Tamamaru

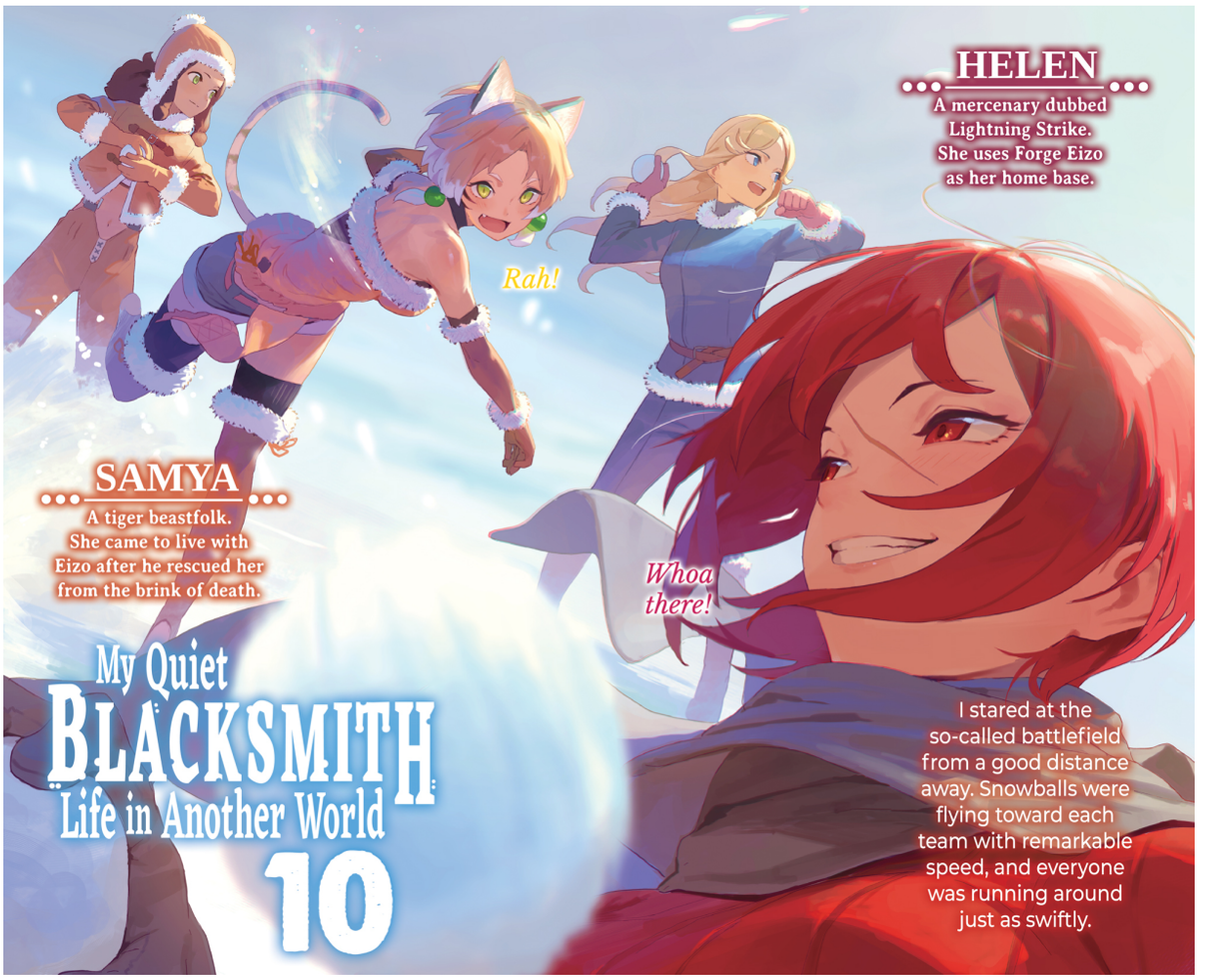
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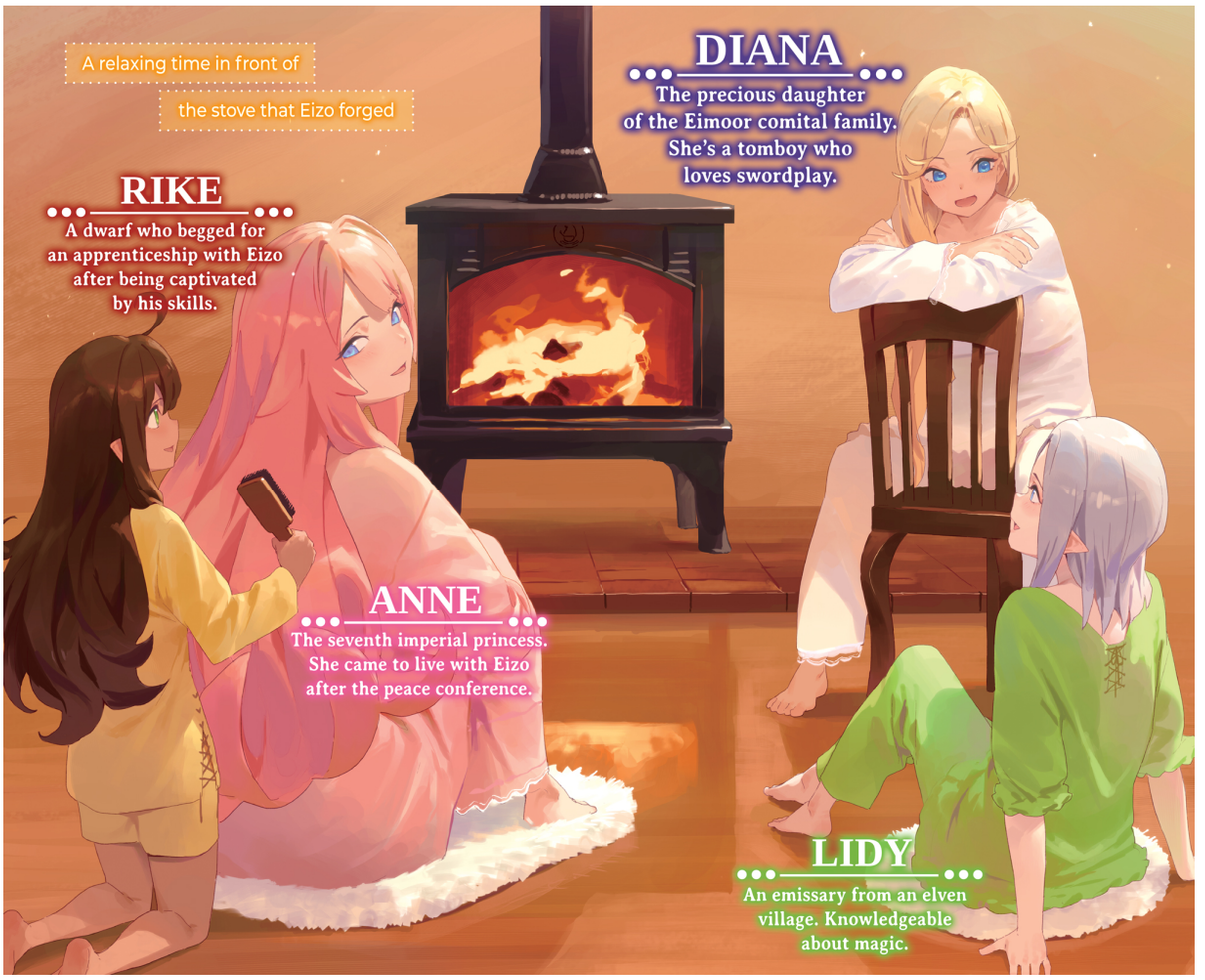


My Quiet BLACKSMITH Life in Another World


Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta
10
My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World



My Quiet BLACKSMITH Life in Another World 10


A relaxing time in front of
the stove that Eizo forged
DIANA
The precious daughter of the Eimoor comital family. She's a tomboy who loves swordplay.
RIKE
A dwarf who begged for an apprenticeship with Eizo after being captivated by his skills.
ANNE
The seventh imperial princess. She came to live with Eizo after the peace conference.
LIDY
An emissary from an elven village. Knowledgeable about magic.



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Prologue: Winter in the Capital

Winters in the kingdom were fairly mild. The temperature never got too low, and there wasn't much snowfall either. But that didn't mean it stayed warm enough that people could welcome winters without any preparation. It was a common sight to see citizens on the bustling streets of the capital reach for another layer of clothes to shield themselves from the cold. Many were also looking to stock up on food, which would become harder to come by during the winter season.

Even if one had the luxury of a heater within their residence, they still had to prepare for winter. In the Eimoor manor, the rooms were fully equipped with heaters, but they required wood to serve as fuel. After purchasing the wood from Camilo, household staff needed to chop it up into manageable pieces and store it. Indeed, there was much to be done.

Catalina was tasked with special jobs within the manor. She wasn't often responsible for the work of a normal servant, but winter proved to be the exception to this rule—she was essential when it came to chopping up firewood and storing it away. She quite enjoyed this period between seasons.

"It's not too cold just yet," she said.

Still, early morning temperatures were dipping. It wasn't enough to make teeth chatter or to give people the shivers, but recently, Catalina had been waking up with cold toes, fingers, and other extremities. Well, perhaps she was partially to blame for this—she tossed and turned in bed so much that her coworkers would sometimes complain, and she'd often stick her arms and a leg out while she was asleep.

She made sure to do some warm-up exercises before she started. Catalina would roll her shoulders and do some squats, exercising just enough to work up a bit of a sweat before she headed out to chop some wood.

Within the Eimoor residence, there was a garden. This was where the Eimoor siblings had played as kids, and it'd become a place to practice their swordplay as they'd grown older.

Marius currently had his hands full as the lord of his household, and Diana had left. Julie, Marius's wife—otherwise

known as Countess Eimoor—rarely set foot in the garden, which was sparsely decorated with flowers. Catalina recalled that they would usually plant flowers here at the end of winter. Flowerbeds would be prepared to create a space of serenity for the household, but more importantly, it was most unwise to leave a large abandoned plot of land within the manor. That would create a massive hole within the defense of the residence. A renovation of the garden would make the area less empty.

Recently, nobles in the capital had taken to building hedge mazes in their gardens. Perhaps the Eimoor garden would soon follow suit; Catalina wasn't sure if Marius was trying to hide the embarrassment of a poorly kept garden.

"Hup!"

Catalina raised the axe high in the air and brought it down to chop the firewood—a lovely *thunk* echoed throughout the garden. Just like that, there was another piece of wood to add to the pile. *Speaking of*, Catalina thought, *one of my lord's friends is a blacksmith who lives in the Black Forest. Surely, a residence in the forest requires some sort of heating fixture. I wonder how they prepare the firewood.*

Cutting down trees was quite the dangerous task, but she could imagine the blacksmith's family easily making short work of that task while casually humming. Catalina gazed up to see the clear azure skies above. No doubt her acquaintances were busily preparing for winter at their cabin under the same sky.

A smile stretched across her lips.

"I think we've got enough food stockpiled," Bowman, the head of the servants, remarked. He stood in a dimly lit warehouse.

"Agreed," Marius replied. "Preparations were finished rather quickly this year."

"Due in no small part to Sir Camilo's assistance, my lord."

The count nodded, grateful for the help. He received gracious accommodations both in the city and in the capital, and he handsomely rewarded those who helped him. And this year, Camilo had managed to gather far more supplies than anyone could imagine—he'd routed all of it to Marius. Naturally, the household didn't want to prepare too much too quickly since the food was perishable, but if the count was forced to hole up in his manor, he could safely do so until the spring. Indeed, he was *very* well prepared.

“You’re already done with the winter fabric prep too, aren’t you?” Marius asked.

Bowman smiled. “Of course, my lord.”

The count internally breathed a sigh of relief. Even people who lived in manors with heaters knew the benefits of wearing multiple layers of clothes for warmth. Doing so would cause some wear and tear of garments, and having fabric to quickly repair any holes was quite literally a matter of life or death.

Apparently, Camilo had also provided the fabric. Marius knew it was unwise to solely rely on one supplier; should anything happen to Camilo’s store, Marius would need to quickly seek help elsewhere. Despite this concern, Marius was torn—Camilo was simply so excellent that he was easy to rely upon.

“Maybe I’ll send him something next time,” Marius muttered.

“Ah, shall I prepare a gift basket of some sort?” Bowman inquired.

“Hmm… No, I think I’ll find a gift for him myself.”

“Are you sure, my lord?”

“Yeah. This is a present for my friend, after all.”

Bowman smiled at his master. “I see.”

As the two left the storage area, Marius spoke to his servant once more. “By the way…”

“Yes?” Bowman replied as he raised an eyebrow.

“I wonder if Eizo has enough food for the winter.”

“I suspect that he’s been storing the blessings of the forest since early autumn.”

“But they’re in the *Black Forest*… Ah, no, you’re probably right. I think Eizo and his family are probably doing well.”

The two nodded at each other. As they envisioned the Forge Eizo family happily spending a peaceful life in the forest, they let out a hearty chuckle.

Chapter 1: Our Days in the Black Forest

There weren't a lot of trees growing in the clearing around the cabin. According to Lidy, our resident elf, it was because the place was thick with magical energy.

Curious, I went to check out the stumps of the trees we'd cut down. Basal shoots (buds that normally surrounded the stump to signify new foliage) hadn't grown on the ones near our cabin.

But that didn't mean that our garden, where the trees didn't grow, was devoid of wildlife or was full of only rock chunks. Mysteriously, some plants and flowers were alive and well. The crops on our farming plot were also growing splendidly—the elves' seeds had a special property that allowed us to immediately replant seeds once the crops were harvested. There was no need to let our fields rest for a season, and we were using that ability to our benefit.

On the open land around the cabin, our resident mercenary, Helen, was training with Diana, the daughter of House Eimoor, and Anne, an imperial princess. Their energetic voices echoed throughout the forest under the orange sky. Soon enough, night would fall upon us.

Shunk. A crisp sound rang out from a ways away, where Lidy and a tiger beastfolk named Samya were practicing with their bows. Rike the dwarf had also joined them. She claimed that if she needed to stay back during combat, she at least wanted some proficiency with ranged weapons—this would allow her to offer some sort of support. Samya and Lidy were teaching her.

Then there was Krul, our beloved drake; Lucy, our wolf (who was actually a magical beast); and Hayate, a petite wyvern who helped us communicate with Camilo—they were scampering around in a funny game of tag. Hayate had a slight advantage because she could fly in the air, but it seemed like flying took quite a bit of stamina. Every now and then, she would rest her wings as she perched atop Krul's back.

In the lively evening air, I sat in the corner of the garden and placed a knife under the light of the magic lantern.

"Yeah, it's beautiful," I muttered.

I'd recently visited Camilo with a delivery for the first time

since entering into a contract with Miss Karen of the Nordic region. While at his store, Camilo had handed me a set of three knives. Each had been carefully wrapped in a piece of cloth, and all three were engraved with names, though they were a bit hard to read: Boris, Martin, and Sandro. These men worked at Sandro's diner, the Gold-Tusked Boar, which was located in the capital. (Sandro was also called "Pops.") I'd promised to sharpen and adjust their knives if they entrusted them to Camilo.

I set down the three knives in front of me, and I could practically envision their faces within the steel. The employees of that diner were all brawny, but they treated their knives with the utmost care. Without my cheats, I doubt I would've noticed the barely warped blade or how the edge was chipped ever so slightly.

Repairs of this degree didn't require me to heat up the steel. I didn't even need my usual anvil; a smaller one would do. I'd brought out my polishing set and taken the knives outside, choosing to work under the cool breeze. I put the blades under the light to confirm the tiny bit of warping, then placed one on the anvil before gently hammering away. It was easy to crack or break a knife, even during simple tasks like this, but I had my cheats on my side.

Small *clang*s of steel rang out as I ensured that I didn't imbue my swings with too much magical energy (if I let my guard down, I could easily forge a knife that would slice through everything), and slowly fixed the imperfections. *Swish. Swish.* After I finished hammering, I went right to polishing the knife to restore it to its former glory. Once that was complete, I placed it under the light. The shiny blade dazzled as it reflected the lantern's glow.

I finished the first and second knives, then reached for the third. Only then did I notice that my three daughters, who'd been frolicking around, were gazing at me curiously. It was rare for them to see me working since I was usually in the forge. I thought it was a good idea to sometimes show them how their father worked.

"This is dangerous work, so don't come too close," I warned.

Lucy, Krul, and Hayate cried out in understanding as I slowly and carefully polished the blade. Could you blame me for being a bit fired up to show off in front of them? *This is Sandro's knife, so I don't think it hurts to put in a little more effort anyway*, I thought. I glided the blade over the whetstone several times and finished it

off by cleaning it under water and drying it with a cloth. As the sky grew dark, I placed the knife under the lantern, and it glimmered spectacularly. My daughters called out their praise. I felt proud when I heard their cheers, and I headed back inside.

I could tell that the footsteps of winter were creeping closer. It was the end of another usual day.

We ate a leisurely breakfast. It wasn't cold just yet, but we'd talked about how the temperature had noticeably dropped in the early mornings. Fall was departing, and winter was creeping closer by the day. I'd been told by Samya and Diana that we didn't get much snowfall here, but it was still best to prepare ourselves for the oncoming colder months. We were lucky enough to have a hot spring, a wonderful facility that warmed our bodies. It was a walk away (a short one) because of the location of the hot spring vein and the convenience of building there. In any case, we couldn't constantly be in the warm water. I'd need something to warm up the entire cabin before winter was in full swing.

"The newly made rooms are a bit farther away," Diana said as she gazed down the corridor in that direction.

There were rooms along the corridor before it bent at a ninety-degree angle to form a block U-shape. That bend was the farthest away, and it contained a few rooms. The living room, where we were currently enjoying our meal, was toasty thanks to the warm air that flowed in from the forge and furnace, but the rest of the rooms, which were positioned closer to the exterior of the cabin, weren't adequately warm. *Since we've got a forge that needs to be hot enough to melt steel, it'd be great if we could utilize that heat somehow, but…*

"This issue is that the forge is out when we're not working," I said, placing a hand over my chin.

We didn't work at night, of course, but there were other occasions where the forge wasn't used. Oftentimes, the firebed was ablaze while the forge wasn't, but the firebed couldn't provide nearly as much heat as the forge.

"It gets cold in the middle of the night, and that's when we'd need heat the most," Diana said as she also placed a hand on her chin.

Samya and Helen looked like they were holding back laughter at the scene.

“Right… This cabin doesn’t have a fireplace,” Anne realized as she gazed around.

I wasn’t sure if the Watchdog had purposely deprived me of one, but the princess’s words were true. *Is it a test of some sort? Like surely I would’ve built a heating unit by winter or something.*

I turned to Samya. “How do beastfolk brave the winter? Do you guys keep a fire?”

“Nah, we just wear layers,” Samya replied.

Her answer was very simple and straightforward. *I see… Since we don’t get much snow, I guess that might be enough for the colder months.*

“I can endure the cold because my body’s built a bit differently. The same can’t be said for you guys,” Samya added.

I nodded. “Makes sense.”

Fair enough. Beastfolk come naturally(?) equipped with animal fur on their limbs. Samya’s a tiger—she must feel like she’s wearing warm gloves and socks at all times. I was sure people like the rest of us, who lacked this fur, could brave the winter with an extra layer or two. However, even if people said there wasn’t much snowfall, that still implied that there would be *some* snow.

“House Eimoor had a fireplace,” I recalled.

“Of course,” Diana replied.

The fireplace served as a central heating unit of sorts—it could send warm air to various rooms using chimney vents.

“We had a fireplace too,” Anne said before I could even ask her. She was a princess who’d lived in an imperial palace. “Each room actually had its own personal fireplace.”

“It didn’t get that cold for me!” Rike exclaimed proudly with her chest puffed out.

I’d heard that the dwarf had lived near the mines, and perhaps geothermal energy or something like that had kept her warm. She added that she’d lived in a small space with her large family and hinted that they only *might* have produced enough warmth to go around.

Yeah, compared to dwarven warmth, human warmth is nothing to sneeze at…

Lidy, who’d lived in a forest like Samya, claimed that she’d had a simple fireplace that’d resembled a hearth. That had helped her get through the winters. Helen was a mercenary who’d traveled around. When asked, she chuckled and said that she’d usually just sat by a fire—sometimes she’d even huddled for

warmth with friends when needed.

"I guess we've got three choices," I said as I raised my fingers. "One, we build a fireplace. Two, we use warm blankets to make it through the winter. Or three, we choose a hybrid method of the first two."

"It'll probably take time to build a fireplace," Rike said languidly.

I nodded in response. We'd recently devoted most of our time to building a hot spring facility, and now I wanted to focus on smithing for a while. But it would be too late if we started building after we felt the cold. After all, we couldn't easily buy something like a heat stove and install it the same day.

Wait... A stove?

An idea was starting to hit me.

That's it!

I was hesitant to introduce culture and technological advancements from Earth, but the item I had in mind was awfully simple and didn't require much technology. *I heard that the first one on Earth was developed over two thousand years ago, and I think something similar would be invented sooner or later in this world, just like the leaf-spring suspensions I once made.*

"What if we use an oil ba—I-I mean, a...cylindrical tube and make a fire inside of it?" I suggested. "We can keep warm with the heat. The smoke will go through a steel tube and will be expelled into the air. I think we'd be able to get quite toasty."

In short, I wanted to make a wood-burning stove. It was very simple to make. All I needed was an area to start a fire and then a chimney to let the smoke out. We were swimming in charcoal and had enough wood to sell, so this seemed like an optimal solution.

"We can make it easy to dismantle and transport," I went on. "During seasons where it won't be used, we'll just toss it into storage."

"Sounds good," Samya said.

Everyone else nodded along.

"Then we can begin making it bit by bit," I said. "Let's work as we usually do today."

The ladies all voiced their assent, and I decided to spend today focusing solely on work.

That evening, the topic of this stove came up over dinner.

“Is it from the Nordic region?” Helen asked as she sipped on a steaming cup of tea poured by Lidy.

“No,” I replied.

“So it’s another invention of yours—like that cart.”

“Huh? W-Well… Yeah, I guess so…”

I tilted my head quizzically but ultimately agreed. Samya looked at me suspiciously. *Well, I didn’t tell the whole truth, after all…*

It went without saying that I wasn’t *the* inventor of the wood-burning stove back on Earth. *I think some dude in America’s credited with making a certain type of wood-burning stove. But in this world, I guess I’ll be the pioneer, which will make me the inventor of this stove. If I were to make it, this stove would be technology akin to the suspensions—something that could be released to the world. There’s no big “if” to this, or so the Watchdog told me.*

I wondered if this meant that I could do as I pleased and that I would be reined in if I got out of line. Since I had no idea what would occur if I ever *did* go overboard, I found it best to not risk it. I chose the safer route in providing the bare minimum of knowledge and technology from Earth.

“And we already have almost enough for our next smithing order,” I remarked.

Rike leaned forward excitedly. “Shall we get to making that new item of yours?”

“Hmm, after all that’s happened, I’d like to let loose for a bit, but we’re gonna need that stove sooner or later. Since we don’t have any large orders on the way, it’s probably best to get to work while we’ve got some free time.”

Rike clapped her hands in agreement. No one else seemed as excited as her, but they didn’t seem to dissent either. My plans became clear. The stove wouldn’t take as much manpower as the hot spring, and at most, it would require some support when digging a hole to insert the chimney into, or when creating a contraption for the chimney’s opening. I was sure that I could get it done in the blink of an eye. Indeed, the issue wasn’t the stove itself, but…

“How many should I make, and where should I put them?” I wondered.

The living room that we were currently in was pretty warm, but I couldn’t guarantee that it would remain that way

throughout the winter. I felt like one was needed here. Next, I had to worry about the bedrooms.

"I don't mind building one for each room," I said.

Not everyone was equally fortified against the cold. For example, Samya handled chilly weather quite well, but Rike couldn't. If I was to take temperature control into account, I thought it was best to place one stove per room and have each person adjust the warmth to their liking. The only issue now was the number that I had to make. *I want to build quite a few, and we've got the guest room to worry about too...*

"Maybe I should place a stove every two or three rooms—specifically in the rooms of people who can't handle cold air well," I suggested. "And I need to put one in my room."

This wasn't because I gave myself special treatment—if the stove was in my room, I could send warm air into the guest room, and I thought that it would overall be much safer. As we discussed the stove locations, ventilation, and the chimney, Lidy turned to me.

"What kind of heating systems are used in the Nordic region?" she asked.

"Uh, let's see..." I muttered. "I'm not sure how Miss Karen keeps warm at her household, but I'm familiar with a small table that's covered with a blanket. Inside, a small brazier of sorts generates heat."

Of course, I was talking about a *kotatsu*, a devil's item—once I slipped inside one, I could never crawl out of it. It had almost a gravitational pull that kept me sucked inside, indulging in the warmth.

"Why not make that?" Lidy asked.

"Well, we'll need to use charcoal in a sealed off space," I said. "And if Lucy wriggled inside, that situation might turn into a horrific accident."

While electric heaters and warmth from the hot spring left me with very few worries, I wanted to be cautious when handling fire. One careless move, and we'd all run into the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Back on Earth, my grandma had told me that she'd had a kotatsu that'd used a charcoal briquette, and some unsuspecting animal had snuck inside only to be found...later...

Well, that's just how accidents happen. I spoke vaguely about this experience to the rest of my family and explained how Lucy

could fall victim.

"Then we won't have that! And that's final!" Diana declared loudly.

I laughed along but vehemently agreed with her.

After I gathered the tools needed to build these stoves, I expected the project itself to be a cinch. I wouldn't be focusing too much on making them look cool or sleek, of course.

"And…" I trailed off as I thought about a few more things that I wanted to forge. "Rike, you've been practicing using a bow recently, haven't you?"

She nodded. "I have."

I had no idea if her skillful hands would translate to superb archery skills, but seeing how she received much praise from Samya and Lidy, it seemed the dwarf was quite precise with her aim.

"I don't mind, of course, but I thought that I could make a crossbow for you," I said.

Back on Earth, this weapon had been banned by the pope, but I'd heard that it was partly due to the fact that killing off people would prevent kidnappers from collecting ransom. That aside, crossbows weren't known for rapid-fire attacks, but they were very powerful. It seemed logical to have a few on standby, just in case. Since Rike was a dwarf, she possessed quite a bit of power and could pull on tougher bowstrings. When I watched her forge, I'd noticed that she had some back muscles too, and I felt like she could pull the powerful strings on a crossbow—that weapon required some *oomph*.

"Bows are useful in their own way, like for firing multiple times in succession, but I don't think it hurts to have a new weapon in case we're asked to fight against something in the future," I said.

I wasn't just talking about the time we'd been asked to subjugate a troll. If, for some reason, we had to hole ourselves up in our cabin, I felt that this new weapon would come in handy. *And I need to think of a way to combat a barrage of fire arrows in case such an occasion arises.*

"Crossbows, huh?" Helen asked as she gazed up at the sky, seemingly recalling her mercenary days. "Yeah, those things are kinda more troublesome than I expected."

"Even with your speed?" I asked incredulously.

"I mean, I *can* handle them."

So they're not really an issue for you. I refrained from speaking my thoughts.

"Those things are quick, and if you get hit, it's pretty bad," she said. "Keeps me on my toes, y'know? And if we attack in a group, someone's probably gonna get hurt by one of those bolts."

"Which means that crossbows are most effective when you don't have many places to flee," I said.

"Like in this forest," she said as she folded her arms behind her head and turned to me.

I grinned back.

Helen nodded along. "Some of these paths are wide enough for a cart, but most of the routes are pretty narrow."

"You think I should consider having a ballista too?" I asked.

"Well, if we're talking about self-defense, it wouldn't hurt to have a ballista," she replied with a strained smile. "If we get our hands on one, this place'll become a fortress."

"A fortress in the Black Forest," Diana said with an excited twinkle in her eye.

Right, she likes stuff like this. I sighed.

"First, we should consider never putting ourselves in a situation where a ballista would be required," Anne chimed in.

She had a point.

Lidy drank a sip of her tea, then said, "Why don't we make a few crossbows for now that are easy to carry around? I'm not sure if *I* can use one, but I'm quite sure that Samya, Helen, and Anne are powerful enough to pull the strings."

Judging from Anne's height and muscle, I was confident that she could blow back an ogre if she wished. *In a sense, any bow she handles would become a ballista in its own right.*

"Oh, and..." I started.

"There's more?" Samya replied wearily.

"I feel like it's best if we have some weapons that are easy to wield within the forest."

"We've got the knives," Rike said.

"Yeah, enough to sell to others," Diana quipped.

We all enjoyed a chuckle.

"That's pretty effective, but I was thinking of a mace or something," I said.

Helen clapped her hands together. "Oh, so weapons that are simple to use. One you can just swing around wildly—it'll become pretty dangerous."

“And weapons that aren’t meant for killing.”

“Like a net?”

“Yeah.”

That would be meant to restrain people or beasts. It could be woven from thin ropes or chains to capture our foe. *But I feel like chains might become fatal if some unfortunate circumstances align.*

“I also think bolas are nice,” I added.

“Why a bola?” Helen asked.

“We can use them in situations where we can’t kill our enemies. Though I can’t guarantee that they’ll make our enemies any more pliant.”

“Fair enough.” She gazed up once more, seemingly uninterested in nonlethal weapons.

“But it’s not like we can make all of these weapons, right?” Anne asked with a large sigh.

I nodded. “I’ll start with the stove, since it’s essential to our life, and then work on the crossbows. I’ll make them in my free time, and if they come out well, maybe we can have Camilo sell some of them for us.”

“I feel like my brother would want a crossbow,” Diana said, sounding a touch tired.

Helen chuckled. “I’ll say.”

Another round of laughter filled our living room.

I’d been making the knives for our order as usual, and I decided to take a break.

“I know that we talked about crossbows before, but do you only forge weapons here?” Anne asked.

“Nope, we make other things too,” I replied. I ladled some drinking water from the forge’s water jug and chugged my full cup.

“When we first went to the city, you made a few sickles, didn’t you?” Samya asked, reminiscing about the past.

That had been over half a year ago. Since then, I’d decided to focus on making weapons, Rike had joined our family, and I’d begun to sell my products to Camilo.

“Y’know the axe and the hoe that we’ve been using? I made them after I came here,” I confessed.

“They’re easy to use,” Anne said. “I think they’d sell well.”

Yeah, I thought so too, and I confidently went out to the city with all these tools. And yet…

“Well, things weren’t so simple,” I said.

The city had the lord’s—that is, House Eimoor’s—personal blacksmith, and they were in charge of forging and repairing farming tools. That was honestly good enough for most people, and they had no need for my tools. That didn’t mean that I *couldn’t* sell my tools if I tried, but there was very little demand for them. The knives I’d been making had been purchased by those in the city who weren’t engaged in agriculture. I’d just barely managed to sell my goods in the Open Market.

“And the other items didn’t sell much either,” I muttered.

“Like pots?” Anne asked.

“Yeah.”

Perhaps people were willing to buy a new one if their old one was incredibly beat up, but usually, small holes and the like could be solved by a resident tinkerer. Many opted to repair and continue to use their items instead of buying new ones. Thus, pots didn’t sell very often; it wasn’t a cheap purchase for those in the Open Market either. *I don’t mind keeping some on hand so people can buy one when they feel like it, but pots take up a lot of space.*

“Small items take more time and effort, but produce very little profit in return…” I mumbled.

There was no demand from commoners for large tableware sets that were metallic. The soup spoons and other cutlery in our house were all wooden. While Marius’s house mostly had metallic spoons, they were made of silver—needless to say, no commoner could just casually afford literally silver spoons. It seemed nails and wood staples were a bit in demand, but I was required to make quite a few, which took a lot of work. The profits just weren’t worth it. Ultimately, I’d ended up making weapons—they took some time to make, but the profits were well worth my time.

“Sure, but I think Camilo would buy most things from you,” Anne said.

“Well, yeah…” I said with a shrug.

I could’ve probably sold Camilo anything, and he would’ve claimed that he had a buyer lined up. He’d probably even buy silver cutlery from me. *I wonder if my cheats would be activated in this scenario.* And it was his competence that allowed him to make those sales. It wasn’t good to be too arrogant, though; even some of my items wouldn’t sell if there was no demand, as

I'd mentioned earlier.

Camilo also wasn't the type to hold on to inventory for too long. This had enabled him to branch out to the empire and the Nordic region.

"Once I get to a point where I don't have to work so much, I wouldn't mind making tools and stuff more often," I said.

For some reason, Anne smiled at me.

"But of course, I don't want to trouble Camilo," I added with a chuckle.

Everyone laughed along with me.

"All right, let's get back to work," I said.

The ladies agreed as the roars of the fire filled our forge, and we returned to our usual workday.

"All's right with the world," I said.

Camilo stroked his mustache and nodded. "You're right."

Before I started building the stove for the winter, we decided to head to the city to deliver our order to Camilo. Of course, I'd sent Hayate first to give a bit of warning about my arrival. At first, the wyvern had seemed confused when she'd seen that Miss Karen had remained in the capital while the Nordic delegation had returned home, but Hayate had soon gotten used to the quiet life. She preferred to fly every now and then, and I didn't mind sending her to Camilo even if I didn't have much to talk about, but it seemed that was unnecessary. I was relieved to hear it.

In any case, as I turned in my wares, I sat down to speak with Camilo and exchange information. The capital was quiet, and he'd received no word from the Nordic region either. We chatted about how Miss Karen might send us some of her products soon, and there weren't any issues in Marius's land—this city included. There was no need for any sort of expedition to solve problems.

It seemed expeditions had been launched every now and then, but Marius had quickly produced excellent results after taking over the title of count—there weren't any more flashy incidents for him to resolve. The margrave also seemed to have his hands full, but there were no signs of any work being passed onto me.

"He's considerate of you in his own way," Camilo mentioned.

"Well, don't hesitate to reach out if anything happens," I said. "My next order will be in three weeks, as we discussed."

I could fulfill the order in a bit more than a week, and I'd delivered this one now so that I could take an extended break until my next order. I planned on using that time to prepare for the winter. My schedule was to spend the first two weeks preparing for the winter, spend the last week on our order, then head out to the city again.

If we finished work early, I considered going for a bit of an outing before winter was in full swing. But if it became really cold, I doubted that we'd be eager to head outside.

Once we dropped off our wares, we returned to our cart with three weeks' worth of coal and ore for our work, along with another large item—fabric. Specifically, wool. The pile of wool was enough for ten people, and weight aside, it was an impressive sight to behold.

"We might be warm in the house, but it will be cold if we venture outside," I'd said on our way to the city as I'd felt the cold breeze.

"Yeah," Diana had agreed. "We all have coats and stuff—does the Nordic region have anything like that?"

"Hmm, yeah, we do. Made to order. They're not really suitable for going out, but they're good enough for sticking close to home."

I'd decided that if Camilo had the material, I wanted to purchase it. Rike and I would primarily be making the stove. We might need some help here and there, but everyone else would be bored and have some time on their hands. I thought that this plan would give them something to do.

After we dropped off the order, I gave the usual apprentice a tip, and our family headed out onto the city streets. I greeted the guards as we passed through the gates onto the road out of the city. The cart was a bit more cramped than usual—Lidy gazed at the small mountain of wool that was taking up most of the space.

"A *dotera*, was it?" she asked. "Is it like the clothing that Miss Karen's uncle wore?"

"Yep, something like that," I replied.

Kanzaburo had actually been wearing a *haori*, but it was close enough. A *dotera* was a coat that resembled it—something that only covered the upper body. It was usually filled with cotton or wool to make it fluffy and warm. My vague explanation had seemingly gotten my point across.

“Oh, like a gambeson,” Helen said.

Her words were spot-on, and while maybe Rike, who’d been raised in a forge, would be lost at that comparison, Diana and Anne nodded their heads with an expression of understanding. *It’s kinda funny to me, but I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.*

In short, a gambeson was a type of clothing. The ladies (everyone except me) didn’t touch much upon the design, but were excitedly chattering about adding some decorations so that each person could be identified from afar. The idea of making them for Krul and Lucy was kicked around too.

As I gazed at the cheery sight, Krul pulled the cart ahead. We entered the forest, and an exceptionally icy breeze brushed against us. Was it encouraging us to hastily prepare for the winter?

We focused upon the upcoming frosty months.

The flames in the firebed roared loudly as I clanged away at a sheet of metal, stretching it out. My goal was a thin, long sheet. Across the forge, Samya and Rike were also hammering away.

Samya had agreed to help Rike and me build the stove. She wasn’t great at sewing, though she could do it if she really needed to. I suspected that this was partly due to how different beastfolk hands were, and I found it cruel to push that task onto her.

“We can sew her share too,” Diana had assured us.

And so, Samya had taken that kind offer and joined us on stove-building duty. I’d already explained to her and Rike the general shape of what I had in mind. I wasn’t planning on making anything complicated—nothing like a stove from Earth that produced a secondary burn. Besides, there was no heat-resistant glass here. My vision was of something simpler, like a fireplace made of steel or a rocket mass heater with a larger opening.

The two ladies were currently building the main frame of the stove, and I was making a pipe for ventilation. There were several ways to forge pipes. One was to create a cylindrical pillar and then stretch it out while creating a hollow inside. This method was fast, and it produced very few seams. The issue was that I couldn’t make a pipe longer than the item used to make the inside hollow. Multiple pipes would thus need to be welded together to create length.

Another method was to spiral a thin sheet of metal around something and then weld the seams together. This would mean there'd be seams along the entire length of the pipe, but I could easily make whatever length I desired. These long seams weren't well suited for pipes that were used to expel smoke, but I had my cheats on my side, so I could make pipes that wouldn't allow even a single drop of water to leak through. My skills meant I was perfectly suited for this job.

And so, I'd placed a heated sheet of metal onto the anvil and hammered away to create a thin, long sheet. Thin sheets of metal seemed to be in demand around our forge—I certainly found them useful. So much so that I considered making a rolling mill of sorts one day. Unfortunately, we didn't have access to a water wheel, and we didn't have an energy source, but our hot spring vein was flowing freely. *Maybe I could temporarily move my forging operation to beside the hot spring to take advantage of the flowing water... Or, on the rare occasion, I could ask Krul to help out, since she's so strong*

But a rolling mill could reliably create a ton of uniform sheets of metal. If such a technological advancement escaped my forge, I worried that it would heavily tip the scales of military power. On the other hand, if the option was to give both the hero and the Demon Lord the same weapons, I'd probably agree to that. *But I wanna believe that such an opportunity will never arise.* And so, I continued to thin these sheets of metal by hand.

I sighed. "Phew."

I wrapped the thin sheet of steel around a wooden stick. *Kind of reminds me of a spring...* Back on Earth, I'd seen videos of a noodle machine that wrapped thin dough around a stick and slid it off. *That's exactly what this feels like, and I think the basic premise is the same.*

"How's it going over there?" I called out as I took a breather.

"We're getting there!" Rike replied cheerfully.

As I turned her way, I saw the beginnings of a large metallic box. Samya swung her hammer nearby, shaping the metal. It was probably unfair to compare her to Rike, who was an exceptional smith; without that comparison, Samya was doing quite well.

"She's got talent," I remarked.

"I agree." Rike nodded. "Maybe it's because she's been helping me out."

Every now and then, Samya aided Rike with minor work, just as she'd been doing today.

"You know, it feels like it's been a while since just the three of us worked in the forge together," I remarked.

Rike nodded. "You're right."

Samya stopped her hammering and glanced around. "Yeah, it really seems like such a long time ago."

The firebed was quiet but scorching hot. The three of us hadn't been alone together since Diana had arrived at our cabin.

"Slowly but surely, this family grew, leading to what we've got today," Rike murmured.

"You sound like my granny," Samya pointed out.

"What?! Hey, Samya!"

The dwarf feigned anger, and Samya and I laughed along. Rike eventually joined us with a smile. *All right, just a little more to go for our growing family.*

"Speaking of, do animals around here hibernate in the winter?" I asked Samya over dinner. I casually sipped on my tea. While I couldn't deny that I was interested in the ecology of this forest, my chief concern was actually something else.

"I was wondering if securing food will become a problem," I added.

Currently, we had more than enough food stored away. If we were forced into a situation where we had to hole up in the cabin, we could, by my tally, survive for at least a month without any outside help. We even had facilities to repair and forge new weapons. *Though I suspect that our forge wouldn't remain so pretty under those circumstances...*

While we had enough food to go around for now, we were a large family of ten, so we depleted resources rather quickly. Surprisingly, Krul had a small appetite, and Lucy didn't eat as much as I'd expected either—perhaps she was utilizing magical energy as a part of her diet. Still, they both ate in accordance with their size. Rike, Helen, and Anne had hearty appetites too, only increasing our consumption. I had no real complaints about their eating habits, though.

"Hmm..." Samya said. "It gets cold around this area, but it rarely snows, and the grass doesn't get buried by frost either."

"Which means you can still hunt," I replied.

"Yeah. But the animals don't move around as much, so it

might be a bit of a pain to find them. I didn't worry too much when I was alone, but now that you mention it, we might need a bit more food for our growing family. Probably a good plan to hunt down more than usual, just to be safe."

It seemed the animals didn't hibernate, but they weren't as active either. That made sense—moving around consumed quite a bit of calories. *If memory serves, I think Earth's military rations were a lot more calorie dense for those in the cold north.* If a person in cold weather had to traverse the same distance as a person in warm weather, the one in the cold would need more calories to do so. And finding calories required burning calories, so it was all terribly inefficient. This was a useful tactic for humans on a diet (a concept that was quite foreign to this world), but for wild animals, it was a matter of survival.

"What about wolves?" I asked.

"I see 'em around every now and then, but they don't roam much," Samya replied. "I usually spot a pack all huddled up and sleeping."

Just then, I heard a loud clatter from Diana. Clearly, she'd overheard us talking about the huddling wolves and wanted to see such an adorable sight for herself. I remembered seeing a skulk of fluffy foxes all clumped up and sleeping near one another in a fox village back on Earth.

"Maybe you guys can see the wolves if you're lucky," I said. "Also, we've got room in storage for extra meat, right?"

"I believe so," Lidy answered. "I stored some potatoes just the other day, and there was still plenty of room left."

Her immediate reply was assuring—she was in charge of the farm, and she often harvested the crops we grew from the elves' seeds to add to our food storage. The beastfolk had a custom of not hunting two days in a row, which was likely some kind of practice to prevent overhunting. Even in the vast Black Forest, if the beastfolk were to go out hunting every day, the animals would be wiped out. This custom was to prevent that situation.

Still, we could hunt again after a short break. When I asked Samya about it, she claimed that there was no explicit rule that prevented hunting twice a week. It didn't mean that I wanted her to go that often, but we agreed that she should go during the little breaks while we made the stoves and crossbows. While she was out, Rike and I would take over doing a majority of the building. I didn't think it would affect our production speed too

much…hopefully.

"The deer and boars are probably pretty fatty too," I said.

"Yeah, probably," Samya replied. "That's partly the reason they move so slowly."

Storing fat was the best way to preserve one's life. Obviously, it was unwise to be *too* fat, but I was pretty sure that the deer and boars of the forest had good enough metabolisms to prevent that, so there was no need for them to worry. The image of a smoker flashed across my mind. *I'm making stoves anyway, and I would just need a few more minor tweaks to create a smoker. But I'll only consider making one if Team Forge gets some free time…*

"In any case, I'll leave hunting to you," I said. "Just let me know if it seems like the perfect day to go."

"Got it." Samya nodded.

I gulped down the rest of my tea, and as usual, I was the first to say that I was headed for bed. I retired to my bedroom and went to sleep.

The morning chill was growing harsher by the day. The sun rose just a bit sooner, signifying the end of autumn and the beginning of winter. It was still too soon to add deer hide to the blankets of our beds, but that day was quickly approaching.

Our cabin, which stood in the middle of the forest, wasn't airtight. There weren't any large gaps, but there was space for cold drafts to creep inside. To put a positive spin on this, we probably had no worries about lacking oxygen for our stoves, but we wouldn't be able to warm our house very efficiently.

Today, we continued to build stoves. Samya and Rike were in charge of the main stove body, and I made the chimneys. I wanted to make a prototype and test it out in the living room, where we usually ate. *Clang*s and *clink*s rang out in the forge as metal struck metal.

"Boss, could I ask you about this bit?" Rike inquired.

Aside from her occasional queries, we all worked silently. I noticed Samya firmly nodding along as I explained my thoughts to Rike, but she didn't speak. The fire roared away, and the sounds of metal rang in the air.

Just then, the door connecting the forge and the cabin slammed open. I turned around and looked up to see Diana. *Wait, she's not alone.* Next to her was Lucy, who'd grown quite a bit since we'd first rescued her.

“Look, look!” Diana exclaimed.

She gently encouraged Lucy forward. Our pup was wearing a bright pink *dotera* as her tail wagged furiously. It seemed her clothes were complete.

“You started with Lucy’s?” I asked.

“Yeah.” Diana nodded. “She’s small and doesn’t have wings like Hayate, so it was a perfect way to practice.”

“Fair enough. It’s sweltering in here, so let’s change locations. I want a better look.”

“What about your work?”

“It’s about time we took a break. Let’s have some lunch.”

Samya and Rike nodded, and we set down our tools. We made sure to not let the fire go completely out as we closed the door to our forge. I was told that Lucy’s outfit should be shown off to Krul and Hayate, and so I decided to serve lunch outside. We ate under sunny skies while a chilly breeze brushed past. Lunch today was dried, grilled meat, freshly baked unleavened bread, some soup, and tea. These hot meals would warm us up and shield us from the cold—Team Forge had been kept warm by the flames of the firebed until now anyway.

Lucy wagged her tail eagerly as she polished off her meat and ran around. She could put her legs through the loop of the *dotera*’s string, preventing the clothing from falling off as she frolicked. Krul and Hayate chased after her. Krul charged at her from the ground while Hayate was in hot pursuit from the sky. Lucy unleashed a few feints of her own to skillfully dodge her sisters. Her clothing was adorned with a floral-designed fabric on one side, accentuating her adorableness, though her agility made her anything but.

“Have they been playing around like this in the evenings?” I asked.

The workday was now over, and I was preparing dinner while the rest of my family either sat outside to cool off or trained with the sword or bow. All the while, my daughters were playing tag and other games. I’d been watching their games, and they resembled children running around—they didn’t used to play around using feints or other sneaky techniques, but now that they were older, their games of tag had gotten more complex.

“I played tag with them just the other day, and I caught Lucy,” Helen said.

The Lightning Strike was incredibly quick on her feet, and I felt like she'd become a renowned track-and-field athlete if she'd been on Earth. No doubt she would've broken record after record—she might've been an untouchable star. Even Lucy, who boasted one of the fastest speeds within the Black Forest, didn't stand a chance against Helen. I'd seen them play around numerous times.

"Then she suddenly began to play exclusively with Krul and Hayate," Helen continued with a slight frown. "Lucy seems more interested in playing with them—she won't give us the time of day."

I offered a strained smile; I didn't know who the parent was in this scenario. "I'm sure she'll play with you again when she gains some more confidence."

"And what if Lucy loses?" Helen asked.

"Then back to her training she goes."

"Hmm... Maybe I should lose on purpose."

"Lucy's a clever girl. I think she'd see right through your ploy."

"Grrr..."

Helen gritted her teeth in frustration, but this was part of life. A child was trying to grow, and for a parent, it was important to watch over her.

"One day, you'll lose to her fair and square," I said.

What would Lucy do then? Will she choose to leave our house in search of a stronger opponent? I'll be very lonely, but at the same time, it's something I should celebrate. I gazed at Lucy, who raced around like a gust of pink wind.

After dinner, we gathered in the corner of our living room. A square box of steel proudly stood there, supported by four legs. A pipe ran from the box and led to a hole in the roof, which served to expel smoke outside. Of course, this was our stove—I didn't really consider radiant heating from the pipe. I'd engraved the sitting fat cat insignia of Forge Eizo onto the stove along with a few decorative etchings. I'd also piled wood around the stove as a sort of defensive measure—this would keep my daughters from getting too close to it. Krul was too big to fit in our house, but I didn't want Lucy or Hayate to touch the stove and get burned. They were both smart enough to know about the dangers, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

For a moment, I recalled something from Earth: Kids were

encouraged to touch a hot stove while it was heating up—their skin would make contact with the heat at a temperature where they wouldn't get burned too badly, and this served as a lesson. I immediately waved that thought away; I didn't want to expose anyone to danger. The chopped wood by the stove took up some space and made the room a tiny bit more cramped, but it wouldn't affect our daily lives. *This room is pretty spacious anyway…*

Our wood, or this wood in particular, dried very quickly. Only recently had I realized that it dried much faster than regular bits of lumber. When the stove had been in the forge still, I'd burned a few bits of firewood inside to test it out.

Rike casually pointed out, "I've been thinking this for a while, but the wood from the Black Forest dries very quickly."

Samya and I looked at her in shock. I'd always assumed that it was normal for wood to dry in a month or so. The bits of wood that were tossed around in our yard (including the wood that came from dismantling the carts we used to drag game back from the lake), dried in a month or less. We used these pieces as fuel or to build new things. In fact, the wood we'd used when building additions to the cabin and constructing our daughters' hut had all come from the forest.

"Wait… Really?" Samya asked gingerly with surprise in her voice.

I didn't know what to say.

"Wait, you didn't know?" Rike asked.

Samya and I shook our heads.

"It takes about six months minimum for wood to completely dry out," Diana chimed in with a sigh. "But it usually takes around a year."

"That's about right," Lidy agreed.

Where did Diana learn that? And if Lidy knows about it too, then…

"I thought you knew that already," Helen added with her own sigh.

Anne nodded. "Same here."

It seemed only Samya and I had been kept in the dark about it. Our family added that they assumed the wood here was special because it belonged to the Black Forest. Samya and I only knew about wood in *this* forest, and we'd assumed that its drying rate was normal for all other wood. In my case, I just thought that was how wood worked in this world, but because I'd made

no previous mention about the drying speed, everyone had assumed it was just common sense that wasn't worth mentioning. *What a huge misunderstanding on both ends.*

I tossed some firewood into the stove and used magic to ignite it. As the quiet crackles filled the room, we began to discuss why the wood here dried so quickly. The wood didn't bend or twist because it dried too fast, and it didn't turn particularly sooty when it burned. There were no downsides, but without a proper explanation, it was still a bothersome conundrum. We were all puzzled.

Is it because of the lack of rain? No, we experience the same weather as the city. As we discussed some other places where wood dried quickly, the empire was mentioned. But none could match the speed of the Black Forest.

"The trees of this forest might be using magical energy to stimulate growth," Lidy said.

"Like Krul and Lucy," Diana agreed. "With magical energy, they can still grow big and strong, even without excessive eating and drinking."

"So the trees don't contain much water, and that's why the wood dries quickly," Anne added.

Lidy nodded. While there was a mountain in the distance, I did think that it was odd for there to be a large forest right in the middle of a rolling plain. The biggest issue was that, even during rainy seasons, there wasn't nearly enough rainfall to support the ecosystem of this massive forest. Until now, I'd thought that there must've been some underground water welling up—just like a lake beneath the surface—that provided a constant source of water for the trees.

With a bit of digging, we'd built a well, and hell, we even had a hot spring vein now. We also had that small pond that would get rid of the overflow, so I didn't think that my assumptions were too out of the ordinary. *And yet, the magical energy around here is so thick that creatures avoid it. Huh? Wait a sec…*

"The crops on our farm don't wilt normally—or normal within the means of elves' crops—do they?" I asked. "I wonder why."

The farming plot was in our courtyard. This was where the magical energy was the thickest, and the crops grew fast thanks to that energy, producing multiple harvests throughout the year. But Lidy had mentioned that the seeds grew like any other outside of the elf forest because of the lack of magical energy.

“Just like us elves, the plants may not be absorbing magical energy infinitely,” Lidy guessed.

The main reason elves didn’t regularly visit the city or capital was because magical energy was vital to maintaining their life force. When Lidy had been chased out of her home forest, she’d come here instead of the capital chiefly because of the magical energy here. The Black Forest was especially thick with it, but Lidy didn’t experience any magical energy sickness because she wasn’t infinitely sapping up energy. I didn’t think that the elven crops had a will of some sort, but if they operated on some sort of mechanism where there was a limit to the amount of magical energy they could absorb, they’d grow normally. That made sense to me.

“Hmm…” I said as I placed a hand on my chin.

Huh? This is weird. It feels like I’m back in the forge. I glanced at my surroundings and noticed that the stove was announcing its existence by emanating heat. The warm air reached me, and for a moment, it felt like the flames from the firebed.

“Oooh, it’s warm,” I said.

Diana smiled. “This is quite nice.”

She was sensitive to the cold—she stood next to me while she placed her hands close to it.

“Don’t get *too* close,” I warned.

“I know,” she replied with a forced chuckle. She grabbed some pieces of logs and hurled them into the mouth of the stove, feeding it more fuel.

“All right, we’re off,” Samya said.

“Be careful,” I replied.

I watched Samya and the other members of the hunting party leave the cabin. Everyone, barring Rike and me, were off to catch some prey in the forest. Krul, Lucy, and Hayate would tag along as well. Hayate had seemed hesitant at first to leave, but I didn’t need to communicate with anyone right now. I told them to send her back with or without a letter if anything happened.

Should Hayate return without a letter, she would take me (and Rike) straight to the place where she’d last been. So, even if the group had moved from that area, I’d be able to narrow down the search radius, and it was better than having no hints at all. Worst case, I’d probably ask Lluisa to lend us a hand, but that would be an absolute last resort.

I didn’t think that we were enemies with the dryad. In fact, we were probably pretty high up there on her friendship list, but she was an existence who wielded power beyond the realms of mortal imagination. It was best not to owe her one. I felt like she owed us a bit more for now, so if needed, I planned to use that as my defense.

But honestly, in terms of danger, we’re probably more at risk here in the cabin than Samya and her team are in the forest. I mean, the sheer difference in power is astounding.

Maybe I should *build a fortress or something. I won’t make any traps that might cause friendly fire, but you know, maybe something that serves as a warning for unwary intruders. Maybe something that’ll ring the alarm in this house. I’ll think about it later.*

Hayate apparently sat perched atop of Krul for a majority of the hunt. Our drake was a huge help when dragging back the prey that was killed. Everyone had their own set of hunting gear, and there was no need for Krul to lug everyone’s stuff around. And so, Hayate’s favorite place during walks became the top of the drake’s back; the wyvern relaxed as she was rocked by Krul’s footsteps. *In human years, I think Hayate’s the oldest, but that doesn’t mean that she* shouldn’t *act spoiled toward her younger sister every now and then. Krul boasts the largest size among her sisters anyway.*

I’d heard that Hayate would often land on Anne’s head and shoulder as well; maybe it was because Anne was so tall. When I asked her if the wyvern was heavy, the princess replied that Hayate had some heft, but it was nothing to be bothered about. Since Anne seemed pretty happy about it, I felt like I shouldn’t say anything more.

Krul’s speed apparently made her an excellent beater, and during this time, Hayate didn’t rest. She flew high up above and gave out cries as a signal. While we couldn’t understand what she was saying, Samya believed that the sisters shared some kind of communication, and Hayate was likely giving out some sort of order.

Lucy had also grown quite a bit and was a huge help during hunting. Perhaps thanks to her abilities as a magical beast, she was very smart. At times, hunting hounds would literally devour their prey, but Lucy never did—she focused on restraining her prey and made no further movements unless she received direct orders from someone.

Diana would often tell me stories of Lucy's heroic hunting excursions with a smile on her face. Animals rarely approached our place. It was thick with magical energy, and they intuitively understood that they would run the risk of turning into magical beasts like Lucy if they lingered. In exchange—though I wasn't sure if I could call it that—animals often visited the hot spring, where the magical energy was much thinner in the air. To be precise, they didn't use our facilities but the pond the excess water flowed into. Wolves, bears, deer, raccoons, and even tigers would all drop by to take a dip. Squirrels and small birds also waded in the shallow parts of the pond, and I felt like we'd seen most of the common animals other than bears.

Back on Earth, I'd watched a TV show where people had set up camp in a cabin in the jungle to catch a glimpse of nature. They would often shriek that a tiger was close, only to run into a deer. But in this world, I didn't have to venture into the jungle; I could see all sorts of wildlife enjoying a dip, even in the middle of the day. *And just to be clear, I'm checking whether the pond is overflowing or not. I'm not just there to enjoy the wholesome scene of animals enjoying a bath. I swear.*

Our family had an unspoken rule that we wouldn't target any of the animals that visited the pond. Sure, we hunted down animals, but I wasn't keen on killing them while they enjoyed a nice rest.

And so, Rike and I waved our hunting team goodbye. My three daughters would occasionally turn around and glance at us, and we waved back at them until they were out of sight within the forest.

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A few days later, I carried a table from the terrace to the yard—I'd decided to have dinner under the skies for a change. It was about to be too cold to enjoy an evening dinner outside, and the season would turn harsh, so I wanted to enjoy this as a last hurrah of sorts.

Today, I cooked plenty of vegetables that we'd plucked from the farm. I couldn't serve them raw, but I'd steamed them and poured a wine vinaigrette dressing (made with some remnants left over; I didn't open a whole new bottle for this) on top. I plated some sautéed boar meat and venison with a side of some

boiled potatoes and a vegetable that resembled a carrot.

Usually, there was only a magic light and a bonfire illuminating our table, but tonight, I had two fires. I wasn't all fired up (no pun intended) or anything, but I also prepared some skewered raw meat that was only seasoned with salt and pepper. I thought it'd be a fun idea to grill and eat them on the spot. I served some wine and other liquor, adding the finishing touches to a humble but satisfying feast.

It was our version of a harvest festival. Our cheers rang out clearly under the twinkling stars that filled the night sky. Usually, our numbers were few—if a family of ten could be called that—but for tonight's party, we had several special guests.

"I've never had Nordic food before, but this is delicious! Wow!" Lluisa cried.

She stuffed her face with meat and gulped down wine as she chattered away happily. As a dryad who was connected to the Dragon of the Land, one of the cores of this world, she served as the master of the Black Forest.

"I'm happy to see you in such high spirits, but...are you all right with this?" I asked.

She was the ruler of nature within this forest, and I wasn't sure if she was allowed to taste the foods and blessings of this land (wine aside).

Lluisa stared at me blankly. "All right with that?"

"Er, I know I'm the one serving you the food, but this meat comes from the animals we hunted in this forest," I said. "I'm not sure if you feel awkward eating it."

"Ah, I see." She flashed a gentle smile that was fitting for a painting titled *The Smile of a Mother*. Her kind expression would serve as the perfect model. "Capturing and eating prey is one of the acts of nature. There's nothing for you to be so concerned about, Eizo."

"I'm glad to hear that."

I gave an awkward smile. She hadn't totally answered my question, but if she was fine with it, then I was in no position to question her.

"Wow..." a small voice cried out.

The owner of the voice was small like a doll—she was Gizelle, the chief of the fairies. Diana had cut up the grilled meat into smaller pieces, and the fairy had also stuffed her cheeks with a dainty morsel.

“We don’t usually get to eat food like this,” Gizelle murmured sheepishly as she saw Diana smile at her.

Fairies were small, and they could, at most, trap a rabbit or something. It was no wonder that she rarely ate boar or deer meat. I’d served it to her before in a different dish when she’d visited us, and I was happy to see her enjoying her meal—it made it all worth the effort.

So, why were these two ladies here? Lluisa had dropped by before taking a dip in the hot spring, and Gizelle had come to check and see if we’d tried to contact her. We’d been right in the middle of prepping for dinner, so we’d invited them to join us. At first, Gizelle had held herself back, claiming that she felt bad for intruding on us, but when I’d pointed out that we had plenty of food and her tiny body ate so very little, she’d immediately accepted. *Maybe she was actually interested in joining the festivities.*

Lluisa, on the other hand, had already made up her mind to join as I’d been explaining that we were preparing for a feast. I’d hardly needed to invite her. *Not that I’m complaining, though; she* did *help us out with some prep work.*

The animals were all preparing for the winter. Lluisa had said that she’d come to patrol the area and decided to take a dip in the hot spring along the way. *So she claims…* Gizelle had also been keeping tabs on the foliage of the forest, and she’d stopped by to see if we’d written anything on the signboard. The odd disease that plagued the fairies hadn’t occurred in a while—Reeja and Deepika were living healthily.

“It’d be best if living creatures didn’t need to take the lives of others to survive, but that’s simply not how nature works,” Gizelle said, smiling like a beautiful doll. “I think it’s quite splendid to see everyone expressing their gratitude to the food that they’re consuming.”

I felt like Gizelle was more fitting to be the master of the Black Forest, but I dared not vocalize such rude remarks. And so, our harvest festival, which included two unexpected and special guests, continued until the flames of the bonfire died down.

####

A few days passed, and the stove’s simple design had worked in our favor—we’d finished making all the ones we needed. I’d

even managed to line the pipes up so that warm air could be delivered throughout our cabin. A large one sat in the living room (the prototype that we'd made first), and we had one in my room to heat up the guest room. I wasn't going to subject our guests to the danger of being near fire, of course.

Diana had one in her room that could send warm air to the others—she was the least resilient to the cold. That stove would warm Diana's, Samya's, and Rike's rooms. The other three ladies were used to colder weather, and we'd decided to place one in Anne's room. Lidy was used to the forest's climate, and Helen had lived through harsh environments as a mercenary that had toughened her up (not her exact words, but close enough). The empire was colder than this forest, but Anne was a princess, and we agreed that she should enjoy the luxuries. She claimed that she really didn't mind, but she *did* have a fireplace back at home. It was best if she used the stove.

Unexpectedly, the stoves all went to people with high ranks, including me since that was my backstory, and one sat in the living room. Diana and Anne seemed quite excited to use their stoves, and I was glad to see it.

However, we couldn't come to an agreement about providing a stove for Krul and her sisters. Some said that a stove would be too dangerous for them, while others felt bad for subjecting my adorable daughters to the cold. I could understand both sides, but in the end, we decided to not place a stove in their hut. Safety first.

And so, Forge Eizo busily prepared for the upcoming winter. I had to think of a safer way to allow Krul and the others to keep warm, but I was a bit curious and anxious about the winter of this world. As the days passed and the cold drew near, I was excited to welcome a new season.

Chapter 2: Winter in the Black Forest

We were finally ready for the winter. I was working away as usual when Rike turned to me.

“You mentioned forging armor before, but are you going to actually make some?” she asked.

“Armor, huh…” I replied as I continued to work away. “Helen’s family, so I made hers as an exception, but it just takes too much time to forge.”

I didn’t forge daily necessities because I wasn’t keen on being rivals with other blacksmiths whose livelihood depended on those items. As for armor, I never made any simply because it took too much time and effort. I could make a sheet of metal that covered only certain areas (sort of like bikini armor), but the reality of actual armor wasn’t so simple. Armor had to be easy to move around in while protecting vital spots. Sure, I could get the right shape down in one go thanks to my cheats, but it still took a lot of time to make. And that was the solid part—if I had to make something like chain mail, it’d take me at least a month, even with cheats going full throttle. *I’d have to painstakingly make every ring and string them together.* And after all that effort, I’d end up with…chain mail for one.

I wasn’t sure if it was because my first items had been knives and swords, or if my past life affected my mindset, but I wanted as many people as possible to use my goods. I’d grown younger with my second chance at life, but this wasn’t a job I could do forever. In a decade, I’d catch up to my age back on Earth. Sometimes, I’d wish that I was younger, but judging from my smithing skills, I’d be beyond a genius if I was in my twenties forging blades that could slice through anything. *I’m already shady enough as it is.*

“I’d really like to see a set of armor made by you…at least once in my life,” Rike said. “But is it just not what you want to do, Boss?”

“Maybe I’ll think about it if I get some rare material,” I muttered.

I had adamantite and hihiirokane in my possession—if there was a metal harder than that but not suited to become a blade,

I'd consider making armor.

"Ugh, that's a pity," Rike said. She sounded genuinely disappointed.

I patted her shoulder gently. We were the only ones in the forge right now. Samya and the others were out hunting again; they had more than enough meat, so this was apparently more of an enjoyable outing. Samya had claimed that they were patrolling the area.

Even on Earth, I'd heard that bears that didn't hibernate were rather dangerous. I'd seen cases where they caused quite a bit of destruction. Samya and the other ladies were making sure that that wouldn't happen. They were searching for footprints to see if there were any predators wandering around needlessly, and trying to spot any abandoned carcasses. Samya was, of course, very skilled at tracking down footprints, but Helen had also claimed that she could identify footprints belonging to beasts. Perhaps her mercenary instincts kicked in for that.

Along with Samya, Lidy could tell if the carcasses looked odd. She'd stated that she could sense danger in a forest, just as she'd done before—this, of course, referred to the incident when she'd had to abandon her old village. The Black Forest was probably the most dangerous in this area, but all forests came with a bit of danger. *It's just easy to forget when I'm living here.*

Lluisa had deemed us the strongest fighting force in this forest, after all. Though that wasn't something I could honestly be happy about as a blacksmith. In any case, Samya and the other ladies were on the lookout for any potential dangers while foraging for fruits and plants along the way. It was a very important mission, and the ladies were on the job.

My three daughters seem to think it's a picnic of some sort, though... I envisioned them scampering through the forest, breathing puffs of white.

Slowly, I went back to work.

What weapons do I need to strengthen our defenses? Everyone's got their favorite weapon partner for close combat, so making more of those is unnecessary. That leaves weapons for ranged combat. The best ranged weapon is one that can be wielded even by those not used to fighting.

In other words, I needed something that even Rike could easily use. I wasn't going to put her on the front lines, but it would be great if she could launch a preemptive strike from the

back row and then support everyone. And if Rike could use the weapon, everyone else in our family would be able to as well. It would be even better if the weapon could adapt to each person's strengths, size, and combat style.

"All right, let's get started on that crossbow," I said.

In truth, I'd wanted to begin making one sooner, but a stove was essential for our daily life. The crossbow would be important during attacks, but it wasn't an absolute necessity that had to be prioritized. Still, I couldn't keep it on the back burner forever.

It was time to make a new weapon.

Roughly speaking, a crossbow was a drawn bow that had a latch or something to hold the string back and keep it from launching. Releasing that latch would release the string and fire an arrow. I had to be precise when building it, though. My plan was to have a disk of some sort in the center of the crossbow body. This disk would spin on a horizontal axis, and it would have a groove cut into it where the string could nestle when drawn back. To keep the disk from spinning prematurely because of the tension in the string, I would also cut a notch on the opposite side of the disk and add some sort of contraption that would lock the disk—and thus the string—in place. If this contraption was released, the tension of the string would cause the disk to spin, and the bowstring would release, firing an arrow.

I decided that the contraption would be similar to a gun and its trigger. On a gun, pulling the trigger releases the sear, which unleashes the hammer, and a bullet is fired. That was what I had in mind for the crossbow.

Of course, when a weapon is fired, the trigger must return to its original position. Guns generally used trigger springs for this, but I decided to use a U-shaped leaf spring for the job. Back on Earth, matchlock guns used leaf springs—because of the spring's shape, it was nicknamed pine needle spring, tweezer spring, or simply, *spring*. I was going to make something similar.

I couldn't make a coil spring just yet; the technology was a bit futuristic for this world. I'd heard that on Earth, Leonardo da Vinci had sketched a diagram of a pistol using a spring. However, it would launch this era forward quite a bit if a similar stroke of inventive genius suddenly appeared, and I had no intention of being the da Vinci of this world. The technology I would be using was quite ancient, and bows were quite old as well. The suspension system I'd built utilizing leaf springs was arguably

toeing the line of modern technology. I felt like maaaybe a coil spring would be just one of a spring's future forms, but now wasn't the time to make such an item—it wouldn't be necessary in this world for a good while. *In fact, the only use that comes to mind is making a toy for Lucy...*

The trigger for this crossbow wouldn't be the thin trigger that came to mind when one envisioned a gun. I opted for a bulky lever instead.

I started to make the main body or frame of the crossbow. Thanks to my cheats, work went smoothly, and I made quick strides. This wasn't a sword or a blade, but my cheats still activated to help me, much to my relief. *Fully creating a blade goes beyond the smithing or metalworking steps—maybe my production-related cheats just kick in as a bonus to help me out on projects like this.*

I wasn't just hammering—every now and then, I'd need to chisel away some parts, and once I was done, I'd need to fit everything together. I placed a nail in lieu of a central shaft and hammered it into a wooden board. *Should be good enough for some minor testing.*

"Are you going to try it out?" Rike asked as she saw me working away.

"Yep. Wanna watch?" I offered.

"Of course!"

She tagged along eagerly. Surely Krul and my other daughters would also be curious if they were around. I made a blocky U-shaped groove on the top of the disk. On the other side, I carved a notch, and the tip of the lever—my trigger—locked inside that notch. The tip prevented the disk from spinning. A leaf spring in the shape of a hairpin was positioned under the tip of the lever, and the tension pushed the tip up. At the same time, the notch and the central axis of the disk pushed the lever down, keeping things in balance. I slipped a string into the U-shaped groove on top of the disk and pulled the sides of that string forward, adding tension. *It would be nice if Rike could do the honors.*

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"We're just testing things out," I replied. "It's fine. Can you pull the lever for me?"

"All right. Here I go."

She gingerly pulled the back end of the lever. The front tip

went down with it, applying pressure to the leaf spring. Once the tip was released from the bottom notch of the disk, the U-shaped groove and the string rotated forward. If the string had been attached to a bow, then the release of tension would've caused it to fire.

I released my finger from the top of the disk, and I asked Rike to let go of the lever. The pressure from the leaf spring raised the tip of the lever, and the tip rotated the disk to find its notch, which once again locked the disk in place. Once locked, the U-shaped groove faced upward once more, ready for another string.

If this were actually a fully functioning crossbow, the bowstring would be drawn and fitted into the back groove, and an arrow (one specially made for this crossbow) would be placed on the bow so that it could be fired again.

"Looks good," Rike said.

"Yeah." I nodded. "Now we need to actually polish it up and see if it still works after some tweaks."

Even though things had gone well during the testing phase, oftentimes something went wrong during the real deal. Back on Earth, I'd had projects that'd worked during development become completely screwed upon launch—that had happened more than just a few times, and I'd needed to overcome several difficulties. I prayed that wouldn't happen in this case.

I dismantled the prototype parts so that I could start making the actual crossbow. The main body of the crossbow seemed to be most important, but when the body was connected to the bow, a flat end that would press against the user's body—something like a buttstock in guns—was equally vital. If that part wasn't made precisely, the user wouldn't be able to take aim or fire as they liked. There was some room for error, but it needed to be as exact as possible. After all, in that famous tale, William Tell is able to shoot through an apple atop his son's head using a crossbow. In other words, one *could* be precise with a crossbow if they used it correctly. *But as William Tell famously said, "Had I missed the first shot and killed my son, the second bolt would have been for you." Sounds like it wasn't* too *accurate of a weapon...*

In any case, the buttstock couldn't be made by swinging my hammer. It was certainly possible that my cheats wouldn't activate here; I had *some* production-related cheats, but they weren't nearly as effective as the ones I'd received for smithing.

For example, if I were to build furniture (and I had before on numerous occasions), I could make decent items—something good enough to sell. But it was like how Helen was far superior to me in combat, and Sandro, Pops from the diner, was a better chef: Someone out there could make better furniture than I ever could. I likely wouldn't stand a chance. *There's no use crying over spilled milk, though. It is what it is.* I wanted to make a crossbow that Rike, who was burly but tiny, could use, but it needed to be large enough for everyone else in my family to wield as well.

I wasn't planning on mass-producing crossbows, but if I were asked to make ten or twenty of them, I could create a jig that would enable me to build the same exact thing over and over again. Since that wasn't the case here, I'd use my cheats and take measurements as I went.

First, I needed to calculate the size of the entire weapon. I placed the butt of the weapon against Rike's shoulder and had her pose as though she were using it. Back on Earth, I'd been into airsoft, and I had her pose like she was aiming a sniper rifle. *Eh, it's close enough, so we should be fine.*

I gently carved the position of her arms into a sheet of metal and made sure to make it one size larger. The crossbow would be a bit big for Rike, but she would still be able to use it, and it wouldn't feel too cramped for the other members of our family. I had her hold the main frame just to get a vague idea of positioning. This was especially important for the lever—if it was in an awkward spot, they wouldn't be able to fire. I wanted to be especially careful with that.

Once the lever was placed beneath the buttstock, I approximated its size while keeping in mind that the lever's position signaled when they were ready to fire. All that was left was to cut up what I needed and process that as necessary.

If I'd had a fretsaw or coping saw on my hands, I would've been able to be more precise with my cutting, but all I had was a knife, which could cut the weapon into a rough shape before I polished it up. *Maybe I should make a fretsaw or something. I feel like it might come in handy in the future.* The knife I was using was, of course, my trusty blade that cut *very* well. With the help of my cheats, the building process was going quite smoothly.

Eventually, I began to make a shape that resembled a flat buttstock. *I mean, that's what I'm gonna use this for, so it should be okay.* I then had Rike hold it once more.

“How’s the size?” I asked.

“It’s a bit big for me, but I can still wield it without any issues,” she replied.

“And the weight?”

“Even when we add more things on top, I think Lidy will still be able to use it.”

“Then we’re doing well. And she’s stronger than I thought.”

Lidy was an elf who had a slender, petite frame. However, she worked with the farming plots and could skillfully use a bow, which required quite a bit of muscle. She was, by no means, weak, but she was surrounded by abnormally strong people. We had a skilled swordswoman, a giantess, a dwarf, a beastfolk, and a certain someone who’d had their muscles enhanced thanks to a mysterious being. Lidy was more than likely strong when compared to the average Joe.

“Should I tell Lidy that?” Rike grinned mischievously.

I let out a strained laugh. “Please, give me a break.”

If I were to rank the people whose bad sides I *absolutely* didn’t want to be on…Lidy would be at the obvious top. That ranking itself might’ve angered her, though, so I didn’t dare vocalize my thoughts.

“I don’t think she’d be bothered by my comment, but as they say, it’s best to let sleeping dogs lie,” I said.

“Is that a saying from the Nordic region?” Rike asked.

“Yep. It means ‘don’t do anything unnecessary, lest we invite an even more troublesome situation.’”

“I see.”

Rike let out a cheerful laugh, and I felt tempted to say more, but it was best to practice what I had literally just preached. I held my tongue and returned to work building the crossbow. To fit the main crossbow body together, I continued to carve and slice away.

Suddenly, I heard the familiar ringing of the clapper.

“This late already?” I mumbled. I remembered sandwiching lunch between bouts of work, but I’d been so focused on building the crossbow.

When I gazed out the window, the sun was already beginning to set. Winter was approaching, and naturally, the days were much shorter now than in the summer months. I realized that I’d completely left Rike to her own devices, and when I hastily turned in her direction, she’d finished up quite a few knives.

“Wow, you’re amazing,” I said.

I gave her a look to tacitly ask if I could touch her blades, and she nodded. I took one in my hands. Her practice was paying off—she’d produced the blades quicker than usual, infused them with magical energy, and even decreased the warping (and any other issues like that). These were more than good enough for entry-level knives.

Rike furrowed her brow slightly. “No, I need to be able to finish these blades with pure skill like you do, Boss. I’m just using cheap tricks to cover for where I’m lacking.”

“But this is more than enough for a knife,” I said. “Can I add these to the order and put them up for sale?”

She smiled and nodded. “Of course. I don’t mind.”

I wasn’t sure if it was in her dwarven nature or if Rike was simply bright, but she was very quick at picking up on things. I felt like her forging speed had increased considerably as well.

“It’s because I’ve got a great master,” she said.

“Aw, shucks…” I mumbled as I scratched my head.

In general, she simply watched how I worked and did her best to imitate my skills. Truth be told, I couldn’t teach her the cheats that I had, and I could only be ashamed of that fact.

“Seems like you can use magical energy quite well too,” I pointed out.

“Um, well…this is actually about all I can do,” Rike replied.

She also began scratching her head sheepishly. Recently, she’d been receiving lessons from Lidy on how to manipulate magical energy. Rike hoped to someday use spells and the like, but she was the only one in the household learning that skill—the other ladies were too busy mastering the way of the sword.

I nodded. “As Lidy once said, practice makes perfect. We can take it slowly, one step at a time.”

“You’re right, Boss.”

Just then, the door between the forge and the cabin opened.

“We’re back,” Samya announced as she stepped inside with the others.

I turned to them. “Welcome, all of you.”

Diana and Lidy were nowhere to be seen. Diana was apparently still outside taking care of my daughters, and Lidy had gone to check on the farming plots.

“How’d it go?” I asked. I was met with a pensive expression from Samya, and so I pressed her for answers. “Is something the

matter? Is it something bad?"

"No, nothing like that," Samya replied awkwardly.

She soon divulged that there were various signs that this winter would be colder than most. The beastfolk could tell from the fruits of the trees and the movements of the animals. The rest of our family, myself included, would miss these signs, but she had the experience to spot them. Anne sipped her cup of tea and added that Lidy agreed with Samya's opinion. I was almost certain now that this winter would be harsh.

"Guess our stoves'll come in handy," I said.

Samya nodded. "I'll head out a few more times before winter, but I think we'll be glad that we've got those to keep us warm."

Since I'd gone through all the effort to make the stove, I was happy to see that it'd be useful, but I wasn't happy that winter would be especially cold. That wasn't something to celebrate carelessly.

"In any case, I guess we should secure more firewood," I said. "If necessary, we can decrease the number of weapons we take for Camilo's order, and if it's *too* cold, we won't be able to go far anyway. Besides, he's already sold quite a lot of our wares to people in the city."

I wasn't sure if the streets would freeze over, but if that were the case, we couldn't possibly traverse with a carriage or cart. This meant that Camilo would mostly need to do business in the city, since the weather would prevent him from traveling with his wares. However, judging from the number of my weapons that had already sold in the city, I couldn't guarantee that my goods would fly off the shelves.

Everyone nodded along. I'd thought that we were already prepared for winter, but it seemed we still had a bit more to do.

Helen's awfully quiet... It was then that I noticed her curiously glancing at the buttstock of the crossbow. I hadn't finished the main body just yet, but it was more than complete enough to see how things fit together, and she seemed eager to find out how it worked.

"You can hold it if you want," I said.

Helen twitched at the sound of my voice and sheepishly turned my way. When we locked eyes, I nodded back at her.

"I-I'd like to..." Helen murmured.

She slowly picked up the crossbow. It was a bit too large for Rike, but as I expected, Helen, who was a bit taller than me,

found it a bit small—she really pulled in her arms as she held it.

"How does it feel?" I asked.

"It's a bit cramped, but I can still wield it," Helen replied. She'd been crouching slightly, and she straightened her posture. "It's just fine."

"Well, if you don't have any issues, it should be fine for us."

"Then could I try it out next?" Anne asked.

She was a giantess and the largest in our family. If she could use it, then everyone in our family could...as long as they had the skill. Anne drew her arms back even farther, but she was indeed *just* barely able to use it. I was hesitant to point out that her size might cause the crossbow to be more of a nuisance, but that didn't seem to be the case. *All right, seems like we can all use it.*

But before I could wrap it up, Samya wanted to try holding it, and then Diana and Lidy, who'd stepped into the forge, wanted to hold it too. In the end, everyone decided to test it out and see how the crossbow would feel in their arms.

####

The next day, thanks to Rike working hard to make knives for our order, we had some time to spare. I'd decided to dedicate that time to working on the crossbow.

Samya and the rest of the hunting team would be out on patrol today. I'd already asked them to bring me some firewood or sticks if they stumbled across any. When I wandered around the forest, I often found twigs and sticks just scattered across the ground. I always had enough, and I usually headed out with another goal in mind, so I never picked them up. However, with our large group of ladies, I was sure that we could collect more than enough for winter. Krul was likely in a good mood because she got to carry more than usual—Hayate would need to find a different spot to perch on today.

"Be careful," I called out.

"We're off!" the ladies shouted.

"Kululu!"

"Arf, arf!"

"Kree!"

After I watched them disappear into the forest, Rike and I returned inside. Today, I wanted to finish up most of the crossbow. I planned to finish the main body and attach the bow

to it. I'd carved a groove that would connect the bow to the frame, and once I deepened that groove and affixed the parts with a pin or something, I'd be done. I actually wanted to add a fastening screw rather than a pin, but mechanics aside, that wasn't something I could make or use so easily. *I think on Earth, some guy made the lathe, which allowed screws to be mass-produced and made them widespread. If I flatten the tip of the pin and ensure that it can't be removed easily, it should do the job just fine.*

I carefully measured the body and carved the part of the buttstock it would connect to. Every now and then, I'd fit the pieces together to see if I needed to make any more adjustments. After some time, I finally managed to cleanly fit the disk, lever, and spring together. All that was left now was to make the bow and a few more parts. I considered mixing metal and wood to create my bow but ended up settling on something fully metallic, which would allow me to use my smithing skills. I could use my magical energy to adjust the hardness and elasticity of the metal, and I felt like I could make one similar to a composite bow. Crossbows were a bit harder to draw than usual bows and required more power, but I didn't think my adjustments would make it too difficult to use.

I heated a sheet of metal in the firebed and hammered it on my anvil to lengthen it out. Using my cheats, I made sure to focus more on elasticity than toughness while ensuring the bow would still function, and I stopped just when it was getting a bit tough.

All that was left was to carve out the notches on either end of the bow where the bowstring would be attached. Of course, the curvature of the bow would change before and after an arrow was released, but that was difficult to see just yet.

I placed the bow onto the front of the crossbow body, opposite the buttstock, and attached it with a U-shaped bit of metal so that the bow wouldn't slide around. Then, I added another piece of metal—this time horizontal and D-shaped—onto the frontmost tip of the body, in front of the bow. I'd crafted these fastening pieces by hammering away at a sheet of metal, and I'd made sure that they were tough enough to endure some rough handling. Then, I'd forged a few other parts that were of equal durability. The U-shaped bracket had several pins fastening it into place. The D-shaped metal would serve as a

stirrup of sorts. The user could step on this stirrup and pull back the bowstring to load the weapon with an arrow.

"Sorry, could you help me out here?" I called.

"Sure," Rike replied.

I *could've* worked on this alone, but it was far easier to have some help. Samya had provided me with an especially strong bowstring (made of the sinew of a tree deer; apparently, deer were preferred to boars because the former had longer legs and thus, longer sinew). We'd already affixed it to one side of the bow. The bow's curve jutted in front of me in a concave D shape. I would need to bring the two ends of the bow together, making it even more concave, so I could attach both ends of the bowstring. When the string was on and the two sides were released, the bow would snap back to its usual shape and the string would be very taut. Needless to say, this was the bit that required a lot of muscle. Luckily, my muscle mass had been increased by the Watchdog, and Rike was a dwarf who was very strong—together, we could handle it.

We prepared to use all of our strength.

"All right, here I go," I said.

"Okay!" Rike exclaimed. "Three... Two... One!"

We matched our timing and compressed the two sides of the bow. Once the D shape had become narrower and deeply concave, we swiftly flipped the bow so that D stood up vertically. The two of us had to use our full weight to keep the bow from snapping back to its original position. I held the bow in place while Rike affixed the string to the opposite end, and once it was in place, we carefully let our hold go slack. The bow was once again in its neutral position, and the string was now taut.

"Oooh!" Rike said excitedly.

The bow was finally attached, and the stirrup, body, and buttstock were in place too. It'd begun to take the shape of a functional crossbow.

"Thanks," I said. "You're a huge help."

"It's only natural for an apprentice to help out," Rike replied with a smile.

"Now then, we're on the final stretch."

"It isn't done yet?"

"Technically, it is, I guess."

But I had two or three more things that I wanted to add. I heated another sheet of metal and began hammering away. I

made something that resembled a shoehorn, and it was large enough to cover the area where the frame was affixed to the bow. Rike pointed at it curiously.

"What is that?" she asked.

"It's to ensure that the bow and string won't shift and move when the bowstring's drawn back," I replied.

"Oooh! I see!"

Rike's eyes sparkled with delight. When the string was pulled back between this shoehorn and the disk, the string would catch in the disk's notch, and no one would risk accidentally getting their fingers caught in there. Finally, I added a small hook to the shoehorn.

"What's this part for?" Rike asked.

"Ah, this?" I replied.

I took a small piece of rope that was lying around in the forge, made a few loops, and added a bit of caulk on the end to fasten it around the hook. I ended up with an item that resembled a grappling hook. This was my version of a draw assist.

"You do this..." I began. I stepped on the stirrup of the crossbow and placed the draw assist's hook on the bowstring. "And then you do this..." I pulled back on the draw assist—tugging the bowstring in the direction of the buttstock. The ropes of the draw assist were taut in the middle of the frame, and the small hook was pulling on the bowstring. When I held the crossbow up with both hands, the looped rope of the draw assist formed an M shape.

"And then *bam*," I finished.

I pulled on the end of the M-shaped rope, and the hook pulled the bowstring back rather easily. It still required a bit of power, of course, but this method allowed the user's hand to become a cog and pull back on the string without using too much strength. I continued to pull back and hooked the bowstring in the groove of the disk. I felt a bit of resistance, and when I let the draw assist go slack, the bowstring remained drawn, and the disk remained in position thanks to the lever holding it securely in place. I removed the draw assist completely and gently lifted the crossbow up.

"All we need now is an arrow to actually use this thing," I said. As Rike clapped, I handed the crossbow to her. "We don't have any arrows yet, but do you wanna give it a whirl?"

"A-Are you sure? Can I?" she asked.

“You’re probably the one who’ll be using it the most, so it’s best if you test it out.”

“Right.”

She immediately nodded and accepted my offer. Clearly, she was eager to try it out, but she was hesitant to use it before I got the chance. *You don’t even need to be so worried about stuff like that.*

Rike eagerly took the bow and placed the end of the buttstock against her shoulder. Her right hand was on the lever, and her left hand gripped the front part of the crossbow body. A bowgun was initially more of a trade name in Japan, but as I gazed upon the crossbow, it truly seemed to resemble a gun.

“Here I go!” Rike cried.

“Go for it,” I said.

She clenched her right hand, and the tip of the lever released the disk. With a loud *twang*, the bowstring was released. The sound rang in the air and echoed throughout the forge, a lot more intense than I’d expected. *But now, we know that it functions like a normal crossbow. Durability and stuff like that will be worked on later.*

“How does it feel?” I asked.

“Awesome!” Rike exclaimed. “I’ve never used anything like it before, but it’s so easy to use!”

“Good. Then we need to be able to fire some test arrows, huh?”

Rike’s eyes twinkled with delight, and she huffed excitedly. I gently placed a hand on her head with a little chuckle.

Normal arrows couldn’t be used for a crossbow. Like all arrows, crossbow arrows had an arrowhead, a shaft, and fletching to help stabilize them in flight—the most notable difference would be the thickness of the shaft. Arrows used for normal bows were a lot thinner; crossbows required bulkier arrows. I hadn’t learned the advantages of thicker arrows via my installed knowledge, and I hadn’t ever wielded a bow back on Earth. However, while I wasn’t sure about the specifics, it was logical to assume that the heavier the arrow and the higher the speed, the more kinetic energy it possessed. *And, uh, yeah, I know nothing else, really.*

I mentally referenced the arrows that Samya usually made (I provided the arrowheads, but she adjusted the fletching and stuff by herself) and made some thicker-shafted arrows. I didn’t

know the specifics of the dimensions, but my cheats allowed me to create some that were pretty decent. At least, I thought so.

"Aaand done," I said. "Rike..."

"Yes, Boss?" she asked.

"When you're done, let's test it out."

I raised the thick arrow in the air as she hammered away, and her eyes shone eagerly.

"Sure!" she shouted.

While Rike was finishing up two more shortswords, I decided to make a couple more arrows. After that, we both stepped outside, freed from the sweltering temperature of the forge. The sun was low in the western sky, and the chilly breeze felt refreshing as we cooled off. Back on Earth, I hadn't frequented saunas much, but now, I felt like I should've used them more.

I mean, I might be able to make one here. We've got a hot spring, and we can just grab a random stone from somewhere. I did *hear that you can't pour hot water on just any old stone, but that aside, building a sauna will probably be in the far, far future...*

I shook myself free from those thoughts, took a thick sheet of metal, and placed it atop the target that our family often used for archery practice. Both the arrowheads and this sheet of metal were filled to the brim with magical energy. I wanted the sheet of metal to stay solid for as long as possible for target practice, and I also wanted the arrowheads to last a while. Only then did I realize that I'd put myself in a bit of a catch-22. I let out a wry laugh as I attached the metal sheet.

The area beyond the target was a clearing, and even if one's aim was off, the arrow wouldn't accidentally strike someone else. *Maybe I should prepare dirt mounds like those seen in shooting ranges and stuff. We've got plenty of dirt from the hot spring dig.*

"All right, could you try loading the bow?" I asked.

"Yeah!" Rike replied.

She placed her leg on the stirrup and used the draw assist to pull the bowstring back and lock it into place. If she'd had trouble, I'd planned on making a pulley system that could easily pull the string or else install some cogs to make it a smoother process for her.

"Hup!" Rike said.

In one go, she pulled the bowstring back and hooked it on the disk. She was now ready to fire. She took one of my arrows and nestled it within the groove of the frame. Then, she slid it until

the base of the arrow was nocked on the bowstring.

She placed the buttstock against her shoulder. Modern technology used dot sights or scopes for better precision and aim, but of course, this world had no such luxury. In fact, there weren't any iron sights used for rifles either, and any aiming tools would be akin to those used on bows.

Rike gripped the lever.

Twang!

A loud sound echoed throughout the clearing as the arrow whizzed through the open space in a straight line. When it made contact with the target, there was a deafening *crack*, and some sparks danced in the air before the arrow fell to the ground.

Seems like the arrow can't pierce through the metal plate. When I approached the metal, I saw that it'd been dented in considerably, indicating the spot where the arrow had struck. *Looks like this target isn't totally unscathed.* When I picked up the arrow nearby, the tip had been completely crushed.

Back on Earth, I remembered watching a video where a bullet couldn't penetrate a sheet of metal. This arrow had clearly suffered the same fate. I couldn't claim that this crossbow was more powerful than a gun, though. I'd kept Rike's skill in mind, and I'd made sure that she'd fired quite close to the target so that she wouldn't miss. Still, this crossbow was more than good enough to serve as a weapon.

"If someone with a shield takes an arrow from this crossbow, I'm sure it will pierce them and cause serious injury," Rike said as she stroked the dented area of impact on the metal.

I nodded. This sheet had been strengthened with magical energy. In other words, while this particular metal could endure the attack, normal shields wouldn't be able to do so.

"Maybe we can defeat a dragon with it," I muttered half jokingly.

"It's possible," Rike replied seriously.

I gave her an awkward chuckle. *Now that we know it has enough power—or more than enough, rather—we need to focus on durability.* I didn't expect this weapon to last an eternity, but if it were to break down with every fire, it'd be quite troublesome.

I checked on the crossbow Rike had just fired.

"Huh?"

Something felt a bit off. This bow had only been used twice, and yet it seemed quite worn down, like it'd been used multiple

times. I could hardly believe that this was a basically new crossbow. I used my cheats to take a closer look and saw that the bow was just a bit warped.

"Hmm…" I muttered.

"What's the matter?" Rike asked as she peered in beside me.

"Could you take a look over here?" I handed her the crossbow and pointed at the bow portion of the weapon.

"Okay. Let me see…"

She carefully scrutinized the crossbow and brushed her fingers along the area I'd pointed out.

"This bow is…" she murmured with a furrowed brow.

"A bit warped, isn't it?" I asked.

Rike nodded and returned it. "Yeah, it is."

I knew it.

"I'd expect a bit of wear and tear over time, but do crossbows normally start to break down this quickly?" she asked.

"Nah," I replied. "If they did, they wouldn't function as proper weapons."

"I thought so…"

Crossbows required a bit of extra time to fire, making them difficult to use in succession, but they boasted power and ease of use. *This bow can only be used twice, maybe thrice if we push it. Is that really a proper weapon? Who would want to fight a battle with a magical sword that can slice through anything but breaks after two swings? Not that this crossbow doesn't have its uses, but this issue is inconvenient.*

"Hmm, where did I go wrong?" I wondered aloud.

"Is it how it's built in general?" Rike asked.

"No, I don't think that's the issue…"

If there was anything wrong when I was building the crossbow, my smithing or production cheats likely would've notified me. And since I received no such warning, the finished product doesn't have any issues. Which leaves what I did after that. But, huh…

"We only used it twice," I said.

"Right," Rike replied. "It doesn't feel like it should break down with such little use."

As we were trying to figure out the cause, a voice called out to us.

"Hey, what are you guys doing over there?" Samya asked.

When I turned, I saw the rest of our family arriving, caked in dirt.

“We finished the crossbow, but there are some problems with it,” I explained. “What about you guys? What happened?”

Samya looked at us suspiciously when I furrowed my brow, but she soon realized that my attention had shifted to the ladies.

“We ran into a wallow,” Samya said. “Kind of rare.”

“Ooh…” I replied, wincing.

Wallows were muddy areas for wild animals. Boars and other creatures played in the mud to wash their bodies and get rid of insects. When I glanced at Lucy, she cocked her head to one side quizzically. She was also caked in dirt. I could easily imagine her charging into a wallow headfirst—pandemonium would’ve ensued as everyone tried to drag her out. Lucy wagged her tail happily, and her innocence dispelled any scolding that I had in my head.

“And what about you guys?” Samya asked.

“Ah, it’s about this crossbow…” I pointed to the crossbow in my hand.

Everyone gathered around. Helen leaned forward eagerly. She loved weapons, after all.

“It’s only been fired twice, but it’s already showing signs of warping,” I explained.

When I offered Helen the crossbow, she looked at it and peered at the bow portion. She traced it with her fingers and stopped right at the warped bit.

“Did you fire arrows both times?” she asked quietly.

“Huh?” I asked. “No, the first time, we fired with nothing at all. We just wanted to check if the bow would work.”

Helen let out a small sigh. “That’s the problem. Bows tend to wear out if you use them without any arrows. I think I heard that the excess energy that should’ve gone to the arrow travels to the bow, and it gets damaged.”

“Wait, really?!” I was absolutely shocked to hear that.

Helen grinned. “Guess there’s some stuff that even you don’t know, huh, Eizo?”

“Yeah. I keep telling you that I’m a normal blacksmith. But I should’ve confirmed little tidbits like that earlier.”

I hung my head. *Maybe I was a bit arrogant. Of course a weapon that could fire an arrow with that much power would cause the bow to be strained. I should’ve considered that.*

“But as I thought, you make some good stuff,” Helen replied. “You didn’t notice the warping until the second shot, right?”

“Y-Yeah,” I replied as I pointed at the target. “Rike fired it, and she hit the target.”

Helen narrowed her eyes and spotted it. “Whoa! It’s horribly dented! You’re awesome!”

She slapped my shoulder and guffawed. Her shoulder hits were definitely *different* from Diana’s. I was being praised, but I also felt embarrassed for screwing up, so I had no idea how to react to her words.

I woke up before dawn.

“Hrmmm…” I groaned as I stood in front of the crossbow.

Yesterday, Helen had informed us that we couldn’t fire a crossbow without any arrows. But since I *had* already fired it and caused the bow to become warped, I needed to repair it. The issue was how to do it. I could try making the bow itself stronger and more robust against damage. That change would make it tougher to draw the bow, but I could add some contraptions for support. I didn’t have to do that, though—I could simply fix the current bow and leave it at that. Rike and I weren’t careless enough to fire it again without an arrow loaded, so if I was careful, I didn’t think it’d be much of an issue.

Crossbows could apparently be handled like guns, with the caveat that a bow couldn’t always be cocked and ready to fire. Last night, Helen had told me that crossbows should only be brandished when there was an arrow and an intent to fire, so there was virtually no risk of firing without any ammunition.

I mean, even with guns, if you don’t plan on using them for a while, you usually remove the bullets and keep the safety on. It probably works similarly to that.

When the sun started to rise, I asked Rike and Helen for advice, and I ended up simply repairing the crossbow. Helen said it was best if the crossbow could be drawn instantly during times of crisis, especially if we needed to blockade ourselves in the cabin. I agreed with her decision.

“I wonder if I should lay some traps,” I wondered aloud.

I gazed at the trees outside. The leaves usually didn’t change too much with the seasons, but the breeze that blew through nipped at my skin. Winter was just around the corner.

“Hmm…” Helen said. “We’ve got natural mercenaries always patrolling the area.”

She was referring to the master of the forest and the wolves,

boars, tigers, and bears that prowled about, always on guard. *Don't think there're any dragons nearby, though.*

"Won't Lluisa protect us?" Rike asked.

"Who knows?" I replied. "I'm not sure if she's allowed to show blatant favoritism toward us, but either way, if she joins any sort of battle, she'd probably alter the land itself."

While Lluisa was the master of the forest, she had no means of directly attacking others. She could change the land like she was playing a sandbox game, and that was the only method she could use to harm enemies. Needless to say, that was bad news for this forest. If the threat was severe enough to endanger the forest itself, she'd probably do it, but in any situation less dire than that, we were out of luck. *If only she was willing to go that far... That's just a random thought, though. She's already done a lot for us, like guiding us to the hot spring vein.*

I stretched my limbs, then said, "All right, let's get to work."

Rike chugged away on her own projects, and Helen headed out once more with the rest of our family. They wouldn't be patrolling the forest today; they were going to take care of the farming plots. It seemed we had some crops that could grow even in the winter—the elves' seeds flourished regardless of the season. Preparations needed to be made for the seeds to be sown.

The ladies were all toiling away outside (and I could occasionally hear Krul, Lucy, and Hayate's cries) while I removed the bow from the crossbow and lit up the firebed. I finished my repairs pretty quickly—all that was needed was to fix the warped bow, though that was easier said than done. My cheats were a powerful assistant, but even then, completing the repairs wasn't physically easy. However, I fixed everything in about the same time it would take me to repair one of my usual weapons. After I finished, I grabbed the repaired crossbow and took it outside.

"It's pretty chilly," I remarked.

"How was it early in the morning?" Rike asked.

"Really cold."

She laughed at my words. Usually, when I took my daughters to fetch water, they were always eager to play in the lake. Not today, though. The only saving grace was that it wasn't cold enough for me to see puffs of my breath in front of my face. When I stepped outside with the crossbow, everyone who was frolicking near the farming plots came up to me, curious about

the weapon.

"Hey, you fixed it," Helen said as she pointed at the crossbow.

"Yep." I raised the crossbow up high. "I figured the sooner the better. I'm gonna test out some arrows—wanna give it a spin?"

She shook her head. "Nah, you should leave that to someone who's actually gonna use it."

"All right, then."

We had the perfect dwarf for the role. Rike drew the bowstring back. I'd retrieved the metal target from the forge, and Samya placed it where she usually practiced her archery. The sheet of metal had been forged by yours truly, and it was exponentially tougher than a normal target. If the crossbow could penetrate this sheet, it could likely pierce through any sort of armor in this world.

Safety was the priority. Once Samya finished setting up the target, we waited until she was a safe distance away, and I finally handed Rike an arrow. She held the crossbow and aimed at the target. Until this point, we'd only checked to see if the crossbow could be used at all; now, we were seeing if she could accurately aim it.

She didn't actually need to hit her target this time. Practice made perfect, and with time, I was sure she'd become more precise. Silence fell upon the rowdy atmosphere outside, and it felt like sound had been blotted out of this world. There was a deafening *twang*, which indicated that the lever had been pulled, and the arrow shot through the air toward its target. Rike and I were familiar with the loud *clang* that followed—it signified that she'd struck the metal sheet.

"Let's see..." I muttered as I narrowed my eyes to get a good look at the target.

An arrow stuck out of the metal sheet—bull's-eye. And since the arrow hadn't hit the ground, it hadn't been parried by the sheet either. *How much did it penetrate?* Our family headed for the target and saw that the arrow had plunged deeply into the target. I grabbed the arrow and shook it back and forth, trying to remove it, but it refused to budge.

"You think it pierced through?" I asked.

"Yeah, probably," Helen replied. "Hup!"

Thanks to her strength, she managed to pull the arrow away from the sheet of metal. A third of the arrow had made it through the metal sheet—it had completely penetrated.

“You think this is good enough?” I asked.

“Way more than enough…” Helen said wearily.

Laughter and clapping echoed through the forest as we celebrated a successful test run.

“Now, all that’s left is to see how well it fares against a moving target, yeah?” Helen asked me with a grin.

I’ve got a bad feeling about this…

“Aim at me,” she said. “I just wanna see how fast this crossbow can fire.”

My intuition rang true—I could hardly believe her suggestion. “Even if we remove the arrowhead from the arrow, I’m pretty sure it’ll still be pretty powerful,” I warned.

“All the better. I’ll know when I’ve been struck,” Helen replied.

“Huh? No, uh…”

I tilted my head to one side as I folded my arms in front of me. Since the Lightning Strike vouched for its power, I knew that this crossbow packed a powerful punch. I was hesitant to use her as a target, but I wanted to gather more information about how well this crossbow could perform. I continued to internally convince myself, and finally, I nodded.

“All right,” I relented. “We’ll test it out with arrows that don’t have any arrowheads.”

Helen shouted joyfully, but the rest of our family sighed deeply. *Forgive me, guys. I just really wanna see how well this crossbow fares against her.* Removing the arrowheads was simple enough, and we finished in a flash. Once again, I had Rike draw the bowstring back and slot an arrow inside. She was already used to it by now, so she could do it much quicker than before.

“I’m ready,” Rike called out.

I nodded in response. Helen stood on the other side of the garden, a bit farther back than the target, and I waved both my hands to signal that we were all set up.

“Ready whenever you are!” Helen shouted back loud enough to make the ground shake. She held a wooden sword in her hand.

Rike and I nodded at each other—Rike took aim.

“Here I go!” she said.

We nervously and quietly watched on. All at once, a loud *twang* broke the silence. Like a thunderbolt, the arrow flew through the air, and the Lightning Strike was waiting on the other end. In a flash, she vanished, and the next moment, a

violent *crack* echoed throughout the forest.

“All riiight!” she said happily as she gave us a thumbs-up.

Next to her feet was an arrow in two pieces—she’d cut it down with a single swing of her blade.



“I’m surprised you were able to match the arrow’s speed,” I said, a touch weary.

Helen grinned back at me. “You know me! But I think the speed of that arrow’s good enough!”

“Well, if it’s good enough, that’s really all that matters.” I knew Helen was strong, but I sighed once more as that fact was really hammered home. I nodded. “Well, the crossbow’s done for now.”

I drew the testing to a close, cleaned up the area, and headed back to the forge.

“It’s gotten cold,” I said.

Building the hot spring facility had taken some time and effort, but I was glad we’d done it. At the very least, we didn’t need to worry about having to bathe in cold water—we could tap into a steady supply of hot water anytime we wished. In fact, we were all eager to bathe every day. *I mean, it makes sense. As a blacksmith, I’m moving around and constantly drenched in sweat.*

I was reminded of our drainage pond—or rather, the animal hot spring where forest residents often took a dip. For some odd reason, wolves, bears, and tigers would peacefully bathe with prey animals like rabbits and deer. Rabbits, for example, were usually quick to flee, even when someone was still a distance away, but when they used the hot spring, they never showed signs of wanting to run. It was as though all animals had equal rights in that area, and they all relaxed without a care in the world. The animal hot spring wasn’t so far from our cabin.

Lidy had told us very early on that normal animals refused to approach our place because the magical energy thick in the air prevented them from coming close. It didn’t seem to bother Krul, our resident drake, Lucy, a magical beast, or Hayate, a type of wyvern. *In other words, if species of their kind prowled about, they could approach our cabin with very little effort.*

Our family had agreed that it was better to eat lunch outside.

“The cabin’s a bit dirty right now—we’ve tracked in a lot of grime from working on the farming plots, so I’d rather not eat there until we clean up,” Lidy had said. “It’s still *just* warm enough to eat outside, and we still have more farming work to do anyway.”

And so, we did just that. We washed our hands first, of course. Lidy had Hayate perched atop her shoulder, and she was feeding the wyvern small bits of boar meat. It was a sunny day under the

chilly air. I stuffed my cheeks with food.

"I wonder if any monsters are attracted to that pond," I wondered aloud.

"Hmm, I'm not sure," Lidy replied. "As I've said before, magical beasts like Lucy can only become corrupted if their beastly instincts are greatly warped. Any animal that's interested in the hot spring would probably be inclined to venture toward the pond."

Lucy heard her name mentioned and wagged her tail happily—she was rewarded with head pats from Diana.

There were two kinds of magical beasts or monsters. While both were affected by stagnant magical energy, the first type included beasts like Lucy—magical energy had changed her biology. The second type was monsters like goblins, beings born purely from magic.

"And of course, purebred monsters could approach that area," I said.

"Right," Lidy replied with a nod.

These types of monsters would kill other living creatures. I had no idea why, and my installed knowledge failed to enlighten me. Aside from the hot spring, our cabin was the only space nearby clearly occupied by people. If a monster were to emerge nearby, it would surely head for us.

"We're a long way from turning our cabin into a fortress, but perhaps we should lay out some traps," I suggested. "Traps not meant to harm, I mean. I want some that can alert us and sound an alarm—I'd like to avoid any unfortunate accidents where possible." Traps, or alert systems, were something I was willing to install.

What if a person or animal is enticed to take a bath and then they get hurt by a trap? That would be terrible. I hope to avoid that. It was a bit late for me to realize this, but our surroundings had become rather comfortable, and I now had enough mental leeway to think about other issues. *Or so I'll keep telling myself.*

Suddenly, Helen let out a whistle. She had a twinkle in her eye, and Anne's face turned sunny and bright. I forced a chuckle.

"Be sure to take it easy," I said.

I'd finished repairing the crossbow before lunch, and I couldn't let Rike forge our entire order for Camilo alone. It was normal for an apprentice to do this kind of work, and Rike had even said so herself, but I kept reminding myself that this was

my job.

Back on Earth, I often did work myself instead of leaving it to my subordinates because I knew it would get done faster if I personally completed it. I had the tendency to do the same in this world too. My subordinates would often scold me and claim that it wasn't wise to do everything myself, but I just couldn't kick this habit.

Fulfilling orders for Camilo wasn't simply a monetary transaction—it was also a way to gather information. Unlike on Earth, current events weren't conveyed via the papers or the internet, and my main source of info came from Camilo. I rarely went to the city and capital anyway.

Camilo was a traveling merchant. Though he now had a store, he'd often dispatch his workers to various regions, making it very easy for him to gather information across the land. This sort of information was vital for merchants like him. He even had nobles as part of his information network. In the kingdom, he was friends with Marius and the margrave, and he could receive valuable intel from them.

And so, every few weeks, he'd give me a brief rundown of current events like some kind of news segment. But in order to receive that intel, I felt that it was important to show him my worth—I needed to provide him with quality goods.

Right now, I was hammering away on a sheet of metal as I usually did. When I'd been outside eating lunch, it'd been a bit chilly, but I was currently sweating buckets due to the heat of the forge.

The furnace was off today (since there were enough shortswords to polish), so it wasn't absolutely *sweltering*, but the firebed was hot on its own, and I was swinging my hammer around. Beads of sweat rolled off me. Since I didn't get cold immediately after, I didn't have to worry about the extreme changes in temperature, but it was uncomfortable to feel such heat all the time.

I didn't totally dislike it, though—sweating made me feel like I was working hard, and I was fond of mindlessly hammering away. *Maybe I* am *a bit of a workaholic…*

"Oh, I know," I muttered as I finished up a few shortswords and took a short break to hydrate. "I just need Arashi to bring me news from Camilo."

Arashi would get to meet up with Hayate, and I'd be able to

get the news once every week or so. It seemed like a decent idea. *Maybe it's better to consult Diana or Anne about it first.* With that idea in mind, I went back to work.

Once our work in the forge was over for the day, we all took a bath in the hot springs (making sure to quickly head inside so we wouldn't get cold) and ate dinner. Over our meal, I told Diana and Anne my idea.

"Well, I don't think it's bad, per se..." Anne said as she tilted her head.

"But something's bothering you, right?" I asked.

"If a wyvern regularly goes to and from the city, it'd be rather suspicious," Diana answered in her place. "If I spotted one, I'd probably chase after it without caring how far I'd go."

"Do you think the person chasing would enter the Black Forest?"

"That'd be a gamble," Anne replied. "Camilo's pretty famous, isn't he? And he's even got a store that's expanding by the day. It's possible that a guy like him would be using petite wyverns as a form of communication, so maybe it won't come off as too suspicious..."

For a moment, we all relaxed...until the princess added, "In other words, anyone who thinks it's strange is someone we should watch out for."

At once, I felt the temperature in the room plummet. Someone gulped nervously. Anyone who grew leery of a seemingly normal activity was astute and likely someone we had to watch out for. The crackles of the firewood in the stove were deafening.

"Which means we're right to lay out some traps," Samya said nonchalantly.

Anne nodded. "You're correct about that."

In our family, we had an expert of forests (Lidy) and an expert of the Black Forest (Samya). I'd be the one making the traps. I could likely create one that even skilled saboteurs would accidentally trigger...or so I hoped.

"It would be best if we didn't need to use traps at all, but it's useful to have information on a regular basis, even if it's only from Camilo," Anne said as she placed a hand over her chin.

Diana gingerly raised her hand. "Why don't I write a letter to my brother and have him send you information?"

"Will he do that for us?" I asked.

“Sure. It’ll probably go through Camilo, though.”

“I don’t think Camilo will bluntly refuse Marius’s information either.”

“Based on social rank, it’d be quite the problem if he did.”

We continued to hash out some ideas. Our family was as lively as ever, perhaps because this information would pertain directly to them. Ultimately, we settled on consulting Camilo during our next order. If he accepted, I’d have Diana draft Marius a letter. That letter would request that he share any info he felt he could tell us (officially, we also had the sway of the seventh imperial princess on our side). I was a bit worried about using a count so casually, and I fretted that I might be suspected as a spy, but Diana didn’t seem so worried.

“He’s just an older brother writing to his sister. That’s all,” she said casually.

And so, I decided to not let it bother me. *Besides, it’s a bit too late for that.* Needless to say, I planned on paying Camilo and Marius for their trouble. I was in no rush to set up traps—that could wait until after our next order, or if it was too cold, wait until springtime.

I’ll enjoy a quiet life for a while, and I won’t be in any rush to do anything, I decided as I cleaned up the dinner plates.

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Since the traps could wait until later, I decided to diligently work on Camilo’s order. The rest of our family went out hunting when they could and also patrolled the forest.

The day soon arrived when we would head to the city. I woke up that morning and saw that the stove had gone out in the middle of the night. When I peeled my covers off, the cold temperature attacked me.

“It’s freezing in here,” I muttered.

I’d experienced some hot and cold weather on Earth, but I’d been supported by various modern technological advancements. For now, the temperature didn’t chill me to the bone, but one day, it might become cold enough for me to be grateful about the technology I’d once taken for granted.

I swiftly prepared for the visit to the lake and stepped outside with my water jugs in my arms. I noticed that I was breathing very faint puffs of white. *Guess I’m not just imagining that the days*

are getting colder.

When I closed the door to the cabin, my three daughters came trotting over to me, also breathing little clouds of white. I wasn't surprised that I could see Lucy's breath, but I was a bit bemused that I could see Krul's and Hayate's too. The former was a drake, and the latter was a wyvern; I'd assumed that reptilians were too cold-blooded for that sort of thing. However, when I touched them, their smooth, snakelike bodies emitted some warmth. *My knowledge from Earth is completely useless when it comes to stuff like this.*

"It's cold," I said. "We can't play in the water today."

Lucy whined and lowered her tail in protest. I gave a forced smile and petted her head. I didn't have to bend so low anymore—though I used to have to get on my knees to pat her head, I just needed to crouch a little now. She was growing.

"Have your mothers wipe you down with some warm water later, okay?" I said.

Lucy's sadness vanished instantly as she happily wagged her tail and let out a bark. Her voice sounded fiercer than before—though I wasn't sure if I should say that to a lady. She still loved to play in the water, and I couldn't stop myself from treating her like a child.

"All right, let's go," I said.

I petted Krul and Hayate too and felt their warmth as we headed out to the lake.

"Yeah, it's colder than usual."

There were ripples across the lake's surface, and it showed no signs of freezing over, but the breeze coming off the mountains was always kind of chilly, and the winter season didn't help. It didn't pierce through my skin, but it was enough to make me shiver.

"Let's head back as soon as we get some water. We'll be going to the city today to fulfill our order."

My daughters cheered happily...or at least, I thought they did. I had the hot spring to clean myself, and the water from the well was enough for our crops. Really, we only needed water for drinking and cooking now—I was able to scoop less water than I had in the summer. Quickly, we turned back and proceeded to the cabin.

When I returned, the stove in the living area was already on, and the gentle warmth enveloped me. Anne usually woke up

last, and she seemed to be in a daze—this was a far cry from her serious self. She had just finished washing her face and was wiping herself off with a towel. Steam rose from the basin, and I asked Helen about it.

"Yeah, I just grabbed some nearby," she replied.

Hmm… Maybe I should lug water once every two days and sandwich it in between runs to the hot spring. That way, I could wipe down my daughters in the morning, and I just needed to ensure that they dried off before the cold got to them.

But when I offered, Helen shook her head. "Evening practices won't be enough to keep me in shape," she said.

The hot spring's nearby, so I guess it's a bit of a light jog for her. She must want the exercise. I simply nodded and didn't push the topic.

Rike had an awkward smile on her face, but she looked a bit excited as she brushed Anne's hair. She would often do that and then swiftly braid the princess's locks or give her other hairstyles. Apparently, Rike quite looked forward to that.

"It's partly because I used to do my little sister's hair, but as you can see, my hair isn't so nice," she'd said.

Rike—and perhaps all dwarves—had stubborn, tough hair that made it difficult for them to have different hairdos.

"I don't often regret being a dwarf, but every now and then, I do wish I was a species with much softer or silkier hair," Rike said.

"Why don't we ask Eizo to get you some scented oil that's good for your hair?" Diana suggested.

Rike waved her hands in front of her. "Huh?! No, I'd feel so bad asking for that!"

"In the spring, we can gather a lot of herbs that are good for hair," Lidy said excitedly. "Let's go out foraging."

Lidy always had silky hair that required no brushing. *I thought it was because she's an elf, but maybe she's got some kind of secret hair care routine of her own. Perhaps I'll get some advice too—before I hit forty and my hairline begins to recede.*

It seemed women of this world were concerned about their hair quite a bit. They cheerfully talked about nicely scented oils or herbs that were effective against tough hair. Some even talked about products that they *wouldn't* recommend, and as I listened to their conversation, I gently placed a hand over my own hairline. Then, I prepared breakfast.

“You guys ready?” I asked.

“Yup,” Samya said.

“I’m ready too!” Rike called.

Those two were wearing their usual outdoor outfits with a few more layers. It honestly appeared like we were going on a long trip or something.

“Hey, you guys all looked like this when you first arrived,” I remarked.

Aside from Samya, who had always lived in this forest, and Helen, who we’d rescued from the empire, most of them had come here after a bit of a journey. Their current attire reminded me of our initial meetings.

“Well yeah, since we’ll be moving around,” Anne replied.

She was wearing very firm and sturdy fabric; I could tell how strong the fabric was at a glance. She would have no problems going on longer trips. *I mean, who would want the imperial princess to wear poor-quality clothes?* Krul, Lucy, and Hayate each wore a *dotera*, and I watched them as we all boarded the cart.

“I wonder if we should wear fluffier layers when it gets colder,” Diana remarked.

“I’d rather stay holed up indoors,” I replied as I boarded the cart.

We had enough things stored up—including food, fuel, and materials—to keep us afloat for a month or two. Unlike summertime, when it was hot wherever we went, it was more comfortable to be indoors during the colder season, so I wasn’t keen on making any unnecessary trips.

Lucy hopped onto the cart and puffed out her chest proudly.

“Good girl!” Diana exclaimed as she petted the pup.

Diana smiled as she received a loving lick in return. Hayate was perched on Krul’s back. I was worried that the *dotera* might make the wyvern slip, but she seemed surprisingly fine as she balled herself up. She swiftly switched to sleep mode.

Krul walked through the Black Forest, pulling our cart along. It was a bit different from normal, since the usually bustling forest was rather quiet. It wasn’t as silent as a tomb, but I felt like there were fewer birds and insects chirping about.

“Some of them have already started to hibernate,” Samya told me as she glanced around. *Guess some think it’s better to just hibernate as soon as winter starts.* After Samya got a good look at

the forest around her, she turned back to me. “You said that you wanted to stay holed up, but are we gonna hibernate too?”

I stroked my chin. “We need to make sure we’ve got ample food and other supplies before we do that. I would hate for us to have poor timing—you know, running out of food sooner than we expected, only to find out that snow’s blocking our path or that the roads have frozen over. It does seem like we should head to Camilo’s while we’ve got the chance…”

Snow was troublesome, but if the road froze over and became slippery as the ice melted, we wouldn’t be able to leave for a long while. Even back on Earth, frozen and muddy roads had stopped a certain toothbrush mustache man’s military from marching. Since the possibility of that was still on the table, I wasn’t keen on tackling these issues. Instead, I wanted to squirrel away some food like soldiers rationing for the winter and prepare to stay within the Black Forest.

“But with the supplies we’ll be getting today, I think we’d be prepared for a while,” Helen said.

She was wearing a freshly made coat made of newly obtained fabric. Diana and Lidy were our main seamstresses, but it seemed Helen was also helping out quite a bit. In any case, I’d just received the seal of approval from a mercenary who (probably) was a pro when it came to surviving the winter. I likely had nothing to fear.

“But I’m in favor of getting what we can,” Helen added. “We don’t know what the future holds, after all.”

“Hmm…” I stroked my chin once more. “When we ask Camilo about gathering information, maybe it’s also best to tell him that we might stay within the forest instead of requesting more time between our orders.”

Our family (barring Rike, who was busy taking care of Krul) nodded along. Krul rolled our cart through the forest on perhaps one of our last visits to the city for the year.

Chapter 3: Winter Also Hits the City

When we made our way onto the road to the city, I saw that the grass was brown—it had lost the vivacious green hue of summer. It was far too cold for bandits and animals to be prowling about. Maybe there'd be an animal or two willing to take the risk, but no bandit would put themselves in danger of getting caught by guards on patrol while braving through the freezing weather. Anne had told me that this was why crime rates from bandits decreased during this time of year.

"I'm only familiar with the empire, but I'm guessing the kingdom isn't so different," she said.

"Yeah, no one chooses to commit crimes during winter," Helen agreed. All the while, she continued glancing around and displayed her vigilance.

Someone desperate might attack us in an all-or-nothing gamble.

I raised the crossbow beside us. "I brought it along with me just in case, but I'd rather not use it."

The string hadn't been pulled back, and no arrow was loaded; I felt like it wasn't necessary to be so cautious during this time of year. We also had two skilled archers and a javelin with us. If anyone dared to come close, the Lightning Strike would decimate them instantly. While I wasn't much help at this point, I did have *Diaphanous Ice*, and the Rose of the Duel Grounds was here too. And of course, in the back, we had the imperial princess with her greatsword. We also had Rike, who would likely be using the crossbow, holding Krul's reins. *She's our last line of defense, but I'm pretty sure it won't come to that.*

Everyone nodded along with me as a cold gust of wind blew past us. It wasn't as chilly as the breeze by the lake, but it was a definite sign of winter. Even so, Krul bravely pulled our cart along. Rike held the reins, but at this point, she wasn't doing very much. If left alone, Krul would make her way to the city of her own accord—she already knew the way.

If Samya or Helen sensed any danger, they'd immediately alert Rike, and the dwarf would use the reins to slow Krul down. But it seemed my daughter was keen at sensing danger too; she'd slow down without being told. Sure, maybe Rike didn't need to hold

the reins at all, but she said that it was best if she could give out orders just in case. So, she continued to sit in the front.

We did begin to discuss that it was probably better if someone else could also manipulate the reins; maybe we'd all take turns in the future. Needless to say, it was Diana who immediately raised her hand to volunteer herself for the role.

The cart rolled on. Our trip was peaceful, aside from the occasional frosty breeze that assaulted our skin.

As we approached the city gates, the guard usually stationed there said, "Ah, you again." Unlike his summer and autumn attire, a cape of sorts peeked out from under his armor.

"Hello," I said.

The cape was adorned with a familiar crest—the insignia of House Eimoor, the lord of this city. This additional article of clothing must've been to keep him warm, and while I wasn't sure if it was doing its job, the guard didn't seem at all cold. *Or maybe they've got secrets on how to keep warm. I should ask if I ever get the chance.*

"It's gotten chilly," the guard said.

"Quite so," I replied. "I wish you and everyone else well. Hopefully you don't catch any sort of sickness during this cold season."

"Thanks. You guys be careful too."

"We will. Thank you very much."

With that, the guard glanced at the road and allowed us to pass. It was a bit unusual for us to receive any sort of season's greetings from him. This time of year was especially—or comparatively, rather—peaceful. I'd expected the streets to be deserted, but I was wrong. People bustled around. Winter wasn't in full swing just yet, and folks were trying to make some last-minute preparations while they could. I glanced at the grumpy man who always stood in front of his shop; this guy would discreetly wave at Lucy, who'd grown quite a bit.

Krul continued pulling our cart through the busy street.

People and horses passed by us on this chilly day. Some horses, having just run as fast as they could go, had streams of white air coming from their nostrils. As I saw the hustle and bustle, the word "December" flashed across my mind.

When I looked up, I saw some smoke billow out from beyond the inner city walls. This wasn't a fire—someone within the walls had likely lit up a fireplace to keep warm. *That reminds me... I*

became friends with Marius quickly, but I don't really know many other people in this city. I've never set foot inside the inner walls either. Ironically, I was more familiar with the inner city of the capital, which was arguably more difficult to get into.

"Yeah, there's a magistrate and a couple of knights in there," Marius had once told me. "Our city is pretty big."

It went without saying that the lord ruled over not only this city but the surrounding land and agricultural fields as well. The magistrate supervised this area, and the knights were there as support. Diana had told me that a portion of the profits that came from the city and the fields became a part of the magistrate's and knights' salaries. In exchange, if there were any issues or problems, they would be on the front lines to fight it out. She gave me the general gist while Anne provided a few more details. *I'll look the other way, but it feels like Anne miiight be telling us some information from her empire…*

"One day, the current magistrate will retire, and Leroy will take the role," I said.

"Timing aside, that should be the plan," Diana replied. "My brother told me so last time we discussed it."

Leroy was Marius's adjutant for now, and he was currently training to become the next magistrate. *I wonder if this city will become a part of his new normal.*

"Ah!" a friendly, energetic voice called out as we entered the warehouse of Camilo's store.

When we went around the back with our daughters in tow, the apprentice looked visibly happy. His bright eyes shone brilliantly. *I'd feel bad to take away his time with my daughters if we holed up during the winter months.* The employees of the store treated us well, and I was sure that many had friends within the city. The time that the apprentice spent with my daughters felt like a good experience for him. *But the apprentice isn't my kid. If I care about him too much without Camilo or the head clerk explicitly requesting it, I might come off as condescending. I should keep myself in check.*

"It's gotten cold," I said.

"Yeah, so…" The apprentice glanced at the corner of the yard.

I'd noticed it immediately upon our arrival; it was the middle of the day, but the flames of a bonfire were roaring away.

"You prepared this for us?" I asked.

"I don't want them to get cold," the apprentice replied.

My daughters would be running around so much that they might even start sweating, but it was easy to feel chills after one stops exercising. A fire would help warm them up and adjust their body temperature.

"Thanks," I said, petting his head.

I went in through the familiar back entrance, and we stepped into the usual meeting room. After a short while, Camilo and the head clerk arrived.

"Hey there. Temperatures have really dipped recently, huh?" Camilo asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "I need a fire at night."

"Need one in the afternoon too, eh?"

"Indeed. I'm very grateful."

We chitchatted back and forth—the discussion of temperature was actually the perfect segue for me to bring up what I had in mind for our order schedule.

"Speaking of the cold," I began, "I'd like to increase the amount of time between orders. I'm not really eager to make frequent trips during the cold season." I sipped on the herbal tea that the head clerk had poured for us, and the warmth spread throughout my body. "But of course, if this extension is inconvenient for you, I'm not so stubborn that I'll stay holed up for most of the winter. I just wanted to know your opinion."

"Hmm, let's see..." Camilo pondered as he gazed up at the ceiling and stroked his mustache. "Honestly, the more of your wares I have, the better. Even if I retain some leftover inventory, I've still got some buyers who'll want your weapons."

"I see..."

"But if I don't have any of your products, I'll make do. It *would* be less than ideal to always be out of stock, though..."

"Hey, I'm not saying I'll refuse to come out until spring is in full swing with the trees lush and green—nothing like that."

Camilo grinned. "That's a relief. I wouldn't want to always be out of something." His face grew solemn as he turned to me. "So will you leave here with around six weeks' worth of supplies? Can you guys carry all of that back to your place?"

I glanced at Rike and Lidy, and the two nodded back at me. "Looks like we're fine. If needed, I'll be the one to do some lugging. It's been a while."

"Don't push yourself. You can't abuse your body like that."

"I'm still young."

For now. I know that things'll get tough for me in about a decade or so.

"If you need anything, send Arashi over," I said.

"Yeah, will do," Camilo replied. He glanced at the head clerk, who headed out to do his usual set of duties.

"Oh, and about Arashi…"

"Ah, and here I thought the conversation was wrapping up." Camilo gave a forced smile.

"Not quite. You know how we always talk before we do business?"

"You mean how we discuss rumors from throughout the land?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Could you write them in a letter and send it to me about once a week via Arashi?"

"You've got no other way of keeping up with current events, huh?"

"Nope. I know that nothing will likely happen requiring me to immediately pounce into action, but…"

"It's better to have information than not."

I nodded again. But before I could mention the bit about Marius, Camilo beat me to the punch.

"Maybe I'll ask the count about news in the capital," Camilo mused.

"I was just about to mention him."

"If it's information you want, I'd expect as much."

He gave an exaggerated shrug. *I guess it's not odd for a merchant to have this train of thought. I mean, a blacksmith like me thought of it…*

"I'll pay you good money, of course," I said.

"Oh?" Camilo perked up. "I smell another *golden* opportunity."

I gave a small chuckle. "Go easy on me, please."

His laugh was hearty. "Quite frankly, I don't need to charge much for simply sending you the news."

"But I know the process will take some time and money, so at least let me pay you for that," I insisted. "It'll help both of us rest easy."

"Well…" He scratched his head. "I feel like I'd be able to skillfully sell this information to other people too. I'll give you a discount for giving me the idea."

Camilo spoke a little awkwardly, but an unmistakable excited glimmer shone in his eyes. *I hope I didn't just accidentally start the*

first newspaper business in this area… No, unless the printing press is invented, it'll probably be hard to spread information across long distances. In fact, any major news is often engraved on a board with beeswax. Don't try to make too much money from this, Camilo. I wasn't sure if my quiet prayers would ever be heard.

"How's the capital anyway?" I asked.

"Well, there isn't anything major going on, but…" Camilo trailed off.

He took a sip of his tea and fiddled with his mustache. It was a habitual action he often did when he agonized over telling me something. I sipped on my tea and patiently waited for Camilo to make his decision, though I could sense Helen's impatience near me.

"Guess I *should* tell you, just in case. We just discussed selling you information, after all," Camilo finally said. He took another sip of his drink and gazed at me. "Remember the people from the Nordic region?"

"Yeah," I replied.

All it'd taken was a couple of unfortunate accidents—the whole situation had led to a less than ideal meeting. *Oh yeah, I promised Miss Karen I'd check her products. When they arrive, maybe I'll take a trip to the city by myself.*

"Back then, I did my best to have my bases covered," Camilo said. "And only after thoroughly conducting research did I determine that she was safe to be introduced to you. Otherwise, I would've never allowed you two to meet."

I nodded firmly. I trusted my friend deeply.

"And since that incident, I decided to look into it once more," Camilo continued. "It seems like the information that reached me back then was revised or tampered with along the way."

"Oh?"

It wasn't unusual for a man like Camilo to have multiple sources of information and news. In fact, I wouldn't have been surprised if he knew some stuff that even Marius was ignorant about. There were very few who wielded power to manipulate information on such a large scale.

"The duke's faction," I surmised.

"That's my guess, anyway." Camilo nodded. "But they aren't the type to let their tracks show."

"I would've assumed as much."

If they'd been easy to track down, the margrave and Marius

would've taken care of it ASAP, before they'd even had the chance to do anything. The duke's faction clashed fiercely against the mainstream faction. In fact, the former wielded enough power to usurp the latter if the stars aligned. Should that happen, various political policies in the kingdom would flip in the blink of an eye. The duke and his faction weren't idiots; they hid their tracks well.

"In any case, just a fair bit of warning," Camilo said. "The information I'd be selling you might be tampered with somehow. I'll provide you with the count's words verbatim, but just keep in mind that he's speaking from the point of view of the mainstream faction."

"Got it," I replied.

Not all information could be purely objective. There would be subjective opinions mixed in at times. It was like debating whether a zebra was white with black stripes or black with white stripes—it was all a matter of perspective. *On a sidenote, I've heard that zebras are actually black with white stripes.* In any case, what I wanted out of this newspaper system of sorts was the atmosphere of this world and stuff like that. Vague inklings of current events would work just fine, even if they weren't completely accurate.

I was holed up in the Black Forest, after all. Even if I were to wander out on a journey tomorrow, I'd have a very narrow scope of this world. That might be a fun life to have, but if I'd wanted to do that, I would've told the Watchdog long ago.

Camilo, however, didn't need to personally collect information. He still had the means to gather various news, and if he was truly invested or interested in something, I was sure that he'd go quite far to get his hands on the news. *It'd be great if I could receive some hints in regard to my smithing work too. The precious metals that we've got back home likely can't be processed using any normal means.*

"I'm counting on you," I said.

"You got it," Camilo replied.

We soon finished possibly our last meeting for the year, and I left the meeting room with my family.

I walked toward the backyard where my three daughters and the apprentice were running around playfully (technically, Hayate was flying). The other employees smiled as they took in the wholesome sight. I was the one who'd made the decision to

decrease our trips during the winter, but I still felt a twinge of regret when I realized that I wouldn't be able to see this scene for a while.

"Hello!" the apprentice called out as he noticed us.

As he approached, I could see him huffing out little puffs of white. He'd clearly been running for quite a bit. My daughters following behind him were also out of breath, and it was clear that they'd gotten their exercise.

"Lucy's gotten faster," the apprentice said between breaths.

"You think so?" I asked.

"Very much so. She's grown quite a bit too."

As he smiled, I realized that *he'd* matured a good deal too. *He doesn't look like a kid anymore… Wait, humans don't grow as fast.* I petted his head and gave him a coin as pocket change, thanking him for taking care of my daughters.

He bowed his head. "Thank you!"

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

The apprentice energetically waved at us until our drake-drawn cart was out of sight, and Lucy watched on, her tail wagging with gusto. When Diana saw the adorable scene, she gave an undeniable gasp of elation and positively *destroyed* my shoulder. *Been a while since she's last done this…*

"What do you think?" I asked.

Krul pulled our cart and left the city while Lucy ensured that the guard sent us off with a smile. I turned to my family.

"About the apprentice's bow to us?" Diana asked.

I gave a small laugh. "No, that's not what I mean."

The apprentice was absolutely a good kid, and there was no reason to question him—the bow wasn't even worth discussing. If the apprentice ended up being some kind of super spy, I'd probably lose my faith and trust in humanity for a while.

"Do you mean the duke's faction?" Anne asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "I'm a bit unfamiliar with topics like that."

"Well…"

My story was that I was from the Nordic region, but of course, that wasn't the case. I knew nothing about politics in this world or information about the palace. It was better to ask experts about stuff like this—Diana and Anne were noble and royal, so they weren't *quite* experts, but it was close enough. They knew more about it than I ever could.

"I think Camilo's intuition is right," Anne said. "The duke's

faction wouldn't want the mainstream faction to gain any more power."

It was in the name—the faction was mainstream. They boasted quite a bit of influence, and their opponents wanted to stop that as much as they could. But…

"If Camilo had known the truth about the Nordic region, wouldn't that have helped the duke's faction?" I asked.

"Eizo, you really are unaware when it comes to stuff like this," Anne replied with a sigh. "Though maybe you left the Nordic region precisely because you're this way."

The cart clattered on; loud sounds echoed throughout the area.

"Look around you," she said.

When I did so, I locked eyes with Lucy and petted her head, but I felt like I was slowly understanding what she was getting at.

"Just counting the people around you, you've got a beastfolk of the Black Forest, a dwarf, a daughter of a count, an elf, a skilled mercenary, and an imperial princess," Anne said, counting down with her fingers as Samya and the others gazed at her quizzically. "And that's not even counting the people you're friendly with: the margrave and count of the mainstream faction, along with an up-and-coming merchant. You also know an officer of the kingdom, as well as quite a few others on the streets."

Anne counted down before she opened her hands once more, and the faces of the people she mentioned flashed across my mind.

"And while I'm not sure of the details, I've heard that you even received commission requests from demons," she went on. "Plus, we've got Lluisa, the master of the Black Forest, along with the fairies."

"Right," I said.

"Plans aside, *you're* the one who's connected to all these people, Eizo." Anne turned stern. "If Camilo had received truthful information, he would've likely thought that it was best to explain it all to you without hiding anything—to neatly wrap it all up. But if that had happened, the aforementioned people and a few others would then have forged some sort of connection to the Nordic region." She smiled. "But regardless of their intent, more than half of any such attempted interference ended in failure. That's because…"

“Miss Karen stayed in the capital,” I finished.

She nodded. “Precisely. The connection is still maintained, despite what the duke’s faction wanted. I suspect that the main goal was to sever your relationship with the Nordic region completely, but the count likely ran around and did his best to stop that. Of course, he’d likely hoped for a stronger bond, but what you have is better than nothing.”

“Hmm… I’m just a normal blacksmith, so I don’t think I can or would want to exert any sort of influence.”

“Right. The mainstream faction probably knows that, but the duke’s faction doesn’t. I doubt they’d believe you, even if you told them.” Anne gazed into the distance. Was she on high alert for danger, or did something else plague her mind? “In any case, I think we should be careful for a while.”

Everyone’s demeanors grew serious—I felt a cold chill slip down my spine. I wasn’t sure if it was because of the frosty air or something else.

“If we’re in more danger than usual, we should probably set up an alarm system while we can,” I said as we headed home.

Maybe just lay out some strings or something. If someone’s leg gets caught, it’ll alert our clapper. That’ll be good enough. It actually didn’t matter if we did or didn’t hear the noise raising the alarm—the most important bit was that any intruder would *assume* that their movements had been sensed. If intruders heard a loud alarm and then nothing happened, they could think one of two things: Either we didn’t notice them, or we did and were just lying in wait to lure them closer. Some would choose to retreat given odds like that.

As residents of the Black Forest, we held an advantage on our home turf. If intruders were wary of anyone lying in wait, they’d probably assume that we would pop out at some point. Of course, if we could also fire an arrow as a warning, it’d be more than enough, but I felt it was fine to keep that idea in the back of my head for now.

By the time I was finished telling everyone my thoughts, I realized that we’d made it back to the quiet forest.

“Let’s see…” Lidy said as she placed a hand on her chin.

Helen, who’d been listening while scanning the area for threats, also gave my ideas some thought. *We’re safer in the forest than out on the streets.* Still, that didn’t mean we were all completely relaxed. Glancing around every now and then, I

noticed that there weren't the usual number of animals out and about. I only saw one tree deer, far in the distance, perhaps somehow separated from its herd.

After a while, Lidy, who'd been looking down, turned toward us. "I thought we could wait until the spring, but I think we should install another clapper."

Helen nodded in agreement. "Krul, Lucy, and Hayate would probably alert us to anybody sneaking around. Still, we should probably avoid fighting here as much as we can. Since the possibility of intruders is still up in the air, it's best if we have some sort of alert system."

She petted Lucy's head. Our pup was a magical beast, and she'd recently gone through quite the growth spurt. For lack of a better word, she would probably be an excellent guard, but in general, Helen didn't want to involve them in danger if she could avoid it. I was of the same mindset.

"Especially so if the wolves will be taking a rest over the winter," I said.

"Yeah," Helen agreed.

Had it been warmer, wolves would've prowled around the forest like guards, and we could've probably left most issues to them. But Samya had mentioned that they didn't move much in the winter, and it wasn't as though the wolves were personally guarding our cabin. It was wise to not expect too much from them.

"All right, let's get started on that tomorrow," I said. "We can rest for the remainder of the day."

Everyone agreed, and as our voices were carried away by the winter wind, we received the rustling of the leaves in return.

####

The next morning, I finished my daily routine in the cold air and stepped back into the cabin. Everyone was in the living room using the hot water to get ready for the day, and I turned on the kitchen stove to warm my hands.

"Looks like we're in for some snow," I muttered.

When I went outside earlier to fetch water with my daughters, I noticed clouds covering the sky. The clouds didn't look too gloomy; I guessed it was snow, not rain, if we were to get anything at all. It was a bit too early for snow, I felt, but like that

famous Japanese song about a hasty Santa Claus, maybe winter had arrived earlier than usual. All the while, Rike and I collected wood so that we could make the clappers today.

Suddenly, I heard our family gasping outside the cabin.

“Wow!”

Worried, Rike and I jumped outside. White particles that looked like round lumps of cotton were floating from the sky.

Snow had begun to fall, determined to paint the forest in a sheet of white.

Chapter 4: White Snow in the Black Forest

“Snow…” I murmured as I gazed at the falling flakes.

Diana stood next to me, breathing large puffs of white. “I wonder if it’ll pile up.”

“I don’t know. I feel like it won’t be too bad with just this amount of snow.”

I was applying logic from my previous world. As a large snowflake settled onto the ground, smaller specks soon followed to create a beautiful sheet of white. While the snowflakes currently floating down were quite large, the snowfall itself didn’t seem too heavy. I noticed my three daughters playfully running about. Hayate was already a full-fledged adult, but I wondered if she felt like she was experiencing her childhood days when she played with them.



Nah, they aren't the only ones excited. I saw Samya, Helen, and Anne running along with them. Lidy stood nearby, allowing the specks of snow to fall into the palm of her hand—she gazed into them with great interest. Rike stood near her and similarly peered at the snow. Lucy was skillfully going to and fro, catching some snow with her mouth. A snowflake actually had a core with branches that formed around it; despite its pure white appearance, it wasn't all that sanitary to eat. *Perhaps it's best for me to keep quiet about that.*

"If you eat too much, you'll get a tummy ache," I called out. "Be careful."

"Arf!"

Following my warning, Lucy no longer ate as much—she continued to chase after the snowflakes with Krul and Hayate. It seemed like she understood my words. I continued to feel some punches on my shoulder as I went back inside the forge to grab the materials and tools for our work today.

"All right! Let's begin," I said.

"Okay!" everyone replied.

"Kulululu!"

"Arf! Arf!"

"Kree!"

I stood in front of a bonfire to get some warmth from the cold as I heard their energetic replies. I was worried that the snow would be a downer, but I was completely off the mark. Everyone split up and began scoping out possible locations where we could lay traps. Snow continued to fall, and a faint dusting of white covered the ground, but the amount of snowfall had decreased considerably. *I don't think we got even a centimeter.* I remembered a show I saw back on Earth where someone made a tree house in the winter forest.

"Hmm... A tree house..." I mumbled.

A tree house seemed like the second most popular structure (next to a log cabin) for someone who wanted to enjoy the quiet life. *If memory serves, in America, it's often like a secret base of sorts, and parents make one for their kids. Since I've got Krul, I don't think I can make a house that'll fit her. It'll be more like a small summer house kind of thing where adults could just gather around and relax. Or maybe it'll turn into an animal observation hut like on that show. This forest has plenty of wildlife; they just don't approach our cabin.*

Maybe I can make it into a watchtower. Judging from our situation, that seems to be the best use. I'll ask Helen or Anne about it later. I couldn't deny that I was just itching to build something.

Diana, Lidy, and I were trying to find the best area to set up a trap away from our cabin when Lidy finally pointed to a spot.

"Why don't we set one up there?" she suggested.

There was a small shrub of greenery that maintained its vibrant hue despite the cold season. One could just barely make out the cabin from this location, and any intruder would assume that we'd heard the alarm. I guessed that this place would manage to hide the precise spot of our cabin while still alerting us to any danger. Normally, guests wouldn't go through this path since this was nowhere near the entrance to the forest.

"All right, let's set a trap there," I said.

The two ladies nodded along and swiftly began to set up the rope. All the while, I built the clapper and prayed that this trap would never get activated.

I made a few clappers and handed them to Lidy and Diana. When Diana shook one, a clear sound rang out. While our family could be heard playing about, the sound of the clapper echoed much louder than I expected within the Black Forest.

"I think we'd hear this noise even if we're working in the forge," I remarked.

"Yeah," Diana agreed.

Lidy nodded along. While elves possessed longer ears, it apparently didn't mean she had much better hearing or anything. She could apparently only hear a little bit more than the average human (or dwarf or giantess). Samya had the best hearing out of all of us. She'd often use her sharp ears to listen in while hunting, which apparently allowed her to find prey.

These clappers were loud enough—enough for an intruder to relay to their comrades that they'd screwed up.

"Okay, I'll leave this place to you," I said.

"Sure." Diana nodded.

I went to visit the other ladies, who were also scoping out other potential spots.

"Heh heh heh," Helen laughed fearlessly.

Helen had never once been grumpy while she'd been living with us, but she seemed to be in especially high spirits today. *Is she happy that she gets to set up traps? It must've been a while since she's gotten to do something like this.* When I gazed in the

direction she was looking, I saw a string that stood out—it would likely be spotted from afar. Even an amateur would surely notice that this was a trap. *I can't imagine Helen making such a fatal flaw. Which means…*

"A decoy," I murmured.

I approached it and quietly reached out. Since no one stopped me, I tugged on the rope, and a loud *clatter* rang out.

"Good, good," I said.

When I turned around, I saw a satisfied Helen giving Anne a high five. I didn't think her culture had high fives, and she just did it to express her emotions. I smiled, impressed by this bit of reverse psychology. *She made it seem like a decoy trap, but it's actually the real thing.* Just then, I noticed a different kind of rope hidden underneath some bits of grass. When I grabbed the rope, the clapper sounded again, and the decoy shook slightly along with it.

"Ah, you tied it to the decoy," I said.

"Ding ding ding!" Helen exclaimed.

This rope was in a spectacular position—an intruder would step on it, even if they walked over the decoy. Some looked like obvious decoys, but when one of them sounded the clapper, all the decoys would arouse equal suspicion to our intruders. And even if someone stepped over the decoy, another rope would be lying in wait. *What a pro. In such a short amount of time, she basically came up with the perfect trap.*

"You're awesome," I said.

Helen grinned. Behind her stood Anne, who crossed her arms with a hammer in hand, equally proud of this work. I patted their shoulders and headed over to Rike and Samya.

"Oooh, this is great too," I murmured.

They'd reached a similar conclusion to Helen and Anne. Samya and Rike's plan was to encourage the intruder to focus on a decoy while setting up a trap in a blind spot. I completely fell for it—the loud sound of the clapper rang out. Furthermore, if one were to back away after being startled at activating one, they'd step on another. Honest old me fell for both tricks completely, but in my defense, it was all for testing purposes. At least I got to see the locations of the traps.

"This is really intricately done," I said.

Samya huffed through her nose proudly as she puffed out her chest.

“She apparently utilized her knowledge of catching prey with traps,” explained Rike.

“Huh, cool,” I replied.

When I glanced around and confirmed where I set the traps off, I realized that I was right in the center. *Ah… The trap looks large. Before I know it, I’m drawn to its center.* During hunts, Samya likely fired her arrow when her prey was in the center of the trap. If we installed a different kind of trap on top of this, it would probably be extremely effective.

“You’re amazing, Samya. I’m blown away,” I said in awe.

She huffed louder than before and puffed out her chest as much as she could.

Ultimately, the snow stopped sooner than I’d expected. My daughters looked a touch forlorn as they saw the very thin sheet of white covering the land. Had the snow kept its initial gusto, we would’ve had a bit more—my daughters found that to be a bit of a shame. But more snow also implied freezing temperatures, so it wasn’t all good or welcome. This was perfect; just barely enough for us to play around in.

“All that’s left is to hole up inside,” I said to myself, as I exhaled out white clouds of breath.

It was a bit past noon. The snow might have stopped, but it was still very cold. We’d moved around a bit, and I was feeling warm, so I wasn’t as bothered by the chilly air for now.

“We won’t be completely holed up, but we won’t be hunting, and we’ll be staying in the forest,” Samya said as she grabbed the ropes.

Soon, we would begin days of isolation where we only traveled to the hot spring or out to forage for what little was currently growing. We’d continue to make items for our orders, and we’d maintain our lifestyle, but for about six weeks—a month and a half—we’d be staying at home. I’d never done anything like this back on Earth. *I wanted to kick back in my new world, but I’ve been pretty busy.* After the six weeks were up, we’d return to our normal schedule of visiting the city once every other week, but I didn’t think it’d hurt for us to relax and enjoy the season for a while. *Since we’ve got plenty of time, maybe I can try processing the precious metals we’ve got.*

“All right, it’s gotten a bit late, but let’s have lunch,” I said.

Everyone agreed with my idea. As silence settled in, it felt like

I just made the signal for our hibernation in the Black Forest. Frankly, I was a bit excited for the quiet days to come.

"Speaking of, will our crops be okay?" I asked Lidy. I had rehydrated some dried meat and was frying it with vegetables.

These vegetables had been harvested a while back and dried for preservation purposes. I mostly had a carrot-like vegetable on hand. *Any leafy greens are consumed immediately upon harvesting.* One of the few exceptions was this dried cabbage-like vegetable that I'd added to this stir-fry. Back on Earth, cabbages were sweet and easy enough to eat on their own, but the crops in this world were a bit astringent. *I think on Earth, I learned that cabbages produce some bitterness as a defense mechanism from insects—maybe the crops here are doing something similar.*

If I could do some selective breeding and ensure that the crops are safely protected from insects and other pests, I might be able to engineer delicious cabbage that's sweet and easy to eat. But if I was going to do something like that, I would've asked for farming cheats instead of smithing.

A quiet farming life in another world, huh...? I feel like I'd attract a lot of people and end up developing a village. That doesn't sound like a bad route either. Anyway, this cabbage had been harvested from our fields, and it'd lost a bit of its astringency after it was dried. The elves' seeds might have allowed it to mature quickly, but I doubted it'd grow large and healthy in this bitter cold.

"Will the cold kill our crops?" I asked.

"We'll be fine," Lidy said as she placed her hands together. "We mostly grow root vegetables, and this place is lush with magical energy. Some leafy crops might have a hard time, though."

"But I thought even root vegetables don't grow much if their leaves are destroyed."

"You're right, but as long as the roots are still alive, they can grow for quite a bit."

"What kind of crops will you be growing for the winter?"

"Hmm, well..."

When I brought up the subject, she seemed more than happy to answer and provided some names of vegetables. After our family listened to the names of each vegetable, they excitedly discussed the types of dishes that could be made with them.

Since we had a late lunch, it was a bit later in the afternoon than usual, and it would be awkward to start working at such an

hour. It was probably difficult to go out for a long excursion either. At most, we could only walk around our cabin. And so, I decided that we'd take the afternoon off—we could do whatever we liked. Taking off at noon had a nostalgic ring to it. We'd added the traps to our cabin, which was a bit of hard work, and we'd been diligently toiling away for a while. It didn't hurt to take it easy when we could.

"All right, what should I do with my time..." I muttered.

I considered cleaning up the cabin, but I had been doing so bit by bit and didn't have much left. We didn't keep many items in the house because we didn't require many things to maintain our lifestyle. If we focused on pure survival, we could gather our things and abandon this cabin within the day. *As a blacksmith, it'd be tough to leave with just the clothes on my back—I'd love to avoid that situation if I could. I don't think magical firebeds and furnaces can be obtained so easily.*

Samya, Diana, and Anne seemed eager to look after my daughters, so I decided to trust them with that. I didn't mind joining the mix, but I spent some quality time with my daughters every morning. I wanted them to spend time with other members of our family if they could. Rike and Lidy headed out to the farming plots. Since I hadn't helped them one bit, this seemed like a good opportunity to lend them my aid.

Suddenly, someone pulled on my sleeve. I turned and saw Helen, who had uncharacteristically decided to stay behind.

"What's up?" I asked. "If you need anything, let me know. As you can see, I've got nothing but time on my hands right now."

"Well, um, I wanted you to take a look at my blades," she replied.

"Sure."

Appoitakara was a special kind of metal that glowed blue; her two shortswords had been forged using a lot of that precious material, though I had used steel for the cores of the blades. I'd turned my cheats up to the max to forge them, and they weren't the type to get damaged easily. That didn't mean that they were immune, though—one could expect a bit of wear and tear whenever they were wielded. Helen had recently been away from battlefields, but she claimed to use her dual blades quite a bit while hunting.

"Sure, I'll look at them," I said. "From what you've been telling me, it seems like I don't even need to light the firebed."

“Sweet!” Helen cried.

If the blades were a bit dented, I just needed to use my hammer—fire wasn’t necessary. I felt like it was the perfect way to spend some time until dinner (or in Helen’s case, until her evening training). I was a bit surprised to see her so elated as she quickly rushed out to grab her blades.

I opened the forge to do some work. *Clitter clatter* went the clapper. *Feels like the forge is in a good mood.*

“All right, let me take a look…” I said as Helen handed me the shortswords.

I gazed at them with my cheats. She must’ve been polishing her blades in her free time; they sparkled beautifully with no blemishes in sight, and the leather handguard seemed to have been rewrapped. *Hmm. The grips are wearing out a little too soon if she’s only using these blades on occasion…* I decided to point that out.

“Huh? Oh, I mean, I train with these blades sometimes,” Helen replied.

Ah. So she might not have been cutting anything down, but she still trained with them.

“I can rewrap the leather—do you want me to?” I asked.

“Nah, I’m good,” she replied. “I’ve got ’em just how I like ’em.”

“Gotcha.”

It was best not to interfere with stuff like this. If she had a preference for the grips, it was best that she do them herself. I felt like the same logic applied to polishing a blade as well. I could be more precise and make a weapon as sharp as could be, but if the wielder found it difficult to use, my skills would be nothing but a nuisance.

The shortswords didn’t seem chipped either, which was characteristic of appoitakara. The metal did seem a bit dull, so I decided to polish them for her. I just needed to straighten out some minor dents, and they would be as good as new.

“How do they look?” Helen asked worriedly.

“I can repair them in a flash,” I replied honestly.

She looked visibly relieved. “I wouldn’t have known what to do if they were beyond repair.”

“I could just forge you new ones.”

“You’d do that for me?”

“I want to test out some new materials anyway.”

“Oof. Metals really *are* your priority, aren’t they?” She gave me

a humorous scowl.

I let out a forced chuckle. “Hey, if I’m gonna use precious metals, I’ve gotta ensure that they make it into the finest hands.”

“You’ve got a keen eye.”

“Sure do.”

We laughed with each other, and I got to work. *All right. Since I’m handling the trusty blades of the finest mercenary of our generation, I’ve gotta return them to her, good as new.*

Gentle *clink*s of metal rang out within the forge. The room was quiet without a fire roaring away. Helen’s shortswords only had the slightest of dents, and there was no need to hammer them with my full strength. I struck her blades a few times, put them under the light of the quickly setting sun, and hammered again. Slowly but surely, the blades were being restored to their former glory. And thanks to my cheats, there were almost no marks made from my hammer—any minor ones could be smoothed out on the whetstone.

“Here you are,” I said, as I handed her one of the finished blades. “How does it feel?”

She stepped away from me and began swinging the blade around. Every time she swung her arm, she sliced through the air with a loud *whoom*. This was no exaggeration on my end. She cut through the space with such speed that I feared a whirlwind would form. I was convinced that even a shield wouldn’t be an obstacle in her path. *Yeah, it’d get shredded.*

Besides, even if a shield somehow managed to hold up against her slashes, it wouldn’t be able to absorb her impact too. The shield-user’s arms wouldn’t be torn off, but they’d definitely break a bone or dislocate a joint. At the very least, their arms would grow numb and become completely useless for a while.

And Helen was using only her arms and raw power. Her second weapon was her lightning-fast speed, and when the two were combined, one could only think that she was somehow cheating.

“You’re amazing, Eizo,” Helen said after she’d finished swinging her blade around. Her shoulders moved up and down slightly as she caught her breath. She gazed at her shortsword.

“Do these fixes work for you?” I asked.

“I was never really worried about the quality of your work,” she replied with a smile. “I’m only testing it out, just in case.”

I grinned back. *I can’t deny that I’m doing my best to hide a bit*

of embarrassment right now. I grabbed the other shortsword and placed it on the anvil. Gentle *clink*s rang out in the forge once more.

"Hey," Helen said in an unusually quiet voice. Perhaps because of her work as a mercenary, she always spoke loudly, and I was almost shocked by how soft her tone was.

"Yeah?" I replied.

"What do you want to do in life, Eizo?"

"Hmm..." I gazed at her thoughtfully and saw that her eyes were fixated on the anvil. *I guess her thoughts just slipped out.* "I was a bit too busy before I came here. I think it would be great if I could just kick back and enjoy the quiet life here for as long as I'm allowed."

My hectic previous life was probably way beyond anything Helen could ever imagine. That was through no fault of her own, though. I felt a twinge of guilt in my chest.

"Don't you want to become powerful and famous or something?" she asked.

"Nope, not at all," I replied. "I'm just a blacksmith. Stuff like that is way beyond me."

"That was a quick response."

"Yeah."

I didn't say that I was already wrapped up in more than enough troublesome matters. If I became influential, I'd likely be engrossed in even *more* sticky situations than usual. That was something I very much wished to avoid.

"Then are you planning on staying here forever?" Helen inquired.

"That's my plan," I answered. "I'm not sure what society will say, but this place is comfortable to live in, and it's enough for me to enjoy a quiet life."

As I spoke, I moved her other shortsword under the sun; it emanated a beautiful pale-blue glimmer. *I think I'm basically done with this one too.*

I wanted to stay here because of the firebed and furnace, but also because this area was thick with magical energy. But that wasn't the biggest reason. First and foremost, I quite *liked* this place. I'd risked my life in this forest before; in fact, I'd encountered multiple dangerous situations back-to-back in a short amount of time. Still, that felt like par for the course. I was living in the middle of nature, after all. I wasn't able to predict

the time when I would die, but that was nature, and it was something I'd readily accept.

"Then…" Helen said in the faintest of whispers.

I set the shortsword on the anvil, wondering if I should hammer it a few more times, but when I heard her voice, I lowered my tool and strained my ears.

Just then, there was a loud *clatter*. It was a bit muffled, but the sound of the wooden clappers was undeniable. Helen and I exchanged a glance—we'd heard this sound just this morning.

One of our traps had gone off.

If it was just some unfortunate animal, that was fine. These traps weren't meant to injure, and maybe the animal would be startled by the sound of the clapper and scamper away. That was more than welcome. Unfortunately, while many animals approached the hot spring, not many would dare venture close to our cabin. We never encountered any large animals nearby—there was only the occasional squirrel or bird. I didn't expect those critters to get caught in the traps, though, and even if they did, they wouldn't make such a loud sound. In other words…

"Is it a magical beast?" I asked.

"Or…" Helen looked solemn. "Someone has just proven that our traps are useful and necessary."

I tossed her the shortsword on my anvil. She gracefully caught it and rushed toward the door. She grabbed her other complete shortsword, undid the latch, and flew out of the forge. I hastily followed her.

Chapter 5: A Visitor

Helen flew out, and I stayed in close pursuit. The clappers kept going off—it seemed that our honest intruder was managing to set off each and every one of our traps. *Yeah, this probably isn't a normal wild animal. They would've fled the moment they set off the first trap.*

Helen rushed past Krul, Samya, and the others who were playing by the garden. Samya and the other ladies were also on alert as they glared in the direction of the clappers.

"Be careful!" I yelled to Helen.

While it might've been a monster or an intruder, I paid no heed and shouted from the top of my lungs. For a brief moment, Helen turned around and smirked at me before she ran even faster. *She's already so quick! She can go even faster?!* Her sobriquet truly was fitting. I crouched and weaved my way between the trees as I watched Helen rush ahead. Soon, I met up with the other ladies.

"Boss!" Rike shouted.

"Eizo!" Lidy yelled.

The two had been out in the fields, and they had caught up with me; they'd heard the clapper too.

"I'll explain later," I said, speaking as fast as I could. "Helen's gone ahead to check the threat, and I'll chase after her. Samya, Lidy, grab your bows and follow us. I want everyone else to stay back with our daughters. But if you sense any danger, leave *immediately*. If we can buy some time, I'm sure Lluisa will notice us."

After I gave my orders, everyone nodded along. I headed deeper into the forest, where Helen had gone. I quickly sensed her; the clappers were still ringing loud and clear, and I could hear her loud voice questioning the mysterious intruder.

"Come on, just tell me where you came from!" Helen barked.

"Agh... I-I'm not anyone suspicious!" exclaimed an unknown voice.

"And how am I supposed to know that? Just tell me who you are!"

"Augh..."

When I heard the conversation, I immediately slowed down. It didn't sound like the situation was out of hand. At the very least, Helen didn't seem to be in any immediate danger. I couldn't see her just yet, but I could practically envision her exasperated expression flecked with irritation. On the other hand, our intruder seemed to be speaking rather languidly, despite their dangerous situation. No doubt that only added to Helen's impatience.

Our intruder sounded like a lady, but she was faced with the strongest mercenary—or ex-mercenary right now—in the world. If she so much as twitched a finger dangerously, she'd say goodbye to this world before she could even blink.

I waded through the underbrush, doing so loudly in order to signal my location to Helen. When I finally spotted her, I understood why the clappers were still ringing. The intruder—a lady I'd never seen before—was on the ground, and she had the rope of the trap entangled around her arm. *Did she turn around and trip?*

The end of that rope was tied to a clapper, and every time she moved, a familiar clatter rang through the air. *This was more of an alert system... It wasn't meant to tie or restrain someone...*

Helen glanced at me. "Apparently, she's a guest. But if she'd used the usual entrance to the forest that we use, she shouldn't have stumbled across this area. She won't really answer any of my questions."

This location was closer to the forge. If one were to take our usual path into the forest, they would be at the trap near the cabin instead. The intruder would have needed to make their way through the yard and enter the forge. Today, Samya and the others were playing with my daughters—both Samya and Lucy would've sensed any such visitor almost instantly. In other words, because the intruder was in this location, careful to evade the ears and noses of our family, they must've had some specific intention for doing so.

"Let's wait until Samya arrives," I said. "We'll hear her out then."

"Yeah," Helen agreed.

Samya's nose reacted every time a person's emotions were stirred. She could sense lies and fibs. Of course, if someone received some special form of training to maintain their cool, or if the person truly believed the lie, she'd have no way of knowing

that. While our intruder had thus far managed to evade Samya's nose and ears, it was best if she was with us now.

The intruder had black hair and flaming red eyes. Her eyes weren't red from crying or anything—her *irises* were that color. Her outfit, perhaps prioritizing warmth and mobility in this cold, was a red jacket with white pants. Her pale white skin further accentuated her striking hair and eyes. When combined with her outfit, she looked to be of the upper class. I thought she looked sort of like a vampire, but maybe that was a rude stereotype. The lady continued to flail wildly as the rope was still around her.

"Please get this rope off me!" she wailed.

"Now, now," I replied. "Could you wait just a little while longer? I think she's gonna arrive soon."

"Come on…"

The lady furrowed her brow. Samya would quickly sense our location, and it didn't take long for her to ready her bow. I was sure that both Samya and Lidy would catch up to us in a jiffy.

Just as I'd expected, she arrived in a matter of moments.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Eizo," she said.

"You're good. Thanks for being so quick," I replied.

I couldn't see Lidy, but I was sure that she was lurking nearby and hiding her presence, ready to take aim if needed. If someone else approached us, she'd likely sound an alarm, and she would fire if this intruder tried to do anything funny. Of course, none of us acted like we were waiting for Lidy too so that we wouldn't give her away. We all pretended like we were looking for Samya and Samya alone.

"All right, could I ask for your name first?" I inquired.

"Huh?" The lady stared back at me blankly.

I could practically hear an annoyed vein popping on Helen's face, but I was, of course, imagining things…right?

"Oh, uh, I, uh…" the lady stammered. She clearly hesitated, but having steeled her resolve, she told us her name. "I'm Juliet."

"Well, Miss Juliet," I started.

"Ah, um, y-yes?"

She jolted with surprise and visibly shrank. *It feels so awkward questioning her when she's so terrified. If she's just acting, she deserves an Oscar.*

"Did you come here to request a weapon from me?" I inquired.

I peered into her eyes as her gaze wandered around with fear.

But I couldn’t tell if she was trying to tell a lie.

“Y-Yes, of course,” Juliet replied cautiously.

I glanced at Samya, who nodded back at me. Juliet was speaking the truth.

“And you have no other motive?” I asked, once again locking eyes with the intruder.

Juliet swiftly nodded. When I glanced at Samya, she did the same.

“If I catch you lying…” I started as I raised my arm in the air.

I swung my arm down, and a loud *crack* rang in the air. An arrow sank deep into a nearby tree. *Looks like that came from a crossbow. Lidy must’ve borrowed it from Rike.* When Juliet saw that arrow, she nodded her head vigorously.



“Lastly, could I ask why you chose this route?” I said. “This is quite a ways away from the normal path into the forest.”

The Black Forest was one of the most dangerous places in the world. At the very least, the general populace held this belief. When inside the forest, most people wanted to head to safety as soon as possible—there was little reason for one to take the longer and more dangerous route.

“I wanted to take a look at your house,” Juliet replied.

“And why’s that?” I asked.

“The exterior of a house can tell me what kind of person lives there. I just want to check—you know, see if there was any stuff violently thrown outside. Things like that.”

“I see…”

Samya nodded again. *Looks like Juliet’s telling the truth. At the very least, she just came to request something from me.* When I turned to Helen and nodded, she did the same back and removed the ropes that were tangled around Juliet’s arms. Lidy appeared with a rustle, and Juliet, who’d been rubbing her arms, jolted in alarm. She apparently hadn’t noticed the elf one bit—she’d been too focused on Helen and me. I couldn’t really blame her for that.

I explained the situation to everyone who’d been waiting for us in the yard. At the very least, we weren’t in any sort of danger, so we entered the forge. I had Diana take care of my daughters outside. This was actually a measure to allow Diana and my daughters to flee should anything happen.

“So you noticed some of us out in the yard?” I asked.

We handed Juliet a cup of wine diluted with warm water. She took a sip and calmed herself down as she lazily replied, “Yeah…”

She looked so sharp, but her manner of speaking was even more relaxed and casual than when Anne had first arrived here. I couldn’t help but be a bit surprised at this juxtaposition.

“Since I saw you guys playing around, I thought it was best if I didn’t disturb you,” Juliet replied.

“I see…” I replied.

I couldn’t sense any discrepancies with her words; however, I did find it odd that she had managed to evade both Samya’s and Lucy’s senses. Maybe the two had been too busy playing around. We’d installed the clappers for precisely these occasions anyway.

“All right, so this is a question that I actually ask everyone who

comes here," I said, causing Juliet's relaxed face to turn stern. "Did you truly come here alone?"

She smiled back. "Of course. I heard that was the condition."

Samya, who stood behind her, nodded.

"All right," I said. "Then I'll make whatever you need."

"Yay! What a relief!" Juliet replied in her usual breathy, lazy tone.

I couldn't help but also relax as I added, "Now then, what item would you like made?"

"Umm... I'd like a shortish knife."

"A shortish knife..." I repeated. "I see..."

"Right," Juliet said with a very firm nod.

"Okay, well how short do you want it to be? There are many sizes, and I'd like to know what you're looking for."

"Let's see..." Juliet said as she gazed up at the ceiling. She soon looked back at me and used her hands to indicate the size. "I'd like a blade about this long and this wide."

She was looking for a blade around fifteen centimeters long. It probably had a use for work purposes, but it was far too short to be used as an effective weapon. *But if she's just using this for work, she shouldn't need a custom model. She could just buy an elite model from Camilo, and that'd be that.*

"It looks quite small," I observed.

"A-Ah, sorry!" Juliet added in her usual languid manner. "I'd like the blade to be in a shape like this."

She indicated a crescent moon shape—something that resembled a claw of sorts. *Wait a second. This looks familiar...*

"Are you possibly looking for something like this?" I asked.

I took a piece of paper and a writing instrument to sketch it out. A clawlike blade emerged from the grip, and a small ring was carved through the end of the grip. Juliet gazed at me with excitement when she saw the illustration.

"Yeah! Exactly like that!" she cried out.

"Got it," I replied.

I internally buried my head in my hands. This blade was indeed familiar to me, and it wasn't through installed knowledge. On Earth, Juliet's blade was called a karambit. I'd never actually owned one before, and the karambit had changed its use over time. Thanks to its compact, clawlike shape and how it could be used with a backhand grip, it could be used as an assassination tool. *I've already accepted this request, but I have to make sure...*

Helen stood behind me to my left, ready to pull me back should anything happen, and I turned to her.

"To use as a reference, I'd like to see how this blade is intended to be used. Could you swing this wooden sword around?" I asked Juliet. Then, I turned to Helen. "And on our end, Helen, could I ask you?"

"Leave it to me." Helen grinned and nodded. Watching her fight from afar was probably very different from actually going up against her. I felt like it was best to have the strongest fighter in our family handle our visitor.

"Here you are," I said.

"Thank you," Juliet said lazily.

She took the short wooden sword (which was normally used for Helen's training). When I encouraged her to step outside, Juliet, who might have been happy to get some exercise, skipped out of the forge. Helen followed her with a large sigh while she rolled her shoulders around.

"Here I go!" Juliet said, wildly swinging her arm around.

Helen, on the other hand, was twirling her blade in her hand. "Ready when you are." She used her free hand and gestured for Juliet to start.

"Okey doke!"

Juliet leaned forward and stepped hard on the ground. She went so low that I felt like her head was practically touching the ground, and I couldn't take my eyes off her unusual crouching stance. The next moment, I thought I heard a deafening *boom*. There was no explosion, of course. On the contrary, Juliet was as silent as a tomb—she'd created a layer of confusion to hide her inexplicable speed. In a flash, she approached Helen.

It would be impossible to parry Juliet's swift attack—that is, if she'd been up against a normal human.

Clack!

But the Lightning Strike was by no means normal. A thunderous noise rang out as she stopped Juliet dead in her tracks. Juliet's blade was in a backhand grip; had her attack connected, she would've destroyed Helen's ribs. The Lightning Strike had managed to prevent that.

"Not bad," Helen said with a smile.

"Aw, thank you," Juliet replied in a lackadaisical manner.

Had I not known any better, I might've found this scene wholesome. But this situation was very clearly anything but

idyllic.

"I'm getting nervous," Diana said softly.

We all nodded along. After that first attack, we all braced ourselves. It was Helen who made the next move. For a moment, her arm disappeared as she swung her weapon, and any normal soldier would've been beaten without fully comprehending the situation. But Juliet used the bare minimum amount of movement and jumped away. It looked like she was floating through the skies as Helen swung through the air. *If that had hit, Juliet wouldn't have been unscathed.* Yet she didn't seem at all offended by such a powerful attack. It felt like time stopped as we all zeroed in on the battle.

Helen remained frozen in place after her attack. She then lowered her arm and gazed at Juliet.

"You're..." Helen started, sounding a bit angry.

"Yes?" Juliet replied with a smile.

"You're an assassin, aren't you?"

The sidelines, me included, began to grow nervous. A tense air hung between the two fighters. I'd already suspected as much, judging from the weapon request I'd received. Helen had only exchanged one blow, but if she could confidently state as much, she was almost certainly correct. *Should I ensure that everyone stays back, just to be safe?*

"Yep, I sure am," Juliet replied.

She didn't seem at all troubled that her identity was busted; she simply hadn't told us because we hadn't asked. And she'd answered only when the question had been posed. I could see a vein angrily pop on Helen's forehead—I was worried that she'd snap her blade at any moment.

"You're not here to do anything to us, are you?" I asked hastily.

"Nope," Juliet replied. "I haven't received orders for such work. If I killed at my every whim, I'd just be a murderer and nothing more. My policy is to only accept jobs against bad people."

She spoke serenely and with a smile on her face. *Guess she's got some pride as a pro.* Just in case, I glanced at Samya, and she nodded back. I felt like assassins might have some training that would make them undetectable liars, but I decided to trust Juliet for now.

"I've got an idea of what to forge, at least," I said.

"Thank you so much!" Juliet replied, smiling broadly.

Helen couldn't hide her suspicion. "Listen, if you try anything

funny…”

“I know, I know. I don’t think I can win against you anyway.” Juliet’s cheek twitched timidly—she could easily imagine what would happen if she went up against an angry Helen.

I gestured toward Juliet. “Then why don’t we head back into the forge?”

“Okay,” she replied.

With graceful steps, she walked toward the forge. Helen stood between her and our family. Juliet was the first to enter. We all sighed, but it seemed we couldn’t let our guard down for a while.

“How about something like this?” I asked as I showed Juliet the final draft of my illustration. “I think I can finish by tomorrow. At the latest, it’ll take just under two days.”

This might have been a custom model, but it was forged out of plain steel. In terms of processing, it was the easiest to do. I didn’t have to do anything different either; the shape of the blade was a bit unique, but my cheats would do their work. There wouldn’t be a dramatic drop in my working speed or anything—I could finish this request in a day. Even if there were any bumps along the road, it’d take two days at most.

“Is that all the time you’ll need?” Juliet asked.

“Yeah.” I nodded firmly.

She looked a touch hesitant for a moment, as though she were trying to discern the truth. Even if I worked that quickly, she likely thought that fast work didn’t imply good work. But after a short while, she gazed right at me.

“Then, I’m counting on you,” she said.

“Your request has been received,” I replied.

A small round of applause sounded to celebrate this business meeting.

“All right then,” I said. “I’ll begin tomorrow. We should take a bath and eat dinner tonight. Oh, you can go back home if you wish. If you come back in three days’ time, I guarantee that your request will be complete.”

“Huh?” Juliet asked. “Um, uh, well…”

“I’m kidding. We can welcome a guest for a couple of days, so if you’d like, please sit back and relax.”

It was best if my clients went back home; since they made it through the forest by themselves, they could surely find their way back. I couldn’t deny the danger that came with that

journey, however. Forests were more dangerous at night, and there were no guarantees about their safety. *It's not like she did anything to us, so we don't have to treat her roughly.*

"O-Okay, then I'll take your kind offer..." Juliet said as she smiled brightly.

"You don't have any assassin tools, do you?" I asked.

"Nope. I'm not here for work, so I left them all at home."

"But what about your weapons and other tools? Surely you would need some to come all the way out here."

Juliet didn't have any bags or items required for travel. *I feel like you'd need a few supplies to visit just the city...*

"Oh, they're all stored away in various parts of my clothes," she answered.

Uh...then wouldn't you have assassination tools too? I decided to hold my tongue and let the strong fighters of our family handle her if needed.

"Okay," I said. "Could I ask you to store them all in the guest room for now? Helen, Samya, I leave it to you guys."

"Sure."

"Gotcha."

These two were the best when it came to physical prowess, so I had the two guide—or rather, put under surveillance—Juliet to the guest room. The rest of the family followed to head to the hot spring, barring one lady.

Diana stayed behind. When everyone left, she whirled around and asked, "Why did you accept her request? She's an *assassin*!"

"Be it a king, an emperor, a hero, or a demon lord, I've decided to forge items for all who meet my conditions," I replied.

"But these tools will, without a doubt, be used to take the lives of others," she pointed out.

"Weren't you guys the ones who told me that I didn't need to agonize over stuff like that anymore?"

"Were we?"

"Yep. What, did you forget?"

Diana giggled. "Of course not. I'm just kidding."

"I'd be lying if I said I *didn't* hesitate just a little, though."

Even if an assassin was faced with a nefarious person, their actions were filled with malicious intent. How could I not be a bit cautious of that fact? But ultimately, I was forging a weapon, as I always did. The items I created always had the potential to take lives. That fact didn't change. I wasn't turning completely defiant,

but if the final goal was the same for the items that I forged, I decided to just keep making weapons as usual.

"I'm fine," I told her. "I already decided that I wouldn't agonize over that conundrum anymore."

Diana peered at me solemnly. "Even so... If, after everything, you still feel that the burden is too much for you to bear, let us know."

"I will. I'll be relying on you guys again."

This time, I didn't let a tear slip from my eye.

I had no idea how Juliet spent her time in the hot spring—frankly, it'd be problematic if I had even an inkling. I was later told that she didn't go on a rampage or anything—she seemed to excitedly enjoy herself. She'd never experienced anything like it before. I was glad that she'd had fun.

Dinner wasn't anything special. I wasn't being cold or anything because we usually threw a bit of a celebration when a request was fulfilled; I wouldn't be able to think of another menu if we also threw a lavish welcoming party. But that didn't stop me from trying to make things a little special. I made a sauce from soy sauce and a garlic-like vegetable (that Lidy had proudly grown) and poured it over our usual meat.

Juliet had a hearty appetite that matched the stride of the rest of my family. "The flavor's a bit unusual, but it's delicious!" she cried.

"We've got plenty," I said. "Don't hold back."

Juliet's eyes sparkled like never before as she increased the speed of her eating, causing the rest of my family to erupt in laughter.

That night, I slipped out of the cabin and met Helen in the forest; I'd done this before to hold a secret meeting with Anne. Of course, I made extra certain that I didn't step on any traps that would sound a clapper.

"What are your thoughts?" I asked.

"I don't sense anything suspicious for now," Helen replied.

I had the Lightning Strike stand guard, keeping watch at the hot spring, during meals, and until our guest went to sleep. Assassins didn't just use concealed blades—they aimed for the kill no matter what the tool was. They could poison people too. I'd had Helen be alert, just in case, but it seemed Juliet had made

no such attempt.

"So did she come here to genuinely request a weapon?" I wondered.

"That's what I think," Helen answered. "If she truly planned on doing something to us, she's had way too many openings. She was quick to entrust us with her belongings, and she easily followed us to the hot spring where she had to be completely naked to take a bath."

"She's that casual even with you by her side, huh…?"

If Juliet underestimated our capabilities, she could surely act carefree, even if we'd held any malicious intentions. But she'd personally experienced Helen's combat skills. While the Lightning Strike wasn't sure if our client had lost any will to fight or if she'd truly come here for a weapon, it seemed clear that Juliet held no ill intentions.

"So? What now?" Helen asked.

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Are you just gonna let her mosey back home without asking any questions?"

"Hmm…"

I crossed my arms in front of me. *I could corner her about her origins and maybe sound the alarm for Camilo and Marius… Maybe they could look into her.*

"It's probably unwise to pry deep into an assassin's affairs," I concluded. "I'd hate to get dragged into any sort of mess. I'll just quickly make her a weapon, then send her on her way."

"Got it." Helen nodded.

"I'll also be wary if she's near me."

"Nah, I'll just drag her outside and watch over her. You should focus on your work, Eizo."

"All right, I'll do that. Thanks, Helen."

When I nodded at her, she patted my shoulder. Our two shadows in the forest melted away, back into the cabin.

####

"Okay, let's do this," I said.

"Roger, Boss!" Rike exclaimed.

After I finished my morning routine, Rike and I got ready for work. As Helen had claimed last night, Juliet was out hunting with the rest of the family. I doubted that they'd go very far. We

had a good reason for this—just like when Anne came to visit us for the first time, they stayed relatively near the cabin to avoid giving out too much information on the Black Forest. I felt bad for pushing troublesome matters onto them, but as Helen had said, it was best if I focused on Juliet's request. That was the only way I could thank my family.

As the firebed grew warmer, I placed a sheet of metal inside, and once it was to temperature, I removed it using a pair of tongs. Now that the hot sheet metal was on the anvil, I needed to use my cheats to their fullest—gradually, I began to shape the metal. And of course, I added as much magical energy as I could, which increased the sharpness and durability of the blade. When the sheet cooled to the point where it refused to change shape under my hammer, I placed it into the firebed again, surrounded it with charcoal, and waited for the metal to grow hot once more. Once the coal burned away and the metal glowed a fiery red, the beginnings of a blade emerged in front of me: a lump of metal that looked like a crescent moon sawed horizontally in half.

"You're so precise," Rike said as she gazed intently at the metal. She'd stayed to help out, claiming that it'd be a learning experience for her. "If you can make a shape this clean from the start, I'm sure that you can forge a beautiful blade."

"Yeah," I agreed. "But more than anything, I want to finish this as soon as I possibly can."

Considering the risks, it was best to get this order over with and send Juliet on her merry way. But I felt a bit guilty. This commission was also a means for me to test how fast I could forge a custom model if I gave it my all. *Besides, the item I'm making today will be held to the highest standards of quality, so I hope Juliet will forgive me for this moment of testing.*

"Could you help me out, then?" I asked.

"Me? Are you sure?" Rike asked with wide eyes.

"Yeah. I just want to see how much magical energy you can imbue in this metal. I feel a bit bad for testing it out on a customer's product, but I don't want to end up making a blade that cuts a little *too* well."

"I see. Well then, if you don't mind..."

I removed the glowing red metal with my tongs and placed it on the anvil. I then pointed out where she should start hammering. My rhythmic *clang*s were combined with Rike's energetic *cling*s—our hammering drowned out the roaring fire

within the forge. Naturally, Rike's work wasn't as good as mine since I had my cheats, but if I scoured the city and the capital, I doubted that I'd find a better blacksmith than her. She was improving by the day, and she skillfully wielded her magical energy without straining herself. *I probably won't have to add on a whole lot more once she's done.*

"You're doing well!" I praised. "Keep at it!"

"Okay!" Rike replied.

As we continued our work, the shape of the blade became clearer, and I added the handle. Every now and then, I'd have to hammer a few times to add a bit more magical energy, but Rike was adding plenty herself. Finally, I had to smooth out the blade on the anvil. If there were any mistakes during this step, the weapon would begin to warp, ruining the entire blade. I had to do it very carefully.

Once that was done, it was time for the final heating. The metal no longer required much hammering, so we didn't get it white-hot or anything. The moment it started to glow red, I dunked it in water.

A loud sizzle filled the forge; steam billowed from the bubbling water, frothing slightly with the heat. I waited for the water to cool and calm down before I took the blade out. I once again placed the metal over the flames like I was searing a bit of meat, and then I placed it aside, waiting for it to cool naturally.

Once the karambit was at a safe temperature, I flicked the blade with my fingernail. Sharp *clink*s rang out, proof that the quenching process had gone well. Rike and I turned to each other and exchanged a high five. Only the finishing touches were left now. The blade was sharpened, and I then checked for crooked areas, which I adjusted with a few swings from my hammer. *Now, I just need to polish the entire thing, and…*

"The blade portion is done," I concluded.

It was time to make a grip—one that was easy to hold. *Guess I'll make what I usually do for my knives.* I wrapped the grip with a thin piece of leather, but I did it so that the wielder could comfortably use a forward or reverse grip. After the leather was wrapped around and fastened, I held the handle myself and found it to be quite comfortable.

"I think this is good enough," I said.

"So this is a…" Rike trailed off.

I raised the curved blade into the air. At the end of the grip

was a ring—also called a hoop—where the wielder would place their fingers.

Before us, in all its glory, was a karambit. Rike seemed entranced by this unusual weapon.

“This is amazing,” she murmured. “The surface is so smooth that I can hardly believe a person forged this. The curve of the blade and the handle fit so well together.”

She spoke excitedly and showered me with praise. *Looks like she’s in her zone a bit.*

Just then, the door connecting the cabin and the forge opened up, with Samya leading the group. “We’re home!” she shouted before she instantly noticed the item in my hand. “Huh? Are you done already?”

“Yep.” I nodded. “This is perfect timing. Miss Juliet, if you will, please.”

“Huh? Uh, m-me?” Juliet stammered.

“Yes, you.”

She gingerly stepped forward and approached me. I handed the finished karambit to her.

“This is what you requested, I believe,” I said. “Could you please do me the honor and confirm that?”

“S-Sure,” she replied.

She carefully took the blade and twirled it around to observe the karambit from various angles.

“Oh, and if you’d like to test out its sharpness, please feel free to do so out in the yard,” I added. “I think we’ve got a few rotting logs nearby, so you can use those as much as you like. If the color of the leather isn’t to your liking, I apologize, but I think it’s best if you dyed it yourself.”

The logs were used for daily training and had taken quite a few clobberings—they almost didn’t resemble their original shapes. They would likely be out of commission soon, and if Juliet wanted to do a few test cuts with a flourish, I didn’t mind.

“No, that won’t be necessary,” she said. “I’ve never quite seen a product of this quality. It’s more than enough. And…”

“Yes?” I asked.

“I’m not quite keen to test this out on wood.”

“I see…”

It seemed wood wouldn’t suffice as her training dummy. I was too scared to ask for any more details.

“Then…can we call the commission completed?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” Juliet replied with a bright smile.

A round of applause filled the forge.

####

The next morning, Juliet quickly prepared to leave. She stood in front of our cabin, and everyone at Forge Eizo was also lined up to wish her farewell. We all had knives hidden on our bodies, but we held no other weapons.

“Please be careful,” I said.

“I will,” Juliet replied. “I pray that we never cross paths in the course of my work.”

After a quick goodbye, she waved her arms as she walked away. We watched the cheerful assassin disappear into the Black Forest until she was completely out of sight.

Chapter 6: The Child of Fire

The following day, after Juliet had left, I decided to take a day off. We'd just finished a custom model, after all. Samya, Diana, and Anne decided to play with Krul and my other daughters out in the yard—they swiftly prepared a few toys. Rike and Lidy would be out in the fields today. I'd always been under the impression that dwarves and elves didn't get along, but that wasn't the case here.

"We've all got personal preferences for friends, of course, but I've never heard of us elves hating dwarves simply for their species," Lidy had said.

"I haven't heard of anyone hating elves back home either," Rike had added.

Personally, I was very happy that they got along. Helen and I were busy finishing up the maintenance of her blades. She didn't have much to do, but as she was the wielder, I needed her to test out the feel of the weapons. I was basically done, and there was no need for me to heat the metal or anything like that.

Ready to work, I headed to my tools to pick up my hammer. But then, suddenly, I felt an odd warmth.

"Huh?" I wondered aloud.

I was very familiar with this warmth, but I wasn't supposed to feel it *now*—both the firebed and the furnace were out, and there was no other source of heat within this forge.

"U-Uh, Eizo..." Helen murmured, absolutely dumbfounded.

I turned toward the firebed, where the warmth was emanating from, and I felt my eyes grow larger than saucers. In the firebed was a fire—no, more precisely, a small *person* was enveloped in fiery flames.

"Hello!" the person said.

"Oh, uh, hello," I replied.

"Yeah, hi," Helen mumbled.

The mysterious being sounded cheerful and friendly. I was probably supposed to be on guard, but Helen and I just stood there in stupefied awe, managing to eke out a relatively normal greeting in response.

In a nutshell, this person looked like a fairy on fire, though

she seemed completely different from Gizelle. While Gizelle's outfit seemed more modern or European (if I were to use Earth's standards), this mysterious fairy seemed to have more of a Middle Eastern flair to her, for lack of a better word. Her clothes were baggy with cinched hems on the sleeves and pants. They seemed quite easy to move around in. Still, this fairy was surrounded by fire, and her outfit resembled a lump of melting iron.



While she'd definitely been the source of the heat from the firebed moments ago, her flames didn't seem to light the small bits of charcoal around her. And though she now appeared before us in her fiery glory, she no longer emanated the warmth I'd felt earlier.

"I've got a lot of questions, but could you wait just a few moments?" I asked.

I asked the fire person—or not really a person—to wait. The smiling being wreathed in fire nodded firmly, and I asked Helen to bring the rest of our family inside. I didn't want her and me to be the only ones around. *The more ears and heads around, the better.* Though I wasn't sure whether this fire person could drink liquid, I also left to prepare some hot water for her. It would've been worrisome to leave her alone if she could burn everything down, but she didn't seem to be doing that.

When I quietly closed the door that led to the cabin, I saw her eagerly waving her hands at me. She glowed brightly. I breathed a small sigh of relief.

Everyone at Forge Eizo soon assembled. I wasn't sure if this fairy was allowed to be in our living room, so I had her sit on the firebed for now. The rest of my family brought in sliced logs and the like to create simple chairs. We set them up around the fiery figure, creating a bit of a stage. She was the star, and we were the audience for her show.

"Hello," the flaming lady said with a bow.

Feels like an idol's about to start a concert. I'm sure that no one here knows about stuff like that, though.

"Hello," we all replied, me included.

"My name is Maribel. Um, I'm probably what you'd call a fire spirit." She smiled as her flames flickered along with her. She wasn't producing any heat.

"A spirit…" Lidy murmured.

Maribel nodded. "That's me!"

Isn't Lluisa a spirit too? She's dignified, but she's so friendly sometimes that it's easy to forget.

"Do spirits come to places like this?" I asked Lidy, despite Maribel being right in front of me.

"Well…" Lidy started. "Monsters emerge from stagnant magical energy, don't they?"

"And spirits are born from pure magical energy, maybe?"

"Bingo!" Maribel said as she clapped her hands. Her fire

wavered with her, and I thought that a log had exploded. “You must’ve done work in this place, huh?”

“Yes, I have. I’m a blacksmith, so I do smithing.”

“Using magical energy?”

“That’s right.” I nodded and responded honestly. What use was there for me to lie to a spirit? In fact, she seemed to be implying that she was born here.

“You often use fire here, and practically every day, you all pray in front of that shrine or altar, don’t you?” Maribel said as she pointed to the simple *kamidana* that I’d made. We all nodded in response. “In any case, I ended up being born! I suppose you can call me your child! You don’t need to be so stiff and polite. Feel free to be more casual with me!”

Following her proud declaration, our family members exchanged glances. This location, where Forge Eizo was located, had more magical energy than most. In fact, the magic even prevented trees from growing in this clearing, and only a select variety of flora could ever hope to bloom. I’d recently wielded dense magical energy to finish a commission. We also prayed daily to deities, who clearly existed in this world. *I suppose that’s enough for a spirit or two to emerge.*

“You’re newly born, but you’ve already got a name, and you seem very intelligent,” I said.

Wait, maybe Maribel is the name of her species, much like a salamander. Is it not her own name?

“Oh, uh, well,” Maribel said as she scratched her head. When she noticed our doubtful glares, she hastily waved her arms in front of her face. “I’m not lying! I was born here, really! But maybe I didn’t phrase it well.”

I tilted my head. “‘Phrasing,’ you say?”

Maribel nodded. “I was born here, but I remember my past.”

“Your past…before you died. A life before you were born again, maybe?”

Back on Earth, the concept of reincarnation was very much alive and well (though I wasn’t sure if it actually existed). Since I’d been reborn here, I was able to understand Maribel very well. However, I wasn’t sure if the same could be said for my family. When I glanced at them, they all seemed to only half understand the concept. At the very least, the idea of reincarnation seemed to vaguely exist. *Wait, I feel like Diana and Anne were once talking about a sad love story about a couple who vowed to be together*

even after they reincarnated.

"Right," Maribel said. "Since only my body is new, I've got a name, and I know how to speak and all that."

"And that body of yours is…" I started.

"Magical energy. There's a dryad in this forest, isn't there? She was probably born from the magical energy that came from the Dragon of the Land. But I'm sure that she also has a past life."

"So, the Dragon of the Land didn't name her?"

"I don't think so. But she's probably lived for centuries, or a couple of millennia, even. I wouldn't know for certain. Oops, please don't tell her that I told you guys about this!" She winked playfully. Then she quickly corrected her posture and stood as tall as she could. "Now then, since the elf behind you seems curious, I feel like I should tell you guys about my goal for the time being."

Lidy jolted in surprise, and everyone chuckled.

"It's nothing major, actually," Maribel continued. "I just want you to let me stay here and watch you guys work."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yep. That's all."

She smiled back. I'd braced myself, preparing for some kind of odd request, but it was so simple and easy that I was stunned.

"I might be able to help you light a fire, but I can't do much more," Maribel said. "I'm a newborn, after all."

"Makes sense," I replied.

Mentally, she seems pretty mature. In fact, she's probably a lot older than I'm expecting. But if her body's like a toddler's, she can only wield so much power.

"Oh, I won't eat much either, just like Krul, Lucy, and Hayate," Maribel added.

"Do you still need food to survive?" I asked.

"I can probably subsist solely on magical energy in this neck of the woods, but I'd feel like something's missing."

She flashed a cheeky grin. *Sounds like she's got a smaller appetite than the average person—we've got enough stored to feed her.*

"Well, I'll be in your care," Maribel said as she extended an arm.

I offered a finger in return. For a split moment, I was worried that her flames would burn me, but Maribel shook my finger without causing any sort of injury.

And so, we acquired another family member at Forge Eizo.

Maribel claimed that she needed no room. She'd stay with Krul, Lucy, and Hayate.

"And y'know, I could be a source of heat for them," Maribel said.

She was a bit polite at first, but she soon started speaking more casually with us. Personally, I didn't mind it one bit. If she wanted to fall into a deep slumber, she said that she could retreat into the *kamidana*. *Have I contributed something to the goddess statue too? No, no. I shouldn't think too deeply about this.*

"If it gets real cold, I'll be counting on you," I said.

"I'm your gal!" Maribel shouted, flexing her arm.

I shouldn't use any honorifics, should I? I'm not eager to work her too much, but as someone a bit older, it'd be great if she could look after my daughters.

"Whoops, it's already getting late," I remarked.

When I gazed outside, the sun was already beginning to set. Since I'd forced everyone to come inside, I wanted them to get back to what they were doing as soon as possible. *And I'll be making dinner.* I told the fire spirit my plans.

"Oh, then I think I'll greet Krul, Lucy, and Hayate," Maribel said.

I glanced over at Samya, who nodded back. *Looks like I can leave them to handle her for now. In the worst case, Lidy or Helen would need to take charge, but I'd like to avoid that scenario as much as I can.* I shook my head to free myself of such thoughts and headed for the kitchen to begin dinner prep.

"Ah," I said.

When I opened the door to the cabin, I realized that I'd forgotten to ask Maribel for her help in lighting the cooking range.

"Eh, whatever."

I could still use my magic, and this range would instantly light up with a bit of fire. It was an excellent piece of equipment. I scratched my head as I closed the door.

We had the usual dinner today: unleavened bread, soup, and grilled, salt-cured meat. I plated Maribel's portion all onto one dish, giving her the smaller portion size that she'd requested. She immediately grabbed the grilled meat and brought it to her mouth.

“Yummy!” she cried.

“I’m glad it suits your taste,” I replied.

Spirits apparently didn’t require food, but they could eat and taste things if they so desired. *Maybe they don’t fully digest their meals, and it kinda just…gets completely absorbed in their bodies. Either way, it’s probably insensitive to pry into the details of a woman’s bodily functions.* We all smiled at Maribel’s hearty appetite; she was probably the oldest in actual age, but she was the newest—and most abruptly welcomed—member of our family.

She resembled a doll (with non-burning flames). She ate heartily, stuffing her cheeks with food, all with a smile on her face. *She looks really adorable. It’s cute, really, but…*

“Hmm, maybe I *should* make some cutlery for her,” I mumbled.

Her food was all on one dish, and she ate using her hands, but her way of eating lacked some dining etiquette. *Since Gizelle and the other fairies might visit us soon, I should make some small tableware soon.* Luckily (I suppose), we had the daughter of a count and an imperial princess who could teach etiquette. I certainly wouldn’t be the one doing the teaching—they could more than handle it. I doubted that Maribel would make many public appearances, but if she hadn’t learned etiquette until now, I felt it’d be useful if she was taught manners—perhaps she could utilize them in her future lives. Naturally, Maribel would only be taught if she wished.

Diana, who must’ve had similar thoughts, locked eyes with me, and we nodded. We practically had a new daughter joining our mix, and I wanted to do what I could for her. As I indulged myself in this tiny bit of happiness, I enjoyed a spoonful of soup.

Once dinner was over, Maribel’s hands were all sticky from the food. Diana looked a touch happy as she wiped the spirit clean. Maribel was a tiny spirit—it didn’t exactly look like Diana (or anyone else) was taking care of a *child*, but it was close enough. Undeniably, Maribel was a newborn, and she didn’t seem to make any fuss when her mouth was wiped clean. I decided to treat her as one of my cleverer daughters. Well, all my daughters were clever, but I could only fully communicate with Maribel.

Once she was clean, she opened the door to the cabin, intending to sleep in the hut with my other daughters. Samya

called out to guide the spirit, but Maribel stated that she was fine and left. *She's close by, so I doubt she'll be in any danger. If she was, Krul, Lucy, or Hayate would cause a fuss.* She glowed faintly in the night as she floated to where Krul and the others were resting.

####

The next morning, I woke up to fetch water. I hadn't missed this routine even in the winter, but it was chillier than usual today, and I wore some fur atop my normal clothes. If I'd had a hunting rifle with me, I would've resembled a *Matagi*. I had Lucy, a hunting wolf, by my side, and Hayate, a hawk—or wyvern, rather—that could help me with my hunts.

I've even hunted down bears. That had happened soon after I'd arrived in this world, during a similar season. *Feels like it was so long ago.* Then, when I'd sheltered Lucy, I'd been up against a bear that had killed her mother. The only difference during this second encounter was that I'd had Helen with me. She'd defeated the bear in a flash, making all my struggles against the first one seem trivial in comparison.

I grabbed the water jugs and headed outside.

"Morning!" Maribel called.

"Kululu!"

"Arf! Arf!"

"Kree!"

"Hey, morning, everyone," I said. "You're all so energetic."

The four sisters were outside waiting for me. Following Maribel's cheerful greeting, everyone else cried out happily too. I petted all of their heads, hung a water jug around Krul's neck, and we all walked to the lake.

As Maribel was a fire (or flame) spirit, the blazes that surrounded her exuded an air of ferocity. But as I'd seen last night, her fire wasn't too bright or hot. When I inquired about it, she claimed that she could adjust both the brightness and temperature of her fire, providing a warm and comfortable night's sleep for my other daughters.

"Huh, no wonder they're all brimming with energy," I said.

"They slept well! That's my guess, anyway," Maribel replied. "If I couldn't adjust my fire, it would be too bright at night, and everything I touched would burn up."

“You’re right about that.”

I had no idea just how common it was for spirits to mingle with humans, but the deity, or whoever it was who created spirits, made sure that they could get along with other species. If this *was* due to some deity’s intervention, I had no idea why Maribel had been sent to me. Maybe there was some kind of nefarious plot in the works. I mean, just recently, I’d been through a not-so-amicable situation, and whispers of danger still loomed in the corner of my mind. But as I saw Maribel playfully frolicking with my other daughters all the way to the lake, I decided to ignore the warning signals that flashed in my heart.

I filled the jug with water, then immediately turned around to head home. I decided not to play in the lake today—Maribel could probably keep us warm and dry us off, but I didn’t want to trouble her too much. Besides, we would all visit the hot spring in the evening anyway.

“Maribel, will you be all right in the water?” I asked as I lugged a full jug back to the cabin.

Since she was a fire spirit, I imagined that she might be harmed by water, but reality wasn’t an RPG.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine,” Maribel replied. “I’ll weaken if I’m in the water for days and days, though.”

“The same goes for us,” I replied. “I think we’d just die, to be honest.”

I wasn’t referring to some kind of new torture tactic that intelligence agencies used—exposure could easily kill a human. If Maribel only *weakened* under those circumstances, then she was tougher than I thought. *Maybe she’s like a high-ranking spirit or something.*

“Then can you take a bath too?” I asked.

“A bath?” Maribel parroted.

“Yep. It’s where you get in a lot of hot water. We’ve got something called a hot spring, where we can draw a lot of hot water from the ground. We fill up a tub with the water, so it’s enough for several people to bathe at once.”

“Huh. Sounds like fun.”

“Everyone seems to like it.”

Yesterday, because of Maribel’s sudden appearance, we hadn’t had much time, so we’d just wiped ourselves down with some water. But if we had some time to spare, our family would often go to the hot spring facility. Krul, Lucy, and Hayate joined

in too. Krul would take a dip outside in the pond where the rest of our forest friends were, and then we'd wipe her clean. I would visit the hot spring facility a bit later. It was partly because I wanted meal prep done before I cleaned myself, but I'd be lying if I said that it wasn't partly due to embarrassment.

Because our timing was a bit off, the ladies would leave the hot spring almost immediately after I entered. Since I was alone on the men's side, I'd clean my body, warm myself up with a quick dip in the bath, then leave. *Maybe I'll try to find some time to take a bath early in the afternoon.* I used to do it every now and then, back on Earth. There were these large public bathing facilities that customers could enjoy. I also very much looked forward to the fruit milk that I'd drink shortly after a hot bath. *That's probably way beyond a luxury in this world, though.*

"Could I take a bath too?" Maribel asked.

"Of course," I replied. "That's why I asked if you were all right in the water."

"Yippee!"

She zoomed through the air to express her elation, and Hayate joined her in the skies. Lucy chased after them. Krul, possibly because she was the older sister, or perhaps because she had a jug of water, watched over them with a smile. Even Hayate, who was supposedly a fully mature wyvern, would occasionally zip through the air with excitement. It was especially adorable to me because she was usually cool and composed when we went to the city or when she was out hunting. *She's one of my daughters, all right.*

"Don't fly around too much, or you might bump into trees," I warned.

"I won't! I'm fine," Maribel said, sounding just a touch grumpy. But she decreased her speed and cautiously looked around her.

The trees of the Black Forest obviously grew wildly without any outside intervention. There were wider areas—wide enough for hunting or for a cart to pass through. But of course, there were just as many, if not more, places that were narrow and cramped. Even if a space was wide enough for a person to pass through, if one were to fly through the air, they could easily hit a branch or two. I didn't want to find out whether a spirit could get a bump on her head.

Maribel and Hayate enjoyed their flight, making sure to dodge any trees or branches that got in their way. Lucy was just

below them, running as fast as the wind.

"Be careful," I warned, feeling like an overprotective father.

I smiled as I watched them play.

Breakfast was a rowdy affair, just as I'd expected. Even without Maribel, our morning meal was usually rather cheerful. Today, we sat down to our simple yet satisfying meal of unleavened bread and soup. Maribel could devour the bread easily, but it seemed she had some trouble eating when it came to the soup.

"I've never really had a proper meal," she said.

This was in stark contrast to Lluisa, who ate heartily without any issue. When I'd been a corporate drone back on Earth, I'd watched a drama series about a working woman who often went drinking by herself. *I feel like Lluisa would be a perfect fit for the role.*

After breakfast, I prepared for work by lighting the firebed and furnace. Maribel offered her assistance, but this was a part of my work anyway, so I decided to use my magic. I knew I'd borrow her powers one day, though. And when that time came, I hoped that she'd offer her full cooperation. Today, I'd be making knives—more precisely, the entry-level ones I sold to Camilo. Rike handled the brunt of the work, and while a lot slower, Samya was also slowly forging knives that were good enough to sell. Diana and Helen weren't all bad either, and we were able to increase our efficiency dramatically.

As for Lidy, she lacked the muscle, and though Anne wasn't clumsy, she was a very big person, so she was at a biological disadvantage for forging smaller items like knives. I believed that these ladies would one day find their calling in the forge...just with other items.

I *could've* joined in and helped forge, but quite frankly, even though I wasn't there, the ladies had very little issue. And if there *were* any problems, I'd jump in to help immediately. Today, I decided to build something else—I received permission from the rest of my family to do so.

I started by creating a small lump of steel. Once the sheet of metal was heated, I took a chisel and divided it into smaller pieces. They were so small that if I dropped them, I felt I might lose sight of them forever. I'd done that before, back on Earth—I'd been making a plastic model kit, and I'd snapped off a small piece, which had ended up triggering an hour-long search for it.

And usually, these tiny parts are vital, and you can't do without them. I wouldn't want to go through the same experience in this world.

The small lumps of steel were heated up once more, and I swung my very small hammer (that I normally used for engraving and stuff). I had the help of my cheats too. Usually, loud *clang*s would ring out, but this time, there were only tiny *clink*s. I was so grateful that presbyopia hadn't set in yet. If I could no longer see things close to me, I'd have to make a large mirror or something to enlarge the image of whatever I was working on.

I was working with very tiny pieces, but the shape was basically the same. Still, it meant that I had to focus more than usual because it required more precision. My experience as a blacksmith aside, if I hadn't had my cheats, I would've likely hesitated to even attempt this project.

After a short while, the lumps of metal turned into tiny, familiar shapes: a spoon, a fork, and a knife. I made several sets, all for Maribel.

I was surprised to learn that the usage of forks was actually a lot more modern than I'd expected—even commoners had gotten around to using cutlery. On Earth, forks still hadn't been popularized during the same era in which this world was currently in, but for whatever reason, this world already used them regularly. Since this was the case, I decided to make several forks.

I also made one extra knife—this one wasn't for table etiquette, though. It was the same knife that every member of our family owned, and there was no need to explain what it symbolized.

"Wow! Amazing!" Maribel said as she literally flew through the air to gaze at the cutlery.

"You can start using these tonight," I said. "Diana and Anne will teach you a bit about table manners."

"Got it!" Maribel replied with a bright smile.

Anne heard me mention her name. She finished pouring in some melted steel, wiped her sweat, and said, "Eizo, shouldn't *you* also learn a thing or two about manners?"

"Do I have to?" I replied in a bit of a troubled tone.

Diana nodded beside Anne. "Judging from the people you're around, you'll probably need to appear for some special

occasions. I see no downside to learning a bit more etiquette." She grinned at me.

My shoulders slumped. "Go easy on me..."

Laughter rang throughout the forge. *All right, back to work. Now that the cutlery's done, I need to make plates, bowls, and stuff like that.* We normally used wooden tableware. Perhaps metal would've worked just fine for mugs, but the trees of this forest were tough and easy to carve. If I used all the magical energy I had, I could probably forge a fairly tough mug—something powerful enough to turn into a hammer during times of need. But I lived in the middle of the forest, and there'd been wooden mugs in the cabin when I'd first arrived, so I decided to go with wood once more. *I don't want to leave Maribel out. I should probably prepare a few more spares in case more fairies or spirits come to visit us.*

Carving wood wasn't smithing, so those cheats wouldn't activate. However, my production-related cheats would likely lend me a hand. I found the cleanest and driest bit of wood I could find, then selected the tools that I normally used to carve scabbards—I also grabbed my own knife. Once all my tools were assembled, I carved a plate, a bowl, and a mug. These didn't need to be as small as the cutlery, which was a huge relief. As the clanging of metal filled the room, I was the only one swishing away at wood. I soon finished the small plate. It would've been large enough for Lucy to eat off as a pup, but she was now too big for it.

I continued to carve away on the bowl and mug. Thanks to my excellent tools, the high-quality wood within the Black Forest, and my cheats, the carving process was a breeze. Under normal circumstances, it would've probably taken quite a while just to carve one mug.

The sun was now starting to set, and I finished dabbing the small wooden dishware with vegetable oil. It would take some time to dry, so the dishes likely couldn't be used tonight. Maribel was ecstatic to see them all completed; however, she looked clearly disappointed when she heard that the dishware couldn't be used just yet.

"Aww..." she whined.

"I think you'll be able to use them for tomorrow's breakfast, though," I said.

The forge was hot and dry. Once the fires were out for the

day, the cold breeze from outside would cause the temperature in the workshop to plummet, but it'd still remain warm for a while. *The dishes shouldn't take too long to dry, even in the winter.*

"Hooray!" Maribel cheered.

She once again flew through the forge, and everyone smiled. My (technically) youngest daughter continued to cheerfully gaze at the drying dishware as we all cleaned up for the day.

####

The next morning, Maribel sat at her seat with twinkling eyes. In front of her was a set of tiny cutlery and wooden tableware piled with food, and she was sandwiched between Diana and Anne. The two noblewomen would go easy on her at first—they had no intention of being strict at the beginning of etiquette training.

"No one can wield a sword skillfully from the start," Diana explained.

It's so like her to use swordplay as an example.

I served a usual breakfast of grilled meat, unleavened bread, and soup. In general, we ate meat with a fork, soup with a spoon, and used our hands to tear off pieces of unleavened bread. There weren't many manners to be had, but Maribel was completely inexperienced. She clenched the spoon tightly, so Diana had her slowly loosen her grip around her cutlery. Anne then gave pointers on how to skillfully bring soup to one's mouth.

And so, the two ladies were teaching the basics of table manners. Samya, who'd once also clutched her spoon awkwardly, was listening in with great interest. Helen was totally capable of using her spoon. She listened solemnly as she heard the ladies say, "You don't have to be perfect at first—let's try eating soup this way." I was eavesdropping with a much more serious expression than Samya and Helen. After all, I was next in line to endure the strict training.

For the next few days, I joined in on forging knives, shortswords, and spears. I'd be exaggerating a little if I claimed that our production speed could rival a small factory, but no normal forge could match our pace. At this rate, since we were taking a long winter break, there'd be days where forging wasn't

necessary at all. Before winter had arrived, we'd used our rest days to travel to various places. We wouldn't go to the city or the capital, but we would explore the forest or go fishing.

On these outings, any fish we'd caught had become our dinner. (I'd tried to forget the number of fish that I, personally, had caught…) *But actually, we won't be able to do that anymore—our family is too large. We might be able to fish for our leisure, but for dinner…we can forget about it.*

We currently had a day off. I'd planned on heading out with Krul, Lucy, Hayate, and Maribel on a bit of an excursion—it would be best if Maribel learned more about the terrain of our forest. However, I canceled plans pretty soon after I woke up.

I got out of bed, grabbed the water jugs, and opened the door. I didn't need to sigh to see that my breath was white from the cold. My four daughters were all breathing puffs of white too as they approached. They were less nimble than usual, and they seemed a bit unsteady.

Snow had piled up last night—a thick blanket of white covered the ground around our cabin. Since trees didn't grow in the clearing, I could feel the sun's rays, which was nice, but unfortunately, the clearing also worked against us during snowstorms. Since no foliage barred the snow's path, it fell straight onto the ground and piled up. *Is this better than constantly being worried about snow falling off branches onto our heads?*

My daughters crunched through the snow as they walked up to me. Maribel could fly (though not very high), but she seemed to enjoy the feeling of snow and chose to walk too.

"Are you fine with the cold?" I asked.

"Yep, I'm all right," Maribel replied.

"I see. I'm truly glad you're with us during cold months like these."

"Yeah? Heh heh."

Maribel grinned happily; she emanated a faint warmth, and snow had begun to melt all around her. *Since it's so cold, I'm sure that she warmed up the rest of my daughters.* I petted Lucy's head, and Krul gently rubbed her snout against me, requesting an empty water jug.

"Isn't it cold?" I asked as I placed the jug around her neck.

She tilted her head to one side. *"Kulu?"*

It seemed the cold didn't bother her much. Since she looked

so much like a reptile, I'd rudely compared her to one. I'd assumed that she underwent brumation or something, but that didn't seem to be the case. She was a drake and in a special class of her own.

"Arf! Arf!"

"Lucy, are you all right too?" I asked.

"Arf!"

She stood up and begged for head pats; I crouched and petted her. I was worried about her feet. She looked like a normal wolf, and I didn't want the pads on her feet to be frostbitten, but I recalled that timber wolves were perfectly fine sleeping atop the snow. *Maybe Lucy's okay too. Samya said that it gets pretty cold around here, and all the creatures of the forest have probably learned to adapt. Plus, Lucy's a magical beast.*

Upon closer inspection, I noticed that the fur on Lucy's feet was longer than it had been in the summer, and her coat seemed much thicker. *Oh my god! She's floofy!* Hayate was the only one who seemed to obviously avoid the snow. She was perched on Krul's back, and then she flew onto my shoulder. When she saw Lucy frolicking around, Hayate was tempted—she ventured to touch the ground for just a moment, but...

"Krah!"

She gave a small squeal and hastily returned to my shoulder.

"I'll be honest, Hayate, I definitely relate to you more," I said.

"Kree..."

I had multiple layers wrapped around my body, but none were waterproof, and I didn't have any thermal socks. Slowly but surely, the cold was getting to me. *Maybe I'm the one most likely to get frostbitten.*

"All right, since it's so cold, let's hurry up and get this over with! Make sure you don't fall," I warned.

And so, I marched on ahead. As I grew older, snow more often put me in a melancholic mood, but when I was surrounded by my daughters, I felt more excited than usual.

"Ugh, it's so cold!" I exclaimed.

My water run had taken a bit more time than usual. I threw off my shoes, layers and all, and placed my feet in front of the stove, which was already roaring away. The heat melted away the chill—I wanted to completely dry off while warming my body. I was probably fine in this weather, but I didn't want any

Trichophyton infections to break out. *Gotta teach the fungi that my feet are not safe spaces for them to start spreading. But…I should probably ask Lidy about useful spells and medicinal herbs that could be effective during times of need.* The heat of the stove warmed up the room nicely. Maribel could become our second heater if needed, but today wasn't her time to shine.

Anne was still in a daze because Rike was brushing her hair. The princess wasn't really a morning person, so no amount of warmth would get her going faster. Rike had taken care of her younger siblings, and she brushed Anne's hair every day, so she was used to it. Helen and Samya, who were done with their morning preparations, were stretching their bodies; Diana combed her own hair while talking with Lidy, who was wiping off Maribel's feet.

It truly was a peaceful scene—like something straight out of a painting. I was usually busy preparing breakfast by this time, and it wasn't often that I got to gaze upon them in the mornings. *But maybe I should make some time every now and then.* Once my feet were dry and I'd warmed up enough, I added water to the pot on the stove that doubled as a humidifier and headed to the kitchen to prepare some breakfast.

"You guys went out too?" I asked.

"Yep," Samya replied.

Over breakfast, we talked about the snow that had piled up. Anyone could tell from a glance outside that a thick layer of snow had fallen overnight—the clearing seemed abnormally quiet. *I feel like it absorbs sound or something.* If one were to gaze right out the window, the transformed scenery was as clear as day. I'd assumed that everyone would stay indoors because they weren't used to this amount of snow, but Samya, Rike, and Helen had ventured outside for a short while. Diana and Lidy had skipped the outing because they were sensitive to the cold, and Anne was too groggy in the mornings to step outside.

"This isn't the first time I've experienced this much snow. It's pretty fun!" Samya exclaimed.

"But it was cold, and we had to wash up, so we immediately came back inside," Rike added.

The ladies often spruced up in the mornings. As an old man, I had a different perspective: *We're in the Black Forest, in* this *much snow, so no visitors will drop by our cabin. Why bother trying to look nice?* I kept that to myself, though. Clearly, I had nothing to gain

and everything to lose from vocalizing my thoughts.

"I wanted to stay out for a bit longer," Helen said with a frown.

Hmm…

"I planned on taking today off, but with this much snow, it's not like we can go far," I said.

Diana swallowed a spoonful of soup, then asked, "Should we just stay indoors?"

I thought for a while but eventually shook my head, "Well, this is a rare opportunity. Since the snow's stopped already, I think it'll all melt away by tomorrow. It's cold, but why not have some fun with our daughters?"

Samya leaned forward excitedly. "What kind of fun?!"

Her eyes glimmered with excitement, and I knew I had to answer to her expectations. We had a lot of energetic ladies in this household, her included. *Only one game comes to mind…*

I glanced at everyone. "Why not have a snowball fight?"

"All right, let's begin!" I called out.

"Okay!" everyone replied.

"Kululu!"

"Arf! Arf!"

"Kree!"

We all raised our arms, except for my daughters, who cried out instead. This was the start of our snowball fight. Samya, Rike, Diana, Krul, Maribel, and I formed Team Krul. Lidy, Helen, Anne, Lucy, and Hayate were on Team Lucy. *It might sound like it's tipped in the favor of Team Krul, but Helen alone is more than enough of a threat.* In fact, in the beginning, some of us suggested it'd be all of us against Helen by herself. Ultimately, I thought that was a bit…*much*, so I'd tried to make it a bit more balanced.

Samya and Helen usually didn't wear many layers, but today they were bundled up in the snow and looked fluffier than normal. In fact, we were *all* fluffy. Diana, who got cold easily, had even wrapped an extra cloth on top of her many layers, making her puffier than the rest. Her fluffiness was on par with Lucy in her winter coat.

Rike and Lidy were also wearing several layers, and Lidy was even wearing a hat, which was an unusual sight for her. Anne wasn't as bundled up. I wasn't sure whether it was because she was so large, but she had fewer layers than even Samya or Helen. She wasn't as fluffy. Only Maribel was completely the

same as usual. Since she was a spirit, it seemed temperature didn't affect her much—even when she touched snow, it took a little while for it to start melting.

I could see Krul's and Lucy's footsteps around the cabin. They'd probably been running around outside while we'd eaten breakfast. All bundled up, we gathered in the yard. It was Team Krul versus Team Lucy—we were pitted against each other. None of us were vehemently trying to make the other team lose...despite the fired-up faces of Samya, Diana, Helen, and my four daughters.

"I'll explain the rules, though they're very simple," I announced. "We make snowballs and throw them at one another. If you get hit, you're temporarily out."

Everyone quietly nodded along. Puffs of white came out of their noses with every breath they took, further implying just how fired up they were.

"Question, question!" Maribel shouted with her arm in the air. "What will Krul, Lucy, and Hayate do?"

My other three daughters likely couldn't make snowballs and throw them. Everyone turned to me.

"I want you all to make the snowballs for them. Put the snowballs in their mouths," I said. "I think they can all fling the snowballs using their jaws."

I'd seen them hurling around a wooden ball and using it as their toy. Precision and distance aside, if they could do that, they could participate in this match. *They might be too strong and crush the snowballs at first, but I'm sure they'll get the hang of it soon enough.*

Back on Earth, snowball fights had proper rules, such as specifying the size of a barrier, but we were just playing for fun—we didn't have to follow strict rules, and it wasn't like we had to choose a victor. There was no need for anything like that...or so I'd thought.

"Why is everyone so easily fired up?" I wondered.

I'd already been hit, so I was out. I stared at the so-called battlefield from a good distance away. Snowballs were flying toward each team with remarkable speed, and everyone was running around just as swiftly.. Now left with nothing to do, I stood on the sidelines.

"Don't squeeze your snowballs too hard!" I shouted.

If packed tightly enough, snowballs could turn into rocklike lumps of ice that could very easily knock the wind out of someone. This was especially true for our family. Throwing rocks was a dangerous activity for kids. Actually, it was far more serious than simply "dangerous"—throwing rocks could very easily kill someone if the rock happened to hit a vital part of the body. That was also heavily dependent on the thrower as well.

But in terms of skill, practically everyone in our family could turn a rock into a weapon. I didn't need to spell out how dangerous it would be if they hurled a lump of ice with their power.

I gave a wry smile at their replies, placing the snowballs I'd made on the side of the field, and recalled what had happened just as the snowball fight had begun.

The match started with a loud *whoosh*. A ball of snow cut through the air at an alarming speed.

"Whoa!" I shouted.

I twisted my body and just barely managed to dodge the attack. Had I not been blessed with some fighting capabilities, I would've been out mere seconds into the game.

"Damn, knew it was a long shot," Helen grumbled with a slight click of her tongue.

She was clearly serious and going for the kill. Eager to launch a counterattack, I grabbed a lump of snow by my feet and formed a ball. I made sure to keep a gentle grip, so I wouldn't destroy the shape, and I mimicked the form of a baseball pitcher. I made sure to not use my full strength as I threw the snow back. My snowball was fairly fast as it careened straight for Helen. It wasn't as quick as her attack, though, and as I'd expected, she dodged it very easily.

"Rah!" Samya exclaimed.

As Helen dodged my snowball, another came straight for her, hidden by mine. Samya's impeccable aim came in handy—her snowball hurtled through the air.

"Whoa there!" Helen cried.

Any decent fighter would've struggled to dodge this double-attack combo. Surely, under normal circumstances, Samya's snowball would've done the job. But of course, Helen was no normal fighter. Living up to the name Lightning Strike, she practically vanished for an instant to dodge the snowball—this was in contrast to her lackadaisical, carefree shout. I was sure she couldn't go all out when fighting in the snow, but the gap in

power was still overwhelming. *Hmm… In terms of combat prowess, maybe it's better for Helen to be by herself.*

We couldn't be solely focused on Helen, though—we also had Anne to worry about. She was tall, and her size came at a disadvantage, but in exchange, her long limbs allowed her to throw some threatening snowballs.

Rike and Diana were keeping Anne in check, leaving Samya and me safe from her attacks, but the moment we breathed a sigh of relief after dodging Helen's attack, one of Anne's snowballs would come flying our way. My daughters were also doing their best to hurl snowballs, but they couldn't match our speed. Krul and Lucy ran across the ground while Maribel and Hayate flew through the air, dodging the occasional snowball that came their way. Their swift and elegant movements implied that they were dodging with ease. The four of them were squealing and laughing while running across the ground or flying through the sky. That alone made this whole suggestion worth it.

In any case, the match went on. We were ten—maybe twenty—minutes into the game. I managed to dodge one of Helen's snowballs that'd come right after Anne's attack. But then…

Thump! I felt something hit my back and realized it was snow. *But I dodged both Helen's and Anne's attacks…*

Confused, I turned around and locked eyes with a smiling Lidy. She'd completely concealed her presence until now so she could sneak up on me and aim for the perfect opportunity. I raised both arms in the air to surrender and left the field as I mulled over who exactly was most terrifying if angered.

The match went on for a good while. In the end, Samya and Helen were the only ones remaining, along with my four daughters. Technically, our daughters had infinite lives in this game (they had already gotten hit by snowballs and were just in it to play around). The two players who remained were running across the snow with astonishing speed while throwing snowballs at each other. Their precise movements reminded me of TAS back on Earth—also known as a "tool-assisted speedrun"—which was programmed to complete video games faster and with more precision than any human player. *I guess some people can really push the limits.*

"Let's go!" Maribel ordered.

"Kululu!"

The spirit rode atop Krul's back, and Krul rushed forward. Maribel hurled the snowballs as far as she could. Krul's speed combined with Maribel's precision allowed the pair to evade Samya's snowballs while heading straight for Helen. The Lightning Strike was currently in a less than ideal position. If I'd been in her shoes, I definitely would've been struck by a snowball or two…or I would've tripped disastrously. But of course, that wasn't the case with Helen. I had no idea what kind of footwork she used, but she managed to just barely dodge the snowballs while regaining her position.

Samya was just as nimble. She skillfully dodged Helen's and Lucy's attacks, and also those of Hayate, who threw snow from the air. Every time the two players dodged, they received a thunderous round of applause. This was a very interesting match—one worth watching. *I truly think so, but…* I had to call a short break for now since we were in a deadlock. We could have another match before lunch, and if people still wanted to play, a match after lunch.

We ended up doing two matches after lunch, but we had to call it quits there because everyone barring Helen was absolutely exhausted.

"Guess it's tough—even for you, Samya," I said.

She was lying down on the terrace, exhausted, and she waved at me. It seemed she was too tired to even speak. Steam rose from her body, making it apparent that she'd exerted herself quite a bit. In fact, everyone was steaming and exhausted, barring me. Once again (or for all four matches, really), I had gotten hit and been forced out early on. I was already cold from the air. Even Diana had removed a few of her fluffy layers because she'd gotten too warm after all the exercise.

"Don't stay out in the cold for too long," I warned.

Everyone replied languidly.

"Speaking of which, she didn't come," Lidy remarked. She'd been knocked out right after me during each game, so she'd already caught her breath.

"Huh? Who didn't come?" I asked.

"Lluisa."

"Ah…"

We'd taken a long break for lunch and been playing around for quite a while. Normally, Lluisa would've suddenly appeared and pondered which team to join. At the very least, she would've

asked if she could stay and watch us play.

"She seems like a busy lady," I said. "She's the master of this forest, after all."

"She frequents the hot spring quite a bit, though," Lidy replied.

"Oh yeah, she did mention something like that."

Ever since we'd built the hot spring facility, Lluisa had been visiting often. Someone in our family would report back if they bathed with her—the dryad apparently *frequented* the hot spring. *Would someone like her miss something this fun? I find that hard to believe.* Admittedly, these thoughts were a bit rude toward the forest's master.

"I hope she's all right…" I murmured.

And I hope that I didn't jinx myself. To be a bit more ominous, I had an eerie feeling—a premonition of sorts.

Suddenly, there was a gust of cold wind, and Lluisa appeared out of nowhere. Everyone who was lying down immediately sat up, though they didn't jump to their feet. Lluisa's usual serene expression was gone, and her solemn appearance made me turn just as stern with concern.

"Sorry for the sudden pop-in, Eizo," Lluisa said.

"I don't mind," I replied. Clearly, she wasn't bringing any good news. I straightened my posture as I prepared to listen to her story. "Looks like you're not here for anything pleasant," I said. I noticed that everyone had gathered around me to listen in.

Lluisa nodded. "I suppose you can say that."

She placed a finger on her chin, but her tone was more casual than I'd expected. At the very least, it seemed there wasn't any pressing danger on our doorstep. *I doubt the clapper traps will be useful in the snow.* It was harder for us to hear them, and if snow piled on top, the weight would prevent the clappers from moving. *I heard that snow doesn't get this high very often, but maybe I should think of a solution.*

Suddenly, Lluisa gestured at Maribel. The fire spirit tilted her head to one side and glanced at me. I nodded back. As the master of the forest, Lluisa likely wouldn't do anything that would anger us, the strongest fighting force around this area. And if she *had* to do something, it involved the future of this forest. I planned on offering her my cooperation as much as possible.

Maribel floated in the air and gingerly approached Lluisa. For

a moment, I thought that I saw the faintest of smiles on the dryad's lips. Maybe she just wanted to observe the new life that had been born here. But her face soon turned stern.

"You're the one who was born here recently, aren't you?" Lluisa asked.

Maribel nodded, and Lluisa observed her. My assumption was that it was rather unusual for Maribel to be born, and Lluisa simply wanted to check in. The dryad was keenly aware of possible monster outbreaks that could affect other creatures. Even if a new life posed no threat, it was the job of the master to see that for herself. This was a very possible scenario, but if that was all, she wouldn't have needed to suddenly appear on such a snowy day. She could've easily visited us another day or even observed the new member of our family in the hot spring. In other words, Lluisa was in a bit of a hurry with reasons of her own.

Maribel looked terrified as she locked eyes with the dryad, but the latter soon smiled faintly.

"You were born in an excellent place," Lluisa said as she petted Maribel's head. She then turned to me. "Now then, Eizo."

"Yes?" I asked.

We locked eyes, and I stared right at her. Silence settled in. The world seemed quieter than usual; the frosty temperature only added to the intensity of the silence.

After a few moments of hesitation, Lluisa finally opened her mouth. "Could you entrust this child to me for a while?"

My eyes widened in shock—the rest of the family followed suit. Maribel had only been with us for a few days, but I already treated her as one of my daughters and as a fellow precious family member.

"For how long?" I asked.

"I can't give you a clear answer," Lluisa replied. "But I'm fairly sure I can return her before all the seasons cycle through once more."

"May I ask why?"

"It's quite difficult to explain, but to put it simply... At this rate, she'll be in danger. She's a newborn, after all. I need to teach her necessary things so that she can live here with all of you. I assure you that I have no plans to harm her in any way."

I placed a hand on my chin. The master of the forest had requested to be in charge of one of my daughters. *Is she*

planning on educating Maribel somehow? Both Lluisa and Maribel are spirits. Surely, they've got stuff going on that humans can't even begin to imagine. But then, why won't Lluisa just teach her those things while she's here?

I glanced at the rest of my family. Diana seemed the most worried, but everyone was anxious and concerned. I couldn't easily hand over our youngest and most adorable family member—especially without receiving details on what exactly would happen.

"What do you think, Maribel?" I asked. "You think you'll be all right?"

This wasn't the best choice I could've made—I couldn't properly decide, so I'd irresponsibly entrusted the final say to poor Maribel. While I might have opened myself up to critique, I still felt it was important to ask for her opinion.

Maribel looked troubled and turned to Lluisa. "Do I have to go?" she asked.

"Hmm, well, it's not like I'll punish you if you refuse," Lluisa replied. "But I guarantee that it would be more in your favor if you came along with me. And as the master of the forest, I guarantee the same benefits for you, Eizo, and your family."

Following the dryad's serious gaze, Maribel gazed at the ground. I bit my lip. Was I vexed because of my powerlessness, or was it something else? Even I didn't know.

Eventually, Maribel raised her head. "I'll go with her."

Her small eyes were filled with determination; she was so resolute that I felt a bit embarrassed about treating her like a child. She'd likely inherited some memories from her previous life, but that probably wasn't all. I truly had no idea what she'd gone through.

"If I can be of use to everyone, I'd rather go," Maribel said.

"I understand," I replied. "Thank you."

I won't say, "I'm sorry." I feel like if I say those words, I'll be trampling all over her precious resolve.

"All right, why don't we go?" Lluisa said.

"Huh? Right now?" I asked. I gulped nervously. Once again, the world around me was as silent as a tomb.

"The sooner the better when it comes to learning."

"I see..."

This was more sudden than I'd expected. I'd wanted to host a farewell party for her. *Maybe I should change my mindset. If this*

was more of a field trip of sorts, there'd be no need for a grand farewell party. Since Lluisa's guaranteeing that Maribel will return, I should trust those words and instead make this into a "see you later" occasion.

And so, I was a bit rough when I tousled Maribel's hair. An arm snaked out from one side of me, drew Maribel close, and hugged her dearly. That was Diana. No doubt Diana had wanted to shout that there was no need for Maribel to go—or, at the very least, that there was no need for her to leave right now. The time we'd spent together was priceless. I was the one who'd made Maribel make the final decision, but to Diana, all that mattered were her feelings and the memories she'd made with the spirit.

Everyone else followed suit. They held Maribel's hand or tousled her hair more violently than I had. We managed to hold back tears, but we were all sad to see our youngest family member go.

Krul, Lucy, and Hayate noticed our gloomy mood and gathered around. Diana had finally released Maribel from her embrace and set her on the ground so that my other three daughters could lick her.

"Hey, you guys, that tickles!" Maribel squealed.

Krul cried out in laughter, and everyone else chuckled along. The snow beneath our feet cruelly chilled us to the bone, but we all smiled, blowing the frost away. Perhaps there would be an instance when another one of us would have to leave for an extended period of time. *I'll save the farewell party for that occasion.* I smiled with the rest of my family.

"I'll try to bring her back as soon as I can," Lluisa said as she placed a hand on Maribel's shoulder.

The fire spirit puffed out her chest proudly, though I wasn't sure if she was putting on a strong front. Even if she were, I was sure that she'd regain her gusto in no time.

Gazing fondly at Maribel, I tossed out a question. "Oh, before you go, can I ask you one last thing?"

Maribel tilted her head to one side in confusion.

"When you come back home, what do you want to eat?" I asked. "I'll make anything you want."

"Anything?!" Maribel cried out. Her eyes sparkled with excitement; she was unable to hide her emotions. She crossed her arms and groaned, thinking long and hard. *I guess both old men and fire spirits alike will agonize over a decision—especially if*

the choice will allow them to eat whatever they want for lunch.

"Oh, I want a thin layer of meat—grilled!" Maribel exclaimed.

"A hamburg steak, huh?" I asked.

"Yeah, that!"

I glanced at Samya, who nodded in response. It seemed we had enough meat stored up for that.

"All right, then," I said as I pounded my chest. "Your request has been received."

Maribel raised her arms in the air happily. "Woo-hoo!"

"Then…"

"I'll be off!" Maribel shouted.

We all yelled back at her, radiating enough energy to practically make the snow melt. "See you later!!!"

Chapter 7: Protecting Important Matters

Once we yelled our goodbyes, Lluisa and Maribel disappeared into the forest. I felt a twinge of pain in my heart, but I immediately brushed that aside.

“She’s gone,” Diana muttered.

“Yeah,” I replied.

Everyone nodded along. Hayate let out a small, mournful cry, and Krul and Lucy followed suit, looking gloomier than usual. We all decided to visit the hot spring. We’d been tired to begin with, and we hoped to wash away our dirt and exhaustion.

I groaned as I sank my body into the warm water. “Ah, this hits the spot…”

I feel like an old man for saying it, but I suppose I am *an old man.* I felt my exhaustion slowly melt away into the water. I wasn’t in a soda hot spring or a sulfur hot spring—this was a bona fide magical energy spring. *But I think any hot bath can wash away exhaustion…*

I gazed at the sky—the sun was setting. The snow-laden clouds had drifted away, and instead, calm tufts of white floated above us.

“Whew,” I sighed.

I saw the soft puffs of my breath mingle with the steam that rose from the hot water in the bath. I then closed my eyes and felt my tired bones relax. Maribel’s smiling face flashed across my mind for a second, but the warmth of the water caused my memory to fade away, and my consciousness was swept along with it too.

“Eizo!”

When I came to, someone was calling out to me. I’d apparently fallen asleep for a short while.

“Oops,” I muttered.

I’d heard rumors back on Earth that falling asleep in the bath was similar to fainting. It wasn’t a good habit to have, though maybe I’d drifted off because of my exhaustion. *Should I take a day off where I just stay in bed the whole time?* I was in a bit of a daze still.

“Eizo?!” a voice called.

“Sorry! I’m up, I’m up! I’ll get out soon!” I hastily yelled back.

I realized that the sun had almost completely set—I’d probably been bathing for almost an hour. Sure, maybe in public baths in Japan, I could’ve spent an hour in the baths while sandwiching short sauna sessions in between, but I’d never spent an hour bathing in this world. I couldn’t blame the others for getting worried about me, and I quickly jumped out of the water, swiftly dried myself off, and flew out of the hot spring.

Over dinner, I made a suggestion to Helen.

She nodded with a cup in her hand. “You’ve got a point.”

I swallowed a spoonful of soup. “Right? I realized it during our snowball fight today. I feel like we should have more ranged weapons. I think it’d be useful.”

“We’re in the middle of a forest, but this area’s practically a clearing.”

“Yep.”

Our current crossbow had been made with Rike in mind, and everyone else could use bows and arrows, giving us plenty of power for ranged attacks. But if we didn’t have our weapons on us, we needed another way to launch ranged attacks. I was hit by plenty of snowballs today, and I felt like that experience could be useful. *Honestly, we could just throw stones—that would be more than enough of a weapon. Our snowball fights today proved that.*

“Should we collect some rocks?” Samya asked.

I crossed my arms in front of me with a spoon in my mouth. When Diana scolded me for my manners, I hastily took it out.

“I feel like it lacks the flair of Forge Eizo,” I mumbled.

“Shall we make something?” Rike asked excitedly.

“Hmm…”

We’d been taking quite a few breaks from our usual forging recently, but we were holing up for the winter. Since we had plenty of materials to spare, some ideas came to mind. When I told everyone about my plans, I received words of agreement.

All right, let’s make one.

Only when I crawled into bed did I realize that I should’ve allotted some days for relaxation where I could do nothing at all.

####

“This’ll invoke a different type of terror from the crossbow,”

Helen said as she shrugged. She was weaving together thin strips of leather. “We don’t know when the attack will come.”

She was probably the only one who truly understood how terrifying rocks could be in times of need. We all had experience fighting monsters, but only she had ever been out on a military battlefield to fight other people. *Maybe Anne has some experience too.* Barring Rike, everyone in our family was just too strong—it was easy to forget that the princess possessed a might that was truly unfitting for a dainty royal. However, though she might have been on the front lines to inspire others, she probably hadn’t gone directly to war. No one wanted to risk injuring an imperial princess.

“Thought so,” I said.

Helen nodded back. “And think of the sheer number of attacks. If everyone here fired at once, I don’t think our enemy would escape unscathed. We’re gonna be using a sling, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I wouldn’t want to be on the receiving end.” She stuck out her tongue wearily.

We were currently weaving slings. Simply put, these contraptions had cups where we could place stones, and there were ties on either end of that cup. One end of the tie would be attached to the wielder’s wrist, and a stone would rest in the cup—the wielder would then grip the other end of the string and fling it around until a high speed was achieved. Finally, they would release, launching the stone forward. *I think it’s easy to get the gist of how this works.*

And so, we’d all gathered in the forge because it was a large space that allowed us to work together. We weren’t using fire today. I wasn’t obsessing over Maribel or anything, but the unusually quiet forge made me think of her absence. We cut the leather that Samya and Lidy had tanned into thin strips as we each wove our ties. This allowed us to adjust the length to our specific body proportions. As expected, Rike was the most skilled at this kind of work. She deftly wove the strips together. I’d seen people on Earth smoothly weave friendship and paracord bracelets, and Rike reminded me of them.

“I’m no match for you for stuff like this,” I mumbled.

“You don’t think so?” Rike asked.

I was able to do a decent job thanks to my cheats, but this wasn’t forging, and only my production-related cheats kicked in.

Mine didn't look as pretty as Rike's, and I could tell that my weaving was more crooked than hers.

Helen was next in line after Rike when it came to skill. Saying that it was unexpected was quite rude, but Helen was good with her hands. *Maybe she can handle more detailed items in the forge one day. That is, if she's willing.*

Lidy was an excellent weaver as well. She employed a different technique than the rest of us, allowing her to also create an intricate and beautiful pattern. Comparing her to Rike was like apples to oranges. Samya, Diana, and Anne were all very skilled too. Samya and Diana were elegantly weaving along; Anne, with her large hands, created a wider weave than the rest of us, but that was still good enough if we accounted for her size. To increase portability, instead of adding a cup, we decided to weave the divot for the stone from leather too.

"Isn't that kind of big?" Diana asked as she pointed to Helen's sling.

Indeed, I saw that Helen's cup was a good deal larger than everyone else's.

"Yeah—this is perfect for me," Helen replied.

"You *are* strong," I added.

Perhaps Rike, Samya, and Anne wielded a lot of raw power, but when it came to skillfully wielding that power, Helen was second to none. Since kinetic energy scaled with weight, she'd probably decided that it was better to throw a larger stone if she could.

With each of us having a goal in mind, we ended up finishing our slings. I gripped mine and swung it around, but since there was no rock in it, it looked a bit awkward. Still, it wasn't like my woven leather was unraveling or anything.

"Okay, let's test them out," I said.

As everyone else agreed, we grabbed our slings and stepped outside. Almost all of the snow had melted away—it was still cold, but not enough to keep the snow, it seemed. I noticed a small pile of snow that had remained, shielded from the rays of the sun. Our yard was in a clearing, which often soaked up the sunlight, and the snow on the field we'd used for yesterday's snowball fight had all melted away, save for some small mounds we'd built as defensive barricades. Krul and Hayate used their snouts while Lucy used her front paws to push the lingering snow mounds around. They seemed disappointed that it was

mostly gone.

They'd done the same when we'd gone for our morning water jug run, but the snow had melted even more since, leaving very little behind. If snow here was rare, they'd be lucky if they could play again next year. Since they'd need to bid it farewell for a while, I wanted my daughters to enjoy the last bit left while they could. *Honestly, we're pretty grateful for this weather. If there was still snow, it'd be a pain to find the rocks we would fling.*

We all scattered, hoping to find a few rocks. They couldn't be too big—otherwise, they wouldn't fit in our slings, or they'd be difficult to fling around. We chose carefully.

In less than an hour, we had a sizable pile. I mean, if we couldn't gather our ammo quickly, our slings would be useless in a pinch. Our biggest advantage was that we could find ammo quickly to use our weapons.

"All right, I'll be the one to kick things off!" Helen said.

I nodded. "We're counting on you to be our role model."

"Sure thing!"

Helen created a loop with one end of the tie, put her hand through it, and attached it to her wrist. She gripped the other end of the tie in her hand and made what looked like a large leather circle. She took a rock, set it in the middle of the sling—which we'd fortified with a bit of cloth—and swiftly got into position. At no point did she show any hesitation, which was proof that she must've used this technique before in some past war zone.

"All righty," she said.

She flung her sling around. We were already a safe distance away, and I didn't expect Helen, of all people, to cause any accidents, but it was always better to be safe than sorry. Our targets were the ones we usually used for archery—the fronts of these targets were horribly splintered from the many arrows they'd taken, and it was time to change them out, so I didn't at all mind if the rocks shattered them.

CRACK! We all jolted at the loud sound. It didn't come from the rock hitting the target—the end of the tie that had been released whipped through the air, creating a sonic boom for just a split second. It'd sounded like a small explosion—very similar to what occurred when someone used a whip. In fact, if one rippled a long chain, they could achieve the same effect.

In contrast to the noise, the stone flew through the air quite

elegantly. It required practice to sling a stone where you wanted, but this one flew in a beautiful low arc and hit the target cleanly. The stone shattered with a crack, implying that it wasn't very tough. But that didn't mean that the target was unscathed. The target had already been damaged by the arrows, and it now sported a hole where the stone had struck. If the rock had hit someone in the head, even if they were wearing a helmet, it would've been a fatal blow. A chill ran down our spines at the thought.

"And that's how it's done," Helen said cheerfully. "All right, let's begin practicing!"

We all nodded obediently.

Large cracks rang in the air as we snapped the ties from our grips—the sounds were quite ominous. The most recent crack belonged to Samya, who'd just slung a stone at a target. Perhaps because she was used to aiming with her bow, she hit her targets expertly. Every time we hit our target, my three daughters cried out in celebration.

Helen crossed her arms behind us. "Yeah, she's awesome." She didn't lock eyes with me as she continued, "If she's this precise and it's practically her first time, it's more than good enough."

"I expected as much," I agreed.

Samya was very skilled at many things and could execute them very well. Naturally, she couldn't be blamed for lacking specialized knowledge in, say, blacksmithing. But she was the best when it came to stuff like this. All she'd received were a couple of pointers from Helen, and then she was hitting one target after another. And to repeat, every time, my daughters cheered joyfully.

Diana would miss her target every now and then, but she generally kept all her rocks in one small area. She might need a bit more practice if she wanted to use this technique for hunting, but her skill was more than enough for chasing away outsiders and protecting our cabin.

"Protect, huh?" I mumbled under my breath. Another loud *crack* rang in the air.

Clappers and defensive, rock-flinging slings—these measures had been brought about by us assuming the worst. We were overthinking...for now. Still, if an elite squad came to attack us, it

was imperative to be ready for them, and I felt it was fair to be prepared for possible monsters as well. Ranged attacks ensured our safety, and there was no harm in having more options. *Of course, I'd rather not use any of these methods at all.*

"You think an abatis would be pushing things?" I asked Helen.

"Hmm..." She scratched her head.

An abatis was a defensive obstacle or barrier made of sharpened wood or branches. Usually, it was pointed at enemies—in our case, anywhere outside our cabin—and it was meant to prevent outsiders from intruding on our territory. I'd seen them in history books back on Earth, and I knew that they were rather ancient technology.

An abatis could be a barricade of sorts, meant to guard ourselves against monsters too. And it'd be useful against humans. I wasn't sure if the existence of an abatis would make an intruder forfeit their plans to harm us, and it'd do us no good if we went through all the trouble of building one, only for it to yield poor results. *Plus, an abatis could possibly lead to unfortunate accidents. I don't think it could land any fatal blows, but it could easily injure someone.*

"I don't think they're totally useless, but they're a pain to maintain," Helen said.

"I see..." I replied.

I scratched my head too. The Black Forest wasn't nearly as humid as Japan's forests, but wood tended to wear out pretty quickly, and it'd need regular repairs or maintenance. These repairs would probably be infrequent, but even so, an abatis took time and money to install in the first place. I wasn't sure if all the effort would be worth it.

"I think you can save that idea until you know that your enemy will come at you with a massive army," Helen said. "You probably wouldn't even set one up around this cabin—it would be better placed much farther out in the woods."

I nodded. "Makes sense."

The idea of barbed wire filled my head. I could probably make some, and even various types, if needed. Razor wire and barbed wire with spikes wouldn't be hard to forge. However, this was extremely advanced technology for this world. If it could remain in this forest, I wouldn't mind making some, but everyone here would potentially leave the cabin one day—it would feel awful to force them into secrecy on certain matters simply because I

couldn’t keep my modernity to myself.

“But hey, as long as I’m here, I’m not gonna let this place get harmed,” Helen said. She focused on the ladies flinging rocks as she narrowed her eyes.

At the very least, we had the strongest person in this area on our side. Our enemy would have to attack us with an even greater force if they hoped to stand a chance against us.

“You’re right,” I said.

Helen chuckled. “Yeah? You think so?”

She patted my shoulder—an unusual thing for her to do. I felt pain that was different from Diana’s usual patting. Normally, anyone would’ve gotten annoyed by it, but I only felt ease and a sense of reliability in Helen.

“Since we’ve all got our slings, it might be best for us to begin training when Maribel returns,” I said. “We should be ready to defend our cabin.”

It was now dinnertime. I rubbed my slightly sore arm—it probably hurt because of all the flinging I’d done today. We’d all already taken a bath, but it seemed the hot spring was ineffective at treating sore muscles. I wasn’t sure whether to feel happy about how rapid the onset of the pain had come—usually, I felt muscle pain the following day. Was this one of the blessings of being younger?

“Like when we practiced before killing that monster?” Diana asked.

She was sitting near the stove to keep warm as she sipped on some wine diluted with warm water. Ever since winter had arrived, it seemed that this was her favorite evening pastime.

I nodded back at her. “If we don’t train, we can’t move as we like during the real deal,” I reasoned. “I feel like I would’ve hesitated if we hadn’t practiced before the monster battle.”

“I agree. I think it’s important that we solidify each of our roles,” Helen said. She was chugging some hard liquor with Rike. “Everyone’s improved considerably with the blade. Diana, you’ve always been stronger than any decent soldier I’d met. Your movements are just a bit too clean, that’s all.”

Aided by the alcohol, Diana let her emotions show, and she beamed with elation.

“Sure, I’ve still got some stuff to teach you, but it might be worth decreasing our training time just a little to focus on

defending the cabin," Helen added.

"Should I join in too?" Rike asked. She downed her liquor and glanced at me.

Rike might have been the weakest fighter within our family, but she still wielded more than enough power to defend herself if needed. She was probably afraid that she was dragging everyone down, but not once had I seen her this way, even during our monster subjugation. I felt like her worries were completely unnecessary.

Truly, everyone else in our family was just too damn strong. This was especially true for Diana and Anne. Despite their ranks, the sheer might that they wielded was absolutely insane from an outsider's perspective. And thanks to Helen teaching them, the ladies had only grown stronger.

Helen placed her hands behind her head. "Well, if we expect the worst, you might have to join in a little. But maybe once a week—or the days we go out to the city. That should be more than enough."

"Yeah, I can do that," Rike said, breathing a small sigh of relief.

First and foremost, Rike was here to be a blacksmith. It didn't make sense for her to gain too much power, and I was in complete agreement with the pacing that Helen had just suggested. *Though, when it comes to strength, Rike's already strong enough, probably. The master of the forest gave us her seal of approval, after all.*

"We should hash out the details at a later date," I said. "I don't think we'll be up against anyone anytime soon."

"Yeah." Helen nodded. She downed her cup and went to the kitchen to rinse it out, signaling that she was done for the night.

Everyone usually stayed up after I retired to my room, but today, we were all exhausted from making and practicing with our slings. When Helen called it a night, we all decided to hit the hay.

####

One evening a few days later, I realized that it would soon be time to head to Camilo's. I decided to check the wares we had for the order, just in case.

As I was cleaning up the forge, the door opened with a loud *bang*.

“Eizo!” Samya shouted. “Arashi’s here!”

I usually received news from Camilo regularly, like a newspaper service, and learned about the current state of the kingdom. I’d been told that things were rather peaceful, and there was nothing amiss. Samya was concerned because the letters were often delivered early in the morning—usually when I returned from my water jug runs. However, this one had unexpectedly come in the evening. Did this letter contain some sort of emergency? I quickly cleaned up my things and rushed out the door that Samya had kept open.

Usually, there was a small tube containing a letter tied around Arashi’s foot, but today, there was an additional package. It was fairly large, and Diana had decided to relieve Arashi of the weight as soon as possible. The package was quickly offered to me, and when I took it, I found that it was rather hefty. If a bird had been entrusted with this item, it would have needed to be a fairly large bird of prey. *I guess Arashi had no trouble—wyverns really are in a class of their own.*

“Thanks for your hard work,” I said.

I petted Arashi’s head, and she cried out. *Is she happy?* She soon began to play around with Hayate, and I knew that I’d never have an answer.

“All right,” I said.

I removed the cloth around the fairly hefty item. I was a bit scared, but it felt like I was unwrapping a present, and everyone seemed a bit eager. When I fully undid the cloth, a small knife was revealed.

“This must be…” I murmured.

Rike, who was gazing on excitedly, immediately looked astonished. I was equally shocked as I gazed at the knife—it was *awfully* familiar. And of course it was; I’d seen this exact shape many times before. It was the spitting image of the knives that we’d produced in our forge.



“Huh, interesting…” Anne said as she scrutinized the knife.

I went out onto the terrace and ignited a light source to inspect the newly received blade. When Anne twirled the knife around, it sparkled beautifully. She placed the knife back on the table and sighed.

“I know that it’s different from ours, but I can’t tell you how I know that,” she said. “But, Eizo, the ones you forge are much prettier.”

“The shape is the exact same, though,” I said.

I gazed up at the wooden ceiling we’d built. The knives we forged here weren’t solely made from my effort—my family made sheets of metal for me and provided support in small ways.

“How’s the quality?” Diana asked.

She was likely curious about whether this knife would prove to be a threat to our sales. If an exact dupe were to make its rounds on the market, our business would be finished. I glanced at the knife on the table—it shone.

“It’s not even close to our elite model in terms of quality,” I concluded. “It might put up a fight against our entry-level models, though. If this isn’t the best that they could do, they might serve as a bit of competition, but I think we’d win by a landslide.”

Diana sighed with relief. I was using my cheats to analyze this item, of course. I could tell that the hammered steel was uneven, and while the shape was the same, I easily spotted some remaining coarse edges.

“The letter from Camilo is about this knife,” Lidy said quietly. She was unable to mask the anger that filled her tone.

I peered into the unfurled letter as I stood beside her.

“Let’s see… ‘I’ve sent you something that’s been spotted in the capital. I’m currently tracking down the source,’” I read. “That’s what the letter says.”

When he sent me updates about the world, his words were always a lot clearer and more detailed. *I wonder if his letter is short because he’s angry too…*

Helen stood next to me. “The capital, huh? I hope it’s not what I think it is…”

“No, I don’t think so,” I replied.

“Yeah.”

Helen was likely implying that Karen was the one who’d

forged this fake—she *was* in the capital, after all. She knew about our knives and even about the fat cat insignias I included on the pommels. (The fake also had the cat engraved—Samya had first spotted it.) Karen was currently training to become a blacksmith, so I couldn't blame people for immediately making her suspect number one.

However, there were no advantages to her copying my work. Obviously, she'd be the prime suspect, and if she did something like this, she'd lose our cooperation completely. That would make her stay in the capital meaningless. If she was going to pull an act like this, she would've fared much better if she'd returned with her uncle. *Admittedly, that's just what I'd like to think.*

"Seems like these knives have been spotted in several places," Lidy said. "And we were sent one to confirm."

"We could've sold our wares to others," I replied.

While I'd promised Camilo I'd sell to him, we didn't have an exclusivity contract. If other vendors offered me favorable conditions, I could easily sell my products to them. And the same went for Camilo's side—he was free to buy whatever items he wished from any person he desired. As long as he bought our wares, we had no right to say a word of complaint.

"A fake, huh...?" I murmured.

Trademarks and patents didn't exist in this world just yet. If one were to falsify and abuse the emblem of a noble, they would face capital punishment at worst, but that held a different meaning entirely.

"So what the hell is this knife anyway?" Samya asked. She sat on the handrail of the terrace and dangled her legs.

I gave a wry smile. "Honestly, I don't know. I can't say anything for certain." Samya huffed quietly, and I continued, "But I think we can safely assume that this is a slight perpetuated by someone—or a group of someones—against Forge Eizo."

When I glanced at my family, their eyes were flickering with resolve. If a fight was being pushed upon us, we'd fight until the bitter end, it seemed.

"But for now, there really isn't much we can do," I said. "My only plan is to write back to Camilo and confirm that this is indeed a fake."

Everyone's shoulders slumped with exaggerated disappointment—their reaction to my carefree words was pretty funny, honestly. Whoever made this fake was clearly picking a

fight with us (or so I'd assumed), but I couldn't understand their motive or their goal.

"If this is a fake—I mean, it is—we're not the only victims here," I said. "This affects Camilo's business too, which was probably why he hastily sent us this knife instead of waiting for us to come to the city."

If a fake was sold, that would be one less knife sold by Camilo. Knives in general weren't very expensive—even shortswords didn't cost a ton. But losing sale after sale added up over time, and he couldn't ignore the fakes. On the other hand, we received our payment every time we sold our wares to Camilo, and though this logic could come off as cold, it didn't matter to us what happened after that. Our transaction would conclude, and it wouldn't affect us one bit—only he suffered a loss.

"But if this continues, it won't be good," Anne said.

I nodded. "If we can no longer sell our wares to Camilo, we're finished. I doubt others would be willing to take on the risk of dealing with us either."

In short, if the demand for Forge Eizo's wares decreased, then Camilo—or anyone else—wouldn't be able to sell our stuff. If that happened, we would eventually run out of clients.

"In any case, we don't have enough information yet," I said. "We have to leave that to Camilo for now and decide where to go with what knowledge we have."

Should we be on the offensive or the defensive? I wasn't sure what we were supposed to do just yet. I took the fake knife and inspected it. The shape was exactly the same as ours, but my cheats told me that it wasn't nearly as good as our entry-level models. This knife was the same as any normal one that could be purchased from anywhere. At the very least, it was nowhere near the quality we touted.

I immediately thought about the funds we had. It was a bit tough with our large family, but we could last for a year or two if we really scrimped. Even if the worst came to pass, we'd have enough time to rebuild ourselves. I didn't want to protect sales if it meant making many new enemies. First and foremost, my days of normalcy with my family (Krul, Lucy, and Hayate included) were the most important. Probably the only other thing I wanted to protect was the quality of my products. My personal popularity aside (it's not what I was looking for anyway), any item forged in this cabin and circulated to the

populace had to be quality. As an artisan, I feared the day that someone would see my wares as useless items that weren't worth their time or money. I had come to this world and had only been a blacksmith for less than a year, but that fear still gripped my heart.

And the knives were made not only by me, but by Samya and Rike as well. I was enraged to find that these fakes might sully the reputation and quality of the items that they made. Camilo's letters had assured me that such a thing hadn't happened...yet.

Before I could ask, Diana had already brought out paper and a writing tool.

"It is a fake," I wrote loudly and proudly onto the paper. I rolled up the paper and placed it in the tube around Arashi's leg.

"I'm counting you," I said as I patted her head.

"Kree!"

With a short cry, Arashi flew out and cut through the evening sky. In a flash, she was out of sight. We watched her leave for a while as she carried a part of Forge Eizo's future on her leg.

"Are you okay?" Diana asked after Arashi was gone.

I noticed that everyone was gazing at me worriedly.

"Yeah." I smiled. "I'm a little shocked, but making a fuss right now won't do anything for us."

Judging from the looks on the ladies' faces, my smile wasn't convincing. I was always awkward when it came to smiling, but they could probably read my mind right now. In this forest, there were only so many methods I could use to find out the truth of the matter. Whereas in the age of the internet where I could do my research and send out some emails, such convenient technology hadn't been invented in this world just yet. There was nothing I could do. At most, I could ask Hayate to send Camilo a letter, but that was all.

It would do me no good to panic or become depressed right now. Being hasty only cornered me; I had to remain calm. It was one of the few useful skills that I'd gained at my previous job (though the company had been totally abusive). I kept telling myself that, but my heart clearly felt different.

"Y'know, I'd considered the possibility that a fake would appear one day." I looked up. Stars had begun to twinkle in the sky that Arashi was currently flying under. "I'd like to know its origin, of course, but above all, I want to know the creator's

motives.”

“Motives…” Helen muttered.

I nodded. “There must be a reason for making these fakes. And that reason might not be viewed kindly by us.”

“Like maybe they just wanted to make a quick coin?” Samya asked.

I gave a wry chuckle. “Yeah. That might actually make me face them head-on.”

Her reason was the easiest to understand and the most likely. The other blacksmith and I were in the same industry (though the quality of our wares differed), and we were fighting for our slices of the same pie. Forge Eizo products were of such better quality than the knife I’d gotten in the mail, so it would be easier for them to make coin a different way: I could make knives of a lower quality than even my entry-level products—perhaps I could call them mass-production quality—and sell them to Camilo. Then Camilo could sell these knives to the fakers, and the fakers would still be able to resell them for a profit. *That’s just how good Forge Eizo products are…*

Making these mass-production knives would increase our workload, but if we simply needed to be fast with no care about quality, I could have Anne, who didn’t help much until now, jump in. And if dignity or obligation didn’t matter, I could even ask Karen in the capital to forge some blades for us and act like an OEM—an original equipment manufacturer.

If I’m gonna use the last option, I’d probably check up on her quality and make her my apprentice. It’d be quicker, but my actions would be a bit too calculating. If profits were the sole motive, I would’ve arranged for us to profit together and settled this matter entirely. Big whoop if that happened. And…

“I wouldn’t mind helping them out if they had a very good reason,” I said. “Even if that reason is just turning a profit. That’d be nice.”

I might’ve sounded a bit condescending, but honestly, if there was a peaceful resolution, I’d have no complaints. That was what my brain was pushing for, though I didn’t know what my heart would say to that.

“Am I being naive?” I asked.

“Oh, definitely,” Anne said firmly. In contrast to her relaxed exterior, she had a cold side, and she would *never* forgive a business rival. But she let out a huge sigh. “It’s par for the course

for you, though, I think."

"Yeah," Diana agreed. Samya and Rike were nodding along too.

"And I bet if anyone begged you for help, you'd help them," Samya added.

Everyone nodded firmly. I felt like even my daughters were in agreement.

"Since there's nothing we can do for now, why not prepare ourselves for tomorrow?" I suggested.

Everyone thought that was a good idea, and I once again turned up to the sky. On this cold evening, the moon shone down on us, and I prayed that things wouldn't go in an odd direction. I prayed to the Goddess of the Moon from the bottom of my heart, and she blessed our land with her gentle moonlight.

Chapter 8: Our Daily Lives amid the Dark Clouds

A couple of normal days passed after that letter. Maribel didn't return, and Camilo didn't provide us with any updates. We continued to make the items for our order. I was curious about current events I might get via letter, but now likely wasn't the time to be using resources for such updates. Once work was done for the day and we cleaned up the forge, I could see the small mountain of items that we'd made.

"We forged quite a bit," I said to Rike, who was cleaning up with me.

"I agree," she replied.

We did a lot of other things on the side, but when we focused, we could finish plenty of blades in a short amount of time. *Though maybe we fall just short of the number that matches our six-week hiatus.*

"It's a bit too late to worry about it, but I wonder if Krul can haul them all," I said. "We'll be riding in the back of our cart along with all of this."

"Hmm…" Rike said, placing a finger on her chin. "I think she'll be fine. She always seems to have some energy to spare when we go to and from the city."

"I see."

Rike manned the reins of the cart that Krul pulled for us. I trusted her opinion—it did seem like Krul got excited if she had a heavy load to pull.

"It'll only be heavy during the ride to the city," I said. "If it gets too hard, we'll carry some and walk alongside her."

"It'll be a longer trip, but we've got no other choice," Rike agreed.

Some manpower might be needed during desperate times. Luckily, every single person in our family had more than enough strength. They could carry quite a few items, and though they likely couldn't match Krul's speed, they could still walk faster than the average person.

"Before we had the cart, *I* was the one pushing our wares," I

said.

"Ah, you were," Rike said.

Back then, it took nearly a day to make a round trip—we traveled considerably faster since Krul's arrival. Since we'd have a smooth return, I didn't mind if we were a bit late getting to the city. We would be just fine as long as everyone else knew about it.

When I told my family over dinner, no one seemed to voice any complaints. Perhaps they'd all, in varying degrees, sensed the heavy load we'd be bringing to the city. In fact, Diana was eager to carry some cargo from the very start—she didn't want Krul to get tired. There was no need for me to even make that suggestion because she had it covered.

"Wait, does that mean that we'll have some time tomorrow?" Samya asked after we finished discussing our next trip.

I nodded. "I wouldn't say completely free, but we'll definitely have enough time to take a few breaks."

My agreement with Camilo didn't dictate that we bring a set amount—I was free to forge as much as I wished. Admittedly, this was a very loose and easygoing contract, but if Camilo was okay with that, I was going to take his offer. *I don't think I'll get a set minimum one day.*

"Hey, then why don't we all go to the forest for a bit?" Samya suggested as she leaned forward.

"The forest?" I asked.

I'd been told that there was no prey nearby, so Samya had been choosing to stay indoors. *Is she going hunting or something?* When I asked her as much, she shook her head.

"There's nothing for us to hunt, but I wanna check the state of the forest," she said.

It'd been around five weeks since she'd last patrolled the forest, and it was risky to jump back into hunting without the latest news.

"Got it," I replied. "We can keep tomorrow free."

Perhaps Arashi might arrive with Camilo's letter, but I wouldn't make him wait for a full day unless our own wyvern became targeted for some reason. Everyone excitedly chatted away about tomorrow's plans—it was as though I'd just told a group of kids that we'd be headed for the amusement park tomorrow. *If they become this lively about tomorrow, then it's worth cutting our order down by a day.*

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“Oh… It’s cold!” I said as I stepped out of the warm cabin.

A cold breeze blew past me, its freezing air like knives cutting away at my skin. *Since there aren’t any clouds, it’ll probably get a bit warmer as the sun rises.* Diana and Rike were packing some items onto Krul. We agreed to have a little picnic or go fishing if we found a suitable spot, and we’d need gear for that.

Once they were all done, Krul was sporting a large basket on her back. It contained picnic blankets, wooden wicker lunch boxes, tableware, and some gear. A bag dangled beside the basket containing water I’d lugged from the lake just this morning.

A long, slender tube had also been packed—we *could* use it as a container to carry spears so that we could fight back during emergencies, but today, it only contained our fishing poles. Once the packing was done, Krul huffed proudly while Lucy gazed up at her sister with twinkling eyes. Maybe she thought that she’d carry the same amount one day. But Krul was an expert of sorts, while Lucy was just a pup. If Lucy grew to become a full wolf one day, she might be able to run around with Maribel on her back.

“It…would’ve been nice if Maribel could’ve tagged along,” Diana said as she gazed at my daughters playing around.

“Yeah.” I nodded.

Had there been four daughters here, it would’ve been an even more cheerful affair. I could easily imagine Maribel flying around with excitement as she went out on her first excursion with us. While I wished to see her smiling face again, she’d gone with Lluisa, and it hadn’t been long since she’d left. I was just wishing for the impossible here.

“Lluisa guaranteed that she’d bring Maribel back,” I said. “Our fun will just have to wait a bit longer, that’s all.”

“You’re right,” Diana said glumly, clearly missing the fire spirit. “I hope she’ll come back soon.”

“C’mon guys, let’s head out,” I called as the preparations were done.

“Okay!” everyone replied.

“Kulululu!”

“Arf! Arf!”

“Kree!”

Revitalized by the cheery responses, we marched through the

forest, undeterred by the freezing wind. We had no clear goal in mind, and so we strolled along at a leisurely pace. Samya and Helen weren't nearly as vigilant either; they were far more cautious when we were on the city's streets.

"We're more used to this area," Samya said.

"People usually don't come here anyway," Helen added. "And there aren't any large beasts around either. We just don't need to be as cautious."

Fair enough. There were only wolves around here, and they rarely attacked us. Only bears or monsters dared to fight, but they were easy to sense without being so on guard.

"The city streets have got plenty of people walking about, so it's more troublesome for me," Helen said.

"You do keep a sharper gaze in the city," I agreed.

I felt a light punch on my shoulder—much gentler than the attacks Diana inflicted upon me.

"But there aren't a lot of beasts during this season," Samya said, a touch weary. "We don't have to be so jumpy."

I thought all the animals were hibernating, but it seemed some dared to venture outside in the cold. I could hear an occasional rustle or two in the brush, and some animals were squeaking away.

"What is that?" Anne asked as she pointed to the birds or squirrels that scampered past us.

"Oh, that's a..." Lidy began, providing answers.

We strolled through the winter forest like we were taking an enjoyable walk.

Various fauna lived within the Black Forest, and there was just as much flora to support the thriving ecosystem. Many evergreen trees dotted the forest—I thought they just naturally grew there, but it seemed it was partly due to the magical energy.

"In the forest I was in, those trees lost all their leaves in the winter," Lidy said.

It seemed there were quite a few of these trees, but I had no idea how exactly magic affected this forest as a whole. Only the forest spirits would hold an answer to that. *Wait, I feel like Lluisa would also shrug her shoulders and claim that she doesn't know either...* In any case, every now and then, we could even harvest fruits that were out of season, which was a unique trait of this

forest.

Samya, who was born and raised here, assumed that this was normal and didn't find anything amiss. I couldn't blame her, since this forest was all she knew. Had Lidy not told me, I would've also assumed that trees in this world simply worked like that for some inexplicable reason. My installed knowledge didn't give me much information about plants. I only knew the shapes of leaves that were fatally poisonous, like wolfsbane, for example. If I accidentally ingested these plants or tried to use one as medicine or something, that would spell the end of me.

In any case, the plants of the Black Forest bore fruit out of season, just like the elves' seeds. But since they *were* out of season, the fruits didn't grow in abundance.

"We'd be lucky if we could harvest a tenth of what these trees produce during their season," Samya explained.

So if a tree that normally produces twenty fruits bears two in the winter, it'd be a good day. We can't expect a stable food source from them. Now that I think about it, when the temperatures dipped and they brought back some fruits after hunts, there were way less of them than usual.

"Elves' seeds can grow quickly, but they grow better in the spring or summer than in the winter," Lidy said.

I assumed that we had a stable crop harvest thanks to the power of the seeds, but it seemed it was due in no small part to Lidy's expert farming skills. *She must've put in a lot of effort.* As we continued to walk through the forest, I noticed Diana's eyes restlessly darting around the forest. Every time some sort of brush rustled, her neck snapped as she turned in the direction of that noise.

She was the greatest hunter of adorable things in our family and was likely frantically searching for a cute, cuddly scene. Helen and Anne were equally alert, but they were probably just being vigilant in case of any danger. *Or so I'd like to think, but they seem a little disappointed when there's nothing special causing the noise. They look just like Diana, quite frankly.*

Ultimately, they were keeping watch of our surroundings, and we weren't out hunting today. We just wanted to patrol the forest, and being vigilant was probably a good thing in this instance. There was no need for me to warn or scold them for their restlessness. As we made our way ahead, with sunlight trickling through the lush greenery, Diana let out a small gasp.

“Ah!”

Helen swiftly placed a hand on her blade, and a slight *clink* reached my ears.

“Oh, sorry, it’s not something dangerous,” Diana quickly said, causing Helen to take her hand off her weapon.

“Is it *that*?” Anne asked. She made a visor with her hand over her eyes and spotted what Diana had supposedly seen.

“Hmm?” I strained my eyes as well.

I couldn’t quite tell. All I could see were the green leaves, lush despite the winter season. Diana approached the spot where she’d supposedly spotted something.

“H-Hey,” I stammered as I chased after her with Krul, Lucy, and Hayate in tow.

“See! Look!”

When we caught up with her, Diana pointed to a certain spot. As I followed her finger, I saw that there was just the thinnest layer of snow with very tiny white flowers growing in a bunch. Even if all the flowers were combined, they’d be much smaller than the average flower in this world. And yet, these small blooms didn’t seem at all evanescent or fragile. They grew strong and proud, amid the cold of the winter, confidently appealing their existence and their path of life. *They’re living all…*

“They’re living all bunched together within the large trees. They’re just like us,” Diana said, vocalizing my thoughts.

Everyone nodded, likely with the same thought, and I did the same.

“You’re exactly right,” I said.

I held Lucy in my arms as she jumped around, hoping to get a better look at these precious lives.

Chapter 9: The Signal to Counterattack

I finished my smithing for the day and was cleaning up the forge. Lidy, who was out in the fields, came to hand me a letter.

"It's from Camilo," she said.

I opened it up and read it aloud. "'There's something I'd like to tell you. You can fulfill your order, so pay me a visit.'"

It was short and simple. Judging from these words, it seemed he'd made some progress on those fakes.

"That's all it says. Let's head out tomorrow," I decided.

Everyone in my family agreed.

We made preparations as we always did, then we rolled through the forest, onto the road, and into the city. Winter was still in full swing, and we reached Camilo's store in no time. The apprentice greeted us brightly despite the cold, and my daughters were overjoyed to reunite with their friend. I stepped inside the meeting room and waited for Camilo. A short while later, he and the head clerk opened the door—the usual pair. The head clerk had something in his hand—it was covered in fabric.

"First, let's talk business," Camilo said. "You brought the usual wares to me, didn't you?"

I nodded. "Yeah. We've brought enough to make up for the time we took off."

I'd indeed brought more than usual, but the items were completely the same. Maybe I should've brought some unusual items, but that would have to wait for future orders.

"Right. Then this is next," Camilo said.

The head clerk brought out a medium-sized item wrapped in cloth and placed it on the table. When I undid the cloth, there was a small knife—or perhaps a tiny shortsword—inside.

"Is this Karen's?" I asked.

Camilo gave a grave nod. I gently took the blade and inspected it carefully. The steel glimmered under the light of the room. This was proof that it had been polished very carefully, since there weren't any spells to add a spark of electricity to metal. It must've taken quite a bit of time and effort. I placed the blade under the light and slowly turned it around, but the light

never bent or wavered, proof that the steel was perfectly even.

I placed my thumb along the blade and checked its sharpness, but I didn't have any complaints. Of course, Karen wasn't able to add much magical energy into the weapon, but in terms of quality, this was very, *very* good. Rike restlessly sat beside me, eager to get her hands on the blade. I soon passed it on to her.

"Take a look," I said.

"Okay!" Rike said as she took the steel carefully.

She scrutinized every inch of the shortsword and analyzed every bit of detail. For now, I wanted her to reach a decision without being affected by my words. Rike followed the same process I did as she inspected the weapon, and the rest of our family simply gazed on with great interest. Finally, she placed it back onto the fabric and gave a small sigh. I think I gulped nervously in anticipation of her conclusion.

"This is a very good blade," she said with a smile.

Karen and our family—or just me, really—hadn't left on the best terms, but we didn't hate her or anything. In fact, Rike was probably happy to see an acquaintance make a blade of such high quality, and I was of the same mindset.

"Agreed," I said. "I think she's got the basics down well, and in general, it's a fine weapon. I can probably give two or three pointers, though."

For example, the balance was just slightly off, and there was a part of the blade that wasn't completely even. I only caught these with my cheats, and for normal use, there would be no issues at all. Rike seemed to agree with my take, and we told Camilo to convey our thoughts to Karen.

"You can have her make her final decision," I said.

Would she want to officially join us, or would she try a little bit more in the capital? I could easily tell her that her skills were good enough, but I wanted to know what her thoughts and plans were.

"Got it," Camilo said. He gave us a big nod, then looked up. "And this is where I want to get to the meat of this conversation."

Here it comes. This is probably the most important topic we'll discuss today. With nervous anticipation, I sank into my seat and adjusted my posture.

"It's about that fake knife."

Everyone had expected him to bring up this topic, but we still

gulped nervously. I gave a little sigh and let out the breath that I'd been holding.

"What did you find?" I asked.

Camilo sighed and showed the slightest bit of hesitation. I felt like his reactions were different from other merchants, and this was precisely why I trusted him so much.

"I haven't figured everything out yet," Camilo started. "But I've found its origin. It comes from a blacksmith who serves a noble in the duke's faction. It's not difficult to get your hands on one of your knives, so I think it was easy enough for them to copy the shape."

"I'm surprised you tracked down the origin," I said.

"They hid it well, but I'm a merchant. Like hell they can hide anything from me! Well, that's what I'd like to proclaim, but it looks to me like they *expected* to get caught doing this."

"A person pretty low on the ladder did it, huh?" Anne asked.

Camilo took a sip of his tea and chuckled. "As astute as always. You're spot-on. He's a baron who's rarely in the capital. Even if I ask Miss Diana about him, I doubt you'd recall his face. He's *that* forgettable."

When Camilo named the noble, Diana shook her head.

"I don't recall a person like that," she said.

"I expected as much," Camilo replied. "His house doesn't stand out in any way, and I don't fault you for not knowing him."

"Hmm..." Anne said as she placed a finger on her chin. "Sounds easy enough to trace back until this point, but beyond that is the issue, I presume?"

"Precisely." Camilo nodded. "Frankly, there's no way that this man could've acted alone and circulated the fakes."

"I mean, he's not even memorable enough for *Diana* to recall him," I added.

Camilo nodded. Within the kingdom, the capital was where many gathered—a place where political power and influence formed a tangled web. How could a practically nameless noble, who wielded almost no power, circulate fake knives? That was certainly a difficult prospect. Even if he suddenly felt like selling knives in the capital, he didn't have a monopoly on the market. Other sellers, such as Camilo, the margrave, or Count Eimoor, would need to provide some sort of backing so that the seller could find a trustworthy route. The baron likely couldn't have sold these knives without some sort of support too. If he could

weasel his way into the capital's market, he could probably make do, but the wall to get inside was impossibly tall.

"Naturally, it's not difficult to put two and two together and assume the duke's backing," Camilo said.

I put my hand to my chin in thought. "The duke, huh?"

He nodded. "He's at the top more than likely. But I doubt he'd do something so simple as lending a hand just because the baron is in his faction. That would make him far too easy to track down."

"Fair enough."

"At the very least, he'd likely feign ignorance or claim that he'd assumed that the baron was selling something else. And that would end my line of questioning."

If the duke was somehow caught lending a hand to provide forgeries, that would be a huge blunder. Even if he was allowed to keep his title and influence as a duke, he'd be heavily restricted in the future. Even a dense guy like me could understand why a noble would want to desperately avoid that route, and the duke was the head of his faction precisely because he was cunning enough to never make such mistakes.

"Then will he cut off the baron as a sacrifice and end this ordeal?" I asked.

If the fake knives could be stopped, our most pressing concern would be resolved. Our opponent might try another method in the future, but we could buy some time for now. *We're still currently taking some damage to our reputation, so we'd better clean up that mess first, I think.* But Camilo's response surprised me.

"Sure, we can end it with that, but we won't be dealing any sort of blow to them," he said.

"Then what do you want to do?" I asked.

He grinned menacingly. *I've got a bad feeling about this...*

"You see, an emissary from the empire is set to visit the kingdom soon," he started.

I heard a clatter and turned to see Anne rising from her seat. She turned red as she promptly sat back down.

"Ahem," Camilo said. "Anyways, it's a bit belated, but since the fuss about a revolution has died down, they'll be here under the guise of confirmation. They want to see if they've caused any trouble to our nation."

"I see," I replied.

“We’ll be providing this emissary with a souvenir from the kingdom. The margrave managed to get his wish through and arranged it for us.” Camilo paused for a moment, looking just a bit awkward. “And he wants to provide a knife with a cat pommel made of something other than plain materials.”

“Huh?”

Camilo was certainly referring to a Forge Eizo knife, but I couldn’t understand. *Why does the margrave want to provide the empire’s emissary with our blade?*

“The emissary will be making a long trip all the way to our kingdom,” Camilo said. “Since your blades have been gaining traction with the populace, the margrave wants to send one as a gift…but he wants it made using special materials.”

“But aren’t our knives circulated in the empire too?” I asked. In fact, the emperor himself had aided us by securing a route for our wares.

“Yeah, but I’ve got all that in mind. The kingdom would like to proudly boast by providing something spectacular made in our nation.”

Camilo winked, a look that was quite unfitting for a geezer. I said nothing more and waited for him to continue.

“And we’ll have the emissary spread the word,” he said. “‘This is the weapon that’s been quite popular in the empire as of late. It’s very difficult to obtain, but I went to the kingdom and managed to get my hands on one.’ That’s what they’ll say.”

“‘Ah? My, oh my, this looks like a fake to me,’” Anne joined in, acting the part.



“The margrave will take a threatening tone and reply, ‘Preposterous! We gave our word to provide the real deal as a souvenir for the emissary, and if *we* provided any sort of forgery, it’d sully the reputation of our kingdom. Oho? This means that someone else has been making fakes! We must search for this dishonest forger at once! I fear that some of these fakes might have been circulating in the empire as well!’ What do you think happens then?”

“If the margrave says stuff like that, the kingdom will have little choice but to act,” I guessed with a hand on my chin.

Camilo smiled humorously. “Exactly. I don’t think we can topple the duke, but we might be able to find the guy who works directly under him…or maybe even that’s a bit greedy. But we can still corner them to a considerable degree.”

“Then you’ll apply pressure and warn them that the kingdom *will* act if their hand is forced.”

“Yep.” Camilo stared right at me.

I gave a strained chuckle. “And so you want me to make the real deal.”

“Yep.”

Camilo smiled once more. He looked a touch apologetic, but clearly, he seemed to be enjoying this situation.

The Story of How We Met X: The Pair in the Moonless Night

The capital of the kingdom was where various races and species mingled. It was a lively place, brimming with glimmering excitement, but it also held its fair share of shadows. Inevitably, there would be something blocking out a part of the light, and shadows would form behind it.

Some people were forced to live in the shadows, either due to the unfortunate nature of their circumstances or perhaps because they chose to tread a path of darkness. All sorts of people from various walks of life mingled, and they were rowdier at night.

In a corner of the capital stood a half-dilapidated building. But one could hardly guess what the interior of this structure looked like: It was absolutely *normal*, in every sense of the word. Any shred of unique charm had been stripped away, leaving only the most basic of furniture and walls. In fact, the furniture didn't look uniquely dirty or weathered by the years, in stark contrast to the exterior of this building; they didn't look brand-new either. If one were to inquire about who lived in this building, everyone would nod in agreement and say that a normal person made it their humble abode. And yet, within this place, two unique individuals sat across from each other, sitting in perfectly normal, plain chairs.

"Juliet, did you manage to get your hands on that weapon?" someone asked.

"Of course," Juliet replied with a nod.

"Hmm... And how does it feel?"

"Very good," Juliet said, her tone containing a hint of ecstasy. "It's much easier to use than I thought, and look, I can hide it with no issue."

She stretched out her arms, and it seemed almost impossible to imagine that she concealed a blade somewhere on her body.

"I can do my job without anyone noticing," Juliet added.

"I see. Then we judged him correctly."

"Indeed."

The two nodded at each other.

“Then here’s your next bit of work,” the person said.

“All right,” Juliet said. “This person had better *actually* be evil.”

“Our client is also quite proper, I’ll have you know.”

“Huh…?” She raised an eyebrow.

The other person laughed. “It’s a request from a duke of this nation, after all.”

“Ah, then I’ve got nothing to worry about.”

Juliet smiled and stood up, ready to leave.

“Oh, I’d like to ask one more thing,” the person called out to her back.

“What is it?” Juliet asked.

“How were the people of the Black Forest?” the person inquired with a sunny smile.

“They were kind and very fun to be around. Oh, and…”

“And?”

Juliet flashed a forlorn smile. “I’d *never* want to cross them. Not in a million years.”



Afterword

Hello, long time no see. Tenth time's the charm! I'm Tamamaru, the part-time light novel author who's nearing fifty. We finally made it to the big double digits! I'd like to thank all the readers for helping me make it this far.

For the first time, this volume ends on a bit of a cliff-hanger with a "To Be Continued..." Those who've read the web novel may know, but I wrote this part of the story around the second year after I started serializing this title, and I wrote so much that it couldn't possibly fit in one volume. So, I decided to split it in two.

The seventh volume was quite hefty, but I only managed to fit it in one book after shaving away quite a few scenes. But I couldn't do the same this time around. Since we finally made it to double digits, I thought I'd try out something new.

Speaking of something new, while I've introduced a few characters who were limited only to the published series, this time, I decided to add an unusual character who's quite detached from reality (Helen's power aside). This character took less inspiration from the mainstream, and I think she turned out just fine. I've planned for her to appear later on, so if you liked her, please look forward to it!

Now, about Maribel, the fire spirit. She was designed pretty early on—I'd like to say during the publishing of the third or fourth volume. I was just waiting for the timing to throw her in. I think there were a few chances that I missed, but I finally added her. And yet, this newcomer immediately vanished from the story. But don't worry—I've got a very important role for her, and I hope you can eagerly await her reappearance.

Now for some acknowledgments. As usual, thank you to my editor, I-san. I troubled you a ton again, and I hope we can continue to work together. Kinta, who worked on the illustrations, the character design, the cover, and all those images, provided some lovely artwork once again. Thank you so much!

I always feel so bad because frankly, I don't really write detailed descriptions of my characters, and since I added a few odd, new characters, I might've caused a difficult time. And yet,

Kinta drew everyone so beautifully, as though I'd given a detailed image from the start. Thank you so much, always.

Thank you to Yoshino Himori, who's in charge of the manga version. I know I wrote some stuff in a confusing way, and I caused a lot of trouble, but I always enjoy the manga as a reader. Thank you.

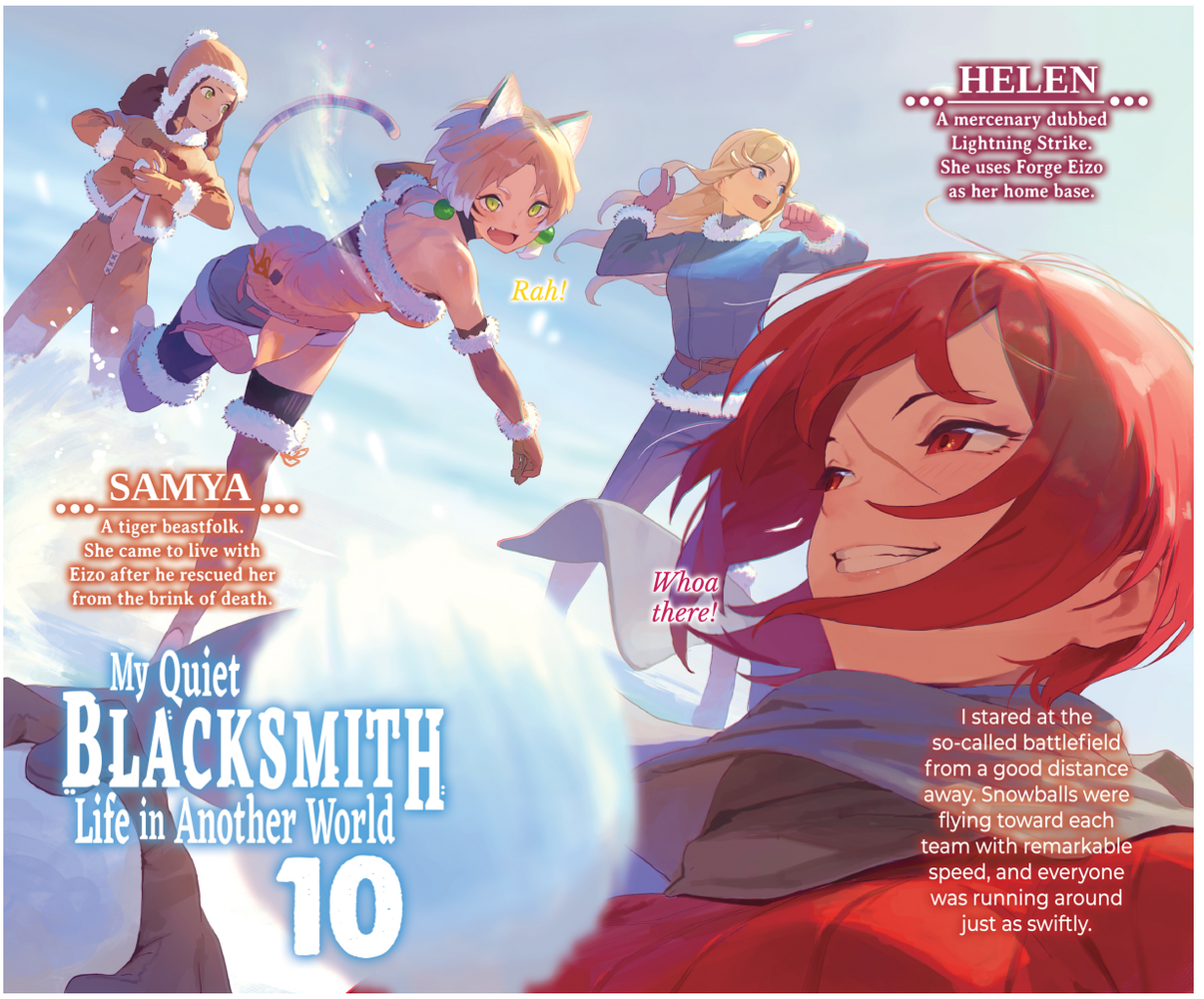
Thank you to those involved in the making of the audiobook and the international releases.

Thank you to my mother and younger sister, as well as my cats: Chama, Konbu, and Shijimi. Thank you to my online and real-life friends. Thank you to the many authors who continue to be friends with me and provide me with their support.

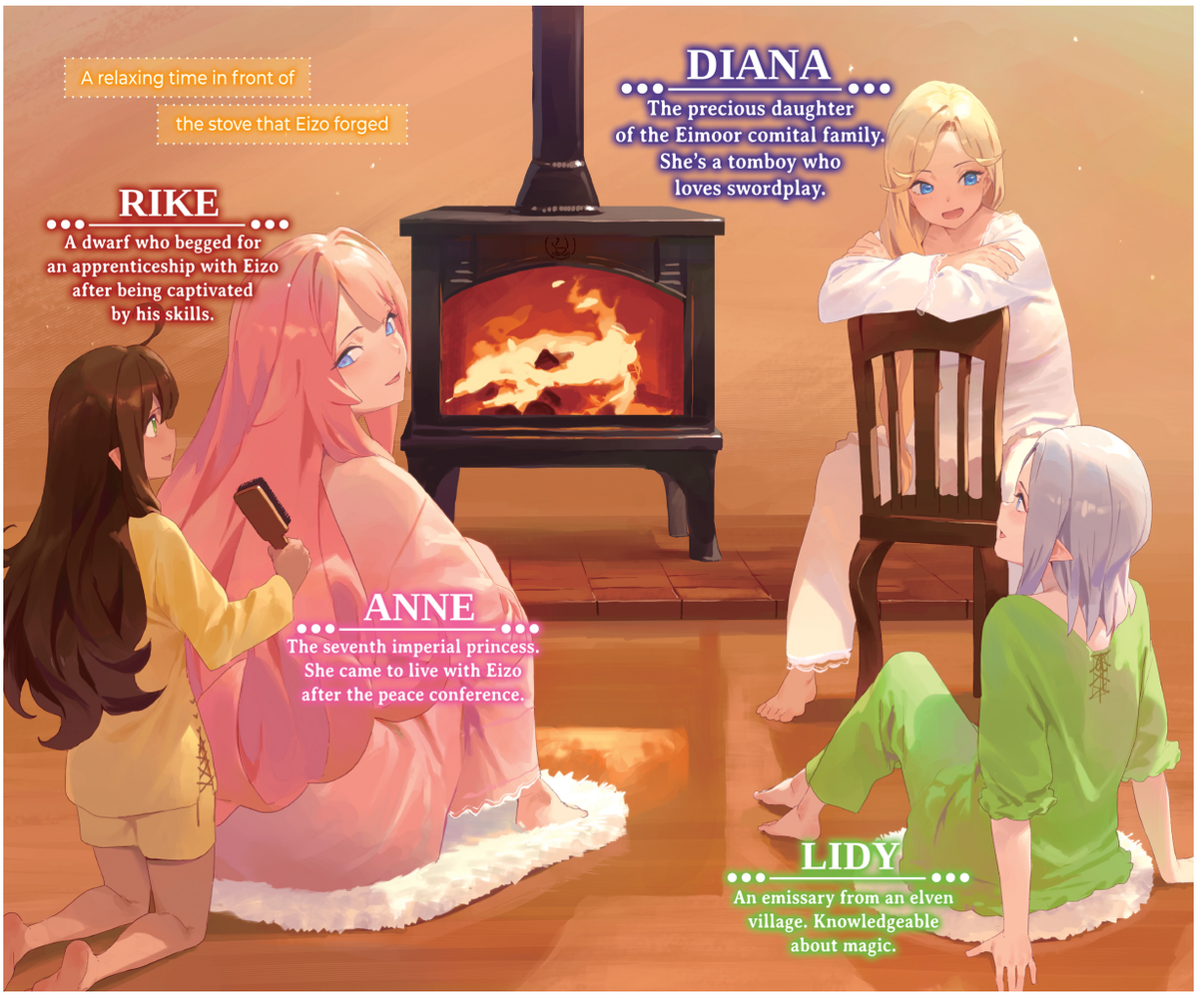
Lastly, I'd like to, of course, thank you, the reader. I cannot thank you all enough. It's all thanks to each and every one of you that I was able to make it to the big double-digit volume. I hope you will continue to enjoy this series.

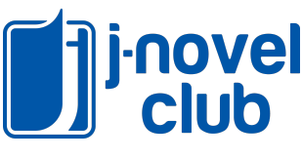
Let's meet again in volume 11!


Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta
10
My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World



My Quiet BLACKSMITH Life in Another World 10


A relaxing time in front of
the stove that Eizo forged
DIANA
The precious daughter of the Eimoor comital family. She's a tomboy who loves swordplay.
RIKE
A dwarf who begged for an apprenticeship with Eizo after being captivated by his skills.
ANNE
The seventh imperial princess. She came to live with Eizo after the peace conference.
LIDY
An emissary from an elven village. Knowledgeable about magic.



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My Quiet Blacksmith Life in Another World: Volume 10
by Tamamaru

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Edited by C.D. Leeson

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