair lost its color and my eyes took on a bloody tint. *I really don't like how I look, but would others see me differently?*

"You'll become popular, I'm sure of it. You have my word as the man who ranked first for three years in a row as the 'number one hottest stud' in the royal capital's newspaper."

"I didn't know the newspaper ranked those sorts of things," I said. *And his name was on it? I don't know how to feel about that.* "Well, if you say so, Sirius. I'm sure it must be necessary. If you don't mind teaching me in between my studies, I'll listen."

"Well said! I'll make you a first-rate womanizer!"

"I don't really like your phrasing!"

I'd always thought of him as…serious, so I never expected him to say things like this. I'm shocked. My impression of him is a bit worse now, but does this mean that he's starting to reveal his true self to me? I'd be happy if that were so.

As I was wrapped up in my own thoughts, my brother suddenly spoke up. "Oh, right. By the way, how's your relationship with Miss Shizuku?"

"Shizuku? Normal, I guess."

She didn't openly express herself often, so I didn't know what she was thinking, but I felt like we were on good terms at least. But it seemed like that answer wasn't what my brother was looking for.

"No, no, that's not what I mean. I'm asking if you're in a…close…relationship with her."

"Wh-What are you talking about?! Shizuku and I aren't like that! Besides, she's an adult! She wouldn't look at me, a child, in

such a way!"

"You think so? I feel like you just haven't noticed. The gaze that she gives you looks a lot more passionate, and far beyond a simple master-and-servant relationship."

"That's impossible. I've known her for so long that she's like family to me. At best, she sees me as her younger brother."

"Hm, seems like I must do something about your clueless attitude first."

I had no idea what he was up to, but my brother seemed more fired up than ever. *I feel like I've got a troublesome road ahead of me.*

***

Ever since my master had thrown away his title, I was more determined than ever in my lessons. I wasn't able to use *Ra Heal* just yet, but I learned around ten other light magic spells, including a low-level healing one. I was apparently learning at a much faster rate than others. It was all thanks to my two wonderful masters: Master Gourley, who taught me magic from a human's point of view, and Selena, who taught me from a spirit's point of view. It was because of their kind instruction that I was able to make such quick progress. I was also grateful to my magical energy, which I mysteriously had in abundance. If I wasn't cursed, I would've never had as much as I did.

I dedicated myself to my other training as well.

"Come on, Callus! Only ten more! You can do it!" Damien said.

"Huff... Huff..."

My entire body was covered in sweat as I swung my training sword with all my strength. The sword couldn't cut through anything, but it weighed about the same as the real thing. It was heavy for someone like me, who hadn't held anything heavier than a spoon while lying in bed.

"N-N-Ninety!" I gasped. After I finished my training, I fell to the ground.

Huff... Huff... Isn't training like this too much for me?

"Well done, Callus! Let's rest a little, shall we?"

"O-Okay..."

Since I received permission from my brother, I lay down on the ground and tried to catch my breath. Shizuku, who'd been staying back until now, suddenly appeared with a cup of water.

“Thank you. You’re a lifesaver,” I said.

“I’m only doing what’s expected of me.”

I gulped down the ice-cold water. *Did she time this so that I could drink cold water on my breaks? As always, she’s an amazing maid.*

“Whew, that really hit the spot.”

“You seem quite tired, but are you all right? I wouldn’t want you to push yourself too much,” Shizuku said, looking concerned.

She didn’t express herself much, but I knew that she was truly a kind person.

“Thanks, Shizuku. I’ll be fine. Moving my body around is tiring, but it feels great.”

“I understand. But if things get tough, please don’t hesitate to let me know.”

“Okay.”

I thanked her and went to my brother’s side. He had swung his sword a hundred times more than me without breaking a sweat. I felt like I could never reach his level, but I wanted to build more stamina. Without a bit more muscle, I wouldn’t be able to fight against my curse.

“Hm, it’s here,” Damien said while looking outside.

What’s he talking about? As I turned towards the direction he was staring, I saw a horse carriage from afar, slowly making its way towards us. *How did he notice the carriage from so far away? Is there a trick to this, or is it instinct?*

“That sound… Heh, seems like it’s a new carriage. Quite the show-off,” he said.

“You can tell?!”

I could only hear the wind, but my brother could apparently tell the type of carriage purely from its sound. *I feel like that skill surpasses wild animals.*

“If you continue with your training, Callus, you’ll be able to hear better too. Your eardrum is also a muscle, you know.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever read a book that proves that…”

Sirius always called Damien a muscle-brained idiot, and I felt like I understood why. *I still respect Damien, of course.*

“Anyways, my friend’s in that carriage. He’s a buddy of mine from work, and luckily, our days off lined up so I had him come here. He’s a good guy, so be friends with him,” he said.

“I see. I’m excited to meet him.”

This manor hardly had any visitors aside from my family and servants. One of my few joys in life was to hear stories of the outside world from my rare guests.

“Also, my coworker knows about you and your circumstances. He knows that you’re the prince, but the other person isn’t aware of this, so be careful.”

“The other person?”

It seemed we had two guests today. I didn’t mind, but I wondered why the other person hadn’t received any sort of explanation. As I tried to ask my brother for clarification, he spoke before me.

“Ah, they’ve arrived. Come, Callus,” he said.

After confirming the carriage’s arrival, he headed in its direction. I hastily wiped off my sweat and followed after him. We arrived in front of the carriage, and the door slowly opened as a man emerged.

“Phew. We’re finally here. I’m not a fan of these carriages because they’re so cramped. I’d much rather walk since it’s faster,” he said. The man had long, flaming red hair and a magnificent sword at his waist.

Is he a swordsman? He seemed skinny at a glance, but on closer inspection, I could tell that his body was well toned. With his intimidating aura, it was easy to tell he was a skilled fighter.

“Let me introduce him, Callus. This is my coworker, Sieg, a master swordsman,” Damien said.

“A master swordsman?!” I gasped.

I couldn’t hide my shock. That title was given only to the very best, like the title of sage for magicians. It was an amazing accomplishment.

“N-Nice to meet you. I’m pleased to make your acquaintance,” I said.

“I’m honored to meet you as well. I’ve heard all about you from Prince Damien, so I was eager to see you for myself,” Sieg replied.

What did my brother say about me? Judging from his usual doting personality, I’m a bit worried. Perhaps due to the other person not knowing about me, Sieg was very frank. I appreciated it. He seemed easy to talk to.

“Right, I have to introduce you to a kid as well. Come on out,” he said to the carriage.

“Is this our destination, daddy? Hmmm, it looks like a pretty

big manor.” A girl with the same flaming red hair as Sieg appeared.

She seemed to be around the same age as me, and was good looking, but the way she carried herself felt somewhat aggressive. I was worried that I would have trouble getting along with someone like her.

Sieg brought the girl before me. “This is my daughter, Crys. She’s a bit of a tomboy, but I’d appreciate it if you could be good friends with her,” he said.

She stared at me as though she was trying to size me up. “You look really weak. Shouldn’t you be training a bit more?”

“Huh?” I said.

She was rude to me from the start. Sieg scolded his daughter, but he didn’t seem to be getting through to her. *It looks like she’s a lot more assertive than I’d expected. Ugh, I’m a bit scared about what the future holds.*

***

According to Damien, Sieg the master swordsman wasn’t employed by Ledyvia; rather, he was a freelance soldier on friendly terms with our kingdom. He was always called upon when we went to large battles, and always fought on our side. Damien had apparently become friends with him during these battles. Since my brother was heroic and manly, it seemed he could easily make friends with swordsmen.

As we were talking, my master came out from within the manor. *Did we talk for too long?*

“Hm? I thought it was lively, but I didn’t think you’d be here, Sieg. Is there going to be another war?” Master asked.

He seemed surprised to meet Sieg, and it sounded like the two were acquaintances. Sages and master swordsmen seemed to be on opposite ends of the spectrum, but the two somehow knew each other.

“My, my. I didn’t think I’d meet you here, Gourley. Have you also been called upon by Prince Damien?” Sieg asked.

“No, no. I’m here because that child is my apprentice. Please do keep this confidential, though. We’ve got some complicated matters going on.”

“Oh, so you’re this kid’s…”

Sieg looked at me with interest. *Ugh, I’m getting nervous.*

“I did sense some strong magical energy from him. It seems you’ve been training him well,” Sieg said.

“That child as well… She must be your daughter, correct? I sense quite the fighting spirit from her.”

I agree. This girl always seems to have her guard up. It feels like she put a wall all around her to prevent anyone from coming close. It’s pretty scary.

“I wanted Crys to lead a more ladylike lifestyle, but she’s not interested in anything other than swords. She’s become quite energetic,” Sieg said, looking slightly embarrassed.

“Daddy, your thinking is a bit old fashioned! Women these days are strong too, and the newest sage is a woman!” Crys countered.

“I hear you, sweetie, so let’s pipe down, okay? I’m sorry, she’s a bit noisy, isn’t she?”

Sieg seemed apologetic. Though he was her father, I still felt it was impressive that she could talk back to him, a master swordsman.

“By the way, Sieg, I’m sorry to request this after you’ve just arrived, but could you spar a little with me? I was actually swinging my sword just moments ago, and I’d like to get some more exercise,” Damien said.

Sieg smiled happily. “I was in that cramped carriage this whole time, so I’d love to move my body and relieve some stress. I’m not sure if I could go easy on you, but if you’re fine with that, I’d be happy to.”

“Heh, I’d expect nothing less from you.”

I could see sparks fly from their gazes as they headed towards the garden. *A match between Damien and Sieg? That sounds like so much fun. I have to tag along!*

***

“Hmph! Hah!”

Cries rang out as my agile brother slashed at Sieg with a training sword. His power and speed were so great that I could barely follow with my eyes, but Sieg dodged these strikes with ease.

“Your swings are as sharp as ever. It’s a shame to leave you as a prince,” Sieg said.

“Heh, I appreciate your compliments. Rah!”

Damien's swings were indeed swift, and I could tell that he was much stronger than a normal soldier. Still, he couldn't lay a scratch on Sieg, and it was clear that a master swordsman was on a completely different level.

"Guess I'll get a bit of a workout in too," Sieg said, brandishing his training sword in one hand.

His movements were so fast, my eyes couldn't catch them. I thought that his sword was on the left, but by the next moment, it had already been swung to the right. As the blade swished through the air, Damien flew back at an extreme speed. With a resounding thud, he collided with a distant tree. But without delay, he stood back up.

I-Is he okay?!

"Heh, you never hold back, do you? You're the only one who would hit a prince like me so hard, Sieg!" my brother laughed.

"I trust you, Your Highness. I know that you won't go down so easily."

"Hah, you know just what I like, don't you?"

Damien laughed as he headed back towards Sieg. He seemed okay, but I felt like my body would be in tiny pieces if I were blown back that far.

"Sieg is so strong. I couldn't see his swing at all," I murmured.

"Mm-hmm! I know. Daddy's super strong!" Crys said, suddenly popping up next to me.

She smiled smugly, looking proud that her father had been praised. *Is she a daddy's girl? Crys isn't aware that I'm a prince, so I need to be careful to not call Damien my brother.*

"Hey."

"Y-Yes?!" I yelled, startled by her suddenly calling out to me. As I'd expected, she was looking at me like I was weird. *I should act normally so she won't find me suspicious.* "Wh-What's wrong?"

"That sword. Are you trying to become a swordsman too?" She pointed to the training sword I had in my hand. I'd forgotten to leave it behind, and had just brought it along with me.

"I'm using it to build my strength a little. I only started recently, so I've got a long way to go."

"Yeah, you don't seem strong at all, so that makes sense."

Why is she so rude to me? Her comments were true, though. I was weak, and though I'd made some improvements ever since my master had arrived, I was still frail compared to other kids. I needed to work harder.

“Fine. Daddy’s busy fighting, and I’m bored, so I could teach you some techniques,” she said.

She sounds condescending, but I’m grateful for any help I can get. She’s the daughter of a master swordsman, so I’m sure she has way more experience than me. I should just take her advice.

As I was thinking of accepting the offer, Crys took a nearby training sword in her hand and pointed it towards me. “Come on, face me.”

“Huh?”

“If I’m gonna teach you, I need to know how good you are. I’ll go easy on you, so just come at me.”

I didn’t know she wanted us to spar. She’s tough from the get-go. Though it was a training sword, I was still hesitant to swing it at a person. Still, since Crys was giving me some of her time, I couldn’t refuse the offer.

“Okay. Please teach me,” I said. I took my training sword and pointed it towards her.

“You’re manlier than I thought. I’m impressed.”

“Thanks…”

I was nervous. I could feel my hands gripping the sword become sweaty. I knew she was just trying to see my skill level, but I was nervous to point my blade at a person. Crys, on the other hand, seemed relaxed and perfectly comfortable with this situation.

“Whenever you’re ready,” she said.

“Okay, then I’ll accept your kind offer.”

I ran towards Crys, who seemed to be taunting me. I raised the sword above my head and swung down as hard as I could.

“Rah!” I yelled, putting in as much power as I could.

I felt like it was a good swing, but she deflected it in one go. “Hah!”

Her timing, angle, and strength were all perfect. Even an amateur like me could see our difference in skill. *She’s around the same age as me, but she’s amazing!*

“You’re not done yet, are you? Come on.”

“Okay, I’ll give it everything I’ve got!”

I continued to swing at her, but she thwarted every strike without breaking a sweat. When I started to grow breathless, she suddenly closed in and knocked the weapon out of my hand.

“And that’s the match,” she said.

She lightly tapped my neck with her sword and smiled

proudly. It was my utter defeat. Our difference in strength was so great that I couldn't even feel frustrated.

"You've got some gusto, but the rest is no good. You can't even beat a slime like that. Here, look at me."

Still with her training sword, she walked a short distance away.

"Look, the axis of your swing is way off. You have to stretch out your back and step into the ground. Make a strong pillar with your body," she said. She stopped and raised her blade. It was frustrating to admit, but she looked really cool, and I realized that she must have been training from a very young age.

She took a deep breath to focus, raised her sword, and swung at a large rock nearby. "Hah!"

"Huh?!"

With a large crack, the boulder split into two. *She's only using a training sword. That was incredible!* She exhaled and looked at me smugly.

"Wasn't that awesome?" she asked. She puffed out her chest with pride.

She was rude, but her skill was the real deal. She didn't differ much from me in both size and height, yet I could only respect her for her swordsmanship. I reconsidered my opinion of her.

"Heh, you must be so frustrated that you can't—"

"That was amazing, Crys! How did you do that?!"

"Huh?! Y-You're too close to me! Step back!"

She pushed me away and put some distance between us. *Hm... I just wanted to take a closer look at her skills.*

"You're an odd one... I guess the fact that you realized how great I am is worthy of praise, though," she said. She again puffed her chest out and beamed with pride. I understood where her confidence came from. If she was that good, it was only natural that she'd be so proud.

"Hey, don't say that you'll teach me for a bit. Tell me more about your skills! I want to see more of your swordsmanship!" I said.

"'Why should I?' ...is what I *should* say, but it does seem like you have an eye for quality. I can teach you a bit more, I guess."

"Really? Thank you! You're so nice, Crys!"

"Of course I am. If you have anything you need, make sure to rely on me and *only* me."

She was unable to hide her happiness. *I get it. She's easy to manipulate. I've heard from Sirius before that there are people who want to be praised or relied on, but can't be honest with their feelings, and end up angering those around them without being able to convey their true intentions. This girl must be someone like that. He even said that I should just be friendly with them without getting angry, and it seems like it's super effective against her. I didn't expect his womanizing advice to come in handy here.*

"Come on, Callus! Hold your sword! My training is strict, you know," she said.

"I feel like she's a bit too pumped, though."

With a touch of anxiety in my heart, I continued to train with her. Damien was a fine teacher, but he talked about muscles a bit too much, which confused me.

"Tighten your muscles there! No, that's not it! You have to relieve tension in your muscles there!" he'd often say.

Crys, on the other hand, taught me with a surprising amount of logic. And because she was about the same size as me, her methods were easy to follow. Still, she was pretty strict and harsh.

"Don't look away! Stay vigilant!" she said.

"I am! I'm not looking away!" I said.

I somehow managed to parry her heavy swings. *Eep, I don't care how much pain I can endure—if that hits me, it'll hurt!*

"Your line of sight is all over the place! Listen, when you fight, you have to look your opponent in the eyes. You can use their eyes to predict their movements. Even while you're looking at their entire body, keep their eyes in the middle of your vision. This is just fundamental knowledge."

"I see..."

I stared at Crys's eyes as she continued to loom over me. Her eyes were beautifully red and clear. Her eyelashes were long. Though she was rowdy and would often sound condescending, when I looked at her closely, she had a pretty face.

"Hey, you better not be thinking about anything unnecessary. Stay focused!" she barked. It seemed she'd seen right through me with those keen instincts. There was no use trying to lie, so I told her the truth.

"Sorry about that. You're just so cute that I couldn't stop staring."

"H-Huh?! Are you an idiot?!" she shouted at me, her face red.

Was it inappropriate to suddenly compliment her appearance? I guess Sirius's training isn't bearing fruit so far. Hmmm…

"Jeez. You just made my heart skip a beat," she said under her breath.

"Hm?"

"Nothing!"

I was afraid that I'd made her angry, but she continued to kindly teach me. It seemed like she was in a good mood. I wasn't sure why, but I was glad that she was.

"Mm-hmm, you're getting better at this," she said.

"Yay! It's all thanks to having a good teacher," I replied.

"Y-You think so?! Heh heh, yeah, I knew you had a good eye."

It was terrifyingly easy to get on her good side, and I started to grow worried. *I hope she doesn't get manipulated by a bad person.* We continued to train for a while until Shizuku appeared, bringing tea and snacks.

"Nice! I was getting a little hungry," Crys said. She eagerly headed towards the snacks, but I stopped her.

"Wait."

"What? Are we gonna keep going?"

"No. Give me your hand."

"Like this?"

Crys outstretched her arm towards me, revealing that it was covered in scratches. This was all because she had diligently tried to teach me, so I didn't want to let this go. I gently put my hands around hers.

"H-Hey! What are you doing?!" she yelped.

"Stay still for a moment," I said before chanting. "*Ra Kiel*."

A small light disappeared into her hand. The wounds on her arms and hands started to heal before her eyes.

"This…"

"How is it? Do you feel better?"

"Y-Yeah," she replied, nodding.

Whew, seems like it went well.

"That was healing magic, wasn't it? I've heard that healing is one of the most difficult types of magic to learn. You're good."

"I can only use simple ones for now."

Ra Kiel was a low-class light magic that could heal simple wounds and act as a disinfectant. It was much weaker compared to *Ra Heal*, and wasn't very effective against curses, but it was much easier to master, and I had managed to learn it two days

ago.

“I can’t use magic much, so I’m envious. You’re amazing,” she said.

“Thanks. I’m happy to hear that.” Being praised so earnestly felt great, and I was glad to have learned the spell. “Okay, shall we go?”

After I used my healing magic on Crys, we headed towards a table in the garden. Shizuku had already laid out some tea and snacks for us, and just looking at them made me hungry.

“Let’s eat!” I said.

“Yeah!”

Since we’d exercised a lot, the snacks disappeared into our stomachs at alarming speed. I was feeling happy, until…

“And daddy left me last time to go fight in a battle! I’m not lonely at all, even if he leaves me behind, but isn’t he being mean to me?” Crys said.

I forced a laugh. “For sure.”

She started to complain about her father in the middle of our tea. She had apparently been raised traveling to various places with her father, making it hard for her to make friends. Until now, she’d never had an opportunity to voice her complaints either. I empathized with her, since I didn’t have many friends myself. But while I’d had Shizuku by my side to talk with, nobody had been there for Crys. *She says she’s not lonely, but she must actually feel very alone. I think Sirius also said that young ladies tend to feel lonely a lot.*

“I see. You’ve been through some tough times, Crys,” I said.

“I have! You get me, Callus! As a reward, I’ll allow you to call me Cryssie. That’s a special privilege, okay?”

“Wow, thanks!”

That’s a strange thing to receive permission for, but I’m happy to make a friend around my age. I’ve got a lot to learn from her.

“By the way, these cookies are delicious! Your maid baked these, right? That’s amazing!”

“I’m honored by your praise, Miss Crys,” Shizuku said, bowing her head to the honest compliment. She seemed happy despite the lack of change in her expression.

My first impression of Cryssie hadn’t been great, but as I got to know her, she seemed like a really nice person. *Did she act that way to get the attention of her father? It’s not good to do so, but I understand where she’s coming from.*

I was lost in my thoughts when Cryssie suddenly said, “Ah,” as though she’d remembered something. “Hey, Callus, in exchange for teaching you swordsmanship, could you teach me some magic? Judging from the spell you just used, you must be pretty good at it, right?”

“Huh? Me?”

I panicked at her sudden request. I did know how to use magic, but I still had a long way to go. I felt I was still too inexperienced to teach someone.

“Um, I still have a lot to learn myself,” I said.

“Oh ho, why don’t you teach her?” Master suddenly appeared. He ate a cookie and continued, “Teaching someone else magic will allow you to better understand it yourself. There are things you can’t learn by only being a student. In fact, I learned a lot from you, Callus. It’s good to experience new things, so why not give it a try?”

“If you say so, Master. I guess I can.”

I was actually feeling a little excited as a number of questions swirled in my head. *What kind of magic can Cryssie use? Could I teach someone?* My heart started to pound with excitement.

“Heh, then it’s a deal. Please teach me, Master Callus,” she said teasingly with a smile.

She’d seemed tough at first, but I was gradually starting to see her cuter sides. *I guess first impressions aren’t everything.*

“You’re staying here for three nights, aren’t you? Then let’s get started after tea. We don’t have a lot of time to spare,” I said.

“Oh, you’re raring to go, aren’t you? That makes me happy. I’ll be strict too, so let’s work hard together.”

We smiled at each other, and I was happy to have made a friend who treated me as an equal. We finished the cookies and as we tried to resume our training, Shizuku stopped us with a serious expression.

“Speaking of which, Sir Callus, there’s something I’d like to tell you,” she said.

“Hm? What’s that?”

“It seems a wyvern has been spotted near this manor. Please don’t enter the forest, for any reason whatsoever.”

Shizuku warned us loudly so that others could hear her. This was an important announcement to make, and she wanted everyone to listen.

“I see. A wyvern is a rare sight,” I said.

Wyverns were a type of dragon whose front legs were wings. I'd read in a book that unlike the dragon, a legendary creature with four legs and wings on its back, wyverns were rather common monsters. They were one of the smallest kinds of dragons and not very powerful, but still dangerous. We had to be careful.

"A wyvern…" Cryssie murmured, deep in thought.

What's up with her?

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

"Huh? N-No, nothing at all!"

She's acting suspicious and clearly thinking of something. Is she…

"You aren't planning on fighting it, are you?" I said.

"N-No way am I thinking that! I can't win against it yet."

So you're planning on doing it in the future. I couldn't deny that I felt she had the power to one day defeat a dragon.

"Good. Everyone will worry, so don't do it, okay?"

"You're right," she replied, still mumbling to herself and lost in her thoughts.

We resumed our sword training, but it seemed like she wasn't all there. Her current state wasn't good for learning magic, so I decided to postpone it until tomorrow.

Will she be okay?

***

The next morning, I was sound asleep in bed until a familiar figure entered my room.

"Callus! It's morning! Wake up!"

"Whoa!"

Cryssie jumped on top of my bed with a thud. Startled, I instinctively hid under the covers, but she didn't take kindly to that.

"How long are you going to stay asleep, huh?! Get up!" she yelled.

"J-Just five more minutes!"

"No! Come! On! Get! Up!"

After she forcibly removed my covers, I reluctantly accepted my defeat. The sun had just peeked over the horizon, and it was still cold outside. *How long has it been since I last woke up at this hour?*

"Come on, let's go outside," she said.

“It’s still early in the morning.”

“That’s *why* we should go outside. It feels nice to run in the morning, you know,” she said happily. It seemed like she was back to her usual self. “Come on, let’s go!”

“Whoa! Wait a second!”

Cryssie tugged on my hand and pulled me out of my room.

“Keep up!” she said.

“Wait! You’re running too fast!”

I chased after Cryssie, who recklessly rushed ahead, and we began our exercise early in the morning. I was worried that she might push me past my limits, but surprisingly, she kept a careful watch on my condition. She may have been a bit forceful, but she was still a kind girl.

“Do some stretches first, or you’ll hurt yourself. You’re especially frail, Callus, so make sure to do plenty.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Hmmm, being called ‘ma’am’ isn’t so bad,” she said with a smile.

I had said it as a joke, so seeing her look so happy was confusing. I still had much to learn before I could understand the heart of a young maiden.

“Let’s swing our swords! I’m gonna be strict with you, so prepare yourself!”

I got in a good workout before breakfast. It was a lot of effort that left me exhausted, but it was fun. I was thankful for Cryssie teaching me that exercise could be enjoyable.

“Now I need you to help me learn magic, Master Callus. Teach me well,” she said.

After we finished breakfast, we headed to my room. I normally started lessons with my master during this time, but he was off attending some business in a neighboring town and wouldn’t be back until dusk. Until then, I could teach my friend as promised.

“How much magic do you already know, Cryssie?” I asked.

“I can use basic spells. But they’re all self-taught, so I don’t have much confidence in them,” she said, then chanted a spell. “*Magi*.”

A blue aura enveloped her right hand.

“Wow, so you learned that by yourself? That’s awesome.”

“Heh,” she said, beaming with pride.

Magi was the most basic of spells. It had no element, creating

the purest form of magic. It didn't require the user to make a contract with any spirits, and could be used by borrowing the power from random spirits around them. I was also supposed to have started with this spell, but my master had me skip this step to avoid angering the light spirits.

"Okay, let's see how much magic you have. Try holding onto this leaf of bethlem," I said, handing over one I'd received from my master.

"Like this?" Cryssie asking, clenching the plant.

The center of the leaf started to rip.

"What does this mean? I've got two tears in my leaf," she said.

"This leaf rips based on the magic that you have. Two tears means that you have pretty good potential."

She grinned. "Hmmm, well, that's only natural for me, isn't it?"

I was amazed to see that she had talent for magic on top of her excellent sword-wielding skills. *She'll probably become a master swordsman that will put even Sieg to shame.*

"You did this leaf thing too, didn't you? What was your result?" she asked me.

"Huh? Me? My leaf ripped like yours too...I think."

In truth, mine had completely disintegrated, but I didn't want to rain on her parade.

"Hmmm, something about that sounded a bit iffy, but whatever. What do I do next?"

"Uh, next, hold on to this like you did with the leaf." I handed her a small piece of white paper.

"What's this?"

"This is a magical sheet, and is made from plants that are sensitive to magical energy. This can tell you what element you're most inclined towards."

"I see. That's pretty useful."

I had received this paper from my master as well. I was supposed to have used this to test my own magic, but that was just another step we had skipped. Cryssie didn't seem to be fixated on any particular element, so I decided to use this method.

"Okay. I'll just hold it and... Eep!"

She let out a cute shriek as the paper suddenly burst into flames.

"Hey, Callus, what's the big idea?!" she demanded, her face red. It seemed she was less angry about the surprise and more

embarrassed by her scream.

“Maybe the paper overreacted because you put in a lot of magic. I-In any case, we got results, so don’t look so scary.”

“Jeez… Hey, don’t tell anyone that I screamed like that, okay?” Cryssie pouted.

I firmly nodded.

“Since the magical paper burned up, it must mean you’re inclined towards fire magic. That element has the most powerful attacking spells, so I think it’s perfect for you.”

“Yeah. Fire is cool, so I’ve got no complaints.”

She seemed satisfied. It was time to proceed to the next step.

“Next, you have to chant a spell. Um, I think the word for fire in the spirit’s language is *Flé.* Try saying it.”

“*F-Flé*…”

As I’d expected, nothing happened.

“Hey, my magic didn’t activate,” she said.

“You can’t do it in one go. Let’s slowly work at it. You’ve got the basics down, so it shouldn’t take too long. Let’s work together!”

She seemed a little disappointed that she couldn’t use magic so quickly, but she came around. “You’re right. I’ll do it.”

And we continued our lesson.

She’s strong-willed and a quick learner, so I’m sure she’ll be able to use magic in no time.

***

“Argh! Why can’t I do it?!” Cryssie wailed.

It was the second day of our magic lessons. She had been diligently trying her best, but grew more frustrated as she continued to fail. I’d expected her to learn very quickly since it seemed like she had the basics down, but for some reason, she wasn’t even close to succeeding.

“Hmmm, I wonder if I can help you somehow,” I said.

I had used all the techniques that I’d learned from my master, but nothing worked. She only had two days left, and I wanted to help her improve as much as possible. While I was trying to think of a new method, my partner Selena chimed in.

“Hey, Callus,” she said.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

Selena was usually floating around me or invisible. Apparently she was possessing me whenever I couldn’t see her. According to

her, it was easy on her body, and though I couldn't quite understand, I assumed it was like lying down in bed.

"That girl is working hard, but it'll be a while before she can use magic at this rate."

"Huh? Why do you think that?" I whispered to evade suspicion, since other people couldn't see spirits. I had to be careful.

"The spirit that possesses her doesn't seem to be on board with using magic. That's why her spells aren't going well."

"I see. Could you ask the spirit why they aren't willing to use magic?"

She gladly accepted my request. *This might be considered cheating, but it's not too big a deal, right?*

"Callus, I found out why the spirit doesn't want to listen to her chants," Selena said.

"Really? Could you tell me?"

I listened to Selena's story.

"Uh-huh. I-I see. We wouldn't have found that out if we hadn't asked," I said.

I decided to quickly address the spirit's unexpected problem. *You know what they say—strike while the iron is hot.*

"Cryssie, why don't we head outside for a bit?" I said.

***

"Raaaaah!" Cryssie yelled gallantly, swinging her training sword.

She looks so cool and heroic.

"Cryssie, are you ready?" I called.

"Whenever you are!"

After she gave me the signal, I tossed a few rocks towards her. She proceeded to cut them all down in midair. *Her skill is amazing!*

"Here's the real deal! Focus!" I said.

"Got it!"

I threw a much larger rock towards her.

She looked at her target and yelled, "All right! *Flé*!"

In the next moment, a strong flame enveloped her training sword. It caught her off guard for a moment, but she quickly regained her concentration and swung her flaming sword towards the rock.



“You did it, Cryssie! It worked!”

“Y-Yeah…”

She was still a little stunned and trying to process what just happened. As she continued to stare at her sword wrapped in flames, the reality of the situation finally started to sink in, and a bright smile slowly formed on her face.

“I-I did it! I can use magic!” She hopped up and down, then ran over and threw her arms around me. “Thank you, Callus!”

“H-Hey, be careful!”

It was the first time a girl my age had ever hugged me, and also the first time I’d had a flaming sword so close to my face. I couldn’t hide my panic.

“O-Okay, let go of me for a second,” I said.

“Hm? Are you being shy?”

Because I immediately put some distance between us, only the ends of my hair were burned to a crisp. *Phew, that scared me. My heart’s still racing.*

“Anyways, congrats. I think it’s amazing that you were able to use magic so quickly after just a bit of advice!”

“Well, that’s just normal for me! But how did you find out that this would do the trick?”

“Erm, well…”

The advice I’d given her was, “Let’s try using magic while swinging your sword.” Cryssie had tried it without question, but she couldn’t help but wonder why this had gone so smoothly.

“You seemed most lively when you were using your sword, so I just thought that this was worth testing out. Yep,” I said.

“That doesn’t make much sense, but whatever. Thanks, Callus. You live up to my expectations as my teacher,” she said, flashing a bright smile towards me.

My heart beat faster when I saw her face, but I also felt a sense of guilt. I wanted to tell her the truth, but I’d only just met her, and I couldn’t divulge my secrets. While Cryssie was taking a break, I talked to my partner, Selena.

“Thank you. It went well,” I said.

“No problem. You’re welcome,” she replied cheerfully.

“Still, I never expected her spirit to say that it wanted to use its first bit of magic on a sword. I would’ve never figured that out without you.”

Cryssie was apparently possessed by a salamander, a large lizard creature that breathed fire. The salamander lived near

volcanic areas, but it was apparently so enamored by her swordsmanship that it had followed her all the way here. *I guess spirits have interesting thoughts too.*

“Hey, Callus! I’m gonna show daddy my magic, so come along with me!”

“Oh, okay! Give me a second!”

Selena and I ended our conversation and followed Cryssie to the manor. She was humming, eager to show her father her new skill.

“Hm?” I said.

We opened the door to find that Sieg was already there by the entrance, preparing to leave. *Is something wrong?*

“Huh? Where are you going, daddy? Why are you dressed like that?” Cryssie asked.

Sieg gently patted his daughter’s head, his eyes downcast. “Sorry, sweetie. I’ve got some urgent matters to attend to. I’ll be back by dusk tomorrow, so play nice with Callus until then, all right?”

“B-But…” She stayed silent for a while before saying, “Okay, I understand.”

She looked sad, but she swallowed her emotions and said she’d be fine. She must’ve been very lonely on the inside.

“While I’m staying here, daddy’s always gonna be with me!” she’d bragged numerous times.

She buried her feelings and sent her father off.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Of course I am. I’m used to being left behind,” she said, putting on a tough act.

Is she really okay? I’m worried.

***

The following day after Sieg had left our manor, Cryssie and I continued practicing our magic and swordsmanship. She seemed in high spirits as usual, but occasionally her cheerful expression would fall away.

I was worried about her, but nothing major happened, and once Sieg returned safely, I felt all was well again. However, the next day, something unexpected occurred.

“What’s going on? It’s a bit noisy,” I mumbled. I woke up to loud voices outside of my room.

What's wrong? I had a bad feeling that wouldn't go away as I headed towards the hall where people were gathered.

"What's the point in staying here? I'll go, even if I have to do so alone!" Sieg said.

"H-Hey, wait, Sieg!" Damien yelled.

They both left the manor. Sieg had looked impatient, meaning the situation was dire. I went to Shizuku, who was standing in the hall, and asked what happened.

"Morning, Shizuku. Is anything the matter?" I said.

"Good morning, Prince Callus. Apparently, Miss Crys has gone missing, so we're searching for her," she replied.

"Huh?! Cryssie's gone?! Are you sure she's not just in the garden, swinging her sword?"

I felt that it was possible, but she shook her head. "His Highness Damien and Sir Sieg have searched around the manor, but she's nowhere to be found. We've even asked our servants to help find her, but she's still missing. We also found a letter by Miss Crys, saying that she was going to go find the wyvern."

"What?!"

I was so shocked that I couldn't speak. Shizuku had mentioned that there was a wyvern around this area, but I'd never expected Cryssie to go searching for it alone. The wyvern was a powerful monster; even if Cryssie was stronger than most her age, she wouldn't stand a chance against it. *She should know that best, so why is she being so reckless?!*

"Wait a sec..."

I thought back to when I'd told her to refrain from searching for the dragon because everyone would worry. *Did that have the opposite effect? She wanted Sieg to pay more attention to her, and she must've known that trying to find the wyvern alone would make him sick with worry.*

"If I'm right, this is really bad."

It's my fault for saying something so irresponsible. I should've thought more before I spoke! But now's not the time to feel bad. We've gotta find her before it's too late!

"Shizuku, do you know what direction my brother went?" I asked.

"I believe they've gone behind the manor. The wyvern was seen there yesterday."

"I see."

I shouldn't go in the same direction as them, but where should I

search? What should I do? Ah! I know!

"Selena! Can you hear me?!" I said.

As I called out to her, the light spirit appeared in front of me. *Thank goodness, she's here.*

"What?" she said.

"I think you heard our conversation, but could you help me search for Cryssie? Do you know of a good method?"

"Hmmm, if I use the skill that only the princess of the spirits can use, we might be able to find her, but..."

"Really? You can?! Then please, use as much of my magic as you like!"

Seeing a ray of hope, I eagerly seized it right away. However, her reply caught me by surprise.

"I'm sorry, but I won't do it with just that."

"Huh?"

She "won't do it"? What does that mean? She has a method but she can't use it? Does she not care about Cryssie? Why won't she help me out this time?! Her words confused me.

Suddenly, I heard a chuckle from behind me.

"Oho, it seems you've run into a bit of trouble."

I turned around and saw my master. He was wearing a black robe and hat, appearing ready to depart.

"Master! Selena won't cooperate!" I said.

"Seems like it. I can't see her, but I can tell from your reaction." He stroked his magnificent beard and said, "Why don't you tell me what you know so far? I can try to think of a solution with you."

I explained what I knew. He stood deep in thought for a while before saying, "Callus, spirits tend to be neutral towards the affairs of humans. They only supply you with magic in exchange for magical energy, and they're not a convenient existence that will do whatever you request. She can't help you because you aren't offering anything equivalent in return."

"'Equivalent'?"

"Indeed. For any request you make, you must offer something equal in value in return. And for a spirit to use a special type of magic, a special type of offering must be made as well."

Selena nodded along with my master's words. *Amazing, he hit the nail on the head!*

"This sort of thing would never occur with a normal spirit, but Selena is a princess of the spirits. It's only natural she varies from

normal procedures."

My master was already aware that Selena was a princess, though he mentioned that he'd never heard of that title before.

"Selena, is what my master saying true?" I asked.

"It's as grandpa says. I don't want to be mean to you, but to use this spell, I'd need something special in return. If *you* were in a pinch, I'd be a bit more lax with the rules, but I can't do the same for a total stranger. I'm sorry."

She apologetically stuck her tongue out at me. *Thank goodness, she doesn't seem to be bullying me.*

"I see. So what do you mean by 'something special in return'?"

"Hm, that's difficult to say. There aren't really any rules to it. As long as I think it's special from a spirit's point of view, it should be okay. I've heard that long ago, there used to be sacrifices on an altar, but I don't want any of that. I'd like something else."

"I understand. A sacrifice would probably be impossible for me to prepare anyways."

Maybe a dark spirit would want that, but Selena's a light spirit. She wouldn't want anything that evil. Hmmm, what would she consider "special"? I can't think of anything.

My master, seeing me deep in thought, took a small rock from his pocket.

It's just a normal, white rock. What does he expect me to do with this?

"This is a Dwelling Stone. It's also called a Spirit Stone, and it will allow you to make an offering to a spirit. Give it a go," he said.

"I can make an offering with just this rock?"

I carefully studied the item he placed on the table. *I can't feel any sort of magical energy from it. It just looks like an ordinary rock to me.*

As I was wondering what effect it'd have, Selena stepped onto the rock. The item was small, so she stood on it using her tiptoes.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Huh? This is a Resting Stone, isn't it? It'd be a waste if I don't get on it."

I looked at her, confused. I had no idea what she was talking about. I looked towards my master, pleading for help. He smiled and provided an explanation as though he had no other choice.

"A Dwelling Stone is like a perch for spirits. Since long ago, it's

been said that spirits could rest on top of that white stone. It seems like an ordinary white rock to us humans, but to spirits, it's like a bench where they can take a break," he said.

"Huh, I didn't think something like that existed. Selena called it a 'Resting Stone.' Do you know why?"

"Hm, that's interesting. It's been a long time since humans lost the ability to see spirits. I wouldn't be surprised if the language simply changed over time."

If spirits couldn't be sensed, conversations couldn't be had, and our languages would eventually drift apart. *That's pretty neat, but now's not the time to focus on that. What should I do with this?*

"Master, what should I—"

"I know, I know. Give me a moment." He turned to my maid, who was standing a short distance away. "Shizuku, do you have something to eat? For example, anything sweet."

"Huh? Well, yes. I've got some leftover cookies that I baked yesterday."

"Ah, that'll do just fine. I'm sorry to inconvenience you, but would you bring some of them to us?"

"Certainly," she replied, sounding a little perplexed before heading towards the kitchen.

Shizuku wasn't aware of the spirits, so I guessed that our conversations had baffled her. But I trusted her, so I didn't mind if she knew my secret. A short while later, she returned with some cookies. *She's as fast as ever.*

"Will these do?" she asked.

"Yes, these are just fine. Callus, take these cookies and put your magic into them like you did with the bethlem leaves."

"O-Okay, I understand," I replied.

I took a cookie and poured my magical energy into it. The cookie glowed faintly, but the light faded away until it looked like a normal baked good once more. And then nothing happened. *That makes sense. All I did was put some magical energy into the cookie.*

One person, however, reacted instantly.

"C-Callus? I could...take that snack off your hands," Selena was restless, her eyes glued to the cookie.

I moved the cookie to the right, and her eyes darted to the right. I moved it up, and she followed. *Ha ha, this is kinda fun!*

"Hey! Don't be so mean! Give it to me!" she said.

I giggled. "Sorry, sorry."

I tried to hand it over to her, but my master grabbed my arm. “Now, Callus. Don’t forget the matter at hand.”

“Ah, right. Of course.” *This is meant as a special offering for Selena. I can’t hand it over for free.*

“Food filled with magic is said to be a luxurious feast for spirits. Thus, when humans wanted to wish for abundant crops or protection from disasters, they’d often place food with magical energy in front of the Dwelling Stone. That was how they’d receive protection from spirits.”

“I see. So we’re recreating that ancient ritual.”

“Indeed. But there’s a limit to the number of times you can provide an offering each day, so be careful with it.”

“I understand. I’ll use the utmost care.”

I carefully formed the words in my head to tell Selena. Mistakes weren’t allowed.

“Um, I’ll give this to you, so could you help me find Cryssie? Also, I want you to help me until we find her,” I said.

“Leave it to me!” Selena replied.

She answered in an instant, and she didn’t even put much thought into her words. It just seems like an ordinary cookie to me, but it’s super effective against her.

“All right. Once you’ve made the contract, place the cookie in front of the stone. Quickly, before she changes her mind,” my master said.

“R-Right.”

I placed the cookie in front of the stone and Selena. She traced the surface of the cookie with her finger, and a translucent chunk of aura was lifted from the snack. She chomped down on this aura in one bite.

“Mmmmm! It’s so sweet!” It seemed to have suited her palate as she happily consumed the magical aura.

This means that our contract is complete, right?

“Your magical energy is delicious enough already, but mixing it with another food adds a different kind of taste. Pairing it with sweet things makes your energy taste even sweeter! You should test this out with meat next time,” she said.

“Um, I’m sorry to put a damper on your joy, but could you tell me where Cryssie is? We don’t have much time,” I said.

“Nom nom… Gulp. Huh? Right, right, of course. Leave it to me!” She proudly pounded her chest.

Thank goodness, she seems to be on board. “What will you do?”

“The princesses of spirits have royal blood in their veins. We’re of higher rank than other spirits, so we can ask for their assistance. Using this power, I can gather information from the countless spirits who live in this forest.”

“Oh, I get it. I can’t see them, but the forest must be filled with spirits. There must be some that have spotted the wyvern!”

“Yep. Give me a bit.”

Selena closed her eyes, and as she concentrated, golden magical energy emanated from her body. She looked so mystical and beautiful.

“*Royal Magic: Sylph Network*.”

As her body glowed, countless threads of light protruded from her body in every direction. I had no idea what was going on, but I knew that I was witnessing something amazing.

“Mm-hmm, I see…” Selena nodded.

It seemed she was already communicating with other spirits. *Are those threads of light allowing her to communicate? That looks so cool.* About a minute later, she retracted her threads and sighed. She had apparently found what she needed.

“H-How was it?” I asked.

“The wyvern is currently east of here. A lot of spirits claimed to have spotted it, so I’m pretty sure this is accurate,” she said.

“East?! That’s in a totally different direction from where Sieg and the others are headed! This is bad…”

Sieg and the rest had gone behind the manor, to the west. They’d gone in the completely opposite direction, and it’d take some time for them to find Cryssie.

As I was in a state of panic, Selena added, “And…they claimed to have seen a red-haired girl headed in the same direction. This is really dangerous.”

“What?! We’ve gotta stop her! Shizuku, I’m heading out for a bit, so could I ask you to take care of the manor?”

I headed towards the entrance, but was shocked to see Shizuku standing in front of me.

“I know this is your order, Prince Callus, but I cannot comply,” she said firmly. I sensed a strong will from her, and it didn’t seem like she’d back down. “I haven’t a clue what you’ve been doing, but I can at least tell that you’re about to do something dangerous. Miss Crys’s safety is of the utmost importance, but I must prioritize *your* safety, Prince Callus. I don’t care if you hate me, but I can’t allow you to leave.”

She stood firm. I couldn't possibly outrun her, and there was nothing I could do.

"Please return to your room," she said.

I'd just gotten a clue, but I wasn't allowed to leave. I wracked my brain for a solution, and once again, my master came in to help me.

"Now, now, Shizuku, please calm down. I shall go along with Callus. Would that put your mind at ease?" he said.

"It doesn't change that staying here is the safest option."

"Either way, I'll leave to find that girl, even if it means going alone. Instead of staying at this manor when I'm not around, wouldn't it be much safer to have him come along with me?"

"Even so, I can't overlook it. There's no need to go headfirst into danger, after all."

"Hm, you're quite stubborn about this."

My master wasn't able to convince her either. *It seems she'll never move, so I'll just do what I can think of...*

"Please, let me find her," I said, bowing my head.

Shizuku raised her voice in surprise. "What are you doing?! There's no need for you to bow your head, Prince Callus!"

"You won't let me go because I'm a spineless man. I've been frail until now, so you can't allow me to go, right?"

"Well..." She fell silent.

If I were a stronger, more reliable person, Shizuku wouldn't have stopped me. This was all my fault, not hers.

I raised my head and pleaded, "I know that you don't want someone unreliable like me to go. But please, give me your consent. Only I know where Cryssie really is."

I was the only one who could communicate with Selena and know Cryssie's current location. If we were to rely on other people, it'd be far too late, and the worst could happen.

"Please, let me leave this manor. I've lived my entire life being saved and supported by others. For the first time, I may be able to save someone else," I said, bowing my head once more.

Silence followed, as Shizuku was deep in thought. My master put his hand on my shoulder and broke the quiet atmosphere.

"Children mature much more quickly than we expect. I'm sure you're a little confused, Shizuku, because you can't keep up with that. I understand the feeling all too well," he said.

"Sir Gourley..."

"Knowing that, could you allow us to leave this place? This

child is trying to break out of his shell. I know that we're heading into danger, but I promise that I'll return him alive. So please, I beg of you."

He bowed his head as well. *He's going this far for me,* I thought, fighting back tears.

"I understand. If you're willing to go this far..." Shizuku said, after much hesitation. "However, if you ever think there's even a bit of danger, please run. If you don't come back in one piece, I'll scold you to no end."

"That's even more terrifying than the wyvern. I'll make sure to keep my promise."

After a moment of levity, she smiled warmly and let us through to the entrance while offering me words of encouragement.

"Goodbye, Prince Callus," she said. "Stay safe."

I nodded, then hurried after my master towards the forest.

***

At first, I'd just wanted to make my daddy worry. I'd planned on hiding in the forest for a short while before returning to the mansion. But I'd stupidly wandered deeper into the forest and gotten lost. I tried to walk back to the best of my memory, but the never-ending scenery of trees blocked my view. *Where's the manor?*

"I'm hungry..."

I had left when everyone was still sleeping, so I hadn't eaten anything today. I rubbed my rumbling stomach and aimlessly wandered around the forest. *My feet are starting to hurt too...* I'd heard that I should stay put if I ever get lost, but I felt like I'd go crazy from hunger and loneliness if I stopped walking, so I continued to trek through the unpaved forest.

"Daddy, where are— Huh?" I was sure that I'd heard a sound just then. It was a bit far away, but I definitely heard someone stepping on some leaves.

"That must be daddy! He came looking for me!" I said with certainty. I started to run, forgetting my hunger and aches. I pushed some foliage aside and headed towards a clearing, but I didn't find my dad waiting for me. It was a wyvern.

"Grrr..." the wyvern growled, its blue scales glittering in the sunlight.

Sharp fangs peeked from its mouth, and its piercing gaze had an air of intensity that further confirmed its power. I'd seen earth dragons that carried cargo and small wyverns with knights on their backs, but I'd never seen one in the wild before. The creature in front of me looked untamed and terrifying, having never been domesticated by humans. *This must be what a wyvern is really like.*

"I-I've gotta run."

It wasn't a matter of winning or losing. I'd surely be swallowed in one gulp if I ran headfirst into this creature. It was vital for me to flee without being noticed. But the more I thought about it, the more I felt my body stiffen. As I tried to force my legs to move, I tripped over a root and landed with a thud.

"Grrr!" The dragon rumbled and turned towards the noise, finding me in an instant.

Its gaze was terrifying, and my knees buckled. My entire body was covered in cold sweat.

"N-No!" I hit my quivering legs, and hastily got up. *I have to run far away! Come on! Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot.*

I desperately moved my legs, trying to flee as quickly as I could. *Please, please, **please** don't chase me!* I begged.

"GRAAAR!" I heard a loud roar right behind me.

It's after me. I can tell! When I listened more closely, I could hear its rough breathing as well. That wyvern was planning on eating me. *I'm scared. I'm so scared. What have I done? I'm such an idiot.* I knew that my daddy loved me. I had no idea why I'd tried to test him like this. *It must be because I'm weak. My mind was too fragile to trust him, and now I'm gonna die because of my weakness.*

"Ack?!" I cried.

I tripped over a rock and rolled across the ground. I glanced at my legs. They were trembling from fear and exhaustion, and I couldn't run anymore. I hit them again, trying to calm myself down, but they wouldn't stop twitching. *N-No!*

"Grrr..."

I felt the ground shake as the wyvern inched closer to me. It looked incredibly angry, and I wondered if I'd accidentally wandered onto its turf. It opened its large mouth, showing great white fangs.

As I was about to die, I remembered a casual conversation I'd had with my daddy.

“Daddy, didn’t you used to be a knight? Why are you fighting by yourself now?”

“That’s a tough question. I used to be a knight who served a master that I respected, but I didn’t feel like working under his successor. So now I’m fighting alone.”

“Huh, I see! Aren’t you gonna find someone else to serve?”

He’d given me a troubled expression. Thinking back, it must’ve been a rude question to ask, but I was genuinely curious.

“Well, now I’ve got you, Cryssie. I don’t really want to find anyone new, but who knows about the future. I might find someone that I’d like to serve.”

“Hmmm, I wanna be a magnificent knight like you, daddy. I wonder if I’ll find anyone to serve.”

He petted my head gently.

“You don’t have to force it. You’ll know once that time comes. When you find someone who you truly believe is more amazing than you, your body will move on its own.”

It was a warm and kind flashback. It wasn’t some revelation that would save me from the wyvern, but it lit a fire in my half-broken spirit and gave me courage.

“Aaaaah!” I yelled, unsheathing my sword and trying to parry the creature’s fangs.

But it was much stronger than me, and I was unable to absorb its attack. My body was blown back as I bounced and rolled across the ground multiple times. My entire body was covered in bruises and scratches. *It hurts. It hurts so bad and I’m lonely.* Gripped by fear and anxiety, I managed to stand up once more, using my sword as support.

“I have to…flee…”

I raised my head to see the wyvern’s gaping jaws above me.

“Oh no!”

My vision went black. I was sure that I was done for and had been swallowed. But in the next moment, darkness wasn’t what entered my view. It was blinding light.

“*Rai Lo!*”

A ray of light blinded the dragon as it roared and flinched in confusion. Somebody was carrying me away. *Who is this?* I looked up, and saw the boy whom I’d called a weakling.

“Callus, why?” I asked, struggling to form words.

He replied in a confident and cheery voice. “You’ve done well,

Cryssie. Leave the rest to me!”

***

“Master, please take care of Cryssie,” I said.

“Of course.”

I entrusted the tired girl to my master, and stood before the wyvern by myself. It seemed surprised by our sudden appearance, but quickly lowered its stance, ready to fight.

“Grrr...”

It was a low and terrifying rumble. With Cryssie lying injured behind me, running away was out of the question, but she didn’t seem happy about my decision.

“Callus, don’t be reckless! Please, just run!” she yelled.

My master held her back as she tried to squirm from his grasp. She would throw herself back at the wyvern if he let her.

“Now, now, stop struggling. I’ll heal your wounds, so calm down,” he said.

“Why are you letting Callus go off by himself?! If you’re his master, go save him!”

She had a point, but he shook his head. “Getting rid of every obstacle in his way won’t help him grow. At times, a master must push his apprentice away and let them face a trial alone. Take a look—Callus is no longer a weak child.”

My master respected my opinion and was allowing me to handle this situation myself. I understood that it was a tough decision to make; he was a worrier, after all. But he knew that the road ahead of me was extremely tough, and wanted me to be able to walk it on my own.

“Good luck, Callus,” he said.

I accepted the challenge. I would not let my master down. “So this is a wyvern...”

I’d never seen one before, and I couldn’t deny my fear. At the same time, a sense of excitement bubbled up from within me. This was a great opportunity to see how much I’d grown.

“Grrr...”

The wyvern moved first. It kicked the ground with its thick legs and rushed towards me. It opened its jaws wide to swallow me whole. I thrust my hand forward, and called out to my partner.

“Let’s do this, Selena. Please lend me your strength.”

“Of course, I’ve got you!”

We synchronized our breathing and activated our magic. I envisioned a strong body, so tough that it wouldn’t lose to anything. I shared my thoughts, and we tried to make this visualization into reality using light magic.

“*Ra Verf!*”

A golden light surrounded my body. My physical abilities were still lacking, but this magic allowed me to temporarily possess more strength than an adult.

“Hah!” I swiftly jumped to the side, dodging the wyvern’s fangs. “Rah!” I took aim at its jaw, and punched it with all my might. The wyvern was caught off guard, staggering backwards before falling to the ground.

“Owww… Fighting with just my hand hurts,” I muttered.

“You big dummy! Who has ever heard of someone fighting a wyvern with their bare hands?!” Selena scolded me.

“Ah ha ha… Sorry. Couldn’t help myself.”

While Selena and I were talking, the creature got back up on unsteady feet. My punch had certainly done some damage, but it was still ready to fight once more.

“Looks like our opponent wants to continue. Callus, are you ready?”

“Of course. The only thing I’ve got in abundance is magical energy.”

I once again poured my energy into my spell. I’d just learned to use magic, and didn’t have many spells to choose from. I only had a few basic spells and practical magic in my repertoire—I was far from being a full-fledged magician.

However, my master had told me that magic wasn’t about the number of spells one knew. As long as I had properly learned the basics, I’d be able to react to any situation. I didn’t panic. I fully believed that the light magic I’d learned desperately, as though I was going to die at any moment, would protect me.

“*Rai Lo*.”

One by one, balls of light started to appear. In an instant, my entire surroundings were filled with bright light. I could now control up to thirty spheres at once. Cryssie was unable to hide her shock.

“Impossible… How can he control this many?!” she said.

“It’s difficult to control multiple objects with magic,” my master said. “Controlling two at the same time is like trying to

solve a puzzle with your left hand while you scribble with your right. But Callus is able to control thirty balls of light at the same time, a feat that even a first-rate magician can't easily do. I don't like the word that I'm about to use, but I feel that's the only way to describe him. He's a genius."

Cryssie and my master seemed to be discussing something with each other, but I decided to focus on my magic. I needed a lot of concentration to control the thirty balls of light. I stabilized my breathing and started to move.

"Let's do this, Selena. Match my movements."

"Gotcha!"

Encouraged by my partner's words, I used my magical energy and visualized the movements of the balls in my head. I controlled them in accordance with my thoughts.

"Move!"

Two balls obediently moved right in front of the wyvern, and stood still.

"Blast!"

The moment the words left my lips, the two spheres burst open and showered the creature in dazzling light. Blinded, the wyvern flinched and growled in pain. I used that moment to control a few more.

"Attack!"

The condensed orbs of light hurled themselves at the wyvern's feet. They didn't have attack power on their own, but commanding them with "attack" would give them some energy to damage an opponent. Each individual ball didn't hurt much, but the pain would build up over time if I kept attacking.

"Grrr..." The wyvern's scales were tougher than I'd thought, and it seemed energetic even after sustaining quite some damage. "Grar!"

In retaliation, the creature lashed out at me with its wings, talons, and fangs. It used everything it could to launch a counterattack.

"Its attacks are so fierce!" I yelled, dodging with all my might. I had no time to counter its onslaught.

"Callus! The eyes! Look your enemy in the eyes!" Cryssie shouted at me.

That's right—she's taught me so much! My opponent and its weapons are different, but we're in a battle!

"I need to straighten my back and look at my enemy's eyes!" I

told myself.

The wyvern's rage-filled eyes were fixed on me. Its glare was terrifying, but I continued to stare back.

"It's coming!" I yelled.

The beast swiftly tried to bite me, but I dodged with ease. Like Cryssie had said, watching my opponent's eyes allowed me to predict its movements. *I have enough time to attack!*

"Now it's my turn!" I said, leading my shot before firing my magic.

"Move! Block!"

The spheres shot towards the wyvern's legs and solidified. In its reckless charge, the creature tripped over the solid light. As it fell, I issued my next commands.

"Move! Attack!"

Several more balls of light flew towards the wyvern's face.



The monster tried to swing its tail at me, but its unsteady footing made the attack easy to dodge. *This is all thanks to my training with Cryssie. My body moves how I want it to.*

"G-Grrr..."

My barrage of magic had brought it down to its knees. It seemed to be in pain, but its fighting spirit lingered.

I couldn't help my curiosity. "Why does that wyvern continue to fight?"

Wyverns with red scales, known as Megid wyverns, were eager to fight, but the monster in front of me was a Sire. These blue-scaled beasts were much calmer in comparison. They almost never attacked humans, and I'd read in a book that they would flee at first sight. *So why is this wyvern so determined to fight?*

"Could it—"

"Graaar!" A deafening roar echoed through the forest, cutting me off. I instinctively covered my ears.

The monster inhaled and puffed up its throat. This was the sign that it was about to use its greatest weapon.

My master realized what was about to happen as well. "Callus!"

"I know! I'll be fine!" I yelled, preparing myself as I had the rest of my spheres dissipate into the air.

If it's trying to use that *move, this could be very bad. If I dodge, I won't be able to protect them behind me.* My master was at my back, so I trusted that they'd be safe, but dodging wasn't an option.

"I'm sorry, Selena. Could you lend me just a bit more of your power?" I asked.

"You really like to push your limits, don't you? But hey, that's why I formed a contract with you. You never let me get bored." She smiled and lent me her strength.

"Graaaaar!" The wyvern roared, expelling a large gush of flames. This move, known as "Breath," was the most powerful weapon it had. From its mouth came a powerful flame that burned everything in its path.

Awesome. Even at this distance, I can feel the heat. If some of that even grazes me, I don't think I'll live. But I can't lose here!

"*Ra Shield!*" I yelled.

A large, glowing shield formed in front me, taking the Breath head-on. The impact was so great that my shield began to crack,

but I used my magical energy to quickly repair it. Light magic had the ability to return things to their original forms, and it had much higher defensive capabilities than other elements. I took a liking to learning a spell that could protect someone, and had mastered it much faster than attacking magic. Magic that had my feelings poured into it was more powerful than ever. Even the wyvern's powerful Breath couldn't break my shield, but it wasn't about to back down.

"Grrrargh!" With an earth-shaking roar, it continued unleashing its Breath with even greater intensity.

Ugh, I can feel the heat even through the shield. I won't last much longer at this rate. There's only one thing I can do…

"Selena, I'm going to use a spell that's one class higher. Lend me your strength!" I said.

"Huh?! But we've never even succeeded in using it! It's much too dangerous!"

She was right; I had been struggling to use a high-class magic spell. It was much more powerful, but required more magical energy and took a toll on my body. My master had forbidden me from using it in this battle as well. I wasn't even able to control this spell, and there was a good chance that I'd fail, but I felt this was an opportunity to surpass my limits.

"Please, Selena, lend me your strength," I said, looking her straight in the eye.

She seemed troubled, but after a while, it looked as though she'd given up. With an exasperated sigh, she said, "Jeez, I guess there's no stopping you. My luck must have run out when I formed a contract." She grinned at me. "Leave the delicate controls to me. You just focus on using as much magical energy as possible. Let's beat that sucker!"

"Thank you!"

"Buuut! This is a one time only thing. I'll get lonely if you're gone, so don't keep pushing yourself!"

"Okay, got it! I promise!"

After giving her my word, I sharpened my focus. *It'll be okay. Selena's by my side to help me. It'll definitely succeed.* I reached for the heart of my magical energy deep within my body, and carefully gathered it towards my hands. Perhaps because I was compelled to protect the people behind me, I felt like I could concentrate easier. *I can do this. I need to activate my magic by using all the magical energy that's within my body.*

“O grand shield of light, defeat the evil and bring light to overflow upon this world!” Selena and I chanted together, synchronizing our breathing.

I carefully released all the light that I’d just stored in one go.

“*Raas Rai Shield!*”

A colossal shield of divine light suddenly appeared in front of me, blocking the wyvern’s Breath and protecting me from the heat.

“I’ll protect everyone!” I yelled.

Until now, I had always been protected by someone else. It was my turn to do the same. My feelings were conveyed to Selena and manifested in my magic. The shield with overwhelming defense had completely negated the great flame.

My breathing became haggard as my body was depleted of magical energy, and I started to see stars. I could barely stand up. *Higher-class magic is amazing! It used up so much of my concentration and magical energy. If I was told to do this again, I doubt I’d be able to. Still, I managed to protect Cryssie.*

“Grrr…” The beast had used up all its magic as well, and fell to the ground.

For the first time in my life, I was able to protect another person. “I…did it.”

Seeing the wyvern fall made the last of my strength leave my body. My knees buckled, but just as I was about to hit the ground, my master rushed up and caught me.

“Goodness. I’ve told you so many times not to use higher-class spells, and yet…” my master started. I was afraid he was going to scold me, but instead he smiled gently. “You did well, Callus. That was magnificent.”

“Thank…you.” I was about to cry from hearing his words, but I held back my tears and put some strength into my legs. *Good, I can still stand.* “Selena, thank you. You’ve helped me so much.”

“Don’t mention it. But you should be careful. That thing’s still willing to fight,” she replied.

“Huh?”

The wyvern was on the ground, but it still glared at us as though to say that there was still some fight left in it.

“What should we do, Callus? Would you like me to land the final blow?” my master asked.

“No. Actually, something has been bothering me. Could you please get me closer to it?”

“Hm, that’s a difficult request, but how could I refuse my adorable apprentice? I suppose we can.”

I borrowed my master’s shoulder and hobbled to the wyvern’s side. It continued to glare and growl, but didn’t attack. It seemed to have used up all its strength and couldn’t move. Around a meter away from the beast, I stopped and analyzed it.

“Callus, what’s on your mind?” Master asked.

“While I was fighting the wyvern, I felt that it was unnaturally weak. It doesn’t even look that injured either.”

“Hm, indeed, Breath uses a lot of energy, but not to the point where it becomes unable to fly. There must be another reason behind this.” He peered at the monster as well. After a moment, he suddenly went, “Hm?”

It seemed he’d found something. “Over there, at the base of the right wing. It looks like something stabbed it. I can’t quite tell because it’s a bit blurry.”

“The base of the right wing? Uhhh…”

His vision was failing him due to his age, so I tried to get a closer look in his stead. I noticed a large arrow stuck in the monster’s body. The arrow was buried so deep that I couldn’t tell it was there while we were fighting.

“Master, there’s an arrow in its wing.”

“Really now?” He put on his glasses to have a better look. “Hm, you’re right.”

“Do you think it was weak because of that injury?”

“It does look rather painful, but seeing how weakened this wyvern is, there’s a possibility that it was poisoned.”

“Poisoned? Are you saying that this beast was hunted?”

“Judging from the size of the arrow, that seems very likely.”

A wyvern’s scales and fangs could be sold for a high price, making it a prime target for fearless hunters. However, there were restrictions set on the hunt. These beasts were intelligent, and they would often try to get revenge on their fallen comrades. Thus, it was strictly forbidden to hunt in regions with high population density to prevent other humans from becoming unnecessary collateral damage. It was also forbidden to hunt around this manor, so it was clear that someone had broken these rules. *What’s worse, this beast escaped with a large wound. Whoever’s responsible for this must receive suitable punishment. But first, I should focus on the wyvern.*

“Master, I—”

“You don’t have to say anything. You want to treat this wyvern, don’t you?” he said, cutting me off.

“Huh? How’d you know?”

I thought that he’d be against the idea, so I was surprised that he saw right through me. *Is there some sort of mind-reading magic in this world?*

“You don’t have to be so surprised. Of course I can tell. You feel responsible for this beast, don’t you?” he said.

“Ha ha ha… You read my mind.”

“The person who should be held responsible is the hunter who broke the law. You don’t have to feel any sort of remorse. But you won’t listen to me, will you? Do as you like.”

“Thank you.”

I inched closer to the wyvern, when suddenly, someone grabbed my arm. Cryssie looked at me with worry, unwilling to release me.

“No, Callus. You’ll die. I’ll apologize to everyone else, so don’t hurt yourself any more,” she said, her voice trembling as tears filled her eyes.

She was an aggressive and selfish girl, but kind as well. I didn’t want to see her cry, but I couldn’t just leave this monster be.

“Cryssie, did you know that the blue wyvern in front of us is called a Sire? They’re generally quiet and docile, but it attacked us. Why do you think that is?” I asked.

“Huh? Because it was hunted, right?”

“That’s partly the reason, but don’t you think it’s unnatural that it didn’t run even though it was so weak?”

The beast hadn’t even attempted to flee, and continued to intimidate us. Its strong feelings couldn’t be explained away by a simple grudge that it may have had against humans. It was as though the monster *had* to fight, even if it meant sacrificing its own body. I’d read up on wyverns before, and I knew of a different reason.

“During this season, Sires raise their young. In other words, I think this wyvern was trying to protect its kids,” I said.

Sires were gentle creatures, and would generally choose to flee at the sight of a human. If it chose to intimidate us instead, there was a good chance that its young was nearby. It was only when this beast had fallen to the ground that I remembered reading about it.

“That wyvern must’ve been peacefully living with its kids here. We humans intruded upon that, so we must take responsibility,” I said.

“B-But you don’t have to do that, Callus! Let’s just go back and leave that to the grown-ups!” Cryssie said.

She’s right. A normal child shouldn’t be doing this. But I’m from the royal family. Even though my identity is kept hidden from the public, I still have royal blood within me, and I must take responsibility for what happened here. If I don’t, I have no right to eat meals with my family with a smile on my face. I can’t be the only one to shirk responsibility here.

“Master, please take Cryssie,” I said.

“Will do. Be careful.”

I left my friend to my master, and slowly approached the wyvern.

“Grrr…” The beast put its wings onto the ground to lift its body slowly. Its sharp gaze continued to tear into me, and I felt like it would pounce at any moment if I made any sudden movements. I slowly inched closer, spreading both my arms into the air as an attempt to show that I meant no ill will.

“Grar!” The wyvern lunged forward and bit my right arm. Its sharp fangs pierced through my skin, and blood started to flow. I winced at the sharp pain that ran through my body, but it was tolerable. *Compared to the pain from my curse, this is nothing.*

I slowly inhaled and exhaled, gathering my thoughts. My wound was deep, but I could easily treat it later. This wyvern was so weak that it couldn’t even land a fatal injury with one bite. I concentrated all my magic into my other arm.

“*Ra Kiel*.”

The magic was of a lower class than *Ra Heal*, and could only heal scratches. It was ineffective against curses, but incredibly effective against poison. *This should do it.*

“Gr?” The dragon, who had been visibly suffering moments ago, slowly became livelier. My magic had worked.

“Thank…goodness,” I said, falling to the ground. *I might’ve lost a bit too much blood…*

“You always push yourself too far. Just watching you takes years off my life,” my master said, catching me once more.

He immediately cast a healing spell on my right arm, and my wound started to fade along with the pain. *His healing magic is amazing.*

“Now then, finish what you’ve started,” he said.

“Right. Thank you,” I replied.

I stood back up and faced the wyvern, which was looking at me quizzically. It was still on guard, but it didn’t seem to be hostile anymore.

“Um, firstly, I’d like to apologize. You must’ve been living in peace, but we disturbed that, didn’t we? I’ll make sure something like this never happens again, so please forgive us,” I said.

I’ve heard that wyverns are intelligent, but will they understand human language? The beast listened to my words with interest, and after a brief silence, it opened its jaws and licked my face.

“Whoa?!” I yelped.

I flinched, thinking that I was going to get eaten, but it seemed that wasn’t the case. After it licked my face for a bit, it rumbled its throat and nuzzled its face against my body. It was being gentle, but its scales still hurt.

“Oho, that’s wonderful, Callus. Seems like the wyvern has accepted you,” my master said.

“Huh? Accepted me? To—oww—what?”

“Wyverns have a habit of rubbing their scales onto friends, so that they can transfer their scent. This beast has accepted you as its friend.”

“R-Really?” I asked the dragon.

“Grar!” it replied, as if in agreement.

Phew, that’s good. We don’t have to fight each other anymore.

“Okay, I think we should remove that arrow first and treat that wound. Master, could you help me?”

“Of course. I won’t let you act cool all by yourself, my apprentice,” he replied.

I laughed. “I’m relying on you.”

The moment we began to treat the wyvern, I heard a loud voice behind me.

“Wait!” a girl cried out.

I turned around to see Cryssie, who was firmly staring ahead of her. *I sense a strong intent from her, but what’s wrong?*

She silently walked past us and stood in front of the dragon. She stared it straight in the eye, and bowed her head.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

My master and I widened our eyes, shocked by her sudden apology. Even the wyvern seemed a bit confused.

“I’m sorry for suddenly entering your territory and surprising

you. I must've scared you. I won't do anything so foolish anymore, so please…"

The dragon interrupted her as it licked her face.

"Eep!" she shrieked cutely.

"Grrr," it said, staring straight at her. Its voice didn't seem to have an ounce of anger.

"Great, seems like you've been forgiven, Cryssie," I said.

"Really?" She seemed doubtful.

The wyvern replied by rubbing its scales on her.

"Thank you," she replied, tears in her eyes as her voice trembled.

I'm glad it's all over now.

"All right, since we've made up, let's treat this wyvern," I said.

"Could I help out? I want to be useful, even though I can only use simple fire magic," Cryssie said.

Fire magic didn't just have high attack power; it could also raise an organism's body temperature, increasing the rate of healing. Her help was more than welcome.

"Of course. Let's hurry up and treat it, then return to the manor. I'm sure everyone's waiting."

And so, Cryssie's mini runaway episode came to a close. It took only about half a day, but I was sure that both she and I would never forget it.

***

The healing process went smoothly, and the wyvern returned to being full of vitality. After we finished and returned to the manor, we ran into my brother and Sieg. They'd just finished searching the other side of the manor, and were about to head in our direction. Damien seemed ecstatic as I told him about finding Cryssie and the wyvern.

"Hah! You're amazing, Callus! I didn't think you'd get ahead of me!" he said, slapping me on the back.

"Hey, ow… My back! Ow…" My brother's pats felt like being bludgeoned by a large blunt weapon.

Sieg came to me and said, "Thank you so much, Callus. I don't know how I can repay you."

"Don't worry about me. Perhaps we should focus on someone else," I replied, glancing towards Cryssie, who was peeking at us from behind my master.

She must've wanted to run towards her father, but the guilt from causing everyone trouble was holding her back.

"Cryssie," Sieg said, slowly approaching her.

He crouched down at her eye level, and slapped her hard. A sharp crack echoed through the air, and her left cheek turned red. She immediately touched her injured cheek in shock.

"I was worried sick! Why did you do something so stupid?!" Sieg scolded her with a terrifying expression.

I'm scared by his intensity even at this distance, so Cryssie must be stunned.

"I...wanted you...to pay more attention to me... So I..." Cryssie choked out her words, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Sieg hugged her tightly. "Oh, you silly girl. If you desire, I'll give you as much attention as you'd like. There's nothing more important in the world to me than you."

Cryssie sobbed as the two hugged each other.

It's nice to have a family, I thought as I stared at them.

***

After a while, once everyone calmed down, I decided to talk to my brother. I'd already told him everything that had happened in the forest, and he believed me for the most part. He seemed to doubt that I had fought a wyvern, though.

"Damien, there's someone I'd like to introduce you to," I said.

"Hm? I don't mind, but who are they?" he replied with a puzzled expression.

I mean, it is *weird that someone like me would have friends.*

"Okay, come on out!" I said, signaling towards the forest.

Suddenly, a blue wyvern's face peeked out from the foliage. "Gr?"

The beast seemed to be asking me if this was okay. I waved, encouraging her to come closer, and she slowly approached us. Damien's jaw dropped as he was dumbfounded by the sight.

"C-C-C-C-C-C-C-Callus?! Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What *is* that?!" he stammered.

"I told you earlier, didn't I? This is the wyvern I met in the forest. I wanted to see how her injuries were healing, so I had her come to the manor."

"Wh-Whoa! She's coming towards us!"

Whoa, Sieg's unsheathing his sword. Oh, Cryssie stopped him.

The servants at the manor were all very surprised, and some even tripped in shock. *Should I have explained things a bit more? Honestly, I did want to surprise them a little.*

"Rawr! Rawr!"

"H-Hey, there's small wyverns too!" Damien yelled.

"So this is the adult wyvern. I've been calling her Saphi. And these are her kids. Aren't they so cute?"

As I'd predicted, she was in the midst of raising her three children. I didn't want her to leave them alone, so I had them come along. I was planning on carefully inspecting them later.

"Saphi! Over here!" I said, waving to her.

"Grrr..." She responded with a low growl and came to my side.

"Um, this person is Damien, my older brother. Could you introduce yourself, Damien?"

"Um, er, well, uh, ahem! I am the eldest prince of the Ledyvia Kingdom, Damien Lionel Leditzweissen. Pleased to meet you, Saphi," he said. He seemed a bit panicky, but he introduced himself well. *That's a relief.*

"I never thought I'd see the day when I'd shake hands with a wyvern. The world is truly vast," Damien said in awe.

Sieg approached us. "I've traveled the world, but never seen anyone become friends with a wild dragon. You really must be something special."

"Thank you, but I think it's only because Saphi is a kind dragon," I said.

She growled with pleasure as I stroked her cheek. It wouldn't have gone this smoothly if she had been more aggressive.

"You're a modest one, aren't you? I'm sure you'll become an excellent magician," Sieg said.

"Isn't that obvious? He's the man I accepted, daddy!" Cryssie said by his side. Her eyes and cheek were still red, but she seemed to have calmed down. She left his side and walked up to me. "I know I'm a bit late to say this, but thank you. You made me really happy when you showed up to protect me. A-And you were so cool!"

After saying that, she suddenly ran away. *Huh? Why'd she run? Her face looked redder than before too.*

"Did she catch a fever?" I wondered.

"Ha ha! Even Sirius needs some time to cure your dull side, it seems," Damien said with a laugh.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

My brother's saying something weird. I don't get it. While I was trying to think back on her words, Shizuku came out to greet me.

"Ah, Shizuku! Sorry to make you worry. But look, I'm back all in one piece!" I said.

"Indeed. Welcome back. I had faith in you," she said calmly, but she hugged me tight.

C-Can't breathe... "Ugh... Gh... Argh! You're so strong!"

She was about to hug me to death. That was close! I breathed a sigh of relief as I escaped from her grasp, and noticed Cryssie staring at me. *Why does she look angry?*

"You guys get along well, don't you?" Cryssie said.

"Huh?" I gave her a look of confusion, and noticed that she was glancing towards Shizuku. "Oh, yeah. Shizuku and I have known each other for a while."

"Hmmm..."

She pouted and suddenly tried to make her way between Shizuku and I. *Wh-What's up with her?* Damien and Sieg laughed while watching us, and Shizuku glared at my friend with the coldest stare I'd ever seen. *I'm so confused...*

Feeling uncomfortable, I tried to excuse myself from this situation. I gathered my thoughts and said, "Um, there's something I'd like to ask of you, Shizuku. Could I?"

"Of course. What could it be?" she replied.

"Since Saphi and her kids are here, I'd like to go all out in this garden and throw a party. Could we do that?"

"Go all out, you say... I understand, please allow me to make the arrangements."

She understood my intentions immediately and gave me a reliable smile.

***

"I'd like to give a toast to our new friend Saphi, to Callus and his bravery, and to the prosperity of the Leditzweissen household. Cheers!" Damien said.

"Cheers!" we all yelled, clinking our glasses.

It was already dark outside in the manor's yard. A large bonfire burned in the middle, illuminating its surroundings in red.

"Thank you, Shizuku. I know I made a troublesome request," I said.

“Not at all. The other servants can relax a little today, so I’m sure they’re having fun,” she replied.

I’d decided to make this an informal party, so the servants had joined us after finishing preparing the food. Normally, there was an attendant for my brother and I since we were princes, but we were celebrating our new dragon friend, and I didn’t think it’d be necessary tonight.

“All right, Saphi! Drinking contest, you and me!” Damien, a heavy drinker, challenged the wyvern.

He seemed a bit bewildered by the beast at first, but he was already treating her as his friend. *That kind of attitude probably makes him popular with the soldiers.*

“Ughhh… I can’t drink anymore,” he said.

Whoa, he lost! This kind of stuff is probably why he’s unpopular with women. The servants couldn’t leave a vomiting prince be, and they rushed to his side to help. *He always causes trouble…*

I gave him a withering look and approached Saphi, who’d just won the drinking contest. “Saphi, there’s a lot of people here, but are you okay?”

“Grrr!” she replied energetically.

Her three kids were nearby, eagerly chomping down on a chunk of meat. They had voracious appetites.

“Oho, it’s been quite a while since I’ve been part of such a grand party. Even an old man like me can still have fun,” my master said, approaching me with a glass in hand.

His cheeks were slightly red. He usually only took a sip or so, but it seemed like he’d been drinking quite a lot tonight.

“How rare for you to be drinking so heavily,” I said.

He chuckled. “Even I know when to relax at a party. Being stiff at a time like this would be rather rude to the host, don’t you think? In any case, Callus, why don’t you reward *her* as well? I’ve found just the thing.”

He handed me a bottle of expensive-looking wine.

“Thank you! I was actually looking for something suitable,” I replied.

I transferred plenty of my magic energy into the contents of the bottle, and poured it into a glass. I placed it in front of the Dwelling Stone that my master had given me.

My partner appeared. “Is something wrong, Callus? Do you need something from me?”

“I wanted to thank you today, Selena. Without your help, I

wouldn't have been able to find Cryssie or fight against Saphi."

"I received equal payment, so I only did what was necessary. There's no need for you to be so concerned."

She may have been correct, but I couldn't help but feel a twinge of loneliness when she made it sound like it was all just a transaction. I wanted to truly become friends with her.

"But it's still true that you really helped me out. Could you accept this offering of alcohol?" I asked.

"Hmmm. You're really weird, you know that? Honestly, it's not good practice for me to receive things for free, but I guess an occasional treat or two is fine. I'll gladly accept this! ♪" Selena pulled out a purple aura from the glass and put it into her mouth. "Mmm! Delicious!"

Thank goodness. She seems to like it. Who should I go to next? While I was thinking of my next candidate, Cryssie walked up to me. She wore a serious expression. *What's wrong?*

"H-Hey, Cryssie. Are you having fun?" I said.

"Yeah. Everyone's really nice and having a great time," she replied.

"I'm glad to hear that. Oh, do you want something to drink? I can pour you something." She had nothing in her hands, so I reached towards an empty glass on the table. Before I could get to it, she stopped me.

"Hey, could you come with me for a bit?"

She shyly looked up at me. Though I was puzzled, I nodded. *Wh-What's going on?*

"Over here," she said, taking my hand and leading me towards the forest, away from the others. We were quite far from the party, and the noise only grew more distant. "This should be a good place."

She released me from her grasp and stood facing me, staring into my eyes. *What's happening?* I frantically wracked my brain and came to one conclusion. *This could be the so-called "confession" that Sirius told me about! He said, "If a woman leads you to a secluded place, think of it as a confession."* My heart pounding, I waited for Cryssie to talk. *How do I even respond to one?*

"Um, firstly, thank you. Thanks to you, my life was spared, and I was able to become friendlier with my daddy. I'm really grateful," she said.

"Huh? U-Uh, yeah! Right, that! I mean, of course, don't worry

about it." *You were wrong, brother!* Thinking that Sirius's words couldn't be taken at face value, I continued to listen.

"So I've been thinking about how I can repay this debt. And I just decided earlier."

W-Wait, so she is *going to confess?* My mouth felt dry and I felt my heart beating faster than ever.

"I'll become your knight, Callus!" she said.

"Huh?"

I was surprised by her words. *What is she talking about? A knight?*

"Uh, Cryssie? How'd you come to that conclusion?"

"You're amazing, but I still can't stop worrying about you. When your arm was bitten by the wyvern, I was so surprised that I thought I'd faint."

"Oh... Yeah, sorry about that."

When she pointed that out, I realized that I didn't treasure my body enough. I thought it was natural for me not to. My very existence caused trouble to others, and there was no way I could think of myself as precious. In fact, I hated myself. I didn't mind mistreating my body, and sometimes I even thought I wouldn't mind if I died. Cryssie saw straight through my dark thoughts.

"So I'll protect you! I may not be reliable just yet, but I'll become even stronger, so that I can proudly declare that I'm a knight! Then I'll stay by your side and cut down anything that could endanger you," she said.

Seeing her brimming with confidence was blinding to my eyes. This girl had so much confidence that I lacked. *I envy her. But it would be a waste if she used her talents on me.*

"Cryssie, do you know what it means to become a knight? Knights spend their entire lives serving whoever they see fit. You can't make such an important decision so easily," I said.

"Of course I'm aware of that. Don't underestimate me."

I tried to guide her towards a different path, but she stood firm. She wasn't willing to change her mind.

"I'm really happy that you think so, but you don't need to go that far. If you simply want to repay your debt, there's so many other ways to do so. You don't have to pledge your entire life to me, Cryssie."

"I'm not just saying this out of obligation to repay you. I want to serve you because you're *you*, Callus. For the first time, I thought from the bottom of my heart that someone else was

amazing. For the first time, I felt that I wanted to fight for someone else. That's why I'm telling you this."

"Cryssie... You're..."

As I heard her honest feelings, I felt my chest grow warm. I never expected her to think about me in this way. *I should choose my words carefully, or else I could come across as rude.*

"Okay, how about this. When we become older, if you still feel the same way, I'll make you my knight. How's that?" I offered.

She hesitated for a while before answering, "Fine. I don't think my feelings will change, but if you say so, Callus, I'll agree to that."

Whew, great. I don't even know how long I'll live. It wouldn't be good if her goal was to just become my knight. This is for the best.

"Then let's start the accolade ceremony so that I can become your knight! I've always dreamed of doing this!" she said.

"Huh?! I didn't even say you were my knight yet! Aren't you moving a bit too quickly?" I said.

"Come on! Here, I'll lend you my sword, so just do it."

Led by her words, we started the accolade ceremony. *I didn't think this would happen...*

"Uh, so what should I say?" I asked.

"I don't really know either, so just wing it. Come on, hurry!" she urged.

Jeez, there's no reasoning with her. Still, this is kinda fun.

"Um, okay. Ahem! I declare this swordsman, Cryssie, to be my knight. Serve me well," I said. As she got down on her knees in front of me, I used the flat side of her sword to tap her shoulders. *I think this is how it's done?*

Looking satisfied, she stood back up and smiled. "Okay, your order has been received. I'll crush anything that comes your way. May your mind be at ease."

"That sounds promising. I guess I can now rest easy."

"Of course you can. You should be honored that I've accepted you."

The ceremony was nothing close to official procedures, and it was more like children acting in a play than anything. Yet, like a priceless treasure, this moment would continue to shine in my memories.

***

The next day, Cryssie and I conversed as we practiced our sword skills. Since she'd traveled to many places with Sieg, she had plenty of new stories to tell. She told me about towns in the desert, cities in the mountains, kingdoms above the sea, and castles flying among the clouds. Her tales were all very exciting, and made me want to travel one day.

"If you're interested, Callus, you should take a look at the outside world! I'm sure it'd be fun!" Cryssie said.

"Yeah, I'd love to go if I can, but..."

"But? What's wrong?" she asked, tilting her head to the side.

I explained to her that I was gravely ill to the point where I'd almost never left this manor. But to keep our conversation from becoming too morbid, I didn't tell her about my curse or my life expectancy.

"I see... I'm sorry for being so insensitive," she said, looking a little glum.

Shoot. I thought I tried to not make it sound so bad, but it seems like it's still too much for the average person. "Y-You don't have to worry about it! Look, I'm so much healthier now," I hastily replied, flapping my arms and legs enthusiastically.

She saw my strange movements and snorted with laughter. *Good, that went well.*

"You're right. I'm sure you'll be fine, Callus. If you're still weak when you're an adult, I'll be by your side to support you," she said.

"If that's a promise, then I'll be relying on you."

To go to an unknown land and adventure with my friend... What a wonderful dream. To make it come true, I'll have to work harder than ever.

***

"It's time we left. Thank you for taking care of us, Your Highness," Sieg said.

In the afternoon, we went outside to send off Cryssie and Sieg. They were supposed to have left yesterday, but due to Cryssie's disappearance, they'd prolonged their stay until today. I wanted them to remain a bit longer, but Sieg was a busy man, and these circumstances were out of my control.

"I've had fun as well, Sieg. Come over any time," Damien said.

"I will. Let's spar next time as well, Your Highness. Callus, I'd

like to thank you especially. I shall never forget you." He extended his arm towards me.

"S-Sure!" I said, clasping his hand and giving him a handshake. He had a true soldier's hand, firm and rugged.

"Cryssie, say your goodbyes too. We don't know when our next meeting will be," he said.

"Okay."

She was uncharacteristically quiet as she stepped in front of me. *She seems nervous. I wonder what she's thinking about.*

"Callus, could you come a bit closer?" she asked.

"Huh?"

I didn't see why she couldn't approach me, but I stepped forward. In the next moment, she suddenly grabbed my collar and pulled me towards her.

"Whoa?!" I yelped. Caught completely off guard, I couldn't offer any sort of resistance as I was tugged to her, and she gently kissed me on my right cheek.

"Huh?" I was shocked as my mind was still trying to process what just happened.

Cryssie's cheeks were bright red, but she still gave me a cheeky grin. "You won't forget me now, will you? If you do, I won't forgive you!"

She ran towards her carriage. Before she got on, her back still turned towards me, she yelled, "I'll become stronger and prettier! Just you wait and see! Look forward to it, Callus!"

"Okay! I'll also do my best so that I won't lose to you, Cryssie!" I said, finally able to provide a proper response.

Seemingly satisfied by my reply, she climbed into the carriage. I was already feeling lonely after saying our goodbyes, but I was more excited for our next meeting. I was looking forward to seeing how much she would grow, and I was eager to show her my own progress as well. These feelings would surely support me during my lonely times.

"Jeez, I've raised a precocious daughter. I hope we meet again, everyone. I'm truly indebted to all of you," Sieg said with a bow, before climbing onto the carriage.

We kept waving until we couldn't see them anymore. My chaotic yet fun five days had come to a close. But when things came to an end, it also marked the beginning of something new. The word "beginning" generally had a positive connotation, but this time around, it was definitely the "beginning" of something

awful.

***

“Huh?” I said.

It had been two days since Cryssie left the manor. I’d finished my magic lessons as usual, but something felt off while I was eating dinner. It first came as a slight sense of discomfort. I put my spoon back down on the table as I tried to figure out what was causing this unease.

“What’s wrong, Callus? Are you in pain?” Damien asked.

“No, I just feel this sense of discomfort.”

What is *this feeling? It’s a sense of anxiety as though I’m standing on the edge of a cliff, mixed with impatience like there’s a knife at my throat.*

Confusion ran through my body as my vision suddenly spun. At first, I thought my eyes had gone weird, but this was different. Before I knew it, I was lying on the table. *Oh no, I coughed up some food. What a waste.* I was still able to remain calm and think about things like that, but in contrast, something serious was definitely happening to my body.

“What’s wrong, Prince Callus?! Wh-What should I do?!”

“Shizuku, lay Callus on the floor. Bring a towel and some water!”

As I lay on the table, I foamed at the mouth while my entire body convulsed. I looked to be in a dangerous state, but I was able to analyze the situation with a cool head, as though I was staring down at someone else. Instead of wanting to be saved, I only felt apologetic for causing a ruckus. *Why can I only cause trouble?* I cursed my own cowardice with the last of my consciousness.

Terminology Dictionary II

Dwelling Stone

A white stone that's said to be where spirits stand. There are various other names for this item, including Spirit Stone, Stopping Stone, and Offering Stone, but Dwelling Stone is the most common name.

They are usually made from white obsidian, but can be created with other stones. Some regions even use bones and horns as materials. To this day, some villages in the countryside will put this stone in front of a shrine and place an offering. These offerings are filled with wishes, and faintly give off magical energy.

Master Swordsman

A prestigious title given to soldiers who excel at their task. They're supervised by the Divine Blade Organization. There are no special benefits in becoming a master swordsman, and exists solely to grant honor to those selected.

Despite its name, the title can be obtained by any skilled warrior who wields a bladed weapon, such as a spear or an ax. The name comes from an old tradition where long ago, weapons weren't given specific names, and all blades were called "swords."

Wyvern

A type of dragon that has wings instead of front legs.

Most are around six to ten meters in length, which is considered a medium size among dragons. They're intelligent creatures and often move around as a pack. They freely soar through the skies and hunt using their sharp talons and fangs.

Some can use the secret dragon technique, Breath. Wild wyverns almost never become friendly with humans, but if it was raised from an egg, it could become a reliable partner.

Chapter Three: The Golden Girl

When I came to, I was somewhere dark. There was no ground below, and I couldn't feel anything around me either. I was simply in a blank space, and I couldn't even tell if I was floating or sinking. Darkness was the most fitting description for my current environment.

"Why am I here?" I asked aloud.

I wracked my brain, desperately trying to retrace my memory, but it was just too hazy. I couldn't remember anything. *Ugh, my head hurts...* While I was in pain, unable to move at all, I noticed a black mist gathering in front of me.

The mist steadily grew larger until it was about my own size. It swirled around and took the form of a human. Two holes appeared on what I assumed was its face. Judging from the location, these were most likely meant to be the eyes. The mysterious fog pointed its hollow eyes towards me.

"What are you?" I asked.

I felt that this mist possessed some sort of consciousness. I didn't know why I thought so, but I just instinctively knew this to be true. As though to confirm my suspicions, the mist looked at me and *smiled.*

"What's...so funny?"

I was in so much pain that I couldn't possibly understand how this situation was humorous. I began to burn with anger. I glared at the mist with rage-filled eyes, but its expression had become sad. *I don't get it. What's going on?*

It continued to confuse me by slowly extending an arm forward. I didn't want to touch this thing at all, and I desperately wished I could flee, but I was frozen in place. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't move away.

"Stop—"

I yelled as loud as I could, but to no avail. The moment it touched me, I felt no pain. Rather, I instantly understood the identity of this entity. It was the curse, the root of the curse of death that ate away at my body. I hadn't noticed until now because the air was filled with the smell of death, but I finally pieced things together. Whenever I had felt pain, I always felt the

presence of this thing as well.

"You… Why are you appearing in front of me after all this time?!"

The curse didn't answer, simply staring at me with interest. It even seemed to be having fun.

"Did you come to mock me?!"

The curse didn't answer.

"Why did you even curse me?!"

Still no answer.

"Do you know… Can you imagine just how much I've suffered?!"

The curse jolted at my words. It created another hole under its eyes. *Is that supposed to be a mouth?* The orifice opened and closed as it unsteadily formed words.

"You…worked…hard."

I couldn't understand. *What is this thing? What is it thinking? Did it just say that I worked hard? What's that supposed to mean? Is it trying to comfort me? If so, it's having the opposite effect.*

"I'll definitely cure myself of this curse," I firmly declared. "You better be prepared. I'll absolutely make sure that you're chased out of my body."

It brought its face close to mine and opened its mouth once more. **"Love."**

***

"Whoa!" I yelled as I suddenly came to my senses. I didn't know if I was in reality or still dreaming. My heart pounded loudly. My entire body and bedsheets were covered in sweat.

"Where am I?"

I glanced around and recognized the familiar view of my bedroom. Bright light leaked in from the window, indicating that it was around noon. My last memory was of dinner, so I had been out for at least half a day.

I heard steady breathing and noticed Shizuku sitting on the ground, asleep next to my bed.

"I'm thirsty…" I murmured. I hadn't had anything to drink, and my throat felt dry.

I noticed a cup of water on my nightstand. Not wanting to wake her up, I reached for the cup. In the next instant, a strong pain rushed through my body.

“Ugh…”

It felt like my body was being ripped apart and my bones were being twisted. *Right. That’s right,* this *is what my body’s truly like. I’d forgotten this pain thanks to my master, but this was part of my daily life.*

“But…why? *Ra Heal* should still be in effect.”

Before I fainted, right before I was about to have dinner, my master had cast the spell on me again. It was supposed to last until noon the next day, but I’d fainted about two hours later. There were two possible causes for this. First, it could’ve been that my master’s magic wasn’t working well. This seemed unlikely—my master never made such elementary mistakes, and nothing unusual had happened when I watched him cast it. The second possibility was much more likely. To confirm my suspicions, I removed my pajama top that someone had put on for me while I was unconscious. My theory was proven correct.

I forced a laugh. “Oh, jeez.” The curse, which had been on my chest, had now spread to around my waist, turning more of my body black.

My heart sank as though falling into a deep swamp. *I guess this is what people call “despair.”* Because I’d seen a ray of hope, the shock had become greater than before. *I guess…I guess I’m really not gonna make it…*

As I felt dispirited, Shizuku woke up and looked at me, her eyes wide. “Prince Callus! You’re awake!”

She desperately clung to me, and her shoulders silently trembled as she sobbed. “I thought you’d never wake up…”

“I’m sorry to make you worry,” I said. *I troubled her again. I truly hate this body of mine.*

As I stroked her trembling shoulders, my master entered the room. He apparently had heard Shizuku’s voice.

“Whew, seems like the worst is over. You sure had us worried,” he said.

My master, possibly preparing for the worst, looked relieved when he saw my face. He had dark circles under his eyes, and I knew I’d made him anxious.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“That’s fine. This isn’t your fault. Now, let me see your body.”

When I showed him how far the curse had extended, his face fell.

“Hm, so your curse is spreading. Let me try casting my spell

once more. *Ra Heal*.” Light flowed from his hand and transferred into my curse. Usually, this would make me feel much better, but it wasn’t effective this time. My entire body was still in pain, as though small needles were swimming through my veins.

“How is it, Callus? Do you feel different?” he asked.

“No. This usually makes me feel better instantly.”

“I see. Hmmm.”

Shizuku, seeing my master so disheartened, had a sorrowful look on her face. *How did this happen?*

“Master, do you know what’s going on?” I asked.

“I don’t know what the cause is, but it seems like your curse has suddenly grown at an alarming pace. I tried to do what I could while you were asleep, but none of my methods were effective. I didn’t think the curse was this powerful.”

“I see…”

Even while we were talking, the curse was moving and planting its roots throughout my body. I didn’t have much time left before it covered me from head to toe.

“To speak honestly, you’re in much worse shape than when I first met you. At this rate, you’ll have nowhere near six months left. At most, you’ve only got two more weeks,” he said with a pained expression.

Upon hearing those words, Shizuku put her hand to her mouth and hung her head. My master’s prediction was most likely correct. I could feel my stamina being sapped away while I just sat there. I didn’t have long.

Amid the sense of dread which now filled the room, my master spoke once more. “The only possible way to overcome this situation…might be for you to learn *Ra Heal*, Callus,” he said.

“Me?”

“Indeed. You and the spirit who possesses you are both special beings. You have an immense amount of magical energy, and Selena, the princess of the spirits, can use special magic. A *Ra Heal* that combines both of your powers might be the only possibility.”

“I see…”

Selena had indeed called herself a special spirit, and I felt that there might’ve been a chance.

“Selena, are you there?” I asked.

“I am,” she replied, making an appearance.

Her usual confident demeanor was gone and was replaced

with anxiety. It seemed I had made her worry as well.

"What do you think about what my master just said?"

"There's no guarantees, but it's worth giving it a shot. I tried to think of other methods, but none came to mind."

"I see." *Then there's no use thinking about it. I have to do what I have to do.* I turned towards my master. "Master, I'll do it. I'll learn *Ra Heal* and overcome my curse. Could you please lend me your strength for a bit longer?"

"Of course. I've been waiting for those words. I'll do whatever I can, and I've even called for some assistance. I'm well prepared."

"Assistance? What are you talking about?" I hadn't heard of anything of the sort.

"When I left the manor some time ago, I was in contact with a certain person. I asked them to help me teach light magic. This person is far younger than me, but has a talent worth observing. I'm sure she'll become a magician greater than myself in the near future."

"Really?!"

My master was a magician with the talent of a grand sage. I had no idea that a light magician above him even existed.

"Her name is Sissy. She's a genius magician, and one of my apprentices. I'm sure there's a lot you could learn from her."

I decided to bet my only ray of hope on this person, and waited for her to arrive.

***

Since I had just recovered from fainting, I spent the rest of the day in bed. My master told me to rest up since Sissy would arrive tomorrow. I knew that I had to save my energy, but I couldn't fall asleep.

"Can't sleep?" a voice suddenly called out to me.

It was dark outside, and no one was in my room except for Selena.

"Yeah, my mind's filled with so many thoughts," I said.

"I see... If you can't sleep, I can hear you out. People can't see me anyways, so it's not like I could tell anyone. Your secrets are safe with me, right?"

"Ha ha, that's true. They're safe with you."

Selena continued to try to lighten my mood, and I was

currently extremely grateful for that.

"Hey, Callus. I'm a spirit, so I don't really understand what it means when humans are suffering or are in pain. But I'll be by your side and lend you my strength until the very end, so don't worry. Even if you fight against a god, I won't leave your side. Heh heh, don't I sound reliable?"

"Yeah. You really do."

She took my hand in hers. We couldn't actually touch each other, but I felt a soft warmth enveloping my hand. Taking comfort in this faint warmth, I slowly fell asleep.

***

The next day, at around noon, my master and I stood outside to wait for Sissy's arrival.

"You can wait in your room, you know," my master said.

"I feel a bit better, so I'll be fine. I want to hurry and meet this person too," I replied.

The torment of the curse would come suddenly at random intervals, but that meant the pain wasn't constant. I could move around freely like usual, but when I had an episode, it felt like hell. Though I was under the spell of *Ra Heal*, the pain was much worse than before I had met my master. If I didn't treat this soon, I felt like I'd lose my mind before my life.

"Hm, seems like she's arrived," Master said.

A horse carriage passed through the gates and approached us. It looked quite elegant, and was covered in a coat of dazzling white paint. *Is Master's apprentice an aristocrat or something?* The carriage came to a halt, and the door opened. A female knight dressed in white emerged. She looked beautiful and dignified, and I assumed that she was Sissy until another passenger behind her stepped out.

"Huh?" I said.

A small girl held the knight's hand. The short girl had beautiful golden hair and seemed a little nervous. *She looks younger than me.* She ran over to us and tripped. *Wow, she tripped magnificently. She fell face-first. Is she okay?* The knight hastily went over to the girl, but she got up by herself and held back her tears. *She's a strong kid.* She dusted off the dirt on her clothes and approached us.

"H-Hi there. I'm Sissy. N-Nice... Pleased to meet you," she said,

unsure of her words.

I was surprised that this child was the healing magician my master had been talking about.

“I hope we can get along, Sissy,” I said.

“Yes! I’ll do what I can!”

I feel really bad for thinking this, but I’ve only got doubts. Will she really be okay?

My master, seemingly reading my thoughts, chuckled. “Now, don’t you worry too much. Sissy is indeed around the same age as you. She might seem unreliable, but despite her youth, her talents are the real deal. I’m certain that she’ll one day become a greater magician than me.”

“Th-That’s not true! I’m really not that good!” she replied.

Hearing my master praise others makes me feel uncomfortable. I think I’m jealous of her.

“What kind of relationship do you and Sissy have, Master?” I asked.

“I was requested by her parents to teach her magic for three days. But by the time I’d met her, she’d already mastered beginner-level spells by herself.”

“That’s indeed amazing.”

Sissy continued to be humble, but I trusted my master’s high praise. Her talents must really have been impressive.

“Now then, Sissy, I’ll leave Callus in your hands. I’ll be away for a bit,” my master said.

“Huh? I-I’m going to teach him by myself?” she asked.

“Yeah. I’ve taught him all I know about healing magic. I’ll go search for a way to undo the curse, so I’ll be leaving the rest to you.”

“Huh?! But, um, ah… Oh, you’re already gone…”

My master quickly gathered his belongings and left the manor. Sissy’s hand, which was outstretched towards him, looked so sad and anxious. She seemed to be an introvert, and I felt it would take some time for me to become friends with her. She was the complete opposite of Cryssie, so I needed to be careful.

“Um, well then, I’ll be in your care. I’ll do my best, so you can be as strict as you like when you’re teaching me,” I said.

“O-Okay.”

She fidgeted and proceeded to rummage through some items that she’d brought along, preparing to teach me some healing

magic. *I don't want to sound mean, but I'm a little worried about her. If she shows reservations, it'll prevent me from moving forward, which is a huge problem. I'd like for her to be really strict with me.*

"There we go!" she said cutely. She took out an extremely thick book from the carriage and handed it to the knight by her side.

I have a bad feeling about this... "Um, what's that book?" I asked.

"Oh, this? It's a book of medical texts. Healing magic is much more effective if you understand how the human body works. So, I thought we could start off with a bit of studying."

She took out another book, and then another, and piled them all on top of each other. *By "medical texts," she's talking about the stuff that doctors read, right?* I'm *gonna read all of this? Seriously? Really?*

"I'd like for you to absorb the knowledge in these three books by the end of today," she said.

"Huh? All of this?"

"Yes! Don't worry, you'll be fine! Even I was able to read all of these books in one day, so I'm sure you can do the same, Sir Callus!" she said with excitement.

Er, I feel like that's because you're a genius, not because these books are short or anything... I've got no confidence that I can read all of this so quickly. Even one book will be difficult for me. But I had no time to say that I couldn't do it, especially when she seemed so fired up for me.

"Okay. I'll do my best," I said.

Sissy's strict training had just begun. I had to process an incredible amount of information, and that night, I dreamed of being crushed by a large book.

***

It had been three days since Sissy arrived. Her lessons were extremely rigorous, and I read one medical text after another, hammering all the information I could into my head. I learned a variety of topics including anthropology, herbalism, toxicology, and light magic studies. They were all very interesting, and learning about them was fun, but I had to study them all within a short period of time. *I asked her to be strict, but I didn't think it'd be* this *tough.*

“Um, do you have any questions so far?” she asked.

“I-I think I’m fine. Probably,” I replied.

“I see. Then let’s start from the top, shall we?”

“Eep!”

Every day, my mind was stuffed with all sorts of knowledge, and I was definitely learning more about medicine. Her lessons were strict, and I felt that any normal person would’ve thrown in the towel ages ago. However, once I endured these lessons, the amount of knowledge that I retained was eye-opening. True to my master’s praise, she was a genius who was knowledgeable about magic and understood how it worked. The knowledge that Sissy had given me had also become part of my power.

“*Ra Heal!*” I chanted.

Light flowed from my hand and slowly seeped into my body. I was able to visualize where the magic had affected me, and how it moved around. This was all thanks to being taught about human anatomy. Since I knew how the body healed, I understood how to grow new cells and adjust veins to close a wound. Knowing the number of bones, as well as the size and location of organs, allowed me to understand how to move my magic within it. A clear visualization was vital for magic, and Sissy’s lessons had greatly helped me in that regard. *But…*

“Shoot, it disappeared,” I said.

I wasn’t able to use *Ra Heal* fully. It disappeared within my body, and I’d failed again. My master had said that *Ra Heal* was the signature spell of light magic, but was one of the most difficult chants to master. *Ra Kiel*, a lower-class spell, used the attribute of light magic to “return things to their original form” with the magic doing all the work. It was much easier to learn, but *Ra Heal* required a great deal of control.

“I’ve still got a long way to go,” I muttered glumly.

“That’s not true! You’re amazing enough as it is. It’s only been a few days since I’ve started to teach you, but you’re already improving at a rapid pace!” Sissy said.

I did feel a bit better from her praise. “It’s all because of you, Sissy. Thank you so much.”

I grasped her hand, but she shrieked loudly and fell from her chair. Her pale cheeks were flushed red. *I thought we’d gotten close over the past three days, but I guess this kind of contact is still out of the question. She’s so shy…*

“I-I’m so sorry, Sir Callus! I’ve never had a friend before, so I’m

not quite used to this," she said, hiding behind the bed with only the top of her head peeking out.

She reminds me of a small animal. How cute. "You don't have friends, Sissy?"

"Yeah... It's a little embarrassing."

"Don't say that. I didn't have any friends until recently either. That's nothing to be embarrassed about." Before I'd met Cryssie, I didn't even know anyone the same age as me, much less have any as friends.

Sissy sounded worried. "But as you can see, I'm dreadfully scared of strangers. I don't think I'll ever make a friend in the future either."

She's so gloomy now. She's kind, smart, and cute, so I'm sure she'll make friends in no time, though. Maybe if she makes her first friend, she'll become a bit more confident.

"Hey, Sissy, how about *I* become your first friend?" I said.

"Huh?" She stared at me wide-eyed.

I thought this was a good idea, but am I being a bit too forceful? "If you've got one friend, I'm sure you can make another. Could you become my friend? Let's play in between our studies. If you don't want to play outside, I've got some board games too."

"Um, well, er..."

I thought she'd be happy, but she looks troubled. I guess I'm being a nuisance.

"I guess that's a no?" I asked.

"N-Not at all! I'm really, truly h-honored!" she blurted out, stumbling over her words. "I'm very honored, but I think you'd get bored quickly. I'm a boring person, so I'm not fit to be your frie—"

"That's not true!" My reply was just as firm, causing her to jolt in surprise. "I had lots of fun studying with you, and you're so much more knowledgeable than me. You're very creative too, and just listening to you is interesting. I have no doubt that it'd be fun to play around with you."

She looked down, her cheeks turning red. "No one has ever said that to me before."

She's not sad anymore, but a bit embarrassed, right? I'll just keep at it. "So could you please become my friend, Sissy? I'm sure we'll have so much fun."

I grabbed her hand and stared into her eyes, covered by her long bangs. There was a lengthy silence before she finally

nodded. “I-I may not be much, but I hope we can become great friends.”

“Yay! Thank you!” I happily hugged her. She was my second friend in my life, so I couldn’t contain my joy.

This seemed to be too much for her, and her face turned beet red as she let out an odd cry and turned rigid. *Whoops, I might’ve gone too far.*

Around ten minutes passed, and Sissy had finally calmed herself down. She still looked a bit rattled, but her cheeks were no longer red, and she seemed more or less back to her normal self. “I’m sorry for panicking. Now, let’s resume our lesson, shall we? Let’s do this one next.”

She took out a book with a black cover. The title read *The Complete Book of Dark Magic.* I didn’t have to open the book to know that this was about curses.

“Sir Gourley asked me to bring a book about curses. There aren’t many out there on the subject, but I still managed to find this one,” she said.

“Thank you. I’ll be sure to read it,” I replied.

I realized that I knew next to nothing about my curse. There were many theories about the topic, such as curses only inflicting humans who had made a contract with the devil, or curses being part of a secret technique that was passed down within a family who dabbled in black magic. None of these theories could be proved with facts, and the ongoing debate was still shrouded in mystery. Many even doubted the existence of curses at all.

I’d asked my master and Selena before, but neither had much knowledge about curses. It proved just how rare this phenomenon was. Hence, books about them were scarce and unusual. Even my father, the king, couldn’t get his hands on one, which certainly attested to their rarity. *How did Sissy get ahold of such a valuable book? I’m a bit curious, but I should read before asking any questions.*

“Has my master read this book already?” I asked.

“Ah, I forgot to tell him that I found this,” she replied.

“I see…”

Sissy looks reliable, but she’ll sometimes forget about important stuff somehow. I think that trait is kind of charming, but she’ll probably freeze up again if I tell her, so I’ll refrain from saying anything.

“Okay, I’ll get reading,” I said. I gathered my thoughts, and slowly turned the pages. My hands were shaking and my heart was pounding, but I was curious to read its contents. “Hm, let’s see… It says, ‘Curses are always caused by the caster, and the strength of the caster’s feelings will determine the strength of the curse.’”

This means that curses aren’t a natural occurrence. There’s always a reason behind one, and there must be a reason behind my curse too. But what could that be? I had this curse from the moment I was born, so it’s impossible that anyone could have harbored a grudge against me. So why? Who did this, and for what reason? I’ve only got more questions than answers now. Engrossed in my thoughts, I continued to read.

“‘Curses generally require dark magic. The attribute of magic that is most effective against it is its counterpart, light magic.’ Yeah, I know this bit already.”

Water and wood magic had healing spells as well, but they were pretty much useless against my curse. I’d personally experienced how light magic was the most effective. As I continued to read, I began to think there wouldn’t be any other interesting bits. But then, my eyes caught the words on a certain page.

“This is…” I murmured. I gulped and felt my fingers grow sweaty as I traced the page. It was a section called, “About Taboo Beings.” These beings were children who were born with a curse, like me. We were regarded as bad omens, and hidden away from the moment we were born. The book stated that most of these Taboo Beings were soon disposed of. As such, there weren’t many records of them. *That makes sense. No one wants to keep evidence of something they want to hide so badly. I’ve really only heard of Taboo Beings in fairy tales. I’m sure the vast majority of people assume that we’re just a product of fiction and fantasy.* But I was proof that they existed, and there was a book right in front of me that could offer some additional insight.

“Are you okay?” Sissy said, looking at me with worry.

I hadn’t noticed it myself, but I apparently had a scary look on my face. “Sorry, I’m fine.”

I took slow, deep breaths to calm myself down. And when I had steeled my resolve, I turned my eyes towards the page.

○ About Taboo Beings

Some humans are born with a curse and suffer from constant, extreme chronic pain. The pain intensifies as the body ages, causing many to die young. In fact, there are no records of these people surviving into adulthood.

Individuals are born with this condition, seemingly at random. No one knows who or what places the curse on these innocent newborns.

As the leading expert on curses, it goes without saying that I had looked into these individuals as well However, there was very little reliable information on them; the few remaining texts were fairy tales, making it difficult to discern truth from superstition.

However, they all held a common belief that these "Taboo Beings" were bad omens, harbingers of a great beast that would scatter its dark magical energy across the world. Of course, I cannot confirm the validity of these claims.

As I devoted my studies to them, I discovered one truth.

Among the Taboo Beings whose existence I've been able to confirm, royal blood often flowed through their veins. Looking into the royal families of various nations, I found an unnatural number of recorded miscarriages.

I hypothesized that royal families used these records to hide the fact that they'd given birth to a Taboo Being. Since these beings were often said to be bad omens, if a prince were ever found to be one, it would cause panic and anxiety amongst the general public.

I sought further clues, visiting the palaces and castles of fallen countries over the course of a few years. This led to the discovery of an odd room. The room was too well-equipped for a prisoner, and it was more fitting to be a room for one exhibiting the symptoms of a Taboo Being. My hypothesis slowly turned into a concrete theory.

I used what little remaining documents I had available and became engrossed in my research.

The royal family and the curse... Just what ties these two together? I first thought that it must've been someone who cursed the royal family, but I felt this was unlikely. It would've been far more efficient to curse the king directly. Why would one curse their newborn offspring at completely random intervals?

I continued to ponder over this thought? and was reminded of the old saying, "Curses and blessings are two sides of the same coin."

What if I flipped my way of thinking? Taboo Beings aren't cursed, rather they have been blessed. They weren't hated, but loved.

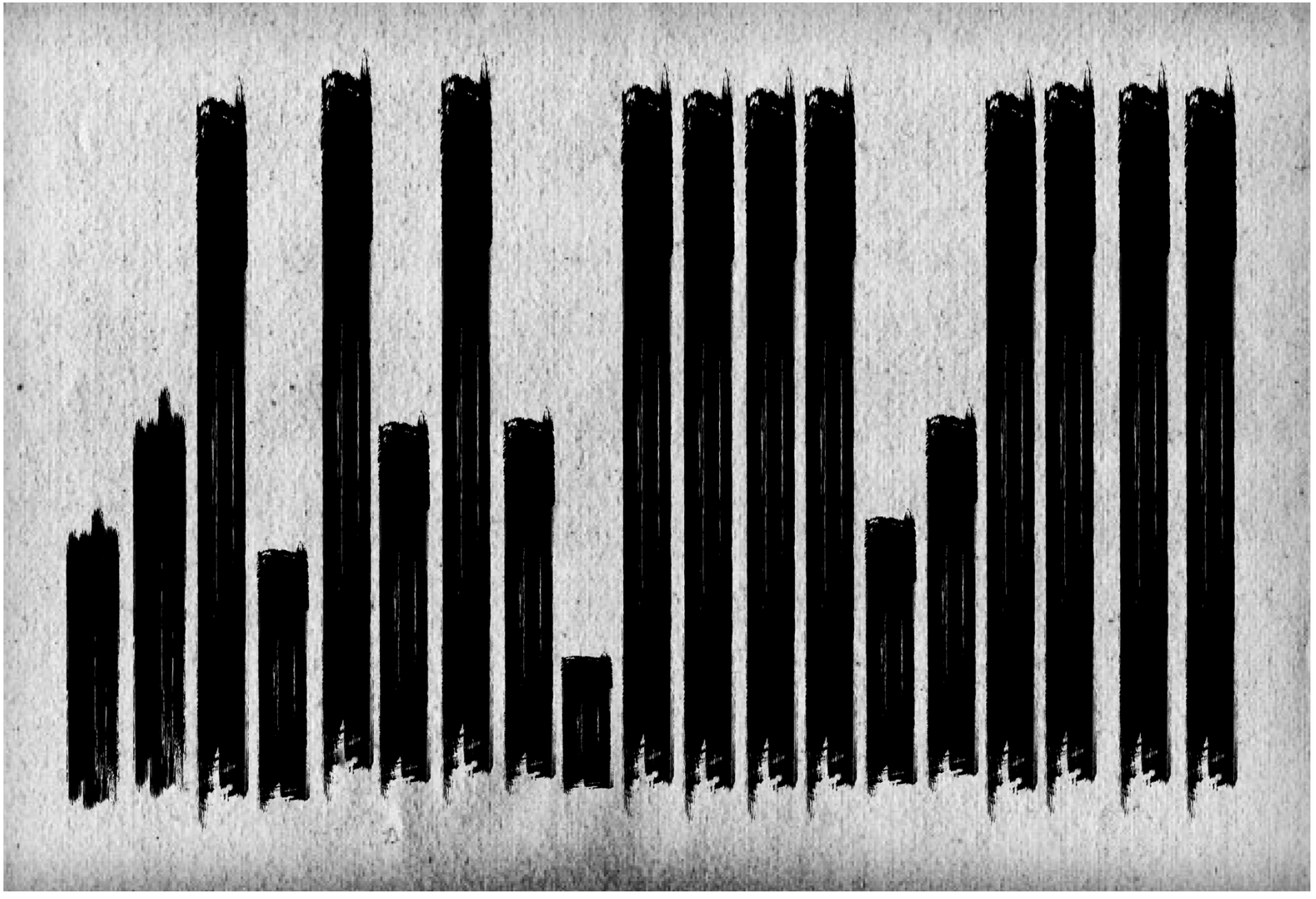
There's another saying that goes, "The royal family's [redacted]

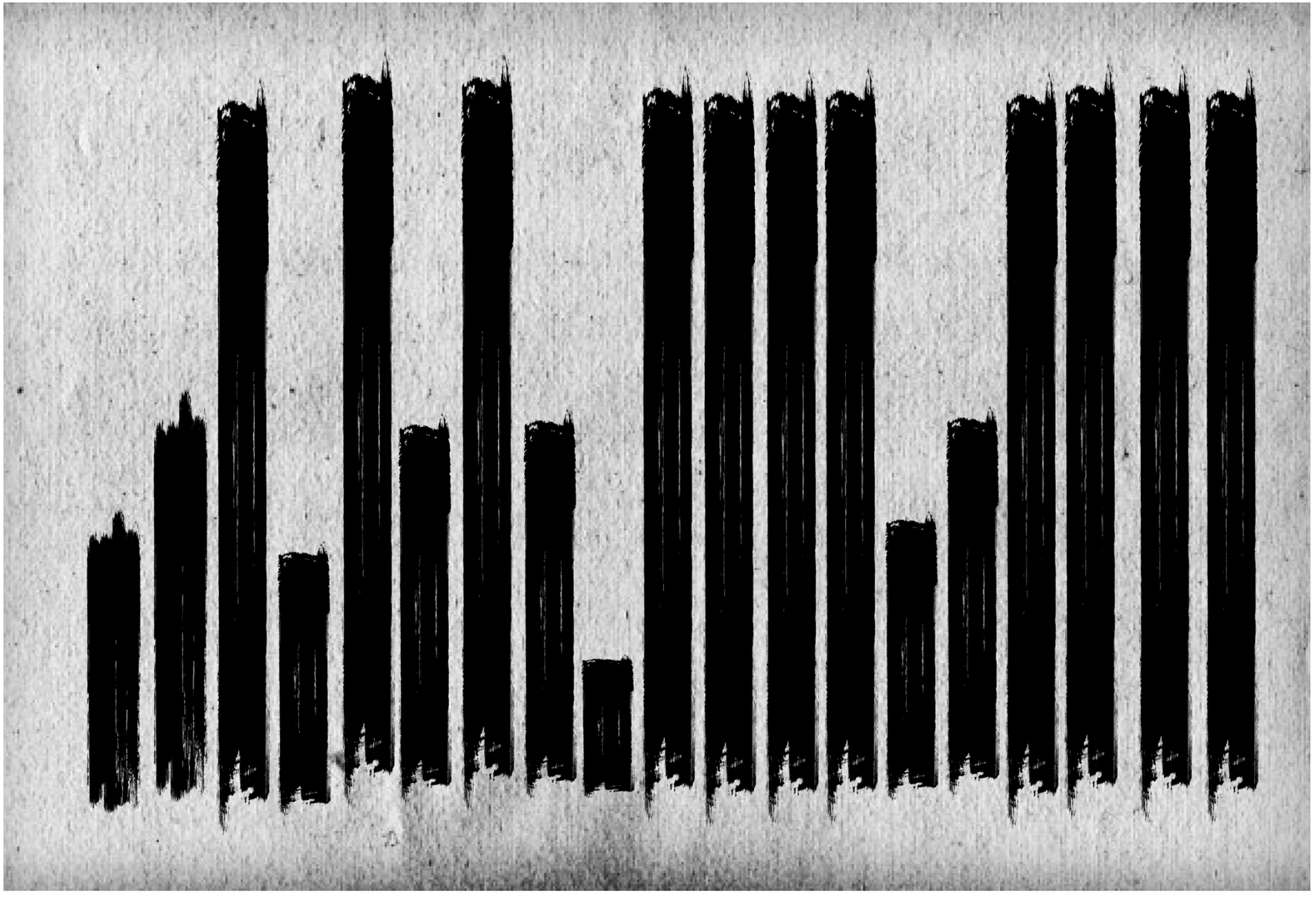
Does that mean these people are loved? The moment this thought ran through my head, I had an incredible epiphany.

Eureka! I got it! If I'm correct, what a twisted, inefficient, and foolish love this must be! Even if I told this to the other researchers, they probably wouldn't believe me.

Goodness... Myself and whoever reads this book must truly be the most blessed people in this world.

Indeed, I must write this down. I must write about him, and the curse. This is too much to keep to myself. I'm sure keen readers have already caught on, but curses are [redacted]





“What’s going on?!” I said. The text had become completely blacked out, making me unable to read anything. “There has to be something… Some sort of clue…”

I flipped through page after page, hoping for some new revelation, but to no avail. Everything had been censored using reddish-black ink, in multiple layers even—whoever had done this had spared no effort in ensuring that these words would never be read. *Who would do such a thing?*

“Sissy… What is this?”

“I’m not sure myself. I found this book stored in the corner of an archive, as though it was being hidden away. It looked like it had been left there for quite some time, so I believe that this book already had these pages redacted by the time it was shelved.”

“I see…”

The author of this book had probably found the truth about Taboo Beings, but someone hadn’t wanted that information to spread. This book was lucky to still exist at all. It had then been secretly stored somewhere, and now it was in my hands.

“The author of this book is Ludois Baskerville. I should probably remember this name,” I said to myself.

Even the date of publication is censored, but judging by how old this book appears, I doubt the author is still alive. Even so, this knowledge might be useful.

“Sissy, did you read the entire thing already?” I asked.

“Huh? Uh, well, yes. I’m reading along beside you, so I’ve got it all memorized,” she replied.

“Your memory is amazing…”

Sissy apparently remembered everything she’d read. I tested it out by quizzing her from this book, and she answered all of my questions instantly.

“Could I have this book? I feel like it’d be dangerous to carry around, so I’ll store it in the basement of this manor where no one will find it,” I said.

The contents of this book might leak somewhere. At best, a person who wanted to keep the truth about Taboo Beings hidden would simply steal it, but it would be horrific if they also went after whoever had read it before. *It’s not an issue if I become a target, but I can’t say the same for Sissy. She can’t endanger her life like that.*

After a brief silence, she finally spoke. “I understand. I have

everything in that book in my head now, so I'll leave it to you to store it properly."

"Thank you. I'll keep it safe." I received the book and promised to take care to not let it be seen by anyone else. "I think you'll be fine, but be careful. Don't talk about this book to others."

"C-Certainly. I'll be cautious."

She's smart, but I just want to make sure. Now then... I've read the book, but I'm not sure if I actually found anything useful in treating the curse.

"It said that light magic was effective, but there weren't any methods in helping me undo this curse. Was there anything that caught your eye, Sissy?" I asked.

"Let's see... I was bothered by the part about blood."

"The part about blood?" *Right, the book stated that Taboo Beings are often of noble birth. I'm also part of the royal family, so that theory might be correct. But what exactly bothered her about it?*

"I don't know who cursed you, Sir Callus, but they must have had a set target or location in mind. If that target was blood, the curse would inevitably affect the victim's blood," she said.

"But my curse is in my left chest. It's got nothing to do with... Ah!" The puzzle pieces within my head finally began to fall into place.

Over the past few days, I'd read various medical texts in a desperate attempt to hone my magic skills, and I'd learned about the human body. My heart was on the left side of my chest, and the heart's role was to pump blood throughout my entire body.

"So it wasn't my flesh that was cursed, but my blood?! That means..."

"Yes. It might not be effective to cast *Ra Heal* on just the surface of your body."

I gathered my thoughts. Throughout my life, I had believed that I was cursed on my chest because that was the center of the black stain. However, I just learned that my blood itself could've been cursed, and the stain was only there because that's where my heart was. Since my heart pumped out blood, it was an easy location for the curse to gather, making the left side of my chest change color.

"So I should cast *Ra Heal* on my heart?" I asked.

"I believe so. I think that the root of the curse isn't the black stain, but something underneath. There's a good chance that it's your blood."

I'd also been bothered about my pain. Regardless of where the curse's mark showed, my entire body was suffering. If my blood was cursed instead, it would make sense that blood flowing through my body caused me to feel pain everywhere.

"Then could I ask you to cast healing magic onto my blood?" I asked.

"S-Sure. I've never done it before, but I'll try my best."

Sissy closed her eyes and concentrated deeply, slowly using her magical energy. She was an expert at healing; her abundant magical energy and in-depth knowledge about the human body put her skills far above that of a normal magician. She truly lived up to my master's praises.

"*Ra Heal*," she chanted.



The light magic she expelled from her hands was absorbed into my body. She targeted the left side of my chest like usual, but instead of focusing on the surface, she aimed for my heart, and poured her magic into it.

"Ugh… Gh…" I couldn't suppress my voice as I felt a stabbing pain in my chest. *I've never felt this kind of pain before.*

"A-Are you okay?" Sissy asked.

"I'm…fine. Please continue…"

The pain worsened, but I urged her to push on. If this torment was due to my curse and her magic fighting against each other, that meant her magic was effective. So I gritted my teeth and prepared myself for the worst.

I couldn't even cry out. It was excruciating—it felt like my brain burst, my eyes popped out, and my teeth melted off my gums, but I continued to endure the agony. *I don't care how much you fight back. I won't give up with this level of pain. Because of you, I've got really high pain tolerance now.*

"*Ra Heal* is now in your blood. I'll continue to pour my magic throughout your body," she said.

"Okay. Th-Thank you!"

Light magic flowed within my veins. I felt it rush through my body, and the pain began to recede. *I think we can call this a success.* I had become about as healthy as the time before I'd had any seizures.

"Yes!" I cheered.

"Um… Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yeah, I am! And it's all thanks to you, Sissy!"

I threw my arms around her, unable to hold back my joy. She let out a small shriek and looked back at me with wide eyes.

"C-Callus?! Y-Y-You're too close!"

"Whoops, I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself."

I calmed down and let her go. Her face was red as an apple, and I felt bad for surprising her so suddenly.

"I'm sorry. I know you don't like stuff like this," I said.

"N-No. No, um, no, it's not like I don't like it, but you know, I, um…"

She continued to mumble as though she'd forgotten how to formulate sentences correctly. I fell silent and waited for her to calm down as well. After about ten minutes of deep breaths, she finally regained her composure.

"Whew. Sorry, I'm fine. I panicked a little," she said.

“I’m sorry too. I’ll be careful next time.”

“Anyways, about that curse, I feel like we can confidently state that it’s in your blood. I felt it when I was casting my magic on you, and it seems clear to me that you look much healthier. However…” She looked down at my chest. The black stain was still there. The pain had receded, and I felt much better, but the curse still latched onto my body, refusing to let go. I also felt its power growing within my body, eager to make me suffer once more.

“I guess this isn’t the cure,” I muttered.

“I’m sorry that I couldn’t be of any help,” she replied glumly. She seemed to feel responsible for this.

“Don’t say that! It’s not your fault. This is something I need to deal with, and you haven’t done anything wrong!”

I was the one at fault. Sissy, my master, and Selena all treated me kindly, but I remained weak, frail, dependent, and foolish.

I know I shouldn’t think this, but every now and then, I feel that maybe…just maybe…I shouldn’t be alive.

***

It had been a week since I first arrived here. When Sir Gourley first sent me a letter about a boy he wanted me to teach healing magic to, I was surprised and more than a little anxious. I’d never had a friend before, as I spent my days learning magic by myself in my room. There was someone whom I could call a teacher in the beginning, but there weren’t many who could teach me light magic, so I soon ran out of instructors.

Sir Gourley was an excellent magician far above my skills, and I was able to learn a lot from him. But he was a busy man, and I could only meet him on rare occasions. Hence, most of my time learning magic was in isolation.

My attendant and knight, Raya, was the only person I could talk to, but she preferred fighting over writing, and her sword over magic. We didn’t have much in common.

Ever since I met Sir Callus, I had fun spending time with him every day. It was stimulating, and he was the first person I was able to converse with who was around my age. I was nervous about him being of the opposite sex, but he treated me well. He kindly and patiently stuck by an awkward person like me.

I hoped we could be friends, and as though he saw straight

through me, he offered to grant that wish. I'd never forget the happiness I felt when those words came from his mouth. Ever since we'd become friends, I'd been able to look him in the eye while talking. This was a brand new experience that never ceased to amaze me.

Sir Callus was a fast learner, and he quickly memorized everything I taught him, from magic to medicine to herbalism to difficult topics that weren't suitable for children. Before, every time I read a book, I'd ruminate on its contents within my head, but I had so much fun discussing these topics at length with another. I listened to his opinions, and I'd give him my knowledge in turn. He'd then offer a different opinion. As though a chain reaction had been triggered, my knowledge and thoughts started to expand, and I hoped that this would last forever.

However, I had one issue with Sir Callus. Every time we met, he'd compliment me on my appearance. I had no confidence in my looks, and I'd grown out my bangs to hide my eyes, but he brushed my hair aside and said, "Your eyes are so pretty. It feels like such a waste to hide them."

I was so, so, *so* embarrassed that I thought my face would catch fire. Just thinking about the daily compliments he'd give me such as, "Morning, Sissy. You look cute today," or "Your golden hair is so beautiful," made my face turn red.

Every time, I'd let out a pathetic squeal and flee. I wanted to be emotionally strong enough to say, "Your red eyes are cool too, Sir Callus," but I was too timid and cowardly. I couldn't even begin to form those words.

I was impressed by his ability to make such cliché and snobby remarks, and I wondered if someone had been teaching him to become a womanizer. In any case, I felt that he was a very strange person.

He was truly odd, and he was my first friend. I wanted him to live. I didn't want him to suffer anymore. Believing that my accumulated skills and knowledge were all for this moment, I tried to teach him magic to the best of my ability.

However, nothing bore fruit. I was able to suppress his pain with my magic, but the curse was slowly eating away at his entire body. It was painful to watch as he became thin and frail, to the point where even standing took great effort.

It seemed odd that someone as intelligent as him would

struggle to learn healing spells. Thinking there must've been a reason, I continued to analyze him closely, and came to a realization. My hypothesis may have been correct, but I worried that telling him might shackle his thoughts.

I continued to think. I thought and thought and thought all I could, and finally came to a decision. Even if this might cause suffering for him and me, I felt it was worth doing.

Please forgive me, Sir Callus. Please forgive me for only coming up with such a clumsy method...

***

"Hm, I see. So the root of the curse is blood," my master said.

He had returned after a week, and I decided to tell him what I had learned in that time. I told him about the book of curses, and that my blood was cursed. He listened intently as I explained how I felt better once the magic affected my blood, but that my curse still ate away at my body.

"How were things on your end?" I asked.

"Well, I reached out to an old contact to see if I could find anything that would be effective against curses, but I couldn't find anything useful. It seems someone doesn't want curses to be learned about in depth, and is finding ways to seal away that information."

"I see..."

I only need a bit more. I feel like one more step would allow me to shut out the curse, but even that seems so far away. Is it truly impossible to cure myself of this curse? As I was lost in my thoughts, in the next moment, a sharp pain ran through my chest.

"Ugh!" I cried out, pressing down on my chest and falling onto my bed.

My vision wavered and my heart thumped loudly. My veins and blood were boiling, and it felt like needles were stabbing into each of my pores. *This...is intense. How much more pain must this curse cause me?*

"Ugh! *Ra Heal*!" Sissy chanted immediately.

Thanks to her quick response, I felt the pain subside. *Whew, that was close. If I was alone, I would've been in trouble.*

"Sir Callus, are you okay?!" she said.

"Yeah, I think so. Thank you, Sissy. I'm fine now."

I tried my best to calm her down, but she was fighting back tears. I managed to survive, but I'd been having these painful attacks more often recently. I used to get them two to three times a day, but it had started to happen as frequently as every three hours or so. I was able to endure the torment, but it was tough for me to even get a good night's rest, as the pain would shock me awake.

I felt bad for needing to wake Sissy up in the middle of the night as well. Continuing this lifestyle would be draining for both of us.

"It seems the situation is far worse than I'd imagined. I'll do whatever I can to search for a solution," my master said, once again preparing to head out. "Sissy, I feel bad about putting this on you, but I'd like to leave Callus in your hands."

"O-Of course! I'll do my best!" she said.

She must've been exhausted, but she continued to bravely take care of me. I was happy, but her kindness was also tough for me to bear. *I'm such a burden. I really shouldn't be alive...*

Suddenly, my master grabbed my hand. "Callus, don't give up hope. Don't lose your will to live. Fight! Don't worry, I'm sure you'll be able to win against this curse," he said.

"...Sorry, I just had a moment of weakness," I said.

"Once you get better, let's go out to eat. There's a good restaurant in a nearby town. It'll be my treat, of course. Isn't that something to look forward to?"

"Yes, I'd love to go."

It was such a tiny dream, yet it felt so far away. My master looked anxious, but he left my room and the manor. I hoped he'd find some sort of clue, but I knew that chances were slim. I had to do what I could.

"*Ra Heal*," I chanted, but my magic faded before it could take shape.

I don't get it. Why can't I learn this spell? I should have enough magical energy and knowledge. Why?

"Sir Callus, do you truly want to cure this curse of yours?" Sissy suddenly asked.

What's she talking about? Of course I do. Why's she even asking me this question?

"Please answer me. Do you *truly* want to cure your curse?" she asked again.

I knew she must've had a reason for her phrasing, but even

so, I felt that this was a nasty question to ask. Even I couldn't ignore my irritation.

"Please listen closely, Sir Callus. *Ra Heal* is a special kind of magic. To successfully use this spell, one needs not just magical energy, knowledge, and skills, but *a wish* as well."

"A wish?"

"Yes. A strong desire to cure their target. This is the key to successfully using healing magic."

I remembered my master saying something similar, but it was only natural to me that I wished to heal myself, so I'd never put much thought into it.

"However, you don't seem to prioritize yourself, Sir Callus. You put others first, and are unable to treasure your own body. You're thinking something along the lines of, 'I'd rather die than watch others get hurt,' are you not?"

"That's..." She'd hit the nail on the head, and I was at a loss for words. It was true that I never thought my wants should come before those of others, but I felt that was just a given. I was born a failure, so I didn't deserve to treasure myself.

"The final piece you're missing is a wish. I believe that because you don't love yourself, you can't use *Ra Heal*."

Sissy's explanation made a lot of sense to me. *I think she's right, but...*

"What should I do, then?" I asked. "I *can't* love myself. All I've ever done is cause trouble to others. I can't possibly like myself one bit."

I knew I was being selfish, but it was simply something that I couldn't do. I could easily like someone else, but I couldn't love myself. Just then, Sissy smiled warmly at my pathetic existence.

"Then could you like me?" she asked.

"Huh?" I was surprised that a timid girl like her had uttered those words.

She took out a small, transparent bottle containing a cloudy liquid. For some reason, I instinctively felt something horrendous emanating from that liquid.

"This is your diluted blood, Sir Callus. I'm sorry, I took some while you were still asleep," she said.

"I don't mind that at all, but..."

If this bottle contains my blood, that water must be mixed with the curse, making it a poison. I have a bad feeling about this...

"Sir Callus, you're my first friend. Even if you don't like

yourself, I do, and I trust you with my whole heart," she said. In the next moment, she put the bottle to her lips and gulped it down in one go.

Instantly, her body jolted and she started convulsing, dropping the bottle to the ground. She writhed and gasped in pain as she fell to the floor.

"Sissy!" I cried.

I jumped out of bed and rushed to her side. Her thin body trembled as she let out painful groans. *These are the early symptoms of the curse! This is bad…*

"Sissy! How could you be so reckless?!" I said, laying her onto my bed.

Her breathing was haggard and her pulse was irregular. Since she was smaller than me, the curse acted upon her much quicker.

"Sir…Callus," she said slowly, staring at me vacantly. "You'll…be fine. I'm sure you can do it. You've worked so hard, after all."

She closed her eyes. She was still alive, but she didn't have long. My master had left the manor, meaning that I was the only one who could do something about this curse. *I have to do it. I must!*

My breathing grew rapid and my hands trembled. My thoughts were a mess and my vision was blurry. *There's no way I can use magic in this state. I knew it, I'm…*

"Callus, pull yourself together," a voice said. Selena appeared in front of me, staring at me intently. "I know just how much you've been practicing. Even if you try to deny it, I know the truth. Trust in yourself. If you can't trust your own power, trust in me and those who are willing to lend you theirs."

Her words touched my heart. *She's right. She's exactly right. My power didn't come from just me—my master, Sissy, Shizuku, my brothers, my family, Cryssie, Sieg, all my servants, and above all, Selena have all supported me.*

"Think hard and make a strong wish. Magic will always answer if you do," she said.

"Okay, I'll do it."

I felt my heart pound. *I can do it. I* will *do it!* I felt my heart grow warm and burn with my passion.

"Thank you, Selena. You've snapped me back to my senses."

"Don't sweat it," she replied with a reliable grin.

I faced Sissy. *I'll definitely save her!*

“All right, Selena! *Ra Daziel*!” I chanted.

I poured a wave of light into Sissy, searching her body. *Okay, I found it. The curse she swallowed is still inside her stomach. Her body hasn’t absorbed it yet.*

“Selena, could you remember this spot for me?”

“Of course, leave it to me. I’m keeping aim.”

I entrusted the location to my reliable partner, and proceeded to make preparations for *Ra Heal*. *It’ll be okay. I can do it. My efforts won’t betray me.*

“*Ra*...”

Trust. Trust in my efforts and those who lent me their power. Make a strong wish. I wish for this girl, who hurt herself for my sake to...

“*Heal!*”

A blinding light filled the room as a shower of light particles flew from my hands. *Is this...my magic? I’ve never seen such a strong light before.*

“Callus, focus!” Selena said.

“G-Got it!” I concentrated once more.

It was too early to celebrate. I aimed for the curse that Selena had locked on to and fired my torrent of light as hard as I could.

“How’s this?!” I yelled.

A bright rain of light flowed into Sissy’s body. I could feel my magical energy leaving me, but I paid no heed. *I’ll use everything I’ve got here!*

“Raaaaah!”

The torrent of light continued on at amazing speed, until I finally managed to rid every trace of the curse within her.

“I...did it...” I gasped.

The presence of the curse had left Sissy’s body completely. *I can really heal now!*

“Well done. That was some good magic, filled with a strong wish,” Selena said, her part finished.

Yeah, that was good. Even I *think it was worthy of praise.*

“That magic was completely above *Ra Heal*. The synergy between your magical energy and my power must have given birth to something new. If I were to name it, it’d be *Ra Lucis*. Hold your head up high, Callus. You’ve just created a new spell.”

“Heh heh, that makes me...happy.”

After knowing I was able to save Sissy, all the strength left my body, and I fell to the ground. I felt so proud of myself, it took a while to finally lose consciousness after being completely

drained.

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“Mm… Mm…”

I stretched my sore body as I came to. *How long was I out for? I fell asleep because… Right! I needed to save Sissy, who drank that curse! I think I fell onto the ground, but I’m on a fluffy bed. Someone must’ve carried me here. Was it Shizuku? I probably made her worry again since I was on the ground.* Thinking I needed to apologize, I opened my eyes and saw a huge pair of breasts in front of me.

“Prince Callus!”

“Urk!”

I let out a pathetic yelp and was hugged with great force. I felt like I’d drown in her embrace. *Hmmm, this size and softness must be Shizuku… I mean, I can’t breathe!*

“When I saw you on the ground, I thought you’d never wake again! I’m so glad you’re okay!” Shizuku cried.

“Shizuku—umph—can’t breathe.”

I gently slapped her arm around my neck, indicating that I was down for the count, but she continued to squeeze me tightly. As I thought I was finally going to die, I heard a voice come to my rescue.

“Now, Shizuku. It’s good that you two are close, but it might be best to give him some space. He might even pass out again,” a familiar voice said.

“Huh? Oh! Yes! I’m so sorry! I just got so emotional…” Shizuku stammered, looking embarrassed. Her cheeks were flushed red as she released me from her grasp.

Whew, I really thought that was the end for me. Finally free, I then noticed my master and Sissy standing there.

My master grinned at me. “It’s good to see that you’re more energetic than I thought. I felt a strong amount of magical energy from the manor, so I rushed back, fearing that something had happened.”

It seemed like he had returned when he noticed me casting *Ra Lucis*. I’d been so wrapped up in the moment that I hadn’t realized how much magical energy I used. I glanced at Sissy, who looked sheepish and apologetic. *She must be bothered by what happened.*

“Sir Callus, I, um…” she started.

“Thank you, Sissy,” I said, bowing deeply.

“Huh?” She stared at me in confusion, not expecting such a response.

“Thank you for risking your life for me. Thanks to you, I was able to complete my magic. I can’t thank you enough.”

“Th-That’s not true. I haven’t done anything. I should be apologizing for doing something so selfish.”

She seemed to regret her actions. I mean, she *did* do something so dangerous that she would’ve died had I not been able to successfully use my magic, but…

“You did it because you were thinking about me, didn’t you? There’s no way I can be angry with you. In fact, I only feel grateful. Thank you,” I said.

I stared into her eyes, or at least what I could see behind her hair. She quietly nodded and accepted my words. Satisfied by her reaction, I turned towards my master.

“Thank you, Master. Thanks to you as well, I was able to use the spell. I know I caused so much trouble for you.”

“Hmph, indeed you have. You two are always pushing your limits the moment I’ve got my eyes off you. I won’t last if I keep worrying so much,” he replied, looking at Sissy and me.

I couldn’t deny that I’d caused him a lot of trouble, and I felt truly guilty for doing so. Sissy, feeling ashamed for having drunk the cursed water, stared at the floor.

“But…apprentices who are a handful are all the more adorable to me. You’ve done well, you two. You both are my pride and joy.”

He placed his hand over Sissy’s head and gently stroked her hair. *Shoot, I’m about to cry.* Sissy couldn’t hold back her sobs as large beads of tears rolled down her face. *I can’t cry just yet. I’ll do that when it’s all over.* I held back the emotions bubbling up inside me, and turned towards the person who’d been supporting me the longest, who’d always been the closest to me.

“Thank you, Shizuku. There’s no doubt, you’ve helped me the most as I’ve suffered with this illness. If you weren’t by my side, I would’ve definitely given up already. I really want to express my gratitude to you.”

“The pleasure is all mine. It’s been a joy to serve such a kind person. Please continue to allow me to serve you,” she said.

I had shared countless memories with Shizuku, each so dear and precious to me. I sensed that we were both thinking the same thing as we smiled at each other, our faces a mess.

“Lastly,” I said. “Selena, I’d like to thank you as well. You’re truly a glimmer of hope to me.”

“I’m glad I got to meet you too. I only approached you at first because your magical energy smelled delicious, but now I like you as a person. I used to be bored with living out my days as a spirit, but it seems like I can have fun every day when I’m with you,” she replied.

I was so grateful. I only had gratitude towards everyone. I even felt thankful for myself, who had been able to meet such kind people. The moment this thought entered my mind, for the first time in my life, I was able to love who I was. *I think I can do this now.*

“Selena,” I said.

“All right,” she answered.

I intertwined my hands with hers and focused. I aimed towards the curse that had plagued my entire body. I had to use the light to cover everything without letting a single bit of the curse out of my sight. *I won’t let you run. I’ll end you right here and right now.*

“*Ra Lucis*.”

The next moment, a brilliant light shone throughout my body. I felt my blood boil and my cells burn to a crisp. It was difficult to breathe. But amid the pain, I felt the curse being purified.

It hurts. It’s painful. As these thoughts ran through my mind, everyone in the room held my hands. None of them could enhance my magic, but they still helped me endure this.

“Thank you,” I said.

For the first time, I felt my entire body truly being purified. It wasn’t just easing the symptoms; the light was driving out the curse itself.

My body was no longer in pain.



***

"I've poured some tea, so I'll leave it here," Sissy said.

"Thank you," I replied, bringing the cup to my lips. I felt my body relax as the aroma of the tea leaves filled my nose. "This is delicious."

"I'm happy to hear that. These tea leaves come from my home country. It's called Dalfrey tea, and it's my favorite as well."

"Huh, I didn't know that." *No wonder I've never tasted something like this before.* I sat back and said to myself, "It's peaceful, isn't it?"

I'd completely calmed my curse. I was able to walk like normal, and no longer suffered from any painful episodes. I finally had a healthy body. However, the curse hadn't completely disappeared. According to my master, the curse had stopped emanating its dark magical energy and had simply been sealed away. But before it disappeared completely, it had created a core in my heart, saving itself from total destruction. As proof, a small black bruise remained on my left chest. He theorized that if I let it be, the curse would wreak havoc once again, but as long as I periodically cast *Ra Lucis* on it, it would stay quiet for a while. In the end, I had finally won back the peace that I'd always wanted.

"You're leaving tomorrow, aren't you, Sissy? Things will get lonely here," I said.

"Yes. It's sad to say goodbye, but I must return. Sir Callus, please visit my country next time. I'd like to introduce you to my older sister as well."

"I look forward to it."

I was still weak, but I felt like I'd become a lot healthier in a few weeks. *When the time comes, I'd like to visit many places.* As I dreamed about the future, I felt something odd.

"Huh?"

A magical energy I'd never felt before was slowly approaching our manor. It was unlike any human or wyvern that I'd ever known. I couldn't hold back my curiosity.

"Sorry, but I'm gonna head out for a little while," I said.

"Huh? Okay," Sissy said, a little puzzled.

I left her in the room and slowly headed outside.

***

Meanwhile, Sage Gourley had also felt this odd magical energy and had gone to investigate. But unlike Callus, the old man had a vague idea of its identity.

“Impossible,” he said to himself. *This can’t be,* he thought as he headed outside.

A small carriage stopped in front of the manor. The emblem engraved on its side was familiar to Gourley—it was the mark of the Magical Committee which he’d been a part of for a long time.

“Whew, I’m finally here,” a beautiful young boy said as the carriage door opened.

This was a boy that Gourley knew well. “Emilia Licht…”

Emilia was the absolute authority of the Magical Committee, and was known as the most powerful magician of his time. He’d also kicked Gourley out of the sages with an unreasonable request and personally scrubbed the man’s name from the Committee.

He turned to Gourley. “I’m heeeere! ♡” he said in a sweet voice, with an adorable yet terrifying smile.

Shivers ran down Gourley’s spine. He was caught completely off guard. He’d assumed that, by cutting ties with the Magical Committee, he’d never have to see this boy ever again. Still, he couldn’t back down here. To protect the two precious apprentices behind him, he had to get rid of this monster.

“What do you want now, Emilia? I’ve got no ties with the Magical Committee, and you should have no reason to meet me,” Gourley said.

“Now, now, don’t be so cold, Gourley. You and I are good friends, aren’t we?” Emilia replied.

“In all the years I’ve known you, I’ve never thought of us as friends. I ask that you leave us be.”

Gourley didn’t back down against Emilia. He glared at the boy, and his aggressive tone would have made any other magician from the Committee faint in an instant. But the boy continued to smile in the face of these sharp words. After all, everyone was well aware that Emilia wouldn’t hesitate to eradicate those who didn’t praise him.

“That’s what I like to see. That forcefulness is brilliant. Why, it’s as though you’ve returned to your old self. Is there something that important to you here? Hmmmm?” Emilia said.

“There’s no need for your meaningless inquiries. Get out.” Gourley brought forth his large staff, making it clear that any

further prying would lead to a battle.

Emilia shook his head. “Good grief, how troublesome. I’m just here to bid my farewells to an old friend... Oh?”

With a creak, the door to the manor opened, and a young boy came out. Gourley’s face strained, and Emilia smiled with glee. The young boy called Callus looked at the two.

“Um, who might you be?” he asked gingerly, not understanding the magnitude of this situation.

Emilia sized him up, carefully analyzing the boy. “Oh ho, so this child must be the singularity. Heh, I do indeed sense high-quality magical energy from him.”

Callus felt an inexplicable cold air surrounding Emilia. It sent a shiver down his spine and covered his skin in goosebumps.

“Magical energy that far surpasses that of a normal human... Could he be the Vessel of the Dragon, or the Dark Blessed Child? Either way, this looks rather interesting,” Emilia said.

Callus cocked his head to one side at these unusual phrases. This was only natural; even Gourley, with his profound knowledge, couldn’t fully comprehend the meaning of Emilia’s words.

“You’ve found a great toy, Gourley. It’s not fair for you to keep it all to yourself,” Emilia said.

“You fool. This child’s no toy. If you try to approach him with such asinine intentions, I won’t hold back,” Gourley replied, a murderous aura emanating from his body.

Emilia received it all with a cool face, and turned his attention to the boy. “Hello there, child. What’s your name?”

“Don’t answer!” Gourley tried to yell loudly, but his voice fizzled out before it could reach Callus. Despite his best efforts, he struggled to vocalize his words. *Damn, he’s using magic to silence any sounds! I can’t stop Callus at this rate!* By the time Gourley had noticed the intricacies of this magic, it was too late. Callus was already talking.

“Um, my name is Callus. Who might you be?”

“Callus. I see. My name is Emilia Licht. I’m the chairman of the Magical Committee, you see. Pleased to meet you. ☆” Emilia replied, sticking out his tongue.

The moment Callus heard those words, he shuddered, immediately wary of the beautiful boy in front of him. “You’re the one who took my master’s title away...”

“Oh dear, I don’t seem to be well-liked around here. Allow me

to make amends then," Emilia said. "Allegro! Bring them over!"

A tall man with bright red hair slicked back emerged from the carriage, holding several paper boxes.

What's he planning? Callus thought as he raised his guard. In the next moment, the serious atmosphere was broken.

"Chairman, what gift should we give him?" Allegro asked.

Callus made a comedic act of falling over. The red-haired man held numerous souvenirs from various places. They were all specialties of the towns the chairman had visited.

"Well, I'd still like to eat those sweet buns and dried fish, so give him the cookies," Emilia said.

"What?! But I bought these for my daughter!" Allegro yelled.

"Shut up. Just buy something on our way back and have her make do."

"Ugh, you're so mean..." Teary-eyed, Allegro reluctantly gave Callus a box of cookies that read *Starfall of the Hill, Stardust Cookies* ☆. "At least eat them with care, please..."

"Um, thank you?" Callus said as Allegro continued to sadly stare at the treats which were meant for his daughter.

As Emilia chuckled mischievously at the scene, Gourley took that opportunity to approach Callus and whisper in his ear.

"Be careful, Callus. He's a true monster. His appearance and mannerisms are all a lie," Gourley said.

"U-Understood," the child replied. He was determined not to give any more information, but Emilia's words shattered his thoughts.

"Hey, Callus. What would you do if I said that I could return the title of sage to your master?" Emilia asked.

"Huh?!"

Callus's heart skipped a beat. He'd thought that such a thing was impossible, and the guilt and regret had remained. His master had thrown away his title and glory, and Callus was sure that the man would do anything to get it all back. However, Gourley himself didn't wish for such a thing.

"Don't listen to him!" Gourley shouted, trying to stop Callus, but a transparent barrier suddenly appeared, separating the master from his apprentice.

"I've used my *Arcane Art: Anti-barrier*. Old folks shouldn't butt in on a young person's thoughts," the chairman said.

"Emilia, you bastard! Get rid of this barrier!"

Gourley attacked it with his magic, but it stood firm without a

scratch. The barrier closed in around him, sealing his movements. After confirming that no one would interfere, Emilia turned towards Callus.

“You see, when I removed Gourley’s name from the Committee, a lot of magicians started to protest against me. So I’m thinking I should bring him back.”

“How selfish. Then you shouldn’t have removed his name in the first place!” Callus said.

“Hey, adults are complicated, you know. We have a lot going on,” Emilia lazily replied, paying no mind to Callus’s words.

The boy felt that it was no use to pursue the topic. “You’re right, I *do* want my master to return to the Magical Committee. That much is true.”

Emilia beamed brightly. “Is that so? Very well, I can do so if you listen to my request.”

“Your request? And what would that be?”

Callus and Gourley couldn’t shake off the bad feeling, but they waited for Emilia’s words. His unusual request shocked the both of them.

“Callus, would you like to join the Magical Committee?”



The prince seemed puzzled. “You want me in the Magical Committee?”

The Magical Committee was a large organization of which Emilia was the chairman. Aside from governmental institutions, it was the largest in the continent, with the vast majority of skilled magicians under its employ. Magical research, raising magicians, creating magical items, pioneering unknown lands, defeating monsters—the Committee was involved in a large number of activities. Those who delivered results were rewarded handsomely, and could even earn a title as esteemed as “sage.”

Callus was aware of all this, but he couldn’t understand why someone would try to recruit him into this organization.

“I hate being bored, you see. As long as things are fun, I don’t mind,” Emilia said.

He would destroy organizations, cities, and countries that got in his way without hesitation. His savage behavior was permitted only because he was an extremely capable magician.

It came as no surprise that assassins were after his head year-round, but he even found joy in these attempts.

“The Committee’s activities are going well. We’ve got a lot of highly skilled people, and we’re becoming stronger and stronger. There’s no doubt about that,” he said. “But isn’t that so boring? I want a problematic member, someone who can really cause a ruckus in this world! I want someone so abnormal, they could even be my equal!”

Emilia’s eyes were practically sparkling, but Callus could only back away. In this moment, Callus strongly understood that Emilia’s cute face was only a mask for an unknown entity lying underneath.

“So, I want you to enter the Magical Committee. If a singularity like you enters our organization, the Committee will change! If an irregular being like you causes a stir, be it for good or bad, our institution will be thrown into a state of chaos. If you accept, I shall undo what I’ve done to Gourley,” Emilia said.

Under normal circumstances, Callus wouldn’t have lent an ear to such a suspicious person. However, if they truly could reinstate Gourley’s status, the matter was completely different. Still, Gourley didn’t want his apprentice to worry about titles and ranks.

“Stop, Callus! Don’t listen to him!” he yelled, but his voice still couldn’t reach the prince.

“Heh, the boy can’t hear your voice,” Emilia chuckled.

“Ugh, you and your unusual magic!”

Emilia had thoroughly silenced Gourley. This decision had to be made by Callus alone. He had to voice his own wishes.

“I’ll just say one thing. That *thing* you have within your body won’t disappear so easily. At the very least, staying as a shut-in within this manor will do you no good,” Emilia said.

“What do you mean?” Callus asked.

“It’s just as I said. That thing can’t be taken care of by human hands. No matter how excellent Gourley may be, he won’t be able to dispel it.”

“Does that have anything to do with me joining the Magical Committee?”

“Well, I guess you could phrase it that way,” Emilia replied with a chuckle. “The Committee is a gathering of schools and teachings from throughout the continent. I’m sure you could find a way to cure yourself, and I can help you out as well.”

Callus thought long and hard. He knew that staying in this manor wouldn’t allow him to completely rid himself of the curse. He was aware that he would one day need to see the outside world, but he wasn’t sure if he could follow the person in front of him. He glanced over at Gourley who was saying something, but no sounds could be heard. *What should I do? Just what…* While he was agonizing over his decision, his one and only partner appeared.

“Callus, your life is yours alone. You should decide what you want,” Selena said.

“What I want?” Callus asked.

“Yeah. Neither Gourley nor I, much less that guy over there, should decide for you. What do *you* want to do? How do *you* want to live? Will *you* be happy if you work under him? Would *you* be fine with everything as long as you could undo your curse?”

Her words struck a chord in his heart. *She’s right. I should decide for myself. I should just decide what makes me happy, because that would make everyone around me smile as well.*

Callus, who’d made his decision, slowly faced Emilia. His eyes were no longer clouded with doubt.

“I’ve decided,” he said.

“Have you, now? Wonderful! Then let’s begin the process straight away. I’m sure things will become more fun—”

“I won’t go with you. I’ll pave my own path.”

There was a pause. “Hm?” Emilia asked. “B-But why?! I’m giving you this offer because I worry about you!”

“I’m sorry. No matter what you say, I don’t plan on changing my answer. I won’t go with you.”

Seeing Callus’s firm attitude, Emilia understood that words couldn’t sway this boy. He gritted his teeth—he wasn’t used to giving up something that he wanted.

“I’d planned to settle this peacefully, but if you aren’t going to listen, I suppose I’ll have to be a bit more violent,” Emilia said. Dark magical energy gathered at his right hand. “*Arcane Art: Cursed Chain Binds*.”

The spell was high class among the binding incantations that Emilia knew. It was a terrifying magic that would tie its victims and knock them unconscious immediately, rendering them powerless. But this was his mistake. No matter how strong they were, curses wouldn’t work on this prince.

“*Ra Lucis!*” Callus chanted, a torrent of light firing from his hand. In an instant, he purified the cursed chains and erased them from existence.

Emilia, not expecting Callus to use such powerful magic, was taken by surprise. This spell was unknown to him.

“To think you’ve grown this much already… I want you even more now!” Emilia said.

Before he could fire another spell, Gourley stood in front of him. The moment Emilia had been caught off guard, Gourley had managed to escape.

“If you plan on going any further, I won’t go easy on you. I’ve been given the nickname ‘Golden Wing’ before. You won’t take me down so easily!” Gourley said. A large amount of magical energy and murderous intent emanated from his body.

Even Emilia could no longer be so optimistic about the situation. As the master and his apprentice glared at him, the chairman suddenly lost interest and lowered his hands.

“You guys are wet blankets. I’m leaving,” he whined. He turned on his heels and headed towards the carriage.

Gourley, Callus, and Allegro stood in shock at such an abrupt change of heart.

“What are you planning, Emilia? It’s unlike you to give up so easily,” Gourley said.

“I just changed my mind, is all. If you two are on such good terms, he’ll probably grow faster under your care. I don’t like

raising people, you see," Emilia replied. He turned to Callus. "So I'll give up for now. But our paths will cross once again in the future. When that time comes, I'd like to see if your answer has changed."

"I don't think it will," Callus replied firmly. He was resolute in his decision.

Gourley, relieved by Callus's determination, asked Emilia, "Tell me. A magician as great as you surely would've noticed the existence of spirits. Why haven't you told anyone? If it became public knowledge, the advancements in magic would be staggering."

Emilia shrugged. "I aim for a perfect form. Magic that requires the assistance of spirits is nothing but imperfection, so it wasn't worth sharing. I'm only interested in those who can go beyond magic and master their own power."

"So you're actively restricting information for your own desires? Is that it?"

"Well, I don't mind if you think so. You should get out of this dingy place soon and join us. You've got talent, after all."

With that, Emilia took his leave. The master and his apprentice continued to stare at the carriage until it was out of sight.

***

Once Emilia was gone, I fell to my knees as I felt the strength leaving my body. *Whew, that was terrifying.*

"Are you okay, Callus? You've done well," my master said, helping me back up. "You chose your own path all by yourself. As your master, I'm very proud of you."

"Heh heh, thank you."

I didn't feel that my choice had been wrong, but something still bothered me.

"Master, how long will I be at this manor?" I asked.

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"That person had a point. I can't stay here forever."

I was grateful that everyone was so nice to me, but I couldn't be spoiled by their kindness forever. I had to see the world with my own eyes, so that I could reassure everyone that I would be okay. I wanted to travel the world and learn whatever I could, so that I could cure myself of this curse with my own power. My master understood my true feelings, and offered a suggestion.

“Then how about you enter the Academy of Magic?” he said.

“The one in the royal capital?”

“Indeed.”

The Academy of Magic was located in the royal capital, Laxus, and was the largest academy on this continent. It was managed jointly by the Magical Committee and the Ledyvia Kingdom, attracting children with magical potential from all across the land. My master had also graduated from this institution.

“You’ll gain all sorts of knowledge about magic that’s on par with the Committee. You can meet fellow young magicians, and it might be good motivation for you. The Magical Committee is involved with the academy, so Emilia might get in your way, but I’ll take care of him myself,” he said.

His suggestion was very enticing. I’d always been interested in the academy because I wanted to learn and play with friends my age. It sounded absolutely wonderful.

“You can enroll at the academy at the age of fifteen. You’ve got five more years, so take your time before you come to a decision,” he said, placing his hand on my head.

He said that I could take my time, but I’d already made my choice. I wanted to grow beyond this manor where everyone protected me, and start anew in a completely different place. With light magic, I wanted to cure myself of this curse, which distorted and ate away at my life.

***

The next day, I went outside the manor to bid farewell to Sissy.

“Thank you so much, Sissy. If it weren’t for you, I don’t think I’d even be here to talk with you like this,” I said.

“That’s not true. I haven’t done much. Your results are due to your own hard work,” she replied.

I was so indebted that I didn’t think I’d ever be able to repay her. I wished that one day I could return the favor, even a little.

“Let’s meet again,” she said.

“Yeah. You can come over whenever you’d like. Oh, but I might not be here in five years, since I’m planning on enrolling at the academy.”

“The academy... I see. I understand,” she replied after thinking for a bit, then stepped into the carriage.

So we're finally parting ways... It's gonna get lonely. As the carriage began to move, Sissy poked her head out the window and yelled, "Goodbye, Sir Callus! Let's meet again for sure!"

Her voice was unusually loud and clear. *It must've taken a lot of courage to raise her voice like that.*

"Yeah! We'll definitely meet again!" I shouted back just as loudly.

***

A one-horse carriage ran through the forest. It was small, but decorated delicately, indicating that its passenger was of high status. It was a serene picture of luxurious travel.

Suddenly, a ray of light tore through the forest, blasting open the side of the carriage.

The horse squealed in confusion as the carriage was blown onto its side from the impact. Amidst the sudden chaos, figures in black robes approached the flaming wreckage.

"Did we do it?"

"I can't imagine he's safe, but let's check."

As they whispered to each other, they stepped closer to the fire. A tall, red-haired man jumped out of the broken vehicle.

"Ow! What gives?!" he yelled, breathlessly fleeing from the fire. It was then that he noticed the mysterious people dressed in black.

"Huh?! Who *are* you guys?!" the man yelled.

"That's our line. Who are you?" came a reply from one of them. This man wasn't their target.

Had they attacked the wrong carriage? They panicked for a moment, but one of them suddenly recognized the red-haired man.

"He's our target's secretary. We've got the right one."

"I see. Hey, where's your master?"

"Eep?!" shrieked Allegro, teary-eyed. He raised his hands as a serrated dirk was pointed towards him. "P-Please stop!"

"Then you better talk. Where's your master?!"

"I don't know! My carriage suddenly fell and I'm confused! Help, Sir Emilia!" Allegro's heartrending cry echoed through the forest.

The knife-wielding assailant, irritated by the secretary's pathetic reaction, approached him with the intent to dish out

some pain. Suddenly, a voice rang out from above, stopping them in their tracks.

“Jeez, you’re so pathetic.”

The mysterious group all looked up in unison. The blood ran cold in each one as they met the icy gaze of Emilia sitting on a tree branch.

“You’ve caught me in a bad mood, so I think I’ll take it out on you,” he said.

Emilia Licht, the chairman of the Magical Committee, was reviled around the world. As such, numerous assassins had been sent after his head, and he once even fought off eight in a single day. None had been able to take his life.

“Back off, Allegro. It won’t take long,” Emilia said.

“O-Okay, chairman!”

Emilia jumped down from the branch, and Allegro skillfully fled.

“One…two…three… Ten in total, I see. When I see so many people after me, I feel loved,” he said.

“You’re underestimating us if you think you can show yourself so easily. Your life is ours,” one assassin said.

They each brandished daggers, their dark blades looking slightly wet. Emilia surmised that the tips had been dipped in poison.

“It looks like you’ve learned a new trick, but it’s mere child’s play all the same.”

“Your savage deeds end here!” an assassin said, rushing towards the chairman. “Die!”

The blade rushed towards Emilia’s chest. The chairman simply took the attack head-on.

“Heh, how’s that?” the assassin said.

The dagger sunk deep within Emilia’s chest, blood spurting out from the wound. The poison changed his skin to purple around the point of incision. He had just received enough damage to die from either blood loss or poison. The assassin, convinced that they were victorious, kept the blade within the chairman’s body and backed away.

“A sharp pain, and numbness in my arms and legs. This poison must be from purple-black grass. It’s been a while since I’ve been inflicted with this one,” Emilia said.

With a huff, he put strength into his body, and his purple skin returned to normal. His wound stopped bleeding as he casually

removed the dirk from his chest and tossed it aside. The stab wound then closed itself in front of everyone's eyes.

"I think I've detoxed enough. I suppose it's not bad to receive an attack every now and then. Now, who's next?" the chairman said.

"I-Impossible," the assassin stammered.

The other assassins hesitated in the face of this unbelievable sight. Even a drop of the deadly toxin from purple-black grass could paralyze a large beast. Their blades had been steeped in this poison, yet the person in front of them seemed as energetic as ever. They could only think that they were in the midst of a nightmare.

"Did you think you could win with this poison? Your target is the head of the Magical Committee. Don't think that I'm the same as other magicians."

"Ugh! Come on, surround him and go for the kill!" an assassin ordered.

With brilliant teamwork, they surrounded Emilia and fired their spells.

"*Fé Ryba!*"

"*Ol Sax!*"

A large flame and a spear of water were aimed towards him.

Emilia put his hand in the air and chanted, "*Arcane Art: Clear Hand*."

The moment the chant left his lips, the spells aimed towards him disappeared in an instant. The assassins couldn't hide their confusion at the sudden turn of events.

"Impossible..."

"Hey, don't look so surprised," Emilia said, waving his hand at one of the stunned assassins. In the blink of an eye, they lost their legs from the knee down. Unable to stand, they fell to the ground as blood gushed from their wounds.

"M-My legs?!" they shrieked in agony.

They continued to writhe in pain, splattering blood everywhere. As though he were looking at garbage, the chairman glanced down at the assassin in disgust. He waved his hand towards the ground.

"Shut up," he said.

In the next moment, the ground beneath the assassin was gouged out, leaving deep gashes in the earth in the shape of his hand. The suffering assassin had disappeared—he was nowhere

to be seen.

The sight was so detached from reality that the assassins trembled in shock. They'd never seen such magic before. They even questioned if what they were witnessing could be called magic. Panic and confusion swirled around in their heads, and none could move an inch.

"What's wrong? Are you guys done? If you know that you can't win, it's much wiser to flee, isn't it? Although, I suppose that's out of the question as well. If you report back saying you failed, I'm sure you'll be eradicated," Emilia said.

"You...!" The assassins, aggravated that he had hit the nail on the head, pounced on the chairman.

From daggers to magical swords to staves, each person grabbed their primary weapon and aimed for Emilia's life.

He chuckled. "Very good. If you're gonna die, you might as well die with a flourish."

Quick as a flash, Emilia grabbed the face of the closest assassin.

"S-Stop..." the assassin said.

"One down," Emilia said. With a grotesque grating sound, the assassin disappeared. Their body, clothes, and scent could no longer be detected, and any trace of their existence had vanished completely. The person could only remain within the memories of others.

"What just happened?!" another assassin cried.

"This is an Arcane Art—an original spell of my own design. You lot, who rely on obsolete means like the power of spirits, will never reach my level. This is the ideal form of magic," Emilia replied.

None of them could understand the chairman's words. They only knew that the monster in front of them was able to use something terrifying that was beyond their understanding.

"With reserves in mind, I think three will be enough," he said.

Paying no mind to the bewildered assassins, the chairman took out three pieces of paper. Each was inscribed with a magic circle. The chairman's magical energy filled the papers, burning them to a crisp and releasing the power sealed inside.

"*Simple Magic Circle: Prison of Rebels*," Emilia chanted.

Magical circles appeared on three of the assassins and sprouted ethereal chains.

"Wh-What's going on?!" they yelled.

In an instant, the chains bound them tightly. No matter how much strength they used, the chains wouldn't move an inch, reducing the captives to clumsily rolling around on the floor.

"You lucky three will come with me alive. I must ask who your boss is," he said.

One bound assassin, choosing death before selling out their boss, tried to bite their tongue off, but a chain wrapped around their mouth, preventing them from doing so. The Prison of Rebels was a spell that could only be used against a traitor. However, in exchange for this specified deal, it had an overwhelming restraining ability. Its effectiveness on these assassins all but confirmed that they had betrayed the Magical Committee.

The spell also protected the target from any attacks, and suicide was no exception. If the target wasn't aware that they were betraying their organization, this magic wouldn't activate, and if that was the case, Emilia simply needed to use a different method.

"Now then, I've grown rather bored of this fight. Let's end this, shall we?" Emilia said, inhaling deeply. He exhaled a purple smoke that surrounded the remaining assassins in an instant and entered their bodies.

"Wh-What *is* this?!"

"Poison?! Don't breathe this in... Ugh!"

Their faces turned purple before they fell to the ground. Within a minute, blood gushed from every pore on their bodies, signaling the end of their lives. The three assassins bound and protected by the chains could only watch in horror as their friends died.

"The toxin of the purple-black grass is impressive. Look how effective it is," Emilia said in a bored tone. He picked up his three hostages and headed towards Allegro. "Let's go. Help me place these three into the carriage."

"Yessir!" Allegro yelped as the three assassins were dropped in front of him.

They glared at the secretary in anger, and his timidness was only justified.

"B-But sir, the carriage is broken..." Allegro said.

"What are you on about? There's one over there, isn't there?" Emilia replied.

"Where?" After a moment, he gasped. "Huh?!"

A new carriage was placed a short distance away, complete with horses. A normal person would've stood there in shock, but Allegro quickly adapted to the situation and did as he was told. The chairman was a man beyond understanding, so there was no use trying to understand at all. Allegro was a man of ordinary talent, but his adaptability was far above others, allowing him to stay as the chairman's secretary and earn a handsome salary.

"I'm sorry, but I'm just doing my job," Allegro said as he carried the glaring assassins inside the carriage.

He felt guilty. These people must've also had a reason for their actions, but that had nothing to do with him. It wasn't even worth weighing their lives against his, for the answer was clear.

"There we go. I'm done, Chairman!" Allegro called.

"Good. Let's head home," Emilia said.

The carriage started again, and not even a trace of the battle was left behind.

***

I immediately notified my family that the curse that had plagued my body had been subdued, though I wasn't completely cured of it. Even so, my family cried with joy. Everyone took time from their busy schedules to gather at the manor and host a "curse recovery" party. I was embarrassed, but overjoyed as well. My father and brothers drank until they fell to the ground, and I could tell that even my mother had a few glasses from her flushed red cheeks. After the long party was over and everyone retired to their chambers, I headed to my father's room alone. I told him of my desire to enroll in the Academy of Magic. I'd already notified him of Emilia's visit to our manor.

"Hm, the Academy of Magic... You seem to have talent for magic, so it's not a bad idea," he said, looking straight at me. "I understand. I'll allow it. It's a good chance for you to see the outside world, and if you stay within the royal capital, I know that you'll be safe. I can help you out as well."

"Really? Thank you!" I said excitedly.

He gave me a warm smile. "I'm only doing what I should as a father. I wasn't able to give you much attention, and I've made you lonely. Listening to some of your selfish desires is a small price to pay." He gently stroked my head. "You've grown, and you've gotten stronger, Callus. I'm a little anxious to let you go

alone, but seeing that you didn't lose to the curse, I'm sure you'll be fine. You should live how you like."

"Okay. I'll do my best!"

Since I had been hidden away from the world and secretly lived in this manor, I knew that others might've pitied me. But I knew that I was loved. It was a fact that no one could deny.

***

"It'll still be a while, but I'll be leaving this place in a few years," I told Shizuku. I'd returned to my room and called her in, notifying her of what I had told my father.

It would take about half a day by horse to get to the academy from my current location. It was impossible for me to commute, so I'd decided to live in the royal capital. I guessed that I'd live in one of the dorms. This meant that I'd have to bid farewell to Shizuku as well. She'd been by my side ever since I was five, and she was like family to me. It was lonely for us to part ways, but I'd return to this manor during long vacations.

"So even while I'm gone, could I ask you to take care of this place?" I asked.

"I see. I understand what you're saying. With all due respect, I shall decline," she replied.

"Thanks, I'm sorry to cause you— Huh?"

Did she just say no? I must've misheard, right?

"Shizuku? Could I ask you to take care of this manor?"

"You cannot."

She declined my request once more. *No way. She's never said no to me before.*

"Um, could I ask why? Did you want to quit being a maid?" I asked.

"No, that's not it." Her next words surprised me. "I don't want to separate from you, so I shall go along with you to the royal capital. I'm terribly sorry, but I will not waver on this decision."

She sounded determined, and I could tell that she was confident in her choice. I'd never heard her voice her opinions so strongly before. I had expected her to obediently stay, so this was quite shocking.

"You're coming with me? Are you serious?" I said.

"Yes, very much so. I'm absolutely serious. I serve *you*, Prince Callus. Not the manor or this kingdom. It's only natural that I

stay with you.”

“But I’m planning on living in the dorms.”

“Then let’s rent a house. A large kitchen is needed.”

“Whoa, you’re deciding all this yourself?”

She was quick to make decisions.

“I’m really happy that you’re willing to come with me,” I said. “I’ll get lonely when I go to an unfamiliar place by myself. If you’d like to come along, it’d be very reassuring. But don’t you want to settle down? I troubled you for so long when you took care of me.”

I was healthy now, but for five years, Shizuku had supported me without taking a day of rest. It had been a hard time for me, but it must’ve been just as tough for her as well. There had to have been times where she was tired of taking care of me in the middle of the night as I writhed in agony.

“You’re still young, so I think there’s time for you to walk your own path. If you stay with me your whole life, it won’t be good—Whoa!”

She pushed me onto the bed, cutting me off. She’d never been this forceful with me before, and I grew nervous as her beautiful face drew so close to mine.

With an expressionless face, she said, “Do you remember the time when we first met?”

“Huh? Y-Yeah. My father brought you here, right? It was during the snowy winter, so I remember it well.”

“Yes. Back then, I was in a sorry state of affairs. I’d lost everything I clung onto, and I felt empty. Just then, you appeared, Prince Callus.”

Shizuku was from the Umbra Organization of the kingdom. Ever since she was young, she had received a very good education necessary for an Umbra, and was trained to eventually become a spy. However, once my father took the throne, he effectively disbanded this section. His father—my grandfather—had apparently heavily relied on this organization, but my father disliked using them. As a result, their more nefarious operations were abolished before Shizuku could get her hands dirty with that work.

“Back then, I was like a doll who didn’t feel anything. I only did as I was told. I was just a puppet. From the organization’s point of view, my upbringing was a huge success. Because of that, when it was disbanded, I didn’t have a purpose in life. His

Majesty pitied me, and had me employed as your bodyguard," she said.

She remained expressionless, but it didn't even compare to the time when I'd first met her. She was a person who did whatever she was told, and at the very least, she wouldn't push me down like this. *How long are we gonna stay in this position?*

"But one day, around two weeks after I first arrived at the manor, something happened. Do you remember, Prince Callus?"

"Two weeks after you first came? Hmmm, did something happen?" I wracked my brain, searching for a clue, but came up with nothing. In response to my uncertainty, she gave me an explanation.

"I'll never forget it. It was the day after a particularly snowy one," she said.

I listened to her calm and comforting voice as I slowly recalled the events of that day.

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"Prince Callus, are you up?" I said, knocking on the door and raising my voice at my small master.

Normally, I would have gotten a reply right away, but for whatever reason, there was none today.

"Excuse me," I said, opening the door with a bit of worry in my voice.

Prince Callus, who was usually lying on his bed, wasn't there—it was empty. I looked around the room and checked every nook and cranny, but he was nowhere to be seen. *He can't move much, so wherever has he gone?*

I immediately reported this to the other servants, and we began searching around the manor. Fifteen minutes later, I finally found him.

"Prince Callus!" I said.

He was on the ground in the yard. Thanks to the thick layer of snow, he wasn't hurt, but his body was cold as ice. I hastily picked him up and tried to carry him to his room. Just then, his lips parted.

"Shi...zuku..." he whispered.

I gasped. "Prince Callus! You're awake!"

Though he sounded like he was in pain, he opened his eyes and looked relieved when he saw my face. Seeing my worried

expression, he gave me something that was in his hand.

"Here," he said.

It was a single flower. It looked cute with its blue petals, and as I wasn't familiar with it, I assumed that it was a rare variety. He had me hold onto the flower.

"This..." I murmured.

"I went...outside to pick this flower. It looked beautiful from my window," he said.

I was surprised to hear such an unexpected reason. I wondered why he had done so, since moving his body for even a little must've brought him excruciating pain.

"I thought this flower...would suit you. You always seem lonely, Shizuku, so I thought that this flower would cheer you up a little."

As I saw him put on a tough face and laugh, for the first time in my life, I felt something warm and fuzzy in my chest. It was the first instance of unconditional love I'd ever received. Ever since I was young, I had spent so much of my time training to become an Umbra that I never thought I'd ever be loved like this.

"Thank you," I said, my voice trembling.

I realized that something warm was trickling down my cheeks. I thought that I'd lost all of my feelings when I underwent my strict training, but it seemed I was finally able to get them back.

Since that moment, I decided that I'd give my entire life to this small yet kind master of mine. I felt it from the bottom of my heart.

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Listening to Shizuku's story triggered my memory. Back then, I had gone out to pick a flower for her because she didn't seem to be interested in anything. I simply thought that a pretty flower would make her happy.

"I will never forget that moment," she said.

"You're exaggerating," I replied.

"It might not be significant from your point of view, Prince Callus, but that moment is an irreplaceable, precious memory to me."

Thinking back, Shizuku must have decided to express herself more from that day on. Little by little, she started to develop her own characteristics: favorite and least favorite foods, strengths

and weaknesses, and topics she liked and disliked.

"Ever since then, I made the decision to serve you for the rest of my life. As such, it's not possible for me to *not* be close to you. Of course, should you truly want to leave my side, I can't stop you," she said.

I paused for a moment. "That's rather sly of you, isn't it? You know I don't want you to leave me."

She smiled so faintly that only I would notice. She'd really gotten good at expressing her feelings. "So, I shall go along with you. I'm already excited just thinking about our new life."

She peeled herself away from me and put her hand on the door.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "Don't you want to, you know, fall in love with someone and live with them instead?"

"I don't mind at all. My heart is already set on you, Your Highness."

"I'm happy to hear that, but that's not the kind of love I'm talking about, right? You don't see me as a man, do you?"

She gave me a bewitching smile that I'd never seen before. "I wonder. What do you think?"

And with that, she closed the door behind her.

"Huh?" I was so stunned that I could only continue to stare at the closed door. I couldn't get a wink of sleep from my heart pounding all night.

Terminology Dictionary III

Arcane Arts

A supernatural phenomenon that requires magical energy, but doesn't rely on help from spirits. Because only those who can scientifically prove magic and express it using a formula can wield it, only a handful of people are able to do so.

Without the assistance of spirits, it's not the most efficient and costs a greater amount of magical energy. In return, the user can perform more complex and elaborate magical phenomena.

Snow Chloranthus

A beautiful flower with blue petals.

They quietly grow in the beginning of winter, and their petals will silently fall as the snow starts to melt. A boy gave this flower to his maid on one cold, wintry day. The flower has already wilted, but it continues to quietly bloom within the lady's heart.

In the language of flowers, it means "love without expecting anything in return" or "don't leave me alone."

Vessel of the Dragon

Born as ■■■ the Dragon, and has ■■■. It uses ■■■ and ■■■. Because ■■■, a vessel ■■■ is born.

Black Blessed Child

■■■ Child.
They have ■■■, and ■■■, ■■■ ■■■.
No matter ■■■ ■■■, contains ■■■ ■■■.

Epilogue: Towards the Light

Ever since then, my days were hectic but satisfying. I woke up early in the morning to train my body before practicing magic with my master. Once the sun started to set, I did some studying, then went to bed early. I'd already formed my own routine.

If my brothers came to visit, I practiced my swordsmanship on top of everything, or had them help me with my studies. I'd sent a few letters to Cryssie and Sissy, but we weren't able to meet in person. They seemed to be busy in their own ways as well.

I dedicated myself to training and learning, sticking to this routine every day for five years. My body was no longer in pain from the curse, but my hair stayed white and never returned to its normal color. Still, I grew taller and even caught up to Shizuku's height.

"Oho, you've grown quite a bit. You look rather handsome, and you remind me of myself in my youth," my master said.

"Really? That makes me happy," I replied.

He squinted cheerfully at my unusually formal attire. I hadn't dressed this well in a while, after all. My master had a few more wrinkles than the time I first met him, but that was all. He was still as energetic as ever.

"You've grown indeed. That jacket looks great on you, Prince Callus," Shizuku said.

I giggled. "Thank you."

She was, of course, by my side. I was headed to the royal capital with her today. I'd decided on leaving five years ago, but even so, I couldn't suppress my nervousness. *Who will I meet?*

"You haven't changed at all since I was young. Why's that?" I asked.

"Have I not told you? I'm a half-elf. I age much slower than regular humans," she replied.

"Huh, really?"

I learned something unexpected just then. I'd lived with her for ten years, but never knew about her identity.

"Why didn't you realize? Her ears are a bit pointy," my master remarked.

"I just assumed it was a familial trait or something."

“What kind of trait is that?”

I couldn’t give a sufficient answer to my master’s retorts. *Well, to be fair, this was my bad. Hm…*

“By the way, that means I’ll be able to continue taking care of you even if you grow old, Your Highness,” she said.

“Hmmm, I wouldn’t really want you to nurse me, though I probably don’t sound convincing since you already tended to me when I was sick,” I replied.

As we idly talked, we headed towards the entrance of the manor. I was greeted by my father, mother, and two brothers—they’d all gathered to send me off. Normally, they wouldn’t have to come here since they all lived in the royal capital. But due to my circumstances, I couldn’t meet them there, so I had them all assemble at this manor.

“Sniff… Callusss… Y-You’ve grown, and I-I-I’m sooo happy for you, but I’ll get so lonely…” Damien said, large beads of tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Come on, Damien. Don’t cry,” I said.

Since he was at the capital, we’d be much closer, distance-wise. I’d still have to hide the fact that I was part of the royal family, but I was sure that we could meet in private. After I calmed down my brother who was bawling in a manly fashion, I went to Sirius.

“You’re just like me, Callus. Tight-fitting clothes suit you very well. But your tie seems a bit plain. Perhaps a red tie would match your eyes,” he said.

“I’m just heading to the capital. It’s not like I’m gonna meet anyone, so I don’t think I need to dress up,” I replied.

“That won’t do! Today’s the day of your departure, Callus. If that’s not the most fitting day for dressing up, then what is?”

“He’s right! He’s right!” my other brother and father chanted.

They really get along with each other. Royal families in stories are often a lot more stiff and awkward. Well, whatever. While they’re all fired up discussing how to dress me, I’ll go to my mother.

“Mother, thank you for sending me off today,” I said.

“Oh, Callus, how you’ve grown,” she said, tears in her eyes as she hugged me. She slowly freed me from her embrace and looked at me, her eyes filled with numerous emotions. After a moment of hesitation, she began to talk. “I can say this now, but Callus, I once wondered if it was truly the right decision for me to give birth to you.”

This must've been her true feelings which she'd kept hidden for many years. *I guess the strange looks she gave me sometimes were because of those thoughts.*

"I love you. That's the absolute truth. But seeing you in constant pain and suffering…made me regret giving birth to you. I felt guilty choosing to raise you while knowing that you had this curse," she said.

There weren't any records of Taboo Beings making it to adulthood. They were regarded as bad omens, and if my existence was made known to the public, the consequences would be dreadful. I knew that her decision to raise me despite that must've been a tough one.

"I had planned to raise you throughout your whole life, but I couldn't bear to see you suffering so much. I left you behind at the manor while you were in pain, and fled towards my work. I'm a failure as a mother." Tears trickled down her cheeks.

Mother must've been suffering just as much as I was. The same probably goes for my brothers and father. It's like my entire family was under a curse.

"You've grown magnificently, and I'm so happy to see you set out on your own journey. But my feelings of sadness are a shadow on this wonderful day. I know I should say my farewells with a smile, but my overflowing feeling of guilt eats away at my chest. I'm so sorry, Callus. I'm sorry that I can't send you off with a smile," she said.

She must still be ensnared by the curse called guilt. Her curse might be far deeper and more serious than my own. She's truly suffering.

"Please blame your horrible mother. Please angrily call me a failure of a mother…" she said sorrowfully, as though she was imploring me to do so.

I clasped her hands. I'd already chosen my words. Even though this curse couldn't be cured with magic, I wanted to bring some light to her.

"It's true that I've suffered plenty. I've…often cursed the day I was born. I was always wondering why I had to go through such agonizing pain every day. But seeing you cry while watching my suffering, it taught me that I wasn't the only one in torment. I won't forget the day that you gave me such courage," I said.

"Callus…"

Watching her suffer with me had been my saving grace. I

understood that I wasn't fighting this battle alone.

"So even during my worst days, I was able to endure it," I said. "That's why I'm still alive. I'm full of happiness, mother. I've been able to learn plenty, move my body a lot, and spend time with the people who are most important to me."

These words were my true thoughts. My life had been fraught with dark times, but looking back, the good outweighed the bad. I was able to say so with pride.

"I have a dream. I want to become an amazing magician like my master and save a lot of people like he did. I'll find a way to undo the curse, and I'll make sure that no one else will have to suffer from it. Isn't that a good dream?" I said.

"Yes... That's...a very lovely dream."

When I looked up, I saw that my mother, my master, my father, my brothers, and Shizuku were all crying. *Everyone's such a crybaby... They really are a great family.*

"Since I'm able to have such a wonderful dream, I won't let you say that you regret giving birth to me. No exceptions. So..." *The words I should say to her are...* "So, mother. Thank you for giving birth to me. I'm happy to be alive." I meant these words from the bottom of my heart.

My mother crumpled onto the floor and drenched my clothes with her tears. *This cloth is made of good material, so I hope it absorbs everything.*

"I'm...also truly glad to have given birth to you. You're my pride and joy," she said.

My brothers hugged me while crying as well. *Jeez, it's getting warm now. My brothers are so hopeless...*

The servants of the manor also sent me off with tears.

"P-Prince Calluuus! You've truly grown so wonderfully..."

"Please come back whenever you like!"

I had so many fond memories of them. Their devoted support had given me so much strength throughout my life.

"Thank you, everyone. Thank you!" I said.

After we released everything that we'd been bottling up, I was finally ready to leave. This time, I could leave with a smile. As they all saw me go, for the first time in my life, I said, "All right, I'll be off!"

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Side Story: A Parting Gift from a Father

A year before Callus decided to leave, a boy visited the royal castle, located in the royal capital of the Ledyvia Kingdom.

“Oh boy, what does His Royal Majesty want from me?” the boy muttered. Emilia Licht had been suddenly called to the royal castle.

He generally refused these summons, but he was told that this came from the king himself. Even Emilia couldn’t deny the order.

“Well then, I guess I’ll look a bit more proper,” he said.

He straightened his back and put on a more serious expression as he set foot into the king’s room, where His Majesty awaited. The large room was dazzling and luxurious, and the king and a few knights were present. The knights seemed like they were used to battle, and even Emilia could tell that they were skilled fighters. After looking them over, he turned towards the king, Gallius Balldrad Leditzweissen.

“Pleased to meet you, Your Majesty. I’m glad to see that you seem to be in excellent health,” Emilia said.

“You seem as lively as ever yourself,” the king replied in a regal tone. He spoke solemnly and majestically.

The kingdom and the Magical Committee were on friendly terms. However, the two didn’t seem to trust each other completely, and sparks would fly whenever one caught the other’s attention.

“What business might you have with me, King Gallius? Since you’ve personally requested me, I believe it’s no simple matter,” Emilia said.

“Oh, it’s nothing too serious. I just wanted to tell you some things in private, without the Committee’s involvement.”

“I see.” *If it really wasn’t a huge deal, there would be no need to summon me. The king surely has no desire to meet me personally either,* Emilia thought.

However, the following words that came from Gallius’s mouth dispelled Emilia’s confusion.

“I want you to pull back from operating the Academy of Magic,” King Gallius said.

“Oh?” *So that’s how he wants to play,* Emilia thought. He thought back to the boy at the manor, Callus. He knew that the boy was a prince and the king’s son. He even was aware that the boy was planning on enrolling at the academy in a year.

Emilia had failed to bring Callus, but he’d been planning on meeting the boy at the academy. He hadn’t expected the king to personally go to this extent—the child’s birth was a secret, after all, and he’d assumed King Gallius had no love for the boy.

“Your Majesty, may I ask why? Both the Committee and the kingdom have worked together to manage that institution. I believe I have the right to be involved.”

“Indeed, you’re correct. However, there’s been a recent increase in claims filed against you. At this rate, it might affect the number of applicants to the academy. Hmmm… How about five years? For five years, could you step back from the academy? That should be good enough.”

“I see…”

It took three years to graduate from the Academy of Magic. In five years, Callus would be long gone. Gallius and Gourley had worked together to think of a plan to simply keep Emilia away for that time. It seemed the king actually loved his son dearly, since he was willing to go this far to protect him.

“I see… Well, I’m beat,” Emilia muttered as a furious rage emerged within him. He had been looking forward to Callus’s years at the academy, and he certainly didn’t expect this to be taken away from him. He suppressed his emotions and answered calmly, “I understand, King Gallius. I’ll accept your suggestion.”

“All right. Thank you,” Gallius replied, surprised by how smoothly this had gone. He’d expected more of a struggle.

“Even I’m aware that irreversible consequences will be upon me if I refuse.”

From an outsider’s perspective, Gallius’s request was a reasonable one. Emilia wasn’t much involved in the management of the academy anyways, so five years wouldn’t have been a difficult order to follow. If Emilia were to decline such a simple demand, it would lead to the crumbling of the relationship between the kingdom and the Committee. Doing so would take away his playground, and that would be the worst punishment for him.

“If I knew that this was going to happen, I would’ve had a

countermeasure, but I see. This is where things are going," Emilia said with a frown, taken aback by this unexpected turn of events. It felt like a toy he was waiting to play with had suddenly been taken away from him.

Emilia was a calculating person, but he didn't take emotions into account, for he didn't truly possess any himself. But Gallius had made the first move in the form of this unusual request. Although it risked his son's identity being exposed, he still chose to protect his child.

"I'm sorry to call you in while you're so busy. That's all I've got to say. Be careful on your way out," Gallius said.

"Then I'll excuse myself, Your Majesty. I hope that we can meet once again." Emilia obediently left, for he understood that voicing any complaints would only make his situation worse. On his way out, he stared at an empty corner of the room with a faint smile. "Your plan went well, didn't it?"

He quickly averted his gaze and acted like nothing had occurred as he exited the room.

Once Gallius confirmed that Emilia had left, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew, he's gone."

Gourley suddenly appeared in the seemingly empty corner that Emilia had been staring at earlier.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Gourley," the king said.

"It seems like he saw through me, though. His instincts never cease to amaze," Gourley replied, glaring in the direction that Emilia had left.

Gourley's invisibility magic had been cast without an issue, yet Emilia had locked eyes with him. Once again realizing how frightening the boy could be as an enemy, Gourley braced himself for the future.

"Even so, it's extremely reassuring just to have you near me. Without your suggestions, I doubt that I could come up with this plan to stop him. I'm truly grateful to you," Gallius said.

"I'm only doing what I need to for my apprentice," Gourley replied, shaking his head.

As the king had stated, this series of events wasn't his idea. Gourley had suggested getting rid of Emilia so that Callus could enjoy his academy life in peace. King Gallius had immediately consented; he had no qualms with removing that monster if it would protect his beloved son. Though this would put Gourley in danger, he had decided to make himself invisible and keep watch

so that Emilia wouldn't do anything odd.

"He's reckless, but he won't do anything that might break off the relationship between the kingdom and the Committee," Gourley said.

"I hope you are right about that. And may this be the last time I ever need to face him," King Gallius said, sighing deeply as he sank into his chair. It seemed like he'd just finished some exhausting task. "This is about all I could do. The rest is up to you, Callus. Good luck."

This act was the king's parting gift to his son—a son to whom Gallius felt he'd failed his obligation as a parent.

Extra Chapter: The Sage of the Golden Wing

In the southwest region of the Ledyvia Kingdom, I, Gourley Sigmaen, visited a small farming village. The place had a population of less than one hundred people.

“Over here, sage!” a villager said, rushing me towards a house made of wood.

“All right. Excuse me, I’m coming in,” I said.

Inside was a boy lying on the ground, atop a futon.

“Ugh…” the boy groaned.

It looked like he was in the middle of a nightmare. I performed a quick checkup on him; his pulse was irregular, and his fever ran high. And of course, he was in quite a bit of pain.

“Since when has he been like this?” I asked.

“Um… Around five days ago. I thought he just had a normal fever, but his condition hasn’t improved at all.”

“I see. As you’ve guessed, this isn’t a normal fever.”

“I knew it! Sage, can my son be saved?!” The villager had tears in their eyes.

“Of course. Who do you think I am?” I replied firmly.

The child’s symptoms were rare. He had a bite mark on his arm, so he must have been bitten by a venomous snake or some other troublesome creature. A normal doctor may have just let this boy rest and prayed for his body to overcome the illness, but this was an easy job for me.

“*Ra Daziel*,” I chanted.

Small particles of light enveloped the boy. The particles soon found the location of his sickness, and signaled a more accurate diagnosis.

“Hm… As I’d thought, it’s venom.”

It had already spread throughout his body, causing inflammation in various areas. At this rate, he had three days left to live at most. This was a close call. I finished my analysis and prepared my magical energy for a spell. Visualization was the most important aspect. I needed a clear image of the venom within the boy’s body to rid him of it.

“*Ra Heal*.”

A wave of light flowed from my hand and surrounded the young boy, extinguishing the venom that affected him.

“All right. He should wake by tomorrow. If you give him nutritious meals, he’ll be back to normal in three days. That’s youth for you,” I said.

When color returned to the child’s face and his breathing stabilized, I breathed a sigh of relief. *I’m glad I was able to save someone again.* Light magic was excellent, but it wasn’t omnipotent. The lives that had slipped through my fingers remained in my memory, and I couldn’t afford to be conceited.

“Thank you! How can I ever thank you…?” the boy’s parent said through sobs, bowing their head.

“This really is no big deal. Now then, why don’t you stay by your son’s side? I’ll be outside to breathe some fresh air,” I said, leaving the room.

I’ve finished all the work I had piled up. How should I spend my time until the next Ceremony of the Sages? I walked into a forest, deep in thought.

“How long has it been since I’ve received a day off? Curse the Committee for working this old man like a dog.”

I’d received the luxurious title of sage, but I was nothing more than a magician within the Committee. I repeated the process of going to a place as ordered and doing what was needed there. It wasn’t much, but this allowed me to use my abilities to their fullest extent. Without the Committee’s support, I wouldn’t have been able to save as many lives as I had. Still…

“Will I spend the rest of my life doing this?”

I had no major complaints about my work, but I kept wondering if this is how I’d want to spend my entire life. I wanted to go out with a bang. At the very least, I wanted an apprentice who could inherit all the skills I’d acquired.

“But I know that’s impossible…”

I was an old man. I couldn’t handle a large project, and it’d be tough to find a talented apprentice. Those with the aptitude for light magic were few and far between. Even the Holy Kingdom struggled to find suitable light magic users.

“This is a good location,” I said as I stopped walking. I raised my voice towards the forest. “You can come on out. I’ll be your opponent.”

In the next moment, boorish-looking men appeared.

One…two…three… Five in total. Based on their movements, they must be ex-mercenaries. They've got quite large weapons in their hands.

"I'd expect no less from a sage. Seems like you've noticed that we were tailing you," a man said. He seemed to be their leader.

His expression seemed relaxed. *I'm being underestimated, I see.*

"What are you following around an old man like me for? I'm sorry to say, but I don't have much money on me right now," I said.

"I don't care about that. I just want the head of a sage." The man pointed his intimidating weapon towards me.

Goodness… They're raining on my vacation.

"Let me ask one question. What are you planning to do with my head?" I said.

"Who knows. Killing a sage would earn us prestige, and we can sell heads for a high price to those who hate the Committee."

"I see. What a foolish reason." I sighed and gripped my staff. *It looks like I can't avoid a battle. Now then, I suppose I'll give them a bit of a scolding.* "All right, come on. Fight, if you really think your blades will reach me."

"Shut up, old man!"

The men pounced at the same time. *Hm, they've got some good teamwork. Let's destroy that first, shall we?*

"*Rai Lo*," I chanted.

A bright light flashed in an instant, blinding the men and crumbling their teamwork. I was only given a moment, but that was more than enough. I approached the nearest man and swung my staff at his face.

"Gah?!" he yelled.

The man fell towards the ground. An old man like me wasn't physically strong, but I could use magical energy to increase my power. This was more than enough for these ex-mercenaries.

"Y-You bastard!" the other men said, regaining their vision.

They once again rushed at me, but they were no longer calm. Without their coordination, I could make short work of them.

"*Ra Sax*," I said, producing a spear of light which came swinging at them.

The spear was lightweight and dished out immense power. The men that were hit were blown back, losing consciousness as their bodies hit the ground or the trees.

"Damn you!" a man roared.

“*Ra Barrel*,” I said, firing a bullet of light as he tried to attack me from behind. I had used my magic without turning around, but judging from the sound, my aim was true.

“I-Impossible… How can this old man beat us?!” the leader said, as he gazed at his friends on the ground. It seemed like defeat had never crossed his mind.

“Did you think you could easily dispose of an old man like me just because I use healing magic? I’m sorry to say, but I was formerly a combat magician. It’s been a while since I’ve been on the battlefield, but in my youth I defeated countless evil people like you,” I said.

When I was young, this kingdom wasn’t as peaceful. Violence broke out almost every day, and I couldn’t keep track of the friends I’d lost. My generation had lived through such turbulent times; none of us could be considered weak.

“Surrender peacefully and I’ll be merciful,” I said.

“Sh-Shut up! I can’t end here!” The man charged at me in desperation.

I pitied him. There weren’t many wars anymore, but poverty was still a major issue. I guessed that he must’ve been suffering from an unfortunate circumstance. I understood where he was coming from, but…

“There’s no good reason to harm another person. For that, you must reflect upon yourself. *Ra Hawk*.”

A golden hawk shot out from my hand. In a blink of an eye, it pierced the man’s body, blowing him back and knocking him out.

“Phew, one left…” I muttered.

I turned around and saw the last man running for his life, his back turned to me. *He’s gone so far in an instant. The trees are in the way, so it’ll be difficult to hit my magic.*

“What a troublesome guy,” I muttered.

As I rushed after him, a black object fell from above onto the man’s head, and he crumpled to the ground. *What just happened?*

“I can’t keep up with all these things,” I said, running to his side.

I approached him, and caught a glimpse of someone nearby. She seemed to be waiting for me.

“You’re…” I murmured.

A woman in odd, tight-fitting black clothes stood there. She didn’t show a shred of skin, and her face was hidden with a headpiece. Her graceful movements and thin tail that grew from

her behind told me that she was a half-beast, but that was all I could glean. Her motives were unknown, and I had no idea if she belonged to any organization.

Feeling more alert than before, I asked, “Who are you? Why are you here?”

I pointed my staff towards her and slowly closed the distance between us. The half-beast dressed in black turned towards me.

“I’m sorry for surprising you. I also would like to apologize for sticking my nose into your business,” she said.

“S-Sure,” I replied. *She must be referring to defeating this man for me. She doesn’t seem to see me as an enemy, but I can’t let my guard down. The way she moved wasn’t normal at all. She must’ve undergone some special training.* “What’s your name?”

“I’m called K.”

She can’t even tell me her real name. Judging from how she’s hiding her face, she must be in an organization that requires hiding one’s identity.

“I came to meet you, Sir Gourley, but it’s got nothing to do with these men,” she said.

“Oh? Then what’s your purpose?”

“I have a secret request… Could you please take a look at this first?” She took out an envelope.

The envelope was smooth to the touch, but the moment I tried to open it, a realization hit me. “This is from King Gallius, isn’t it?!”

The letter was closed with Magical Sealing Wax. This was a special kind of wax that was infused with magical energy. Using this would prevent the sender from faking their identity. If anyone were to do so, the oath would bestow a heavy punishment onto the person. The Magical Sealing Wax on this envelope was that of none other than His Majesty, King Gallius, the monarch of the Ledyvia Kingdom.

“I didn’t think you worked for the kingdom, much less directly under His Majesty,” I murmured.

I’d only seen him a few times, but he was an intelligent and thoughtful man, and an incredibly capable king.

“Your appearance as a person of the kingdom tells me that the Umbra is still present. I thought that it’d been disbanded,” I said.

“I apologize, but I cannot tell you anything about myself.”

“I’d assume so. I suppose I’ll read this message.”

I undid the seal and read the letter inside. It stated that he wanted me to save his secret child. *I believe there is His Royal Highness, Prince Damien, skilled in combat, and His Royal Highness, Prince Sirius, adept at strategy. I had no idea there was another son besides them…*

"It says here to ask you for details. Could you tell me?" I asked.

"Certainly. His Majesty's hidden child, Prince Callus, is currently resting in a manor located in the Forest of Hoba, to the west of the royal capital. We've had famous doctors try to treat him, but his situation hasn't changed."

"I see. And what kind of illness is His Royal Highness, Prince Callus affected by?"

K's next words shocked me. "Prince Callus was born with a curse."

"What?!"

Normally, it was impossible for a person to be born with a curse. The exceptions were Taboo Beings. I'd only heard legends of their existence, and had never seen one myself. I never expected them to exist, much less be currently alive.

"How old is this child?" I asked.

"He's currently ten years old. The fact that he's still alive is a miracle in and of itself. We'd like for you, Sir Gourley, as a user of light magic, to treat him." She bowed her head.

The kingdom must've been searching for the perfect timing to send me this request. I'd been busy for the past few years traveling the land, and there was always someone from the Committee by my side. Making this request in those circumstances could have alerted the chairman. They probably decided to ask me now because I'm away from my duties.

"Are you sure that you can trust me with this information? I might leak this elsewhere, you know," I said.

"His Majesty has told me that you're a trustworthy person."

I haven't associated with the king much, but he speaks highly of me. In any case, I can't turn down his earnest request. If anyone needs my help, I'm willing to go anywhere I can. It's a bit of a shame, but I suppose I'll have to end my vacation.

"Take me to the child," I said.

The gears of my fate had started to turn. Back then, I hadn't even dreamed that this decision would change not just my life, but the fate of the entire continent as well.

Afterword

Hello, everyone. I'm the author, Genkotsu Kumano. Thank you for taking your time to read this book. I'd like to thank those who decided to read the afterword first before jumping into the story. I've avoided spoilers, so you can read this until the end worry-free.

I'd like to first introduce the proper way to abbreviate this book. I've taken the first bit of the title and abbreviated it to *Yomehan.* Please use this hashtag to discuss your thoughts about this book on Twitter or any other social media platform. I'll secretly like your tweet.

This book was a story that I originally uploaded onto a web novel site. I was grateful to see that it was popular on other sites as well, and I was finally able to make it into a book. I'm sure some of my readers have supported me from the web novel site as well. Thank you so much for your support. I'll continue to work hard on this series.

I've made this book so that those who've read the online series can enjoy it as well. I've upgraded the contents, and even added a few new episodes. I've aimed for both newcomers and those who read the web novel to enjoy this book. I'd be happy if you could continue to support me!

Lastly, I'd like to provide some acknowledgements.

Thank you to Falmaro, who drew my characters so cutely. Thank you so much! They drew not only the heroine, but the main character Callus so adorably. Every time I received their illustrations, I screamed by myself in my room.

Thank you to my editor, Warafuji, who squeezed in this book within the first batch of DRE Novels. It was tough rewriting the manuscript, wasn't it? Please treat me to delicious food again.

Thank you to the proofreaders, the sales team, everyone who helped me make this book, and everyone who picked this up to read. I'd like to end this afterword by expressing my gratitude.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone in volume 2!



I Only Have Six Months to Live, So I'm Gonna Break the Curse with Light Magic or Die Trying

Author: Genkotsu Kumano
Illustrator: Falmaro


It may be the only type of magic that can dispel the darkness and alleviate your curse.
Gourley Sigmaen
Callus's master, a magician who holds the prestigious title of Sage. He can use the magic of miracles known as light magic.
I was able to read all of these books in one day, so I'm sure you can do the same, Sir Callus!
Crys Lamiared
Master Swordsman Sieg's daughter, a girl who can wield her sword as well as an adult. She's Selfish and rude at a glance, but has a lonely side too.
Sissy
A girl who used to learn light magic from Gourley, and ended up teaching Callus as well. She's timid, but her skills are first-rate.
Daddy's busy fighting And I'm bored, so I could teach you some techniques.
Prince Callus, I've baked some scones. Would you like some? I've also prepared some tea.
Shizuku Rindoh
A half-elf maid who serves Callus. She holds deep affection for her master and is devoted to supporting him as he suffers from the curse.
Callus Ladiezwiesen
A boy born with a curse on his chest who lives in constant, agonizing pain. He learns about light magic and suppresses his pain while polishing his skills.
That's it! I just need to learn light magic.
Selena
A spirit who claims to be princess of the spirits. Drawn to Callus's magic, she possesses the boy. A bit moody and selfish, she's grown fond of Callus and dedicates herself to supporting him.
Did you know? Light spirits are special just for existing!

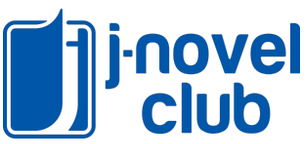

"Rai Lo!"
"Yessir!"
"First, let's try using Rai Lo."
The moment the words left my lips, she put both hands over my right hand, which had stored my magical power.

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I Only Have Six Months to Live, So I'm Gonna Break the Curse with Light Magic or Die Trying: Volume 1
by Genkotsu Kumano

Translated by piyo
Edited by Austin Conrad

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