III

AUTHOR: GENKOTSU KUMANO
ILLUSTRATOR: FALMARO



I ONLY HAVE SIX MONTHS TO LIVE, SO I'M GONNA BREAK THE CURSE WITH LIGHT MAGIC OR DIE TRYING


III
AUTHOR: GENKOTSU KUMANO
ILLUSTRATOR: FALMARO
I ONLY HAVE SIX MONTHS TO LIVE, SO I'M GONNA BREAK THE CURSE WITH LIGHT MAGIC OR DIE TRYING



I Only Have Six Months to Live, So I'm Gonna Break the Curse with Light Magic or Die Trying III

Author: Genkotsu Kumano
Illustrator: Falmaro


"DRINK! PLEASE! I'M BEGGING YOU!"
CECILIA LA LILYNIA
A saint adept at light magic.
"SILENCE! DON'T YOU DARE RIDICULE ME!"
EMILIA LICHT
The strongest magician who serves as the chairman of the Magical Committee.
"A HUMAN SUCH AS YOURSELF TRIES TO ACT LIKE AN ELF? NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU SWITCH YOUR BODY, YOU CANNOT HIDE THE STAINS OF YOUR SOUL."
LUNA
A moon magician confined to the underground area of the Academy of Magic.


"THE CURSE OF THE TABOO BEINGS ISN'T SIMPLY DARK MAGICAL ENERGY. IT ORIGINATES FROM MANUSIA, THE GOD OF DARKNESS."
"WHICH IS WHERE THE TERM 'DARK BLESSED CHILD' CAME FROM."
"BUT WHY WOULD THE GOD OF DARKNESS DO SUCH A THING?"
"EVEN I AM UNSURE OF THE DETAILS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO MYTHS, THE GOD OF DARKNESS WOULD APPARENTLY MARK ONE WHO HAD GAINED THEIR FAVOR. TO THOSE WHO WORSHIPED MANUSIA, THIS WAS SAID TO BE THE GREATEST BLESSING AND HIGHEST HONOR THAT ONE COULD EVER ATTAIN. THOSE BORN WITH THIS MARK WERE RESPECTED AND CALLED A 'BLESSED CHILD.'"
CALLUS LEDITZWEISSEN
A light magician born with a deadly curse in his chest.
TVAL RAIZAX
The legendary white dragon who slumbered underground. The hero Arth's partner.

CHAPTER ONE: EXPANDING REALITY AND A MYSTERIOUS HOLE
CHAPTER TWO: LEGEND OF THE WHITE DRAGON AND A PRISONER OF THE STARS
CHAPTER THREE: THE WHITE DRAGON FLIES ONCE MORE
EPILOGUE: THOSE WHO WERE TRANSPORTED
EXTRA STORY: CRYS'S VISIT

Table of Contents

1. Cover
2. Color Illustrations
3. Chapter One: Expanding Reality and a Mysterious Hole
4. Chapter Two: Legend of the White Dragon
5. Chapter Three: The White Dragon Flies Once More
6. Epilogue: Those Who Were Transported
7. Extra Story: Crys's Visit
8. Afterword
9. About J-Novel Club
10. Copyright

Download all your Fav Light Novels from Just Light Novels

Happiness is being able to live a normal life, I thought, as I spent my carefree days in leisure.

Chapter One: Expanding Reality and a Mysterious Hole

One night, Saria Lulumitt, the Clock Tower Hermit, was holed up in the clock tower as usual, obsessing over her research. Students were usually forbidden from staying at the academy overnight, but as long as she stayed within the clock tower, she had permission—or rather, silent approval—to remain. Saria had used that to her advantage and spent her days within the tower. However, now with the body of a child, she would get sleepy at around 9 p.m.

"And…done," Saria said with a sigh in front of a suspicious-looking device. "All I need now is a power supply, but I'll just let *them* handle that."

Recently, she had been pouring all her resources into this contraption. Thanks to her hard work, it was filled with surprises the world had never seen before.

"Heh heh, I can just imagine the looks on my cute juniors' faces when they see this," Saria said, grinning to herself.

The young lady had always felt that relationships with others were a pain. However, after meeting Callus and his friends, her mindset had begun to change. In fact, she was now looking forward to the arrival of her friends. Of course, Saria was quite unwilling to admit it.

"This seems like a good stopping point," she said with a yawn. "I can just make any final adjustments tomorrow."

It was already past nine at night. She'd usually be in bed by now. She removed her worn-out lab coat, changed into some comfortable pajamas, and flopped onto a large sofa. As she tried to let her consciousness slip now that she was comfortably tired, she noticed an odd presence of magical energy.

"Hm…?"

Her curiosity got her up. In the next moment, a deafening explosion echoed throughout the area.

"Gyaaah?!" she screamed, rolling off the sofa. "What's going on?!"

The tears in her eyes proved just how startled she was.

“That seemed really close by! What was that sound?”

Facing the direction of the explosion, she leaned out the window to check. She was greeted by a sight that shook her to the core.

“What *is* this?!”

At a corner of the academy, a wall had been completely crushed, a gaping hole having been blasted through. But Saria couldn’t sense anyone nearby. The enormous hole emanated a strange aura, as though beckoning people inside.

“What is that? Does it have anything to do with the magical energy I just sensed?”

Saria gazed at the hole with great interest.

In the basement of the clock tower, Luna—the mysterious moon magician who was confined within—noticed the oddity and opened her eyes. As she felt the room shake once more, the stake that was pierced through her right arm started to crack. She gave a knowing smirk.

“And so…it’s begun,” she muttered, gazing up at the domed ceiling.

A countless number of lights glimmered above, like stars twinkling in the night sky. And just like real stars, these lights flickered and moved ever so slightly, creating an artificial night sky within her room.

“My earnest wish shall be granted very soon,” Luna said to herself in the cold, lonely basement. “I need *him* to act.”

***

After school, Cryssie, Jack, Volga, and I went to investigate the large hole that had suddenly appeared last night. It was the talk of the academy. Some theorized diastrophism, while others claimed that it had been done by a monster. There was no shortage of rumors, and the actual cause still remained unknown.

Of course, we were curious about the hole too, and decided to look into it ourselves. *I wonder what it’s like,* I thought. Apparently the hole had appeared rather close to the clock tower. Since a loud explosion had been heard, I guessed that Saria must’ve been very shocked by it. She was a boarding student and belonged to the dorms, but I heard that she rarely went back.

“Whoa,” I said. “I expected a crowd, but there’s still so many

people here."

The closer we got to the hole, the larger the crowd became. Teachers, students, and outsiders alike were all gathered around. *Did the outsiders just sneak through a gap in security or something?*

"Excuse me," I said, trying to navigate my way through the crowd.

The large number of people was a little suffocating, but I still managed to move forward and see the hole with my own eyes.

"It's enormous," I said, taken aback by its size.

It was pitch-black inside. Even with the entrance right in front of me, I couldn't see how deep it went.

"I wonder what's inside," I said aloud.

"I heard that people from the Committee investigated inside, but there was nothing there," Jack answered. I was impressed by how fast he could gather information.

"I can see that there are man-made objects, so is it a ruin or something?" I asked. "The hole is cleanly made too."

Within the opening of the gaping maw was a pillar-like structure engraved with letters. It was clear that none of this had been formed naturally.

"I guess that's all we can tell for now," I said, glancing around in hopes that I hadn't missed anything.

I noticed someone standing next to me, furiously jotting down notes.

"Those letters belong to the old kingdom!" the person mumbled. "Which means this must be about five hundred years old!"

The student seemed to be older than me—an upperclassman. He was clearly studying the hole with great passion, and I couldn't help but be curious.

"Um, excuse me," I said, gently poking him.

He jumped in surprise. "Whoa! Y-Yeah, what's up?!"

"I'm Callus, a first-year. Sorry for scaring you."

"A-Ah, I apologize for yelling too. Uh, I'm Gordon, a second-year in Class B. Nice to meet you."

He bowed his head. We'd only just met, but he seemed like a nice person.

"Do you have any business with me?" he asked.

"Um, may I ask what you're writing? Or if you don't mind, could I take a look?"

“Huh? Sure, I don’t mind…”

He handed me his notes, detailing his analysis of the hole and coupled with an illustration. Not only were the size and shape of the hole listed, but there were also notes about the pillars, with theories on the meaning behind the letters and patterns. It was abundantly clear to me that Gordon had some truly noteworthy abilities.

“You were able to glean all this just by looking at it from a distance?” I asked. “Your analytical skills are very impressive!”

“Ah ha ha… Thank you,” Gordon replied.

He seemed happy for a moment, but then his expression turned dark.

“Is something the matter?” I asked.

“Well, I appreciate your kind words, but I’m not impressive at all. This academy is filled with geniuses. Compared to them, I’m just a pebble, an average student. No matter how hard I try, I’ll never be able to rise above Class B.”

People with talent were referred to as “gemstones” waiting to be polished, but those on the opposite end who were deemed talentless were referred to as “pebbles.” Pebbles would never shine no matter how much they were polished, and they would instead crumble and be worn away. I hated the term. It denied and mocked hard work and effort.

“Gordon…”

“Whoops, sorry about that,” he said. “Didn’t mean to make the mood all gloomy. But it’s the truth, you know. And this academy taught me that.”

The Academy of Magic revolved around a merit system, where skill meant everything. While aristocrats had a crooked loophole called the Upper Class, everyone else had no such help available to them. It didn’t matter how earnest, ambitious, or kind you were; if you didn’t have the skill and abilities to back them up, you couldn’t rise through the ranks. I had light magic on my side, but I don’t think I would have made it to Class A without it.

“But judging from these notes, I think you’d excel at your studies,” I insisted.

“To become a part of Class A through studies, I’d need to discover something amazing,” Gordon replied. “I’m good at memorizing textbooks, but I wasn’t blessed with much imagination.”

Simply being hardworking and earnest wasn’t enough to gain

the respect of others. I knew that all too well, but it still made me sad to hear him put himself down like that.

"If I had a bit more talent, I probably wouldn't be treated like that," Gordon muttered under his breath. Before I had a chance to ask, he ended the conversation. "I apologize for boring you. I'm done with my analysis, so I think I'll head off for now."

"Right, sure," I said, returning his notes. "Thank you for letting me see something so important."

He tucked them away in his pocket and gave me a goofy smile. "Thanks for complimenting someone like me. It really made my day."

With that, he disappeared into the crowd. As I was looking at his back, I felt someone slap me from behind.

"Ow," I said.

I turned around, but no one was there. *But...I don't think I imagined it.*

"Where are you looking?" said a familiar voice. "Down here."

"Down?"

My small upperclassman looked at me with a frown.

"Hi, Saria," I said. "What's wrong? It's so rare to see you outside."

"Because my rude junior wouldn't drop by, I had to go *out of my way* to come pick you up. I hope you're grateful."

Every now and then, she'd bump into someone and stagger with a "whoops," making me worry about her.

"Are you curious about that big hole too?" she asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "It feels odd to me, like it's not a normal ruin. I don't have any proof, but it's just what I think."

"Hm, I see. It's good to see you interested in so many different things...but there's something even more important! I've finally finished it!"

"Finished? Are you talking about that thing that I helped you with before?"

"That's right! Heh heh. It's a beautiful creation, if I may say so myself!"

She laughed proudly. I wasn't sure what she was making, but I remembered assisting her with a shady device, recording numbers and the like. If she had completed her invention, I would be eager to check it out.

"Now then, come along! Why don't I show you the result of using all my little gray cells to create my most brilliant invention

yet!” Saria said haughtily as she headed towards the clock tower...and tripped.

Because she was wearing a lab coat that was far too large for her, she often got her foot caught in its hems.

“Hey!” Saria demanded. “What are you standing there for? Help me up, Junior!”

“Right! Of course!” I said, rushing to her side so that I wouldn’t anger my small upperclassman further.

***

As Saria dragged me to the clock tower, Cryssie, Jack, and Volga tagged along. I’d cleaned the tower only days before, but it was already a mess again. *Saria always makes a mess when she gets too absorbed in her research. I’ll have to clean up again later.*

“Heh heh heh,” Saria chuckled in a carefree manner, pushing a large object. “Thank you for coming.”

What is this? Its three-dimensional surface was fitted with crystals, buttons, and even a magic circle. It clearly looked suspicious to me. The rest of my friends also looked perplexed at the item in front of them.

“Now then, before I start this up, let me ask you all one question,” Saria said. “Do you believe in spirits?”

“Spirits?” Cryssie and Jack said, tilting their heads to one side.

Spirits were generally regarded as something that existed only in fairy tales. I couldn’t blame them for being confused.

While I was gazing at the duo, Volga said, “There are numerous ruins that indicate that gods roamed our land many years ago. If gods exist, I don’t see why spirits can’t either.”

“Hm, interesting argument,” Saria replied. “Spirits are often said to be existences under the gods. Your reasoning is quite logical.”

“Thanks.”

Volga glanced at Cryssie and Jack with a condescending smirk. And of course, the latter two started to voice their complaints. *Everyone’s become so friendly.*

“All right, all right,” Saria said while clapping her hands, silencing the room. “Why don’t we put an end to our arguments for now? First off, let me say that I’m working under the assumption that spirits do indeed exist. And the one who proved that to me is none other than Junior over there.”

Saria pointed at me.

“Uhhh…” I said.

“Ah, I probably should’ve asked you for permission beforehand,” Saria said awkwardly. “Can I tell them about you?”

She was referring to the fact that I could see spirits. Saria was the only one in the academy who knew. It would’ve been troublesome for that knowledge to spread throughout the academy, and I still thought so. However…

“I don’t mind,” I replied. “I trust my friends.”

“Is that so?” Saria replied with a smile. “You have my gratitude.”

She proceeded to tell my other three friends about spirits. She explained how spirits were required to activate magic, and every magician was unknowingly possessed by one. I had special eyes that allowed me to see spirits, and Saria was doing research on these entities. Lastly, she mentioned that the Magical Committee was aware of their existence, but had purposefully kept quiet about it. She even discussed how this couldn’t become public knowledge. Smoke rose from Jack’s head as he took the time to process it all.

“Th-There’s a lot to take in,” Jack said before turning to me. “So basically, spirits exist and you’ve got the power to see them, right?”

I nodded. I expected him to be taken aback by this unusual ability, but his reaction was much different from what I anticipated.

“That’s awesome!” he gushed. “You can see spirits?! I wanna see ’em too!”

“That’s right,” Cryssie said proudly. “Callus *is* amazing. I’m glad you finally understand.”

The two quickly accepted me and my abilities. *I’m glad they’re my friends.*

“I understand,” Volga said. “I’ll even believe that Callus has that ability. But what’s that got to do with that shady device over there?”

“I’ve always wondered why humans couldn’t perceive spirits,” Saria answered with a twinkle in her eye. “With the cooperation of Junior, as I continued to do my research, I realized something.”

Indeed, I’d assisted with an odd experiment of hers in the past. I’d pointed to an area where a spirit was floating around, and she had used her suspicious-looking device to observe that

space. Her device was the result of that experiment.

"At first, I believed that humans and spirits resided in different spaces," Saria explained. "But with the help of Junior, I came to realize that I was wrong. Spirits can see and hear the same things that we do. In other words, they're living in practically the same realm."

"Makes sense," I said.

I couldn't touch Selena, but I could converse with and see her. This implied that we were living in similar worlds.

"My custom magical tool has told me that our realm and their realm—which I refer to as a dimensional layer—have a discrepancy of around 27.296 percent. In other words, if I can expand our existing dimensional realm and reduce this discrepancy, we can see and touch spirits!"

Saria looked excited. I was completely blown away. This person was trying to use her intelligence alone to remove the boundary between humans and spirits. I was certain that this place must be at the absolute cutting edge of modern science.

"I've made a magical tool that can expand our dimensional realm. I call him Mr. Expand," Saria explained with her chest puffed out. "He can expand our existing dimension, which we reside in, from the material realm to the astral realm. In other words, if we activate this bad boy, we can perceive spirits for ourselves!"

"I see." I only barely managed to understand Saria's words.

"That sounds interesting," Volga added.

Cryssie and Jack seemed puzzled, and it looked like they were about to explode from confusion. *They really might if Saria continues.*

"In short, with this device, we can see and touch spirits," I explained.

"Ah, that makes sense," Cryssie said. "So it's just a mystical magical tool."

"Got it," Jack added. "I knew that already, though."

I doubted that the two truly understood Saria's explanation, but they didn't look as overwhelmed anymore. Saria had apparently also caught on to the pair's understanding capabilities and pressed on.

"Anyway," she said. "Now that we're all on the same page, I'd like to activate Mr. Expand. However, I require quite a bit of magical energy to use this device. I'm sorry, but can I have you

all lend me your strength?”

We all looked at each other and nodded without hesitation. If this grand experiment really allowed humans to become closer with spirits, it would make history. I would lend as much energy as I could if it meant I’d be able to help out. Following Saria’s instruction, we placed our hands on the magical tool.

“Mr. Expand here is a prototype,” she further explained. “Even with all the energy it requires, its range is limited to just this room. I’m relying on you all.”

“Sure,” I replied, my hand placed on the shady device. “We’ll do our best.”

Saria happily scribbled some notes. She seemed to be jotting down the density of magical energy within the room and other details. Upon confirming that Cryssie, Jack, Volga, and I had our hands on the device, Saria approached us and spoke loudly.

“All right, my dear juniors! Activate Mr. Expand!”

She pressed a button, causing the device to glow. It immediately started sucking our magical energy.

“This is…quite a bit,” I said.

It felt like I was using a high-rank spell. Magical energy was swiftly being sucked out from my hand, and everyone furrowed their brows, feeling the same struggle.

“Ugh… Grrr… Damn it!” Jack said, falling out first. “I can’t anymore!”

He fell back onto the floor as he vented his frustration. Jack was an unusual magician with three spirits possessing him, but he only had a bit more magical energy than the average user. Still, he had hung in there for quite a bit.

“I can still go on!” Cryssie shouted.

“Yeah,” Volga agreed. “I won’t let Callus act cool all the time!”

The two did their best for as long as they could, but they eventually gave up and sat down too. It only showed just how much energy this device needed. Quite honestly, I was almost at my limit too, but I desperately wanted this experiment to succeed. If everyone could see spirits, I was sure that humans and spirits could become friends. This would become an even more splendid world to live in. *So…I’ll give it my all!*

“Raaaaah!” I yelled, squeezing out all my energy from within me.

As I poured everything I had into the tool, it gave a blinding flash of light, and an invisible wave spread throughout the room.

“Huh?!” I gasped as I felt my body waver.

In the next moment, it felt like my body was enveloped in water. *What is this?* Had the machine malfunctioned or gone berserk? I hastily looked over at Saria, but she smiled and gave me a thumbs-up.

“Good work. You’ve done it, Junior! Today is the day we make history!”

“Huh?” I asked pathetically.

I glanced about and saw spirits all around. Near Cryssie was a large fire lizard, a salamander. A splendid wolf with black fur was by Volga. And next to Jack were three spirits: a mole, a fish, and a bird.

“Whoa, seems like I’ve got a lot!” Jack cried. “No wonder I could use three elements. Heh, maybe I’ve got something that makes spirits like me.”

He happily played around with his spirits while Volga seemed to be getting along with his wolf. As for Cryssie…

“Are you my spirit?” she asked.

The salamander met her gaze, its tongue flicking out as it happily wagged its tail. It must’ve been happy that it could finally be seen. She reached out, but was unable to touch her spirit. The salamander, who hopefully looked forward to being petted, seemed a little down.

“I’m sorry,” Saria apologized. “Mr. Expand is still a prototype. You can see and hear your spirits, but you can’t touch them yet, it seems.”

“I’m happy to be able to see my spirit,” Cryssie replied. “Thank you.”

She gazed kindly at her salamander and pretended to pet its head. She couldn’t touch it, but the spirit happily wagged its tail. I believed that when spirits and humans became partners, a strong bond was born. This was true even if one couldn’t see their spirit. Cryssie, Volga, and Jack were getting along with their spirits so well that I could hardly believe they were only meeting each other for the first time. To me, that was proof enough.

“Saria?” a dignified voice rang out.

Selena was gazing at the researcher with a serious expression. Since Selena could now be seen, Saria was able to meet her gaze.

“You must be the princess of the spirits,” Saria said with a respectful bow. “I’m honored to be able to meet you.”

I know this sounds rude, but I didn't think she'd be able to act so elegant and respectful.

"Saria, your magical tool is simply wonderful," Selena said. "I'm sure that this invention could serve to tie spirits and humans together. On behalf of all spirits, I'd like to give you my deepest gratitude."

Selena lowered her head. She would often take a slightly selfish attitude, but her current actions made her fit to be called a princess. I felt like I was witnessing an unusual event.

"I don't think I'm worthy of receiving your gratitude," Saria replied. "Connecting spirits and humans has been my earnest wish."

"Thank you. With people like you around, the day the distance between us is crossed might not be too far away."



The two looked at each other and nodded. They were both of different ages, origins, and species, but they had the same goal. *Yeah, I think spirits and humans will become friends really soon.*

Suddenly, I heard someone call out to me.

"Callus, can you come over here?" Jack said.

Curious, I jogged over to him.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"It seems like they wanna tell me something," he replied. "Can you understand them?"

Indeed, it looked like Jack's spirits were chattering away. Excluding the princess of the spirits, the species couldn't speak the human language, though they could apparently understand us. And there was a rule which said humans would never understand the language of spirits. No amount of studying would change that. And so, I decided to ask Selena.

"Selena, can you help me?" I asked.

"Of course," she replied. "Leave it to me."

Borrowing the assistance of my reliable partner, I decided to tell Jack what his spirits were saying. A bit curious myself, I listened to Selena's words, and I was shocked to hear the unexpected news Jack's spirits had to share.

***

"What's wrong?" Jack asked as I took him to the corner of the room. Everyone else was having fun with their spirits. "Why'd you call me here?"

"Sorry, but I don't think it's good for others to hear this," I said.

"I don't get it, but sure. Can you tell me?"

"All right."

I thought back to what Jack's spirits had told me. *It might be too shocking if I tell the story all in one go. I should reveal it a little at a time.*

"Hey, you have a brother, don't you?" I asked.

"Hm?" Jack replied, cocking his head quizzically. "Yeah, I've got a younger brother in my village."

I decided to pry a little further. "You...have more than one sibling, don't you?"

He widened his eyes in shock before gazing down sadly. I'd never seen a cheery guy like him look so down before. He took a

deep breath and sat down.

"Yeah, I did," he said.

He occasionally looked up, but told his story slowly, as though he was reminiscing about the past.

"I might've told you this before, but my hometown is a village out in the boonies. It takes a few days by carriage just to get to the nearest large city. Our village is poor, and rarely do any merchants stop by."

This was why Jack wanted to get good grades at the academy and earn a well-paying job. He'd told me so in the past. To say that Jack had come to the academy to make money might sound shallow, but this was an important issue to him.

"It's a common story," he continued. "Some sort of illness spreads throughout a countryside village, and every few years a drought leads to a bad harvest. If you're unlucky, these two events could overlap."

I gritted my teeth. A large city could ask nearby cities or the royal capital for help. But for a countryside village, it required a huge effort to simply ask for assistance nearby, and there were no guarantees that they would receive the aid they'd need. Reality wasn't so kind as to always offer help to those who needed it.

"It got really bad back then," Jack said. "We were gnawing on tree roots to stave off hunger. I was a bit older, so I could've made do with that, but my younger brother and sister weren't so lucky. Those two, frail from hunger, both fell ill at around the same time. They didn't last three days after that."

Jack struggled to get the words out as sorrow filled his eyes.

"It's still fresh in my mind, you know? They'd go, 'Don't worry, brother.' And their faces were just... They must've been suffering the most, but even until the very end, they were worried about me. I never want to experience something like that again."

He fell silent for a brief while before he slowly looked up at me.

"That's why I *have* to be able to make money. I need to take care of my younger brother who was born after that. It's the only way I can atone for my sins—I let my siblings die and I couldn't do a thing for them."

"I see. So that's what happened..." I said.

As he'd said himself, his experience was likely not an unusual one. Books often had mentions of pandemics, as well as famine

due to poor harvests. But for the first time, I was able to hear it from someone who had experienced it for himself. How could it not leave a huge impact on me?

"You're amazing, Jack," I said. "Despite your hardships, you keep pressing forward and trying to do what you can. No wonder your two siblings are lending you their strength."

"Hm? What do you mean?" Jack asked.

I pointed to the spirits around him. "You actually only have one spirit possessing you. The other two used to possess your brother and sister."

"Wha?!" Jack gasped.

It was only natural for him to be so shocked.

"J-Just what is going on here, Callus?!"

"Well..." I started, telling him the story that I'd heard from his spirits.

***

Seven years ago, a great famine had occurred in Jack's village. They couldn't harvest any crops, and there was nothing left to hunt as the animals had moved on. Even their food storages had run out, and adults and children alike were all slowly starving to death.

But the tragedy didn't end there. A disease had spread throughout the kingdom, and Jack's village fell victim as well. Jack and his parents had luckily managed to stay safe, but his younger brother and sister had fallen ill.

"Ugh..."

"It's so hot... It hurts..."

The two young siblings would groan in agony from hunger and illness. Two spirits were watching over the pair. But without magical energy, the spirits couldn't activate their magic. They could only watch over the weakening siblings. The moment they thought that this was how it would end, a miracle occurred.

"Who are you?" the siblings asked.

On the brink of death, the pair were able to see spirits. Not even the spirits knew why this occurred, but there were stories of humans gaining this ability when they were about to die. The spirits were overjoyed that they could finally be seen. With desperate gestures, they managed to ask the siblings if there was anything they could do. The time they had spent together

was short, but even so, the spirits were determined to offer their aid. The two siblings made an unusual request.

“I’ll be fine,” the younger brother said. “But can you help my big brother?”

The spirits were shocked to hear this. These kids were dying, yet they still wanted to help others.

“My big brother is always doing his best for us,” the younger sister said. “But we can’t do anything in return…”

“Please… Can you lend him your strength?”

The next day, after the two siblings made their request, they passed away. When someone possessed by a spirit died, the spirit would usually live freely or look for a new host. However, these two spirits refused to take either route.

“We should grant the wish of our small masters.”

“I agree. We promised them, didn’t we?”

The spirits vowed to fulfill their young masters’ dying wishes. They hadn’t received any magical energy, but even so, they believed that they had formed a bond. Neither had an ounce of hesitation when they made their choice.

***

“Most of the time, only one spirit can inhabit a person,” I explained. “But the two spirits that heard the wishes of your siblings broke that practice to fulfill their wishes. I thought that bonds between humans and spirits were gone, but I never would have expected them to remain in this form. I’m shocked.”

Jack fell silent upon hearing my story before he suddenly crouched down.

“God, I’m such an idiot. Here I was, thinking that I had something that made spirits like me,” he said, pressing down on his eyes as his shoulders trembled. “They were going through so much pain, and yet they were worried about *me*?!”

Tears spilled from between his hands. He’d only found out the truth now, after all these years.

“When they were suffering, I couldn’t do a thing! I couldn’t give them medicine, and I couldn’t even provide them with enough food! All I could do was squeeze their hands and talk to them. That was it! So why?!”

“That’s not true,” I said. “During times of pain, there’s nothing that could make one happier than having a family member by

their side. I'm sure your two siblings were grateful for that."

When one couldn't move and was suffering, the thing they'd feel the most would be loneliness. I knew that better than anyone. No matter how painful and difficult things became, I would feel a lot better when my loved ones were beside me. *And I think Jack's siblings thought the same.* Hence, in their final moments, they'd wished for their older brother's happiness.

After crouching down for a while, Jack wiped his tears away and stood up. He talked to the spirits that surrounded him.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks for listening to their requests. Thanks for lending me your strength. And I'll be relying on you all in the future. I know that I might seem unreliable, but I'll do whatever I can so that I won't repeat the past."

The spirits heard his words and smiled before settling on Jack's shoulders. I wasn't sure if they understood everything he said, but it was clear that his feelings had gotten through to them.

"Thanks, Callus," Jack said, turning to me. "If you'd never told me this story, I would've believed that I was someone who could use three elements because of my own powers."

"I didn't do much," I replied.

"That's not true. If I hadn't met you, I wouldn't have known the thoughts of my younger siblings. I truly can't thank you enough. I'm proud to be able to call you my friend."

Jack had a smile of his own.

***

"I'm shocked," Saria suddenly said that evening, after we had conducted the experiment. "I didn't think there were people other than you who could see spirits."

I was in the clock tower to clean up. Everyone else had already left and we were alone.

"Were you listening in on my conversation with Jack?" I asked.

"My ears are a bit better than others'," she said. "I'd appreciate it if you could keep quiet about this to him."

"Sure."

If she'd heard it, there was nothing I could do. She wasn't the type to tell others anyway.

"It's said that every living organism has a soul," Saria continued. "And I believe that spirits are altered souls. Hence,

when humans are on the verge of death and the soul leaves the body, in that moment, they become an existence akin to spirits. If so, it wouldn't be odd if we could communicate with spirits in that brief period of time."

"I see," I said. "That seems like a possibility."

She really is intelligent. She was able to form a well-thought-out theory with only fragments of information.

"Do you know anything about it, Selena?" I asked.

"I don't," she admitted. "You're the first human I've talked to."

"Right. That makes sense."

It was something even Selena wasn't aware of. I couldn't blame her; even humans didn't know much about their own kind. Perhaps other humanoid spirits would know.

"How many other humanoid spirits have you met, Selena?" I asked.

"Huh? None."

I tripped out of shock. *S-Seriously?!*

"When I was newly born, the one who showed me the ropes was a normal spirit," Selena said. "That spirit might have had a lot of knowledge, but they returned to the star's womb."

The star's womb was a special place that often made an appearance in fairy tales. Souls that had fulfilled their roles would go there to be rebirthed. I'd always thought that it was just a tall tale, but since Selena had mentioned it, there was a good chance that this place actually existed.

"I've tried to find someone like me in the past, but I wasn't able to," Selena admitted.

"I see..." I replied.

It seemed like she had led a difficult life of her own. There was still so much that I didn't know, but there was no need for me to rush things. I had my reliable friends by my side, after all.

***

One morning, my homeroom teacher and fellow apprentice, Macbell, had a few announcements.

"It's been almost two months since you all entered this academy," Macbell said. "It's about time you seriously think about our periodic screening."

Three times a year, Class A students would undergo a screening where they had to produce some kind of result to

maintain their rank. Failure to do so would cause a demotion to Class B in the next school term. I was just thinking about finding a research topic, and it seemed everyone else was as well.

"The course system will start soon too," Macbell added. "You all should think of where you'd like to enter."

The moment he left the room, we all got up and started chattering away. Jack rushed to my side.

"H-Hey, what was that whole course system thing again?" he asked.

"Huh?" I replied. "They've already explained it plenty of times before. Weren't you listening?"

He scratched his head. "Well, homeroom's boring, you know? I might've fallen asleep a few times... Oh, but I'm different now. I've decided that, for my brother and sister, I'll take this more seriously. I even woke up early today to practice my magic."

He proudly puffed out his chest. It was true; Jack had become more serious about his studies since that day. Whenever he had questions about his lessons, he'd ask me or Volga for help, and he had even spent some time training his endurance with Cryssie. Jack had always been a skilled and resourceful guy—if he worked hard, I was certain that good results would follow.

"You know that for every school term, Class A students have to produce some kind of result, don't you?" I asked him.

"Yeah," he replied. "I have to show research results or leave a good record at some kind of competition or something, right? If I can't, I'll drop to Class B. It's terrifying."

"Right, but we can collaborate to achieve those results. In other words, we can work with other people to produce something. And this course system helps us out with that."

"Huh, I see. Makes sense, though—two heads seem better than one when it comes to creating something."

I felt this was especially true for first-years; everything was new to us and we didn't know how to get started. It was reassuring to have friends on our side.

"This course system is, of course, different from the class ranks that we're divided in," I explained. "The system is more akin to a study club. Students in Class B and above can choose their own 'course group' and study with like-minded students after school, or work together to conduct research."

"Huh. I generally only talk with people in this class, so it might be a good opportunity to speak with people from other classes,"

Jack said.

I agree. Being able to speak with upperclassmen seemed especially useful. There weren't many opportunities to get to know them.

"There are six courses in total," I continued. "It's up to you whether you want to join any of them or not, but it's recommended to do so. You can benefit quite a bit from the learning experience, and you can get advice from your seniors."

I showed Jack the paper which listed each of the courses—we'd received this leaflet in the past.

```
-Alchemy Course: Little Alchemist
-Pharmacology Course: Yggdrasil
-Sorcery Course: True Wizards
-Warrior Course: Page of the Round Table
-Invention Course: Chemical Egg
-Astrology Course: Stargazer
```

According to the teachers, it was possible to join multiple courses, but most students only chose one.

Cryssie approached us as I handed Jack the leaflet.

"Oh? Are you guys talking about the courses?" she asked.

Volga was behind her. *Speaking of, I wonder which course they'll join.*

"Which one will you join, Cryssie?" I asked. "Will it be the warrior course?"

"Well, research really isn't my forte," she replied. "I just want to get results quickly, I guess."

As the name suggested, the warrior course trained students to become full-fledged knights. While other courses focused on studying or magic, this one was purely physical. It was most suited for Cryssie, who was aiming to become a knight. For the periodic screenings, she would only need to place high in a martial arts competition or defeat monsters as requested. In this course, she would certainly be able to exchange more useful information with her peers.

"Are you planning on joining the warrior course too, Volga?" I asked.

"It's my first choice, but I plan to look around some more," he replied.

"Huh, I see..."

With six in total and the option to have a trial period, it didn't

hurt to check them out before coming to a decision.

"And what about you, Jack?" I asked.

"Hmmm… Well, I don't really have a particular one in mind," he answered, looking slightly troubled.

Yeah, I can't think of Jack's favorite subject either. Let's see…

"Rumors and eating seem to be your favorite things to do," I said. "I can't think of anything else."

"You're not wrong, but boy, do you have an awful impression of me. Maybe I'll join the pharmacology course."

"That's a good plan. You're a magician with the wood element, so you're probably compatible with medicinal herbs and the like."

"Exactly."

He was able to wield the wood, earth, and water elements. We'd recently learned that his potential for earth and water magic had been bestowed upon him by his siblings. In other words, he was actually a wood magician by nature, excelling in that element more than those other two.

"And what about you, Callus?" Jack asked.

"Hmmm… Let's see." I thought back to the courses that the teacher had told us about. "I do want to take a peek at the alchemy course, and both pharmacology and sorcery sound interesting. But I'd like to visit the astrology course too, and the invention course sounds like fun."

"So basically all of them," Jack said wearily.

"All of them except for the warrior course…" Cryssie said, looking a little down.

I felt a little guilty, but it certainly wasn't my priority. I wanted knowledge more than physical strength, though I wasn't sure what information would point me in the direction of undoing my curse.

***

Once the course system began, our two afternoon classes decreased to one, and the remaining time was allotted to our new courses. This system wasn't mandatory, and students who didn't join any were free to leave. However, this meant that these students had to pass the periodic screenings alone. Just because they had more free time didn't mean they could afford to waste any of it. As a side note, if students in Class B brought excellent results during the periodic screenings twice in a row, they would

get promoted to Class A. I was unsure of what results would be regarded as “excellent,” but it seemed like a tall order.

“All right, let’s start with the alchemy course,” I said.

I had decided to visit each one, starting with alchemy.

“Welcome! You must be Callus!” a student said with great enthusiasm. “Come on in; have a look around! Take your time!”

Every course wanted excellent students, and most would fight over potential recruits from Class A. Since I’d caused a fuss recently, my name had become needlessly widespread. These courses would definitely be after such a well-known student.

“I’m a third-year, Jayce Kermist, and I serve as the head of the alchemy course. Feel free to ask any questions!”

“Thank you,” I replied. “Okay, this might seem like a rudimentary question, but what exactly is the purpose of alchemy?”

I knew alchemy had something to do with metals and magic, but that was about it. I probably should’ve done some studying beforehand, but the course head didn’t look bothered in the least as he answered.

“There are a lot of minerals with special properties. Examples include orichalcum, tamahagane, hihi’irokane, and apoitakara. The goal of alchemists is to make these minerals with our own hands. And that’s what this course tries to do as well.”

“I see,” I replied. “That sounds really interesting.”

“It does, doesn’t it?”

Jayce smiled brightly. *This person must really like alchemy.*

“Some people try to make unknown metals, while others want to create the strongest sword,” the course head continued. “In short, if you want to do something with magic and metals, this is the place. Experimenting with alchemy is fun—you should try it out.”

“Okay,” I said. “May I have a peek, then?”

The day ended with Jayce showing me what others were experimenting on. They were all very interesting and I enjoyed my time spent there.

***

The next day, I dropped by the pharmacology course with Jack. Students were experimenting with various medicines, and the room was filled with the scent of herbs.

“Th-The smell is pretty overbearing,” I said. “I’m getting a little dizzy.”

“Really?” Jack asked. “I’m used to it already.”

It seemed Jack’s agricultural background had helped him acclimate to the smell. He was already making friends with the upperclassmen, so it seemed like a good fit for him.

“Are you planning on staying here?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t really have any other place in mind, so I might,” Jack answered. “What about you? You went to the alchemy course yesterday, didn’t you?”

“I’m still looking around. Alchemy looked interesting, but I’d like to explore my other options first.”

“I see. It’s not like you’ve got a deadline for this, so why don’t you take your time?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll do that.”

While pharmacology seemed interesting, I decided to forgo joining it for now. I couldn’t find any clue that pointed me in the direction of my curse yet.

The day after that, I entered the room for the sorcery course. True to its name, it was a place to hone one’s magical abilities. It could be useful for students who wanted to purely improve their magic capabilities, unravel mysteries related to magic, or conduct magical research. Though this course had piqued my interest, quite honestly, I felt like I could learn everything here from my master. Since I was enrolled in the Academy of Magic, I was eager to learn something that I knew nothing about.

The following day, I visited a room located in the highest area of the academy building.

“Uhhh… I think I’m in the right place.”

It was for the astrology course, where people studied the stars. I entered the classroom and told a student my reason for being here. A woman dressed in a black robe came out from the back. I felt like she was gazing at me intently through her glossy, black locks.

“Nice to meet you, Callus. My name is Il Denevia. I’m the head of the astrology course. I hope we get along.”

“Pleased to meet you. I hope so as well,” I replied.

Denevia gave off a mysterious air. In fact, the entire room had a mystical aura surrounding it.

“It seems like you’ve sensed the magical energy that fills this area,” she said.

“Huh? Y-Yeah,” I replied with a jolt, surprised that she had seemingly read my mind. “It does feel a bit odd here.”

“How familiar are you with stargazing?” she asked with a piercing gaze.

“Um… I only know that you observe stars and make predictions.”

“I see. I understand.”

She proceeded to bring out a large piece of paper and unfurl it on top of a desk. The glimmering night stars were detailed very precisely on the parchment. I could tell by the illustrations that they held a great deal of respect for stars.

“Your understanding isn’t incorrect,” Denevia said. “Those who make a living out of stargazing are called astrologists. They observe the stars to predict future events. They foresee natural disasters, famines, and wars, and work to protect people from them.”

“That’s amazing,” I said. “I didn’t think such a thing was possible.”

I was surprised to learn that the stars told so much, and Denevia’s explanation grabbed my interest.

“Constellations are born when stars connect with each other,” she continued. “This can be seen as the largest magic circle in existence. Such an immense power has a great effect upon this world. By deciphering constellations, one can see into the future.”

“Constellations are magic circles?” I asked. “That’s on quite the grand scale.”

Whether it be day or night, stars were always in the skies. It was impossible to flee from them. My interest only grew.

“Denevia, are you aiming to become an astrologist?” I asked.

“I am. I was born with excellent eyesight, and I’m able to perceive the stars quite well. I’d love to use this power to help people.”

I thought she looked really cool, talking about her dreams with such a serious expression. *Dreams, huh? What would I have wanted to be if I hadn’t been cursed? Once I rid myself of it, I’d like to seriously think about my future.*

“Then…can you see the future?” I asked.

“That would’ve been ideal,” she replied, looking a little troubled.

Uh, did I touch upon a sensitive topic?

“Did I say something rude? If so, I’m very sorry.”

“Oh, nothing like that at all,” she said, shaking her head. “I probably shouldn’t be telling you this since you haven’t joined yet, but the stars are currently moving very erratically. Hence, it’s been quite difficult to get an accurate reading. It’s not just us; even well-known astrologists are confused by this. Had we been in a better state, we might have been able to predict that giant hole.”

The academy was in an uproar when that hole appeared. Indeed, had it been seen ahead of time, the confusion might’ve been kept to a minimum. *What’s in the depths of that hole anyway? It’d be great if I could enter it.*

“I never knew that the stars could move erratically,” I said. “Do you know the cause of it?”

“Sort of. This is just my guess, though.” Denevia’s slender finger glided across the paper filled with star illustrations before stopping in a certain location. I gulped in surprise. “Right here. This is the dark area of the sky known as the star absence. The stars originating from this point are currently moving erratically.”

The star absence was an area of the skies that was dark, as though part of it was missing. No one knew exactly what it was, but I had learned about it when I met Luna, the moon magician. But if I told Denevia about that, she might get involved in something dangerous.

“Long ago, when this land still had gods, it’s said that the star absence didn’t exist,” Denevia explained. “During that era, astrologists apparently wielded greater power. However, the War of the Six Gods caused the gods to disappear. This created a hole in the skies, and astrologists could no longer predict the future as accurately. While a handful of astrologists are still treasured today, there has been a considerable decrease in the number of people trying to read the stars. It’s quite tragic.”

“I see…”

According to her, astrology was seen as an old practice in society. As proof, there were only a few students here. And in time, the number of students interested in the field would only diminish further.

“My wish is for the hole in the sky to be filled once more so that a full set of glittering stars shines down upon us,” Denevia said. “But of course, I have not the power to make that reality.”

“I think that’s a lovely wish,” I said. “I hope it comes true.”

She once again stared at me sternly. *What's wrong?*

"You're a good person," she said meaningfully. "Perhaps I can tell you."

"Huh?"

She took out a small silver coin from her pocket. She placed it on her palm and handed it to me. When I looked more closely at it, I was astonished. On its surface was an engraving of a moon, closely resembling the emblem on the moon amulet which I'd received from Luna.

"This…"

"This is the symbol of Blaues Licht," Denevia said. "I'm not sure what that shape represents, but the people of that religion apparently worshipped it."

I can't believe it. The religion of the moon had changed, but it was still alive. *Luna would be ecstatic if she heard about this!*

"According to one of their teachings, 'If one offers their prayers to the skies, the skies will one day return to their original form.' There's no basis to this belief, but it's our only ray of hope, our last sliver of salvation," Denevia said, handing me the coin.

Is she really giving this to me?

"You may have this coin," she said.

"Huh?" I asked. "But isn't it important?"

"I have my own, so there's no need for you to be concerned. I give these out to those who might join me."

So this item is to propagate the religion. I guess I can accept it, then.

"If my story piques your curiosity, please visit the store that bears this symbol," she said. "We're always welcoming new friends."

"I understand. I'll think about it," I said before leaving.

"Seems like we got invited," I quietly said after confirming that I was alone.

I wasn't speaking to myself, but to my partner who was always by my side.

"What will you do?" Selena asked. "Are you going to visit that store?"

"Hmmm… I'll think about it once I tell Luna," I said. "The Blaues Licht is a religion that's been approved by the kingdom, so I don't think it's dangerous. Still, it's best to exercise caution."

"You're right. The moon is pretty intriguing, but it's not a

priority, and there's no need for you to be so hasty."

Once I came to my decision, I asked my partner, "Was there no moon in the sky when you were born?"

"Er... No, I don't think there was. I think. By the time I was born, the gods had already vanished."

"I see. Thank you for telling me."

Selena didn't like to talk about herself much, so I was happy to learn even a little bit. I hoped that she'd one day tell me more about her past.

***

After school, I headed to the clock tower to visit Luna. I told the moon magician everything that I'd talked about with Denevia in the astrology room. Luna listened to my story and closed her eyes for a while before she finally spoke.

"I see," she said. "So the will of the moon remains."

Her eyes softened. I'd never seen her with such a kind expression before. To her, the moon was the only thing she could turn to. It must've been reassuring to know some people still believed in it. I was glad I could tell her.

"I apologize for being greedy...but may I have this coin?" she asked, rolling it between her fingers. "It's a fragment of faith that lives on to this day. I find it difficult to part with."

It seems she likes it a lot.

"I don't mind," I replied. "But without it, I might not be able to hear more by visiting the store with the Blaues Licht symbol."

"That shouldn't be an issue," Luna answered. "The moon amulet I gave you has the same symbol. They should accept you with that. If they don't, just say the word, and I'll return this coin to you."

"Okay. Then I'll visit you again when the time comes."

Luna carefully tucked away the coin within her sleeve.

"By the way, Callus," Luna said. "What's going on aboveground? It seems like things have gotten rather noisy."

"Ah, well, you see..."

I told her about the huge hole that had appeared aboveground. *It's amazing that she could sense that when she's deep underground. She's not your average magician.*

"I see," she mumbled. "A huge hole."

"Does any of that ring a bell?"

Since she'd been here from ancient times, it was possible she knew something about it. But she shook her head.

"Sorry to say, but I know nothing about a hole," she answered. "Even if there was a ruin, it was likely created after I was sealed up here."

"I see..."

I slumped my shoulders in response to having my theory proved incorrect. *I guess I've got no choice but to head inside and see for myself. I wish I could enter it soon.*

"But above all, Callus, be careful," Luna said. "I can sense an evil energy waking and growing more powerful. I doubt it's unrelated to the hole."

"Evil energy?" I asked.

"Yes. It feels like dark energy, just like your curse."

I glanced down at my chest. The curse was currently docile, but it was powerful and remained in me still. Without the help of light magic, it could run berserk at any moment and eat away at my body.

"What should I do?" I asked.

"Nothing different. You just need to keep studying like always. Come now, why don't we conduct our training today as well?"

I nodded. I had recently been using this area to practice my curse techniques, where I weaponized the curse in my body. While there were risks that came with manipulating the curse, the power it afforded was well worth it. Since this was a unique ability, it would be very dangerous if I accidentally hit other people. And so, this was the only place I could do my training. I was lucky to have my teacher here as well.

"Ah, we'll be using a different method from usual today," Luna said.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

Blue light enveloped her body. I watched the light split from Luna's body and gather in front of me. It gradually changed into the shape of a human.

"Whew, this should do it," the humanoid light in front of me said as it opened its eyes.

"Whoa!" I yelped in surprise.

This figure of light looked like Luna, but she was clearly much younger. She was around 120 centimeters tall, and looked to be around six years old.



Luna's physical body, which the light had separated from, sat silently with eyes closed. *What's going on?*

"Uh... What is this?" I asked.

"It's very simple," the girl in front of me said with Luna's voice. "I tossed aside my physical body and took on a form similar to a spirit's, freeing me from my shackles."

So this girl in front of me must be Luna.

"Become a spirit?" I wondered. "Is such a thing possible?"

"Not everyone can do it. The soul and magical energy must become one to leave the vessel of the physical body. Only highly skilled magicians or organisms of greater rank—dragons, for example—can do this."

"I see..." I was blown away by the scale of this ability.

Since dead animals could become spirits, this might not have been an impossible feat.

"Thanks to the large tremor, my seals have weakened ever so slightly," Luna elucidated. "And I can now move around like this. It's much easier for me to teach you while moving than sitting still. It *is* infuriating, however, that I must take on this young form because of my seals."

She frowned, clearly expressing how humiliated she felt to look so young. *Maybe she's wearing a large, pointy hat to make herself look taller.*

"Anyways, shall we begin?" she asked.

"Yes, please!"

My curse technique training had begun. This was quite a difficult ability to master—I was stimulating the curse within me so I could use it. Naturally, this meant that sharp pain would course through my body every time I did so. And every time, I hastily used my light magic to heal my body. If Shizuku knew about this dangerous training, I was sure she'd scold me to no end.

"Huff... Huff..." I panted. It had only been thirty minutes, but my entire body was drenched in sweat. My shoulders heaved as I tried to catch my breath. This training had taken a lot more out of me than I'd expected.

"Why don't we stop here for today?" Luna suggested. "It'll be dangerous if we proceed any further."

"No," I gasped. "I can...still go on."

"I see you still have some magical energy and stamina left, but it's not safe to stimulate your curse any more. You

understand, don't you?"

"...Right. Okay."

I obediently followed her words and sat down on the ground with a thud. I grabbed my water bottle and downed the contents in one go. *Ah, this really hits the spot.* I'd tried to act tough, but my body was reaching its limit.

"You're able to use that ability quite well," Luna observed. "I think you could use it in real combat."

"Thank you," I replied. "But I hope I never have to actually use this."

Curse techniques were powerful, but they came at a great risk. If possible, I didn't want to ever use them against someone. Still, I never knew the future, and it was best to become strong while I could. I would never turn down a chance to improve myself if it meant that I could protect the people who were precious to me.

"It's probably best to not use curse techniques any further, but I can help you with anything else," Luna offered. "Since we've got some time, why don't I take a look at your light magic?"

"Huh? Really?" I asked.

She nodded. "The moon and light are quite similar to each other. There must be something that even I can teach you."

I was still uncertain of Luna's identity, but one thing was for sure: her knowledge and skill when it came to magic were far above mine. I felt extremely lucky to receive her guidance.

"Actually, there's a high-rank spell I learned from my master a while back. I'm still unable to use it well," I confessed.

"Is that so? Can you try it out in front of me? I'll take a look."

And so we continued our training, using our time together to its fullest. Luna was very good at teaching me; her explanations were easy to understand and effective. I decided to visit her whenever I had the free time.

***

The next day, I was talking with my friends about the courses.

"So, have you made your decision?" Cryssie asked me.

"Er, to tell you the truth, not yet," I admitted. "They're just all so interesting."

It would've been an easy choice if there were a course for researching curses, but such a thing obviously didn't exist in this

academy. There likely weren't many people studying up on curses even within this entire continent.

"I think I won't join any course for now," I said. "I can choose my own topics more freely that way."

"I see," Cryssie replied. "Then maybe I'll do the same. It seems a lot more fun to be with you."

"But what about the warrior course?"

"If all I need to do is enter a contest, there's no need for me to stick to a course. If the only merit in joining one is to train against other students, it doesn't seem necessary. None of them were that strong anyway."

It sounded like Cryssie had easily bested the upperclassmen. The warrior course seemed ecstatic to have such a strong person join their group, but unfortunately, the lack of challenging opponents had bored her. I felt bad for those people, but I was happy to receive her aid. It reassured me quite a bit.

"Hey, Callus," Jack said. "If you decide on a research topic, let me know. There might be something I could help you out with."

"I thought you were joining the pharmacology course," I said.

"Well, it's not against academy rules to join multiple courses, and I doubt it'd be a problem for students of different courses to help each other. I'm planning on staying with pharmacology, but if you need anything, just call me. I'll do anything within my power. I'm sure I can do that much."

In general, students only chose one course. Choosing multiple would inevitably result in the student neglecting one, and there was a good chance that their relationships with others in the same course would deteriorate. But it technically wasn't against academy rules. Simply helping out a classmate was likely not too much of an issue either.

"You don't have to go out of your way to help me," I told him. "First and foremost, we all need to pass the screening. That's what matters most."

"You say that, but I want you to pass too," Jack replied. "I've got no clue what your topic is, though."

"Hm, yeah. I'm thinking about that too."

Research on curses was a personal endeavor; I had no intention of submitting that to the academy screening. In the end, I hadn't progressed a single bit when it came to my screening. *What should I do?*

“Did you go to visit all the courses you were interested in?” Volga asked.

“The only one I haven’t seen yet is the invention course,” I answered. “I was a bit on the fence when it came to that one, but maybe I should drop by.”

When it came to magical tools, I felt like it was quickest to ask the Clock Tower Hermit, Saria. She was regarded as a genius within the Academy of Magic, and must’ve been miles ahead of anyone within that course. *But it might be a waste to not give it a chance. All right, I guess I’ll head to the invention course. I hope I can see something wonderful!*

***

The invention course was located in the annex, away from the main school building. Apparently, explosions were a daily occurrence, and it had been moved to mitigate the loud noise and trouble it could cause.

“Welcome. I’m Limane, head of the invention course. Feel free to ask me any questions.”

Limane wore round glasses and a white lab coat, making him seem like a researcher. Everyone else was wearing a coat as well. *Maybe it’s like the uniform for this course.*

“As the name suggests, we’re a gathering of people who like to invent things,” Limane said. “While there are people who like to create machines that aren’t related to magic, many of us are interested in magical tools. Invention and necessity are closely linked.”

The course head proceeded to guide me through the room and show me the equipment of their “facility.” It seemed better furnished when compared to the other courses. Magical tools were vital for contemporary society; perhaps they had a higher budget because their inventions were so highly valued.

“When you hear the term ‘magical tool,’ you might imagine a weapon to use against others, but a majority of them are there to improve your quality of life,” Limane chattered on. “For example, the magical stone lamp is regarded as a household item, and magical tools are very successful at assisting one’s life. We aim to create new tools, or improve on those that already exist, in order to benefit society. We work tirelessly to achieve this goal.”

“Wow, that’s amazing,” I said, a little overwhelmed by all the information.

“And… Ah, I’ve gone on a little tangent,” he said as he gazed at a large machine in front of us. “Lastly, why don’t I show you this?”

The machine was about twice my height. I’d never seen it before, but it was clearly an expensive device.

“This is the crown jewel of our course,” he explained. “A high-speed magical-energy-calculating device, also dubbed ‘Mother.’”

“Mother…”

Judging from its size, it indeed looked like a mother to something. Three students touched the device, activating the machine. Unfortunately, an amateur like me had no idea what any of it actually meant.

“What are they doing?” I asked.

“When developing magical tools, the most time-consuming and painstaking processes are constructing a magical energy circuit and calculating a magical formula expressed in an equation,” Limane explained. “Mother assists with creating a circuit and performing calculations. Thanks to this machine, the time required to create complex magical tools has drastically decreased.”

I wasn’t completely sure why that was so amazing, but judging from the energetic explanation that I’d just received, there was no doubt that this machine was splendid. I was interested in magical tools, and I liked to observe and use them…but did I really want to *create* them? While I was forming my own conclusions, a familiar figure caught my eye.

“Huh? Gordon?” I said.

“You’re…from that hole incident,” Gordon said.

This second-year was the upperclassman who had been analyzing the pillars near the large hole. I remember being blown away by his keen analysis.

“I didn’t know you belonged to the invention course,” I said.

“Ah, well, yeah. I am for now,” Gordon replied.

“For now?”

He shifted awkwardly before he continued. “Well, I’m not some gifted student who excels in this academy. You shouldn’t get all friendly with me…that is, if you want to belong here.”

I tried to ask what he meant by that, but I noticed a change in the room and decided to keep my mouth shut. I felt cold gazes from all around pointed towards me. *I really hate this. There’s a*

strong sense of hostility in the air.

"What's going on?" I muttered.

"I told you when I first met you, didn't I?" Gordon said. "I'm a pebble, a sore sight to everyone. If you don't want to be like me, it's best if you don't associate with me any further."

"B-But…"

I was stunned by the words I'd just heard. If Gordon was speaking the truth, it meant that he was being treated unfairly by others in this course. I couldn't let that slide.

"What is this about?" I asked, turning to Limane.

The course head shrugged with indifference. "Nothing much. Research will always have certain priorities. It's only natural that the most resources go towards inventions that will actually be useful. Conversely, it's only natural that useless research would be put on the back burner."

Limane spoke while looking at Gordon with disdain. *I get how this course operates now.* A caste system had formed based on what they were researching. Those whose research was deemed more useful were treated well, while everyone else was pushed aside. It was understandable that profitable research was prioritized in terms of resources. However, it didn't seem right that those who wanted to pursue research that they were interested in were treated unfairly to the point where they felt ashamed of their own areas of study.

"That's weird!" I insisted. "This is wrong!"

"It's fine, Callus," Gordon said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "I'm happy that you'd defend me, but this is a problem within our course. You shouldn't stick your nose into it."

"But Gordon…"

He sounded kind, but he looked sad. It was obvious that he was forcing himself to stay positive about this.

"But that doesn't make it right!" I protested. "Why don't you leave this place—"

He shook his head. "Sorry, but I can't do that. This is the only place I've got. I'm not talented in magic, and I don't have some absurd intellect. Invention is all I've got. And I love inventing, you know? As long as I can continue doing this, I don't care what people think of me."

But his eyes told a different story. He must really hate being treated like a nuisance.

"It's getting late," Gordon said. "Why don't you leave for

today?”

“A-All right,” I relented.

“What else could I have done?” I asked myself after leaving.

Should I have marched back in and shouted, “You guys are wrong!” or something? Doing so wouldn’t have changed anyone’s mind. No matter what I did, I was an outsider; it didn’t matter what I said to Limane. My words would have no effect.

I reluctantly walked home, trying to come up with different plans to help Gordon. Suddenly, someone called out to me.

“Sir Callus!”

“Huh?” I turned around, and saw Shizuku standing in front of the academy gates.



Her maid uniform made her stand out among the crowd, but her beautiful appearance only caused more of a stir. And of course, since she was calling out to me, the students' gazes were fixed on me as well. *This is embarrassing.*

"What's wrong, Shizuku?" I asked.

"I happened to pass by, and I noticed that it was about time your classes ended, so I decided to wait for you," she replied. "Have I caused you any trouble?"

"Not at all," I said. "Let's go home together."

And with that, Shizuku and I walked ahead. I'd never walked home with her from the academy before, so it was a refreshing experience.

"So, that's what we learned at school today," I prattled, telling her about my day. "And my friend, Jack, wasn't listening at all."

"Is that so?"

Shizuku listened to my story cheerfully, but she had a look of worry. "Sir Callus, is something the matter?" she asked.

"Huh?" I was taken off guard by the sudden question. "What do you mean?"

"The entire time you've been talking, it's as though you're not all here. And every now and then, you look a little sad. It seems like you're feeling guilty about something."

I was shocked by her observation. I was definitely still bothered about Gordon, but I had been trying my best to act natural and hide it. My poor acting was useless in front of my maid.

"I thought I hid it well," I admitted. "You're really sharp, Shizuku."

"I can tell because it's you, Sir Callus," she replied with a gentle smile. "I've always been watching you."

I don't stand a chance against her.

"I don't know if there's anything I can do about it, but if you don't mind, will you please tell me what's been bothering you?" she asked. "I'd like to be of assistance to you, even just a little."

"Shizuku..."

I was moved by her kindness. Thinking that it was rude to hide my feelings from her anymore, I told her what had happened in the invention course. It wasn't a fun topic to talk about, but she listened intently.

"I see," she said, placing a hand on her chin. "Is that what happened?"

“What can I do? I’ve tried to think of a few ideas, but I don’t think I can help out Gordon much.”

“Sir Callus, I think there’s only so much you can do alone. People need others to help each other out.” She stopped in her tracks and looked straight at me. “If you cannot resolve this issue by yourself, all you need to do is borrow the strength of others who can.”

“That might be true. But I don’t want to cause trouble for anyone.”

“When *your* friend relies on *you*, do you find that to be troublesome?”

“No, of course not.”

Shizuku nodded. “Your friends will certainly have the same feelings. I’m sure they’d be more hurt if you tried to solve everything by yourself.”

Her words struck a chord with me. *True, all my friends are kind and love taking care of others. So much so that if I tried to keep all my worries to myself, they’d get angry. They’re all good people.*

“I believe you should look at this from a different angle,” Shizuku said. “Don’t you have anyone in mind? Perhaps a friend who could solve this issue for you?”

“A person who could resolve the issue in the invention course…”

The first person who popped up in my head was Macbell. *But if I remember correctly, he wasn’t too involved with the invention course. A scolding from him might get some apologies, but it wouldn’t solve the crux of the matter.* I needed someone who was more understanding of that course and could move the hearts of others. Suddenly, another person flashed across my mind. *They might be able to solve the issue of that stifling course!*

“It looks like you’ve thought of something,” Shizuku said.

“I have. Thank you! Because of you, I think I know what to do next.”

As I gave her another word of gratitude, I walked forward. *I’ll start tomorrow. I’ve gotta meet them.*

***

The next day, around noon, I skipped lunch and walked to the clock tower. I opened the door and walked up the stairs.

“Saria!” I said. “Wake up!”

“Huh?! Whoa! What?!”

The Clock Tower Hermit wearily opened her eyes. Her body, which had become younger due to a special concoction, caused her to grow tired more quickly, to the point where she often took naps. She might’ve looked unreliable at a glance, but she was the most intelligent person in the academy. She really was my reliable upperclassman.

“I’m sorry for waking you,” I said. “There’s something I wanted to ask you about.”

“Good grief. You sure are a rowdy one, Junior. But no matter. Your *benevolent* upperclassman here will hear you out.”

Making a show of her own kindness, Saria sat onto a chair and heard my story. She occasionally furrowed her brow in discontent.

“I see,” she muttered with a sigh. “I think I get what’s going on. As always, *that* place is still fighting over silly matters.”

It sounded like she was familiar with it.

“I knew it,” I said. “You used to be in the invention course.”

“Yeah, but that was so long ago. I abandoned that room as soon as I could.”

If that place had always carried such a suffocating aura, I could easily imagine that Saria had a bad impression of them. I had no idea what she’d experienced, or why she had left to instead hole up in the clock tower. *Maybe I’m asking too much from her.*

“Um,” I started. “I know I was the one who brought this to you, but I don’t mind if you decline. You don’t want to get too involved with them, do you?”

“Indeed, I don’t have good memories of that place. Just remembering them makes me shudder. But that’s all the more reason for me to face them.”

Saria looked at me with a serious expression. Her eyes were filled with determination.

“And my pride won’t let me run away like a coward in front of my junior. I at least need to show you my reliable side for once,” she said. She stood up and started fiddling with potions that were rolled across her desk. “Not this one… No, not this… This one will explode…”

“Don’t leave something so dangerous lying around,” I muttered. Her desk definitely needed to be reorganized later.

“Found it!”

With a loud pop, she undid the cork, put her hand on her hip, and downed the liquid in one go. *The color of that potion looks a little shady. Will she be okay?*

“Gulp… Gulp… Whew! This tastes awful!” Saria said with a sigh. “I should probably improve the taste a bit more.”

“I knew it looked bad. What does it do?”

“Heh heh heh. Just look and see. Oh, it’s starting to have an effect already.”

With a large crackling noise, Saria’s body slowly started to change. I could only look on in astonishment as she suddenly grew larger and taller. Before long, the selfish little girl was nowhere to be seen, and an adult woman wearing a lab coat that suited her very well had taken her place.

“Phew,” she said. “It’s been a while since I’ve reverted to my original form.”

The way Saria talked was the same, but it made a very different impression with her current appearance. Her previously oversized lab coat was now a perfect fit for her.

“Now then, let’s go, Junior,” she said.

The nineteen-year-old Saria, who’d just aged ten years in the span of a few minutes, picked up a pair of glasses from her desk and flashed a smile.

***

Saria Lulumitt was regarded as a genius within the Academy of Magic. Since her youth, she had developed a talent for fiddling with magical tools, so when she entered the academy, it was only natural for her to join the invention course.

Students aiming to become fully fledged inventors were working day and night, conducting a variety of research. Saria was eager to join as soon as she had learned of them. What kind of inventions would she see? Could she become friends with fellow inventors? She’d had such high hopes for the invention course.

However, those hopes were soon dashed by reality. By the time she joined the invention course, it was already rotten to the core. Only profitable research was prioritized, and everything else was treated with contempt. Before then, Saria had rarely interacted with others, quietly working on her research by herself. This sight was so horrifying and ugly to her that it

caused her no small amount of grief.

“Why must these people be treated this way?!” Saria had said when she first entered and saw such unfairness festering within.

The attitude of single-mindedly pursuing profit while looking coldly on inventions deemed useless was already entrenched there. Saria, who loved inventing more than anyone, felt that this was wrong. But the course, which had already adopted this idea and was unwilling to budge, wouldn’t change just because of one girl’s objection.

“I didn’t think you were this bad at understanding matters,” a student had told Saria, refusing to listen to her words.

Even so, she continued to frequently visit, in hopes of changing this mindset. She put her thoughts into action. “Nobody is better or worse than anyone else just because of what they want to pursue. All inquisitive minds should be respected equally,” Saria had declared, hoping that someone would listen. However, the cold gazes, derisive laughter, and heartless rumors that spread about her behind her back only reinforced the idea that she was alone, isolated, and ostracized by her peers. Saria’s heart, so completely rejected, shattered into pieces.

It wasn’t long before she stopped visiting altogether. It had been too painful for her to ask for her name to be removed from the course’s registry. So instead, she left without a word and fled to the clock tower, where she holed herself up to conduct her research alone.

She invented a medicine that de-aged her. She didn’t want to turn into a distorted, ugly adult like the invention students. Perhaps her pursuit of this de-aging process had been fueled by that very resentment. By the time she’d earned the nickname “Clock Tower Hermit,” her mind had found peace, but she no longer felt compelled to visit that course room.

Or so she’d thought.

But then she’d met someone who made her think that she should become a little more flexible. And so she decided to head there once more, to an old place she thought she’d never return.

***

“It’s been quite a while since I was last here,” Saria remarked as she peered pensively at the entrance to the invention course

room.

“Excuse me,” she said, stepping in.

“Pardon me,” I also said, entering with her.

Everyone stopped what they were doing and stared at Saria.

“Uh, who might you be?” a student asked. “Could you be looking for a tour?”

Saria rarely left the clock tower, and it was likely even more unusual for her to appear in her adult form. It only made sense that everyone would be perplexed by this unfamiliar face.

“I’m Saria Lulumitt. I came for a little tour. I should still be associated with this course, so it shouldn’t be a problem, should it?”

“Huh?! Uh, please wait a moment!” the surprised student said, hastily retreating to the depths of the room.

Another person swiftly approached us instead: the course head, Limane Bascadio.

“My, my, Miss Saria,” the head said. “Thank you for coming all this way. I didn’t think you’d ever show up here again. I’m sure our already-graduated upperclassmen would be ecstatic.”

“I wonder,” Saria replied, seemingly mocking herself. “I think they resented me quite a bit.”

I wasn’t sure of the details, but it was clear that she’d been involved in a feud with the invention course. She’d found many things about the place troublesome, and I had a feeling she really didn’t want to be here. But for my sake, she was facing this room once more. *I can’t thank her enough, really.*

“I’m here to take a look at your research,” Saria said. “I hope that isn’t a problem.”

“Of course not,” Limane replied. “I’d be more than happy to hear your thoughts.”

We were then led to a certain object.

“We’re currently working on…this tool!” Limane said, showing us an illustration on the blackboard.

It looked to be a long, cylindrical vehicle. Complex equations were scribbled on the side. *But nothing is pulling this machine. How would it move?* Saria gazed at the illustrations and formulas with interest while muttering to herself.

“I see,” she finally said. “This must be a large locomotive that uses magical energy as its fuel source.”

“Precisely,” Limane said. “We call it the magic train. You should know just how beneficial it will be when it’s completed.”

Shoot, I can't keep up with Saria and Limane's conversation at all!

Saria noticed that I was having trouble, and began to explain. "Horse and dragon carriages are the norm for travel, but a small portion of the city is currently utilizing small vehicles that only need magical energy for locomotion. These are called sorcery cars."

"I never knew such a thing existed," I said in awe.

"Well, it's only been around for a few years. I wouldn't be surprised if it flew under your radar."

The advancements of magical technology were outstanding. Saria had said that it wasn't rare for matters that were thought to be impossible to become possible within the span of a few days. *That's so cool!*

"The magic train they're trying to create is built upon the same principles as those sorcery cars," she continued. "It could seat hundreds of people and move at high speeds. Once a track of some sort is built, you might be able to visit the City of Magic within a day."

"A-A day?!" I stammered. "It takes four days by carriage!"

And the train could carry hundreds of passengers. This invention truly could change the world.

"But we're still in the testing phase," Limane admitted. "We haven't been able to build a prototype just yet."

"Still, this isn't an impossible feat," Saria said. "And you're planning on absorbing magical energy from the dragon below. It's a good idea since you wouldn't need to store magical energy somewhere. Very logical."

"I'm honored to receive your praise."

"But you know, this isn't suited for paved roads. If you want to carry hundreds of passengers in one go, you should create a thin path made from iron, and round tires that would fit on those tracks."

"I see... Indeed, I'd also thought that the wheels had room for improvement. Your method may be able to resolve this issue. I thank you for your valuable opinion."

And once again, Limane and Saria's conversation had left me behind. After a brief exchange, the Clock Tower Hermit shifted her gaze towards a certain student.

"Now then," she said, looking at Gordon. "Can you show me your research?"

"Huh?" Gordon asked hastily, not expecting to be called out.

Suddenly, everyone, including Limane, started chuckling. *I really hate this atmosphere.*

"But..." Gordon mumbled.

"That item in your hand is your invention, is it not?" Saria asked. "I'm interested. Do show me."

He reluctantly handed her the item. It looked to be a small pair of fashionable glasses with a silver rim. A small mechanism was installed on the temple of the glasses.

"Hmmm," Saria said with interest. "Is this an analysis device?"

"Correct," Gordon replied. "Ancient languages have been recorded into the device, which will automatically translate for the user."

The student had created an ancient-language translation device. *This sounds interesting. I'd love to use it.* But the other students didn't seem to agree.

"I think that's quite enough, Miss Saria," Limane said, interjecting. "I don't think you'd find much from observing something like that."

Saria's eyebrow twitched. "And what do you mean by that?"

"I'm sure you're aware of what I mean, aren't you? A translating device is rather meaningless. A dictionary could do the job just as well, or one could simply learn the ancient language. What you have is a worthless invention that will not contribute to the advancements of society."

That's going too far. I took a step forward to protest, but Saria stopped me.

"Huh?" I asked.

"Why don't you leave this to me? Take a good look at my valiance," she said with a reassuring grin, then turned to Limane. "Good grief. You have such a good head on your shoulders, but you're shackled by unfortunate thoughts."

"And what exactly is that supposed to mean?" Limane asked.

The air was filled with an awkward tension.

"You know what I mean. You—no, everyone in this course misunderstands the fundamental meaning behind inventions," Saria replied proudly, essentially rejecting the entire group.

"Are you saying that we don't understand inventions?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

She spoke with confidence as the other students of the room all directed glares at her. Saria, who disliked mingling with others, must've been very uncomfortable being the center of

attention in this way. But she stood tall and proud.

“You think these translating glasses are better than my magic train?” Limane asked.

“Not at all,” Saria replied. “I believe your invention is splendid as well.”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying. Are you making fun of me?”

Saria’s words had clearly irritated him. He looked to be on the verge of exploding from anger.

“I’d like to ask why you’re not understanding of others,” Saria said. “There’s no saying what’s better or worse when it comes to inventions. Creating something new, no matter what that may be, is splendid in its own right. Why are you trying to rank them?”

“Because money and resources are limited. We cannot funnel our resources into each invention equally. It’s only natural that some are prioritized over others.”

There’s a point there. Say what you want, but you couldn’t deny that money was required for creations, and resources were finite. It was logical to prioritize those that had a better return on investment.

“Miss Saria, are my thoughts incorrect?” Limane asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” she replied. Limane breathed a sigh of relief, but Saria wasn’t done yet. “It’s not incorrect. However…it’s foolish. Certainly, I understand that not all inventions can be funded equally, and that priorities must be created. But that’s no reason to mock other people’s inventions.”

Saria gave a sweeping glance around the room and raised her voice so that everyone could hear her.

“There are no ranks when it comes to a person’s curiosity. We should respect all inquisitive minds. Isn’t that how we should be, as researchers?”

The room fell silent, and some students, perhaps moved by Saria’s words, looked down in shame. But Limane didn’t seem to see it that way.

“Y-You’re just spouting empty platitudes!” the course head declared, his loud voice echoing throughout the room. “How could those glasses possibly be of any use?! It’s just a glorified translator and nothing more!”

In contrast to his panic, Saria remained calm.

“A more advanced translator sounds splendid,” she said, putting on the pair of glasses. “For example, if one were to

explore a dangerous ruin, it would be far too risky to bring a scholar along. Having something like this at hand would exponentially increase efficiency. Let’s say that we can input a variety of languages. The human language has its own set of patterns. This magical tool might eventually be able to analyze unknown languages in the future.”



“Could it have such a use?” Gordon gasped.

I was also surprised by this possible use case. *The world of magical tools is deep!*

“N-Now you’re making baseless claims!” Limane grumbled.

“Not at all,” Saria answered. “Inventions can always evolve in unexpected ways.”

She proceeded to point up at the ceiling towards the light that illuminated the room. *I wonder what she’s trying to say…*

“Magical stone lamps. I think an explanation of these is unnecessary, but this tool uses magical energy to cause glowing stones to produce light. It’s now used throughout the continent, but it wasn’t originally made as a light source,” Saria said, drawing us all in. “Those stones were originally used as batteries that could store magical energy. By processing its surface and pouring magical energy into its center, people *by chance* found out that it glowed. Now, other minerals are used as battery sources, and this stone is used solely for magical stone lamps.”

She paused for a moment, then continued. “Now, let me ask you: was that initial battery invention meaningless? I don’t think so. And because we took this roundabout method, we were also able to invent the magical stone lamp. You may mock some inventions for seeming worthless, but they each have potential lurking within, and could lead to something even more wonderful.”

After her passionate explanation, Saria returned the glasses to Gordon. Moved by her words, the second-year student could only stare in awe.

“Do I think profitable inventions that could generate money are splendid? Yes, of course. But I also believe that inventions that may not make much money are equally wonderful in their own right. That’s all I’d like to say. You’ve all got fabulous talent, and I wouldn’t want you to waste it on something so trivial and silly,” Saria finished.

“Gh…” Limane grumbled, gritting his teeth. He shifted his gaze towards the ground.

Everyone else followed suit, and an awkward air filled the room. They all must’ve realized that their actions had been unsightly. This didn’t mean that everything was resolved and we’d all be friends tomorrow. Human relationships were complicated. But I was sure that Saria’s words had reached the hearts of the people in this room. From here on out, it was up to

them to change.

"Now then, why don't we take our leave?" Saria suggested, turning on her heels. "I was able to experience something very intriguing today. You have my gratitude."

I hastily chased after her.

"What...are *you* researching?" Limane asked.

"Something that the Committee is absolutely not pursuing," Saria replied, her back still turned. "If you're curious, feel free to visit at any time. I've just gotten used to looking after my dear junior here."

And with that, she left the room.

***

We headed straight for the clock tower. In a sudden puff of smoke, Saria reverted to her younger self. Her normal form was her younger appearance, and the medicine she drank temporarily made her older, closer to her actual age.

"Saria, thank you," I said. "I didn't think you'd go that far for me."

It had probably been exhausting for her just to visit that place, yet she had done so much more. It truly warmed my heart.

"I should be the one thanking you, Junior," she replied.

"Huh?"

"If you weren't there, I wouldn't have been able to face my problems. I would've simply looked away, put a lid on it, and lived on while shutting my emotions deep within my heart. I was finally able to speak my mind today, and it's like a fog has been lifted. I feel a lot better and a lot more refreshed." She gave me an enthusiastic smile. "So, thank you. Thanks to you, I feel like I've been saved."

"I didn't do anything," I said, scratching my head. I felt a little embarrassed receiving such unexpected praise. "Saria, do you think they will change?"

"Who knows? They might, or they might not. There's no guaranteed formula when it comes to changing a person's mind, so even I can't predict what'll happen next."

But it looked like a lot of people had felt something when they'd heard Saria's words, including Gordon.

"I'm sure they will," I said. "Your words struck a chord with me,

so there's no way they didn't reach the hearts of the other students there."

"Heh heh. Well, I'll be happy if that's the case."

***

A week after the incident with the invention course, I was spending my days as usual. I hadn't set foot within the course room since, but I hadn't heard of any troubles. I was still reluctant to drop by, so I decided I'd ask Gordon about it whenever I saw him again.

As homeroom was ending, my homeroom teacher talked about an intriguing affair.

"Regarding the large hole that appeared in the academy," Macbell said, "we've finished strengthening the area with magic, and it's now been deemed safe."

Our classmates began chattering to each other about this news. There'd been an ongoing investigation ever since the hole had appeared, but it seemed to have ended for now. I was glad to hear that there weren't any dangers.

"Apparently, that place was hollow to begin with," Macbell continued. "For whatever reason, the walls crumbled, causing the hole to emerge. There are quite a few buildings and ruins inside, many of which were built long ago. This is all very important and valuable information, so a large-scale investigation will be conducted soon. Normally, entering the area would be prohibited until the investigation is over...but we were actually able to obtain permission this time around. In other words, students are allowed to explore the place."

"What?!" I yelped.

I would never have imagined that I'd get to see inside. I couldn't help but find it odd that we'd received permission, but I wasn't about to miss this opportunity.

"Only those who inform us that they wish to venture inside are allowed to do so," Macbell said. "If you'd like to, please let me know later. A single teacher can only handle so many students at a time, so I can only bring along five per trip. I'd like to bring as many as possible, but if there are too many who wish to attend, I might not get to everyone."

Each expedition would have five students and one teacher, making a group of six in total. It was a little concerning that the

group was so small, but if our safety had been guaranteed, it didn't seem like an issue to me.

"We're predicting that quite a few students would like to enter the hole," Macbell said. "I'm not sure when our turn will come, but once a date is set, it'd be great if you could schedule your tasks around it."

Yeah, I can see that many students would be curious. Since there seems to be a limit, it's best to act quickly. But…five people, huh? Who should I go with? Maybe Cryssie, Jack, Volga, Saria, and Cecilia…oh, and Gordon might be interested too. It didn't seem possible for all of us to enter, and I planned on asking everyone for their opinions. *Maybe I should ask Luna too.*

Just what could be waiting for us in that large hole? I was already getting excited.

***

The next day, after school, I went to the large hole alone. It remained as impressive as ever, and as usual, there was caution tape and a fence nearby. However, there was no longer a large crowd dying to get a look. The occasional student would stop and look in that direction, but no one was getting any closer…aside from one person.

"I knew you'd be here," I said.

"Hm?" The student turned around upon hearing my words.

While everyone else had lost interest and moved on, Gordon still seemed as passionate as ever. Just like when I had seen him on the first day of the discovery, he was diligently taking notes.

"Hi, Callus," he said. "What's up? Did you come to see the large hole too?"

"Actually, I'm here to see you."

"Huh? Me?"

Gordon tilted his head to one side, completely taken aback by my response.

"As you might already know, we're allowed to check inside the large hole now," I said. "Out of everyone I know, you seem to be the most interested in it. I was wondering if you wanted to come along with me."

A number of my classmates were eager to take the tour. I wasn't sure when we'd be able to go, but our class had at least already received permission. Gordon might have been filing his

own request, but I decided to ask anyway.

"I'm happy to receive the invite, but…I'm sorry," Gordon apologized. "I won't go with you this time around."

"Ah, so you filed a request for yourself?" I asked.

"No, I haven't done that either," he replied with a shake of his head.

Then why did he decline? I was so sure he'd be interested.

"Um, could I ask why?" I inquired.

"I'm going to be conducting joint research with other students from the invention course. I actually have a meeting today after this, so my schedule is booked out this week."

"Huh?!"

Gordon had been ostracized, so he was creating inventions by himself. *Does this mean…*

"Once you and Saria left, someone called out to me. They said that they were interested in my research and wanted to collaborate."

"Th-That's amazing!" I said. "Congratulations!"

He scratched his head, looking a little embarrassed. He was trying to hide his emotions, but it was clear that he was overjoyed.

"The atmosphere of that place has been changing since then," Gordon said. "The course head doesn't seem to pressure others as much, and we're starting to exchange ideas more freely. It's all because of you guys. I can't thank you enough."

"It's all thanks to Saria. I didn't really do anything besides watch."

"That's not true. You saved me, you know."

"Huh?" I cocked my head to the side. I was the one who had brought Saria there, but that didn't seem to be what he was referring to.

"When the course head mocked me, you got angry for me," Gordon explained. "That made me really happy. And in that moment, you saved me."

"I only did what was normal," I said.

"Not at all. I'd been ostracized for a while. No one took me seriously, and I felt like I wasn't allowed to step into their world. That was how lonely I felt. But in that moment, when you wanted to defend me, I realized that I wasn't alone. You're like my hero."

It was my turn to get embarrassed and scratch my head. I'd never been called a hero before.

“I know!” Gordon suddenly said. “I’m not able to tag along to visit the hole with you, but I want you to have this. It’s really not much, but I think it might help you just a little.”

He took out the pair of translating glasses that he had shown us before, as well as a small pouch he had by his waist. He handed them both to me.

“I know what these glasses are, but what’s this bag?” I asked.

“It’s a pouch that has the effect of expanding space. It’s small, but you can store items that would usually require a large backpack. It’s my own creation, so it might not hold a candle to more advanced magical tools, but I think it can be of some use.”

A pouch that could shift space seemed expensive. It was an extremely popular magical tool that every adventurer wanted. Of course, they also sold for a very high price and were difficult to obtain. If Gordon could make something this amazing, then surely he must’ve had plenty of untapped potential.

“A-Are you sure?!” I stammered. “Are you sure you’re happy to give me something this amazing?”

“Of course,” he replied with a smile. “Use it to your heart’s content. But of course, I was only able to make it with a bit of luck, so there aren’t any replacements.”

I couldn’t believe that he’d give me something so precious. I felt a sting in my eyes.

“I’ll take care of them as best I can,” I said firmly. “Thank you so much.”

“I’m happy to see you look happy. When you tour the hole, have fun for the both of us, okay?”

After Gordon taught me how to use these tools, I returned home in high spirits.

In the end, my expedition team members included Cryssie, Jack, Volga, and Cecilia. I had invited Saria too, but she’d declined my offer, saying, “I’ve already used up all my ‘going outside’ stamina.” But since she was intrigued by the large hole, she’d ordered me to tell her everything about it when I returned. Since Saria had done so much for me, it was my turn to repay the favor; I was determined to give her a spectacular report.

***

The day of the trip had arrived. It was around noon, and since all my classes had finished in the morning, there was plenty of

time to spare for this expedition.

"All right, everyone here?" Macbell said, looking over each of us.

It was a sunny day. It didn't really matter since we were about to enter a cave, but beautiful days like this always gave me a sunny disposition. It was a perfect day to begin our little excursion.

"You guys are lucky," Macbell said happily. "We had quite a few applicants, but I didn't think you guys would be chosen first."

Indeed. Not only were we able to explore the hole, but we were also the first group to be able to do so. I wasn't particularly hoping to go first, but nonetheless, it made me happy that we were able to receive this special spot anyway. *It seems a bit* too *much of a coincidence, but I should probably just be happy with what I have.*

"Lady Cecilia, I believe it would be better for you to have an attendant by your side," a student said.

Three people were gathered around Cecilia, likely her attendants. However, they weren't allowed to tag along with her due to the trip's five-student limit. We already had a full party. While this hole was supposedly safe, they couldn't help but worry.

"I'll be fine," Cecilia assured them. "I'll be back soon. Will you kindly wait here?"

"But..." a student protested. It only showed just how revered the saint was.

"Cecilia, are you sure you'll be okay?" I asked gently.

"I am," she replied firmly. "They just worry a bit too much. At times, they must be able to leave my side."

She proceeded to smile and turn to her attendants. "If you all don't drop this matter...I shall get angry."

Whoa! Her smile is even scarier than her angry expression. Her attendants seemed to agree, as they each looked down and backed away. *I guess that's that.*

"I wonder if the hole really *is* safe," Jack remarked. "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Oh? Scared before even entering?" Volga asked. "You can leave if you'd like."

"Sh-Shut up! I'm not leaving!"

The two continued to bicker, only showing how friendly they'd gotten. While I laughed at them, Cryssie approached me. Her

eyes were filled with more confidence than ever before, and just having her by my side reassured me.

"What's wrong, Callus?" she asked. "You're so quiet. Are you spooked too?"

"No, I'm actually pretty excited," I replied. Until now, I'd spent my whole life inside a manor. It had been a life of happiness, but no stimulation. "My entire experience here has been a never-ending slew of surprises. Unknown places, buildings I've never entered before, people I've never met, and items I've never touched... I'm sure that this expedition will be filled with even more shocking discoveries. And that makes me so excited."

"Huh..." Cryssie said, giving me a gentle smile.

"Wh-What? Did I say something weird?"

"Nope. I was ready to kick your butt if you gave me some weak crap about being scared, but it seems that won't be necessary."

And with that, she walked away. *Hm... I really can't read that girl's thoughts. I'm always impressed by how amazing Sirius is.*

"Ah, they must be your friends. You've built a lovely relationship with them," a mysterious person suddenly said.

"Yeah, I agree," I said, then jumped in surprise. "W-Wait, what?!"

Since when has she *been here?* The person in question wore a large, pointy hat and looked up at me.

"Very good reaction," she observed. "It makes it all the more worth it to venture outside."

"L-Luna?!"

I had thought that she was trapped in the basement of the clock tower. She looked smaller than before, so she must have used that technique she'd shown me before to turn into her spirit form.

"Why are you here?" I asked. "I thought you couldn't leave that place."

"I thought the same. But I tested it out, and it looks like I can leave that basement," Luna answered. "However, I must remain in my spirit form, and I can't seem to leave the premises of the academy."

"Huh... Is that so..."

"In any case, are you fine with this? Your friends are all giving you strange looks."

"Huh?"

I noticed that Cryssie was staring at me, a little taken aback. *Oh... Right. Since Luna's in her spirit form, other people can't see her.*

"Uh... Er..." I tried to laugh it off. "Ah ha ha, I was just talking with Selena."

"Hey! Don't blame this on me!" Selena piped up.

I managed to fib my way out of the situation. *Whew, that was close. I need to converse with Luna in a quieter, more natural way so that people won't get suspicious of me.*

"I get that you're able to leave that basement, but why are you here today?" I mumbled under my breath. "Did you come to see me off?"

"No. I just became curious about the hole myself. It's as simple as that," Luna replied, shifting her gaze towards the hole. "I sense a bad presence from there. You'd best be careful."

"I will."

Our teacher had told us that we were safe, but I decided to remain vigilant upon hearing her words. Ideally, nothing would occur.

"Are you all ready?" Macbell asked, taking the lead. "Then let's depart."

We set foot inside the massive cave, its creepy maw gaping wide enough to swallow us whole. I shuddered, unable to stop comparing it to a monstrous mouth.

***

As seen from the outside, the inside of the hole was pitch-dark. Macbell illuminated the ground in front of us with a magic stone lantern, but the light was small and unreliable. *If the ground is rocky, it will be dangerous. I'll brighten it up a bit more.*

"Rai Lo."

I created a large sphere of light to illuminate my surroundings. *I don't think we'll have to worry about tripping over something now.*

"Light magic sure is useful for times like these," Cryssie said, staring at the sphere. "I'm so jealous."

"Thanks," I replied. "You can rely on me for stuff like this."

While Cryssie's fire magic also had the ability to make her environment brighter, it was dangerous to use in small areas or forests—she could use up our oxygen or cause a brush fire. Light magic, on the other hand, was much safer, and being near the

light always calmed me down.

"Oh, I see something up ahead," Jack said.

He's right. I see remnants of an old building. Did someone live here long ago? Or did their house get buried in a landslide or something? This is interesting.

"Sir, do you know what this building was for?" I asked Macbell.

"Sort of," he replied. "This building was apparently built before the creation of the Ledyvia Kingdom."

"It's that ancient?!"

The kingdom was built in the year 980 of the Age of Man. This meant that these buildings were, at the very least, over five hundred years old.

"Before the kingdom was created, this land was home to Zilpan, the Golden City," Macbell explained. "The city was very prosperous, until it was destroyed by the sudden appearance of a great monster. You guys know of this, don't you?"

We nodded.

"You must be talking about the beings of evil, right?" I answered. "I remember prominently seeing them in picture books."

Dark beasts, also known as the "beings of evil," had appeared without warning one day, decimating large cities in an instant. There were no recorded details of these entities, so we weren't sure of their biology or if they were even alive. There was simply too little information about them.

All we knew was that they had suddenly appeared and destroyed Zilpan, and that my ancestor—Arth Leditzweissen—had slain them.

"This group of buildings was apparently destroyed at the hands of the beings of evil," Macbell said. "We don't have many buildings like these, so this is an invaluable piece of history."

"Definitely," I replied.

The dilapidated building was covered in scratches, like it had fallen victim to the claws of a beast. *This must have been the doing of a being of evil.*

"Selena, have you ever seen a being of evil?" I asked.

"Nope. I always lived in leisure, away from people," she replied, disinterested.

My partner had been alive for a long time, but she had surprisingly little knowledge about the past. She had apparently never even possessed a human before me.

“How about you, Luna?” I asked. “Does anything ring a bell?”

“A little,” the moon magician replied, toddling beside me. “I’ve fought one multiple times in the past.”

“Wait, really?! What kind of entity was it?!”

“A hideous and terrifying monster. It was vulgar and lacked intelligence—a truly foolish creature. I can’t count how many times I chased it away with my own hands.”

She looked on, displeased. *It looks like she really hates them.* I wanted to talk about it more, but Luna fell silent, and I didn’t think she was willing to divulge any more details.

“Oh, there it is,” Macbell said. “The depths of this cave.”

A large stone gate stood ahead. The area had once been sealed by a stone door, but it had crumbled away, allowing us to enter.

“Sir, what kind of place is this?” I asked.

“That’s still under investigation,” Macbell answered. “But I’ve been told that it’s safe, so there’s no need for you to worry.”

We stepped inside the ruin. As I went to do the same, something caught my eye.

“Aren’t those…?”

Words had been engraved above the gate. The etchings looked weathered due to time, but I could just barely make them out.

“Those must be ancient letters,” I concluded. “Maybe I can put that tool to good use.”

I rustled around the pouch that I’d received from Gordon and took out the pair of glasses he’d also given me. They had been installed with a translating device, and I remembered hearing that they could also translate ancient text. I put them on and turned to the letters.

“Let’s see…”

With a few small blips, the glasses focused on the letters. A few seconds later, the engravings transformed into letters I could read.

“Uh, it says, ‘My greatest friend rests here.’ Huh. What’s that about?”

Could this ruin be a gravesite? As I was lost in my thoughts, the glasses started beeping again.

“Huh?!” I gasped.

For a moment, I thought that the tool had malfunctioned, but I soon realized that I was wrong. It was reacting to the

engravings near the ones that I'd just read.

"Is something written here too?"

It was so dark that I had failed to notice it. Since it was so high up, the investigation team might not have noticed these etchings either. I rotated the dial next to my glasses and zoomed in, enlarging the text. *This is handy.*

"This must also be ancient text. Let's see..."

A few seconds later, the glasses had finished translating, and popped the results in front of my eyes.

"'Arth Leditzweissen'? Why's my ancestor's name here?!"

The mysterious ruin had my ancestor's name. I was yet to learn of the secrets that this place held.

***

The ruin became darker and chillier as we headed deeper inside. The inside was larger than I'd thought, and vases and statues of humans were scattered throughout.

"What is this place?" I wondered aloud.

"It was created after the ruin we saw outside," Macbell elaborated. "It was apparently built after the kingdom was created."

If that was true, then the name I had seen on the ruin made sense. The first king and founder of the Ledyvia Kigdom, Arth Leditzweissen, was also my ancestor. Judging from the engraving outside which read, "My greatest friend rests here," along with the first king's name carved into the stone, it seemed likely that we had found the grave of the king's friend.

But why was the gravesite created in such an inconspicuous area? There's still so much I don't know.

"This must be the deepest we can go," Macbell said. "Don't touch anything."

We were greeted by a room with a large statue of a white dragon. It was carved beautifully, and in such great detail that I was sure that the statue would start moving at any moment.

"Awesome," everyone said, awed by the elaborate statue.

I wasn't well-versed in art, but even I could tell how amazing this statue was. I couldn't look away, and I found myself almost enchanted by it.

"Hm?" I said.

Macbell caught on to my perplexed attitude. "Ah, so you've

noticed it, Callus."

"Yes. This dragon has two tails."

Indeed, this magnificent beast had two long, slender tails sprouting from its body. While this was certainly an unusual sight, a two-tailed dragon held a deeper meaning in this kingdom.

"According to the investigation, this statue is indeed modeled after the Bicaudal White Dragon," Macbell said.

"I knew it!"

My ancestor, who'd rid the land of the beings of evil, had had a powerful ally and friend: the Bicaudal White Dragon.

"What's this Bicaudal White Dragon?" Luna asked.

Right, she was sealed underground before this kingdom came into existence.

"It's a legendary white dragon that defeated the beings of evil alongside King Arth," I explained.

As the name implied, the two-tailed dragon could soar through the skies at high speeds and expel a blazing breath of light. The legends of this beast lived on to this day, and those who lived within the kingdom would worship it. According to legends, King Arth took up a spear while riding atop the back of his trusty dragon, and triumphed against the beings of evil. And in honor of the dragon's contributions, the emblem of this very kingdom was a two-tailed dragon.

Luna seemed quite interested in my explanation. "I see... I didn't think such a thing existed. A dragon with two tails certainly seems rare. I would've loved to meet it."

"When King Arth passed away, the white dragon also disappeared," I added. "I wonder what it's up to."

Dragons had long life spans, so it could have still been alive. But if it was, it was probably living away from humans.

"The Bicaudal White Dragon is a mysterious beast," Macbell said, turning to Jack. "There aren't many records documenting it, so this statue could become a huge clue in further uncovering the truth about the dragon. It's a very important artifact, so don't touch it."

I continued to gaze at the statue, but when I looked down, I saw that Cecilia was putting her hands together and praying towards it. Her form looked very divine, as though she'd come straight out of a painting. After a short while, she put down her hands and turned to me. She'd apparently noticed my stare.

How can she tell when she's got a cloth covering her eyes? How odd.

"The legend of the white dragon is very well-known within the Holy Kingdom as well," she explained. "When I was a child, I often read exciting tales about it."

"I see," I replied. "It's rumored that the white dragon manipulated light, so I can see why it'd be famous within your kingdom."

Cecilia's hometown, the Holy Kingdom Lilyniana, revered light magic and saw it as holy. I wasn't surprised to hear that the white dragon would be famed in such a place.

"But I wonder why this ruin is so deep underground," she pondered. "If one wanted to worship the white dragon, it would've been better to choose a more conspicuous place."

"I agree. I thought that was weird too."

I remembered the engraving outside again. *My greatest friend rests here...* It was likely that this friend was the white dragon. *But then why was his greatest friend hidden away in this place? Did he want his friend to rest in peace? If so, they could've built something within the royal castle.* This ruin had likely been created in secret. Even my father, the current king, probably didn't know about it. But no matter how much I thought, I couldn't find an answer.

"Seems like there's nothing more for us to see," Volga said, breaking the silence.

He was right. We'd seen everything this place had to offer, and if we stayed down here for too long, it'd soon become nighttime. It was best to leave while we could.

"Then why don't we leave?" Macbell suggested, heading to the exit. "Don't forget anything, and watch your step."

We all followed behind him when Luna stopped in her tracks.

"It's coming," she said.

"Huh?"

Before I could ask what she was talking about, the ground and walls of the ceilings started to crack loudly.

"What?!"

We all gasped and instinctively huddled together, frozen in place. I looked around and prepared to use my magic. Since light magic boasted excellent defense, I was confident that Cecilia and I could protect everyone if the ceiling were to fall on us.

"Callus, prepare yourself," Luna warned, looking stern. "It's coming."

I had no idea what she was referring to, but this clearly wasn't the time to be asking any questions. I gave her an obedient nod and turned to my partner.

"G-Got it! Selena, are you ready?!"

"Whenever you are," she said confidently.

All right, then I'm ready! The cracks grew larger and larger as a black, gooey substance started to gush out from below.

"What *is* that?!"

Like an amoeba, the black substance wriggled about in a disgusting manner, completely emerging from the cracks below. It slowly formed a shape, creating arms, legs, and a mouth. With a round body, slender limbs, and a creepy mouth equipped with a tongue and teeth, it clearly resembled a terrifying monster.

"Eek!" Cryssie quietly shrieked. "Wh-What is that?! It's so gross!"

"Calm down, Cryssie," I said. "I think that thing's dangerous."

The thing that appeared to be a monster stared at us, and after letting out a disgusting squelch, it gave a horrifying grin.

"...you."

It started to talk. I honed my senses to pick up on its words. But I wasn't prepared to hear what it had to say.

"I...found you! Arth!"

"Is that thing a monster?!" Volga shouted.

"I've never seen anything like it in books!" Jack yelped.

As the two guys remained vigilant, I had to agree that I'd never seen anything like it before. Its body looked elastic, and it had a horrific mouth. The rotten stench and magical energy emanating from it was so repulsive that it made me shudder. This entity was like the culmination of all the hatred and resentment in the world. It was absolutely teeming with malevolence. But what was most concerning was the words that it uttered.

"I...found you! Arth!"

I had no idea what it was talking about at first, but then I remembered King Arth's name being engraved outside.

"Raaah!"

The dark monster opened its mouth wide and rushed towards us. The being itself wasn't very tall—only around forty centimeters—but its mouth opened much wider than any normal creature's could. Its massive maw stretched almost completely across its entire body. A single bite would obviously

be deadly.

"No choice here. *Ri Sax!*" Volga chanted, immediately creating a lighting spear.

He threw it towards the black monster. The spear pierced through the entity, skewering it and causing a chunk of its dark meat to splatter onto the ground. The stench only grew stronger.

"I'm curious about that thing, but we need to get out of this cave right now," Volga said.

"Yeah," Macbell agreed. "This is clearly an emergency situation. We should leave as soon as we can."

I was curious about the white dragon, my ancestor, and the monster, but safety was the top priority. It was also imperative for us to report this incident to someone. We immediately turned around and tried to leave, but in the next moment, the floor started to crack.

"Gh!"

A horde of dark beings started to emerge from the cracks. They ranged from large to small; some crawled along the ground while others had wings. A variety of these dark entities blocked our path, focusing their hostility on us.

"Arth... I won't forgive you!"

"How dare you bury us deep underground!"

"Now is our time for revenge!"

"The Blessed Child! Let us devour the flesh of the Blessed Child!"

The monsters cursed us with disdain.

Amid the dangerous situation, I turned to the moon magician. "Luna, could these entities be..."

"Indeed. Those are the beings of evil," she said. "I didn't think I'd ever see them again."

I grimaced. "The beings of evil..."

Their names were etched within legends, known to be horrific creatures that destroyed our kingdom. I would've never expected to face them here.

"There's nothing they love more than tormenting the living," Luna explained. "They especially bear a grudge towards light magicians. You have no choice but to fight if you want to return alive."

"I-I see," I managed to say, my mouth becoming dry.

"Callus, was what you just said true?" Jack asked.

He'd heard me say the words "beings of evil," and had grown

alarmed.

"Yeah, there's no mistaking it."

I couldn't tell them about Luna, so I decided to say that I'd seen it in a book somewhere and hope that they'd believe me. Jack clearly looked panicked at my words, but Cryssie seemed calm as she quietly unsheathed the blade by her waist.

"I don't care who we're up against," she said. "If they get in our way, we just need to cut them down."

"Exactly," Volga agreed, bracing himself.

I guess we've got no choice here... I readied myself to fight as well.

"Grrr..."

The black beings glared back at us and inched forward before dashing at full speed. Like a starting pistol giving a signal, the other entities followed suit and rushed towards us. Our exit was behind them; we had to fight our way forward.

"We should prioritize fleeing!" I shouted. "We need at least one person to make it out and call for help!"

Everyone nodded. It would have been ideal to beat all of them, but we had no idea just how many we were up against. Our best bet was to call for backup.

"Fé Arms!"

Fire enveloped Cryssie's blade as she charged in and hacked away. With elegant movements, she dodged through fangs and talons to cut her enemies down. She was amazing; she'd gotten a lot stronger since the last time we'd met.

"Tch... There's no end to them," Cryssie said.

While her sword carved deep gashes in the entities, after a short while, they would get up and rush back in. Normal beings would've been dead by now. Even if they were sliced in two, new arms and legs would sprout from their wounds, or they'd quickly regenerate and stick back together. It was crystal clear that their regenerative capabilities far exceeded any normal organism's.

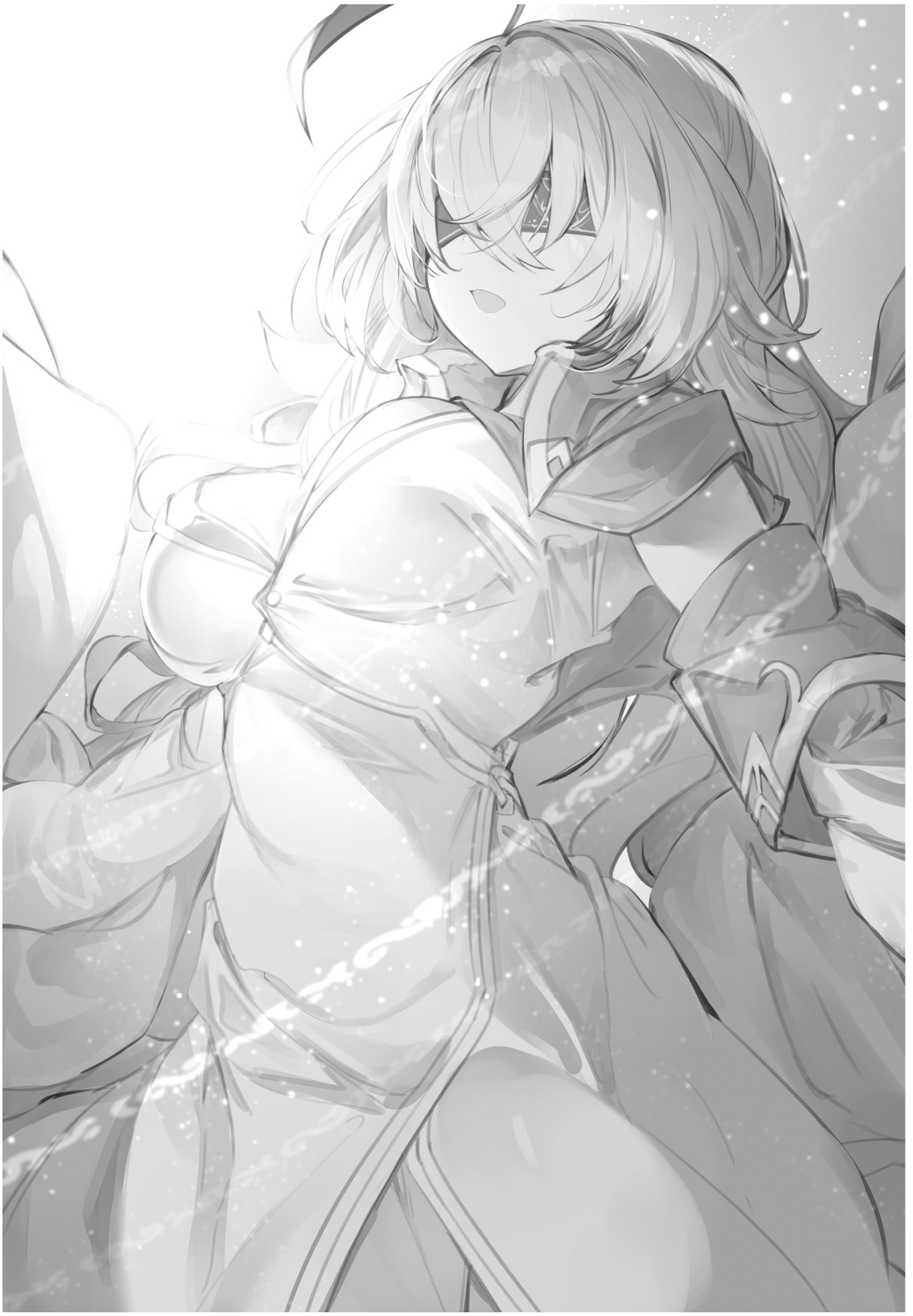
They weren't immortal—if they sustained immense damage, they'd melt away and disappear—but they still healed at an astonishing pace. *How can we defeat these monsters?* Suddenly, an aria echoed through the air.

"Come, O grand ray of light. Defeat the evil, and please bring light to overflow upon this world."

I felt an immense surge of magical energy behind me. When I turned around, I saw Cecilia surrounded by particles of light—

she was able to cast high-level spells as well.

“Raas Rai Lux!”



A blinding light filled the room. The beings who were subjected to the light sizzled and burned away as they groaned in agony.

"G-Grah..."

As the beings fell to the ground, it was clear that this was much more effective than normal magic.

"According to the legends of the white dragon, the dragon used its power of light to destroy the beings of evil," Cecilia explained. "It seems like light magic is highly effective against them."

"Makes sense," I replied. "Then here I go! *Ra Sword!*"

I created several blades of light and pierced the dark beasts. They writhed in agony before melting away and disappearing. *Good! We can do this!*

"Grrr... Once again you bar our way!"

Their attacks grew stronger and more aggressive. Cecilia and I desperately used our light magic to fight back.

"Just...a little more!" I gasped.

We'd been slowly pushing forward, and we had finally made it towards the exit. But once again, three more emerged from the ground and pounced upon us. We were caught off guard and couldn't react in time, but in the next moment, three blades of pale blue light rained down from above, skewering the monsters.

"Hmph," Luna huffed. "I may not have much of my power left, but I can at least handle this much."

Awesome! She can use magic even in her spirit form!

"Thank you, Luna!" I said. "I think we can—"

The beings of evil expressed great fear towards the blue blades to an almost exaggerated degree. We dashed ahead while they were faltering, when another large crack—the biggest one yet—sounded through the air, and an enormous being of evil appeared.

"What?!"

The towering monster must've been about ten meters tall, nearly touching the ceiling of the ruin. Eight thick arms and legs sprouted from its body, each limb looking strong enough to easily crush a person. I wasn't sure if even a high-level spell could handle it. If Cecilia and I launched our attacks at the same time, we might have had a chance. However...

"Hah... Hah..." Cecilia panted, looking exhausted.

She'd used up so much of her energy to get this far. I was blessed with an immense amount of magical energy due to my curse, but even I was starting to grow tired. Needless to say, she was clearly at her limit. *What do we do? What do we do?!* As I desperately tried to think of a strategy, I heard a voice ring out.

"Zieo Lo!"

Suddenly, the ground beneath the giant creature grew muddy. Unable to handle its hefty weight, it sank deeper and deeper into the ground.

"Heh heh! How do you like that?" Jack said with a proud grin. "Perfect for a big old lug like you, huh?"

"Jack!" I shouted. "Since when were you able to use a spell like that?!"

"Ever since you told me about my younger siblings, I've started training, you know? I wanted to show this off after I'd learned even greater spells, but..."

"That spell is amazing enough! Isn't that a compound spell?!"

Magicians who could use multiple elements had the ability to combine their elements as well. Mud was created from combining water with earth. But there was only a handful of magicians who could use multiple elements to begin with, and it was even rarer to find someone who could wield compound spells.

Ever since that day, when Jack had learned about his late siblings, he'd turned over a new leaf and studied hard every day.

"G-Graaah!"

The monster sluggishly tried to make its way towards us.

"Just sit tight already! *Mol Bind!*" Jack bellowed.

Thick tree branches sprouted from the mud and constricted the being of evil. The power of his spell was astonishing as he locked the massive creature in place.

"My mud is filled with nutrients... The branches that sprout from it are springing with energy!" Jack yelled, using his three elements to their maximum potential.

I couldn't believe my eyes. *Jack's amazing!*

"Callus, I can't hold it for long!" he said. "I'll leave the rest to you!"

"Right! I've got this!"

I wasn't about to waste the opportunity that Jack had created for me. I gathered my magical energy and prepared to unleash it all in one go. *I'll aim for its gaping mouth and end it in one shot!*

“O grand sword of light. Tear through the evil and bring light to overflow upon this world,” I chanted, steadying my breathing with Selena. I calmed myself down and perfected my spell. *“Raas Rai Sword!”*

An enormous blade of light appeared above my head and flew towards the being of evil, penetrating its maw.

“G-Grah…!”

The entity flailed and writhed in agony as it groaned in pain. It managed to bite down on the blade and shake its head, trying to remove my spell, but the sword sank deeper, and the being struggled to break free. The large being of evil slowly crumbled away and disappeared. It might’ve been sturdier than most, but as light magic entered its body, it was unable to fight back and succumbed to the light.

“And now…” I started.

I thought we could finally escape, but even more dark beasts emerged from the cracks. *Just how many are there? This is endless!*

“Rai Lo!”

I created several spheres of light and launched them. I just had to create enough of an opening for us to flee.

“Raaah!” I yelled as a rain of light showered down on the monsters.

They writhed in pain and slowed down, but they hadn’t been completely stopped. I was prioritizing covering a wide range over accuracy, and one of my spheres flew in an unexpected direction—towards the statue of the white dragon.

“Ah!” I gasped.

For a moment, I thought the white dragon statue would break, but it instead absorbed my light. The statue’s eyes started to glow.

“What’s going on?”

In the next moment, a blinding ray of light shot out from the statue’s jaw. It was so bright that I was sure I would’ve lost my sight if I’d kept my eyes open. I instinctively covered my eyes; I couldn’t be certain, but I felt like everyone else had done the same. Once the brightness past my eyelids had faded, I slowly opened my eyes.

The beings of evil were all gone.

“Were…we saved?” I wondered.

I was confused by it all and needed time to process reality. Since the beings had melted away, the floor remained free of

corpses. With no trace of the monsters, it almost felt like the battle hadn't happened at all. *What was that amazing light? I didn't think that statue had such a function. But since it does, did my ancestor predict this situation?*

"In any case, let's leave!" Cryssie urged. "We don't know when we'll get attacked again!"

"Right," I said, moving to leave.

Suddenly, the white dragon's eyes glowed once again. I winced, expecting another flash of light, but nothing came.

"Huh?!" I gasped.

A brilliant light appeared under my feet, forming a magic circle. I suddenly found myself unable to move.

"Callus!" Cryssie tried to reach out to me.

But an invisible wall blocked her way. As I looked on in confusion, I heard another person cry out to me.

"Callus!" Cecilia shouted, as she was locked in place as well.

Everyone else seemed safe, but we two light magicians were trapped by the magic circle.

"Give me a sec!" Cryssie said, looking desperate. "I'll get you outta there right away!"

She attacked the invisible wall again and again, trying to free me, but to no avail. No matter how much she punched or sliced at the wall, it wouldn't budge.

"Cryssie..." I murmured, hastily trying to reach out.

But I couldn't reach her, and in the next moment, my vision was dyed black.

Terminology Dictionary VII

Current dimensional realm

The current existing dimension, which takes the form of numerous layers piled on top of each other. The greater the discrepancy between layers, the less likely it is for beings on those layers to sense each other.

According to Saria, spirits live in the astral realm (or spirit realm) while humans live in the material realm.

Because magical energy exists over a wide area, both humans and spirits are able to interfere with it.

Star womb

Said to be in the center of the stars, it’s where all life ends up. Souls that have completed their life will return to this place, transform into pure souls, and once again receive a new life.

Classroom system

A unique system utilized within the Academy of Magic.

Students can choose from six types of courses representing different fields of interest, and work hard alongside like-minded students. It’s a valuable opportunity to hear the opinions of upperclassmen, and almost all the students at the academy participate in the system.

Chapter Two: Legend of the White Dragon

“U-Ugh…” I groaned, rubbing my aching head as I slowly got up.

Where am I? It’s so dark. I can’t see anything. I should probably light up my surroundings.

“Rai Lo.”

However, despite my chants, nothing occurred. *This is weird. What’s going on?* This was something to look into, but for now, I prioritized sight. I rummaged through the pouch I had received from Gordon.

“Errr… Ah, found it.”

I took out a magical stone lantern. *Right, I brought it along with me because I knew we’d be going inside a dark cave.* Even if I wasn’t able to use light magic, if I poured my magical energy into the tool, it would light up.

“There we go.”

The lantern illuminated my surroundings, shedding light on an underground area. The ceiling was quite high, and the floors were unpaved dirt. The area seemed spacious, large enough that my lantern wasn’t enough to illuminate it fully.

“It’s like a completely different place from the ruin I was at moments ago…”

My surroundings had changed in an instant; I guessed that this must’ve been some type of dimensional spell.

“Master told me about spells and sorcery that could travel across space, but I didn’t think I’d experience it for my— Huh?”

I noticed something moving on the ground, and looked down to see Cecilia.

“C-Cecilia?! Are you all right?”

I crouched down and checked her vitals. To my relief, her breathing was stable and her pulse seemed normal—she was just unconscious.

“Whew, thank goodness.”

After breathing a sigh of relief, I started to think of a plan to escape this area. If I started to fall into a state of panic, it wouldn’t just be my life at stake—Cecilia would be in danger as well. I had to remain calm.

“My memory’s coming back to me. The statue of the white dragon glowed, and a magic circle appeared beneath my feet.”

I guessed that the circle must’ve activated a dimensional spell. Dimensional spells were difficult to cast, meaning that if a trap like that existed within the ruin, whoever had set it up was undoubtedly an amazing magician.

“That circle appeared beneath me and Cecilia. In other words, that trap specifically chose us for some reason.”

Straightaway, the first common denominator that came to mind was our light magic. If that was the reason behind our teleportation, there was definitely a reason for our being here. There was a good chance that the statue of the white dragon and its effects had been created by my ancestor.

“I should probably wait until Cecilia wakes up. It’s dangerous to wander around on my own anyway.”

The moment I decided to rest, I felt an intense, malicious presence in the air, causing my body to shudder. I quickly turned towards the direction of this ominous feeling and noticed an evil being with four legs slowly making its way towards us. Its horrifying jaw yawned wide as drool dripped from its mouth, invoking a sense of fear.

“I can’t leave Cecilia alone here! Let’s do this, Selena!”

I called out to my always-reliable partner, but there was no response.

“Selena?”

I quickly looked around, but she was nowhere to be seen. *Now that I think about it, I couldn’t use magic when I first woke up here either. I had assumed it was just because I was still waking up, but it seems like that’s not the case.*

“Selena isn’t here…”

I racked my brain, searching for clues. When the magic circle first appeared beneath my feet, Selena was with me. We must’ve gotten separated when I was teleported here. If I was to presume that dimensional spells didn’t allow the transport of spirits, it all made sense. But if my presumptions were true, I was in the worst situation possible. This also implied that Cecilia couldn’t use her magic as well.

“Grrr…”

All the while, the being of evil was slowly inching closer. *What do I do? What can I do? How do I overcome this situation without magic?* I could use my magical energy to buff my physical body a

bit, but I wasn't against an opponent who would go down so easily. I needed a better method that allowed me to launch stronger attacks.

"Rrr... Grah!"

The creature, seeing me falter and sensing an opportunity, pounced at me with its fangs bared. *Think! I have to think of something! I can't die here!* In my panic, my memories streaked across my mind. *Am I seeing my life flash before my eyes? I've never seen it before.* I'd heard that this phenomenon would sometimes allow a person to dig through their memories and overcome desperate situations. *Then I've gotta search for an answer too! There must be a way to survive!*

Milliseconds felt like an eternity as I searched for a clue—any clue that I could grab. And one idea popped into my mind. I placed my hand over the left side of my chest and concentrated deeply. I was afraid of using this power, but it was far preferable to death.

"If you want to stay in my body, you better lend me some of your power! *Curse Edge!*"

I grabbed my curse with my fingertips and tried to wield it to the best of my abilities. Suddenly, a large, black blade flew out from my chest and sliced the being of evil in two. I had just used my curse technique. Whenever I used this ability, my body would be in pain and I would require immense amounts of magical energy. In exchange, I was able to use an extremely powerful technique, and above all, I didn't require the assistance of spirits. In other words, this was the perfect place for me to use it.

"Huff... Huff... I did it."

I breathed a sigh of relief as I clutched my aching chest. The being of evil, slashed by *Curse Edge*, disintegrated without regenerating. The curse's power was effective against these things. But my celebration didn't last for long.

"I guess all that noise got the attention of others."

From large to small, various beings of evil slowly emerged and scuttled towards me. There were far more than ten of these things, and I couldn't have guessed just how many lurked within this wide area.

"Come if you dare! I won't let you lay a finger on Cecilia!" I roared into the darkness as I gambled my life on this battle.

***

Within the ruin, in front of the statue of the white dragon, the beings of evil had been eradicated by the bright light of the statue. There were no signs of these mysterious entities emerging from the ground. However, the group that stood there looked glum.

“Callus!” Crys cried, her voice reverberating throughout the area.

The group had searched the ruin, leaving no stone unturned, but Callus and Cecilia were nowhere to be seen.

“I’m worried about Callus and Cecilia, but we should probably leave for now,” Macbell said. “I must report this to the academy as well.”

The two missing students were indeed a subject of worry, but there were no guarantees that the beings of evil were gone for good. With the loss of the two light magicians, it was unknown if the others could survive another battle. It was extremely dangerous to remain here any longer.

Volga and Jack nodded, understanding their perilous situation. But Crys fell silent, her back turned.

“Crys, I understand your feelings, but we need to leave this place,” Macbell urged. “It’s likely that a dimensional spell has transported the two away from here. I don’t think we’d have any luck searching for them here.”

Crys turned around and gazed at her teacher with a sharp glare. Her frustrations were apparent—the corners of her eyes were red.

“I’ll remain here,” she insisted. “If you’d all rather leave, then feel free to go.”

“Don’t be so stubborn,” Macbell said. “I have the only lantern. What can you do alone in a pitch-black cave? If those monsters attack you again, do you truly think that you can handle them alone?”

Crys bit her lip, her shoulders trembling. “Even so! Even so, I have to do this!”

She was fully aware how reckless her words sounded. But she couldn’t bear to just leave and head home.

“I promised Callus that I’d become his knight,” Crys said. “And yet, not only was I utterly useless during our battle with those monsters, but I could only pathetically watch on as he disappeared right in front of my eyes. How could I go home like this?”

Blood dripped from her tightly clenched fists. Sadness, frustration, and powerlessness swirled around in her mind, clouding her judgment. While Macbell struggled to find the words, Volga impatiently stomped up to the girl and violently grabbed her collar.

“You better cut it out,” he growled.

The air turned tense while Crys remained silent. Jack looked on anxiously, thinking that this could turn into a fistfight.

“If you wanna die here, I’ll leave you alone,” Volga said. “But you don’t, do you? You want to save Callus, yeah?”

“Of course,” Crys replied. “That’s why I’m staying here.”

“Are you an idiot? How does that help him? You know that best, don’t you? If you really wanna save him, we should leave this place for now.” He shifted his tone. “I don’t know what happened to him. But I truly believe that he’ll make it back. So, when he does, we should be prepared to help him out then. We should leave for now and rethink our strategy.”

He released Crys’s collar from his grip. She had calmed down considerably.

“So? You still wanna stay here or what?” Volga asked.

“No,” Crys answered, bowing her head to apologize. “I’m sorry. I went against my better judgment.”

“Hm,” Volga muttered in admiration, not expecting her to obediently lower her head.

“I also believe that Callus will return,” she said. “When he does, I’ll definitely protect him then.”

“Good answer. All right then, let’s leave.”

Crys nodded, and the group left the ruin. Once everyone had left and silence fell upon the ruin, only one spirit-like existence remained.

“I didn’t think a trap like that existed. I was careless,” Luna muttered, gazing at the statue of the white dragon. “If I was in my peak form, I wouldn’t have lost, but in my current body, I suppose I can’t move any further.”

Luna’s body grew paler and paler; as she used her spells, she had used up all her powers, and her spirit would soon return to her sealed physical body.

“Callus, you must return safely,” she said. “You still have much you need to do. You must undo my seal and return the world to its original form.”

She transformed into particles of light and disappeared into

the air. Only the statue of the dragon remained, presiding solemnly over the quiet ruin.

***

A girl was dreaming. She was dreaming about her hometown that she had left. She was facing a certain person.

“Sister, may I speak with you?” she said respectfully to her older sister.

“Oh? How unusual,” her sister said, bemused.

This younger sister had a peaceful personality. She was quiet and rarely went against the opinions of others. She was a good child, but that only worried her older sister. Would she ever be able to do what she truly desired?

“I simply must listen to my cute younger sister’s request. Do voice your thoughts.”

“Certainly. You’re scheduled to enter the Academy of Magic in two years’ time, correct? I…was hoping that you would grant me that privilege instead,” Cecilia said with a serious expression.

Her older sister, Margaret, was shocked to hear those words. “Cecilia, you understand that we have already finished the process for my enrollment, do you not? That is a very difficult thing to overturn. I hope you understand that.”

“I do. I’m very aware of just how much trouble I’d be causing so many people. But despite all that, I’d like to attend the academy.”

“I see…”

Margaret and Cecilia were the two beautiful princesses of the Holy Kingdom of Lilyniana. They were a lovely sight to behold, filled with benevolence and gifted with the ability to use light magic. Indeed, these two princesses were the most cherished treasures within the Holy Kingdom. Their kingdom had friendly ties with the Ledyvia Kingdom, allowing a princess to enter the Academy of Magic. However, this privilege would only be granted to one; the citizens of Lilyniana couldn’t accept both princesses entering the academy.

Margaret had been selected from the two sisters. In contrast to the shy and withdrawn Cecilia, Margaret was very sociable and thought to have been the ideal candidate for the academy. What’s more, the older sister had given her consent. She was hesitant in sending her introverted younger sister to a different

nation. However, astonishingly, her younger sister had requested to enter the academy.

“If you would truly like to go, I don’t mind conceding the privilege to you,” Margaret relented. “I was looking forward to my experience a bit, but I’m not dead set on attending.”

“Th-Then…” Cecilia started.

“But I have one condition. Will you please tell me why you’d like to attend the academy?”

“W-Well…”

Cecilia seemed to struggle to provide a response, implying that it was difficult for her to vocalize. But Margaret had an inkling about her younger sister’s reason.

“It has to do with that boy you met during your pilgrimage, doesn’t it?” she asked.

“Pft!” Cecilia erupted into a coughing fit, her face redder than an apple. Even without a response, anyone could tell at a glance that Margaret’s deductions were correct. “H-How did you…”

“You’ve become more reliable than ever before since returning from your pilgrimage. And you seemed ecstatic every time you received a letter, so I guessed that you must have met someone wonderful. I asked your attendants about it.”

“I didn’t think you would find out,” Cecilia muttered, looking embarrassed.

Margaret smiled happily at her adorable younger sister.

“Answer me, will you, Cecilia?” she asked. “You would like to enter the academy because of that boy, wouldn’t you?”

“Th-That’s right. I want to meet him again, and if possible, become his strength,” Cecilia said, slowly revealing her innermost thoughts. “He is in the middle of fighting a merciless fate, and I’d like to support him. Hence, when I returned from my pilgrimage, I underwent strict training to further improve myself.”

“I see… I understand why you’ve been working so hard.” After Margaret pondered her sister’s words for a while, she finally gave her answer. “Very well. I shall take care of changing which of us will enter the academy. You’ve still got quite a few years ahead, but it’s best for you to be prepared.”

“R-Really?! Thank you so much!”

Margaret smiled at Cecilia’s beaming face. *This process isn’t a hassle at all, as long as I get to see you look so happy,* Margaret thought.

“Cecilia, the outside world is filled with hardships,” she warned. “There may be times when you face a predicament. But I know you’ll be fine. You’ve got a strong heart and a powerful light that glows brighter than mine.”

Margaret approached her younger sister and squeezed her tight. Cecilia was slightly embarrassed by her sister’s warm embrace, but hugged her back.

“Thank you,” Cecilia said. “I’ll do my best.”

***

“Where…” Cecilia mumbled as she slowly got up.

She was atop a rocky floor, and her entire body was covered in scratches. Even her head was throbbing. She had likely hit her head on the floor, knocking her out.

“I was fighting the beings of evil, and…”

Cecilia dug through her memories, trying to remember what had occurred.

“Have I been transported somewhere else? Just what happened here?”

The ground around her was filled with gashes, hinting at a fearsome battle that had taken place. A nearby lantern illuminated her surroundings. She tried to brighten the room a bit more with her magic, but her spells didn’t activate.

“If I can’t use magic, this situation must be worse than I thought. Huh?”

From the corner of her eye, she spotted something at the edge of the lantern’s light.

“What is…”

As she slowly approached it, she realized that it was a pair of human feet. Shocked, she rushed over and brought the lantern to confirm whom they belonged to.

“Callus! Are you all right?”

Her friend was lying on the ground. She examined his body and noticed that he was covered in wounds and bleeding from his injuries. He’d lost quite a bit of blood already, now a sizable puddle on the ground. Cecilia had studied a bit of medicine when she was younger, and could tell from a glance at Callus’s pale face that he was in critical condition.

“These wounds are horrible…and his curse has gotten more energetic. What happened here?”

As she touched his body to confirm the extent of his injuries, Callus's eyes fluttered open.

"Ugh," he groaned. "Ce...cilia..."

"Callus! You're awake!"

He turned towards her.

"Wait just a moment! I'll save you!" Cecilia shouted.

"Are...you okay?" he asked.

Cecilia was at a loss for words. Callus was on the verge of death, and yet he was still concerned about the safety of others. *No... He's always been like this. That's why I want to support him.* She thought back to when she had spent time with him as Sissy. They hadn't been together for long, but the princess treasured those memories.

"Don't worry, I'm fine," Cecilia said.

"Thank goodness..." Callus muttered with a smile, before he lost consciousness once more.

Cecilia hadn't learned any more about what had occurred here, but she was able to piece together one thing.

"Thank you, Callus," she said, with determination in her eyes. "Thank you for protecting me. Now it's my turn to return the favor. I don't know why we can't use spells here, but we've still got other methods we can use."

She then took out medicinal herbs and potions. Upon inspecting Callus's pouch, she even found some water. This was more than enough to tend to his injuries.

"I'm not letting you die here. I came to this academy to save you, you know," she said, removing his clothes to check his injuries.

"This is bad," she muttered with furrowed brows.

The first thing she saw was the black curse that spread across his chest. While Cecilia was unconscious, Callus had stimulated his curse in order to wield it and fight. Since he couldn't use light magic here, the curse was able to spread freely, further infecting his body. Coupled with his deep injuries, Callus was in a precarious state.

"I'll save you. I swear it!"

Cecilia was filled with knowledge regarding human anatomy, medicinal practices, and curses. She was far more knowledgeable than a normal town doctor. She called upon everything she had learned so that she could treat Callus.

"First, I'll use holy water to calm the curse. Then, I'll grind

these herbs and apply them to his wounds. He's got an injury here too..."

She'd brought a first aid kid on the off chance that someone might get hurt in the cave, as well as a magic pouch that allowed her to store numerous items within a small space. *I'm glad I brought these with me just to be on the safe side.*

"I don't think I've got enough bandages..."

She wasn't expecting anyone to be this gravely injured. She could've ripped off a strip of cloth from her garments, but they were muddied and filthy, far too unsanitary to be used on wounds. *What should I do?*

"I can't afford to hesitate here."

She removed her blindfold and wrapped it around Callus. This was no normal cloth—it had been passed down for generations and was filled with light magic which could repel any hypnotic spells or sorceries. Above all, it had the additional effect of remaining clean. She'd always worn it, but it wasn't unsanitary at all, and she could even hope that the power of light could fight against the curse for a small while.

"And...done."

Cecilia finished treating Callus while her face was exposed for anyone to see. However...

"Ugh..." Callus groaned in pain. His body was heating up; at this rate, he could slowly weaken and die.

"I have to hurry!"

She took out her canteen filled with holy water, a liquid that had been cleansed with light magic. Drinking this recovered one's stamina and temporarily conferred greater resistance against curses. It would certainly help reduce his fever as well. She brought her canteen to his lips and slowly poured the water in, but he was unable to swallow, the liquid spilling out from his mouth.

"Drink! Please! I'm begging you!"

Cecilia tried again and again, but Callus would cough it all up. There was no going back; he was in danger, and Cecilia, who could think of no other way, decided to take matters into her own hands.

"I'm so sorry! Pardon me!"

She took the canteen and poured the water into her own mouth before pressing her lips onto him and had him drink.

"Mmph..."

It was said within the Holy Kingdom that the lips of a saint had a soothing effect on others. This theory said that light magic flowed through their lips into their partner to cause this effect, but it had never been scientifically proved by sorcery. But this was all Cecilia could do. If this was the only way for Callus to drink the water, she had no other choice.

Please! Please drink the water! No one was sure if her prayers had reached Callus, but she saw his throat move as he swallowed.

"He drank it!"

Cecilia repeated the process and fed Callus the water. She acted desperately in hopes of saving Callus. Once he'd ingested some of the liquid, color started to return to his pale face. The saint once more tried to pour the water into her mouth, when someone grabbed her hands to stop her.

"I'm…fine," Callus said.

"Sir Callus!"

He looked to still be in pain, but he opened his eyes. Overcome with emotions, she hugged Callus tightly.

"I'm glad! I'm so, so glad!" she cried as tears streamed down her face.

Callus stroked her head as though calming a child. "Thank you. And I'm sorry for making you do so much for me."

"It's not a problem at all. As long as you've awoken, I'm…"

Cecilia trailed off and calmed down a little as she peeled herself away from him. The two stared at each other. It felt like an eternity before Callus gave a gasp of realization.

"Is something the matter?" Cecilia asked.

"Er, um…" he said, shifting awkwardly. Cecilia quizzically stared at the boy before he finally pointed to her face. "Your blindfold is off. Is that all right with you?"

"Ack!"

She had completely forgotten about it. She quickly tried to cover her reddened face with her hands. Her clear, blue eyes were unique; if Callus saw them, he would immediately recognize her as Sissy, the girl he'd met when they were kids.

"U-Um, I, errr…" she stammered.

Cecilia didn't mind if her identity was exposed, but she didn't want her secret to be revealed like this. *What should I do? He might hate me.* But the words that she heard next completely floored her.

“I’m sorry, but let me be honest here,” Callus started. “I knew that you were Sissy, ever since we met in the academy courtyard for tea that day.”

“Huh?!” Cecilia’s mouth gaped open in shock. “U-U-U-Um, wh-wh-wh-what do you mean?!”

“Sorry. I just figured you had a good reason to hide your identity, so I pretended to not notice,” he said with a laugh.

Cecilia turned bright red from embarrassment and shock. “H-How did you realize that it was me?!”

“The moment I met you, I had an odd feeling of familiarity. I had no idea why, but I was certain that you were Sissy when I drank your tea.”

“Ah…”

Cecilia had poured Callus a cup of tea in the academy. Five years ago, when the two had met at the manor, she had done the same thing. The taste and aroma of the drink had triggered Callus’s memory.

“I didn’t think you remembered that,” she said.

“Of course I do. You’re my savior, Sissy, and someone really important to me. A blindfold can’t hide that.”

Cecilia felt her chest grow warm, but she was still unable to form the words that expressed her passionate feelings that flickered within.

“Um, I…always wanted to meet you again,” Cecilia stammered awkwardly, voicing her thoughts.

She wasn’t able to speak smoothly. There were tons of things she wanted to talk about now that her identity had been revealed, but she couldn’t verbalize them. It was vexing and made her impatient. Callus, who had sensed her thoughts, gently clasped her hands.

“Don’t worry,” he assured her. “It’ll be fine. Once everything calms down, let’s talk a lot, just like we did back then.”

“Yes! Please!”

She swallowed her words and leaned into his chest. Callus kindly stroked her head for a while.

“Have you calmed down?” Callus said after several minutes.

“I have,” Cecilia replied, reluctantly leaving his side.

Even Callus looked a bit embarrassed, as his cheeks turned pink.

“So…is ‘Sissy’ just a fake name?” he asked. “Cecilia’s your real name, right?”

“I was often called ‘Sissy’ when I was young. It was sort of like a nickname. When we first met, I was in the middle of a saint’s pilgrimage throughout the continent, where I’d gone by that name to hide my identity.”

“I see. So, what do you want to be called from now on? I shouldn’t call you ‘Sissy’ in front of others, should I?”

“No, it’d be a little embarrassing for others to hear it.”

“All right, then. You’ll remain as Cecilia.”

“But…when we’re alone, I don’t mind,” Cecilia said, looking slightly embarrassed. “In fact, I’d be quite happy if you called me ‘Sissy’ when it’s just the two of us.”

“G-Got it,” Callus replied, feeling his cheeks grow warm as well.

He remembered the feeling of her lips on his own. He had been half unconscious, but the memory was stuck in his mind.

“Uh, why don’t we walk ahead?” Callus suggested. “I think there was a path over there.”

“R-Right. Let’s.”

The two didn’t touch upon *that* subject as they tried to leave. There were plenty of things they wanted to talk about, but leaving this area was their top priority.

“Let’s go, Sissy,” Callus said, extending his hand to her.

“Okay!” Cecilia replied, taking his hand as the two made their way through the darkness.

***

“I understand the situation,” Headmistress Laura Magnolia said with a stern expression. “We’ll evacuate our students immediately.”

Macbell stood in front of her. He had managed to barely escape the cave, and then headed straight to Laura to report on the events.

“Other than the students who were with you at the time, does anyone else know about this?” Laura asked.

“No, ma’am,” Macbell replied. “I thought it was best to let you know first, and I haven’t told anyone else. I’ve also warned those students against discussing this incident with others.”

“Very good. Make sure that this is kept confidential.”

“Am I correct in assuming that we’ll be covering this incident up?”

The atmosphere in the headmistress's room became tense, but Laura did not express anger towards Macbell's phrasing. She remained stern and serious.

"If word gets out, the entire royal capital would fall into a state of panic," Laura said. "Even I'm not sure just how much damage such hysteria could cause. I must report this to the king first and wait for further instruction. I can no longer handle this case by myself."

"I apologize for my careless words. I spoke impulsively," Macbell answered, feeling ashamed about his thoughtlessness.

"Not to worry. A teacher like you, who cares so much about his students, is a treasure to this academy. I'm sure there's plenty to be done before offering an apology. Will you kindly assist me?"

"Y-Yes, ma'am! Of course!"

Laura smiled. "First, will you contact the Magical Committee? I am quite reluctant to do this, but we require their assistance. So —"

"Oh, there's no need for that," a third voice interjected, his words echoing throughout the room.

Laura and Macbell turned towards the door in astonishment.

"Hi there. It's been a while, Laura. Have you been doing well?"

"Chairman Emilia?! Why are you here?" Laura replied.

Neither she nor Macbell could hide their shock. Why was Emilia Licht, the chairman of the Committee, here? Since when? And why had he decided to show up now?

"I thought it was about time for you to rely on me," Emilia said. "Perfect timing, isn't it?"

Laura seethed on the inside. It was clear as day that the chairman had seen through everything and was well aware of the circumstances. But showing her irritation would only give him more satisfaction, so she remained calm and collected.

"Thinking back, this incident was rather odd," Laura said. "A huge hole suddenly appeared, but an investigation team was formed in such a short amount of time. And they deemed the area safe just as quickly."

Laura had felt that more time and research were needed in regards to the hole. However, her thoughts had never reached the research team. In fact, without her knowledge, students had received permission to tour the site. There were only a handful of people who could exert such power, exceeding even the

headmistress's.

"To top it all off, among the first students allowed to enter was that boy you have ties with," Laura said. "It's all a bit *too* coincidental, I think."

She had a close bond with Gourley, Callus's master. She was aware of the feud that had occurred between Callus and Emilia, and she had worked to keep those two separate from each other. But it seemed Emilia had slipped out of her view to pull some strings.

"You must have done something," Laura accused.

"In regards to the tour, it's just as you'd expect. As a teacher, it's only natural to want students to have a valuable learning experience, no? That child was able to enter first because…well, he was just *very* lucky. I've got nothing to do with it," Emilia said with a foolish excuse and a faint smile.

Laura gritted her teeth. She knew that he was lying about it all. The chairman always acted for his own gain, and he certainly wouldn't mind sacrificing a student or two if it ultimately worked in his favor. The headmistress swallowed her anger and tried to act as composed as she could.

"Were you able to foresee the appearance of that giant hole?" Laura asked.

"Heh heh," Emilia chuckled. He made a ring with his thumb and index finger, and peered through it. "Have you forgotten? I'm a super first-rate astrologist. It's expected of me to predict such a grand event, wouldn't you think?"

Even Laura could no longer contain her irritation at his aloof attitude.

"And you didn't tell us about it?" she inquired. "If we had known, perhaps we could've worked to prevent it."

"Tricks are meaningless in the face of the great flow. And sometimes, acting recklessly just makes everything worse. When it comes to fate, the wisest choice is to properly handle an event after it's occurred. Besides, I'm prohibited from entering this academy. If you'd like to blame someone, blame His Majesty the King."

"Gh…" Laura growled.

But blaming Emilia here would do her no good, and it wouldn't improve the situation. Instead of airing her grievances, she had other matters to attend to. If she caused Emilia's mood to sour, she'd be unable to receive aid from the Committee,

which would only lead to more trouble.

“Oh, speaking of,” Emilia said, “I’ve brought some reliable forces with me, so relax. I don’t want this place to be destroyed either, you see.”

He snapped his fingers, and two men entered the office. One was tall, about sixty years of age. He was slender with a slight slouch, and he held a staff. His long, messy hair and filthy clothes gave him the appearance of a vagabond. The other man wore a helmet that completely obscured his face. However, the rest of his body wasn’t armored—in fact, he was dressed rather lightly, with a sleeveless top that accentuated his well-defined muscles. In stark contrast to the first man, he looked quite powerful. Laura looked surprised at first, but soon turned stern.

“Moongrim the Withered, and Metal the Iron Man…” she muttered. “I didn’t think you’d bring two grand sages.”

Among the countless magicians, only the truly exceptional ones could receive the honored title of “grand sage.” Needless to say, there weren’t many of them, and they never exceeded ten in one generation. Grand sages were highly respected or feared by others, but the way Laura saw it, those with this title were one of two kinds of people.

First were the mages who produced excellent results. They either made revolutionary discoveries or greatly contributed to magical society. For example, Gourley would likely be put in this group for having raised many superb magicians. Or rather, he would have been if he hadn’t resigned.

The second group were those who had been selected solely for their overwhelming power. Every now and then, there would be a magician who possessed an absurd amount of power, who could single-handedly go toe-to-toe with an entire army or nation. They were more like monsters wearing the skin of a human. Mages who commanded such immense strength also received the title of grand sage from the Committee.

In a sense, those in the latter group represented the more literal meaning of the title. When the Committee had just started to form, wars broke out much more frequently. Magicians who could end those wars on their own were revered by the Committee. The two grand sages in front of Laura were definitely that type—these two each held enough raw power to topple a nation if they wished.

“Ah, I’d love to die,” the old man said lackadaisically. “I want to

wither away and die."

"It's been a while," said the energetic, burly man in a helmet. "Have you been well? Now that I'm here, you can rest easy!"

The two grand sages had completely different personalities.

"I've also brought another hundred mages or so," Emilia added. "I don't think we can lose with all this power. Laura, I leave *you* to command them all. Use them well..."

"M-Me?" Laura asked in confusion. "I thought you'd be taking charge, Chairman."

Laura, whose title of sage was a step below that of the grand sages, would practically be commanding her superiors. And the two men before her far exceeded her in magical ability. She'd only feel dwarfed in their presence, much less be able to command them effectively.

"I'll act alone," Emilia replied. "This is such a grand stage! I want to enjoy it from the front seats."

"What nonsense are you on about?"

"Heh heh. Well, you'll know soon enough. I've brought another reliable assistant along, so work together with him, will you?"

"An assistant?"

"Oh yes, it's someone you know *very* well. You two should get along just fine."

With that, Emilia left in high spirits. Laura wearily watched the selfish boy leave, then noticed this "assistant" enter her office.

"Good grief. You've been tasked with something quite troublesome, eh?"

"You're..." Laura gasped, her eyes wide. Indeed, she knew this person all too well.

"I shall lend you my aid as well. What should we start with?" Gourley Sigmaen asked.

He was Callus's teacher, and the only one in the Magical Committee's lengthy history to cast aside the title of grand sage.

"S-Sir Gourley?!" Macbell gasped. "Wh-Why are you here?!"

The apprentice couldn't be more shocked. Macbell didn't have the fortune of being able to learn light magic, but thanks to the aid of Gourley, he had become a splendid magician. He still held his master in high regard, never forgetting to respect his teacher.

"That man, Emilia, called out to me. How did he find out that I was in the royal capital, I wonder?" Gourley muttered with a weary sigh. "Normally, I would've ignored his words. But if my

cute apprentice is in peril, I obviously cannot leave that be. Laura, will you allow me to be of assistance?"

"Of course," Laura replied. "I feel bad about asking for your aid since you've left the Committee, but I'm afraid I require your help."

"Don't mention it. I owe you one for looking after Callus, so you don't need to hold back."

Upon looking at this reliable man, Laura internally breathed a sigh of relief. She certainly had her doubts about being able to keep two grand sages in check, but with Gourley by her side, he could surely use the two quite well.

"I shall take command of evacuating the students, and report this to the king," Laura said. "May I ask you to work with the Committee's mages to defend the academy?"

"Very well," Gourley said with a nod before turning to the two men who outranked him. "As you've just heard, may I ask for you two to come along with me?"

"Sure... I don't mind. I'll just do what I must," said one.

"Of course! It's been a while since we've worked together, Gourley! Boy, am I looking forward to this!" said the other.

Gourley led the two mismatched grand sages out of the headmistress's room. Once Laura confirmed that only she and Macbell remained, she sighed deeply. Emilia had only been in her room for a few minutes, but she felt so exhausted as though she'd stayed up all night.

"Are you all right, ma'am?" Macbell asked worriedly. "Perhaps some rest will do you good."

"No, I'm fine," Laura replied. "All this time, students are in danger. We don't have a moment to rest."

"I understand. I may not be much, but please allow me to help however I can."

"Thank you, Macbell."

The headmistress stood up and began her duties.

***

"Good grief... What were you guys trying to do?" asked a young girl with unique chestnut-colored hair.

Saria was in her laboratory and home, the clock tower. She had found three of Callus's friends—Crys, Jack, and Volga—sneaking around the giant hole and decided to bring them back.

They had initially declined her invitation, but she'd countered with a threat: "I'll scream if you don't come with me." And so, the three had reluctantly followed her.

But none of them were eager to talk. Saria once again gave a deep sigh.

"Let me guess. Since it's you three we're talking about, you tried to evade the teachers and sneak into the giant hole to save Cecilia and Junior. Am I wrong?" she asked.

"H-How did you..." Crys gasped before realizing that she'd been tricked. She clapped her hand over her mouth.

"It's weird, you know," Saria continued. "Just when I think the academy is getting noisy, I see you guys scurrying around. And since Junior isn't with you, I'm guessing they were dragged into some sort of trouble and got left behind. It's not difficult to figure that out."

"You're truly amazing, Saria," Crys said, raising her arms in the air to surrender. "You're exactly right. The truth is..."

Crys told Saria what had occurred in the giant hole, and the young researcher listened with great interest.

"I see. I would've never expected that," Saria said.

She'd had a few theories of her own regarding the hole, but reality had chosen the worst possible scenario. Should the beings of evil make it outside the royal capital, it was unknown just how much destruction it could cause. If the citizens of the kingdom caught wind of this, there would be mass hysteria, and countless lives would be lost. Saria flinched when she understood just how serious the situation had become.

"I see. I understand now. That's why you three were trying to sneak back into the hole to save Junior and Cecilia," Saria said.

"Right," Crys confessed. "The teacher told us to leave the rest to the adults, and that students should head home, but we couldn't just leave Callus behind. We decided to do what we could."

Jack and Volga nodded along.

"Exactly," Volga said. "Going home like this would only sully the Jaguarpatch name."

"M-M-Me too! I'm not scared of those monsters!" Jack declared, though he was trembling a bit.

Everyone had made up their minds.

"I understand that we're doing something rather foolish, but please let us go," Crys implored. "We have to return to that cave!"

“No,” Saria immediately replied, shooting her down.

Despair filled Crys’s eyes. “Please! We won’t cause you any trouble.”

“No means no. Even if you returned to that cave, how much of a chance would you have to save Junior and his friend? The two have been transported elsewhere using a dimensional spell. How could you pinpoint their location when such a spell has been used? I doubt you guys could find him even if you did go back.”

Crys fell silent at Saria’s words. The researcher had a point—Crys and the others had no means to reach Callus for now. It would be a miracle if they could even find out where he was.

“Unfortunately, as your upperclassman, I can’t allow you to take such a risky gamble,” Saria said simply but firmly. She was clearly not open to negotiations.

But Crys couldn’t back off. “True, we might be doing something reckless. I understand why you think this is a gamble. But even so, I want to save Callus!”

Crys lowered her head, and Volga and Jack followed suit. Saria gave a weary sigh.

“Did you guys not understand what I just said?” she asked. “I said no to visiting that large hole. I won’t stop you from saving Junior.”

“Huh?” Crys cried out pathetically.

“I’m worried about him too, you know. I’ll happily lend you my aid.”

Saria’s powerful declaration made her look reliable, and the three felt their confidence bolstered by her words.

“Thank you, Saria!” Crys said, overcome with emotions as she pushed the upperclassman into her chest.

“Whoa! Let go!” Saria said, flailing for a short while before she was freed from being suffocated. “Good grief. Calm down.”

She looked exhausted, but deep down, she felt happy to be relied on by her underclassmen.

“All right, listen up,” she said. “Based on your story, we can assume that Junior and Cecilia have been transported elsewhere by an ancient trap created by the kingdom using a dimensional spell. The first thing that comes to mind in terms of what the two have in common is light magic.”

She proceeded to elaborate on her deductions, which she’d gleaned from Crys’s story. The three underclassmen listened quietly.

“In other words, there’s a good chance that the two are safe,” Saria concluded. “The kingdom, which worships the white dragon, likely wouldn’t treat light magicians with disdain.”

“I see. Then what can we do?” Crys asked.

Saria hesitated a moment before she spoke. “I’m not sure what you can do for them at this moment. But I’m sure the two will make it back. Instead of going to look for them, we should prepare to welcome them upon their return.”

“‘Prepare to welcome them upon their return?’”

“Precisely. Why don’t we rest for a bit? I can see that you guys are exhausted. In your current state, you wouldn’t even win fights you’d normally be able to handle.” Saria took out a few potion bottles from her cooling magical tool, and handed them to the underclassmen. “There will come a time when you three will shine. I’m sure of it. So for now, you need to rest. You mustn’t mistake where you use your energy.”

“I understand,” Crys said after a moment of silence. With determined eyes, she downed the potion in one gulp.

Saria gave a satisfied nod. “And that’s good enough. You three should rest for now. I’ll keep watch outside.”

“Okay. If anything happens, be sure to wake us up right away,” Crys said.

She sat on the ground, easing her tense nerves, and tried to rest her body. Saria looked at the three students.

“So many people out here are thinking of you,” Saria muttered under breath. “You two must come home safe.”

***

Meanwhile, Callus and Cecilia were holding hands within the dark cave.

“There are steps here, so be careful,” Callus warned.

“A-All right. Thank you,” Cecilia replied.

The two proceeded, trying to find a way out. Until now, Callus had been more reserved and treated the saint like an upperclassman, but now that her identity had been revealed, he could speak with her more casually like they had done in the past. Cecilia didn’t dare vocalize her thoughts, but she was very happy about it.

She giggled. “Walking around like this reminds me of my time with you back then.”

“Yeah,” Callus agreed. “You weren’t at my manor for long, Sissy, but I remember having so much fun.”

Callus, who couldn’t leave the manor, had only had Sissy and Crys to call friends. His time with both hadn’t even added up to a month, but the happy memories remained fresh in his mind.

“I know we’ve been more formal at the academy, but could I act more friendly with you from here on out?” Callus asked.

“O-Of corth!” Cecilia stammered, biting her tongue and speaking awkwardly.

Callus couldn’t suppress a chuckle. She hadn’t changed one bit.

“D-Don’t be mean!” Cecilia said. “Please don’t laugh.”

“I’m sorry,” Callus replied with a laugh. “I don’t mean to make fun of you or anything.”

The two proceeded deeper and deeper into the cave, continuing their friendly banter like they were making up for lost time. Gradually, the dirt floor gave way to stone tiles and crumbled pillars. The two fell silent and remained vigilant of their surroundings.

Callus froze in place. “This is…”

Before them stood a huge ruin much larger than the one with the statue of the white dragon. It was so massive that the lantern couldn’t fully illuminate the area. Callus gulped nervously, wondering what was inside.

“Callus…” Cecilia sensed his fear and squeezed his hand.

Her soft, warm, and gentle hands slowly eased his nerves.

“Thank you,” Callus said. “I’ll be fine now.”

“Okay. Then let’s go in.”

The two gathered their courage and stepped into the ruin. It looked to be a bare, spacious room, devoid of any statues or decorations. The pair cautiously walked on.

“I wonder what this place was made for,” Callus mused.

“Is it to worship the legendary white dragon? I feel like it must have something to do with that statue we found earlier,” Cecilia said.

“Yeah. I think the white dragon’s related to this ruin. But it doesn’t look like this place was made as an area to worship it.”

The entire time, Callus had been wondering why he and Cecilia had been transported here.

“The place we were transported to only had one path, which led to this ruin,” Callus said. “In other words, we’ve been guided

here. And…I think the one behind it all is my ancestor, King Arth."

The first king was said to be a powerful, intelligent monarch. Much of his heroic bravery existed in tales, and there were numerous books and songs dedicated to him even in recent times. In fact, Callus had received his name partly out of a desire for him to grow up strong and kind, just like the king.

"Hm? That's…" Callus trailed off as they proceeded into a large clearing.

He saw what looked to be a lone pedestal with two long support pillars protruding from it. A thin stone beam about a meter in length had been placed horizontally on top.

"I wonder what this is," Callus said.

One side of the stick had been sharpened. It would probably be able to pierce something, but it seemed a bit too unwieldy to use as a weapon.

"It's probably not just some ordinary object," Cecilia said.

"And this pedestal's the only thing in this clearing. It must be of great importance."

The pair slowly approached the pedestal. Even up close, it looked quite ordinary, but Callus felt oddly enchanted by it. It was as though he had found a long-lost item—he felt something akin to love as these thoughts welled up from within him.

Callus absently reached out towards it.

"Callus?" Cecilia asked, noticing his actions.

"Huh? Wait, what was I…" the boy mumbled, snapping back to his senses upon hearing his name.

But his hand was already on it. What had he been trying to do with it? The moment he tried to release the item from his grasp, it gave off a bright glow.

"Ugh!"

"Eek!"

The two covered their eyes as a brilliant flash of light filled the area. A few seconds later, the light had died down, and they slowly opened their eyes. In front of them was an enormous, pure-white dragon with magnificent scales.

"Huh?!"

The massive dragon was over ten meters in length. At the end of a long neck, its head was about to touch the ceiling of the room. Its scales gave off a dazzling white sheen, each like a carefully crafted work of art. Its fangs and talons were sharp like blades forged by a master craftsman, and its long, supple tail

moved gracefully with a mind of its own. The dragon's eyes had a wild spark, but they were also filled with intelligence. Callus felt like the beast could read his mind.

"What year?"

"Huh?" Callus gasped, shocked that the dragon had uttered human words.

He'd read that these beasts possessed high intelligence, but he had never heard of any of them communicating with people. Cecilia hadn't known this either, and looked just as surprised.

"I'm asking what year it currently is."

"Ah...erm, it's 1555 in the Age of Man," Callus replied.

"I see. So it has been over five hundred years. Time flies."

The dragon spoke pensively, as though he was reminiscing on the past. Upon closer inspection, Callus noticed that the dragon's body was translucent. Because he was glowing, it was difficult to tell at first, but the semitransparent dragon didn't seem to have a physical body. Could this beast be similar to a spirit? If so, that raised another question: while Callus could see spirits possessing him because of his curse, why was Cecilia able to observe the dragon as well? This was also why Callus had failed to notice the dragon lacked a physical body at first.

"Um, excuse me," Callus asked gingerly, steeling his nerves. "Are you the great white dragon who defeated the beings of evil with King Arth?"

The white dragon lowered his head until he was at eye level with the two students. His face was large—he could swallow several adults in one gulp. Callus and Cecilia looked on nervously.

"Indeed, that is so. My name is Tval Raizax IV, a proud bicaudal dragon and Hero Arth's irreplaceable friend. I am pleased to meet you, child who carries Arth's blood."

Callus was astonished that Raizax knew his identity, but the dragon continued while staring at the boy.

"There is nothing to be alarmed of. Your magical energy greatly resembles his, you see."

"I see. I'm honored to hear that," Callus replied.

Callus held a lot of respect for Arth, so he was genuinely happy to hear that he resembled the first king.

"Small child, what is your name?"

"Pardon my belated introduction. My name is Callus Leditzweissen. I have read many tales about you since my youth.

I'm truly honored to meet you."

"I see. So my brave tales live on? I certainly do not dislike hearing that," Raizax said in a low voice while giving a smile. The dragon occasionally stared into the distance, likely thinking about the past. *"Callus. As I look more closely at you, your face resembles Arth's quite a bit."*

"Huh? Really?"

"Indeed. He also had unique white hair and red eyes..." Raizax trailed off as though he'd noticed something before gazing at Callus with pity. *"I see. You two really are similar...to an alarming extent. Then I suppose it's only natural that we have met. The great guidance is cruel and heartless."*

"Wh-What do you mean?"

Callus was worried by the dragon's mysterious words. After the beast thought for a while, he finally decided to speak.

"You see, my partner Arth never told anyone else of this, but he was a Taboo Being. A poor soul born with a powerful curse within him."

"What?!" Callus gasped.

Even Cecilia was stunned into silence. There were indeed records of Arth dying at a young age, but none mentioned him having a curse.

"He had tried countless methods to undo the curse, and I had offered my assistance as well. Defeating the beings of evil was but one. Hah, but that resulted in him being heralded as a hero, making him king. Life is truly unpredictable, is it not?"

As shocking facts were being revealed in succession, Callus couldn't help but ask his question.

"U-Um, and what happened to King Arth? Records indicate that he passed away right before reaching adulthood, due to an unfortunate accident. What happened to the curse?"

"I see. So that is how it remains in history."

Raizax had been hesitant to speak further on the subject, but as he saw Callus's earnest expression, he chose to divulge the truth. The boy was his partner's descendant, and he trusted that Callus could endure the cruel reality.

"Frankly speaking, Arth died because of the curse. From light magic to dragon's blood, he managed to slow the curse's spread, but he was unable to completely rid himself of it. Before such a person came to be called a 'Taboo Being,' the more archaic term had been 'Dark Blessed Child.' These people would, without fail, die before

their twentieth birthday. Even with my power, I was unable to reverse this rule."

Raizax spoke with genuine regret. All Taboo Beings would die before becoming adults. As the harsh reality was thrust upon Callus, Cecilia looked at the boy in worry. Would he be hurt? Would he feel despair?

However, the prince displayed neither. With a glimmering gaze, he looked straight at the white dragon.

"I see," Callus said. "It's truly a pity. You said Taboo Beings used to be referred to as 'Dark Blessed Children.' May I learn what this means?"

"As you might already be aware, curses originate from dark magical energy. But even so, the curse that plagues Taboo Beings is quite special."

"Special?"

"Indeed. The curse of the Taboo Beings isn't simply dark magical energy. It originates from Manusia, the God of Darkness."

"What?!"

Manusia, the God of Darkness, was said to be one of the gods that existed during ancient times. However, there weren't many legends about him. Unlike Flam, the God of Fire, Melk, the God of Water, and Raila, the God of Light, Manusia was regarded as a minor deity. Only a few people in certain regions worshipped him, and many wondered if he had even existed at all.

"But why would the God of Darkness do such a thing?" Callus asked.

"Even I am unsure of the details. However, according to myths, the God of Darkness would apparently mark one who had gained their favor. To those who worshipped Manusia, this was said to be the greatest blessing and highest honor that one could ever attain. Those born with this mark were respected and called 'Blessed Children.'"

"Which is where the term 'Dark Blessed Child' came from."

"Precisely. Those who worship the darkness revere pain as the highest form of love and affection. The suffering one would receive from the curse was likely a source of joy to believers."

Raizax paused for a short while. Perhaps he had said too much; the dragon regretted his actions. Anyone would be shocked to hear that they'd been cursed by a god. In such a predicament, the dragon was unsure if giving out so much information had been a good decision. But his worries were

soon proved groundless.

“This is all that I know.”

“Thank you so much for telling me such invaluable information,” Callus said firmly, without looking at all discouraged.

“Oh?” Raizax said with interest. *“Do my words not bring you despair? Your curse was bestowed upon you by a god, and even the great Arth was powerless to stop it.”*

“I’ve already felt despair more times than I can count. In the past, I was only given six months to live. But now, I’ve been able to live a normal life. I won’t feel despair, no matter what you tell me.”

Callus smiled. Upon seeing it, the dragon was filled with memories of his old partner.

“How nostalgic. He never lost heart in the face of adversity either.”

“Hm? Sorry, did you say something?” Callus asked.

“Oh, nothing at all. I was just reminiscing about the past.”

Raizax was certain that over the course of five hundred years, it wasn’t just Arth’s bloodline that had been passed on. His spirit had been as well.

“Now then, why don’t we end the small talk for now? The survivors of that time have started to act again, no?”

“R-Right! Yes, the beings of evil have been resurrected! I thought King Arth had defeated all of them, so why are they still alive?” Callus cried.

“Indeed, I had annihilated the ones above with my light. However, a portion of these beings feared my existence and hid deep underground. After many years of restoring their strength, they waited for the power of darkness to resurge.”

“And that time is now?”

Raizax nodded. *“By the time we noticed that there were beings of evil hidden underground, Arth had already grown too feeble to move. He no longer had the energy to go deep under the earth and defeat these creatures. Thus, Arth and I entrusted that responsibility to his descendants. We documented methods on how to defeat these beings, and built a ruin to house my spirit form. We considered moving the royal capital as well, but it would be too late if we noticed the beings of evil once they started to spread. He kept the royal capital here so that his descendants could be the first to notice when these beings would resurrect once more. And above all, he couldn’t bring himself to give such sobering news to his people, so*

soon after they had finally attained happiness and peace."

"I see," Callus said. "You said that you documented these methods, but I've never heard of such a thing."

"Ah. I suppose that cannot be helped. Back then, it was rare for the throne to be succeeded without any bloodshed. Jewels and precious metals might have been preserved, but I would not be surprised if ancient texts were burned and destroyed."

The Ledyvia Kingdom was peaceful in modern times, but there had been an era when things were quite different. In fact, it was more unusual that Callus and his brothers had maintained such a good relationship. It was far more common for brothers to kill each other for the throne.

"Arth had another plan in case his documents were burned, of course. Hence, I am here. We dragons could live for an eternity, and we are an existence resembling spirits. Indeed, I was the one who created Arth's light magic. Once he passed, I cast aside my physical body and became a spirit."

The dragon spoke of this casually, but his decision had been far from it. For dragons that could seemingly live forever, death was a welcome end that closed the curtains on their long lives. They were proud to fulfill their lives as dragons, and it was the greatest honor to end with this glory. Clutching to life by becoming a spirit was looked down upon, seen as an ugly and desperate act. Because of that, dragons rarely chose to do so.

"As I had become an existence that would never fade, I kept watch over the beings of evil so that I could lend my power to the one who carried Arth's spirit. I cast aside my porcelain scales and slumbered within this ruin."

"What?!" Callus gasped.

He was shocked to hear those words. He'd assumed that the cause of Raizax's death had been unrelated. Instead, the dragon had chosen to end his life for the future of the kingdom and to honor the wishes of his friend. For centuries, he had been alone within this dark area in preparation for an occasion which he could never expect.

"Why would you go to such great lengths?" Callus asked. "You're a dragon, and you must've had the option to live with your kind. Why did you sacrifice so much for humans?"

"What I am does not matter. Though our birth and appearance might have been different, Arth was my best friend. I believe that is reason enough."

There wasn't an ounce of regret in the dragon's words. Callus felt tears welling up as he realized the depths of this bond.

"Thank you," Callus said. "Thank you for doing so much for my ancestor and this kingdom. I'm not an official prince, but on behalf of our kingdom, you have our deepest gratitude."

"I do not mind. I do not expect anything in return when it comes to friendship."

Raizax grinned, showing off his sharp fangs. Callus couldn't help but wonder who Arth really was. How had he been able to form such a deep bond with a different species?

"Now, Callus. I shall ask you. What will you do from here? The invigorated beings of evil will surely try to worm their way aboveground."

The prince was nervous. Those terrifying entities were still crawling around in abundance.

"What will happen if they do make it aboveground?" Callus asked.

"As beings of darkness, they find the greatest joy in causing pain. That is how they display their affection. They shall continue to impulsively destroy and wreak havoc on the area. Countless lives will be lost, and the very earth will decay. The curse shall then spread. I once had the misfortune of seeing the remains of a kingdom in their wake. Words cannot express just how terrifying and horrific it was..."

Callus frowned as he simply imagined this nightmare. He didn't even want to think about his beloved kingdom being ruined. And above all...

"I cannot allow the curse to spread," the boy declared. "I don't want anyone else to experience this pain and agony."

Callus couldn't sit back and do nothing while his loved ones, family, and friends were plagued by this curse. He wiped away his fear and decided to face the problem head-on.

"I'll stop the beings of evil," Callus said firmly. "I believe this is my reason for learning light magic."

Raizax gave a satisfied smile before mumbling under his breath, *"Heh, you really do resemble him. It is as though I have returned to those joyous days."* He moved his long neck as his face approached Callus. *"Then I shall bestow upon you my power. It can tear through the heavens and destroy the darkness. If used well, you will have nothing to fear from the beings of evil."*

"R-Really?! Thank you!" Callus exclaimed. With the white dragon who had once defeated the beings of evil on his side, he

felt more reassured than ever before. “Um, so how do you bestow this power?”

“Before I appeared before you, you touched upon my spear. You remember that, do you not?”

“A spear? Ah, you must mean the object placed over there.”

Callus thought back to the stone structure that had been placed upon a pedestal. Raizax had appeared after he touched the item.

“That spear is my power given form.” Raizax proceeded to show his tail to Callus. *“I was a bicaudal dragon, but that is in the past. I only have one tail now.”*

“Oh, you’re right. I didn’t notice it.”

The Ledyvia Kingdom’s flag had a white dragon with two tails, and picture books had also always portrayed the magnificent beast with two tails. But Raizax currently only had one.

“Before we battled the beings of evil, I cut off one of my tails. After much effort, I used it to create a spear which I gave to Arth.”

“And that’s the spear that I touched earlier. But the moment I did so, it disappeared.”

“Disappeared? No, it is right there.”

The dragon pointed at Callus. The boy looked perplexed.

“Um, what do you mean?” he asked.

“It is no normal spear, you see. I simply materialized the concept of a spear, but it has no set shape. It can shift its form in any way desired by its owner.”

“I-I see…”

Callus needed time to process all of this, and he could only feign understanding.

“Which means the spear had changed its shape and is now inside Callus’s body, correct?” Cecilia asked, trying to clarify matters.

“Precisely. I do not mind if you see it that way.”

The boy seemed to finally understand, but he still couldn’t quite grasp the concept of a spear being inside him. He didn’t feel any different either.

“My power has already been passed on to you. You must envision a spear that pierces through all, and release it with your voice. Within you is the Dragon Spear of Light, Raizax, the strongest spear and one that is crowned with my name.”

Callus looked at his right hand and tried to imagine the weapon. The sight of his ancestor portrayed valiantly within

picture books popped into his mind. The first king had soared through the skies atop a white dragon with a glimmering spear in his hand. It was then that Callus remembered that the size and shape of the spear had been different in each book. Legends had never given details on the weapon, and it was only natural for people to have different interpretations, so he had never given it much thought. However, it could've simply been that the spear changed form based on the occasion. He concentrated deeply and poured magical energy into his right hand.

"Raizax!"



His hand glowed brightly. Once the light had died down, he was holding a spear giving off a pale glow. The weapon wasn't ornate; it was created solely to pierce through opponents. Decorations and flattery were unnecessary, as its beauty lay within its austere simplicity.

"This…is the Spear of the White Dragon," Callus said as he stared at the weapon in his hand.

The materialized magical energy had no weight, but the boy could easily tell that the power it held was astronomical.

"Ah…"

After a short while, the spear disappeared. Callus attempted to summon it once more, but Raizax stopped him.

"The power of the spear hasn't stabilized with your body. Overusing it will only take a toll on you. You should rest easy for now."

"I-I understand," Callus replied with a nod.

"Now then, shall we end for today? If you pour your magical energy into the pedestal that held the spear, it will activate a spell to teleport you to the surface."

"I understand," Callus said. "Before that, may I ask you two more questions? If you don't mind, that is…"

"But of course. You may speak."

"Why did the beings of evil start moving now? Does it have anything to do with my curse?"

Raizax thought for a moment before answering. *"This is simply my guess, but I believe that to be the case. Five hundred years ago, when Taboo Beings were born, the beings of evil also became active. I do not think that is a coincidence. The beings of evil are a magical existence created by magical energy. And the curse is also created by dark magical energy. They are closely related."* The dragon then spoke in a kinder tone, as though to assure Callus. *"You must be worried that your existence has caused the beings of evil to become active once more. But I assure you, that is not the case. There is a separate, much greater reason for why the beings of evil have arisen. They would have crawled out whether you were here or not."*

"Thank you," Callus said, breathing a sigh of relief. "That makes me feel a lot better."

Even if it hadn't been on purpose, if the prince had been the cause of it all, he would've surely blamed himself for years to come.

"And what is your other question?"

“Oh, right. Why are we able to see you?”

“Well, that is because I am not a normal spirit. Those born as a dragon, a species of great pride, will become a spirit of high rank. High-ranking spirits are able to expand the realms of perception so that we may be seen by humans. It does require a bit of training, however.”

“Huh?” Callus was puzzled. His partner, Selena, was also a spirit of high rank. And yet, she couldn’t be perceived by other humans.

“Raizax, you see…” the boy started, shedding light about his partner.

He told the dragon that he was possessed by a princess of the spirits. While he was able to perceive Selena and talk with her, she couldn’t be seen by other humans. And he currently couldn’t communicate with her. Callus told Raizax everything he knew about it.

“I see. A light spirit, a princess of the spirits. I cannot blame her for being unaware of the method to appear in front of others.”

“What do you mean by that?” Callus asked.

“There are numerous princesses, but the light princess is the youngest sister. Because she was born last, she was not told a thing.”

“Wait… So that means Selena has older sisters?!” Callus inquired, shocked. He’d never heard about them before.

“Yes, I suppose you could call them that, but they are not related by blood like other living organisms. They have all experienced similar births, is all.”

“The same births?”

“Indeed. I am not too knowledgeable on this either, but it is said that princesses of the spirits are born differently from others. But…ah, she is called Selena. I see… Does Selenea know of this, I wonder…?”

“Um…”

“Ah, apologies. I am just thinking out loud. In any case, the light princess is not at fault for lacking knowledge. She was left all alone before her parents or sisters were able to impart that knowledge. Not to worry. I can give her a few tips, and she shall be able to appear in front of others in an instant. Once we leave this area, I can teach her.”

“Thank you so much!”

“Now then, shall we go? Do you have a Resting Stone with you?”

Callus tilted his head.

“The Resting Stone is an old way to refer to the Dwelling Stone,” Cecilia quickly added.

“Ah, right. I remember now. Uh… Yes, I’ve got one right here,” Callus said, taking out a white stone from his pouch.

This Dwelling Stone, or Resting Stone as it was called in ancient times, was a place for spirits to rest. To this day, some regions placed these stones in front of small shrines and gave a prayer along with an offering.

“What will you do with this?” Callus asked.

“I am sure you have experienced this already, but dimensional spells tear spirits away from humans. However, if spirits touch the Resting Stone, they will be transported along with humans.”

“I see… So with this, you can go outside too.”

“Precisely. You need my power to defeat the beings of evil.”

“You’ll be a great help. With you by my side, I’ve got nothing to fear!”

“Indeed.”

Raizax gave a happy smile. As Callus and Cecilia prepared to touch the pedestal and teleport outside, the earth shook violently, causing the pair to lose their balance.

“Whoa!”

“Eek!”

They managed to keep themselves upright, but the two were now on high alert.

“Was that…” Callus started.

“The beings of evil, yes. They act quicker than I had expected. They might already be outside. If so, we must act swiftly as well.”

“Right. Let’s hurry!”

If the beings of evil were to go on a rampage, the royal capital would be in danger. Callus, Cecilia, and Raizax quickly tried to head out.

***

The entities had been lying in wait for a long, *long* time. They were huddled together within the depths of the dark underground, waiting for the opportunity to exact their revenge. These creatures, born from darkness, were completely different from normal living organisms. While the denizens of the light sought their own happiness, these beings of darkness lived for the suffering of others. Concepts like good and evil had nothing

to do with it. This was their only motive for their actions. It was their display of affection, their raison d'être. These beings, burrowed deep within the soil, craved hearing the screams of terror, the cries of agony, the utterances of resentment, the howls of insanity, and the claims of despair. Only these would provide sustenance and quell their thirst.

"G...raaah!"

A crack ran through the floor, allowing the first one to break through to the surface. The bright sunlight sizzled its skin. It hadn't experienced sunlight for the past five hundred years, and a sharp pain coursed through its body. It found that to be comforting.

"Grrr..."

As it looked around, it noticed a variety of buildings. They were beautifully maintained and smelled of people. They would make for a bountiful source of pain and fear. A repulsive grin formed on the creature's lips. Without waiting for its friends to emerge, it immediately began searching for victims. It didn't care what its target was; it just wanted to inflict pain upon something, anything. Suddenly, a human appeared in front of the vile creature.

"This must be a being of evil. Indeed, it looks much more horrifying than anything I've ever seen."

"Grrr..."

Saliva dribbled from the dark entity's mouth, as a feast had appeared before its eyes. The person looked to be a bit elderly and lacking in meat, but that didn't matter. It was finally time, after a long period of waiting, to gorge on delicious flesh. It was eager to dine before its friends. It approached the elderly man, imagining the taste of meat filling its mouth.

"Meat... Let me eat..."

"I'm surprised. I didn't think you could understand our language," the elderly man said, lowering his staff. He proceeded to try to reason with this being. "I'm sorry, but there are no more people residing on this land. It'd be great if you could live elsewhere. In fact, if you'd like, we could even support your emigration to the fullest extent possible."

From an outsider's perspective, this old man's actions were worthy of criticism. No normal human would try to reason with a monster that should've been killed on sight. But this man was different. It didn't matter whom or what he faced; if there was a

way to resolve a situation without fighting, he would always choose that method. Since old times, this man had never changed this mindset. Because of this way of thinking, he had befriended countless beings. Unfortunately, the monster in front of him wasn't willing to listen to reason.

"Kill! Die!"

The monster opened its maw and pounced on the elderly man. Rather than flee, he chose to fight back.

"Ra Hawk."

With a swing of his staff, a hawk of light appeared and sliced the being in two with its wings.

"G-Gaah?!"

The being of evil crumbled to the ground before it could even process what had happened. Its body melted away like mud before completely dissipating. Nothing of it remained.

"So its body disappears after death. While it makes the cleaning process a lot easier, we won't be able to conduct research on their biology," former sage Gourley muttered, gazing at the now-empty ground.

A man wearing an iron helmet emerged behind him. "We've finished preparations here, Gourley. We can start whenever you need."

"Ah, thank you, Sir Metal. It's a huge help."

The grand sage, Metal, had another nickname: Iron Man. He was a capable fighter who had been associated with the Committee for numerous years, and was naturally well acquainted with Gourley as well. Among the grand sages, all equipped with extremely unique characteristics, Metal was more normal than most. Gourley didn't dislike the man.

"I was shocked to hear that you quit the Committee," Metal said. "And you rejected the title of grand sage? I'll bet even Emilia didn't expect that! Ah ha ha ha!"

His face was obscured by the helmet, but it sounded like he was enjoying himself.

"You don't have any regrets, do you?" Metal asked.

"None at all," Gourley replied.

"Excellent! Life is short! It's best to live without any regrets!"

The two set foot in the academy courtyard. Around a hundred mages of the Committee, several teachers of the academy, and thirty knights of the kingdom were gathered. Students had been evacuated from the academy, and a barrier had been placed to

keep the beings of evil within the institution. If they emerged, they would be disposed of swiftly.

"Sir Metal, do you think we can win this battle?" Gourley asked.

"But of course. I'm here, aren't I?"

"Oho, how promising. Then I shall rely on you quite a bit."

"I wouldn't have it any other way. Leave it to me," Metal said proudly before parting ways with Gourley to return to his post.

A knight then approached the former sage. He had flaming-red hair, a muscular physique, and a piercing gaze. Gourley's eyes widened in astonishment upon gazing at this man.

"I can't believe it," Gourley muttered. "I didn't think *you'd* be here, Your Highness."

"It has certainly been a while, Sir Gourley. I'm glad to see you doing well," replied Ledyvia's first prince and Callus's older brother, Damien Lionel Leditzweissen.

Though a prince, he was a capable knight. He had brought the others along to fight against this danger.

"I didn't think you'd be able to gather this many knights," Gourley said. "You act swiftly and masterfully."

"It's all thanks to the headmistress notifying us as soon as she did," Damien replied. "We were able to act in a timely manner."

The moment Laura had received a report from Macbell, she had sent a messenger to the king. Damien, who was there at the time, acted quickly. It was a stroke of luck that Damien had been at the castle, as his busy schedule often took him away from the royal capital.

"I've already had the other soldiers guide the citizens to safety," Damien said. "You may be at ease and fight to your heart's content."

"Thank you, Your Highness," Gourley said. "Have you told the public about the beings of evil?"

"I have not. I've only told the citizens that a dangerous monster had appeared and that they should stay away. I don't think any other information has been given." He looked grim. "My heart aches to think that I'm tricking the people, but it would be extremely troublesome if other kingdoms heard of the appearance of these beings of evil. Should the empire catch wind of this, they would surely use that as an excuse to invade our land."

To the northeast of the Ledyvia Kingdom was the Ingram

Empire. The two nations had been on bad terms for generations, and they had been engaged in two large-scale wars in the past. In recent years, matters were resolved with smaller battles, but this incident could give the empire justification to attack the kingdom, all under the guise of maintaining peace within the continent.

The empire was one of the most prominent military nations within the continent. Should the royal capital fall, the kingdom wouldn't last for long, and they'd be invaded in the blink of an eye.

"As such, I have no complaints about my father's decision," Damien said. "However, what I'm most worried about is..."

"Callus," Gourley finished.

The first prince nodded. Both he and King Gallius were aware that Callus was missing.

"Callus willingly entered the ruin of his own volition," Damien said. "I have no intention of blaming the academy or the teachers. However, should something happen to him... I don't know if I could remain calm."

His gaze was filled with emotion, but Gourley was unable to tell if it was rage, frustration, or perhaps a different feeling.

"I will definitely save Callus, even if it costs me my life," Damien declared.

"Of course, Your Highness," Gourley replied. "We will rescue him at all costs. I shall do whatever I can."

The two began their battle with renewed determination. Suddenly, a large crack appeared on the ground, and a wriggling dark entity slowly emerged. Without a moment to lose, Damien gave his order.

"Don't let them leave the premises!" he roared. "You'd best act worthy of the name of the Royal Knights!"

His men shouted back proudly as they charged the beings of evil. A fight they couldn't lose had just begun.

"Charge! Don't let a single one escape!" Damien bellowed as the knights slashed against their foe.

The beings of evil took on different shapes. Some looked like small orbs while others merged into a large humanoid form. The knights could handle the smaller ones, but things wouldn't go so easily against the larger entities.

"In my way!"

The large humanoid being swung its thick arm, sending

several knights flying. The knights took advantage of any openings, but the monster had a tough outer layer. Their blades only left small scratches.

“I can see that some of these are stronger,” Damien growled as he slashed down several monsters while taking command.

The beings of evil were proving to be a more formidable foe than initially expected. These monsters didn’t fear death as they pounced with everything they had. They were quite tough as well, and even when split in two, they would move around for quite some time. The air was filled with a putrid stench coupled with grating screeches. Along with their horrifying appearance, it was easy to lower the knights’ morale. Some had, in fact, already given up and lost their wills.

“Your Highness! A large one is headed this way!” a knight shouted.

Damien turned to see a large being of evil quickly approaching him. The knights desperately tried to fight back, but with every swing of its arm, the knights were tossed aside like leaves.

“Don’t let it approach His Highness!”

The knights used their spells and boldly launched their attacks, but no matter how much damage they dealt, the monster quickly regenerated and pressed on. The being marched through the knights and met Damien’s gaze. It gave a horrifying smirk.

“That thing’s aiming straight for me…” Damien said.

The beings of evil didn’t possess high intelligence, only a strong impulse to inflict suffering on others. But from this single-minded obsession, they could perceive exactly what would cause the most suffering in their victims. The knights, above all, feared Prince Damien sustaining an injury. The monster had sensed this and decided to put its thoughts into action.

“Graaah!”

The monster yelled and rushed forward. Swords, shields, and magic proved ineffective against it, and despair filled the faces of the knights. In the midst of the battle, one person stood in front of the being of evil.

“Ha ha ha! He’s a lively one,” laughed Metal, the grand sage with a helmet.

He gracefully walked up to the monster as though he were taking a stroll. The monster paid no heed and tried to swipe

Metal away with its thick arm.

Clang!

“Huh?!”

The moment its fist made contact with Metal, a loud sound resonated, causing it to freeze. And that wasn’t all. When the monster removed its fist, a black liquid was dripping from its wound. It felt like it had punched a large boulder or a chunk of iron. Had it truly made contact with a human? The man before it didn’t seem to be using magic, confusing the being of evil even further.

“What’s wrong? Is that all you’ve got?” Metal asked.

“Grrr!”

The being was angered by his words. Humans were supposed to be weak creatures that served only to feed their lust for the affections of darkness. The only exception had been five hundred years ago, when a single man had appeared and almost destroyed them all. That man had ridden on the back of a white dragon and wielded a spear of brilliant light. He was the only human they’d ever feared. But that man was already dead, and it was unlikely for another person like him to exist. Filled with rage, the monster clobbered Metal again and again.

“Graaaaah!”

“Ha ha ha! You’re lively, all right! About time for me to return the favor, then.”

Metal clenched his fist and punched the monster. Though it appeared like a normal punch, the attack blew a hole right through the creature.

“Grar?!”

With a large hole gaping in the left side of its stomach, the monster tilted off-balance. It could only look on in confusion as Metal took this opportunity to throw two more punches. The grand sage hadn’t moved from his spot, yet two more holes were blown through the being of evil. Every punch he landed had the force of a cannon.

“Im…poss…ible…”

The monster fell to the ground, unable to support its large body. Metal stomped on its head.

“It was a bad matchup, that’s all!” Metal said. “My body is filled with metal! Your flimsy attacks just don’t work on me!”

Among the grand sages, Metal was said to be the toughest. With graceful steps that were unfitting for a battlefield, he

rushed into a crowd of monsters.

***

“Are they outside already?!” Crys asked, looking through the clock tower’s window.

The intense battle raged on outside, and the loud clangs reached the clock tower. Every now and then, the tower would shake, and Saria would hastily grab the bottles and flasks that were about to fall.

“It certainly doesn’t feel great to just watch,” Volga said with a hint of excitement. “I’d love to join in.”

“You’ll just be chased out,” Saria warned. “It’s best to just stay here for now.”

Crys, Volga, Jack, and Saria were currently holed up within the clock tower. Had they simply remained hidden, their magical energies would’ve been sensed, but the clock tower was equipped with a jamming device that hindered the effects of magical detection. They wouldn’t be caught so easily. Above all, the teachers assumed that only Saria was within the tower. She was known to be one who remained hidden and isolated from everything, so the probability of her joining in the battle was close to zero. This was likely the reason why the clock tower hadn’t been thoroughly inspected.

“Is Callus still inside?” Crys wondered as she observed the battle through binoculars.

Callus was nowhere to be seen. Impatience rose in her heart, and she had grown parched. Saria noticed this and offered her a cup of cold water.

“Don’t get impatient…is what I’d like to say, but I understand that it’s only natural. Just sit down and relax for now. If you can’t act when needed, then what’s the point?”

“Right… Thank you,” Crys said obediently, sitting down and accepting the cup of water.

Saria nodded with satisfaction. “In any case, where has Junior gone?”

She put a flask of coffee to her lips as she wondered wearily. It only looked like she was sipping on a suspicious potion.

“Speaking of which, does anyone remember what the magic circle looked like?” she asked.

“The shape?” Volga asked quizzically.

The group tried thinking back, but they couldn't recall a thing.

"Would the shape provide any information?" Volga asked.

"Yep. In fact, if you remember the design of the circle, we can further narrow things down. It's not that hard to do. With prior knowledge, it's an easy feat for anyone to accomplish. I'm sure you'd be able to do it too."

Saria spoke coolly, but Volga was at a loss for words. The shape of a magic circle differed based on the type of magic. Some differences were less noticeable than others, mostly to prevent spells from being copied. It was extremely difficult to predict the effect of a spell from simply observing its magic circle. This was something even adult magicians struggled with, and yet Saria was able to do it. Volga had known Saria to be a very capable student, but he hadn't known how impressive she truly was. She only looked like a young girl, but Volga stared at her with renewed respect.

"Dimensional spells, huh...?" Saria muttered. "I just hope they're all right."

"What do you mean by that?" Jack asked.

"Those transported by dimensional spells are said to be unable to use magic for a while. Since these spells are extremely rare and almost never seen, it's still unknown exactly what causes that effect."

"Wait, doesn't that mean Callus might not be able to use magic right now?! Isn't that really bad?!"

Crys jolted upon hearing these words. She squeezed her body that was about to go berserk from worry and clenched her hands, biting her lip. She knew that acting out now would not help the current situation.

"Calm down," Saria assured her. "We're not even sure if that's the case."

The most probable theory for this phenomenon was known as teleportation sickness. The body would be unable to keep up with the sudden shift in location and environment, making the person ill and leaving them unable to cast spells. However, this theory had never been tested. Saria racked her brain in search of other explanations and was lost in her thoughts for a while.

"Ah!" she suddenly said. "Why didn't I notice something so simple? I'm appalled by my own stupidity..."

She hastily left the room and started to tinker with a magical tool. The other underclassmen looked at her in confusion.

“Uh… Saria?” Jack asked gingerly.

“Shut up for a second, will you?!” Saria scolded him.

“S-Sorry…”

Jack looked a little down, but the young researcher paid no heed and activated a certain magical tool.

“I knew that some people couldn’t use magic after teleporting,” Saria said. “And I’ve wondered why. I couldn’t find a likely reason by myself, but I’m different now. I’m equipped with more knowledge than my past self.”

“You mean…” Volga muttered.

“Spirits.”

Jack and Crys looked perplexed, but Volga seemed to catch on to Saria’s words.

“I see,” he said, looking surprised.

“I’ll give you a simple explanation,” Saria said. “There are two types of teleportation: one designates a location while another designates a subject. As the name suggests, the former will teleport everything within a location while the latter will only teleport certain subjects. Are you able to follow along so far?”

Jack and Crys nodded.

“So, if one were to be teleported because they were the designated subject, what do you think happens to the spirit possessing them? Here’s your answer.”

She activated a magical tool. It whirred to life as Saria continued her explanation while holding on to the device.

“Presto. Teleportation likely separates the spirit from their human. As such, people who have teleported are unable to use magic. The spirit left behind would want to return to their master, but they wouldn’t have the means to do so. And so, they’re only left with one option.”

The magical tool activated its effect, surrounding the space with a unique force field, causing a certain someone to make their appearance.

“They would go along with another person who would give them the best chance of reuniting with their master,” Saria concluded. “Am I wrong, princess of light?”

She grinned and stared at the space in front of her. Her tool had revealed Selena.

***

“Ra Sax!”

As Gourley chanted, a spear of light appeared from his staff. With a single swing, he sliced the being of evil pouncing on him in two, subduing the threat.

“Huff… Huff… There’s no end to this,” Gourley panted, his shoulders rising and falling with his breaths.

He’d already cut down dozens of them, but the foe showed no signs of weakening. In fact, it looked like their numbers were only increasing. Even Gourley was reaching his limit.

“Callus, I pray for your safety!” the man said, worrying for his apprentice’s well-being.

A small monster took advantage of the opening and launched itself at Gourley’s back, baring its glittering fangs to bite the man’s neck.

“Wilt,” a voice suddenly said.

In the next moment, the being of evil let out a scream of agony.

“What?!” Gourley yelped, noticing the monster and jumping back.

The writhing monster’s body withered away before it fell to the ground, devoid of any moisture. The being continued to growl in pain until it completely dried up, looking mummified. Unmoving, it crumbled away like flecks of sand and disappeared into the wind.

“Though it’s composed of magic, it seems to require moisture… And if so, then it’s a simple matter of making it wither away,” a tall, elderly man said as he appeared in front of Gourley.

In his hand was a staff made from a dead tree. He moved sluggishly, like a specter that somehow continued to live.

“You have my utmost gratitude, Sir Moongrim,” Gourley said.

“I’ve only done my job,” Grand Sage Moongrim the Withered replied in a surly manner.

While Gourley had worked with Metal a few times in the past, he had never associated with Moongrim. Of course, the former sage had heard of the man, and the two had even conversed before. Their first meeting had been back when Gourley had just entered the Committee. Even back then, the grand sage had looked like an old man—a trait that continued to this day. Thus, Gourley was shocked to see that Moongrim hadn’t changed one bit after all these years. The light magician had mustered his courage and asked about it once, but he’d never received a clear

reply. It was then that he understood that grand sages were monsters beyond human intellect; it was a waste of time to even try to understand them.

“Ah, how troublesome. I want to hurry and head home, yet they come one after another,” Moongrim muttered, making his irritation clear.

With an outstretched hand, he opened his eyes wide. Several beings of evil in front of him started to writhe in pain.

“G-Gaaah?!”

Their bodies dried up as they lost their moisture. Gourley knew that *something* was happening to them, but he wasn’t sure what. In the end, the monsters were unable to retaliate as they turned into shrunken husks. He shuddered. Was this magic? Or an arcane art? Indeed, grand sages were monsters.

“It’s a pain to even walk around. I’ll stay here, so you can go elsewhere,” Moongrim mumbled.

“I understand. I’ll leave this area to you,” Gourley replied.

The light magician decided it was best to leave. Simply staying around put him at risk of getting dragged into the grand sage’s spell.

“But…there are no signs of these things decreasing,” Gourley said.

Beings of evil continued to appear from the cracks. Gourley and the others were able to stand their ground for now, but exhaustion had started to appear on the faces of the knights and mages. The moment Gourley considered casting a healing spell, a geyser of magical energy spewed from one of the cracks.

“Huh?!” he gasped.

He shivered at the terrifying magical energy. He’d felt the beings of evil emanate an uncomfortable aura of magic, but the monster in front of him was on a completely different level.

“Huh. So you haven’t been able to kill a single one yet?”

Three humanoid beings of evil made their appearance. One was large, while the other two looked a lot smaller. Gourley was at first surprised by their impressive command of the human language. The other beings could talk, but most spoke awkwardly and clumsily, unable to string together whole sentences. But the three in front of him spoke as fluently as a normal human, implying that they likely had enough intellect to be on par with people as well. In other words, their spells and magical abilities would also be far greater.

They already looked physically strong; it would be troublesome if they possessed the ability to use spells as well.

"I-I'm sorry...Lord Muglupa," a being of evil apologized to the smaller humanoid that had just emerged.

It appeared that "Muglupa" was the name of the leader of these monsters. Muglupa looked around and confirmed its surroundings.

"Hmph. These cheeky humans came prepared, I see. It's been a while since we've had a feast. Why don't we start things off with a bang?"

Muglupa grabbed a large piece of debris that had formed when the ground cracked with its right hand. It turned towards an area where mages had gathered, and used its left to snap its fingers.

"Apport."

The large chunk of debris had disappeared. Alarmed, everyone quickly scanned their surroundings. Suddenly, a shadow loomed above them. They looked up at the skies, expecting a cloud to have obscured the sun, but it was the debris, now suspended high above them.

"R-Retreat! You'll be smashed!"

Like scuttling baby spiders, the knights fled from the area as the debris crashed down with a deafening rumble, kicking up clouds of smoke and dust.

"Th-That was close..."

Had the knights hesitated a moment longer, they would've been crushed by the debris. Cold sweat ran down their backs. Gourley was indeed surprised by what had just occurred, but he was more taken aback by the spell that had just been utilized.

"Is that a dimensional spell?! I didn't think they could use such a thing!" Gourley said.

Spells, arcane arts, and other magical phenomena that could manipulate time and space were categorized as dimensional spells. It was an extremely unusual type of magic, and even Gourley could count on one hand the number of times he'd seen it with his own eyes. He couldn't believe that even beings of evil were capable of such high-class magic.

"Heh heh. Go on. Rampage to your heart's content and disperse pain across this land," Muglupa ordered.

The other beings of evil only grew more erratic, making the battle even more chaotic. The three powerful beings of evil that

had suddenly appeared had broken the delicate equilibrium of power—the humans were slowly losing as the number of wounded only increased over time.

“Ra Heal!”

Gourley quickly cast his healing spells on those who were most gravely injured, but as the number of wounded piled high, he realized that his efforts were only a drop in a bucket. He didn’t have nearly enough magical energy to treat everyone.

“Good grief. This certainly takes a toll on an old man like me!” Gourley muttered.

The Committee had dispatched healing magicians, but their numbers were few, and frankly they weren’t good enough. Light magicians like Callus and Gourley excelled in healing magic, and they were considered the cream of the crop in that field; the majority couldn’t keep up.

“At this rate, the front lines will crumble,” Gourley said, cursing under his breath as he made short work of a creature that came his way. “I don’t think we can completely hold them down. It’s only a matter of time before they pour into the city. What is that idiot chairman doing during such an emergency?!”

Chairman Emilia had shown up at the beginning, but he hadn’t been seen since. Gourley had expected the boy to make an appearance once the battle started, but even when they were being pushed back, Emilia hadn’t emerged.

“I never expected much from him to begin with, but would he truly allow the academy to be destroyed?” Gourley muttered.

What exactly was the chairman’s goal? The light magician tried his best to search for answers, but he was unable to think clearly while constantly under attack. He had to prioritize the enemies in front of him.

“I want to go home… They’re a stubborn lot,” the elderly grand sage muttered as he approached.

“Sir Moongrim!” Gourley gasped.

Moongrim must have defeated countless monsters, but he was completely unscathed and didn’t look tired in the least.

“Those three must be in charge!” Grand Sage Metal bellowed next to Moongrim. “If we beat them, we’ll probably have an easier time dealing with the rest!”

Metal also looked as cheery as ever. Gourley was astonished to see how powerful these two truly were; they were in a class of their own.

“Gourley, go treat the wounded,” Metal said. “Moongrim and I will deal with the bosses!”

“Thank you, Sir Metal,” Gourley said. “I wish you luck.”

“Of course! Leave this to me!”

Metal rushed in towards the horde. Moongrim, who was now forced to fight the monsters’ leaders, looked troubled but followed after the burly grand sage.

“You’ve always been so selfish,” Moongrim mumbled. “You haven’t changed a bit since three hundred years ago.”

“Ha ha ha! Thank you!”

“I can’t believe you take that as a compliment…”

The two men stood before the enemy, speaking in a casual tone unfitting for a battlefield. Moongrim slammed his large staff onto the ground and glared at the being of evil in front of him.

“Disappear.”

Several thin, sharp thorns protruded from the ground and skewered the monster. Upon closer inspection, these thorns looked to be dried tree branches. The thorny wood, depleted of its moisture and condensed to its limit, was harder than iron and would sap the moisture of its victims in a split second, turning them into shriveled husks. One after another, the beings of evil were pierced by these branches and horribly disfigured. Even the knights and other magicians fighting alongside the grand sage looked on in fear at this hellish sight.

“Ha ha ha! As always, you don’t hold back!” Metal shouted with a laugh as he charged in.

In front of Metal was a large being of evil, one of the three powerful entities that had recently emerged from the ground.

“Oh? Are you coming to me? That saves me the trouble!” Metal smiled.

“You puny weakling of a human… Don’t get carried away.”

The massive entity stood at least five meters tall, boasting a muscular body with four thick arms. It was clearly much stronger than the rest, but Metal didn’t display an ounce of hesitation.

“I am Barbatos of Iron Arms. My fists of iron will crush you into pieces.”

“Heh, so strength is your forte, huh? I like that. I won’t run or hide, so why don’t you come at me with everything you’ve got?”

“You dare mock me?! Die!”

Barbatos let loose a barrage of punches at Metal with its four

arms. A flurry of destruction ensued. Every punch it landed was like a meteor hammering into the earth, and its fists created craters upon impact with the ground.

"Ha ha ha! Trivial! How very trivial! Huh?"

The being of evil noticed an oddity and stopped its attacks. When it glanced at its fists, it noticed that they were crumbling away.

"Wh-What's going on?" Barbatos shouted in bewilderment.

Metal approached the monster in a composed manner. Despite the onslaught he must've received, the man didn't have a scratch on him.

"Your fists are impressive, no doubt," Metal said. "But you're unable to scratch my metal body. A pity."

"A-Ahhh!"

For the first time in its life, Barbatos felt fear. Until now, fear was something this monster had inflicted on others, but that was nothing short of conceit. In the face of the truly powerful, it would also feel fear. Barbatos had only learned this now, when it was too late.

"In exchange for you giving me something so wonderful, why don't I return the favor with a special little gift?" Metal said.

"N-No! Stop!"

Barbatos tried to flee, but it was futile. Metal clenched his right fist and braced himself before delivering a supersonic punch. A shock wave emanated from his fist, destroying everything in its path. He had named this move the Metal Buster, a punch that could destroy impregnable fortresses and put an end to great wars. Barbatos's body was blown back.

"G-Gah..."

The monster crawled along the ground with a giant hole blown through its stomach. However, it glared at Metal while regenerating its wounds. Barbatos hadn't lost its aggression just yet.

"You still live?" Metal asked. "You're quite sturdy. Don't worry, I'll finish you off right now."

He approached Barbatos. Suddenly, dark appendages with sharp tips sprouted around him, trying to pierce his body.

"Oh?" Metal said in a carefree manner, genuinely surprised by this turn of events.

The moment the appendages launched themselves at Metal, sharp tree branches emerged from the ground and repelled the

attacks.

“You’re letting your guard down a bit too much, Metal,” Moongrim muttered, retracting his branches. “Though I’d doubt an attack like that would even scratch you.”

“Thanks! You really saved me there!”

“No need for flattery. And...they’re coming.”

Moongrim glanced at the two other beings of evil. Like Barbatos, they too held great power. One was Muglupa, a being that could use dimensional spells. The other had a wriggling body sprouting numerous odd tentacles. This was likely the one who had attacked Metal moments before.

“Hello. My name is Meliava of Forestation. Nice to meet you,” the being said with a smile.

It looked like a young boy with dark skin. If it disguised its tentacles and hid within a crowd, it could likely pass as another human.

“Your ability seems similar to mine, mister. We should be friends.”

“Silence, monster,” Moongrim growled. “Don’t act like a human. You disgust me.”

“Ouch... You’re awful. I’m trying to compromise here.”

Meliava looked and talked like a human, but these traits only made Moongrim loathe the monster more. There was nothing more repulsive than a monster wearing a human’s clothes.

“Since there’s still people this powerful prowling about, humanity must be prospering,” observed Muglupa, the apparent leader of the beings of evil.

Every time it spoke, its voice made people shudder. But the two grand sages remained vigilant in front of these two monsters, which held powers outside the realm of human capabilities.

“It’s good that humans are thriving. If there’s a land without people, we cannot spread misfortune and unhappiness. However, we have no need for powerful humans. Like livestock, we must toy with, scorn, and humiliate weak humans to our hearts’ content. The unhappiness we attain from that will provide us with happiness that we savor. We can deal with strong humans such as yourselves...at a later date.”

The monster gave the two grand sages a frosty gaze, and the pair braced themselves. Something was coming. Muglupa slowly pointed its index finger at Metal and Moongrim.

"Teleport," it muttered.

Magic circles suddenly appeared under Metal's and Moongrim's feet.

"What?!" the two gasped.

They immediately caught on to what was occurring and tried to stop the activation of the spell, but they were too late. Muglupa used its magic, and the two grand sages disappeared from sight.

"Huh?!" the knights and mages collectively wondered, shocked by what had just occurred.

What had happened? No one could process the situation, but one thing was clear: the grand sages were no longer present. In other words, they would have to defeat these monsters without their aid. Defeat flashed across their minds. The two grand sages had practically been carrying the entire battle on their backs.

"Hm. As I'd thought, dimensional spells take a lot out of me. I can't use them anymore, but the nuisances are gone. You lot can run wild," Muglupa said.

The monsters bared their fangs with glee.

"Graaah!"

The beings of evil ran forward as though they had been freed from their shackles. The power of the grand sages could no longer hold them at bay. The remaining mages and knights desperately tried to resist, but they were clearly lacking.

"Carry away the injured! We must stop them here!"

Should even one monster make it out of the academy, they wouldn't be able to contain the situation. The beings of evil would attack and feast on the citizens, gaining more power. Should that happen, the royal capital wouldn't be strong enough to defeat the beings of evil by themselves. Knowing this, the knights stood their ground to face the monsters.

"Ra Barrel!"

Gourley's spell fired bullets of light against the menace, but it wasn't enough. The monsters showed no signs of stopping or slowing down. Faced with despair as the monsters continued to emerge with no end in sight, Gourley grimaced.

"Huff... Huff... I certainly don't enjoy getting older," he muttered. "I'm almost completely out of magical energy. Were I younger, I would've been able to fight a tad more..."

Tasked with treating the injured as well, Gourley was running out of stamina and energy. Without his staff, he wasn't even sure

if he could remain standing.

"And that idiot chairman still hasn't shown his face. The royal capital really will fall at this rate."

Indeed, Emilia was still nowhere to be seen despite the impending doom that was unraveling in front of Gourley's eyes. Why did the chairman choose to remain hidden? What was his goal?

"Well, I never did know what he was thinking. But things have turned dire and we're at too much of a disadvantage. We're currently in an unforeseen situation where both grand sages are gone, and yet he *still* refuses to appear! What is he thinking?!"

While the light magician once again cursed under his breath, Barbatos approached. It had suffered a blow from Metal, but its wounds had already healed.

"I didn't think any light magicians still existed. I suppose I'll let out the humiliation and rage I felt from that iron helmet onto you," Barbatos said.

Exhausted, Gourley raised his staff. "Good grief, that thing looks tough. I hope I can deal with it."

His foe clearly looked like the sluggish yet powerful type. If Gourley chose to flee, he could surely get away. However, without Gourley, there would be no one else left who could fight against Barbatos. With the two grand sages gone, the only one who stood a chance against these monsters was the light magician himself.

"Die!"

Barbatos launched its arms at the elderly magician. Gourley jumped back, evading the fists as they made contact with the ground. He saw the floor shatter and knew that one punch was all it would take to end his life. In turn, he heightened his vigilance.

"Ra Hawk!"

He swung his staff and created a hawk of light. His bird flew towards Barbatos and left a deep gash in its right shoulder. The hawk circled around, slashing at its enemy's back and waist.

"Gah?!"

Barbatos cried in agony, proving that light magic was effective, but its wounds healed almost immediately.

"Hmph. That hurt, old man. I was in trouble for a sec there."

"Tch... I didn't have enough magical energy!"

Indeed, light magic was greatly effective against the beings of

evil, but Gourley was out of stamina and his spells had lost their edge. Had he been in a better state, he could've defeated Barbatos in one attack.

"How regrettable..." Gourley muttered, out of breath, as his knees hit the ground.

Lacking both magical energy and stamina, he could no longer remain standing.

"Yes, that's the one. Despair is most suitable for human faces. Ah, but don't worry. Everyone here will die soon too. You won't be lonely for long."

"What...did you say?" Gourley gasped.

"Take a look."

Barbatos pointed behind it, attracting attention towards the leader, Muglupa. Satisfied with how it was overpowering the humans, the leader suddenly shifted form. Its body started to bubble, expand, and grow larger. It transformed into a being around ten meters tall, sprouting wings and a tail. Its neck grew longer as sharp talons protruded from its hands. It now resembled a dark dragon.

"What *is* that?!"

"Five hundred years ago, a shitty dragon gave us a lot of trouble. It flew through the skies, expelling Breath from its mouth. Upon seeing this power, our leader decided to mimic it," Barbatos explained.

The beings of evil excelled in regeneration and transformation. While most could only sprout an extra limb or two, those of higher rank could imitate the characteristics of other creatures. Muglupa, a monster of the highest rank, had spent many years learning to successfully copy the traits of a dragon. In addition, the leader was even able to use dimensional spells. These two abilities made Muglupa more powerful than any other being of evil that had plagued the land.

"It's planning to use Breath filled with magical energy from above," Barbatos said.

"Impossible," Gourley said. "No normal human can withstand such an attack!"

"Exactly. It'll become a wonderful, hellish sight for all to see."

Barbatos smiled in ecstasy, imagining the scene. These monsters were born from darkness and relished the misfortune of others—it would be like Heaven for them.

"I...can't let you do that!"

“Oh? You can still stand?”

Gourley mustered the strength to get up, but it was clear that his body had reached its limit.

“Come if you dare!” the light magician shouted. “I’ll at least take you down with me!”

“You…!”

Barbatos swung his thick arms again and again, but Gourley continued to dodge the attacks. The mage was so weakened that a light tap from the monster’s fists would be enough to kill him, but Barbatos failed to land a single blow.

His eyes… Can he still fight? Barbatos thought, bemused.

Like a bird of prey, Gourley’s sharp glare pierced through Barbatos, and his pressure overwhelmed the monster. Barbatos was up against an elderly man, and an exhausted one at that. To feel fear against such a person was humiliating, and it was infuriated for having such thoughts.

“I cannot forgive you! I won’t ever forgive you! I’ll rip your flesh to shreds and tear you apart limb from limb! I’ll drag your organs out and kill you as you writhe in agony!”

Barbatos allowed its fury to take over and lunged at Gourley, but the mage no longer had the strength to flee. Was this how it ended? Gourley surrendered, preparing to offer his life to the monster in front of him. As its large hand reached out to destroy the elderly man, the entire area was surrounded by a blinding flash of light.

“Wh-What’s going on?!” Gourley yelped.

“Argh! So bright!”

Both man and monster were blinded and confused.

“What just…” Gourley muttered, slowly opening his eyes once the light died down.

The first thing that caught his eye was a dragon, clad in majestic, brilliant white scales. The massive dragon was so breathtaking that Gourley briefly forgot that he was in the midst of a battle.

“Absolutely beautiful…”

Gourley closely examined the dragon, from his head to the tip of his tail. He noticed a human beside the beast—one he knew all too well.

“Why… Why are you here, Raizax?!”

Barbatos immediately switched targets and jumped at the white dragon, its eyes filled with rage. It was clear that the two

had some sort of feud between them. The white dragon glanced at Barbatos and gave an indifferent huff through his nostrils.

“So we are faced with a noisy one. Very well, let us show them our power.”

The boy looked surprised upon hearing the dragon’s words, but quickly gave a determined nod. “Yes, let’s.”

And so, the boy extended his hand towards Barbatos, who was exponentially larger than him.

“Die, white dragon!”

Barbatos drew back its four arms and swung down. The boy chanted his spell.

“Rad Blow.”

The dragon expelled a Breath that decimated everything in its path. The golden flames enveloped Barbatos in an instant and turned it into ashes.

Terminology Dictionary VIII

Legend of the White Dragon

A porcelain dragon soared through the skies.

On his back was a hero of white, rushing through the battlefield with a powerful roar.

In his hand was a spear made of a bicaudal tail. He tore through the plains and put an end to a war that lasted one hundred years.

No one could equal his bravery and valiance. The beings of evil did not stand a chance; they were destroyed time and time again.

The sun would rise, but never fall. The silver dawn broke, illuminating peace.

This is but the beginning of the legend of the white dragon.

Chapter Three: The White Dragon Flies Once More

“I didn’t think the situation was so dire,” I said as I came to the surface with Raizax.

The horrific scene astonished me. Beings of evil ran wild while injured humans desperately fought back. I hadn’t expected them to invade so quickly. I couldn’t use my spells when I had fought them underground, but I currently had Raizax, the spirit of light, by my side. I was prepared to fight without relying on my curse’s power.

“Callus. The spell you cast earlier was splendid. I am surprised to see you succeed without any practice.”

“It’s all because of your help. Thank you,” I said. “Your power is amazing, and I feel more confident than ever.”

The powerful tingle I had felt when using the dragon’s magic remained in my hands. I was sure that I could handle even large beings of evil.

“G-Grrr…”

I noticed that they had gathered towards us, intense hatred apparent in their gazes. I must’ve looked like my ancestor in their eyes—Raizax had said that I bore a striking resemblance to the first king. I was a Taboo Being as well, so I could understand their confusion.

“Then I shall teach you a few other dragon spells. In truth, I had wanted you to slowly learn each one, but time is clearly of the essence. You will learn as you fight.”

“Right! Got it!” I replied.

Raizax proceeded to teach me a few more spells. It was nerve-racking having to use them without any practice, but the longer I hesitated, the more sacrifices would be made to the monsters. I couldn’t forgive that.

“Go, Callus. Show them our power!”

“Okay!”

I gathered my magical energy as I rushed into the beings of evil. As I gained their attention and let them pounce on me, I activated my spell.

“Rad Tval Claw!”

The moment I spoke those words, my hands were covered in glimmering dragon claws. I swung my hands at them, and the sharp claws moved in tandem, tearing through the beings of evil.

“I have to say it again: this power is amazing!”

“Ha ha ha! But of course! This is the power of a dragon; it shall not lose to even the princess of the spirits,” Raizax answered happily.

The dragon’s magic was more powerful than Selena’s, but in exchange, it used a lot of magical energy compared to her precise control. Raizax excelled in attacks over a wide range, but Selena was much more suited to treating others or manipulating multiple spells at once. *I didn’t think each spirit possessing me was so unique!*

“All right! Who’s next?!” I yelled.

“G-Grrr! You!”

The beings of evil slowed down, wary of my spells. A girl approached me.

“Callus, I’ll go treat the wounded,” she said.

“Yeah, I’ll leave it to you, Sissy—I mean, Cecilia!”

She giggled. “Of course. I’ll handle it.”

She wore her blindfold again, transforming the girl into a saint as she left to tend to the injured. *I’m sure she can handle it, so I should focus on the beings of evil.*

“Callus! You’re all right!”

I turned towards the voice in surprise. “Master?!”

I didn’t expect him to be here. He seemed exhausted by the rough battle, and his clothes were stained red. *He must be covered in wounds.*

“I’m glad… You’re really safe…” my master said with tears in his eyes as he inspected my body to confirm it.

I didn’t think I’d worried him so much…

“I’m sorry, Master. I’ve worried you so much…”

“No, no, it’s fine, as long as you’re safe. I have a few questions I’d like to ask you, but we must do something about this situation first.”

“Right.”

He looked towards Raizax. “Callus, is this dragon an ally?”

“Yes! And a powerful one, at that!”

“Indeed. You may use me as much as you like,” Raizax said.

Master jolted in surprise; he likely hadn't expected the dragon to talk.

"I knew that high-ranking dragons could understand our language, but I'm shocked at how fluently he speaks," my master said. "Either way, it's reassuring that he's our ally. Please offer us your assistance."

"Of course. You may leave that to me. I shall rid you of these maggots with my power," Raizax replied, glaring at the beings of evil.

The monsters were intimidated by the dragon's stern gaze. *Amazing! Even his glare is so effective! Raizax must be truly terrifying to these monsters.*

"Now then..." I started.

"Wait, Callus. Something is not right," Raizax said, staring at a place above the academy building.

"Huh?"

What's going on? I thought.

"I sense an extremely strong presence of dark magical energy from the top of that building, much stronger than the small fry down here. If we leave it be, things will soon turn ugly."

"Right. Their boss still remains," my master said.

Now that he mentions it, I do *sense a bad feeling from that area.*

"Callus. Your magical energy also has its limit. It would be unwise to use it all here."

"But if we don't beat them, everyone will..." I protested.

There were many people fighting here, and I couldn't abandon them. *What can I do?* As I agonized over a decision, the beings of evil that had frozen in place began to inch towards us.

"These jerks..." I said through gritted teeth.

The beings of evil were grinning. They knew that I was waffling over a decision and couldn't attack them. They still had their guard up, but it was only a matter of time before they jumped on me while I was hesitating.

"What can I do?!"

Was I unable to do anything despite returning to the surface? *I have to search for a way to overcome this situation, and fast!*

"Arth! Kill!"

Like a dam had burst, the beings of evil rushed towards me. *I have no choice but to fight here!*

As I tried to use my spells, a loud explosion sounded from a short distance away.

“Huh?!” I gasped, turning towards the noise.

The person held a glittering blade of light, cutting down the monsters one after another while rushing in. *Is that…light magic? Are there other light magicians aside from my master, Cecilia, and myself?! I don’t think there are any students with that element.*

“Raaaah!”

They slashed at the large creature in front of them, slicing it in two, before jumping by my side. I was stunned.

“You’re finally back! I was so worried, you know,” she said.

“C-Cryssie?!” I cried.

“Hee hee.”

“Why are you here?! And why can you use light magic?!”

“We’ll talk later! Leave this area to me!”

With a flourish of her sword, she chanted, *“Ra Arms!”*

Particles of light surrounded Cryssie’s sword. *There’s no mistaking it. That’s light magic! But I thought Cryssie could only use fire!*

“All right, let’s do this!” Cryssie yelled. “You better keep up, Selena!”

Selena appeared by her side. *N-No way! Why’s she with Cryssie?!* I was completely befuddled by it all, but they left me behind as they charged into the horde.

***

A while back, within the clock tower, Selena had appeared in front of the students thanks to the magical tool’s effects. After a few moments of quiet, Saria, the oldest of the group, decided to break the silence.

“It’s been a while, princess of light,” Saria said. “It seems like my deductions are correct.”

“Yeah, I’m surprised,” Selena answered. “I’m glad I stuck with you guys.”

Selena, who had parted ways with Callus, wasn’t sure whether she should go with the students or the teacher. Possessing the teacher might’ve given her a better chance of reuniting with Callus, but Selena had instead chosen to follow the students who headed to the clock tower. That building contained a magical tool that allowed humans to see spirits. Without Callus, it was her only chance of communicating with the others.

“I didn’t think he was really apart from his spirit, though,”

Saria said. “Is Junior all right?”

“Callus will be fine. There’s no need to worry,” Selena replied.

“Oh, can you tell?”

The spirit nodded. “A bond is formed with the person a spirit possesses, and it applies to other spirits as well. I have no idea where he currently is, but I can still feel Callus’s magical energy out there. He’s alive, and I’m certain that he’ll return.”

Saria, Jack, and Volga nodded in agreement as the spirit spoke firmly. Crys, who had remained silent this entire time, approached the princess.

“Miss Selena…I’ve got a request,” she said.

“A request? And what might that be?”

It was the first time Selena and Crys had exchanged words. The spirit had seen Crys since her youth, but the red-haired student hadn’t known Selena for very long. What’s more, the difference between them was that between a human and a spirit. It was difficult to gauge how close they were, but Crys had a request nonetheless.

“Please lend me your powers,” Crys said.

“Are you talking about the power of light magic?”

The girl nodded. “I know that spirits dislike lending their powers to those who aren’t their partners. I don’t care if you mock me. But please, just for now, please lend me your powers for Callus!”

She lowered her head. During the battle within the ruin, Crys had become painfully aware that her current strength didn’t hold a candle to the beings of evil. That gap couldn’t be closed with sheer willpower alone—she needed something greater. Light magic would completely change her situation. When she had seen Callus’s magic, she’d thought about how she would’ve fought with his element. If her imagination could become reality, she might stand a chance against those monsters.

Selena saw the girl desperately begging for her aid.

“Spirits cannot easily switch their partners,” the princess said. “I cannot wag my tail towards a person I don’t like.”

Her head still low, Crys gave a pained expression. But Selena gently put her hand on the girl.

“But you’re different. Someone important to Callus is important to me as well,” Selena said.

Crys raised her head in shock. The spirit was smiling at her.

“Very well. I shall entrust you with my powers,” Selena said.

“Thank you so much, Miss Selena,” Crys said, tears welling in her eyes.

“You can just call me ‘Selena.’ We’re partners now, are we not?”

“Right. Okay then. Let’s go, Selena. Let’s show everyone our power.”

“I’m letting you know right now, but in terms of the strength of my spells, I won’t hold back. You’d best keep up.”

“You’re on!”

And so, the pair headed towards the battlefield.

***

“Raaaaah!” Crys roared, rushing through the battle.

In her right hand was the weapon she’d received from her father, Ruby Rose. Light enveloped her blade as she sliced through the beings of evil.

“Kill! Kill her!”

The monsters instinctively hated the light. Baring their fangs and claws, they rushed towards Crys, who was its source.

“You’re so annoying!” Crys yelled, slashing the monsters down.

Callus and Gourley couldn’t hide their surprise as Crys expertly manipulated an element that she wasn’t familiar with.

“Amazing!” Callus gasped.

“What a genius of magic,” Gourley muttered. “It feels like a waste for her to become a swordswoman.”

Light magic was said to be more difficult to manipulate than the other elements. It was unheard of for a person who had just learned light magic to immediately use it in combat. Spells had to be used multiple times over many months, slowly deepening one’s bond with spirits, to become effective.

Then why was Crys able to use light magic to such an impressive degree? It was because she and Selena had the same goal. They both wanted to save Callus and become his strength. Because the two held the same feelings, they could match each other’s rhythms. Once this battle was over and their goals were attained, they likely wouldn’t be able to fight this well anymore. But in this moment, the pair were able to work together as though they’d been doing so forever.

“There’s so many of them!” Crys yelled. “Then I’ll be using this sword too!”

She grabbed another blade that was lying on the ground—a simple broadsword that had likely been dropped by a knight who had left the battlefield.

“Fé Arms!”

In her left hand was a blade enveloped by fire. In her right was a sword of light.

It was extremely difficult for a mage to manipulate both elements at once. Jack had done so in the past, but that had been the result of painstaking practice, and it certainly wasn’t a technique that could be mastered in one try. And yet, Crys had done it. Her desire to protect had shattered the barriers of difficulty.

“I can feel power flowing through my body… There’s no way I can lose.”

The spell that surrounded her blades also flowed through her hands and coursed throughout her body.



Crys's body, which had received the buffs of two elements, was stronger than ever before as she gracefully wielded her swords, cutting down the monsters with ease. Her might rivaled a thousand warriors, and the beings of evil, who had underestimated her as a silly girl at first, felt fear in the face of her power.

"S-Surround her! Surround and crush!"

The monsters tried to push her back with sheer numbers—no matter how strong she was, she only had two arms. There was a limit to how many enemies she could take on. They surrounded her and tried to subdue her in one go.

"Twin Sword Style: Luminous Flame, the Dance of White Fire and Flowing Blades!"

As though she were dancing, Crys dodged the countless attacks and slipped through their openings before delivering her deadly slashes. One after another, the beings of evil were sliced into pieces. The fiery blade, adept at ranged attacks, blocked the monsters, while the sword of light, capable of eradicating evil, landed the final blows. Crys didn't think before moving—her experience as a swordswoman and her instincts were all she needed to wield the two elements as though they were her own.

"And...this is the end!" she yelled, swinging both swords and making a cross-like incision into the monster.

"Ack!"

In less than ten minutes, she had managed to defeat all the beings of evil around her.

***

It all happened in a flash. Cryssie, who had managed to borrow Selena's power and manipulate two elements, had defeated all the monsters in the blink of an eye. But it was clear that she had used much of her energy—the moment it was all over, she fell to her knees.

"Cryssie!" I called out, rushing to her side. "Are you okay?!"

She was drenched in sweat. After moving around so much while using two elements at once, she must've been exhausted.

"I'll heal you right now! *Ra H—*"

"Wait...a second," she huffed, stopping my spell. "You have...other things to do, don't you? I'll be fine. Conserve your energy."

“But…”

“What? Can’t trust me? And look, *they’re* with us too.”

She pointed to where Volga and Jack were fighting against the beings of evil. *They’re still at the academy too?!*

“We’ve culled their numbers quite a bit,” Cryssie said. “We’ll be fine here. Go on, Callus. There’s no need to worry. This time, I’ll be sure to have your back.”

“Cryssie…”

She stared straight at me, her eyes filled with determination.

“Got it,” I replied. “I’ll leave it to you.”

“You got it. Oh, and I suppose this is where I part ways with her.”

Selena slowly emerged.

“Thank you for lending me your powers, Selena,” Cryssie said. “I’ll leave Callus in your hands too.”

“Of course. It was only for a short while, but I had fun,” Selena replied.

Her voice couldn’t have reached Cryssie, but my friend smiled anyway as though she had heard.

“Go on, you two!” Cryssie urged. “I’ll protect this place! I swear it!”

I glanced towards my master and nodded. “I’ll be off.”

With Selena by my side, I headed towards the academy building.

***

As I left the monsters to Cryssie and the others, I continued to run, aiming for the roof of the academy building. The boss of these entities was apparently there. *I don’t know what it might do if I leave it be! I’ve gotta defeat it quickly!*

“In any case, who is this dragon?” Selena asked grumpily. “Why’s he with you?”

“I-I can explain…” I started, telling her about Raizax.

“Huh, I see. Raizax, was it? Thank you for saving Callus, but he’s *my* partner. You know what I’m getting at, don’t you?”

I was worried about Selena’s severe attitude. *Does she really need to provoke him?*

But Raizax only looked at her and chuckled. *“Heh, there is no need for you to be so alarmed. I have no intention of stealing your partner, so be at ease.”*

“Well, if you say so,” Selena said with a pout.

Whew, I’m glad that’s resolved. As I rushed on, I suddenly felt a powerful murderous intent. I instinctively jumped to the side as a bullet whizzed past me. *That was close! A moment later, and I would’ve been hit!* I turned around to face the culprit, and saw a being of evil resembling a normal boy.

“You’ve got good instincts. I was confident that my attack would hit.”

I could easily tell at a glance that this boy was a being of evil from the creepy tendrils sprouting from its back. The tips of these tendrils had an opening; the bullet must have been fired from one of them.

“I’m Meliava of Forestation. I’m a special being of evil that evolved after many, many years. The big oaf you defeated was also technically special, just like me. But it was the weakest of us three, and the most stupid. Don’t expect me to be like that one.”

Meliava emanated a powerful, sinister magical energy. *Yeah, this one definitely seems stronger. I don’t think I can flee.*

“I guess we have to fight!” I said.

“You’ll receive my five-hundred-year-long hatred!”

Three tendrils emerged from Meliava’s back and fired bullets at me. The moment I tried to dodge, something grabbed my leg.

“Huh?!” I gasped, looking down to see a tentacle sprouting from the ground and wrapping around my ankle.

The monster had extended its appendages while we were talking. *I can’t dodge like this!* If I were to slash through the tentacle, the bullets would hit me. As I was about to use *Ra Ordo* to defend myself, a certain voice echoed through the air.

“Yeah, if I were to interfere, it would be now.”

A grotesque grating sound was heard, and the bullets disappeared into thin air. *This unpleasant voice must be…*

“That was close. You should thank my benevolent self.”

“Emilia…” I muttered.

“Heh heh heh. You remembered my name. I’m happy to hear that.”

With a smile, the chairman of the Magical Committee appeared before me. How could I forget the culprit who had taken my master’s title from him?

“What is your goal?” I asked. “Why did you save me?”

“Goodness, you must hate me. Can’t you believe that I just did

it out of the goodness of my heart?" Emilia replied.

"I can't," I answered immediately.

He chuckled. *Why is he even here?*

"I've got a few thoughts of my own, you see," Emilia said. "But do you really want to waste your time on me right now? I'm saying I'll be that thing's opponent. Ulterior motives or not, don't you think it's wise to work together for now?"

I stayed silent. I was reluctant to listen to him, but he had a point. I didn't have a second to spare, and it was better to leave this one to the chairman.

"Fine," I relented. "I don't trust you, but I'll let you handle this."

"And that's just fine," Emilia replied, shooing me away. "Now, leave this extra to me and go on. Hurry."

What is this man thinking? But now wasn't the time to be worried about it. I tried to rush ahead, but numerous tentacles suddenly sprouted from the ground and surrounded me.

"Don't you dare ignore me!"

The tendrils tried to attack me—if they managed to wrap themselves around my body, my bones would be shattered. I tried to quickly use a spell, but *he* moved before I could.

"First of the Five Blades: Lightning Blade."

The moment the chant left Emilia's lips, there was a flash of light, and the tentacles had been sliced into tiny pieces. I guessed that it was an arcane art of some sort, but I had no idea what had just occurred. *This man is truly dangerous.*

"Now, go on," Emilia encouraged. "You should do what you must."

"Okay..." I reluctantly answered, and left the area.

***

"Heh, I think he'll make it just in time," Emilia muttered to himself as he watched Callus leave. He gave a satisfied smile.

"I don't know who you are, but you've got some nerve standing in my way," Meliava said, approaching Emilia.

Several thick tendrils sprouted from its body, pointing towards the chairman. Meliava looked calm, but it was clearly quite infuriated.

"Oh, are you still here?" Emilia said with a disinterested yawn. "Your role's over, so you can go away now, or...do whatever it is you things do."

Meliava couldn't contain its fury. ***"You dare underestimate me?!"***

Humans were its prey. And yet, this being of evil wasn't even being considered by this human in front of it. Meliava was enraged to be treated so nonchalantly.

"I'll kill you, human!"

Tentacles rushed at Emilia. Each appendage held great power, enough to crush the bones of one's entire body by wrapping around its prey. Emilia, however, showed no signs of panicking at this dangerous predicament.

"It's been a while since anyone treated me like a human," the chairman said with a fearless smile. "It's quite nostalgic, really."

A snap of his fingers was all it took to create a powerful wall that repelled the tendrils.

"*Anti-barrier.* This wall shows how far apart we are. You'll never reach me. And that won't change for all of eternity."

"Stop talking nonsense!"

Meliava fired its bullets, but it wasn't able to lay a scratch on Emilia's wall. The monster fired seeding bullets—should its terrifying attacks burrow into its foe, the seeds would sap nutrients from its host, causing tendrils to sprout. But if the attacks never made contact, their raw power wasn't much different from that of normal bullets. No matter how many Meliava fired, Emilia's wall wouldn't budge.

"Seems like you don't have any other attacks," Emilia said, looking bored. "I was looking forward to meeting a being of evil, but this is just disappointing."

He held out his hand towards Meliava. The being of evil sensed a horrendous aura of magical energy and tried to flee, but it was too late.

"Clear Hand."

An invisible hand caused Meliava's body to disappear from the neck down in an instant. Only its head remained as it squelched onto the floor.

"Im...possible..." Meliava said, its face distorting with hatred. No longer was there a visage of an innocent boy; it was replaced by the true face of the evil entity, hating everything it could. ***"I won't forgive you. I never will, human."***

Meliava continued to curse the chairman, but Emilia simply approached the monster with disinterest and squashed its head.

"Extras should know when to get off the stage."

Emilia cruelly ground Meliava's corpse with the sole of his shoe, then gazed up at the academy building roof. Callus and Muglupa were already clashing.

"Speaking of which, I guess I'll go observe the main stage," Emilia said with a creepy smile plastered on his face as he headed up. "I look forward to hearing your response."

***

"Whew, I'm finally here," I panted as I approached the academy building. The boss was on the rooftop. "Yeah, I feel sinister magical energy from above. It's completely different from the others."

Was it because I was exposed to dark magical energy? The left side of my chest started to ache and throb. If I didn't do something quickly, the worst might occur. I tried to enter the building, but Raizax stopped me.

"Wait, do not go inside. It will only slow you down."

"Huh?" I asked. "Then how else can I go up?"

"Heh. You have me by your side, do you not?"

With a grin, Raizax's body suddenly started to glow, and the translucent dragon turned solid and sturdy, as though granted a physical form. Astonished, I reached out and found that I could now touch the dragon. *I thought I couldn't touch spirits! What's going on?!*

"High-ranking spirits can temporarily attain a physical body," Raizax explained. *"But of course, one cannot do so for long."*

"A-Amazing... I didn't think you could do something like this!"

I touched his scales in awe.

"Hey!" Selena cried, equally stunned as I was. "I never knew you could do that!"

"Fear not, light princess. Once you manage to get the hang of it, you can do something like this as well. After this battle, I shall teach you."

"Really?! That's a promise!"

Selena looked on happily. Raizax was knowledgeable on abilities that high-ranking spirits had—it was a good learning experience and a breath of fresh air for Selena, who'd never met anyone of similar rank before.

"Ride on my back, Callus. Like my friend from years ago, let us soar through the skies and lay waste to these maggots."

“Okay! Thank you!” I replied.

Raizax lowered his body so I could climb aboard. I placed my foot on his shoulder before sitting on his back. His body was slightly warm to the touch, as though he were actually alive.

“Now then. Here I go. Hang on tight!”

“Right!”

A flap of his large wings was all it took to take to the air, and another flap saw us ascend instantly. In the blink of an eye, we’d arrived on the rooftops of the academy building. Despite his large body, Raizax moved gracefully, seemingly freed from the shackles of gravity. His large wings and powerful Breath only attested to the fact that dragons were truly one of the strongest creatures to have ever roamed the land.

“Ah, there he is!” I said, spotting the boss high above the rooftops.

It had taken the form of a jet-black dragon, flapping its large wings in the air. Raizax saw the being of evil and gave an annoyed click of his tongue.

“That monster... It has the cheek to mimic my *form, does it? Such deceit is an act of sheer folly.”*

Raizax quietly mused in anger; his pride as a dragon had been hurt.

“Do you know what it’s trying to do?” I asked Raizax.

“I sense a large presence of magical energy near its jaw. It is likely trying to copy my Breath. Should a Breath filled with magical energy be expelled onto the city, it will surely cause destruction.”

“What?!” I cried. “Then we’ve gotta stop it quickly!”

“Indeed!”

Raizax flapped his wings with great energy, increasing his speed and approaching the fake dragon in an instant. The being of evil noticed us. It looked shocked to see Raizax. *I can’t blame it. A white dragon that decimated them five hundred years ago is in front of them once more, after all.*

“What?!”

“You are a fool to mimic a dragon. I shall once more use my light to destroy you.”

Raizax stored light in his jaw before releasing a hypercondensed torrent of light towards the jet-black dragon’s body, burning the fake’s scales to a crisp.

“Gaaah?!”

The being of evil, damaged by Raizax’s light Breath, let out a

loud cry before falling onto the rooftop of the academy building. It had taken an attack at such close range; the damage it was dealt was surely great.

"Do not let your guard down, Callus. It is still alive."

"Huh?!" I gasped. "Even after receiving that powerful attack?!"

"Indeed... It seems to have been storing quite a lot of magical energy during its time underground. How very troublesome."

Raizax pursued Muglupa to the rooftop. The jet-black dragon slowly got up and glared at us. Its body was still burnt from the light, but it was quickly regenerating and healing its wounds. *What impressive vitality.*

"You're that annoying white dragon and his master, Arth. To think you were both still alive... That was outside my calculations, but no matter. I, Muglupa, shall kill you all here and open the curtains upon an era of darkness."

"Hmph. Of course a black insect like you would underestimate their opponent. You should have stayed underground, crawling around like the ant that you are. Or did you come out because you yearned to see my light once more?"

"You...bastard!"

Muglupa's face twisted with rage. *I don't think Raizax needed to provoke it...*

"Callus. I cannot stay in this physical form for long. I would appreciate it if you assisted me with your magic."

"Right. Selena, can I count on you?" I asked.

"Of course!" my partner replied. "Our light magic will defeat that thing!"

I turned to Muglupa while still on Raizax's back. I'd never cast spells while riding a dragon's back before. It made me a little nervous, but I had no other choice.

"Has besting us once gotten to your head? Certainly, we were inferior back then...but the situation's different now."

Muglupa gave a terrifying grin before it spread its wings and launched into the sky. I expected the monster to attack us, but it instead flew in a different direction, as though it was fleeing from us.

"Has it decided to run?" Raizax asked.

"No! The city's in that direction!" I cried.

"What?!"

Raizax immediately understood Muglupa's plans and chased after the monster.

“Grr... That pest!”

The monster prepared to launch its attack onto the city. It likely didn’t have enough power to decimate the royal capital, but dozens or even hundreds of lives could fall victim to the being of evil’s Breath.

“Raizax!” I called.

“I know!”

Raizax flew between Muglupa and the city. As the monster launched its black Breath onto the city, Raizax placed his hands in front.

“Do not underestimate me!”

A barrier of light appeared, defending the city from the Breath filled with dark energy. *Th-That was close...*

People below started to shriek and panic.

“Wh-What are those dragons?!”

“There’s two of them!”

The citizens obviously noticed the battle in the skies. It was best if they fled for safety, but some would surely try to approach us out of curiosity. We couldn’t let a single attack fall upon the city.

“You’ve blocked my Breath. That’s commendable,” Muglupa said with a scoff, then opened its jaw wide and unleashed a torrent of magic towards the skies.

The Breath split into over a hundred rays midair before falling onto the city. If so many of these made contact with the royal capital, countless lives would be lost.

“Ha ha ha! You’d better hurry, or you won’t be able to save the people! Of course, I’ll be laying waste to the humans myself in the meantime!”

Muglupa let out a triumphant laugh. The situation was dire. If we went to protect the city, Muglupa would be allowed to move around freely, but if we attacked the monster, we’d be unable to defend the citizens from the Breath falling out of the sky. However, we didn’t despair.

“Callus. Princess of light. You can both move, yes?” Raizax asked, turning his neck towards us.

Selena and I replied immediately.

“Duh. Who do you think you’re talking to?”

“Please leave it to us!”

Raizax gave us a satisfied grin before he nodded and turned back to Muglupa. With a large flap of his wings, he quickly

approached the monster.

"Are you stupid?! Are you really going to leave the humans to die?!"

"You are the stupid one here, you puny ant. Callus, show this fool your power along with your partner."

I had no idea how my ancestor had fought five hundred years ago. But I felt like he had likely worked alongside his own partner, supporting each other where they lacked—just like I was doing now.

"Callus, I'm ready when you are."

"I'm relying on you, Selena!"

Riding on Raizax's back, our twin hearts resonated. The wind howled around me as I soared through the skies, but I concentrated and paid no attention to my surroundings. *It's okay. I practiced this so many times in the past. I'll just do what I always do. Concentrate. Focus.*

"O grand wall of light..."

I began chanting my aria while Raizax approached the being of evil. Muglupa had launched multiple powerful Breaths, and it didn't have the energy to move around so freely. Raizax wasn't going to let this opportunity slip by.

"Filthy black insect, you have underestimated us. Because of your pride, you will all be annihilated once more."

"You foul white lizaaard!"

Muglupa desperately swung at Raizax, but the white dragon easily blocked the attempt and used his other hand to land a devastating punch.

"Gah?!"

Muglupa hurtled through the air and fell onto the academy premises, away from the citizens of the city.

"Push back the evil and bring light to overflow upon this world," I chanted, preparing to use my high-class spell.

It was the most powerful defensive chant that I knew how to use. If I couldn't use it successfully, countless lives in the royal capital would be lost. I had to use all the magical energy within me.

"Raas Rai Wall!"

A massive protective wall of light appeared, completely enveloping the royal capital. The wall which I had poured my all into protected the people from the Breath of darkness that rained down.

***

While Callus was fighting in the skies, panic ran below, throughout the royal capital.

“Run! Or you’ll get dragged in!”

“What are the knights doing during this emergency?!”

Some fled from the royal capital. Some shut themselves inside their homes. Some wailed that the world was coming to an end. Everyone had their own reactions to the scene, but some citizens had instead chosen to pray to the skies above.

“I’m so grateful… Oh so very grateful…”

An elderly woman, dressed in purple attire, sat on the ground, put her hands together, and offered a prayer. A young girl, upon seeing her grandmother do this act, looked at her quizzically.

“Grandma, what are you doing?!” the girl cried, shaking her grandmother’s shoulders. “We should hurry up and flee!”

The two had been out shopping when they were suddenly faced with the sight of a pair of dragons engaged in battle. The granddaughter had first been stunned by it all, but she’d immediately snapped back to her senses and chosen to rush home. Her grandmother, however, had suddenly sat down. The granddaughter had thought that the elderly lady’s knees had buckled due to shock, but she soon found her deductions to be wrong when her grandma started to pray.

“Come on! Move! We can’t stay here! It’s dangerous!” the granddaughter shrieked, trying to forcibly move her grandmother.

But the elderly woman suddenly snapped her eyes open and bellowed, “You idiot! The divine white dragon is fighting for our sake, and you think only about saving yourself?! Don’t be so ungrateful!”

“What the heck are you talking about, grandma?! That’s just a dragon!”

“No, that’s *the* divine white dragon! The divine white dragon has manifested itself to save us all!”

“You mean the one that appears in fairy tales?! No way that’s true!”

“You don’t mean that! My great-great-great-great-grandmother’s diary stated that she’d seen the divine white dragon with her own eyes!”

“That’s literally ages ago! How can you trust that?!”

The granddaughter worried for the elderly woman. Had she lost her marbles? But her grandmother wasn't the only one who was praying. Other devout believers of the royal capital were also offering their prayers.

"O divine white dragon! Please save us all!"

While the citizens prayed, the jet-black dragon slowly raised its body. It had been slammed onto the ground and had taken quite a bit of damage, but it could still move. Indeed, the being of evil wasn't willing to go down so easily.

"You cursed white dragon!"

Muglupa glared at the white beast flying through the skies some distance away. Hatred and murderous intent filled it like a bottomless well that had spewed forth, burning its body. Muglupa, however, didn't give in to these intense feelings.

"You'd better remember this. I'll definitely kill you."

Muglupa turned its back towards the white dragon and flapped its wings, trying to flee. This was unheard of for these monsters. No matter what disadvantage they might be at, beings of evil would always give in to their impulses and rampage across the land—that was simply their nature. But after lying in wait for five hundred years, the monster had learned the concept of patience. This was nothing short of evolution. After fleeing for now, it would be able to return one day, much more powerful. Raizax, the white dragon, noticed Muglupa fleeing and sensed the possible danger.

"This is troublesome. It's trying to escape. We need to defeat it for good, here and now."

The white beast gave a strong flap of his wings and chased after Muglupa while talking to Callus.

"Callus. I am quickly reaching the limit of how long I can remain in this physical form. I will lend you my power for the final blow. You must use that power to destroy it."

"I don't mind, but will you be fine after using all your power?" Callus asked.

"Do not worry. I will not disappear from exhaustion. I will simply fall asleep for a while."

"I understand," Callus said, making his resolve. "I'll definitely finish it off here."

Should the boy fail and let Muglupa escape, numerous lives would be sacrificed to the monster. A massive weight fell on his shoulders.

“Don’t worry, Callus,” Selena assured him. “I’ll give you all the support I can.”

“Right. Thank you, Selena,” Callus replied, thanking his reliable partner and taking a deep breath.

I won’t fail, Callus thought.

“Let’s do this, Callus! Call my name and manifest the spear slumbering within yourself!”

Raizax’s body glowed brighter as light flowed into the boy. Callus received the powerful energy and raised his right hand into the air, just as his ancestor had done many years ago.

“Raizax!”

As the chant left his lips, an enormous flash of light gushed forth and converged to form a great spear of light. It looked as though Callus was holding a bolt of lightning in his hands—this was the exact legendary spell used five hundred years ago to end the great war. The citizens couldn’t take their eyes away from this dignified scene.

“I’m grateful. I’m so very grateful,” the grandmother said.

“It’s…beautiful,” the granddaughter said, entranced by the sight.

“I-It can’t be!” Muglupa shrieked, its face filled with despair upon seeing the spear.

It remembered the spear that had burned its friends to ashes. It had been many centuries since that incident, but the fear remained fresh in its mind. Callus braced the spear, aiming for Muglupa without an ounce of hesitation.

“It really does feel like I’m facing you once more, Arth,” Muglupa mumbled, glancing at Callus.

The monster remembered their battle like it was yesterday. Callus concentrated deeply, clenching the spear tight and thrusting it forward with everything he had.

“Take thiiiiis!” Callus roared as a massive ray of light tore through the skies.

Quicker than lightning, the dragon’s spear flew towards Muglupa. It pierced the monster’s body, filling it with light magical energy and completely destroying it from within.

“Gaaaaah!” Muglupa screamed, falling to the ground.

The monster had hardened its body right before the attack landed, but it was no use—sharp pain coursed through it as its body crumbled away.

“I still can’t win… Do I still not have a chance?!” Muglupa

roared, filled with rage and defeat as it fell onto the academy premises.

***

“Hah… Hah…” I panted the moment after I unleashed *Raizax*, steadying my breathing with my shoulders as I fell onto the dragon’s back.

I-I’m exhausted. I didn’t think it’d take so much out of me.

“Are you all right, Callus?” Raizax asked with worry.

“Y-Yes, I’m fine,” I replied.

“You have done very well with your small body. Without you, numerous lives would have been lost. You have become a hero.”

“A hero?” I chuckled. “You’re exaggerating. But…it’d be nice if someone thought of me that way.”

It was a little embarrassing, but I didn’t hate it at all.

“Raizax, I’m fine, so could you head to the place where the monster fell?” I asked. “It might still be alive.”

“Very well. But do not push yourself.”

After giving me his warning, Raizax flew towards the academy where Muglupa had fallen. The spell I’d used earlier had exhausted me, but I still had some magical energy left. If Muglupa was still alive, I’d be able to land the finishing blow.

“It’s a stubborn one,” Raizax said wearily.

I looked ahead and saw that while a large portion of its body had been burned, Muglupa was still crawling on the ground, trying to flee. No longer able to maintain its dragon form, it had reverted to its humanoid shape.

“It’s still alive after receiving that attack? It’s so resilient,” I muttered.

I’d expected it to still be breathing, but I couldn’t hide my shock. However, its body was crumbling away; the light magic that had entered its body was likely still attacking it from within. In a matter of minutes, Muglupa would probably disappear on its own.

“Is this place good enough?” Raizax asked, landing a short distance away.

I slid down towards Raizax’s tail and jumped onto the ground.

Phew. It feels great to soar through the skies, but I’m more at ease when my feet are touching the ground.

“Now then, Callus. I must fall into a deep slumber soon. I am

sorry, but I must have you deal the final blow against that thing."

"Already?"

"Manifesting spells depletes quite a bit of my energy, and I have been resting in a place that does not contain magical energy for a long time. I am almost completely out."

Upon closer inspection, I noticed that Raizax's body was slowly fading away. He really was reaching his limit.

"Do not worry. As I have said before, I am simply falling into a short slumber within you. After a while, I shall appear before you again."

"I understand," I said. "Thank you so much, Raizax. You've been so much help, and I really appreciate you."

"I should be the one thanking you, Callus. Simply meeting you has made my five hundred years of hardship worth it."

Raizax stared at me, his gaze filled with a hint of nostalgia. *Maybe he finds me similar to his former partner.*

"Ah, one more thing. My spear, Raizax*, is within you. Unlike other spells, this ability does not require the assistance of spirits. In other words, even if I am asleep or you are separated from your light spirit, you will be able to use it."*

"R-Really?!"

I was shocked to hear the news. *Is this spell similar to arcane arts, then? It must be special, so I should keep it in mind.*

"However, that spear is still not used to your body. You can only use it once a day at most. Do not push yourself."

"I understand," I replied. "I'll be careful."

Raizax gave me a satisfied nod, then turned to Selena. *"I apologize, princess of light. I had wanted to tell you many things, but I do not have the time right now."*

"I don't mind," Selena replied. "I can meet you again, can't I? I'll hear all about it during our next meeting."

"Of course. Please wait for me with Callus."

The white dragon turned back to me once more, his body already half gone. *I guess this is it for now.*

"We have not been together long, but it has been fun, Callus. As a Taboo Being, you will encounter various obstacles barring your path. But do not worry. You have many people who care about you, and you carry an honest heart that conveys to them your gratitude. As long as that remains within you, you will be able to overcome anything in your way."

"Okay," I said.

I knew that we weren't parting ways forever, but I still felt my eyes grow hot. I had received something incomparably significant from Raizax.

"Smile, Callus. Men should part ways with a smile on their faces. Even at his death, Arth did not fail to show me his."

I wiped away my sadness and formed a bright smile. "Right! Thank you so much!"

Raizax nodded with satisfaction before he disappeared. It would get lonely, but we wouldn't be apart for long. I'd be sure to talk with him lots more when we met again.

"Callus," Selena said.

"I know," I replied, turning to Muglupa.

"G-Grah..." The monster uttered a terrifying, low growl as it continued to crawl on the ground.

Its body was crumbling away, and anyone could tell that it was too late, but the monster still clung to its life. I knew that it was dying, but I still felt fear towards it.

"Let's end this," I said, my guard still up as I approached Muglupa.

Damien had told me that beasts were most dangerous when they were about to die. I hadn't forgotten his words.

"Hah... Huff... You're..." Muglupa said, staring at me in befuddlement.

What's up with it?

"H-Humans cannot live for so long," Muglupa gasped. ***"I thought it was odd. I see now, you must be Arth's descendant."***

"Yeah," I replied. "King Arth has died, but I will carry out his wish."

"Heh. Heh heh heh! Arth has died and that white lizard's gone! We won! I knew it!" Muglupa crowed with a forced smile.

His laugh was maniacal.

"No, *we* have won again," I firmly declared. "I'll be the one to end you."

"Ha ha ha. Indeed, I'll die here. The hated light that resides within my body can't be removed. But...I can still do this, you know." Muglupa placed its hand over its chest and chanted, **"Overport."**

Numerous black balls appeared around the monster. In the blink of an eye, the surrounding trees, walls, and ground were gouged out. Sensing danger, I jumped back from Muglupa.

"Wh-What's going on?!" I yelled in panic.

An unprecedented event was clearly occurring as my surroundings started to disappear. At this rate, the academy and the royal capital would be destroyed as the damage began to spread.

"In exchange for my life, I've just activated a large-scale dimensional spell. This magic will randomly teleport objects, and the range will cover the entire royal capital. Heh heh. I wonder where they'll go. Into the skies? Inside the ground? Or maybe into the ocean or to a land far away? Wherever it may be, you humans won't come out unscathed."

Muglupa gave a horrific grin as it crumbled away. *I didn't think it still had a final trick up its sleeve!*

"I won't let you! Stop this right now!" I shouted.

"It's no use. Once activated, even I can't stop this spell. Until it loses power, it'll continue to randomly interfere with this dimension. This city's done for!"

Muglupa gave a hearty laugh. *What? But we've fought so hard and finally won! Is this really the end? What can I do? Is there* anything *I could do?*

"Selena! Is there a way for me to stop this?!" I asked.

"Hm," Selena said. "If it hasn't been fully activated yet, we can use a large amount of magical energy to envelope it and possibly stop the spell..."

"I still have magical energy!" I said. "All right, let's do this."

"Wait, Callus!"

I tried to approach Muglupa before the spell was fully activated.

"You shouldn't do that. You won't get away so well yourself," another voice called out to me.

I turned towards it and saw Emilia. *Why's he here?*

"That thing's unstable," Emilia noted. "Maybe your magical energy is enough to stop it, but you'd need to touch the dimensional spell directly to interfere with it. And I can guarantee that won't end well for you. You might even get sucked into the space between dimensions and be unable to leave for all eternity."

Emilia gave a happy grin as he explained the terrifying situation. It might've been best for me to ignore his words, but I knew that he was an expert when it came to magic and arcane arts. It was worth lending an ear to his thoughts.

"What do you mean, 'it won't end well'?" I asked.

“I mean exactly what I said,” he replied. “That dimensional spell—it’s more of an arcane art, but we can leave that aside for now. It’s like a bomb. Its fuse has been lit, and we’re just waiting for it to explode. You can use your body as a shield to prevent the bomb from damaging others, but what do you think would happen to you, as you experience the explosion from point-blank range? I don’t need to tell you just how horrific that result would be, do I?”

Emilia chuckled. *How can he laugh in this situation? Does he know just how much damage this spell would cause once it fully activates?*

“Then are you telling me to leave it be?” I asked.

“Now, now. Calm down. Maybe that’s what *you’d* have to resort to…but I’m different.” He spoke triumphantly. “I hold deep knowledge about dimensional spells. You probably won’t find anyone with more knowledge about these spells than me on this entire continent.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I’m saying that *I* can stop this dimensional spell without creating any sacrifices.”

He smiled. For a man as proud as him to firmly give this declaration, I was sure that he was telling the truth. But…

“You’re not going to do it for free, are you?” I asked.

“Heh, I’m glad to see that you’re quick to catch on.”

I see. He was waiting for this moment. This man was likely waiting for me to ask for help when I realized that my powers weren’t enough.

“Was me entering the giant hole and being attacked by these monsters all part of your plan too?” I asked.

“Precisely so. You’re sharp, aren’t you? You might’ve thought you’d been moving of your free will, but you were just acting according to my script,” Emilia answered happily. “The one who allowed students to tour the giant hole, decided on the number of people that could enter at one time, and allowed *you* to enter first…was me. You moved exactly how I’d expected. Sure, the legendary white dragon appearing was unexpected, but I was able to jump in and guide you all back to moving exactly as I’d hoped.”

As he laughed, I felt an intense wave of displeasure. This man was treating people like pawns in his game, and felt nothing when he moved them around as he pleased. If he were left to his

own devices, he would only cause trouble for more people.

"What are you trying to do?" I asked. "Why did you make me act this way?"

"Why don't I ask you the same question I asked five years ago?" Emilia said with a suspicious smirk, extending his hand to me. "Callus, join the Magical Committee and work under me as my subordinate. That's all. Simple, isn't it?"

"What?!"

I'd rejected this offer five years ago. Since he'd been silent this entire time, I'd thought that he'd given up on me. But I was wrong. He'd simply been waiting for the right timing, for a situation where I absolutely couldn't refuse this request.

"Now then," he said. "Take my hand. Or else it'll be too late."

"Why do you want me so badly?" I asked. "I don't think I'm that valuable."

"That's not true. You're the one within the great flow, and yet you possess the ability to change it. You're a singularity. With you by my side, I can shape the future however I wish and make anything I desire a reality."

I had no idea what he was on about, but it was crystal clear that teaming up with him would only bring about a horrible future. If I lent him my help, the future awaiting me might be worse than if I let the dimensional spell go berserk. I quietly pondered my choices. What was I supposed to prioritize? *But I already know the answer to that. I want the people most important to me to be safe, and I can't guarantee that if I let the dimensional spell fully activate or accept Emilia's offer. So...*

"I've decided," I said.

"Really?" Emilia said happily. "Then why don't you—"

"I won't take your hand."

Once again, I rejected Emilia's offer. He stiffened, likely not expecting me to refuse him a second time.

"What are you saying?" he asked. "You have no choice."

"Anything I've wished for has always been at the end of a difficult path. And I'm sure that it's the same this time around too. Your way sounds like the easy road, but there's nothing I desire there."

I steeled myself and gazed towards Muglupa. I didn't think I'd be safe, but I'd do it to protect everyone.

"Callus! What are you doing?!" Selena cried, sensing what I was about to do.

“I’m sorry, Selena. Can you apologize to everyone for me?”

“What are you—”

I ran forward without turning back to her. I was a horrible partner, deciding to do this all on my own. But I wanted everyone to be safe. I wanted everyone to live, to be smiling tomorrow. This was the only path I could take.

“You… I won’t let you!” Emilia roared, giving chase from behind. I could clearly sense his animosity.

I don’t have time to waste with you! What can I do?!

“You will be mine, Callus!” the chairman bellowed.

But the moment he was about to reach me, a blue light stood between Emilia and me. And when the light died down, the moon magician had appeared.

“Huh? Luna?!” I gasped.

“Good work making it back, Callus,” she said with a faint smile. “I’d expect no less from my student.”

She turned to Emilia. She was small because she was in her spirit form, but Emilia’s eyes were glued to her. *He can see spirits too?*

“Who are you?!” Emilia roared. “Do you think you’d get off so easily from getting in my way?!”

“That’s my line,” Luna replied. “Who are *you*? You’re a pitiful husk of a human, one that’s fallen into the depths below.”

Emilia twitched upon hearing those words.

“A human such as yourself tries to act like an elf?” Luna asked. “No matter how many times you switch your body, you cannot hide the stains of your soul.”

“Silence! Don’t you dare ridicule me!” Emilia roared, creating magical blades and launching them at us.

Luna created a wall of blue magic to block the attacks.

“Go, Callus,” she said. “I shall hold him off for a short while.”

“Thank you!” I shouted.

I left Luna to handle the chairman and dashed ahead.

“Ugh…” I groaned.

The closer I got to Muglupa, the more pain my body was in because of the dimensional distortions. My movements were sluggish, and I felt like I was being shredded. My breathing grew haggard and my vision started to grow hazy, but I refused to stop.

“You… Why…” Muglupa gasped, gazing at me in bewilderment. It must’ve thought that I’d already fled.

“I’m here to stop you,” I said, searching for the source of its magical energy. I felt the strongest presence from its chest as I touched its body to pinpoint the magic’s location.

“Right here!” I yelled, placing my hand over its chest.

I poured in all my magical energy. Selena had mentioned enveloping the source of power; I envisioned that while using everything I had. There was no room for error as I focused and manipulated my magical energy.

“Go!” I grunted.

I desperately used my energy to search for something, anything, when I suddenly felt like I had grabbed Muglupa’s core. *This must be it! I need to surround this thing and push it down to save everyone!*

“If you do that, you’ll—”

“I know,” I replied. “I probably won’t come out unscathed. But I still have to do this.”

I wanted to remain living and enjoy my time at the academy longer. It was saddening to think that I’d be letting all of that go. But if my sacrifice could save everyone else, I wouldn’t hesitate—I’d happily give myself up.

“I’m sorry, everyone,” I muttered as their faces flashed across my mind.

I felt bad for being unable to bid everyone farewell, but I hoped they’d forgive me. I wanted them to live for my sake as well.

“Raaaaah!”

Using all the magical energy residing within my body, I sealed the dimensional spell. An incredible impact slammed into me. I felt my body twist and my vision distort before everything popped. I lost my sense of balance completely and it no longer felt like I was standing on the ground. In fact, I didn’t know which way was up or down. Was I even breathing? Was I alive? My vision turned white before it became pitch-black and disappeared.

***

“He…really did it,” Emilia said, his knees hitting the ground as Callus disappeared.

With the boy now gone, the plans that Emilia had been cooking up for some years now had vanished into thin air. The

feeling of loss was great.

“He’s done it. Good,” Luna said with satisfaction.

“You!” Emilia roared, infuriated. “Why did you get in my way?! My perfect plan which I created with astrology is now ruined!”

“Heh. ‘Perfect plan,’ you say? How long have you looked into the future before spouting such a thing? A few years? A few decades, perhaps? Astrology would be disappointed to hear those words.”

Luna, who sounded like she’d seen through everything, was an odd existence to Emilia. Who exactly was she? As the chairman questioned her identity, he tried to use his arcane arts to glean more details, but even he couldn’t figure her out.

“Who are you?” Emilia demanded. “You’re neither spirit nor human. What exactly *are* you?”

“I’ve no obligation to answer,” Luna said. “My work here is done. I have nothing more to talk with you about.”

Her body grew pale before she faded away. Emilia reached out, trying to grab on to her, but he was too late—she was gone.

“Farewell, human child. Shall the stars guide, may we meet once again.”

Emilia swiped through the air, frustrated. He quietly crumpled to the ground.

***

“Just what is going on?” Gourley wondered as he approached a forest on the outskirts of the academy, faced with a horrific sight.

Trees lay flat on the ground, the earth was gouged, and debris was scattered across the area. What could’ve possibly caused this much destruction in such a short amount of time? Gourley couldn’t imagine it.

“Did Callus really come here? Hm?”

As he walked through the mountain of debris, he found a certain person sitting atop the rubble—Emilia, the chairman of the Magical Committee. The chairman looked like all the life had been sucked out of him. Known for his usual confident remarks, it was unusual to see him in such a state. Gourley remained wary, wondering what had occurred.

“What are you doing here?” the light magician asked.

“Ah, Gourley,” Emilia replied, sounding slightly haggard.

Gourley guessed that the boy must've been experiencing great shock.

"Is the battle over on your end?" the chairman asked.

"Yes. We've dealt with all the beings of evil. There's no need for you to appear anymore."

"I see."

Emilia gave a disinterested reply as he gazed at the massive crater that stood in the middle of all this destruction. Gourley wondered if a massive spell had been used, as he felt a presence of strong magical energy emanating from it.

"Did Callus come here?" Gourley asked.

"He did. And he's gone now."

"What do you mean? Where did he go?"

Emilia recounted the events that had occurred. He would normally act a bit more coy, but the loss of Callus was so great to him and such a huge miscalculation on his part that he no longer had the mental capacity for it.

"And that's it," Emilia finished with a sigh.

He had created numerous plans for this day, but they had all been in vain. While he was thinking of his next steps, Gourley suddenly grabbed the boy by his collar, exerting strength that no elderly man usually could.

"You! How low have you sunk?!" Gourley bellowed.

"What's with you all of a sudden?" Emilia asked. "I wasn't the one who made him disappear, you know. In fact, I tried to help him. What a stupid child."

"Shut up! Don't you dare speak of Callus!"

Gourley clenched his fist and landed it squarely in Emilia's face. The boy's small body rolled onto the ground, his nose broken and bleeding.

"That hurt," Emilia muttered.

"It's nothing compared to the pain that that child has endured! Callus sacrificed himself for everyone, and yet you still think only of yourself! Have you no shame?!"



“Such nonsense. Humans can only live for themselves.” Emilia stood up, patted the dirt off his clothes, and wiped his nose, stopping the blood. “I’m bored now, and I’m going home.”

“Do as you like. Don’t you ever show your face again.”

Emilia didn’t respond as he left, leaving Gourley by himself. The light magician crumpled to the ground, lamenting the loss of his beloved apprentice.

***

Within the royal palace of Laxus, a large round table stood solemnly with King Gallius and two princes gathered. The first prince, Damien, was the brawn, while the second prince, Sirius, was regarded as the brains. Damien, who had seen the surge of the beings of evil with his own eyes and taken command, reported the news to Gallius and Sirius.

It had been two days since the incident, and the total damage caused had already been assessed. While there were numerous wounded, miraculously, there had been no deaths, and the appearance of the beings of evil had never leaked outside. The black dragon had been witnessed by many citizens, but thanks to its transformed shape, the citizens had simply thought that a dragon had rampaged on the city.

In addition, the legendary white dragon had emerged, defeating the dark beast. Citizens hadn’t expressed fear, but rather excitement and awe as the battle unfolded in front of them. Some even suggested making the day of the white dragon’s emergence into a holiday to celebrate this joyous occasion.

It was unlikely that other nations would attack in this situation. Information had been successfully regulated regarding this monster.

However, both Gallius and Sirius were notified of one other event, involving a certain person whose existence couldn’t be publicized.

“And that concludes my report,” Damien finished.

“I see…” Gallius muttered lifelessly.

Exhaustion had peaked ever since the beings of evil had made their appearance, and the wrinkles on his face looked deeper than before. Sirius, however, had risen from his seat and approached Damien, grabbing the Flaming Lion by his collar,

looking furious.

“You were there, and yet you couldn’t protect him?!” Sirius shouted in anger. “Why didn’t you save Callus?!”

Callus was gone. Because a student of the academy had disappeared, the academy, the royal capital, and the nearby forest had been searched by a team. But there were no signs of him. The boy was last seen in an area that had faced the most destruction. The people searching for him likely thought that he was dead.

“I can’t forgive you, Damien,” Sirius growled. “Callus was finally able to live a normal life…and yet you practically left him for dead!”

“I have nothing to say,” Damien replied. “It’s all my fault. I don’t mind if you resent me for the rest of your life.”

“You!”

Sirius raised his fist in the air, aiming for his brother.

“Stop, Sirius,” Gallius scolded. “Damien fulfilled his duties.”

During the battle with the beings of evil, Damien had commanded the knights and fought on the front lines. Without his efforts, the monsters would’ve surely spilled out into the city and devoured the citizens. Damien had indeed properly fulfilled his role—Sirius knew that. But the Blue Eagle couldn’t resist displaying his anger. He was also irritated at himself, unable to lend his aid because he was unfortunately away from the royal capital.

“Damn it!” Sirius yelled, slamming his fist onto the desk, his hand throbbing from the pain.

Gallius turned back towards the first prince. “We don’t know for sure yet if Callus is really dead. Do we know where he went, or do we have any idea about his whereabouts?”

“No, but I’ve been told that there’s a way to look into it,” Damien replied. “I’ve brought someone who could further enlighten us on that topic. May I bring him in?”

“Certainly. You may.”

Damien motioned for the person waiting outside to head into the room.

“It certainly has been a while, Your Majesty,” the person said, removing his hat and placing it in front of his chest before bowing.

Sporting a magnificent white beard, Gourley Sigmaen had reported on the events right before Callus’s disappearance. The

elderly man, familiar with Selena as well, had heard her story. He was told about Raizax the white dragon, and the incident that had occurred underground—all which had already been reported to Damien. The light magician immediately got to business; time was of the essence.

"We're making preparations to find a way to search for Callus's location," Gourley said. "But I have one request."

"And what might that be?" Gallius said, giving Gourley permission to speak his mind.

"Please allow me to form a team to search for Callus, and let me lead the search."

"We already have a team formed. Can I not simply have you take charge of that?"

"No, Your Majesty. From selecting the team members to utilizing the method which I find best, I'd like you to leave all of it to me."

The magician looked at the king sternly. Gallius, after pondering for a while, finally nodded. "Very well. I shall do something about the budget. I leave my beloved son in your hands."

The king bowed his head. In public occasions, a king must never bow his head, but this was unofficial business. Gallius begged Gourley to find his beloved son.

Gourley, who had sensed how much the king cared for Callus, bowed deeply in return and spoke firmly. "Please leave it to me, Your Majesty. I swear to you that I shall find your son."

Terminology Dictionary IX

Laxus, the Royal Capital

A large city located to the north of the Ledyvia Kingdom. Numerous people reside in the city, and the merchant district is always bustling like a festival.

To the east is the continent's largest educational facility, Lemitizia, the Academy of Magic. The academy produces many excellent students every year.

The name of the royal capital is said to be based on that of Arth Leditzweissen, the founder of the kingdom's partner, who soared through the battlefield.

Beings of Evil

Organisms made of dark magical energy.

Most of them have no unique abilities, but they are extremely vigorous and difficult to kill without light magic, which is their weakness.

Powerful beings have the ability to freely transform their body, while others may awaken unique abilities.

Those born from the darkness will instinctively lust for the suffering of others. They hold not the concept of good or evil; they can only hate and torment other living beings.

—Soliloquy of Laxus

Epilogue: Those Who Were Transported

The first thing I felt was an extreme thirst which was more akin to pain. I opened my mouth to breathe, trying to generate some moisture, but only dry wind and sand entered, further parching my throat.

"Huff... Huff..."

The next thing I felt was extreme heat. I was tempted to just throw off all my clothes and walk around naked, but I was too tired to even attempt that. I felt sick, like all my organs were spinning within my body. My head was throbbing and I was unable to think clearly. *What was I doing again?*

"Wh-Where am..."

I placed my hand on a wall and managed to get up as I slowly opened my eyes. I looked to be in a small corridor. *Or maybe it's an alleyway...* There was a main street in front of me with a number of people walking about. *But...it's so hot.*

I'd never felt such intense heat outside before. It couldn't be helped that I yearned for something to quench my thirst. Another tidbit that bothered me was that the wall felt rough to the touch. This didn't feel like stone or wood. *The surface is crumbly... Is this sand?* I'd only seen buildings made from hardened sand in books.

"What's...going on?"

If people were around, I could ask for help. I placed my weight onto the wall and slowly walked forward, managing to make my way to the main street. I saw then that this town was in a desert, something I'd never seen before. Dry sand danced in the air as people walked around, wearing cloths that covered their faces. The sun's strong rays beat down from above as I felt my skin sizzle from the heat.

I was confused. This obviously wasn't the royal capital, and I wasn't even sure if we were within the Ledyvia Kingdom. No desert like this existed within the kingdom. I was curious about where I was, but I had to drink something first. I could feel the sun sapping my strength away. *At this rate, I'll faint again within a few minutes. I have to ask for water, and fast.* I staggered over to the people nearby and asked for help.

“U-Um, water…”

The people glanced my way before quickly turning ahead and walking past me.

“Huh?”

I was completely ignored. Refusing to give up, I tried to talk to another person, but they ignored me as well. After my third attempt, a realization hit me. None of these people seemed to have mental leeway. In fact, they didn’t care if someone was fainting on the side of the road; their lifeless eyes just looked ahead while walking. The people of the royal capital had a bit more leeway, but these people here simply didn’t have the means to help another. I was also wearing clothes that were clearly not of this town; that was likely another reason for them to be wary of me.

Some people were watching me from a distance with a grin. They weren’t mocking my situation, but looking at prey—would they strike and take all my possessions if I fainted here? If so, I’d lose everything.

“Ugh… This is bad…”

I started to lose the strength in my legs. I stopped sweating and my vision grew hazy; I was clearly dehydrated.

“Hah… Hah…”

I forced my aching body to get up and walk ahead. I had nowhere to go, but standing in place would just cause me to faint there. The people of the town looked at me as something bizarre; they likely thought that I was just a child dressed in odd clothing. Some gazed at me with pity, but no one offered me a hand. I couldn’t wait for help. I glanced at my surroundings through my hazy vision. I saw numerous buildings with signs. Some were lodgings while others were weaponries. *Which place would give me the highest chance of being saved?*

“U-Ugh…”

My legs felt heavy like stone. It was painful to even breathe. As my consciousness started to slip, I found a certain store. *Maybe…I can get…* I mustered all my strength and dragged my body in front of the building. I placed my hand on the door and I fell—the door opened as I collapsed into the entrance.

“What’s going on here?!” a voice yelled.

Someone in the store must’ve noticed me.

“Oh, come on now! Give me a break!”

They’re troubled. Well, I can’t blame them.

They might chase me out. If that happened, I'd have no chance of being rescued. I used my last ounce of strength to twist my body and dig something out of my pouch. I made sure that my hand holding the item stood out and offered it forward...before my vision grew dark.

***

"U-Ugh..."

Feeling dazed and exhausted, I slowly came to. A bright light shone down on me; I slowly opened my eyes and got up, glancing around. I was atop a bed in a small room. I reached out to a cup of water on the bedside table, eagerly downing the contents in one go. Loud gulps echoed through the room.

"Whew, that really hit the spot."

Water had never tasted so good. I noticed a pitcher nearby. I immediately poured myself another cup, and another. As I finished my third cup, the door to the room opened with a creak, and a man I'd never seen before entered.

"You awake, kid? If you can drink water by yourself, you should be all right," he said.

The bald man had darker skin and spoke in an unfriendly manner. *He must be the one who saved me.*

"Um, thank you for saving me," I said.

"If you were a complete stranger, I would've chased you away," he replied. "But if you're one of us, then that's another story. I've only done what was expected of me."

He pointed towards the moon amulet placed on the bedside table—a necklace I'd received from Luna. *Right, this is the last thing I took out.*

"You must be part of Blaues Licht," I said.

"Well, it's not really a personal choice as much as my family's. We've been a part of them for generations."

As my consciousness had been fading, I'd found the sign of an equipment store with the emblem of a crescent moon—the symbol of Blaues Licht. Given a sliver of hope that this amulet would make me seem like a part of their group, I'd taken a gamble and entered the store. And it'd worked. He claimed that any other store would've chased me out.

"But that necklace is made very well," the man noted. "Are you perhaps a person of high rank?"

“Ah, er, um, no…” I stammered. “This item has been passed down through many generations, so I’m not quite sure myself.”

“I see. Well, I’ll leave that aside for now.”

The man decided to believe my words for the moment. I couldn’t tell him about Luna, and I wasn’t even sure if he’d believe me anyway.

“Um, my name is Callus.”

“I’m Taric Mishal. I can’t do much, but you can rest here for a while.”

He placed a plate of sliced fruit on the table. He sounded unfriendly, but he seemed quite good at taking care of others.

“Eat this and rest,” he said. “Don’t move much for today.”

“Right, got it. And, uh, thank you so very much. I promise that I’ll repay the favor,” I said, bowing my head.

“Hmph, kids don’t need to do that,” Taric said, leaving the room.

Yeah, this man’s really nice.

Left with nothing else to do, I glanced at the plate of fruit, filled with red ones and some others that I’d never seen before. I took a slice with my hands and popped it into my mouth.

“Whoa, this is really good,” I muttered.

The tartness and sweetness of the fruit mixed together very well. It was delicious. *I think Shizuku would like fruit like this…* As I thought back to those I held close, I realized that I was alone. The scenery outside the window made it clear that I was in a completely different nation. With time to gather my thoughts, I tried to remember the events that had led up to this.

“That spell must’ve teleported me here…”

This was a completely different situation from the time I’d been transported in the cave. I hadn’t traveled far, and Sissy was by my side. But I was absolutely alone this time around, and I had obviously been sent to a place much farther away.

“Selena, are you there?”

I received no response. Just like last time, spirits couldn’t come with me because of the dimensional spell.

“U-Ugh…”

Loneliness overwhelmed me, and it felt as though my heart were being torn apart. *I’m…truly all alone.*

***

It was midnight at the Academy of Magic. Two days had passed since the clash with the beings of evil, evidenced by traces of the monsters' rampage that still remained within the premises. Bumps started to appear in the ground as someone tried to emerge from below.

"Bwah!" a man wearing an iron helmet grunted loudly as he made his appearance. He uprooted his entire body from the ground and patted the dust away from his clothes. "Whew! It's been a while since I've had a breath of fresh air! It feels great! Good grief, that was a terrible experience!"

The loud man was none other than one of the grand sages: Metal, who went by the nickname Iron Man. After he'd removed much of the dirt, he began to walk away. Suddenly, a voice stopped him.

"Welcome back, Metal. You've had a rough time, huh?"

Metal turned towards the voice and noticed a boy with a pretty face. The one calling out to him was Emilia, the chairman of the Magical Committee.

"Oh," Metal said with a bit of surprise. "How unusual for you to come out and welcome me back."

"I was a little worried about you, I'll have you know," Emilia replied. "It would be quite troublesome if you died, after all."

Only because you're after my powers, Metal internally scorned. The two had known each other for many years, but a bond had never formed between them. They were only together because they benefited each other, and nothing more. Neither was fond of the other.

"I didn't think a dimensional spell would be used," Metal said. "And it sent me below, to boot. If it was anyone else, they would've died."

Underground, Metal couldn't have told left from right and up from down. Any normal person would've panicked.

"Chairman, has the other one been found?" Metal asked.

"Moongrim is still gone," Emilia answered. "Since we can't feel his magical energy, he must've been sent a lot farther away than you. But he should be fine. That guy really just can't die."

"Hm, that's true."

Metal agreed that Moongrim wasn't a man who would die simply from being teleported.

"But those...beings of evil, was it? Why were they able to use magic?" Metal asked. "I don't think they were able to do so five

hundred years ago."

"That wasn't magic, but arcane arts. More specifically, that was a type of Congenital Arcane Art."

Metal looked perplexed by Emilia's words. "Congenital Arcane Art?"

Emilia looked at the grand sage wearily and began explaining. "It's a special type of innate arcane art—in other words, it's a type of spell that you're born with. Not many people can utilize it, but it's extremely effective. Quite rare too. The arcane arts that Moongrim uses fall under this category as well."

"Ah! Now that you mention it, something like that *does* exist! So were they born with the ability to use arcane arts?"

Emilia shook his head. "Recent research has found that Congenital Arcane Arts are deeply related to the structure of one's brain."

"The…structure of your brain?"

"That's right. If one's brain shape *coincidentally* takes the form of a magical expression, they can use Congenital Arcane Arts. When these people have magical energy flowing through their brain, it'll automatically activate the expression and use arcane arts. Fascinating, isn't it?"

Emilia chuckled.

"I see…" Metal muttered. "So, those monsters transformed the shapes of their brains and acquired the ability to utilize Congenital Arcane Arts."

"You're ignorant of many matters, but it seems you're not stupid. That's exactly right. Changing one's body freely is the unique ability of the beings of evil," Emilia replied, thinking back to those monsters. "But only the higher-ranking ones were able to activate spells. The others lacked the precision to shift their physical bodies. Had they all been able to use Congenital Arcane Arts, this battle likely wouldn't have gone in our favor."

"Ha ha!" Metal laughed. "You say some funny things. Had that happened, you would've simply increased the number of grand sages, no?"

The chairman stopped in his tracks as the air instantly turned tense.

"What do you mean?" Emilia asked.

"Exactly what I said. You were *controlling* the balance of power in this fight. I thought it was weird. If you wanted to seriously fight against those guys, you should've called my older brother

or Kirce. But you called for myself and Moongrim instead."

Emilia silently stared at Metal.

I can't sense a hint of emotion from his gaze. This is creepy, Metal thought.

"I thought it was weird because the two beings that could use arcane arts used spells similar to Moongrim and me. You *wanted* this to be a close battle, hence you chose grand sages that weren't completely suitable for this fight. Am I wrong?" Metal finished.

"Heh, you're overthinking it. I was just relying on you two is all," Emilia replied.

"I see..."

If the chairman wasn't willing to talk, there was no need to forcibly pry the answers out of him. His twisted personality wouldn't change anytime soon. Metal turned his back on Emilia and walked forward, but stopped for a brief moment, his back still turned.

"It's a bad habit of yours to consistently believe that you can control everything," Metal said. "Things won't always go in your favor."

"Thank you for the warning," Emilia said, as two people flashed across his mind. "But I know that all too well."

One was the boy who made sure that things never went the chairman's way. Another was a mysterious girl whose very existence was an enigma. Emilia swore to himself that he would, without fail, obtain everything he desired.

"That's great. I pray that your evil plans will never reach fruition," Metal said before he finally left.

Left alone, the chairman mumbled to himself, "I don't care who gets in my way. That doesn't matter to me. I *will* achieve my earnest desires, and I won't stop until then."

Only the night stars twinkling above heard his words.

Extra Story: Crys's Visit

It was a beautiful day off. One girl with flaming-red hair looked nervous outside a certain house one afternoon.

She took deep breaths. "I don't look weird, do I?"

She once again checked her attire—a white blouse and navy-blue skirt. She had agonized for hours about her outfit, and these clothes were on the pricier end of her entire closet. She was wearing her favorite skirt and a blouse that she had bought recently. It had a low neckline that showed a bit of her cleavage, which was a little embarrassing, but she was meeting a certain boy. She had no time to act so shy. *I'll be fine,* she thought. She had taken twice as long as usual to do her hair; it shouldn't have been messy. Crys Lamiared continued to reassure herself as she steeled herself, then gave a rather loud knock. A few seconds later, the door opened, and the owner of the house emerged.

"Welcome, Cryssie! Come on in," Callus said, welcoming her with a bright smile.

He glanced at her face before checking out her attire. "Wow!" he praised in awe. "You look really fashionable today! It's really cute!"

"R-Really? Thanks," Crys said, her cheeks turning pink.

She was usually more of a strong-minded tomboy, but that side of her was hidden away for now. Callus felt his heart thump when he noticed how different she was from usual.

"Welcome," Shizuku said. "We've been waiting for you, Lady Crys."

The maid's expressionless face made it hard to read her thoughts, but Crys was being welcomed. The two ladies had often gotten into little quarrels every time they met, so the young lady internally breathed a sigh of relief.

"Want to go to my room and start?" Callus offered.

Crys nodded. Today, she was here to have Callus teach her. She greatly excelled in physical training, but she disliked studying, and the scores for her next test were in danger. If she received failing marks on her tests, she'd need supplementary lessons that would cut into her free time. So today, she'd decided to visit Callus and have him help with her studies. Jack had

wanted to tag along too, since his scores weren't anywhere near excellent, but Crys had forcibly stopped him. She couldn't have him get in the way of this precious time that she could spend alone with Callus.

"Um... You're not good at history, right?" Callus asked.

"There's also math and literature," Crys added.

"That's like...almost all of the subjects. All right, since we don't have much time, let's start."

The two sat by the table in Callus's room and laid out their textbooks to begin studying. Crys usually got sleepy when studying, but she was eager to take this more seriously and show Callus her good side. Callus, in turn, had decided to become more passionate in teaching, and the two were studying at an astonishing pace.

"So we use the formula here..." Callus explained.

"I see. If you plug it in like this, I can solve it."

"Exactly. You're so quick to learn, Cryssie. Amazing."

Crys gave a proud huff. If she were a dog, her tail would be wagging at an astonishing pace by now. As the two continued to cheerfully do their work, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," Callus called.

"Pardon me," Shizuku said, entering the room.

She had a tray in hand with a plate of scones, and steam rose from the tea.

"I thought you'd be tired, so I brought some tea and snacks," Shizuku said.

"Thanks! We've been concentrating for quite a bit, so why don't we take a break?" Callus suggested.

Crys nodded. She was reaching her limit as well, and she was grateful to have some sugar in her system to regain energy.

"Speaking of, I've still got the snacks that my master bought for me last time," Callus said. "This is a great opportunity, so why don't we eat those too? Come on, join us, Shizuku."

After the maid sat down, Callus left the room, leaving Crys and Shizuku behind. They'd known each other since five years ago, but they'd never been in a room alone together before. An awkward silence ran between them. As Crys wondered what she should do, Shizuku opened her mouth.

"Is Sir Callus having fun at the academy?" the maid asked.

"Huh? Y-Yes! Of course!" Crys stammered. "He's always listening to lessons with great interest, and seems to be having

more fun than anyone else! I'm by his side, of course, so it's only natural, I suppose!"

Crys puffed out her chest with pride and glanced at Shizuku, expecting a few thorny remarks. But the maid instead gave a happy smile.

"What's wrong?" the girl asked.

"I'm happy that he seems to be having so much fun," Shizuku replied.

A bright droplet welled up in the maid's eye as she quickly wiped it away. Crys knew nothing about the curse, but she was aware that Callus had been unable to leave the manor for several years because of his illness. And of course, she knew that there were people by his side, devoting their lives to supporting the boy.

"I'm grateful to you," Shizuku said. "I believe Sir Callus has been able to adjust to the academy well because of friends like you, Lady Crys."

She spoke from the bottom of her heart. While she was jealous of Crys for being able to aggressively associate herself with the boy, she also was extremely grateful that such a girl was by his side.

"Whenever Sir Callus comes home, he always cheerfully talks about his day at the academy," Shizuku said. "And of course, he talks about you as well."

Crys scratched her head with embarrassment. She'd never expected to hear those words from the maid.

"Um, thank you. If I'm able to be part of Callus's strength, I'm happy," she said before staring straight at Shizuku. "But you're part of his strength as well. He's always talking about you at the academy, and he's always bragging about his lunch. He goes, 'Anything Shizuku makes is delicious. This one is especially good…' and stuff like that."

Shizuku widened her eyes with shock. She'd never expected her master to brag about her one bit.

"You might be envious of me because I'm able to spend time with him in the academy, but honestly, *I'm* envious of *you*," Crys continued. "You're able to be by his side and support him more than anyone. He probably trusts you the most."

"Lady Crys…"

The two looked at each other. They were charmed by the same person, and a bond had formed between them.

“Thanks for waiting,” Callus said as he entered the room. He tilted his head quizzically, noticing that the tense atmosphere had disappeared. “Huh? Did something happen while I was away?”

“That’s a secret,” Crys said. “It’s rude to stick your nose into a girl’s affairs, you know.”

“What? Aw…” Callus gave a troubled expression towards his maid, but Shizuku was uncharacteristically secretive.

“It’s a secret,” she said.

“Now then, why don’t we have some tea before it cools down?” Shizuku said. “Please have a seat, Sir Callus.”

“You’re really not gonna tell me?” Callus whined.

“Nobody likes a guy who’s too nosy, you know,” Crys said. “Come on, come closer!”

“No, you should sit closer to *me*,” Shizuku insisted.

“Uh, you guys are both too strong!” Callus cried.

And so, the three cheerfully spent their time together.

Afterword

Hi there! I'm glad we can meet again. I'm Genkotsu Kumano. How was the third volume? I think the story has progressed quite a bit and has reached the core of the plot. I'd be happy if you enjoyed it.

Both the second and third volumes have used the royal capital as their setting, but a myriad of events have occurred, and another nation appeared just a bit at the end. This story is growing larger and larger.

How will Callus face his greatest obstacle yet? What do Luna and Emilia want? What is the curse's true nature? Please look forward to uncovering all of these questions! There's still tons of information that hasn't been released yet, and I think the world of this story will become even more fun.

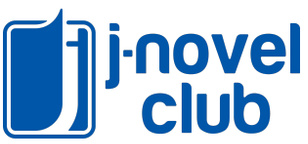
Some might have already read it, but this story has become a manga as well and started serialization! Sumi Suzukaze has drawn Callus cutely and charmingly, so please read it if you haven't yet! You can read it on DRE Comics!

Finally, for some acknowledgments. Thank you to Falmaro, who has been in charge of the illustrations for the third volume as well. Falmaro's beautiful illustrations were most soothing while I was writing this story. I truly cannot thank you enough!

Thank you to my editor, Warafuji! Thanks to those delicious meals, I've been given a lot of energy!

I'd like to thank the proofreaders, the sales team, and everyone else who has been involved with creating this book, as well as all the readers. And with that, I'd like to end this afterword.

I look forward to meeting you all again!



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!
Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters of series like this by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:
J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

I Only Have Six Months to Live, So I'm Gonna Break the Curse with Light Magic or Die Trying: Volume 3
by Genkotsu Kumano

Translated by piyo
Edited by Austin Conrad

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © Genkotsu Kumano, Falmaro 2023
All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2023 by Drecom Co., Ltd.
This English edition is published in arrangement with Drecom Co., Tokyo
All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC
j-novel.club
The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.
Ebook edition 1.0: December 2023