
6
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I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering MAGIC


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Character



Lardo

One of the three ancient dragons who once threatened the world. She advises Liam while dwelling in his body. Somewhat old-fashioned due to her long lifespan.



Liam

Count Hamilton's fifth son who is actually a transmigrator from another world. He loves magic more than life itself.



Paitho

One of the three ancient dragons who once threatened the world. She moved into Liam's city after he woke her from her slumber. Constantly sleepy.



Dypho

One of the three ancient dragons who once threatened the world. She started hanging around Liam after falling for him and his magic prowess.



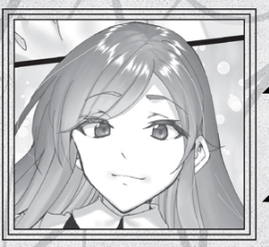
Asuna

A bright and energetic hunter. She was originally in a party with Liam.



Jodie

A motherly hunter. She was originally in a party with Liam.



Scarle

The prudent and insightful first princess of Jamille Kingdom. She made Liam a baron.



Chris

A tomboyish wolfman. She attacked Liam to protect the holy land but joined him after learning the divine dragon dwells within him.



Reina

A devout elf. She began following Liam after receiving his guidance.



Flora

The illegitimate child of Parta's grand duke. She was sent to ensnare Liam in a trap but joined him after he saved her.

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I sat on my throne in the palace's audience hall, the Duchy of Parta's delegation before me—ten people, all in full dress. It was clear at a glance that they were mostly, if not all, noblemen. Since becoming a Hamilton and getting to know Scarlet, I'd had my fair share of encounters—even *scuffles*—with nobles, but this was my first time facing so many all at once.

I felt nervous confronting them despite my place on the throne, but evidently, they were far more on edge than I was. As for why… Well, the answer was right behind me: Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon, enveloped in a faint and mystic glow, were lurking behind my throne in their dragon forms, though with their bodies a mere fraction of their original size. Outside the window behind them were their actual bodies in their full-sized glory.

In short, three humongous dragons were right outside the palace while their smaller glowing projections were poised behind my throne. I had asked Lardon earlier what this display was for, and her answer was simple:

"Nothing. There is no particular purpose for doing this."

"What? Then why…?"

"When faced with the incomprehensible, humans tend to formulate their own interpretations—their own reasons—to make sense of it."

"Basically," Dyphon cut in, *"we're trying to show them that we're head over heels for you and—"*

"They will assume that we dragons are under your wing, thus feeding into their fear," Lardon finished, completely ignoring her. Paithon remained silent all the while.

Anyway, lo and behold, it was as Lardon had predicted—the delegates were stiff as boards during the audience.

"As such, our country has no intentions of antagonizing your—"

"They say actions speak louder than words."

"They say actions speak louder than words."

"Urk…"

As for the conversation itself, I left everything to Lardon. I was her puppet, and she my puppeteer. My mind worked wonders

when it came to magic, but the same couldn't be said for anything else, so I relinquished myself to her lead and mindlessly repeated after her. Her advice never betrayed me, after all.

"Regarding the incident the other day, we are also victims of—"

"Ah. And perhaps next week, you will claim to be the aggressors?"

"Ah. And perhaps next week, you will claim to be the aggressors?"

"Urgh…!"

I had to hand it to Lardon—everything she said shook them to the core and left them completely lost for words. I grew ever more assured of my decision to entrust everything to her.

"Grrr… Why, you! How dare you treat my darling as your puppet!" Dyphon hissed directly to my mind. Maybe she could do this now that she was in her dragon form? Anyway, she didn't seem as pleased as I was about this whole arrangement.

"I can't take this! How dare you run your mouth!" yelled one of the delegates.

"Then I suppose I can assume negotiations have broken—"

"Are you listening to me?!" Dyphon shrieked, irked about being blatantly ignored. Power swelled from within her and cracked the floor she was standing on.

Of course, because of this interruption, I didn't get to parrot Lardon's response. Not like they would have heard it anyway—the angry delegate jolted as the others scrambled to shut him down.

"Mind your words, you!" one hissed.

"Please accept our sincerest apologies, Your Majesty," another said. "This one is still young and inexperienced. He means no ill will…"

The timing made it look like Dyphon got mad at the sudden outburst. Seeing a dragon enraged on my behalf, the young delegate turned pale as a sheet and sent the rest of the delegation into a panic.

Lardon scoffed. *"As immature as ever… Well, I suppose you* have *quite literally devolved."*

"I didn't devolve—I was reborn! Get it right! Besides, it'll happen to you too when the time comes!"

"I suppose it will."

"Aaargh! You and your arrogant mug! I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"

“You could say my maturity has granted me more composure.”

And now they’re squabbling… Obviously, I knew not to repeat after Lardon *now*. Amid my silence, however, the clash between the two dragons grew increasingly intense as literal sparks formed in the air between them.


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Okay, not good. While I was all for pressuring the delegation, I did *not* want these two to start fighting again. This had nothing to do with magic, but even I knew well that nothing good would come out of it.

Dyphon bristled. *"Listen here, you—!"*

"Dyphon," I called.

"Don't stop me, darling! Today's the day I send this jerk back to her maker and—"

"Stop," I said firmly, making her wince. "Just drop it, okay?"

"Ugh... Fine. If you say so." Dyphon withdrew, as evidenced by the dissipating pressure in the air. She was looking like an abandoned puppy, though, so I found myself reaching out and patting her head with a wry smile.

"Heh heh..." Dyphon's expression softened under my touch. It was almost hard to believe she'd been out for blood just moments ago.

"Did you see that?"

"Y-Yes... He's completely tamed the dragon..."

"I knew it. We really can't make him our enemy..."

The delegates began whispering among themselves, but Lardon didn't give me any instructions, so I just ignored them and continued comforting Dyphon.

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After the audience, Lardon retreated back into my body, while Dyphon and Paithon reverted to their human forms. We returned to my room, where Paithon fell asleep while standing—impressive, honestly—as Dyphon sat on the couch and attached herself to my arm.

"Darling," Dyphon whined. "Let me kill her, please?"

"K-Kill?" I sputtered. "You mean Lardon?"

She nodded, pouting like a little girl. Unfortunately, *real* little girls didn't make such bloodthirsty requests.

I shook my head. "No, absolutely not."

"Awww. But she's sooo annoying! Please, darling? Pretty please?"

"Oh, come on..." I didn't even know what to say at this point. Was I supposed to take her seriously? To make matters worse, I would've appreciated some advice right around now, but Lardon wasn't saying a thing.

"I really can't?" she asked again.

"I'd rather you didn't..."

"Fine... Then pat my head."

"What...? Pat your head?"

"Mm-hmm." Dyphon bowed, presenting her head to me; her hair was perfectly parted from the middle into a pair of pigtails. The sudden demand left me baffled for a moment, but I reluctantly reached out and began petting her as requested. Dyphon leaned into my touch, giggling in pleasure.

Fortunately, this seemed to brighten her mood, but I still had my doubts. She was out for blood just a second ago; would a dragon really be willing to let that go just for a few head pats?

"You see..." Lardon suddenly chimed in, and I perked my ears to listen. *"When our kind wishes to birth an offspring, we transform into the race of our desired partner."*

I nodded. She and Dyphon had told me about this before.

"When we change forms, what we desire also adapts," she continued. *"For example, we enjoy having our neck or face licked in*

our dragon forms, while we enjoy head pats in our human form."

"Oh…" I couldn't wrap my head around dragons enjoying being licked in the face or neck, but I suppose it wasn't too different from how cats and dogs liked nuzzling and sniffing one another. *Yep, I guess that checks out.*

As I looked down at Dyphon, I realized that I couldn't be more thankful that their preferences adapted to their physical forms. I really—and I mean *really*—wouldn't want to deal with this cute little girl asking me to lick her face or neck. I furtively breathed out a sigh. *Thank goodness that didn't happen.*

Just then, I noticed Dyphon's quiet gaze on me. "Hmm? What is it?"

"Are you talking with her again?"

"Oh… Yeah, I am."

"Ugh, I hate it! I'm so jealous!" she whined. "I want to possess you too, darling!"

"Can't you?" I cocked my head. I never thought about it until now, but what was stopping her?

"No… 'Cause she got there first…"

"Oh… So only one can fit?"

"No. Normally, *nothing* can fit," she said. "You see, darling, your soul is bigger than the average human's. It's like you've got an extra soul or something… Anyway, that's how she got in there."

I hummed. "My soul…"

"O tiny human who houses a big soul," Lardon suddenly said.

That jogged my memory—yes, that was the first thing Lardon said when we met. *Hmmm… Come to think of it, the abnormality with my soul is probably because of me and Liam.* As it turned out, this body had enough space for one dragon but not two.

I glanced over to Dyphon, who was still sulking like a child. With Lardon's words lingering in my mind, I pondered over what I could do. *The reason Lardon can enter me is because my soul is big, so…*

I promptly stood from the couch.

Dyphon frowned. "Darling?"

"Hold on for a sec." I walked across the room, opened the door, and peeked my head out. "Irene?"

"Yes, Master," answered the elven maid on standby in the hallway. "What can I do for you?"

"Could you show me your hand?"

“Oh, of course…” Irene looked puzzled but readily offered it. “Like this?”

I closed my eyes and gently took her hand in mine. She gasped softly; she probably sensed my mana coursing through her body, *probing* it.

Human—or, well, *elven*—anatomy was beyond me, but I was more than familiar with how mana was structured in our bodies. My magical talent had bloomed ever since I reincarnated into Liam’s body, possibly because of my “big soul,” so I figured I could also get a sense of a soul’s “size” the same way I could detect mana.

“Master…?”

I released Irene’s hand. “Thanks. Is anyone else nearby?”

“Huh? Oh, yes… Please wait a moment.” Irene pinched her skirt and hurried away. Not a minute later, she came back with two more elven maids.

I gave them a simple explanation and probed their mana just like I did with Irene. This way, I now had a broader sample size to work with.

Having a soul twice as large as normal might have also made it easier for me to probe the body’s…mana structure or mana core, or whatever it was called. Anyway, I could tell that mine was substantially larger.

“Thanks. You three were a huge help.” After a moment of consideration, I reached out and patted their heads—which fortunately seemed to please them.

With that, I returned to my room. “Thanks for waiting.”

Dyphon had remained seated on the couch with a curious frown. “What did you do?”

“This should work,” I mumbled. Thinking back to the mana structures I probed earlier, I formed an image and crafted a new spell: “Oversoul!”

“Huh? Wh-What?!” Dyphon gaped at me, wide-eyed. “D-Darling?”

“Well? Did it work?”

“Yeah…” she mumbled, staring at me in pure shock and disbelief. “Your soul… It got *bigger*.”

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“Do you think this’ll do?” I asked.

“Yeah! Then don’t mind if I do…” Beaming, Dyphon shuffled closer and peered up at my face. Then, in stark contrast to her usual demeanor, she fluttered her eyelashes and whispered, “Close your eyes, darling.”

“Hmm? Okay.” If she said that to Lardon, I would’ve suspected she was up to no good—but not with me. Even though I had no idea what she was planning, I knew for a fact that Dyphon would never do me any harm. So, I went ahead and closed my eyes. “Like this?”

“Mm-hmm…”

Once again, I felt her shuffle closer. A weighty warmth suddenly leaned over my chest, and then…

Something soft pressed against my lips.

“Wha—?”

The next moment, a brilliant light erupted from Dyphon’s body, one so blinding that it was visible through my eyelids. As the light grew, her presence faded away— No, she was gradually *moving into my body*. I thought I was imagining things at first, but there was no mistaking it with her immense mana and its powerful flow.

I stood there restlessly until, shortly after, the light finally subsided and Dyphon’s presence completely settled inside me. I opened my eyes, and sure enough, she was no longer standing in front of me.

“Dyphon?” I called.

“I’m here, darling,” she said, speaking to me the same way Lardon usually did.

I nodded. “Looks like it worked.”

“Uh-huh!” she crowed, then let out a dreamy sigh. *“Ahh, I’m inside my darling…”*

She sounded like she was in complete bliss. Hearing her so happy made all my efforts well worth it.

“What about you, Lardon? You, uh…okay being in there with her?”

“Of course. Think of it like you’ve made another room. We do not share the same space.”

“Ah, I see.”

“So there are no issues…for me.”

I tilted my head, realizing those words had a deeper meaning to them. Before I could ask, however, light burst from my body and swelled into an explosive flash. In no time at all, Dyphon was standing before me once more.

“Awww! I got pushed out!” she whined, close to tears.

My eyes grew wide. “What? Pushed out?”

“Yeah! Your soul turned back to normal, so I was pushed out…”

“Oh… The spell’s effect wore off.” I’d failed to pick up on the meaning behind Lardon’s cryptic wording, but as always, magic was a different story. I figured the problem out right away.

Oversoul only temporarily made my soul bigger. Like any other spell that morphed your body, the magic was bound to wear off after some time had passed. So, what happened just now was that my spell wore off, my soul reverted to its original size, and Dyphon, being the last one in, was ejected from me.

“Do it again, darling!”

“I mean, sure, but…”

“Is that a no…?” she mumbled, looking up at me with puppy dog eyes.

“No, that’s not it. I don’t mind doing it again. It’s just…”

Dyphon probably wanted to *stay* inside me, meaning I’d have to cast the spell over and over—and here came the problem. Oversoul was, at the end of the day, a spell that consumed mana, and I certainly couldn’t keep feeding it twenty-four seven.

I gave it a bit more thought before asking her, “Could you wait for a bit?”

“Sure! I’d wait for you till the end of time!” Dyphon bobbed her head eagerly, and she looked like she meant every word.

Under her expectant gaze, I quietly closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Then, I snapped them open and chanted, “Oversoul, forty-sevenfold!”

Multicasting Oversoul did not, in fact, make my soul forty-seven times larger, nor did the subsequent casts make a difference. Essentially, all it had done was reset the timer forty-seven times at once, which confirmed *another* problem.

The first one, as I said, was that I couldn't keep feeding my mana to keep Dyphon inside me. Hence why I multicast it just now—to slowly revise and improve the spell. The second problem was one that I'd been thinking about recently, as it rendered my magic inferior to preexisting spells: Spells I made on the spot tended to be mana-inefficient.

Usually, I'd be faced with an urgent problem, quickly make a spell to solve it, and rinse and repeat. Nothing else mattered as long as I could get rid of the issue in front of me—that was the mindset I'd fallen into. Thus, *making* spells was easy, but they all used up more mana than needed.

"You are akin to an amateur chef," Lardon remarked, as if she'd perfectly read my mind. *"You use more ingredients than needed for a single serving and consequently leave more food scraps and kitchen waste."*

Her analogy was spot-on. That was exactly what I was now—an amateur chef. Whereas preexisting spells were, following Lardon's analogy, dishes made by seasoned professionals who could make a single serving using as little of the ingredients as possible. I needed to get a bit closer to that level of efficiency.

Since I couldn't continuously use Oversoul, I wanted to try optimizing the mana consumption by refining the spell bit by bit, all while making the best use of multicasting. Dyphon's sparkling and expectant gaze faded from my consciousness, along with any passing thoughts; my mind became a canvas painted purely in the color of Oversoul's optimization. I multicast the spell, compared the results, identified problem points, made minute adjustments, and recast it over and over.

"Oh, darling…"

"Hah… He is single-handedly doing what would normally need the combined efforts of tens of first-class mages. Of course, it seems he doesn't realize it himself."

My focus became razor-sharp and my surroundings grew distant as I continued improving Oversoul. I had no idea how long had passed, but by the time I used up just about all the mana I had in me, the mana cost of Oversoul had been reduced by around thirty percent—an impressive reduction, if I did say so myself. But still…

"What's wrong, darling?" Dyphon's voice filtered into my ears as

my concentration finally wore off. She was looking up at me like a child waiting eagerly for her present.

“Hmm, well…” I sighed. “I managed to optimize the spell, but I don’t think it’s enough to keep it activated for long periods of time.”

“R-Really?”

“Yeah. Trying to optimize it any further—”

“Would be akin to wringing a dry towel,” Lardon finished.

Her interjection caught me off guard, but I couldn’t have put it better myself. I made the spell on the spot, so at first I was wringing a drenched towel—a spell with lots of room for improvement. But now that I’d wrung it dry of all possible optimizations, there was barely any water left to draw out.

“So…there’s no use?” Dyphon whimpered, on the verge of crying.

Seeing her like that made me want to do something, so I racked my brain for any other possible way, but to no avail. None of the solutions I came up with were any different from optimizing the spell.

Just as my head began to spin, Lardon’s chuckle drew my attention. *“Would you like a suggestion?”*

“You have one?!”

“Indeed. All you need to do is repeat as I say…”

I froze, nearly doubting my ears. Would saying that really resolve this issue? But this was Lardon’s advice for a matter outside of my expertise, so there was no harm in trying. Thus, I turned to the girl beside me and looked her in the eye.

“Dyphon.”

“Yes? Do you have another idea, darling?”

“Well… I think I can manage it just overnight while we sleep. What do you think?”

Dyphon’s jaw dropped, and her eyes blew wide like she’d received the shock of her life.

See? There’s no way this can—

“Me and darling, together at night…?” she mumbled.

Then, out of the blue, blood spurted from her nose.

“Dyphon?! Are you okay?!”

“Yes!”

“Huh?”

“Darling, I’m okay with that! No, that’s *better*!” she gushed, eagerly leaning over me.

I was baffled by her sudden burst of enthusiasm, but, well…if she preferred it this way, then there wasn’t much else for me to say. Using Oversoul just overnight, especially now that I’d optimized it, wasn’t too big of a burden on me mana-wise.

“I can always count on you, Lardon. You’re amazing,” I marveled. The single line she had recommended to me was all it took to quell Dyphon.

Lardon chuckled. *“Surely not as much as you.”*

“Uh…?” I had no idea why the compliment had circled back to me, but either way, Dyphon was still pleased and satisfied. *All’s well that ends well, I guess.*

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The delegation was provided with several guest rooms in the reception hall. Inside one such room, two middle-aged men sat face-to-face.

One had a large build and gentle demeanor—he was Martin Highmore, the chief delegate sent by the Duchy of Parta. As gentle and mature as he looked, Martin was the sort who knew better than to act on impulse, a quality that led to his selection as chief delegate for this mission.

The other man was fairly skinny and appeared almost frail, yet sometimes fostered a sharp glint in his eyes: Dominique Laguiole, the deputy delegate selected to assist Martin. Unlike his chief, however, Dominique's demeanor was quite contrary to his appearance; he was firm and unyielding in his beliefs, and thus trusted to deliver Parta's stance on this matter.

Identically grim expressions presently marred their faces.

"What are your thoughts?" asked Martin, the chief delegate.

Dominique's expression warped bitterly as he wrung out, "He was enraged... This may very well be our last chance."

Martin sighed and nodded grimly.

Only half a day had passed since they first entered this magic city and had an audience with Liam in the palace. They, along with the rest of their delegation, were utterly overwhelmed by the three dragons' display of power.

"I almost wish I'd never heard that he was Hamilton's fifth son..."

"I concur," said Dominique. "Perhaps knowing him only as the Monster King would have abated some of our shock."

"Indeed. The divine dragons serving the Monster King... Certainly, there is nothing shocking about *that*."

Their forlorn gazes met and, at the same time, they heaved out heavy sighs.

"If this is, as you said, our last chance, then it would be no exaggeration to say that Parta's fate rests on our shoulders," Martin declared grimly.

“Truth be told, I didn’t want to come here,” Dominique admitted bitterly. “I’ve no doubt our predecessors are now leisurely gazing at the moon with a glass of wine in hand after leaving us with *their* mess…”

“Well, there was little we could have done. This is the nature of our work, and we were in no position to refuse. Am I wrong?”

“I certainly can’t deny that. Still, if only they had given us any sort of information as to what exactly it is they did…”

Martin sighed. “Yes… Yes, I understand.”

Liam didn’t have a very good relationship with the Duchy of Parta, or any of the three surrounding nations, for that matter. While there was some variety in their behavior, they took a rather condescending stance all the same—or more crudely put, they *looked down* on Liam.

The land that once hosted the Tri-Draconic War had now become center stage to the three countries’ greedy ploys as they endeavored to outwit the other in order to gain the promised land for themselves. Generally, they had been hoping to take advantage of Liam—use him for all he was worth before tossing him aside.

Of course, that had brilliantly backfired on them. Liam’s power was not something they could ever hope to take advantage of. Far from it, he was so strong that he could protect his land while fending off all three nations at once. To top it all off, with the three dragons now on his side, wiping out an entire country was well within the realm of possibility for him.

Hence, the Duchy of Parta had reshuffled their personnel and dispatched members of the moderate faction for this delegation. Perhaps that was a good move in the bigger picture, but Martin and Dominique could only lament having drawn the short end of the stick.

“Well?” Martin continued. “What do you think?”

“Frankly, I cannot say for certain. We can only leave the matter to chance. However…” Dominique gulped. “From his behavior, I believe we still have some room for negotiation—a final test to prove ourselves. But should we push our luck…”

Martin nodded heavily. He was chosen for this delegation precisely because of his cautious nature. Even conversing with his deputy in a private room, he avoided making decisive statements

that could serve as any form of pretense later on.

"In the first place, we came here to mend and deepen our relations," he said. "Let us keep that in mind and tread carefully."

"Understood," Dominique replied.

Faintly, their expressions relaxed. Martin agreed with Dominique's diagnosis that they were currently being given their "final test," which meant that the situation was not beyond hope just yet. The slight leeway lightened the load on their shoulders.

"Hm? There seems to be some commotion outside," Martin observed.

"You're right..." Dominique stood from his seat and headed to the window.

Outside, a young member of their delegation was surrounded by giants.

"What are they doing?" Martin asked.

"They appear to be, er...showing off their muscles to one another."

"What?" Martin balked in a rare display of befuddlement. He stood up as well, brows furrowed, and approached his deputy by the window.

Dominique stepped aside to reveal the exact scene he had described: Their youngest and most physically fit member, Lynn Morley, was flexing his muscles and laughing with some giants. Due to his physique, Lynn had been placed into their delegation to protect Martin if worse came to worst. For now, though, his muscles were being put to use very differently than they had intended.

A little while later, both parties waved goodbye, and the giants saw Lynn off as he returned to the reception hall.

Martin and Dominique watched this play out in a daze until Martin quietly said, "Let's...ask him what happened."

Dominique nodded in agreement. The two left their room for the front lobby and quickly ran into Lynn in the corridor.

"Oh, Mr. Martin..."

"What were you doing?" Martin asked.

The young man blinked. "What do you mean?"

"We saw you with the monsters out front."

"Oh..." Lynn sheepishly scratched his head. "You see, I was just walking outside when they suddenly called out to me. They said I

had a great build… Oh, right! I meant to ask you—those monsters, er, I believe they were called ‘giants’? They invited me to have a drink with them later. May I?”

Martin and Dominique stared at him, utterly baffled.

Unfazed by their silence, Lynn continued, “One of them told me I showed way more promise than the, uh…the ‘boar woman’? I *think* he was complimenting me.”

Slowly, the pair turned to one another with mirrored bemusement. They most certainly weren’t expecting this. They had stepped into enemy soil fully aware that they could be walking right into their graves; such a warm reception was far beyond their expectations.

“What do you think?” Martin asked his deputy.

After a lengthy, perplexed pause, Dominique finally managed to answer, “It may be impolite to decline…”

Martin hummed and stroked his chin, mulling it over. Finally, he looked up at Lynn. “Very well. Make sure to behave courteously.”

Lynn nodded. “Understood, sir.”

Unable to shake off their disbelief, Martin and Dominique joined Lynn out to the front where they watched him walk off with the giants, laughing and chatting like they had been best buddies for decades.

The two delegates stood frozen in place, still struggling to process the baffling sight.

“Just what is going on…?”

“I wish I knew…”

The giants’ friendliness was too far removed from the grim resolve with which they’d stepped into this land, and that immense gap thoroughly rattled them.

Unfortunately, it seemed more shocking things were yet in store for them today.

“Huh? Are you two heading off somewhere?”

“Y-Your Majesty?!”

Truly, nothing could be more shocking than Liam, the king of this monster nation, appearing before them with a casual and innocent smile.

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“Er, you’re…”

Two delegates stood before me, though my memory failed to match names to their faces. I recalled they had stood at the front and center of the delegation, though, so one of them must be the leader—just who I was looking for. Now if only I knew what to call them… They *had* introduced themselves earlier, but it was no use—I couldn’t remember for the life of me.

Oh, yeah! This is where I ask Lardon for advice!

“I do not remember each and every little human’s name,” she said, sounding very faintly apologetic.

Oh, right… She always talked about having no interest in any human but me—that had been her stance ever since we met. *I guess she wouldn’t bother with their names, then.*

“Just ask them now, as casually as you can.”

Taking her advice, I said to the delegates, “You’re the leaders of the delegation, right? What were your names?”

“Indeed, I am the chief delegate,” said one of them with a bow. “My name is Martin Highmore.”

The man beside him followed suit. “And I am his deputy, Dominique Laguiole.”

So, the stout and dignified guy on the right was Martin, and the skinny guy on the left was Dominique.

“If I may, what brings you here, Your Majesty?”

“Oh, I was thinking of showing you two around.”

“Er… Show us around?”

“You know, sightseeing? You’re already here—might as well take this chance to get to know our city.”

“Oh… Thank you kindly.” Martin bowed once more.

Beside him, Dominique blinked widely. “Y-Your Majesty, are you saying *you* will personally…?”

“What?” Martin whipped his head back up and gawked at his deputy, before directing it to me in shock.

“That’s right. Nobody knows this city better than me.”

“G-Goodness! We couldn’t possibly trouble Your Majesty over

such—”

“Sir,” Dominique cut in and tugged on his chief’s sleeve. Once their eyes met, Dominique gave him a firm and meaningful look.

Martin swallowed his words. In the end, despite the terribly conflicted look on his face, he once again bowed his head. “We sincerely thank you for your generosity,” he said somberly.

Huh? What’s that about?

Lardon chuckled in amusement in my head. *“How else would they react when the king who had threatened them so sternly now came to show them around the city?”*

Ah, that explains it… In any case, with the two delegates in tow, I turned on my heel and led them on a tour of the city streets. Monsters, as usual, came flocking around me.

“Master, the humans taught me how to bake a cake! Care to try some?”

“Master, I’ve captured some foolish bounty hunters. How shall I deal with them?”

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam, huggies!”

I was in the middle of guiding the chief and deputy delegates of Parta, so I just gave them some quick feedback and answers before telling them I was busy and moving forward. We barely made progress even then—responding to each monster still took up much of our time—but eventually, they finally caught on and stopped approaching me.

Freed from the monsters, I turned to Martin and Dominique. “Sorry. That took a while, didn’t it?”

“Not at all! In fact, we would like to apologize for taking up your precious time,” said Martin.

Dominique gulped. “Your Majesty, were they…monsters?” he asked slowly, as if choosing his words.

“Yeah. We’ve got some humans around too, but ninety-nine percent of those you’ll meet here are monsters.”

“Is that so…? Goodness, they are hardly any different from humans…”

“You’re right. They all look like humans for some reason, don’t they? Oh, but the slimes are still slimes, I guess.” I looked down and smiled. Most of the monsters dispersed after seeing that I was busy, but Sli and Lime remained bouncing innocently by my feet like giddy little puppies. I didn’t really mind them tagging

along for this walk, so I let them be.

“I wasn’t referring to their looks… Er, ahem. Yes, it is quite fascinating.”

I tilted my head. *What else could he mean but that?* But I couldn’t ask it aloud since Dominique had already brushed it aside and nodded.

With slimes on either shoulder, I continued to show the delegates around while explaining how the lights and other infrastructure worked, which constantly drew out impressed gasps from the two.

“D-Does that mean the lights stay on throughout the night?”

“Yep.”

“B-But does that not rapidly consume public funds?”

“By public funds, you’re talking about money, right? Well, I made sure they’re powered by excess mana, so they cost nothing.”

“N-Nothing?!”

“It costs nothing to keep the city bright all day…?”

Well, I got where they were coming from. If someone told me about this before I became Liam, I would’ve laughed them off and called them an idiot.

“And…” Martin gulped. “Your Majesty, you said that *you* made them?”

“That’s right. Almost everything magic in this city was made by me.”

“Lord Liam’s amazing!”

“So cool!”

Sli and Lime bounced on my shoulders as I tilted my head and parsed through my memories. *Yep. If it’s magic, I’m pretty sure it was my doing.*

Dominique gulped. “I-If I may ask, where did—”

“Oh!” Martin gasped, cutting him off.

Dominique and I turned our attention to where he was looking.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Th-That thing on the ground… Is that a manastone?”

“Huh? Oh, you’re right.” As he said, there was a manastone just lying there. “Hang on a sec,” I told them and looked around until I found an elven maid sweeping the streets nearby. “Ah, there! Um, Layla?”

“Oh! Yes, Master?” She beamed and rushed over to me. “How

may I help you?"

"Over there—you missed a spot."

"Huh? Oh, I'm so sorry!" She rushed over to where I was pointing and swept up the manastone. "My apologies, Master..."

"It's all right. Make sure to put it in for recycling."

"Okay!" Layla bowed and went on her way.

After seeing her off, I turned back to Martin and Dominique. "Yeah, I've been thinking of making our street cleaning magic-operated as well, but it's... Hm? What's wrong?"

Both delegates were staring at me, jaws dropped in disbelief.

"Y-Your Majesty..." Martin stuttered. "D-Did she just...*sweep* it?"

"Yeah. I mean, it was lying by the side of the road."

"B-But that was a manastone..."

"Uh-huh."

Martin and Dominique looked at one another, utterly stunned.

"T-To think such an expensive resource was just lying on the side of the road and treated akin to garbage..."

"But Mr. Martin, I just realized—nobody even thought to take it all this time, right?"

"Ah...!"

"Just one manastone should be enough to purchase an entire house in my hometown, but here it's just..."

The two delegates seemed to be in complete shock. Come to think of it, manastones *were* really expensive; that was why we were exporting them through Bruno.

"Well, it's not actually garbage. We run it through recycling and use them to... Uh, are you listening? Guys?"

Unfortunately, my words fell on deaf ears; the two were far too shaken to even register them.

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I continued the sightseeing tour with the two delegates, inadvertently shocking them even more as we progressed. They were mostly impressed by the convenience that my magic inventions brought to life in this city.

Martin breathed out in awe. “I-I’ve never seen such innovations…”

“Are these blessings granted by the, er, divine dragons?” Dominique asked.

“Nope. These are all my inventions.”

“T-Truly?”

The two slowly took in their surroundings with incredulity. In the meantime, the sun set beyond the horizon and darkness slowly embraced the streets.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“Can we make it bright?”

“Go for it,” I told the pair of slimes on my shoulders.

They hopped right off of me and bounced down the street to turn on the magic lamps. After that, the streets lit up almost simultaneously, as if the light had breathed life back into the city enveloped in darkness.

Sli and Lime gleefully made their way back to me and bounced around my feet.

“We’re dooone!”

“Bright and shiny!”

“Uh-huh. It sure is.” I smiled and gave them a few pets as thanks.

Beside me, Martin and Dominique sighed softly at the sight before them.

“So this is the rumored nightless city…”

“Why, the rumors do not even do it justice…”

“Indeed. It’s as bright as daytime.”

“Actually,” I said, cutting in as I walked back to them, “there’s still room for improvement.”

It was a simple matter to make these lamps brighter—all I had

to do was make them use more mana. But unlike offensive magic, they weren't a one and done; they needed to be kept activated throughout the night.

Incidentally, there were two types of mana lamps. The streetlights were infused with mana upon activation, which they would slowly consume until morning, when they would naturally die down. On the other hand, lights in houses and buildings were constantly supplied with mana from outside, so the homeowners could switch them on or off as needed.

Both were, in fact, still fairly lacking in efficiency. Since they were indispensable to everyday life, they needed some more refining. *I really should work on that...*

"M-My apologies, Your Majesty..."

My thoughts were spiraling into magic and spells as per usual, but before I was too far gone, Martin suddenly apologized to me, looking pale as a sheet. I blinked, pulled my mind back to the present, and tilted my head.

"Could I have displeased you in any way...?"

"What? Oh, no. Not at all." I chuckled wryly. "It's just a habit of mine. Don't sweat it."

"A...habit?"

"Yeah. When I get an idea, I just fall deep into thought. I can't help it—I just really love magic."

I truly did, even back when I couldn't use it, and especially now that I could. I had no idea why, but becoming Liam Hamilton had granted me great talent for magic, and since then, it only filled my head more than ever. I could lose myself thinking about magic till the sun set without even realizing.

"Astounding. I can certainly see your passion through this city," said Martin as he looked around the streets.

His deputy hurriedly chimed in to agree. "Indeed. I see much brighter lights over there. Are those also your inventions, Your Majesty?"

"Yep. That's the entertainment district over there. It's got lots of taverns and bars, so everyone wanted it to be easier to find. I arranged the spell a bit so the lights there look different."

"It certainly—"

BOOOOOM!!!

Before Dominique could finish speaking, a huge explosion

occurred right in the district we were looking at. Smoke rose to the sky, forming a ten-meter-wide mushroom cloud.

“Wh-What is that?!” he yelped.

“Oh…” I chuckled. I had a feeling I knew what that was. “Wanna go take a look?”

Martin and Dominique exchanged a glance before nodding reluctantly, and together, we approached the site of the explosion. There, we found Gai and Chris glaring fiercely at one another in the middle of a large road, confirming all my suspicions.

“Lynn!” Martin yelled.

A young man standing behind Gai whipped his head around. “Oh! Mr. Martin, Mr. Dominique!” he exclaimed as he rushed over to us.

Martin furrowed his brow as he looked the young man over. “What in the world happened? Don’t tell me you—”

“N-No, you’re mistaken! I haven’t done anything, sir!”

“Can I trust you’re telling the truth?”

“Of course! You see, when Mr. Gai and that woman, er…”

“That’s Chris,” I offered. “She’s a wolfman.”

“R-Right.” Lynn reluctantly nodded. “The moment those two saw one another, they just…started fighting.”

“Out of nowhere? That’s preposterous…”

“Oh, that’s just how those two are,” I explained before Martin could accuse the young man any further.

Martin turned to me, wide-eyed. “I-Is that true?”

“Yeah. Just look around you.”

The delegates turned their heads. Gai and Chris were in the middle of their fiery stare down, but the giants, wolfmen, and other monsters around them weren’t the least bit fazed.

Martin gulped. “O-Oh, I see…”

“Some aren’t even looking,” Dominique observed in disbelief.

“Goodness… This must happen every day to warrant such nonchalance…”

Martin was entirely right to assume that. It might’ve still made a bit more sense if *everyone* was cheering at their showdown, but as much as a third of the crowd just went back to enjoying their drinks. This was only possible because the sight was an everyday occurrence.

“It seems I cannot reason with you, boar woman,” Gai growled.

Chris scoffed. “Looks like we agree on something for once. I can’t seem to get through your empty skull either.”

“Cease your mockery!” Gai bellowed, then charged at Chris.

With that, the battle went underway. The delegates watched pale-faced as the two strongest fighters of our country clashed head-on. Gai went at full throttle as he swung his fists, the shock waves breaking through buildings and pavement, while Chris circled around him so fast, her afterimages shimmered under the night sky.

One would think that she could weave past Gai’s brute force with her agility, but it wasn’t so simple—Gai’s fists accurately honed in on Chris the moment she stepped within range.

“Tsk! Not bad, meathead!”

“I’m nothing like you, boar woman!”

Speed types like Chris would typically employ hit-and-run tactics, but she could hardly get a hit in before needing to run. Their relentless exchange continued, forming a whirlwind of force with them at the center—one so fierce, the delegates beside me grunted in shock and began gasping for air.

Guess I’d better put a stop to this. Holding my hand out, I fired forty-seven power missiles. They arched into the air before crashing all around the two rivals, dispersing the whirlwind they’d formed.

Gai froze. “Hm? This is…”

Chris whipped her head around and gasped. “Master!”

I looked them both in the eye. “We’ve got guests today. Let’s wrap this up, okay?”

Gai grunted. “Hngh… If that is your order, then I shall obey.”

“Ah, well…” Chris shrugged.

They lowered their hands and relaxed their stances, finally breaking up their fight.

The moment Liam stopped Gai and Chris’s fight with a single magic spell, the delegates instantly froze.

Martin gulped. “Did you see that…?”

“Yes… What fearsome magic. It stopped a fight between two S-rank monsters in an instant.”

“Indeed, but that’s not all…”

“Huh? What do you mean, Mr. Martin?”

“You see, I’ve quite the sharp eye for magic, and that,” he said, eyes narrowed, “was not the dragon’s power.”

Dominique blanched and drew in a sharp breath. Martin’s observation was simple, yet it had terrifying implications: Liam could wield power much stronger—*three times* stronger—should he choose to borrow the aid of the divine dragons.

“I knew it… We must not get on his bad side, no matter what.”

“Yes, sir…”

The two delegates gulped, once again feeling the weight of the responsibility upon their shoulders.

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Later that night, I was alone in my room—

“Eheh heh… I-I’m inside darling…”

—or, well, I *would’ve* been, if not for Lardon and Dyphon both dwelling within me.

I had promised Dyphon that I would enlarge my soul for her every night, and now the time came to fulfill my promise. I still had no idea how it looked or felt to them when they hung around inside my body, but at least Dyphon seemed to be having a great time—so great, in fact, that she was giggling to herself—so I just ignored her and let my mind wander to magic as usual.

I’d managed to satisfy Dyphon by following Lardon’s advice, but that didn’t stop me from wanting to learn how to keep Oversoul constantly activated anyway. With that goal in mind, I was now thoroughly reassessing the spell.

“I would advise against getting too hung up over it,” Lardon suddenly piped up.

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

“I am talking about that spell. Remaking it from scratch will be quite taxing, with no guarantee of success.”

“Oh, no issues there,” I replied with a chuckle, possible improvements to the spell whirling nonstop in my mind all the while. “I mean, magic is a miraculous power—with it, any wish can become a reality.”

Lardon huffed. *“Well, you certainly sound enthusiastic.”*

“Because I love magic,” I said with a bright smile.

In my past life, magic was just a dream—a star in the sky, far beyond my grasp. But now that I had this power within my hands, surely there had to be *some* way—I just hadn’t thought of it yet. Sure, the results might not turn out to be worth all the effort I’d put in, but even then, I wholeheartedly believed in magic’s endless possibilities.

“Hah… I see. It seems I was being daft.”

I cocked my head at Lardon’s sudden self-derision. “What do you mean?”

“It’s as I’ve always known. Your body is small, but your spirit is broad.”

“Uh, okay…” She *did* say something like that when we first met; that had even given me the idea of making Oversoul for Dyphon. *But why bring it up now?*

My curiosity would have to be left unsatiated, however, since Lardon had already clammed up. I knew from all the time we’d spent together that there was no prying any answers from her at this point, so I pushed it to the back of my mind.

With that done, I focused my attention back to studying Oversoul—when all of a sudden, mana flashed before my eyes and dispersed, leaving me staring blankly for a moment.

“A letter…?”

It was a notification via the Liamnet; I had modified the spell so I’d be signaled whenever I received letters and messages through it. I chanted under my breath, summoned the Liamnet, and opened the letter.

“Oh… It’s from Bruno.”

Although he maintained his increasingly humble attitude, it was no exaggeration to say that Bruno was one of my most important human allies at present. Given that, I had made sure he could also access the Liamnet.

And his letter…was *shocking*, to say the least.

It was already well into the night when I visited the reception hall unannounced, but nevertheless, Martin and Dominique welcomed me in full dress. Together, we headed inside and settled down in one of the parlor rooms.

“Your Majesty, it is an honor for you to visit us in person. Please, do let us know if you need any—”

“No need for any of that. I have something to tell you, and…” I frowned. “It’s not good news.”

“N-Not good news?” Martin anxiously pursed his lips.

I took a deep breath. “It seems there has been an attempted assassination on the grand duke.”

“What…?”

“Th-That’s…”

Shock—no, bewilderment?—washed over their faces.

“The grand duchess was nearby and jumped in the assassin’s

way, so it seems the grand duke is safe. Still, this is no small matter, so I thought I'd let you know."

"P-Please wait, Your Majesty..." Martin stiffly held his hand up. "May I ask when this happened?"

"This afternoon," I answered, recalling Bruno's letter. He'd just so happened to be visiting Parta on some business and let me know via the Liamnet right away. Even I could tell this was big news, so I came to pass it on to the delegates despite the late hour.

However, Martin and Dominique's reaction to the news was to look at one another before turning back to me, their faces scrunched up.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"It happened this afternoon, yet you have already received the news?"

"Yeah."

My short answer only warped their expressions further.

What's with them?

"Pay them no mind. You've delivered the message, so just leave."

I nodded and stood from the couch, faithfully abiding by the advice. "Anyway, that's all I came to say. Bye."

"Ah, please wait a—"

Martin tried to stop me, but I had full trust in Lardon's judgment. I simply smiled at him and went on my way without casting them a second glance.

I left the reception hall and made my way back to the palace. As I walked through the streets still bustling with life despite the late hour, I couldn't help but wonder: "Why the sudden assassination attempt?"

"I wonder as well, but I've already seen many such scenarios in the past."

"Really?"

"Indeed. It must be just another consequence of their power struggle," Lardon explained. *"Nothing you need to concern yourself over. The next news will likely come tomorrow morning earliest and evening latest. There is little point pondering over it till then."*

"All right."

Since Lardon insisted, I decided to drop the thought entirely and instead returned to thinking about magic. My focus easily fell

back to optimizing Oversoul for Dyphon.

And once again, things played out exactly as Lardon predicted.

Martin's and Dominique's complexions had not improved since Liam's visit late last night, and they only continued to worsen that afternoon.

"Everything King Liam said was true…" Martin mumbled, appearing even more haggard than ever. In his hand was an urgent report sent from the duchy. "From the attempted assassination of His Royal Highness to even what happened to the grand duchess…"

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Martin? This report was sent to us with utmost urgency—with the fastest messenger available, right?"

"Yes… Even then, it took an entire day, yet King Liam was already aware of this by last night."

"How could that be…?"

Martin could only wince in response. After brooding on it, he finally said, "We must report this to His Royal Highness."

"B-But why… Oh! Could it be that King Liam was behind the—"

"If only that were the case…" Martin sighed.

"What?" Dominique blinked, unable to comprehend his chief's words. "What do you mean?"

"If King Liam were the culprit, then that would explain how he already had the news. However, if not…"

Dominique gulped. "I-If not…?"

"Information is power," Martin said. "If King Liam is able to attain intel far ahead of us, then we must not turn him or his country into our enemies."

Dominique inhaled sharply. "I-I shall pen the letter right away!" he exclaimed and rushed out of the room.

Left by himself, Martin stared at the letter in his hands. It had taken an entire day for this urgent report to get here. He let out a shaky breath and closed his eyes.

"How fearsome," he whispered, his awe echoing emptily in the room.

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“Hm hm… Hm hm hmmm!”

A cheery tune reached my ears as I was busy practicing my magic in my room. It drew my attention—this was the happiest I’d ever heard Dyphon to date—and I couldn’t help but stare.

When our eyes met, she blushed and giggled bashfully. “Oh, darling… Why are you staring at me like that? It’s embarrassing…”

“Oh, my bad, it’s just… I noticed you’re in a really good mood today.”

“Of course I am!” she crowed, looking happier yet. “I got to spend the entire night inside you, being one with you… I feel like I might die from all this happiness!”

“O-Oh…” Was it really such a great thing for her? I mean, granted, she did ask for it herself, but still… I wasn’t expecting her to like it this much.

“I’m in tip-top shape thanks to you. I feel like nothing can stop me now!”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh! As they say in another dimension, a maiden in love can do *anything*!”

Well, she was excited, I knew that for sure. After all, she was starting to speak nonsense.

Lardon scoffed. *“She is in top condition and in an impeccable mood. Even I can’t stop her now.”*

“I-I see…” For another dragon and Dyphon’s rival to say that was…definitely something.

Just then, a knock came from the door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Reina.”

“All right, come in.”

The door opened and in came Reina, the chief of the elven maids. “I apologize for disturbing your rest,” she said with a deep bow.

It appeared she was also addressing Dyphon since she was—well, *looked like* she was in the middle of cuddling with me, but at

the moment, Dyphon hardly seemed bothered by Reina's presence in the room.

Well, if she didn't care, then all was good. I turned to Reina and asked, "What's up?"

"I've come to report the weather. According to several slimes, it appears a storm is on its way."

I cocked my head. "The slimes?"

"Their fluidity tends to decrease around stormy periods, and thus they become more susceptible to physical attacks."

"Oh, really?" I had no idea. Well, I guess one look at their physical appearance was enough to tell that they were different from other monsters. Perhaps their jiggly and gelatinous bodies, half composed of liquid, made them more sensitive to the weather. It made perfect sense to me.

"Therefore, I would like to ask for your instruction regarding the delegation should the storm arrive," Reina continued.

"Oh, right! The delegation..." Normally, I would've just holed up in my room and practiced magic all day, but for now, I needed to see what I could do for our guests.

I stood, approached the window, and peered outside. "Oh, yeah. I can already see some gloomy clouds in the distance."

"Indeed. It seems it will set in come evening."

"Hmm... I mean, how am I even supposed to deal with this? Lardon, do you—"

"You in a pickle, darling?" Dyphon cut in.

I was about to ask Lardon for advice since this was outside of my expertise, but then Dyphon spoke up. It seemed she was paying attention to our conversation, at least.

"Yeah. This is the first time a storm's coming while we have guests. I have no idea what to look out for and all that stuff..."

"Psh, it's simple."

"Huh? You know how to deal with the delegation, Dyphon?"

"Nope, not a clue."

"Erm, then what...?"

"What I do know is that the storm's causing you problems. Right, darling?"

"Well, yeah..."

"Then we can just blow the storm away!"

"Huh...?"

“Be back in a jiffy!” she exclaimed.

With that, she threw the window open and kicked off from the windowsill, smoothly morphing back into her dragon form once she was midair. She headed straight for the incoming storm, her large figure growing ever smaller, all the way until she looked like no more than a speck on the horizon.

“What could she be up to?” Reina wondered aloud.

I shrugged. “Who knows?”

“She mentioned blowing away the storm, but it must be some figure of speech that—”

Reina was cut short when, out of the blue, the sky began to *tremble*. The speck that Dyphon had become flashed brightly, unleashing *something* toward the oncoming storm and causing an explosion so immense, we felt the shock wave from all the way here.

Reina’s jaw dropped. “Th-The storm, it’s…”

She had assumed Dyphon was only speaking figuratively, but as it turned out, it was quite the opposite. I also stared at the great spectacle in shock.

“U-Unbelievable…”

“She *did* say she was in tip-top shape,” I remarked with a wry smile. Now I understood what Lardon meant when she said she couldn’t handle Dyphon as she was now. It was terrifying to think about how much a dragon could achieve from just being in a good mood.

“Oh…”

“What is it, Reina?”

“Ah, well…” Reina sheepishly turned to me. “I was just wondering what she would do if you told her now that the Duchy of Parta was bothering you…”

I held my head. “Do *not* tell her that. Absolutely not.”

I could already imagine her beaming brightly and saying, *“Then I’ll blow away that country too!”* I shook my head and made absolutely sure that Reina’s lips were sealed.

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The next day, Bruno came to visit and requested a private conversation, so I let him into a parlor room in the palace. We sat face-to-face, just the two of us.

"Thanks for the letter," I began right as I settled down in my seat. "The delegation thanked me the next day—told me that it was a huge help to hear the news ahead of time."

"Is that so? I am glad I could be of use to you, Your Majesty," Bruno replied, courteous as ever despite my casual remarks.

I nodded. "Yeah, you were a huge help. They were impressed that I had the news so soon. Thanks, Bruno."

"It was all thanks to your magic, Your Majesty. It may look like I'd grasped the intel quickly, but in truth, I only began investigating after I noticed their messenger leaving on their fastest horse. My letter would have also arrived much later if not for your spell."

"But still, thank you."

Bruno was being humble; I knew it couldn't have been easy. Given the severity of the situation, it was easy to imagine a gag order had been imposed. Nabbing the intel he did was undoubtedly impressive, no matter what he said.

"So, what brings you here today?" I asked.

"Truth be told, I haven't received any information on the grand duke's wife ever since the first report a few days ago."

"Really?"

"Indeed. We know nothing as to how severe her injuries are…or if she is even still alive."

I hummed. "But is that so strange? If she's injured, then she wouldn't be able to move around, would she?"

"Yes, but humans leave traces simply by existing," Bruno said. Noting my confusion, he elaborated, "Let us say for example that the grand duchess was injured. If her wounds are light, she would be sighted walking about normally. Otherwise, the doctors would have been called in."

I furrowed my brow. "So…she's dead?"

Bruno shook his head. “If she had passed away, then they would have begun preparing for her funeral. Even if they wished to hide the fact, there would have been signs that they were trying to store—ahem, pardon me—to *preserve* her remains.”

“Oh… So there’s absolutely nothing?”

“That is correct.” Bruno nodded. “Frankly put, it’s rather disturbing. We have no clue as to what is happening or what they could be planning. Therefore, Your Majesty, I would advise against making any decisive agreements with the Duchy of Parta until the matter is cleared up.”

“But why?”

“They have sent an *official* delegation. Thus, any agreement made with them could be used against you on official matters as well.”

“Hmm, I see…” *That must be how the ball rolls in diplomacy.*

“I concur with the boy. You’ve no need to discard your moral high ground,” Lardon added.

I nodded. If Lardon agreed, then there was no room for doubt.

“Got it. Thanks, Bruno. Until the situation clears up, I’ll just keep them as guests and avoid deciding anything. But make sure to let me know once you figure something out.”

“Of course.” Still seated, Bruno deeply lowered his head.

“Hmm?”

“Is something the matter?”

“Oh, just now, I got a letter—well, a report—from Scarlet. She said she’s in the palace.”

Scarlet sent me a letter through the Liamnet, just as Bruno had a few days ago. I swiftly sent her a reply, and not even a minute later, she entered the room.

“Master…” she began, pausing when she noticed I wasn’t alone. “Ah, I see you were speaking with your brother.” She turned to Bruno and nodded politely. “It has been a while, Lord Bruno.”

“Indeed, it has,” Bruno replied while standing to bow.

Bruno saw Scarlet as the princess, while Scarlet saw him as her master’s older brother. Who knew what kind of long-winded pleasantries they’d start rambling on if I left them to their own devices?

“Scarlet,” I hurriedly cut in. “What did you have to report? Did something happen?”

“No, not at all. I simply wished to pass on some information that I had gathered.”

“Information?”

“Yes. Truth be told, I have been investigating Parta ever since I heard the delegation was coming,” she said. “Even if we will ultimately reconcile, they have undoubtedly committed transgressions against you, Master. Thus, it would set a bad example if we mended our relations without receiving any form of compensation from them.”

“Oh, really…?”

“I must agree,” Bruno piped in. “Your Majesty, you may be very willing to forgive them, but I have always been of the opinion that they must suffer the consequences of their actions.”

It was hard to tell from his stony expression, but Bruno seemed really angry about it.

“O-Oh…” I gulped.

“In any case,” Scarlet continued, “amid my investigation, I also happened to learn of a certain type of magic. Necromantic magic.”

“Necromantic…?” I cocked my head. That was the first I had heard of it. *I wonder what kind of magic it is…*

“It controls and subordinates the souls of the dead,” Lardon answered.

“Ah, I see. The souls of…” I froze, eyes blown wide. “Wait, *what*?!”

If that was true, then it wasn’t completely unrelated to my greatest task at hand, namely improving Oversoul, a spell that enlarged my soul. It seemed necromantic magic was a bit different—Lardon said it controlled and subordinated dead souls—but anyway, I had very little knowledge on this kind of magic to begin with, so it was incredibly appealing to me.

Scarlet saw my reaction and smiled brightly. “Shall I urge them to offer that as reparations?”

“Sure— Oh, but…” I flinched, recalling that just moments ago I had promised Bruno that I wouldn’t make any official agreement with Parta. And here I was, not even ten minutes later, trying to break that promise.

I hazarded a glance at Bruno but was met with his calm smile. “Please, do as your heart desires.”

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“Now then, I must return to Parta,” Bruno declared as he stood from his seat.

I raised a brow. “Why?”

He turned to me and smiled politely. “Your negotiations with the Duchy of Parta will become more significant henceforth. The more information you have, the better. Hence, I shall regularly send you any intel I can gather.”

“Oh… All right. Thanks.”

Bruno smiled and bowed once more before excusing himself.

Scarlet followed suit and stood from her seat too. “Please excuse me as well, Master.”

“And where are *you* off to?”

“To visit the delegation. I shall visit the chief delegate, Martin Highmore, and sound him out.”

“Are you sure you can do it?”

“Please leave it to me,” she replied with great confidence, both in her voice and expression. Seeing her look so confident made me feel all the more that I could trust her with this task—not like I could’ve done a better job than her anyway.

“All right. It’s all yours.”

“Thank you.”

“Pass a message for me,” Lardon suddenly said.

“Huh? Oh… Scarlet, hang on a sec. Lardon has something to say.”

Scarlet gasped and straightened her back. “I am listening,” she said, looking a little nervous to receive a direct message from the divine dragon she so respected.

“Tell the delegation to be at ease, for Dyphon has already blown away the coming storm.”

I passed her words on, and Scarlet nodded. “Understood! Thank you very much for your advice,” she said before bowing once more and finally leaving the room.

Now left alone, I cocked my head and asked Lardon, “What was that for?”

“Just a threat,” she answered. *“They might not yet know the reason for the storm’s disappearance. The lass would do well to capitalize on this and use it as leverage in the negotiations.”*

“Um, as in…?”

“With this, they would realize that you can order the divine dragons and even change the weather at will.”

“Ah, I get it now.”

After Dyphon blew the storm away, I hadn’t bothered telling them that one was supposed to come since, well, it wasn’t coming anymore, plus I didn’t want to worry our guests. Besides, it wasn’t rare for even the most experienced fishermen to misjudge the weather. Weather could change at the drop of a hat; you could wake up in the morning to see that the previous forecast hadn’t come to be. So I had thought there was no particular reason to tell them.

But now, the situation had changed. According to Scarlet, the Duchy of Parta owned “necromantic magic,” and since I wanted to get my hands on it, Lardon had advised Scarlet to use that info to gain leverage in the negotiations.

“Wow. Gotta hand it to you, Lardon. Forget using it for the negotiations—I just forgot about the storm entirely.”

“Hmph… You are fine the way you are. Just think about magic and nothing more.”

“Thanks.” Right off the bat, I decided to turn my thoughts back to magic. “Hmm, necromantic magic… You said it can be used to capture and subordinate dead souls?”

“Yes, although they are broadly categorized into two types,” Lardon said. *“One is for subordinating the soul itself, while the other is for placing it into a vessel before subordinating it.”*

“Oh…” I nodded and took some time to internalize this new information—until something about it caught my attention right away. “Huh? But for the second type… No, wait, I guess it’s the same for the first…? Anyway, aren’t they pretty similar to Familia?”

Familia was a spell I had cast on all the monsters in this city—or rather, this *country*—along with some humans like Asuna and Jodie. Any familiars made through this spell were under a rule of absolute subservience to my orders, though I’d never made use of it myself.

“One’s for the living and the other’s for the dead, but they’re

essentially the same, aren't they?"

Lardon chuckled. *"As always, your mind works fast when it comes to magic."*

"So I'm right?"

"Indeed," she said, and I could almost see her nodding. *"They are certainly the same in that regard. However, they have one difference."*

"And that is…?"

"The difference between the living and the dead."

"Hmm…?" What did she mean by that? Sure, the living and the dead were different, but… "*Which* difference?"

Lardon chuckled again. *"Ah, yes. My apologies. Think of it in terms of magic, although it might be rather difficult to connect the dots."*

I fell into thought once more, this time focused on what separated the living and the dead when it came to magic. Lardon would probably tell me the answer if I asked, but I had my pride too—since this had to do with magic, I wanted to solve this riddle and find the answer myself. I probably wouldn't have been this persistent had it been about anything else.

"Was it too difficult after all? Then I shall give you a hint. What do the dead lose when—"

"Is it…mana?" I mumbled, speaking over Lardon. "The difference between Familia and necromantic magic… Familia is cast on the living, so the familiars are just given orders and they'll act with their own abilities. But for the dead…the person who subordinated them has to provide them energy to use."

"Full points for that answer," Lardon said, her tone tender and proud.

I beamed, glad that I found the answer myself right before Lardon even gave me a hint.

"Impressive as always. It was not entirely about magic, so I suspected it might be tough."

"Well, I managed," I said, shrugging.

"And now that you have unraveled that mystery, there is something you must do."

"Something I must do…?"

"Indeed. This is vital. Without this, you cannot cast necromantic magic."

"What do I need to do?" I asked immediately.

Inside me, I felt Lardon smile as she muttered, *"You must die."*

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I gulped. “Die…?”

This was the first time Lardon sounded so…*threatening*. That she was joking crossed my mind first, but I immediately abandoned the thought. It sure didn’t sound like one, and she wasn’t the type to make these sorts of jokes in the first place. Hers were more roundabout and sarcastic.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“It is the condition to become a user of necromantic magic,” she explained. *“You must experience death or near death at least once.”*

“Ah, so that’s why…”

“Indeed. Of course, we cannot have you die for good.”

“Right.” I nodded firmly. Dying was definitely *not* on my agenda today. “So what should I do?”

“The founder of necromantic magic discovered that there is a point in the threshold between life and death in which one’s soul enters a state of ‘departure’—an indefinable moment wherein you are neither dead nor alive.”

There was an amused lilt to Lardon’s voice. She hadn’t lied about the fact that I needed to die, but just twisted her wording of the truth. My lips twitched; now this was way more in line with her sense of humor.

“So basically, I need to enter that point of ‘departure’ and then quickly, uh…heal? Or recover? And since I would have ‘died,’ I’ll be able to use necromantic magic afterward?”

“Precisely.”

“And how can I do that?”

A beat later, streams of light emerged from my body and converged into the figure of a young girl.

I stared at Lardon and cocked my head. “Why’d you pop out?”

“Two reasons. First, to help you visualize. Second”—she smirked—“once I finish explaining, you will surely feel the urge to try it out right away. However, this involves the body and soul—life and death, so to speak. It won’t do for me to remain inside you as you make your attempt.”

Fair enough. I nodded in understanding.

With that, Lardon spun on her heel and searched the room—which was still the same parlor where Bruno and Scarlet had also been mere moments ago—and her gaze quickly fell on the table by the couch. She walked right over, quietly reached out, and—*snap!*—tore off the corner piece like it was a sheet of paper, never mind that the table was about as thick as my wrist.

Lardon then firmly pressed the wood between her hands. The wood creaked and cracked beneath the pressure, painting a sight that was frankly difficult to reconcile with the petiteness of her arms.

Once she was done carefully molding the wood like clay, she revealed to me the end result:

"A boomerang...?"

Lardon nodded and chucked it into the air. The small woodwork circled the room before returning to her hands, as anyone would expect a boomerang to. I turned to her, a brow arched.

"A human's mana," she began, "is directly related to the size and quality of their soul; *you* have an immense mana pool because your soul is so big. When humans die, their soul rapidly disperses from their physical body. Necromancers have coined this instantaneous phase as the 'departure phase.'"

"Ah..." I nodded, committing her explanation to heart. Although she didn't explicitly mention it, I could tell that what I was about to do could very well put my life at risk.

"The method is simple," Lardon continued. "You simply need to restore your soul the moment it disperses during the departure phase—with your own mana, of course."

"So...I have to cast healing magic at the same time?"

"Logically, yes. But practically, that is not feasible."

"Why not?"

"As I said earlier, you will be suspended between life and death during this phase—and no human can use magic when they are dead."

"Oh..."

Lardon herself had deemed the idea impossible, so I swiftly cast it aside.

Taking a step back, I reminded myself that only my approach was wrong, that it *was* possible to recover during the departure

phase, just not by casting magic there and then. What was more, I knew it was within my capabilities. Earlier, Lardon had said, *“It won’t do for me to remain inside you as you make your attempt.”* In other words, she knew that I’d attempt it right away—that it was something I could do.

“Hmm… How about healing magic that will activate on a timer?”

“You are half correct… Actually, no, I give that a hundred points.”

“What?” I blinked, perplexed. That was too huge a leap. Now I had no idea how correct I actually was.

Lardon chuckled. “You are not at fault. Yours is a perfect answer when thinking only in terms of magic, hence the change in my assessment.”

“Uh, okay…”

I wondered why she was being so unusually meticulous about this, but Lardon answered that question before I could even voice it out.

“This is a matter of life and death,” she said. “I need to make absolutely sure that you understand what I am explaining.”

“Oh…”

Lardon chuckled. “I suppose I should thank you as well. Now, I have learned to be flexible in these matters of— Eek!”

My body moved before I realized it. Overwhelmed with gratitude, I found myself embracing her small figure and unwittingly drawing out a small, rather cute yelp from the girl. “Thank you. Really,” I whispered.

“Hngh…” Lardon’s cheeks flushed red as I held her in my arms.



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“R-Release me…” Lardon mumbled, her voice much meeker than usual.

“Huh? Oh, my bad!” I immediately drew back. With some space between us, I could now see that her face was flushed. “Are you all right?”

“Yes…” She took in a deep breath, and in no time at all the flush faded from her cheeks.

“You sure?” I asked again.

“Yes. I’m okay.”

“Well, if you say so…” Still, I had to wonder—why did her face turn red?

Lardon put a hand on her hip and arched her brow at me. “Knowing you, I’m sure you’re utterly clueless as to my reaction just now.”

“Oh, uh…yeah.” I nodded. “But I do know that the fact that you’re saying that means the reason has nothing to do with magic.”

Lardon blinked, then chuckled. “Indeed.”

“Is it bad that I don’t know?”

“No, not at all. You do best when you focus solely on your strengths.”

“All right. I’ll do just that, then.” I decided to take her words at face value. They made sense to me, and besides, I knew I could always trust her advice.

“Now then, back to the topic.”

“Right. You said my idea was half correct but also worth a hundred points?”

“Yes. You get full points because you are on the right track, although your thought process is not entirely correct because of how I guided you.”

“Could you explain a bit more?”

“Very well. First, you were correct in thinking that you must prepare something before entering the departure phase. You were simply mistaken in suggesting healing magic.”

“Then what should I prepare?”

“Mana,” she answered. “Mana and the soul are exceedingly homogenous, meaning mana can be used to repair the soul. However, one cannot use mana during the departure phase, so you must emit it beforehand and then intake it later in the process. Essentially, you will be recovering not with magic or spells, but rather pure mana.”

“I get it… And you knew I couldn’t figure all that out, so you made me think in terms of magic first.”

Lardon smiled and nodded. “Do you understand now?”

“Yeah. But does it really not need to be a spell? Just mana?”

“Correct. You see, a soul in its departure phase is much like…a sponge, let’s say. It will naturally absorb its mana from its surroundings to restore itself.”

“Is it really that simple…?”

Lardon smirked. “Of course, it is often not. For various reasons, the most common being inadequate mana to complete the restoration. Perhaps it’s not the best analogy, but…think of it as trying to repair a shattered plate without enough adhesive.”

“Oh…” I nodded. Despite what she said, that sounded like a pretty good analogy to me.

“Insufficient mana will not reconstitute a human soul. Forcing in another person’s mana is possible, but that would turn the person into a different soul, and thus, a different person entirely.”

“Hmm… How do I make sure I prepare enough mana?”

“Oh, there are many ways. In your case, perhaps you would best understand if you think back to the concept of return rate.”

“By return rate, you mean…”

Lardon nodded. “Indeed.”

A while back, I added a new factor to my magic training by recycling and reusing a percentage of the mana I’d used—a percentage I’d taken to calling the “return rate.”

“You said your current limit is a twenty-nine percent return rate, yes?” Lardon continued. “To attempt this by yourself, you would need fifty-one percent.”

“Fifty-one…” That was a huge leap from twenty-nine. It was well above my limit, meaning this should be impossible for me.

“That being the case, I shall lend you a—”

“I can do it,” I cut in.

“—hand… What?”

“I said I can do it. Fifty-one percent, right?”

Lardon narrowed her eyes. “When did you improve your return rate?”

“I haven’t. It’s just that the situation here’s different.”

“The situation…?”

I nodded confidently. From here on out was my expertise: magic. “Twenty-nine percent is my rate under the assumption that I’ll be *continuously* recycling my mana for training. But it’s a different story if I’m just doing it once.”

“Hah… I see. It’s like the difference between running a short sprint versus a marathon.”

“Yeah, exactly!” I snapped my fingers. Lardon was great at coming up with analogies. “If I’m just doing it once, then I can easily surpass fifty-one percent.”

Lardon chuckled. “Impressive.”

“Huh?”

“Even if you are just doing it once, it’s no easy feat to attain a fifty-one percent return rate. Of course, your confidence in your ability is the most impressive of all.”

“Oh…” As always, it felt great to receive Lardon’s praise.

“Then let’s get started, shall we? Are you absolutely certain you can do this?” she asked again.

“Yeah.”

“Very well. Place all your focus on emitting and recovering your mana. I shall guide you to the departure phase. And make sure to take down all forms of magic barriers around here.”

“Okay.” I nodded and closed my eyes.

I began putting together the mana-recycling spell that I’d made for training, restructuring it while visualizing a full-powered, no-holds-barred, short-distance sprint.

Finally…

“I’m starting,” I said.

“Go ahead.”

I unleashed all the mana I had in my body. Much like when I fired off magic or power missiles, I simply released mana from my body with a spell that would regain and recycle *a hundred percent* of it.

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After I unleashed all my mana, something shot out of Lardon's hand, which I willingly took head-on.

Instantly, the world *changed*. Everything disappeared into a bright flash of light. *No, hang on. Is it light…or just nothingness?* I felt like my senses were betraying me completely—I could hardly tell what was what.

The bizarre sensation was just beginning to rattle my mind when I realized something far more baffling: I couldn't see myself. My face was one thing, but normally, looking down was all it took to see my own body—but now, there was nothing. It was like I no longer existed in this world… The surreal experience left me feeling further detached from my already-murky senses.

My arms and legs still responded to my commands, but when I reached up to touch my face, I felt nothing. I tried pressing my palms together, but to no avail. Essentially, I could move—could *feel* myself moving—but I couldn't make contact with anything, even myself.

But this is my body. Shouldn't I at least be able to link my hands together? What is this? What's happening to me?

Failing to comprehend, I fell into a panic. I couldn't see a single thing, and the tips of my fingers and toes were starting to feel cold. The chilling sensation slowly crawled up and made me tremble. I tried to clench my fist, to put forth any sort of effort to stop it, but I couldn't even feel my fingers against my palm, let alone stop this odd sensation.

Eventually, I began to wonder: Was all this just a dream? I couldn't think of any other explanation.

No matter what I tried, nothing worked.

Oh well… I give up, I thought, then paused. *No, wait… My limbs can't move, but maybe—*

Liam sat slumped on the couch. Others would probably assume he'd simply fallen asleep, but his current companion knew otherwise.

Lardon took a deep breath. “Now then—”

“Darling!” Dyphon threw the door open and leaped into the room. “Huh? He’s sleeping? Guess I’ll take a li’l nap beside him, then! Eheh heh…”

She plopped down on the couch—then *froze*. All her cheer faded away as she realized something was off.

“Uh… Darling?” Dyphon shuffled closer and peered at Liam’s face, hesitantly reaching out, before drawing her hand back in shock. “He… He’s *dead*?!”

Dyphon whipped her head around and finally realized that Lardon was also in the room. “What the—?! Hey, what are you doing out here?! What happened to my darling?!”

Lardon smirked, a stark contrast to Dyphon’s panicked expression. “They say love is blind, but I never realized that would be true for a dragon as well,” she mused. She had been standing right beside Liam, yet Dyphon never noticed until she realized something was off.

Anyone who knew about the war centuries ago would doubt their eyes at the sight of the two dragons harmlessly squabbling like this now.

“Don’t dodge the question! Why’s darling dead?! Ugh, whatever! If he’s dead, then I’ll just die too!”

“Oh, settle down. I don’t mind if you wish to die, but I suspect he wouldn’t be as apathetic to the matter when he finds out.”

“You’re talking about darling…? What do you even mean?”

“He’s trying to learn necromantic magic.”

“Oh, what? That’s my darling!” Dyphon cheered, her mood swinging the other way around. As quick-witted as ever, she understood the situation from that short explanation alone. “Aha, I see, I see… He *is* in a state of suspended death, now that I look closely. Whew! Scared the heck out of me!”

“It’s called the departure phase.”

“Never heard of it.” Dyphon rolled her eyes. “Humans take every chance to make stuff sound all cool.”

Lardon chuckled. “I suppose you never fancied such customs, did you, Lady Blitztress?”

Dyphon glared at her. “You itching for a fight? ’Cause I can kill you, if that’s what you want.”

Instantly, the air in the room tensed, so much so that a

weakhearted human would have fainted from the mere pressure emanating from Dyphon. Her fierce belligerence was a stark contrast to her petite and youthful appearance, but Lardon faced her pressure head-on with complete composure nonetheless.

"Ah, is that so? And how many decades do you think that will take you?"

Dyphon gasped and snapped her head to Liam. "Oh, just hurry it up, will you?! I can kill you *after* you bring my darling back!"

Lardon chuckled. "Very well."

Outwardly, Lardon appeared younger than Dyphon, but there was a vast difference between their mental ages. Hence, Lardon acted mature for her appearance, whereas Dyphon acted more like a child despite looking older—a rather amusing mismatch between them, one that Lardon tended to have her fun with.

An amused smirk was still on Lardon's lips as she turned to Liam. Since this was a matter of his life or death, Dyphon readily stepped away and gave her space. Lardon held her hand out—then froze.

"Hmm…?"

"What? Hurry up or I'll— Huh?" Dyphon caught herself, realizing why Lardon stopped.

Under their stunned gazes, the air in the room began drawing toward Liam's body, yet none of their clothes so much as fluttered. It only appeared as if air was getting sucked into him, but in actuality…

"He's…absorbing his mana on his own? Impossible…" Lardon mumbled.

Dyphon blinked and, after a beat, grinned from ear to ear. "That's my darling!"

One was shell-shocked while the other was delighted, but both were thoroughly impressed by the unbelievable sight unfolding before them.

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I cautiously opened my eyes and blinked away the white spots in my vision. Slowly, my senses returned to normal.

“Lardon… Oh, and Dyphon?” *What’s she doing here?* I squinted as their figures gradually became clearer to me.

“What did you do?” Lardon asked. “It should have been impossible for you to return by yourself.”

“Huh? Oh…” I blinked away the last vestiges of the odd sensations and slowly organized my chaotic thoughts. “Hmm… Was that a bad move? I couldn’t move my body at all, but I felt like I could draw in my mana, so I gave it a go…”

The two girls just stood wordlessly.

“I guess this means I can control my mana more naturally than my limbs? That makes me kinda—no, *really* happy, actually.” Saying it out loud made me feel giddy all over. I loved magic above all, so I was over the moon to think that I could handle mana so masterfully.

As I basked in that warm and giddy feeling, I realized that the two dragons were staring at me: Lardon with her eyes narrowed, like she was struggling to find words, while Dyphon was simply beaming like the sun.

“What’s wrong, you two?”

“I’m just so impressed, darling!” Dyphon exclaimed.

Lardon recomposed herself. “In other words, you were able to absorb your mana without my assistance…because it felt natural to you?”

“Y-Yeah, I guess so.”

“Hah… Goodness, you never fail to surprise me.”

“Uh… Should I not have?”

“No, not at all. I suppose it’s simply par for the course for you,” Lardon mused.

“But still impressive!” Dyphon crowed as she clung to me.

I didn’t quite get what they were so hung up on, but I just shrugged it off. Then, I frowned. “Huh…?”

“What is it?” Lardon asked.

“These white spots in my vision… They’re not going away.” I looked around, and sure enough, my vision was still flashing white in certain spots. I thought they’d get better after some time… Actually, now that I looked closely, they weren’t “white spots,” exactly…

“That is how the world looks to users of necromantic magic,” Lardon said.

“What…?”

“Tell me, how many colors is the moon in your eyes?”

“The moon…?” I cocked my head at the sudden question. “Well, the moon glows, so…one color, I guess?”

Lardon nodded. “Humans see it that way. However, to us—”

“It’s four colors!” Dyphon shoved Lardon aside and proudly cut in.

“What? Four?”

“Uh-huh! Oh, but the most vivid one is blue, followed by pink and orange, and lastly the goldish glow humans can see too.”

“Really…?”

“Yes. We see it in four colors because we can see forces related to the moon,” Lardon explained. “Similarly, those who lay hands on necromantic magic see the world in a different color. For example…”

She snapped her fingers. The window curtains all fell at once, blocking the light from outside and draping the room in darkness—or it should have, but instead the room remained lit.

“Huh? It’s still bright…”

“An ordinary human would be in total darkness by now,” said Lardon.

“It’s because you’ve gained the ability to perceive, ah…*otherworldly* forces,” Dyphon added.

“Hmm… I get it.” That added up with what Lardon said before—that I could only use necromantic magic after experiencing near death.

“Needless to say, you’ve simply gained the ability to *see*,” Lardon continued. “From here, it is up to you to learn necromantic magic.”

“Okay… By the way, you two *can’t* see these?”

“No,” Lardon answered bluntly.

“‘Cause we can’t die,” Dyphon added.

“Oh…”

“Such is our kind. We can die, but we are immediately reborn,” Lardon said, casting a sideward glance to Dyphon, who puffed out her chest in response. Come to think of it, Lardon mentioned that Dyphon had been reborn and reverted to her youth a few times. “We cannot experience death, and so, we are not privy to the world you see now.”

Dyphon shrugged. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t curious, but there’s not much we can do, is there?”

I held my chin and hummed. That made complete sense, and I probably should’ve dropped it then… But because I was seeing a whole new world for the first time, my mind felt stimulated and sharper than ever. I organized my thoughts quickly, and soon I raised my head again to face the two girls.

“Should I help you experience it?” I offered.

Dyphon blinked. “What?”

“What are you saying? That is impossible.”

“Not with magic it isn’t,” I replied without missing a beat.

Their breaths hitched and their eyes grew wide—it seemed these words, coming from me, were especially convincing. I was hopeless with anything else, but magic was always a different story. Lardon knew this best, so any doubt was quickly wiped from her eyes.

Both their gazes gleamed with anticipation and awe.

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“Anything is possible with magic, hm?” Lardon mumbled once she’d calmed down.

Unconditional trust was one thing, but her full confidence in my magic expertise felt just as good. Those had been my greatest sources of joy since I became Liam.

“I wanna try too! Please, darling?” Dyphon crooned.

Lardon nodded. “Indeed, this is a good opportunity. I’ve no reason to refuse.”

“All right… Oh, but are you sure? It’ll change the way you see the world, so…” I trailed off as I looked around the room.

While I was slowly adjusting, the world now looked slightly different from what I was used to. I had no regrets, not when this was necessary to learn new magic, but for others, such a sudden change might be too big a price to pay for mere curiosity. *I guess Lardon and Dyphon aren’t just anybody, but still…*

“It matters not to me,” Lardon said with a nonchalant smile, contrary to my expectations. “All will be reset upon our rebirth.”

“Well, I don’t care even if it doesn’t! This is proof of my darling’s love for me, so I’ll gladly take it with me to my next life!” Dyphon crowed.

Despite their vastly differing opinions, both were ready to give it a try.

“All right. Let’s do it, then. Who’s going first?”

“For now, I shall assist you with her,” Lardon offered. “I would be the better candidate for this, as I’ve already experienced guiding mana.”

I nodded. “Makes sense.”

This was a matter of life or death. Lardon had tried to help me earlier, so she at least had a better grasp of the technique than Dyphon did. It only made sense to start with Dyphon so Lardon could assist me…but Dyphon seemed to disagree. I turned my head to find her glaring at Lardon.

“What?” Lardon asked breezily.

Dyphon clicked her tongue. “You better not be trying to kill me.”

Lardon met her glare, but instead of returning the hostility, she simply chuckled in amusement.

Dyphon frowned. “Wh-What? Cat got your tongue, hm?”

“Not at all.” Lardon shrugged. “Shall I go first, then?”

“Hmph. You sure? What if I—”

“I trust him,” Lardon said, glancing at me with a smirk. “Well?”

“Huh?” I blinked, startled that I was suddenly brought into their little squabble, then nodded. “Oh, uh… Yeah. I’ll do it properly. I promise.”

For some reason, Dyphon bristled and suddenly yelled, “Aaargh, no! I’ll go first! Me, me!”

I whipped my head to her in surprise. She’d been so suspicious of Lardon just a second ago, yet now she was raring to go first.

She leaned over me, eyes nearly bloodshot. “Darling!”

I flinched. “Y-Yes?”

“I trust you! I trust you waaay more than she does, got it? So, I’m A-okay with whatever you want to do to me!”

“Uh, all right… That’s great. But can you calm down a bit?” I was kind of overwhelmed by her sudden burst of intensity, but at least she was now okay with being first.

“Now then, let us change locations,” Lardon said. When I raised a brow, she explained, “We had best avoid destroying the city.”

Dyphon agreed. “Will the sky do?”

“That sounds good.”

As I looked between them in bewilderment, Dyphon suddenly offered her hand and smiled. “Let’s go, darling!”

“Huh? Oh— Whoaaa!”

I absently reached my hand out, which Dyphon grabbed without waiting to pull me out the window, Lardon following closely behind. We shot up into the sky at breakneck speeds and broke past the clouds, until we couldn’t even make out the city underneath. It was just us, the endlessly blue horizon, and the dazzling sun.

“Is this far enough?” Dyphon asked.

Lardon nodded. “I believe so.”

Dyphon cast me a glance, so I gave her a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry. I can fly on my own.”

I let go of her hand and cast flight magic to stay airborne. I couldn’t be holding on to her as she attempted to enter the

departure phase.

“Let us begin… Are you ready?” Lardon asked.

I still had no idea why we had to come all the way up here, but I nodded anyway. “Anytime.”

Lardon turned to Dyphon. “And you?”

“Hmph! I wholeheartedly trust *darling*, so of course I’m ready!”

Lardon chuckled and swiftly transformed back to her original, humongous dragon form. Spreading her wings, she flew higher up.

I gasped as I craned my neck. “Oh, I get it… It’s Dyphon’s mana she’ll be guiding, after all.”

Lardon was taking this very seriously. She *needed* to, or else she wouldn’t be able to guide all the mana unleashed by a fellow dragon.

“I’m ready, darling.”

“Okay.” I nodded.

Dyphon quietly closed her eyes and clenched her fists, and the next moment, mana gushed out from her body. It surged all around us like a tidal wave of energy, instantly swallowing up the tranquil sky and transforming it into a violent storm.

Lardon then gathered all of Dyphon’s mana, forming a huge vortex of power in the air that condensed into one point.



Slowly, the vortex changed. Mana on its own wasn't tangible—at most, it looked like a faint mist—yet Dyphon's mana was beginning to take shape. It swirled like a tempest before converging into a glowing sphere, growing brighter and brighter until it seemed to illuminate the entire sky.

I squinted up, completely captivated. "It's like…a second sun…"

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Like a prodded beehive, the city of monsters erupted into buzzing chaos.

“What in blazes is that?!”

“Are we under attack?!”

“Somebody go tell Lord Liam!”

From the ground, it must have looked like another sun far too bright to distinguish from the real one had just appeared in the sky—a very valid cause for panic. Amid the chaos, however, Paithon soundlessly appeared in the middle of the street while hugging her favorite pillow. She gazed up at the sky, as drowsy as ever.

Scarlet made her way through the crowd, looking just as panicked as the rest. “Lord Paithon!”

Paithon’s gaze languidly dragged over to her. “Hmmm? What is it?”

“This might be some foreign nation’s scheme. I highly doubt there is any need for concern over your safety, but I would still—”

“Huuuh? But that’s Deedee.”

Scarlet blinked. “Er… You mean Lord Dyphon?”

It was then the monsters finally noticed Paithon’s presence. Hearing those words, they turned their attention to her, allowing the chaos and panic to gradually settle down.

Paithon nodded and pointed to one of the suns. “Uh-huh. That’s Deedee.”

“Is it truly…?” Scarlet mumbled, filling the air with murmurs once again, but this time, they were of shock rather than panic. When Paithon affirmed it with another nod, Scarlet breathed out in relief. “I see… The divine dragons are truly astounding.”

“Looks like Lala’s beside her. Oh, him too.”

“‘Him’?”

“The impressive guy.”

“M-Master is up there as well?!”

“Uh-huh. Looks like he’s doing something to Deedee.”

At once, Scarlet and the monsters looked at the sky. Now that

they knew Liam was right there, where a second sun had been born, a new surge of respect and astonishment passed over them like a wave.

"Wow... Such immense mana," I marveled.

Lardon, still in her dragon form, sighed. *"Good grief. She's certainly putting me to work."*

"Hey, you good?"

"Yes. In fact, you should worry about yourself. It's almost time." She glanced the other way.

There, Dyphon was levitating in a fetal position, almost like she were floating underwater. Small amounts of mana continued to leak from her body before getting sucked into what now looked like a second sun; even after all that, she still hadn't emptied her mana pool. But like Lardon said, it was only a matter of time.

"I'm fine." I flew over to Lardon's side and placed my hand on her. "You ready?"

"Go ahead."

I chanted an aria and amplified my mana to its limit, and then: "Time Deceleration!"

Instantly, the world around us slowed.

"Is this...a new spell?"

"It's derived from Time Shift. It slows down the flow of time."

Lardon hummed. *"Unfortunately, this is still too fast."*

"I know that. Just give me the signal."

"Very well," she muttered and said no more, counting on me to do my job.

Amid the slowed world, I waited patiently for the right time. Then, the moment mana stopped flowing out of Dyphon's body...

"Now!"

"*Amelia Emilia Claudia*..." Once again chanting the names of the three songstresses I adored in my past life, I raised my mana to its upper limits. I leaned close to Lardon, held my hands out, and cast two more spells: "Time Acceleration...and Time Shift!"

Suddenly, my hands snapped back and spurted out blood, as if something had exploded inside.

"Are you okay?!" Lardon exclaimed.

"Dyphon! Focus on *Dyphon*!" I yelled.

Lardon clicked her tongue and began guiding Dyphon's mana,

from the sun it had become and now back into her body. Watching all this unfold again but in reverse made for a bizarre picture.

Time Acceleration was another spell I'd derived from Time Shift, as well as Dyphon's Time Leap. It sped up time such that a single day could fly by in just ten minutes—perfect for when you wanted a particular day to come sooner—except in the same breath, I had also cast Time Shift, a spell that *rewound* time.

A spell that accelerated time and another that rewound it—by using both simultaneously, I created an equalizing push-and-pull that essentially *stopped time*. At this moment, only I, the caster, and Lardon, whom I was touching, could move.

Dyphon, however, had stopped with the rest of the world—I made sure of it, since I figured this would stop her from being reborn the moment she died.

"Ugh…"

That said, this was quite the burdensome combination. Time Shift alone was hard enough to cast, but now I had added in two more time magic spells. My arms bore the brunt of it, as I was using them to transmit my mana, and I felt my consciousness slipping from my grasp.

I gritted my teeth, telling myself I needed to hang in there—

"Hah… You are truly unbelievable."

—but the moment I heard Lardon's voice, a wave of relief washed over me, and everything turned dark.

.203

“Ugh…”

My consciousness resurfaced alongside a prickling headache and fatigue weighing over my body. I felt like I’d pulled an all-nighter and barely gotten any rest before being jolted awake. My mind yearned to sink back into the depths, but before I completely succumbed to the urge, I felt something soft squish against me.

“Oh, darling’s awake!”

That’s Dyphon’s voice… I slowly opened my eyes, but my vision was still black. “Uh…”

“Darling! Oh, darling! My darling!” Dyphon exclaimed, her voice pitched in glee.

I felt a greater pressure over my face at once and, only a beat later, realized that an incredibly nice smell was tickling my nose. I began struggling in my confusion.

“Mm… Mmgh!”

“Oh, gosh! Sorry about that, darling!”

My view promptly opened up, and the first thing I saw was Dyphon in her human form. She was so close that I could see each individual eyelash as she innocently peered at my face.

I see… She must have been hugging me. “Um, where…?”

I took a look around. Dyphon was in front of me, while Lardon was a little farther back, also in her human form. The three of us were still floating high in the sky.

“Um… Oh, right.” My mind slowly started back up, and my memories returned to me. “So…did it work?”

“Uh-huh! You’re the best, darling! I knew you could do it!” she preened, cheerily clinging to me. “Now I can see the world the same way as you. You could say we’re living in the same world now!”

“Yeah… I guess you could.” We didn’t actually have the exact same view of the world, but I wasn’t about to kill her mood by pointing that out.

“Heh…” Dyphon let go of me and turned to Lardon with a very smug expression. “Heh!” she said again, louder this time.

Lardon raised a brow. “What is it?”

“I’m way better than you now!”

“Have you forgotten that I will also have my turn?”

Dyphon, however, continued looking down on her with a haughty smirk, like she was admonishing a foolish child. “I can see it now.”

Lardon narrowed her eyes. “See *what*?”

“This.” Dyphon propped her hands on her hips and held her head up high.

She just struck a pose, but I could feel it—something that felt like mana was coursing through the air, and soon, it began to take shape. Another girl appeared beside Dyphon. She was...also Dyphon. More precisely, a version of her who looked to be a beautiful young woman in her mid-twenties.

Lardon’s eyes widened. “That’s your...”

“And that’s not all!” she proclaimed, her smirk stretching wider than ever. She clenched her fists, gathering power as energy once again flowed and took shape.

Yet another girl appeared. Again, it was Dyphon—she looked to be in her forties, much older than the other two but certainly no less stunning. She exuded the charm that could only come from a mature woman.



“Tsk… I see now.” Lardon’s face warped bitterly.

Now that’s new, I mused. “What does she mean?”

“Those are both of her past lives,” Lardon answered.

“What?” I blinked. “Oh, right… She was reborn…”

The reason Dyphon was immature compared to Lardon was because she was literally a “newborn.” The three dragons were vastly different from humans, and one of those differences lay in how they were reborn when they reached the end of their lifespan. They weren’t *reincarnated* as different people, but rather *reborn* as themselves once again. Dyphon was reborn after the Tri-Draconic War, and so she was younger than Lardon, who had survived it.

With that in mind, I turned my attention back to the three Dyphons: a child, a young woman, and a mature adult. They were very different, but they were all clearly Dyphon.

“Heh! Now you know I’m better than you,” Dyphon gloated.

Oh, right. She said that earlier too… “What does that mean?”

Lardon sighed. “She means to say she has been reborn once more than me.”

“Oh… Well, I guess she has.” She was younger now because she was reborn ahead of them, so that would make sense.

“And thanks to that…!”

The three Dyphons looked at one another and nodded. Then, all at once, they transformed into dragons!

I looked up, agape—it was a stunning sight. Perhaps other dragons would be able to distinguish between them, but to me, it just looked like three identical dragons were looming over us in the sky. I felt like I was looking at triplets.

All three unleashed powerful roars. The sky trembled and shattered, and something leaked out, spreading over the sky and swallowing the sun.

“*That* is the cause for her triumphant attitude,” Lardon said. As I turned to her in confusion, she elaborated, “Even if you aid me through the same process, there would only ever be two of me—hardly a match for her.”

“Oh… So that’s why she’s so smug…”

Lardon nodded, a bitter expression on her face. I’d never seen her look so frustrated. She probably didn’t like losing to a fellow dragon, and there was little room for argument about this since two was clearly fewer than three. I realized once more that only

they could rival one another.

In the meantime, the Dyphons returned to their human forms. The other two stayed back while our present-day Dyphon flew over and threw her arms around me. “Thank you, darling! I love you!”

Her blunt confession was nothing out of the ordinary, but seeing Lardon’s bitter expression, I found myself reluctant to accept it like I always did.

At the same time, down on the ground, Martin and Dominique were looking up at the sky from the reception hall’s courtyard. Their faces were beyond pale—they looked no better than corpses.

“Th-There are *three* Blitztresses…?”

“Is it…an illusion, perhaps?”

“A dream… Yes, we must be dreaming.”

“O-Of course. A dream… Indeed.”

Unable to process the shock, the chief and deputy delegates could only avert their eyes from the unbelievable reality before them.

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Some time later, I stood in the city plaza surrounded by a crowd of monsters. Lardon and Dyphon were behind me, while Paithon was in front.

Paithon turned her head left and right, scouring through the sea of faces. “Uh, nope… Nope again…” Finally, her eyes lit up in recognition. “Aha! There!”

She beelined for one spot in the crowd. An elf yelped and jumped out of the way, and even then, Paithon didn’t seem to have noticed her there. Her stride was uninterrupted all the way until she stopped in front of an empty spot.

“Wooow… Wow, oh wow. This brings me back… I’ve never seen this before!”

In her excitement, she’d made two very contradicting sentences, but I brushed it aside and asked, “Can you summon her? Or, uh, give her shape?”

“I can try.” She held her hand out and, with a listless “heave-ho,” grabbed something and pulled—and out from thin air came another girl.

“Ohhh!” the crowd cheered, as if she’d just performed a neat little trick.

“Wooow… Nice to meet you. I’m Pipi,” said Paithon.

“Did you really just introduce yourself to me, you airhead?”

Scoffing in exasperation, the husky-voiced girl Paithon pulled out of thin air landed a chop on her head. She and Paithon were two peas in a pod, except the girl looked around ten years older than Paithon—a beautiful woman in her late twenties.

“Is this a success?” I wondered.

“It is indeed,” Lardon easily answered.

Dyphon clung to me with a bright smile. “It annoys me that she got to do it too, but anyway, you’re awesome, darling!”

After I was done guiding Dyphon and Lardon through the departure phase, Paithon had flown up to the sky and said she wanted to do it too. She was normally so carefree and lived her life at her own pace, but it seemed her sense of rivalry was alive, and

she didn't want to be left out from whatever her fellow dragons were up to. Needless to say, I had no reason to turn her down, so I helped her out with Lardon's assistance.

And that brought us back to this moment, where Paithon had just pulled up her past self like the other two dragons had.

"So now..." I trailed my gaze over the group. "There are seven of you in total?"

Lardon nodded, and Dyphon wrapped her arms tighter around me. "You've got that right, darling. *Two* of each of them, and *three* of me—only me!" she exclaimed, making sure I knew she was a cut above the rest.

Lardon and Paithon had been reborn the same number of times, meaning Dyphon trumped them both by one cycle. "It'll probably look incredible if all seven of you turned into dragons at once," I mumbled.

It was a passing thought, no more than a childish idea, but Dyphon perked up and asked, "Do you wanna see that, darling?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"You said it'd look incredible if we all turned into dragons. Do you wanna see that?"

"Oh... Well, maybe. It'd make quite the picture, that's for sure."

"All right!" Dyphon stepped away from me and thrust her finger at Lardon. "Hey, you! Cooperate!"

Lardon huffed and turned away. "I refuse."

"What did you say?!"

"You are in no place to order me around. I wouldn't mind if *he* asked, though."

"Huh? Me?" I blinked. "Uh, I wanna see it...please?"

"Hm. Very well." Lardon nodded swiftly and turned to Paithon. "You had best ask her as well."

Dyphon's lips twisted into a bitter scowl. I had no clue why she was making such an expression, so I just nodded at Lardon and looked at the last dragon. "Hey, Paithon?"

She turned to me. "Oh, hey! Thank you! This is fuuun."

"I'd like to thank you too," said the other Paithon. "Oh, right! Hey, can you hold your liquor? I've got some good alcohol in my secret stash—wanna have a go?"

"Tempting, but I'd like to ask another favor," I replied.

"A favor...?"

“Yeah. Could you two turn into your dragon forms? Dyphon and Lardon will do the same.”

“But why?”

“Um… I’m not sure, actually.” I tilted my head and tried to put my thoughts into words. “I guess I want to witness a never-before-seen spectacle?”

The older Paithon hummed. “Sounds about right, coming from a human boy.”

“I don’t mind,” drawled the younger Paithon. “He takes reaaally good care of me.” She took out her pillow and cuddled it affectionately. She seemed to really like my gift for her.

The older Paithon nodded. “Well, fine. I’m not so happy about doing it with *them*, but consider it my thanks for giving us this fascinating opportunity.”

I spun around. “They said okay.”

Lardon nodded calmly, while Dyphon bobbed her head in excitement. “All right! Sit back and watch, darling!”

Together, Lardon and Dyphon summoned their past selves once more. From three, they became a group of seven girls—an entire crowd of varying expressions—as they slowly ascended to the sky. Once they became mere specks in the middle of the vast blue canvas, all seven scattered like a blooming flower.

And then, the seven girls grew into seven *dragons*.

Many monsters on the ground, save for leaders like Gai and Chris, frothed and fainted. Even I just barely stopped myself from bending over.

“Wow…” I breathed out in wonder as I looked up at the breathtaking sight.

Seven dragons painted the broad sky with overwhelming majesty.

.205

I lay sprawled out over the bed as I expelled all my exhaustion in one heavy sigh. With my nerves unwound, I felt like my eyes would slip closed any moment now, taking my consciousness with it.

To help the three dragons, I had cast time magic spells one after another. Though I did recover my mana along the way, it was my first time consuming so much in such a short time. Evening just set in, but I was more than ready to hit the hay.

"You have my thanks."

"Hmm...?" I slowly blinked, dragging my slipping consciousness back to the surface. "What did you say?"

"I said you have my thanks."

My eyes widened as I sluggishly pushed my upper body from the bed.

"What? Why the face?"

"No, uh... I was a bit surprised, that's all." That she thanked me so straightforwardly—*twice*, even—was shocking, to say the least, not because I saw Lardon as ungrateful, but because she didn't strike me as the type to easily express her gratitude.

"I suppose this would count as a little bonus in our long and endless life."

"A bonus...?"

"We never would have opened the door to this new horizon if not for you," she explained, *"and eventually, we will be reborn and lose this power."*

My jaw dropped. "Wait, really?!"

"Indeed. Our rebirth is quite literally self-reincarnation. We return to our roots, our origins, and that includes both our flesh and minds. Though we carry over our memories, to us, that is no more than 'the memories of a past self'—a complicated little souvenir."

"Oh, wow..." I recalled her explaining this around the time she and Dyphon reunited too.

"Each life, we walk different paths and foster different personalities, hence the many different monikers we are known by. Dyphon has the

most—Blitztress and Hellblaze to name a couple," Lardon explained. *"And so, this power, too, is something unique to this life. That is why I called it no more than a small bonus."*

"I'd help you again if you're reborn, though."

Lardon chuckled. *"I suppose I appreciate it—the thought, that is."*

"Huh?"

"You will no longer be alive by the time we are reborn."

"Oh…" *That's right…* I was a human, and they were dragons. Of course I'd die first. "Right… I guess I wouldn't."

"Indeed. Live a good life and die a human," Lardon said, a pleasant lilt to her voice. *"In any case, we shall enjoy this power to its fullest in this life."*

"It's just too bad it won't stick with you…"

"Is it? I, for one, am satisfied. Also, I've come to a decision with them."

I cocked my head at the sudden change of topic. "Huh? What do you mean?"

"We have unanimously decided to express our gratitude for this unique experience. Should you wish for power, we will lend you our aid—all seven of us."

"Oh…" I couldn't follow her words. Between the conversation dragging out and my exhaustion piling up, she'd lost me somewhere in the middle. But basically, she was saying she'd help me if I was ever in trouble, wasn't she? "Mmkay… Thanks."

"What a bland response. Do you not fully understand? Well, I suppose you are fine as you are." Lardon chuckled. *"Should you come to desire the world, then simply say the word."*

"The…world…"

It's not like I ever wanted it, so whatever…

Overwhelmed by fatigue, I blacked out. It wasn't until I woke up the next day that I realized the magnitude of her offer, leaving me rightfully stunned by the powerful backing I'd just earned.

In the Duchy of Parta, Bruno sat in his mansion as he looked over a report, which he had just received from the spy he sent into the grand duke's domain. The secret letter, composed of merely one sentence, was much like the one he'd received when he learned of the assassination attempt.

However, as he looked through this letter, Bruno creased his

brows in confusion.

"'Dragon Slayer'...? What in the world..."

He stared at the letter long and hard, its mysterious contents leaving him unsure as to whether he should urgently pass this information to Liam.

.206

I opened my eyes, sat up on my bed…and frowned.

Something was nagging at me, but I couldn't tell what. I looked around—my room seemed unchanged. My senses were telling me that it wasn't simply because I was seeing the world in a different way now that I'd experienced near death.

"Ah, you're awake."

"Oh. Morning, Lardon."

"Hmph… It's morning no more, unfortunately."

"What?" My eyes snapped to the window.

Finally, I realized what was wrong: The morning sun was nowhere to be seen. The direction of sunlight changed depending on the time of day, and so the room's lighting would also change from morning to afternoon—*that* was the cause of my odd sense of discrepancy.

"It's already afternoon? I sure slept a lot, huh…"

"You exhausted your mana yesterday. If anything, it's impressive you woke up by afternoon."

"Well, I did use some bloodsouls to recover."

"Even so. You are always quite the man when it comes to magic."

It was a little embarrassing but also flattering to receive Lardon's praise.

With the conversation dying down, I pondered on yesterday's events as I sat in bed. I'd wrung so much mana out of me that I was too exhausted to even bother last night, but with my mind refreshed after a good night's rest, I tried to see what I could glean from the dragons summoning their past selves. However…

"Hmmm…"

"What are you thinking about?"

"Yesterday," I answered. "You summoned your past selves, didn't you? I was wondering if maybe I could do it too, but I just can't figure out how."

"Hmm… I already had an inkling of this, but yesterday's events have only proven my hunch correct: You cannot imitate what we did."

"What? Why not?"

“Because that was not magic.”

“Oh…” I understood what she was getting at. I could only think in terms of magic—I’d been this way ever since we met, and it was only proving more true in recent days. Thus, I decided to ask instead, “What is it, if not magic?”

It wasn’t magic, and I couldn’t understand or imitate it—that was fine—so what else could it be, then? *I guess it only looked and felt like magic but wasn’t actually?*

“I cannot say for certain, as it hasn’t been long since I gained this ability,” she began, *“but I believe it is simply innate to us dragons due to the cyclical nature of our lives.”*

“I see… So it’s unique to you.”

That added up. I also experienced the departure phase but never saw my past self—only the three dragons could. It stood to reason that it was just a dragon thing.

“Guess there’s no point in thinking about it, then.”

And here I was hoping to craft a necromantic magic spell out of it… It wasn’t looking too promising, though, so I tossed the idea aside.

A few hours later, deep into the afternoon, Bruno came to visit with a rather troubled expression. He said he had something to discuss, so I led him to a private parlor room and instructed the chief maid Reina not to let anyone else in. We settled down on the couch, face-to-face.

“What happened, Bruno?” I asked right away.

“Truth be told, I wasn’t sure whether I should tell you, Your Majesty, but I believe it would be best for you to decide for yourself.”

I frowned, feeling the weight of the matter. “What is it?”

Bruno brought out a folded letter. “I’ve received intel from within the grand duke’s mansion.”

I took the letter from him and read it—written there were no more than two words. “‘Dragon Slayer’… What is this?”

“I do not know.” He shook his head. “It has been heard around the grand duke recently—all while they are negotiating with you, Your Majesty. Considering your fateful connection with the divine dragons, I am hard-pressed to take it as a coincidence.”

“I see…”

Bruno made a very good point. This “Dragon Slayer” thing could be some antidragon weapon or countermeasure of some sort. *In that case…*

“Lardon, does this ring any bells?”

“None,” she answered promptly.

“None at all?”

“No. I tried asking my past self, but she gave the same answer.”

There was a hint of amusement in her tone, probably because she did, in fact, have a past self to ask now. I smirked, a little amused at the thought as well.

In any case, if she didn’t know about it, then it probably wasn’t a big deal. I turned my attention back to Bruno. “Thanks for this. It shouldn’t be a problem, but could you keep an eye out, just to be safe?”

“Of course.” Bruno bowed, looking significantly more relaxed than before. Although he couldn’t hear Lardon’s side of the conversation, he must’ve also realized from my demeanor that it was no big deal. With that, he stood from his seat, took another bow, and excused himself from the room.

Not long after, Reina came in and told me Scarlet wanted to talk, so I nodded and told her to let her in. Scarlet took the seat where Bruno was just moments ago.

“I come with a report, Master,” she began. “Parta has agreed to offer their necromantic magic.”

My mood did an instant one-eighty at the news. I propped my hands on the table between us and eagerly leaned forward. “Really?!”

Scarlet smiled pleasantly. “Yes. The duchy sent an urgent message to Martin, giving their approval.”

“I see… Still, I’m surprised they accepted. Did you do something?”

“Just the bare minimum. It is all thanks to you, Master.”

“Me…?”

“Yes. The delegation witnessed you helping the divine dragons summon their past lives. Seven dragons in the sky… It was quite the spectacle.”

“Oh…” I nodded.

“They were in a rush to get in contact with Parta, so I assigned some wolfmen to safely transport their letter at the earliest.”

“Oh, did you? Nice work as always, Scarlet.”

She did all that so that they’d get the message as soon as possible. I never would’ve thought of that, so I appreciated Scarlet’s effort all the more.

“It is my honor,” she replied. “In any case, that is how we received a swift response. They’ve yet to decide on the details, but the offer itself is quite certain. The delegation will bring it here directly, as I’m sure you are very eager to see it.”

“Thank you, Scarlet! This is great!” I took Scarlet’s hand and shook it up and down.

With a new kind of magic nearly within my grasp, I couldn’t help the excitement bubbling within me. I was as thrilled as when I got my first toy as a child.

Dyphon stood atop a rocky mountain on the city outskirts.

She had her own house in the city, but she didn’t quite feel at home there. Unless she was hanging around Liam, she often found herself here instead. This mountain was her abode, a place familiar to her now, but today, something was different. Two beautiful women—her past selves whom she’d summoned—were accompanying her.

“I still can’t believe we’re able to meet like this,” the oldest mused.

“Well, it’s been theoretically possible, so I’m not too shocked,” said the young woman. “I guess it *is* a bit of a surprise, though.”

“You should be more shocked! And grateful to my darling!” the current Dyphon exclaimed.

“You’re certainly smitten with that boy. Are you hoping to birth his offspring?” asked the oldest.

“Of course!”

The young woman huffed. “You’ve already found a mate so soon after being reborn. Seems we’re pretty lucky in this life.”

Dyphon snickered. “Jealous?”

“Oh, just a bit.”

All three versions of Dyphon chuckled, enjoying their lighthearted conversation.

The eldest shook her head. “I’m somewhat irked that we died once more than Lardon, but at least we’ve gotten the upper hand against her in terms of numbers. I suppose we should thank him

for that."

"I don't mind thanking the boy," said the young woman, "but I still can't forgive *that*."

The oldest narrowed her eyes. "You're referring to the cause of your death?"

A dark cloud suddenly hung over them.

"Yeah. That thing..." The young woman growled, and the pleasant smiles fell from the faces of the other two. Their anger was palpable in the air. "Dragon Slayer... I swear, the next time I run into that..."

The mountain—no, the earth itself seemed to tremble under the immense hostility boiling from Dyphon's very being.

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I stepped into our usual meeting room in the palace, furnished with a round table in the middle. Scarlet and Reina readily welcomed me—they were, after all, the ones who called me here.

I settled down on my usual seat—the chief seat, located farthest from the door. Neither of the girls moved, and after a moment, it came to me to give them a nod. With that implicit permission, they finally took their seats as well.

“So, what did you want to talk about?” I asked.

Scarlet spoke up first. “There is a matter we wish to discuss with you.”

“With me?”

“Yes. Of Reina’s initiative,” she said as she turned to the elf.

I followed her gaze to Reina, who stood and bowed before sitting down again. “I wish to speak regarding your negotiations with the Duchy of Parta.”

“Negotiations… About necromantic magic? Is there a problem?”

“No, not exactly. I’m simply concerned that one-sidedly demanding an offering from them could leave room for problems in the future.”

I cocked my head. “What do you mean?”

“Recently, I have been entrusted with more business matters with your older brother.”

Reina was one of my top executives alongside Gai and Chris, and in contrast to them, she was less of a fighter and more of a thinker. She was prudent and clever, so I often assigned the brainier tasks to her—for example, taking charge of our dealings with humans. Naturally, in the course of her work, she’d gotten more involved with Bruno, who was my middleman for such matters.

I nodded. “And? What about it?”

“Ah, there are no issues with my work itself. Everything is proceeding smoothly,” she said. “However, I’ve heard much from humans through my work. One of those is how they discipline their pets.”

“Their…pets?”

“Apparently, it is important to establish a proper hierarchy with them, and at the same time to give them proper love and care.”

“Hmm…” *I suppose that makes sense, but…* “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Well, I believe Parta has already been made very aware of your power. If we press them for an offering on top of that, I fear we might sow seeds for future hostility.”

“You think so…?”

Reina nodded. “Yes. Therefore, I believe we can exchange gifts with them now to make them indebted to us.”

“That way, they will not bite the hand that feeds them,” Scarlet finished.

All right, I get the idea. They explained it well, and it was clear what needed to be done. Still, given how important this was, I decided to ask Lardon for her thoughts. “What do you think, Lardon?”

Scarlet and Reina knew that I often sought Lardon’s advice, so my question didn’t take them aback—they just quietly waited.

After a short pause, Lardon answered, *“It is unsuitable for building a true relationship of trust, but it would be your best bet if you wish to safely acquire necromantic magic. Although it will only help your current goal, it should enable you to get what you need.”*

“I see…” I nodded in agreement. With that decided, I turned back to Scarlet and Reina. “Then we’ll go with that.”

Reina bowed. “Understood.”

“In that case, we will need to decide what to offer from our end,” Scarlet said.

“Would a few manastones suffice, Master?”

“Sure, that sounds good. How about we add in a few good wines? I can make ’em in a jiffy with my dust box.”

“Very well.”

I hummed. “But is that really enough?”

Scarlet and Reina exchanged questioning looks.

“Er, it would depend on how much we wish to indebt them…”

“I suppose another gift would give us more than enough leeway during negotiations.”

“All right. What do you suggest?” I asked.

“How about something rare?”

“Manastones are precious, but they are not so rare in our country…”

“Hmm…” *A rare item, huh? That’s a tough one…*

We didn’t have a lot of those in our country. Most of our products were made with my magic, and I always made sure my magic could be replicated and the products reproducible in order to better the lives of my familiars. No matter how precious the product, we could always just make more.

A prime example would be the wine I mentioned earlier. Dust Box was a spell I made based on Item Box, wherein time passed exceedingly quickly for whatever was placed inside, making it rot faster. That same reason was also why storing processed alcohol inside would make it mature faster, allowing me to make a hundred-year-old wine in just a week.

Basically, I’d made tons of stuff, but none were one of a kind.

“Try changing your perspective.”

I blinked. “In what way?”

“Inventing something with magic is nothing new to you, is it? Surely you could do it again.”

“Well, sure I can, but then—”

“Then, never make it again henceforth. That would make it ‘one of a kind,’ no?”

“Uh… Huh? Oh!” *She’s right!* I snapped my fingers. That was a complete blind spot—I never thought of it that way.

“Well? Can you do it?”

“I’ll give it a try.”

“Very well. A word of advice, then: I would suggest making something visually appealing with very little practical use.”

“All right.” I folded my arms and nodded, grateful for the advice. Having something to work with was worlds better than just being told “anything’s fine.” It was the same with asking what to make for dinner—suggestions weren’t restrictions; they helped give a direction to work toward.

I fell so deep into thought that I blocked out all noise around me. After god-knows-how-long, my thoughts fell into place, and I finally looked up to find Scarlet and Reina silently watching me, waiting.

“I need a bit more time,” I told them. “Lardon, could you lend me a hand? There’s something I wanna try.”

“Very well. What shall I do?”

“Could you take your human form? I’d like your past self out too—that should help me visualize.”

Lardon hummed, and a second later, two girls emerged from my body with a flash of light. One was a familiar young girl, the other a beautiful woman. Scarlet flinched at their sudden appearance, but I cast her a look telling her it was fine.

“Thanks,” I told the older Lardon.

“It’s impressive that you thought to use me. I like your guts.”

“All right… Absolute Magic Shield, forty-sevenfold!” I formed an image in my mind and made layers of magic barriers in front of me. “Phew…”

“What are those for?”

“Lardon, I want you to attack this with something purely mana. A magic missile should do.”

“Very well.” Lardon nodded. For something so simple, she didn’t need to return to her dragon form. Holding her hand up, she unleashed her mana toward my magic barriers, shattering layer after layer. It seemed she put in quite a bit of force since there were forty-seven of them.

“Ugh… Forty-sevenfold!” I added another batch right when the first one was running low.



By now, I had prepared nearly a hundred barriers—it wasn't light on my mana, that was for sure. Once all the barriers were shattered, all that was left was a sky blue orb.

"What is this?" Lardon asked.

"High-density mana lingers in a tangible form, kind of like a manastone," I explained. "When all seven of you were gathered, I noticed that each of you had a slightly different quality to your mana—so the color of the residue would be different too." I pointed at the orb. "Lardon—er, the older one—could you do the same thing?"

"Very well."

I once again made forty-seven layers of magic barriers, and the past Lardon also threw her mana against it. Dizziness assaulted me when I added another batch of forty-seven, as if I stood from my seat too fast. Finally, once all the barriers were cleared, a purplish orb remained.

I took it and cracked it open, revealing a beautiful surface inside. "If I ask all seven of you to do this, then I can make a one-of-a-kind gem."

"Oh...!" Reina and Scarlet marveled, their eyes sparkling.

The older Lardon was also impressed. "So you could tell from a mere glance that the wavelength of our powers differed, hm?"

"Hmph... That is the kind of man he is," said the current Lardon, her head held high and proud.

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Inside my room, I set an orb on the table and mustered my magic. A sharp wind blade split the spherical object into two, and both pieces fell to the side and rocked over the surface. I picked them up and examined them closely—the inside was layered, colorful, and stunning.

This was one of the orbs I made with the dragons' help. After the two Lardons' assistance, I got the three Dyphons and two Paithons to pitch in as well. The gem didn't have a name yet, but I could leave that to Scarlet—I wasn't very creative with names, after all.

"This looks good."

Nodding to myself, I cradled both halves in my palms, pressed them together, and cast Power Missile and Absolute Magic Shield, essentially pulverizing the orb within a solid container.

"That will do," Lardon chimed in. *"Your gift will have much more worth if it is one of a kind."*

"Right. All I have to do is never make it again."

I opened my palms, scattering colorful sandy bits over the floor. I could make it disappear completely, but I saw no reason to go that far—it was no more than ordinary colorful sand now.

"With this, you now have your goods," Lardon mused.

"Hmm…"

"What's the matter? Is something bothering you?"

"Well… I was wondering if it's worth preparing another gift or two. Imagine we give them this, then suddenly whip out another gift—wouldn't they be extra happy in that case?" I paused, waiting for a response, but got none. I felt panic flare within me. "H-Huh? Did I say something strange?"

"No…" Lardon chuckled. *"If anything, I'm impressed."*

"What?"

"That would be effective, yes. Although I certainly wasn't expecting such an idea from you*, what with your head devoid of anything but magic."*

"Oh…" I placed a hand on my chest and breathed a sigh of

relief.

“It appears I’ve been underestimating you.”

“No, well… The idea came to me while watching you guys,” I admitted. “I mean, I’ve only ever heard of three legendary dragons all my life, and then—out of nowhere!—I find out there are actually seven of you. If I’d known that from the start, I wouldn’t have been shocked at all.”

Lardon chuckled. *“I could say the same about you.”*

“What? Me?”

“You don’t understand? Then forget it.”

“Uh, okay…” *How does that apply to me in any way?* But Lardon told me to forget it, so I did.

“Let us return to the topic at hand. Your idea is not bad at all.”

“Really?”

“Of course, you may be giving them too much confidence through the gesture, but for now, our priority is to secure necromantic magic. There should be no issue with taking the extra step.”

I nodded. I got Lardon’s approval—all that was left was to figure out what else to give.

A few days later, I called Bruno over to the palace. We met in a parlor room and sat face-to-face, just the two of us, as usual.

“Thanks for coming all the way here,” I told him.

“Not at all. I will always respond to your summons.” Bruno bowed then looked me in the eye. “May I ask what you need of me?”

“You see, I’m thinking of giving Parta another gift,” I said, explaining my conversation with Lardon a few days ago.

Bruno listened intently and nodded. “Impressive, Your Majesty. I believe Parta will most certainly offer you the magic in exchange for this.”

“Yep. By the way, I’m curious—how’s the grand duke’s wife doing?” Last I’d heard from Bruno was that she got hurt after protecting her husband from an assassination attempt. “Maybe I could give her something?”

Bruno hummed. “I’m afraid I have no further details on the matter, as there was a strict gag order after the incident. However…” He frowned. “Ostensibly, she is said to be ill.”

“She’s ill, huh?”

“Yes, though I’m quite confident it’s no more than a cover.”

“So I *shouldn’t* give her anything?”

“Not necessarily.” Bruno shook his head. “Officially, she is ill, so there is no problem whatsoever with sending a formal get-well gift. They couldn’t possibly turn it down, given that they themselves made the statement.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Medicine would do, but as the illness is unknown, you may also consider something just generally good for health,” he suggested. “If you wish, Your Majesty, you may leave this matter to me. It should be fairly easy to find a high-quality edible bird’s nest at this time of year.”

“Would that make a good gift?”

“Yes. They are good as medicine and as a women’s beauty product, so you can even choose which would serve as your rationale behind the gift.”

“All right. That sounds—”

“How about a dragon’s nest?” Lardon suddenly suggested.

“A dragon’s nest?” I blinked. *Did she bring that up because we were talking about edible bird’s nests?*

Today was my first time hearing about edible bird’s nests, so needless to say, I had no clue what a dragon’s nest was. Bruno, on the other hand, seemed to know—his eyes were blown wide in shock.

“A dragon’s nest! O-Of course! If you can procure one…then Parta will undoubtedly be in your debt.”

I turned to him and raised a brow. “Really…?”

That’s quite the reaction… Just what in the world is a dragon’s nest?

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I was soaring through the sky high above the clouds, guided solely by Lardon's directions.

"From my knowledge," she explained, *"when humans refer to a dragon's nest, it could be one of two very different things. The first is treasure, a trove borne from their tributes since ancient times."*

"Oh..." I nodded.

I knew about that already, and before I became Liam, I would've been one of those people looking up at the dragons as symbols of fear and worship. If they appeared near a small town or village, the inhabitants would naturally feel the need to offer tributes to ensure their safety.

"Some would even offer young women as sacrifices, but I would usually just send them back. What use would I have for them? Most of the time, they offered gold and wealth, for which I also had no use, but I accepted anyway so they would finally leave me alone."

I chuckled. "Right. You're not exactly greedy for money."

As I got to know the dragons, I realized that they genuinely didn't care for material wealth. To them, gold was not much different from weeds along the side of the road.

"Alas, they were convinced that their offerings pleased me, so they came by every now and then to offer more. Each time, I would, hmm...shove them into a corner, and before I knew it, the pile had grown quite a bit."

Lardon spoke like a lazy bachelor who tossed her dirty laundry and trash aside in her room, leaving them to stew until the last moment. Her analogy was amusingly human, and just imagining the scene drew a laugh out of me.

"In any case," she continued, *"the pile that was meaningless to me would amass into what humans call a treasure trove of wealth, far more valuable than any royal tomb... That is one kind of dragon's nest."*

"I see. Sounds like just the kind of place treasure hunters would love."

"Indeed. The treasure was of no use to me, so I gladly let them take

it so long as they didn't bother me. Unfortunately, most of them caused a ruckus, so…" Lardon trailed off and chuckled ominously.

I let out a nervous laugh, sensing what she was hinting at. I'd heard of what often happened to grave robbers and treasure hunters, and if they were facing Lardon, well… I guess they could consider themselves lucky if they died a quick and painless death.

"So, what's the other kind?" I asked.

"Hmm… That would be our destination for today."

I nodded, unsurprised. Our goal was to prepare a gift for the duchy, after all, and I didn't need a dragon's nest to gather wealth and riches; I had plenty of my own. Lardon could only be leading me toward this second kind of dragon's nest.

"When we seclude ourselves in our nest, various things…'seep' in."

"Seep in…?"

"Indeed. It's a little difficult to explain. Life force, mana, scent, breath… Our 'essence' seeps into the nest." Lardon hummed. *"I've heard that human rooms often come to smell like their owners—perhaps it's something similar."*

"Ah… I know what you mean."

"Good. In any case, that essence then materializes. Just as bird's nests are made of solidified saliva and dried leaves, our nests tend to contain the materialization of our essence."

"I see now… Does it have some amazing effect like bird's nests?"

"Not as far as I am aware, no," Lardon said with amusement. *"It is just highly combustible and works well as perfume."*

"Huh? Then why…?"

"Because humans assume it to be something great, simply for materializing within a dragon's nest."

"Oh…" That sounded about right.

"Incidentally," Lardon added, *"our scales, when freshly plucked, are rather effective at promoting growth."*

"Oh, wow. Really?"

"Indeed. If you crush one and feed it to a toddler, they grow into an adult within the next hour, then proceed to die of old age."

"That's *too* effective!" I blurted out. It had an effect but no practical use… *No, wait—I guess it could work as poison?*

"There it is," Lardon said as our destination finally came into view.

"Hm? It's…in a mountain?"

“The caldera, to be precise.”

“That’s where lava spews out from a volcano, right? Why’d you choose that place?”

“Back then, I was quite fond of bathing in lava.”

“What…? In *lava*?” I blinked. “Uh… Was it relaxing?”

“Very much so, though I’ve grown tired of it now.”

“O-Oh…” *Bathing in lava… So she basically dips her entire body into it?* I didn’t even know what to say. I found it hard to imagine for a second, but when I thought of Lardon in her original dragon form, I supposed it wasn’t that outlandish.

I stopped dwelling on the fact once we landed on the caldera. A thin veil of smoke blanketed the valley-like terrain, the space wide enough to fit around a thousand people.

“Is this the right spot?”

“Yes.”

“All right. So, uh… What exactly am I looking for?”

“Hmm… If I recall correctly…”

Suddenly, my eyes caught movement all around us—several figures were seeping out of the earth and gradually taking shape.

“What?! Those are…!”

Lardon Juniors. Their rising figures were a little see-through, but there was no mistaking it.

“You left some of your kids here…?”

“No, those are not my offspring. Those are…” Lardon hummed thoughtfully. *“An imprint remains in your vision after you stare straight at the sun, yes?”*

“Huh? Oh, I guess so…”

“That is something similar. My power left an imprint on this space because I spent so long here.”

“Um… So, simply put…?”

“You may think of it as my excretion.”

“You’re calling that thing your *poop*?!”



The transparent Lardon Juniors were now up and about. I felt kind of bad for the little guys, what with Lardon treating them like waste.

"Whoa!" I kicked the ground and leaped away—one of the fake juniors had come charging right at me, crashing into the now empty ground and *exploding*. "Wh-What in the world?!"

"Do not let your guard down. Imprints or not, they are still made of my power."

"Hah… I see." My expression was strained. I certainly couldn't afford to take it easy if I was facing off against Lardon's power. "I can take them down, right?"

"I apologize for making you clean up after me," Lardon said jokingly.

Wow, she's really doubling down on that poop analogy… I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and decided on my course of action. *I have to rearrange Power Missile for this situation!*

"*Amelia Emilia Claudia*… Power Laser, sixty-onefold!"

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What I unleashed was a clump of pure mana—much like Power Missile and Magic Missile—but with extra consideration to avoid excessive damage to my surroundings. After all, I didn't have my hands on a dragon's nest just yet.

Fine threadlike streams of mana rained down on the Lardon Juniors, piercing through their bodies and dissipating before hitting anything on the other side—I'd only endowed them with enough power to pierce through their targets. As a result, all the Lardon Juniors were punctured like pincushions, while the surrounding terrain remained completely untouched.

Lardon chuckled. *"A splendid arrangement."*

"It was easy to judge how much power I needed to put in since those guys were just pure lumps of energy."

"Your mana is growing well."

"I'd say it was thanks to the aria." I scratched my cheek. "Gotta say, though, an aria sure does bump up my mana a lot…"

Arias made spells stronger. When I first learned about them, I had estimated that an aria bumped my power up around one step up. But recently, they'd been boosting me around two, sometimes even *three* steps up. It was a welcome boost, of course, but I couldn't help but wonder why it was.

All of a sudden, the ground began to shake.

"Whoa!"

I lost my balance and just barely planted my feet back on the ground, when I realized the situation was shifting drastically—the fake Lardon Juniors were writhing over the ground and gathering together. Their combined weight was the cause for the sudden shaking.

"What are they doing…?"

Lardon scoffed. *"A vain struggle."*

I cocked my head, but soon, I understood what she meant. After piling atop one another, the juniors melted and merged into one, reshaping themselves like clay. The outcome was, not too shockingly, a large dragon that looked just like Lardon. The only

difference was that this one was also see-through and didn't feel alive at all.

Vain indeed, I thought as I kicked off the ground without hesitation. There was no way this huge thing had any intelligence—I couldn't even tell if it was conscious.

Sure enough, it was just as sluggish as it looked—I easily closed in on it. With a huff, I pressed my palm against its chest, drew my mana toward that point, and cast flight magic, sending it flying upward.

"Now..." I narrowed my eyes and raised my hand to the sky. "*Disappear*."

An enormous power missile, filled with as much mana as I could muster, roared through the air and swallowed the fake Lardon, erasing the large dragon without a trace a moment later. My attack had completely taken it down—I could feel it.

I lowered my hand and let out a scoff. I'd obliterated the thing in one hit, but I was far from refreshed. Lardon would never get done in so lousily, so I couldn't stand seeing that weak thing take her form. Now that it was gone, however, I felt a little better.

"All right." I turned and looked around the caldera that was now free of transparent little dragons, but come to think of it, Lardon never got to explain to me what exactly I needed to be on the lookout for. "Um... What does a dragon's nest look like?"

With a hum, Lardon emerged from my body and manifested into her usual human form—cute, but with an air of dignity and age about her. She propped her hand on her hip and looked around.

"I believe I spent most of my time...over here," she said as she moved to an unassuming spot on the ground and began tapping on it with her foot.

"So...should I dig there?"

"Indeed. As carefully as you can, like you're simply pushing the dirt aside."

"In that case... Gnome!" I summoned an earth spirit, and out came a cute mascot-like figure. "Could you dig straight down here? Make sure to move only the soil and rocks."

The spirit bobbed its head. Despite its adorable appearance, its command of the earth was precise and masterful. It lifted the soil and rocks from the ground, finishing its task and turning to me in

no time at all.

I poked my head inside the hole and found a stone—black like obsidian, and just as big as my palm. When I jumped inside and picked it up, I was surprised to find that it was as warm as human skin despite having been buried underground this whole time.

I craned my neck and saw Lardon peeking into the pit. “Is this it?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Great.” I jumped out and landed back by her side. “So this is a dragon’s nest, huh? Wow…”

I turned the stone over in my hand. The warmth emanating from it was unusual, but I still found it a little hard to believe that this could be considered such a precious gift. Still, the world was full of mysteries, and I’d be hard-pressed to understand them all. Since this was Lardon’s suggestion, all I had to do now was take this out and bring it home.

“Why not skim the scum as well?” Lardon suggested.

“Hm…? Isn’t that something you do when cooking?”

“Indeed. Humans used that analogy long ago, and I quite liked it,” she mused. “There are impurities in that stone. It will have more value if you filter them out first.”

“All right, I get it. What exactly am I filtering out?”

“You just saw them.” Lardon’s youthful features twisted into a teasing smirk.

“Oh… Oh, *those* things?” She was referring to those fakes.

“Correct. Those were impurities of this stone. Over time, they leak out, condensing and taking form, leaving a stone that is ‘well fermented’ and holds more value. Or so I’ve heard,” she added, chuckling.

“That’s another interesting analogy,” I mused.

“Indeed. I held my stomach laughing the first time I heard it. It’s not every day I hear something related to me being described like a mere cooking residue.”

I chuckled as well as I examined the stone in my hand. “All right. Then let’s get right to filtering, shall we?”

“Very well. Then you must figure out how to—”

“No need. I already know.”

“—do it… Hm?”

“Watch.”

I held my other hand over the stone, just close enough to nearly touch it. Then, I closed my eyes, sharpened my senses...and *pulled*!

My eyes snapped open. The impurities began seeping out of the stone and gathering in the air, all of which I eradicated with a power missile before they became a problem.

“Good.”

The stone was now jet black, as if any and all color had been sucked right out of it. Perhaps the very first human who discovered the concept of darkness had been staring into something exactly like this.

“Have you...” Lardon mumbled, drawing my gaze away from the lump of darkness in my hand. “Have you done that before?”

“Nope. But I’ve experienced it before, so...”

“What...?”

“You helped guide me to the departure phase, remember? I figured they followed the same logic.”

Lardon blinked and, after a pause, burst into laughter. “Ha ha ha! I would expect no less from you!” she exclaimed, voice mirthful and pleased.

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After returning from the caldera, my first order of business was to hand over the dragon's nest to Scarlet, so I headed straight to her mansion. She met me in the living room, where I set the stone down on the table between us—it was like a manifestation of darkness, as if a hole had opened up in space itself.

"So *this* is a dragon's nest…" Scarlet slowly reached out, eyes wide in wonder, but her fingers had merely grazed the stone's surface when she suddenly flinched and drew back.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"W-Well, it just looks so strange…"

I chuckled. "I get it. Kinda scary, isn't it?"

"I-Indeed…"

"But it's safe—I guarantee it. I never would've brought it to you if it was dangerous."

"Oh, thank you…" Overcome with emotion, Scarlet lowered her head. She then looked back up with a determined nod. "I shall bring this to the negotiations right away."

"Thanks, Scarlet."

"Of course, Master." Scarlet paused for a moment. "Ah, may I ask you something?"

"Hm? What is it?" I cocked my head. *There shouldn't be any more issues…*

Scarlet looked me right in the eye. "I am thoroughly impressed that you managed to acquire a dragon's nest, but I cannot help but wonder: Was there truly a need to prepare this?"

"Oh…" I nodded. She had every right to think that. As the one in charge of the negotiations, she probably felt this was a bit excessive. "Well, I guess I'm just grateful."

"Grateful…?"

"Because they're going to give me new magic."

"But that—" Scarlet cut herself off and pursed her lips.

What's with her?

"She must be reluctant to negate your opinion," Lardon supplied.

Ah. Yeah, that sounds like Scarlet, all right.

In the meantime, Scarlet had managed to smooth over her expression. “Splendid, Master. I’m certain Parta will bow before your benevolence and respond positively to our discussion.”

“Bow? That’s a bit much…”

“I shall do my utmost to bring you good news.”

My acquisition of necromantic magic was banking on this, so I looked her in the eye with a steely gaze and nodded firmly. “Please.”

Her response was a simple bow, confident and reassuring as ever.

With this, I had crossed off everything on my to-do list. All that was left was for me to return to the palace, kick back, and wait for the good news. I was a little pooped from preparing all those gifts, so I figured I’d take it easy by practicing some magic.

But when I got back to my room, I was met by an ambush—a peppy girl instantly tackled me by the waist.

“Darling!” she cried out.

“Whoa!” Since the bed was already right behind me, I let myself fall backward and sink right into the sheets.

Dyphon giggled. “Are you here to take a break? I’ll rest with you!”

“I was going to practice my magic, actually…”

“That works too!” She tightened her embrace and nuzzled against me.

Come to think of it, Dyphon actually helped me a lot this time around. I hadn’t stopped to think about it because I’d been so busy lately.

“Dyphon…”

She looked up and batted her eyelashes. “Yes, darling?”

I smiled. “Thank you.”

Dyphon blinked owlishly before she wrapped me into an even tighter hug, clearly overcome with emotion. “Darling! Oh, darling! I love you!”

Lardon then emerged from within me and took a seat on the couch near the bed. “Good grief…”

I stared at her for a while, a little startled by her sudden appearance, until I realized—it was almost nighttime, which was about when I used Oversoul to allow Dyphon to dwell within me.

Considering they weren't on the best terms, Lardon must have preemptively evacuated. I kept my mouth shut; it wasn't my place to say this or that about their relationship, especially since all their years couldn't fix it. I decided to put it out of my mind for the time being.

"Come to think of it…" I looked down at Dyphon. "Do *you* have a nest?"

"Oh…" She visibly wilted. "I'm sorry, darling. I don't think I can help you on that front…"

That must have meant she didn't have one, which was fine. My curiosity instead fostered another question: "Why not?"

"You see, my past self never stayed in one place for too long, so…"

"Ah, I see. Simple enough." I chuckled.

A dragon's nest formed when their essence seeped into a place over time. Obviously, it would never happen if they didn't stay put for long enough.

So Dyphon's the type who can't sit still… That perfectly fit my image of her, although I felt a bit bad for thinking this given how glum she looked right now. "I guess Paithon would have one since she's always snoozing away…"

"She does not," Lardon said.

"Huh? Why not?"

"She certainly stays in one place. Sometimes, she even sleeps for years."

I nodded. That was why I figured she'd have a dragon's nest—of course, not the piles-of-sparkling-treasure kind.

"But too many creatures die around her, and the impurities impede the nest's formation," Lardon explained. "Imagine adding in too much water when kneading flour… Yes, that should suffice."

"Oh…" I easily imagined a pile of wet and soggy flour unable to hold shape.

As always, Lardon had a knack for breaking things down. It wasn't a perfect analogy—she said as much in the end—but she still made it easier for me to understand. *Seriously, nobody can beat her when it comes to explaining and teaching things…*

"Say, darling…" Dyphon crooned. "Are you done with the work you've been busy with recently?"

"Oh, yeah. It's…" I paused in consideration, then nodded. "It's

mostly done. Our goal has always been to just stop Parta from messing with us. We want to get along with our neighbors, after all. And it looks like we'll be able to make peace with them pretty soon."

Scarlet seemed rather determined to nab necromantic magic for me too, and I'd been letting her be since it wouldn't get in the way of our primary goal anyway. *Well, there's also the fact that I really,* really *want it…* Anyway, it'd be great if things finally calmed down after this.

"In that case…" Dyphon smiled. "Once it's all finished, how about we…make a baby?"

"A baby, huh…" Given how often she brought up this topic, it hardly got a reaction out of me anymore—besides an awkward smile, usually. That being said, she'd been a *huge* help, and her fondness for me was endearing. After giving it some thought, I finally nodded. "All right. Let's do that."

"Really?!"

"Yeah, sure."

Dyphon gawked for a moment before throwing herself on top of me. "Thank you, darling!"

"Aha ha…"

She clung to me for a while, giggling and nuzzling against me, before whipping her head around to look at Lardon.

Lardon met her gaze and raised a brow. "What?"

Dyphon's lips twisted into a smug smirk. "Did you hear that? Darling's making a baby with me once he's done with his work."

The other dragon narrowed her eyes. "So?"

"Darling," she stressed, "is making a baby with me once he's done with his work."

Finally, Lardon frowned. Her mood was clearly soured.

Uh, I don't mind making a baby, but I'd rather you guys not fight over it…

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“Oh!” Dyphon suddenly looked up at me. “Darling, how strong are you?”

“What?” I blinked, taken aback by the sudden question.

“I just realized I’ve never seen you fight for real! I know you’re super strong for a human, but how strong exactly?”

“Hmm… How strong…” I gave her question a bit of thought, but frankly, I had no clue. I had never tried to gauge my abilities against others.

Lardon scoffed. “A pointless question.”

Dyphon instantly shot Lardon a glare. “I wasn’t asking *you*, thank you very much. And what do you even mean by ‘pointless’?”

“Exactly that. It is meaningless to ask him such a question. This man”—Lardon looked up with a smirk, contrasting Dyphon’s deepening scowl—“has no interest in power.”

Dyphon rolled her eyes. “Oh, cut the crap. How did he become so strong, then?”

“Hah… You see, he is only interested in studying magic. He sees no meaning in fighting, and so has neither the need nor motivation to gauge his strength.”

Dyphon looked between Lardon and me, her eyes narrowed incredulously. Then, her expression instantly relaxed into a carefree smile. “So his strength is *immeasurable*!” she concluded.

That’s a pretty huge leap in logic…

“Indeed it is,” Lardon said.

Why are you agreeing?!

“Darling!” Dyphon threw herself on me and looked up with puppy dog eyes. “Show me your full strength someday. Pretty please?”

“Uh… All right. I will.” I had no idea where this was going, but I just nodded for now. I could only hope she’d be satisfied with a magic spell or something…

Suddenly, the door opened with a *clack*, and in came Paithon hugging her pillow. Her half-lidded gaze lazily scoured the room before landing on me. “Found youuu…” she drawled as she

tottered over.

“What’s…up?”

Before I even finished my question, Paithon flopped beside me over the bed and began snoozing away. She was curled over her favorite pillow with a serene and angelic expression.

Dyphon stuck her lip out. “Ugh, shameless brat…”

“Now, now, let her be. It’s not the first time she’s come here to sleep.”

“That’s not it.” Dyphon huffed. “She can sleep without a worry all thanks to you, but she doesn’t even say anything before dozing off! No ‘good night,’ no nothing!”

“Oh, now that you mention it…” I recalled the past few seconds. Paithon came in, shambled to the bed, and flopped straight into dreamland without much in the way of conversation. Dyphon *was* right, but I still chuckled. “Well, it’s not really a big deal.”

My gaze fell on Paithon, and I briefly studied her face. Somehow, she looked more content than when we first met. After seeing that, how could I get hung up over a single greeting?

“Hmph!” Dyphon puffed up her cheeks and begrudgingly dropped the case. However, she soon spun her head to glare at Lardon, who was stifling her laughter. “What?”

“It’s amusing,” Lardon answered. “A while back, we all gathered at his request to overwhelm some humans, no?”

Ah, she’s talking about the time we welcomed the delegation.

Dyphon raised a brow. “And? What about it?”

“My past self is saying that such a sight was still within the realm of possibility, but this scene right now? It would have been unthinkable in the past.”

Dyphon blinked, her petulant expression slackening into shock. In the past, the three dragons made the world tremble beneath their transcendent power. Now, here in this room, they were just leisurely lounging around in their human forms.

“What do your past selves have to say about it?” Lardon asked.

Dyphon knit her brows. “This is why I hate you…” she mumbled instead of an answer.

The dragons’ pasts were rampant with bloodshed and battle. I had no idea what could’ve led up to such a catastrophic war, but I knew for sure that I preferred seeing them at peace the way they were now.

I was considering taking a photograph and saving it in the Liamnet, until a knock on the door interrupted my thoughts.

Scarlet came in and bowed. “My apologies for disturbing your rest, Master.”

“No worries. What’s up?”

“I came right away, as I’m sure you wish to see it as soon as possible.”

Raising a brow, I watched curiously as Scarlet turned to the door and waved her hand. Two elven maids pushed a trolley into the room—and something was on top of it.

I gasped and leaped out of bed. “Wait, is that…?!”

Scarlet nodded. “The Duchy of Parta has sent us Ancient Memoria containing the spells Living Dead, Cursed Oath, and Raging Spirit.”

“Ohhh!”

I wasted no time getting to the trolley and snatching the box away. Inside was a pendant—it reminded me of the ring I received from my teacher—and in my excitement, I immediately grabbed it.

Out of nowhere, light flashed from the box, blinding me for a second before dispersing like fireworks.

I blinked. “What was that…?”

“I haven’t the faintest clue…” Scarlet mumbled. She and the maids looked perfectly fine.

Was it just a flash of light? was what I thought for a second, but I was soon proven wrong—I heard a dull *thud* behind me. My eyes snapped toward the sound, only to find that Lardon had fallen from the couch.

“Lardon?!” I rushed over and cradled her small body in my arms. “Lardon! What happened?!”

But the girl was completely unconscious. Beads of sweat dotted her temple, and ragged breaths rasped from her throat. It was like she’d gotten horribly sick out of nowhere.

“This…again…”

My head snapped to the feeble voice. “Dyphon?!”

Dyphon trembled on the bed, her breathing just as labored as the girl in my arms, before she lost consciousness and slumped over.

“Wh-What in the world…?”

Lardon, Dyphon, and even Paithon had collapsed in agony.

Things had taken a very sudden turn for the worse.



I looked up in horror. A hooded skeleton had appeared above each of them, looming mutely as they each revealed a large hourglass. They flipped over, and sand ominously trickled down, as if counting down to *something*.

That moment, it all clicked in my head.

“Dragon Slayer…”

A shudder ran down my spine. Things were *not* looking good.

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All three dragons had collapsed at once, their faces pale as a sheet, each breath a struggle.

Scarlet was horrified at the sight—as one would expect, given her deep adoration for the dragons. “Th-The divine dragons—”

“Don’t touch them!”

Scarlet flinched and withdrew her hand. “M-Master?”

“Don’t touch the hourglasses. We don’t know what they might do,” I warned.

“Oh… U-Understood.”

I got closer to the three girls and stared at the hourglasses. The trickling sand made itself known, the sound silky and hushed yet forebodingly loud in our ears.

“Our only saving grace is that it won’t kill them right away…”

Scarlet’s eyes widened. “Are you certain?”

“Yes. Otherwise, there would be no point in these hourglasses.”

“I-I see. You make a good point…”

“That said, it’s possible their condition will worsen as time goes on…”

Scarlet gulped, her devotion to the divine dragons fueling her fear.

I, on the other hand, simply observed each of their hourglasses, comparing them against one another. Strangely, my head was cool as ice. Maybe the sight of all three dragons collapsing at once was so jarring that I had no room for panic. Or maybe…

“Maybe it’s thanks to Lardon,” I mumbled.

Lardon always placed full trust in my magic prowess—and this was clearly some form of magic, so I felt that I could manage somehow. There was no way Lardon would show so much confidence in me if I couldn’t do this much, and it was her confidence that fed my own.

For that reason, I faced this new problem with a calm head. I gritted my teeth and narrowed my eyes, never once taking them off the hourglasses.

“Scarlet, apprehend the delegation,” I ordered.

She drew in a sharp breath. “Yes, Master!”

“You can interrogate them—no, *torture* them if you need to. Just make sure they spill everything they know.”

“Right away!” Scarlet spun on her heel and left the room.

She looked every bit the enraged demon, so I knew I could leave it to her. She probably knew more about interrogation and torture than me, and she wouldn’t show any mercy to those who dared lay their hands on the divine dragons. I already had my hands full analyzing these hourglasses—this Dragon Slayer spell.

I looked closer. Something about the sand nagged at me. “Is that…their mana?” A little more observation, and I nodded firmly. I was sure of it—it was theirs.

“You are correct.”

I gasped and whipped my head around. “Who’s there?!”

No one else was in the room, but the voice answered: *“It’s Dyphon. The previous one.”*

“What?” I turned back to the bed, where Dyphon still lay unconscious and pale-faced. I couldn’t see anyone around her.

“Sorry. Getting my voice to reach you is the best I can manage now,” said the previous Dyphon. *“I don’t know how long I can last, so I’ll make this quick. This is Dragon Slayer, a spell that was made to kill us. Although, I’m the only one who’s ever been hit by it…until now.”*

“I see… That explains why Lardon knew nothing about it.”

“Exactly. Incidentally, this thing is the reason I reincarnated once more than the other two.”

“Oh…!”

“And as you suspected,” she continued, *“we’ll die the moment our hourglass runs out. We have approximately three days.”*

“Three days… Then what should I do in that time?”

“I don’t know.”

“What?”

“I wouldn’t have died if I knew, now would I?”

“Ugh…” Right, of course. If she knew how to fix this, then she wouldn’t be the *previous* Dyphon. “Where do I even begin…?”

“This spell doesn’t work independently. Follow the mana.”

“The mana…” I closed my eyes and did as she said.

A moment later, I felt it—an incredibly long string of mana came from the three dragons and gathered toward one point. Following that sensation, I flew out the window, up into the sky,

and found that it led to somewhere just slightly past our national border.

To the Duchy of Parta.

I slowly descended back into my room, just in time for Reina to come running in.

“Master!”

“Perfect timing, Reina.”

Reina gasped as she looked at the dragons collapsed around my room. Her features set sternly as she turned to me and nodded. “Your orders, please.”

Our gazes met, neither less grim than the other, as I clenched my fist and opened my mouth.

“Gather all our forces—we’re moving out.”

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Reina swiftly regained her composure and nodded. “Understood!”

After a prim bow, she spun on her heel and left the room, no questions asked. It was a relief to see her as collected and reliable as ever, even in this pressing situation.

I looked down at the dragons and clenched my fist.

“I’ll save you all… I swear it,” I whispered, my voice hushed yet firm, like the resolve brewing within me.

A huge army of monsters spanned before me.

I had assumed Reina was going to gather them in the city, but when she finished her preparations, she led me here, outside the city gates. When I asked her about it, she simply explained, “We’ve not enough room in the city for everyone to gather.”

“Wait— *Everyone*?”

“Yes, everyone.”

My gaze was drawn back to the crowd. “Um… What exactly do you mean by ‘everyone’?”

“I am referring to all of your familiars, Master.”

“Seriously?!” *I know I said to gather all our forces, but I wasn’t expecting our entire population…* I frowned as I cast a glance at the city behind me. “But then we’d be leaving this place completely empty. If they attack—”

“Fret not, milord.” Gai the giant, one of my three monster executives, proudly stood at the front of the army. “A city is but a vessel. Where you go, we follow—for where else do we belong but by your side?”

I stared at him, slack-jawed. Lardon always teased me for having nothing but magic in my head—and she certainly wasn’t wrong—but even I could tell that this was far from normal.

When I gave Reina the order, I was just hoping to gather all our *fighters*. Where else would you find a city whose residents were all willing to gather as an army—to leave their homes empty and go out to battle?

“Oh…” On second thought, though, everyone here *was* a monster, so I guess they all qualified as fighters—and with my order, I’d unwittingly called them all here.

Chris scoffed. “Won’t you quit showing off already, meathead?”

“Ha ha ha! How shallow of you, boar woman!”

“What did you say?!”

“Why, I was simply stating a fact—I will always follow milord. But perhaps by your standards, such is merely a bluff? Tut-tut…”

Chris bristled and gritted her teeth in frustration, but before she could figure out how to retort, a chuckle cut into their little squabble. It had come from Alucard—surprising, given the noble vampire normally kept to himself.

“It looks like you lost this time,” he mused, earning a vicious glare from the wolfman.

Gai and Chris were somehow butting heads even now, all the while an entire army of monsters stood behind them, awaiting my word. Feeling the weight of their gazes, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

“The Duchy of Parta has laid a trap,” I announced, my voice booming over the crowd. “Because of them, Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon’s lives are now in danger.”

The monsters erupted into murmurs. Even Gai and Chris forgot about their squabble and turned their wide eyes to me.

“They used a spell called Dragon Slayer…and the limit is three days. Once three days have passed, the dragons will die,” I continued amid growing clamor. “I want to save them, and I need your help. Everyone, please…help me stop Parta.”

I lowered my head until all I could see was the ground, and my surroundings instantly fell silent.

Do they not want to? It is *a pretty selfish reason…*

I raised my head, slowly and fearfully—but to my surprise, all the monsters *roared out*, shaking the earth with their gallant war cries. The army of over ten thousand filled the air with the spirit to rival several tens of thousands more.

“You guys…”

“Master,” Reina called, her eyes cool as steel. “Your orders.”

The rattling war cries immediately came to a stop, and thousands of eyes gathered on me. I took in a deep breath as our destination came to mind: the land that lay right past our border.

“To Gharral Fortress, on the border of the Duchy of Parta! Our goal is to take it down and occupy it!”

The loudest war cries of the day rocked the heavens and shook the earth.

After the monsters marched off, I returned to my room. My bed was excessively huge, fit for a king, and on it lay Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon with still much room to spare. I stared at them from the bedside; their faces were warped in agony, temples dotted in sweat.

“I can do this,” I mumbled, part in conviction and part in encouragement for myself.

First, I summoned my item box and took out a large pile of manastones that I had retrieved earlier. I crushed them, filling the room with mana, before dropping my gaze to the three girls and steeling my resolve.

“*Lardon Dyphon Paithon*... Oversoul!”

Today, the three names I chanted were not of my favorite songstresses, but rather the three dragons before me. My burning desire to save them was channeled through the aria, powering the spell that temporarily enlarged my soul.

“Come!”

Four souls flew out of the three bodies and were drawn into mine.

One thing I realized after the previous Dyphon spoke to me: Dragon Slayer had put the three dragons out of commission, but it seemed to have little effect on souls of the past—souls that were already dead, and therefore could no longer die again.

These souls of the past nestled into my body...and appeared before me in faint, transparent forms.

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In drawing out the dragons' souls, I'd made two gambles for two reasons.

The reasons were simple: Lardon and Oversoul. While dwelling within me, Lardon could also freely come out in her human form, which she'd said was possible because my soul was big—a statement that led to my invention of Oversoul for Dyphon. Thanks to that, I had learned that my body could serve as a vessel for other souls.

As for the gambles, the first had to do with the dragons' past lives being nearby. I figured that had to be the case, since the dragons had been able to summon them ever since experiencing near death. So, I placed my bet on them being ready to enter my soul once I expanded it—and I was right. Not only did they transfer to my body, they could even take form before me now.

That made my first gamble a success. But...

"Looks like the second was a bust," I mumbled as I looked over the four figures with a bitter sigh.

"Hm? What do you mean by that?" asked the past Lardon.

I knit my brows and turned to the three girls lying on the bed. "I was hoping *they* could also escape from the spell's grasp. It would've been a load off my shoulders if they could just take shelter in my body... You know, kind of like a loophole."

"Ah, I see... Yes, that does sound like a good place to start."

"That won't work," the previous Dyphon cut in. "I couldn't lift a finger against this accursed spell."

The other dragons fell silent. Among this group, *she* had the most experience with Dragon Slayer.

I hummed. "Were the four—er, *three* of you on good terms?"

"Generally, we were at one another's throats," answered Paithon. "Though I guess it also depended on the era and circumstances."

"Try to imagine how you'd feel toward someone worse than your lover's fling but not as bad as your parents' murderer," added the previous Dyphon.

“Uh…” What little comprehension I’d managed from Paithon’s explanation whittled away at the outlandish analogy. “So basically, you’re on *bad* terms?”

Lardon nodded. “But why ask such a thing?”

“Well, you just reminded me of Gai and Chris.” They squabbled and bickered, determined never to let the other get the last word in. “If Gai had deemed something impossible, then Chris would’ve instantly clapped back.”

Paithon huffed, shooting a nod at Dyphon. “This woman has a dreadful personality, but her skill and knowledge are on par with ours.”

“I concur,” said Lardon. “It would take quite the spell to kill her. Not to mention, it speaks volumes that she herself is so resigned against it.”

I stared blankly at them.

Lardon arched a brow. “What is it?”

“Well, uh… I know you said you hated each other’s guts, but it sounds to me like you actually acknowledge one another.”

Clearly, they didn’t know how to feel about that—all their faces warped like they’d been forced to swallow a bitter pill.

“That’s bogus! Besides, it’s all Lardon’s fault that this happened!” Dyphon snapped, especially frazzled—it seemed she was just as frank as her current self.

“Oh? Seeking fault with me now, hm?”

“No, not you! The *current* Lardon!” Dyphon pointed at the unconscious girl on the bed. “Wasn’t she asked about Dragon Slayer? She should’ve gone to me, and I could’ve warned you!”

Lardon raised a brow. “And why would she have gone to you?”

“Yeah, right there! *That’s* your problem! You’re always so cocky, acting like you know it all—even though *you* understand humans the least!”

Lardon pursed her lips and furrowed her brows in displeasure.

Meanwhile, I furtively cast a glance at the current Lardon. I recalled she’d said something to that effect when we first met—that she didn’t understand humans, nor did she care to. From what Dyphon just said and Lardon’s bitter expression, it seemed that wasn’t something new to her current life.

“There’s—”

“‘*There’s no use crying over spilled milk,’* right? Yeah, yeah, thanks

for your magnanimous advice, O wise and amazing dragon.” Dyphon snarled mockingly, eliciting a sharp glare from Lardon.

Before their argument could fester any further, Paithon cut in. “Is this really the time for this? I believe we’re working on a time limit here…though I’m certain *you* don’t need me to tell you that.”

Dyphon’s face flushed as she clicked her tongue. “No, I don’t! I knew that already!”

Paithon had hit her where it hurt. The more time they spent here pointing out each other’s flaws, the less time we had to fix this whole issue.

The eldest Dyphon, who’d remained silent this whole time, finally turned to me and spoke up. “She’s quite right. We cannot afford to waste our time here. Drawing us out like this is already quite the loophole in itself—we cannot bet on it lasting long.”

“That is true,” Lardon agreed.

“I was thinking the same thing. You’re impressive for a human,” said Dyphon.

Paithon nodded. “Your mana goes without saying, but your outside-the-box thinking is especially commendable.”

With the eldest Dyphon’s words, the dragons stopped bickering and turned their attention to me. In a complete shift from earlier, they sang my praises in perfect harmony.

“But yeah, we can’t be sure how long this will last.” The younger Dyphon shook her head. “You need to keep supplying the spell with mana… I’ve heard you can’t keep it up when you sleep?”

She must have heard that from the current Dyphon. I always used Oversoul for her, after all. “You don’t have to worry about that,” I said.

She raised a brow. “Look, now’s not the time to be acting tough, all right?”

“No, I’m not acting tough. This is an emergency situation—I can go three days without sleep.”

Sometimes, circumstances just called for three consecutive all-nighters. I’d pulled it off for far less in my past life, so there was no way I couldn’t manage the same now, when the three dragons’ lives were at stake. Even if I had nothing, I knew I at least had my grit.

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Three days is no big deal if I just steel myself.”

“Hmm… You’re more interesting than you look.” Dyphon arched her brows, her eyes lighting up in intrigue, and before I realized it, the other three gazing at me had adopted similar expressions on their faces too.

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“Hm?” I squinted hard at the four figures standing in front of me. *I could be wrong, but…*

“What is it?” asked Lardon.

“Is something…leaking out?”

“Ah. Yes, you are correct,” she answered right away.

“It’s been bugging me for a while… Is that your mana?”

“And it’ll probably keep leaking too,” Dyphon said with a shrug.

She wore a nonchalant expression, as did the rest, so I breathed a sigh of relief. “I guess it’s not a problem.”

“What? Of course it is.”

“Huh?” *Did I misread their expressions?*

“Our current forms are composed of our power,” Lardon said.

I nodded. Whenever Lardon—the current one, I mean—emerged from my body, my mana would remain untouched; I had no need to exert any power on my end. It was the same for these past dragons, even if they’d managed to enter my body with Oversoul.

“The weaker our life force, the more the ‘roof’ will leak.”

“It’s like a leaky roof, huh? I get it.” No matter the version, Lardon always made good analogies. “We need to do something before it gets worse… I guess that doesn’t change our goal.”

“That’s right,” said Dyphon.

“Do you have any concrete plans?” Paithon asked. Her expression was so mild, you wouldn’t believe her life was at risk.

I nodded. “When I had a look up in the sky, I felt seven strands of mana running through the earth and supporting Dragon Slayer.”

“Ah, I see. It must be a site-based large-scale spell.”

I had read from the books in the Hamilton manor that while most spells were cast with an individual’s mana, some large-scale spells required the right place, conditions, and ambient mana.

“Dragon Slayer is probably—no, *definitely* founded upon seven core sites,” I concluded.

Paithon sighed. “How troublesome.”

“Once this kind of spell is activated, just taking down one or two will do nothing to it overall,” Dyphon added.

“Indeed. We must take down all seven if we are to hope for any chance of canceling the effects.”

The dragons were as smart as ever, having drawn out more vital information from just one conclusion.

“So we have to crush all seven sites before the time limit,” Paithon summarized.

“Why did you send out the monsters?” Dyphon asked. “Since you can help us take form, we can handle the rest.”

“Oh, about that…” I scratched my cheek. “This is just my gut feeling, but I think we need to dismantle them in order. Destroying them all at once won’t do.”

Dyphon made a face. “Ugh, seriously? I really need to have a nice, long *conversation* with whoever made this spell.”

“I sense a deep obsession from it,” Paithon remarked. “Perhaps it was born of great fear of our kind.”

Lardon faced me and asked, “Do you know the right order?”

I shook my head. “Only the first. I can probably sense the next once we take it down…and so on and so forth.”

“Then I suppose splitting up is off the table.”

I nodded. Paithon was right—whoever made this spell must have been so afraid of the dragons, for them to prepare such a thorough and meticulous spell to kill her kind.

“Oh well,” Dyphon said with a sigh. “Then it’s all up to you. I’ll follow your orders.”

“A good idea. I shall do the same,” said Paithon.

Lardon huffed. “We will simply be reborn if we fail…but I suppose I could help you make some time to say your goodbyes, at least.”

And with that, I gained the cooperation of all past dragons.

A large army of monsters marched in formation, past the red barrier and onward to the Duchy of Parta. I watched the imposing sight from high up in the sky, feeling a little moved by the scale of this whole campaign.

However, my thoughts were cut off by a stifled laugh. I turned my head to find the previous Dyphon looking down with twisted lips, clearly not sharing my sentiments. “What are they *wearing*?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Is that some sort of, uh…armor?”

“Oh, you mean the enchanted armor?”

“Huh? The heck is that?”

“You don’t know? I made a few tweaks, but it should pretty much be the same as what Lardon made…”

“Lardon?” Dyphon raised a brow as she glanced at said dragon, then snapped her fingers. “Oh… Oh, *that* thing.”

Lardon huffed. “Ah, yes. I recall the humans called it that.”

I blinked for a moment. “Oh, that’s right. You said it was the humans who called it ‘enchanted armor’…” I forgot about that. All this time, I thought Lardon called it that way too.

Paithon looked down with narrowed eyes. “Rather impressive. Did you make all those yourself?”

“I did. We don’t usually get the chance to use them, but there’s no room for mistakes now. I’m sure we can occupy the fortress without any—”

I snapped my mouth shut—a sudden idea just flashed through my mind.

“What is it?” Lardon asked.

“I…” I turned my wide eyes away from the marching army far below to the four figures floating beside me. “I can stop it.”

Dyphon frowned. “Stop what?”

“The leak.”

At that moment, four pairs of stunned eyes locked on to me.

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I held my hand out, summoned my item box, and took out a high-purity block of processed high mithril silver.

Normally, metals were processed for ease of use, transport, or storage, so there was no need for me to do so—I could keep as much as I wanted in whatever form in my item box—but I did it anyway, just in case I ever needed to give it away. I applied this practice to any metal I kept, and among them, high mithril silver was my most-stocked resource.

Lardon hummed. “Materials for enchanted armor?”

“Ah, I see,” said Paithon.

“But will it work?” Dyphon wondered.

“Surely he has a plan.”

Clever as always, the dragons swiftly understood what I was trying to do. As the name suggested, enchanted armor was a suit of combat armor that I could endow with custom abilities. My plan was to make suits for them—to stop their leaking life force.

Picturing a raincoat meant to wall in their mana, I rested my hand on the high mithril silver and began molding it. With thousands of suits already under my belt, it was a frankly simple task. The armor gradually took shape, and soon, the first prototype was completed under the dragons’ watchful silence.

Lardon raised a brow, befuddled by the unfamiliar shape her own invention had now taken on. “It looks like ordinary clothes,” she pointed out.

I was as confused as she was. What I ultimately produced—despite using high mithril silver—was not armor but a set of folded clothes. *I know I envisioned a raincoat, but still…*

“I wonder why…” I furrowed my brows, but the answer came to me right away. “Oh, I know! It must be because I respect you.”

Dyphon frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

I nodded, now more certain of my feelings. “I guess…I thought that armor wouldn’t look good on you.”

Enchanted armor assisted with both offense and defense, but these ancient dragons were the last beings in the world who’d

need that sort of help, so I subconsciously made ordinary clothes instead.

Lardon huffed. “Funny boy. So oddly humble.”

“Seems just like your type, no?” Dyphon smirked. “Well, I guess the current you knew that already—that’s why she indwelled him.”

“Indeed. How fortunate.”

As I listened to their exchange in confusion, Paithon asked me, “Could I try that on?”

I handed the prototype “armor” to her. The moment it fell into her hands, the clothes opened up and enveloped her body, with Paithon simply standing still and letting it happen. In just a few seconds, her entire outfit had changed.

Dyphon snorted. “Wow, talk about tacky!”

Ouch… I groaned, her merciless remark striking like a stab to my heart. All my fashion sense must have been converted into talent for magic—or so I comforted myself. I asked Paithon, “How is it?”

“Hmm…” She pointed her slender finger to her chest and shook her head. “No dice.”

“Oh… It’s still leaking?”

“Indeed. It doesn’t seem to have any effect whatsoever.”

“So enchanted armor can’t help here…”

“Aw, don’t feel too bad,” Dyphon said with a candid smile. “We’re dragons, after all. We’re just different from the rest. It’s not your fault you can’t hold back our life force.”

“Right…” I mumbled, dejected despite her consolation. I really wanted to help them, so this failure came as a bit of a shock.

Paithon took off the armor and handed it back to me. “In any case, it looks like we must hurry.”

“That would be for the best,” Lardon breezily agreed.

Dyphon shrugged. “It’s not like things were looking very bright to begin with.”

The three of them were ready to move on, but I was still reeling from the blow. Magic was a miraculous power; there was no way it could fail. There must be something wrong with *me*—with my ability. That realization left me stunned and dazed.

Just then, the eldest Dyphon suddenly spoke up and asked, “Are you not going to try *that*?”

I blinked. “‘That’?”

The younger Dyphon shot her a wide-eyed stare. “Gosh, I almost forgot you were here!”

Until now, only the previous generation of dragons had been participating in the discussion. The oldest one here, the Dyphon of two generations ago, had remained completely silent.

Lardon scoffed. “Have you had your fill of asserting your dominance?”

“What…?” I raised a brow.

“Has she not been silently watching over us like a wise elder this entire time? She is, after all, the only one here who is two generations old,” she said mockingly.

“Huh?” In my surprise, I turned to the eldest Dyphon and found her frowning in discontent. She was much more mature than her current counterpart, but it seemed the core of her personality remained the same.

The previous, younger Dyphon rolled her eyes. “Ugh, don’t mind her. What were you talking about?” She seemed much more open to her past self and threw the question in to spare her from the snide remark.

“I was talking about that thing you made for the current Paithon,” she said.

“That thing I… Oh!” *Of course! I have* that*!*

I took the failed enchanted armor from Paithon, melted it back into high mithril silver, and redid the whole thing. I still fashioned it into ordinary clothes—that part wasn’t a problem, and it was way closer to the new image in my mind now anyway. In no time at all, I’d finished revamping her enchanted armor.

I clenched my fist. “Nice!”

The younger Dyphon looked skeptical. “What? Will it work now?”

“Yeah, it will,” I said with conviction.

Her eyebrows shot up. She hummed, clearly impressed.

I handed the reworked prototype to Paithon. “This should work for you.”

“Then I’ll give it another go.” Paithon nodded and reached out. Once again, the clothes opened up and swallowed her body. Her life force was still leaking out, but this time… “It’s being absorbed…? Oh, I get it—the pillow!”

I nodded and said my thanks to the eldest Dyphon.

If blocking it was out of the question, then I just had to absorb it. Thus, I applied to this enchanted armor the feature I had added to the current Paithon's fog-absorbing pillow.

From Paithon's expression, I was sure that this was the right answer.

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The rest of the dragons followed suit and put on their enchanted armors. Just when I was about to relish in my success, I realized—their suits were coming apart at the seams.

"Oh…"

"What is…" Lardon looked down at her armor. "Ah."

Dyphon shrugged. "Go figure."

"Handling our life force is no easy task," Paithon murmured.

I looked at them all. "Do you mean…?"

"Tools grow worn through usage," Lardon explained, "and the greater the force, the faster they wear down."

"I see… Then the answer is simple."

I shut my eyes, and as soon as I had a mental image ready, I reopened them and started wrapping the dragons with my mana. None of them even flinched; they simply watched as I slowly remodeled their armor. My vision was simple, so I finished in no time.

Dyphon looked down at her clothes and hummed. "Did you make it self-repairing?"

I nodded. "It'll repair itself as long as it's within range of my mana."

"My, you're putting quite a lot on your plate," said Paithon.

Lardon huffed. "He is a man, after all."

"I actually don't hate those types," Dyphon mused. "I guess that's why my current self fell head over heels, huh?"

As their idle chatter filled the air, I furtively took a deep breath and gritted my teeth. Truth be told, this was no walk in the park, especially now that I had four suits of enchanted armor to maintain on top of Oversoul. I could hardly discern the dragons' expressions past my flickering vision.

I clenched my fist *hard*—enough for my nails to dig into my skin—and gritted my teeth harder. Somehow, that made me feel a bit better.

"Please, do not delude yourself," I suddenly heard Paithon say. "You're merely holding yourself together through sheer will."

“Yeah… I know.”

That scared me for a second—she saw right through me. Regardless, that didn’t change what needed to be done: Keep this up, dispel Dragon Slayer, and save the three dragons. I closed my eyes and swore to myself that *nothing* could be more important.

“Thanks,” Dyphon whispered as she reached out and swiped her hand over my forehead. Only then did I realize that I was sweating bullets. “If this all works out, I’m sure ‘I’ll’ be over the moon—the happiest girl in the world.”

“I’ll do my best,” I murmured.

Lardon huffed. “In any case, we have ourselves quite the valuable experience.”

“What do you mean?” Paithon asked.

“How long has it been since we manifested in this world? Yet not once throughout this long life would I have ever imagined being saved by a human. Are you the same?”

Paithon smirked. “Certainly.”

“I guess we’ve landed ourselves in a fascinating scenario,” Dyphon agreed.

“Well then,” Lardon continued, “why not take the chance to enjoy it to the fullest?”

Together, the three looked toward the eldest Dyphon, who returned their gazes with deep and thoughtful eyes. It felt like the air around them had changed.

Funny, I thought absently. The eldest Dyphon hardly opened her mouth, yet each time she did brought a huge shift in everyone’s moods.

She took in their befuddled expressions with a wild grin. Then, not a moment later, her body burst into light and mana surged from within her. I threw my hands up to shield my eyes, and before long, the light settled down.

As I lowered my hands, my gaze found its way back to the older Dyphon. Her boorish enchanted armor had been replaced with black attire.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“The humans from a fallen nation once wore this,” she explained. “Hmm, what did they call it again? It was an era before knights and the like had even—”

“A military uniform,” Lardon supplied.

“Ah, yes. A military uniform. Everybody could use magic back then, so even ordinary soldiers wore soul-endowed clothes rather than armor.”

“I do recall seeing this kind of outfit before,” Paithon said.

Lardon hummed. “I see… Wearing that outfit would certainly make it seem like we are under human rule and protection.”

The eldest Dyphon nodded, then the rest of them looked at one another and smirked.

“Interesting,” the younger Dyphon crooned. “Count me in!”

“And me,” Paithon added.

“It irks me to be in agreement with you lot…but I suppose I cannot pass up on such an intriguing experience,” Lardon said.

They each changed their outfits from bulky armor to the same kind of military uniform that the eldest Dyphon was wearing. Their outfits looked formal and sturdy, but still worlds softer than armor. In fact, I’d say they looked good in them.

Dyphon folded her arms. “Hey, this isn’t half bad.”

“I agree. I might keep wearing this from now on,” Paithon mused.

“Hmm… I feel as if we can enhance this, perhaps to further emphasize the concept of subordination…”

Dyphon snorted. “For all your whining, you sure are having a blast with this.”

“Hmph. Say what you will.”

“Hey.” As the three dragons began clamoring among themselves, the eldest Dyphon called out to me and looked me in the eye. The air about her had shifted once more, catching me off guard. “Is there anything you want?”

I raised a brow. “What?”

“Just say the word, and I’ll make it happen. Perhaps you want a new spell or—”

“I want to hurry up and save them,” I said without missing a beat. The vow I swore earlier was still burning fiercely in my heart.

The four dragons fell speechless. Seeing them all stare at me wide-eyed was kind of funny, but also somewhat unnerving. I never thought I’d see the dragons of legend looking so stupefied.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh…” Dyphon blinked. “Uh, it’s nothing. Just caught me off guard.”

Lardon nodded. “I might be the most shocked of us all, given I’ve spent the longest with him.”

“No.” Paithon shook her head. “I’ve known him the shortest, but even I thought he would ask for magic.”

“Oh…” I chuckled dryly. *So that’s what they were so shocked about.*

Of course I wanted to learn more magic and spells. They weren’t wrong to think that, given how I’d acted until now. But…now just wasn’t the time for that. I wanted magic, sure, but the current Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon’s lives were at stake here.

Then, it hit me.

The entire time, the four dragons had been so calm, so nonchalant, almost as if this was just another day for them. It finally dawned on me why—that was probably because they knew they’d be *reborn*. To them, the death of their current selves meant no more than another chapter added to their history. Death wasn’t a big deal at all.

But I was just a human, and to me, death was frightening. As I thought about the three girls and all the time we spent together, the desire to save them kept welling up within me.

“Interesting… You wish for neither magic nor mana, hm? Then I have just the thing for you.”

The eldest Dyphon smirked as she raised her hand. Her slender fingers sliced through the air above her head, forming a rift in space and revealing a starry sky beyond.

“Ah…!”

The power flowing from beyond the rift left me frozen in place. My gulp sounded loudly in my ears.

Asuna

“Now *this* is the life…”

Asuna sighed as she took a sip of her imported coffee under the comfy shade of the sidewalk café’s eaves. She leisurely watched the stream of people passing in front of her, absently noting how much livelier it was compared to her old town.

“Oh, wait… Is it even right to call them ‘people’? Can ‘people’ be used for monsters too?” she wondered aloud. Her straying thoughts were a testament to her idle and relaxed mood.

“Oh, hey! What’re you doing here, Asuna?”

Asuna turned toward the voice. “Hi, Chris.”

Chris’s fluffy ears twitched attentively. Originally a werewolf, Chris was one of the many wolfmen who had evolved thanks to Liam’s magic, becoming the leader of her race in the process. She shuffled closer to Asuna, a curious expression on her face.

“What’re you up to?” she asked again.

“Having some coffee,” she answered. “Wanna join?”

“Hmm… Nah, I’ll pass. I’ve got somewhere to be.”

“Work?”

Chris nodded with a bright smile. “You see, I sent some hunters home crying a while back, so my bounty’s gone up again!”

“Wow, good for you!” Asuna clapped her hands.

Hunter guilds from human countries issued bounties for monsters like Chris. Although she and many others had become exceedingly humanlike after their evolution, to the humans, monsters were monsters.

Chris was among the most notable ones. Not only was she the wolfman chief and one of this country’s top executives, she had even taken it upon herself to chase out any invaders. Consequently, the hunter guild grew wary of her strength and placed a bounty on her head.

She wasn’t the only one, of course, but given her status, Chris’s bounty was appended with “dead or alive”—a condition given only to threats that called for no less than the most elite hunter parties. Long story short, her life was being targeted by the best of the

best, and yet…

“Master’s brother told me that some humans are on their way here to kill me, so I’m off to play with them for a bit!”

Chris just looked like she was about to go out for a walk.

“Won’t your bounty go up again?”

“Just what I want! I’ll make it go sky-high and shove it in Gai’s face!”

Asuna laughed. “Of course.”

“Oh, I know! Asuna, you should come with me! Let’s go exterminate some humans together!”

“What? You want *me* to join? Hmm, but… Whoa!”

Without waiting for a response, Chris grabbed Asuna’s wrist and cheered. “It’s decided! Let’s a-gooo!”

Asuna chuckled and let the peppy girl lead her by the wrist.

Amid a vast red wall stretched across a wide plain, four hunters stood ready for battle.

“Formation ‘Mountain’!”

“Got it! Proceed as planned!”

Three men in heavy armor clustered around a lone female mage. They were like a turtle hiding in its sturdy shell, waiting for a chance to strike—and before them stood Chris and Asuna.

“They’re solidifying their defense and waiting to counterattack,” Asuna observed. “Looks like they’ve done their research on you, Chris.”

“Hmph. Cheeky bunch,” she said, not an ounce of concern in her voice. “Say, Asuna—wanna race? Let’s see who can tear off their ‘shell’ first.”

“What? But there’s no way I’ll win…”

“C’mon, let’s do it! You’re the only one who can race me, after all. Okay?”

“O-Okay…” Asuna gave in to the pressure and reluctantly nodded.

“On my mark… Ready, get set—*go*!” Chris bolted off the ground like a gust of wind. “Wahoo!”

“W-Wahoo…” Asuna followed suit, notably less eager.

Despite the gap in their enthusiasm, in reality, both girls were rushing through the plains faster than the hunters’ eyes could follow. First in was Chris—packed with momentum, her attack

rammed right into one of the hunters' huge shields, only to find itself unexpectedly repelled. Chris quickly leaped away, distancing herself.

"Magic?" She clicked her tongue. "You really are a cheeky bunch."

Asuna caught up and came to a stop beside her. "Chris, are you okay?"

"Looks like we don't need to hold back, Asuna."

"R-Right." Asuna took in a deep breath and gathered her focus.

From there, the duo seemed to become one with the wind, tormenting the hunched turtle with their combined speed.

The hunters weren't wrong to fortify their defense and wait for a chance to counterattack. Alas, in the face of the relentless storm that Chris and Asuna had become, the first-rate hunters could do no more than hold up their defenses till the very end.

In no time at all, Chris was looking down at four unmoving bodies. She spun around to Asuna and held her hand up, grinning broadly. "Wahoo!"

Asuna blinked for a moment before she met Chris's hand in the air.

"Wahoo!" she cheered back.



“Guess we’re sharing this win, huh?”

Asuna shook her head. “Nah, you can have it. I can’t be bothered.”

“You sure?”

“Yep. Victory’s all yours.”

“All right. I’ll treat you next time!”

“Awesome.”

Two friends smiled amid the vast and spanning plains. Once again, Speed Star Asuna had chosen to hide in the shadow cast behind Chris’s blinding light.

Scarlet

When Scarlet first moved into this city, Liam had casually suggested, “Should I bring your mansion here?”

But the sudden disappearance of an entire mansion from the capital was bound to be shocking, to say the least. The idea was scrapped in favor of plan B: building a mansion that was just like it. Thus did Scarlet’s new home in the city of monsters come to be.

Tonight, Scarlet was lounging in her room in this very mansion, dressed in her nightwear and a book in hand—a volume on the history of the promised land and the Tri-Draconic War.

The three dragons had slowly but surely flocked toward Liam—starting, of course, with Lardon—and had since established an amicable relationship with him, but Scarlet knew not to take this for granted. At the end of the day, the dragons were transcendent beings far above humanity. Liam was far from ordinary himself, and perhaps that was why he hit it off with them.

Regardless, Scarlet believed that the time may come when they would need a more human perspective on the world—hence her studious devotion. It would be for the best if her efforts ultimately wound up for naught, but she saw no reason not to prepare for the worst in the meantime.

Clink.

A sudden sound from the window interrupted her quiet evening.

Scarlet’s expression stiffened, and her shoulders tensed up. Cautiously opening the window, she called out, “Who’s there?”

“I’ve come to speak with you in private,” said a voice.

She couldn’t see anyone, and this voice… It was altered with magic—she couldn’t tell if they were male or female. Clearly, they didn’t want to be identified.

Scarlet narrowed her eyes, warier than ever. “What about?”

“You must be nearing your limit now, princess.”

Scarlet frowned. “My limit?”

“You are one of very few humans in this nation of monsters. The harassment must be unbearable.”

“Is…that how it seems to you?”

“Humans and monsters are like water and oil. They were never meant to coexist.”

Scarlet’s lips quirked into a rueful smile. Was this what it felt like to talk to a wall? This person seemed wholly convinced that she was living a life of shame and misery in this country; she could even sense some pity in their voice.

“So? What are you getting at?”

“Take the Monster King’s head.”

“Monster King…” Scarlet blinked, taking a moment to realize they were referring to Liam, the king of this monster nation.

“Do that, and my lord shall sweep everything under the carpet.”

“Your lord, hm…?”

“And then—”

The speaker suddenly fell silent. Scarlet realized why a moment later—footsteps were approaching from outside her room.

“I will come again,” said the voice, and the presence outside her window quietly vanished with the evening breeze.

Scarlet remained in place, eyes roving the scenery before her, until a knock came from her door.

“Come in,” she called.

The door opened to reveal an elven maid, Reina, who also happened to be one of the top three executives of this country. The two of them often worked hand in hand on this nation’s internal affairs, so Scarlet had given her express permission to enter her mansion at any given time.

Reina entered the room, startled by the open window. “Lady Scarlet? Is there something in the yard?”

“Not anymore,” Scarlet replied with a chuckle as she shut the window. “Just a rat prodding me to double-cross my master.”

Reina’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh? They went to *you*? My, that’s…” She rested her cheek on her hand as she looked for the right word. “Quite the *incompetent* rat,” she decided.

Reina knew Scarlet very well. In fact, every monster in this country knew of Scarlet’s bottomless loyalty for Liam. The mere thought of her double-crossing him was so absurd that Reina didn’t hesitate to call someone she’d never met an “incompetent rat.”

“Worse yet, they were completely convinced that I was being

persecuted in this country." Scarlet scoffed. "How utterly delusional."

"My, oh my."

"What a nuisance..."

"What shall we do?" Reina asked, her eyes steady as Scarlet raised her brow. "Shall we report this to Lord Liam? Or would you like to deal with it yourself? Just say the word, and you will have my cooperation as well."

Scarlet immediately shook her head. "Do not inform Master. I couldn't possibly trouble him with such a measly matter. I'll handle it myself."

"Understood."

"More importantly, what brought you here?"

"Ah, yes. You see, His Majesty's brother came by and..."

Reina proceeded to explain the reason for her visit. Sensing a long discussion ahead, Scarlet offered her a seat and gave Reina her full and undivided attention.

The events of mere moments ago had long been banished from their minds. Be it a call to betrayal or to sour a relationship with someone's "lord," to Scarlet and Reina, it was hardly worth a single minute of their time.

Bruno

That day, Bruno sat in his study as he wrote up a sales report for the goods imported from Liam's country. It was a familiar task, one he'd done many times by now, but Liam always just skimmed through it and finished with an "I trust you." Regardless, Bruno took to the task with great sincerity.

At some point in his work, Bruno got distracted by a knock from the door. "Come in."

"Pardon me."

A woman entered, the very image of prim and proper. Her glasses were set neatly on the bridge of her nose, and not a single wrinkle could be seen on her suit. She was Kukuru, Bruno's secretary.

Kukuru shut the door behind her and set down some documents on Bruno's desk. "Here are the additional documents you asked for, sir."

"Just leave them there. I'll use 'em later." Bruno waved his hand and turned his attention back to his report. However, as he heard no movement from his secretary, he set down his pen and raised his face with an arched brow. "What's up? Anything else?"

Kukuru's brows were furrowed in bewilderment. "Sir, you're writing that report to hand it to your younger brother, correct?"

Bruno narrowed his eyes. "Don't refer to him that way. He's a king."

His stern rebuke only deepened her confusion. "Er... Is His Majesty keeping an eye on this mansion, perhaps?"

"Nah, probably not. I don't think he's cast any magic on me either. He's indifferent to these sorts of things."

"Then—"

"Because I respect His Majesty," Bruno cut in before she could voice her question. "Isn't it wrong for me to behave differently just because he's not watching?"

"I-I see..." Kukuru nodded, some reluctance lingering in her expression.

Bruno's lips quirked into an inscrutable smile. He didn't lie—it

was wrong to be two-faced, and he firmly believed that.

However, it wasn't because he *respected* Liam.

Bruno was a calculating man. He knew that if he maintained his respectful behavior at all times, then it would someday reach Liam's ears—and that could only paint him in a better light. This was just one of Bruno's many calculated moves, the first of which was, of course, adopting a thoroughly humble attitude before his younger brother after he became the king of monsters. All of this would ultimately build up to the moment Liam came to the moving realization that Bruno had treated him with respect both in his presence and out of his sight.

Needless to say, even Bruno's secretary had no idea about this. He had to perfectly play the part of a faithful ally, after all.

"So," he continued, "what about my report?"

"Oh, yes… His Majesty hardly parses through them, so I've been wondering if there is any need to be so thorough…"

Bruno smiled. "You think so? Then I'll give it some thought."

That was all he said outright, but in his mind, disappointment swelled immensely. Kukuru had been chosen as his secretary for her excellent paperwork skills, but it seemed she was inclined to cutting corners—hardly a good trait. Perhaps she had all the best intentions for her superior, but Bruno believed that when it came to these kinds of people, it was only a matter of time before they began cutting corners in their own duties as well.

It was a small glimpse but all he needed to see. Bruno reminded himself to only assign her nonvital tasks from now on.

After Kukuru left the room, Bruno turned all his attention back to his desk. Her suggestion, on the contrary, had sparked a fire in him, motivating him to complete the perfect report—even if Liam wouldn't read it.

Afterword

Light novels are written by humans to depict human lives.

Hello, everyone! It's nice to meet you, or maybe it's "long time no see" for some? I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novel author. I sincerely thank you for picking up a copy of *I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic Volume 6*.

Thanks to your support, we were able to publish a sixth volume, which I bring to you with the same concept as always: Liam being the magic geek that he is and using magic to solve the many incidents that pop up around him. As for any problems that *can't* be resolved with magic, well, that's where his experience comes into play—the things he's learned and the people he's saved all come together in his time of need. Of course, the finisher is and always will be Liam's magic! In other words, nothing has changed from the previous volumes, so you can rest assured and enjoy this sixth book like you have the last five.

Finally, some words of thanks:

To Kabotya, the illustrator, thank you as always. Everyone looks so cool and adorable on the cover.

To my editor and TO Books, thank you for publishing the sixth volume! Thank you, thank you!

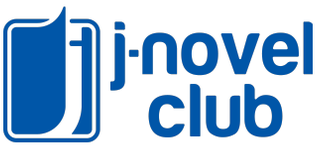
And to everyone who picked up this book, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I now set my pen down while praying that this volume will sell well so I can bring you the next one too.

Sincerely,
Nazuna, May 2022







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by Nazuna Miki

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Edited by Christian Jay Aniz

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