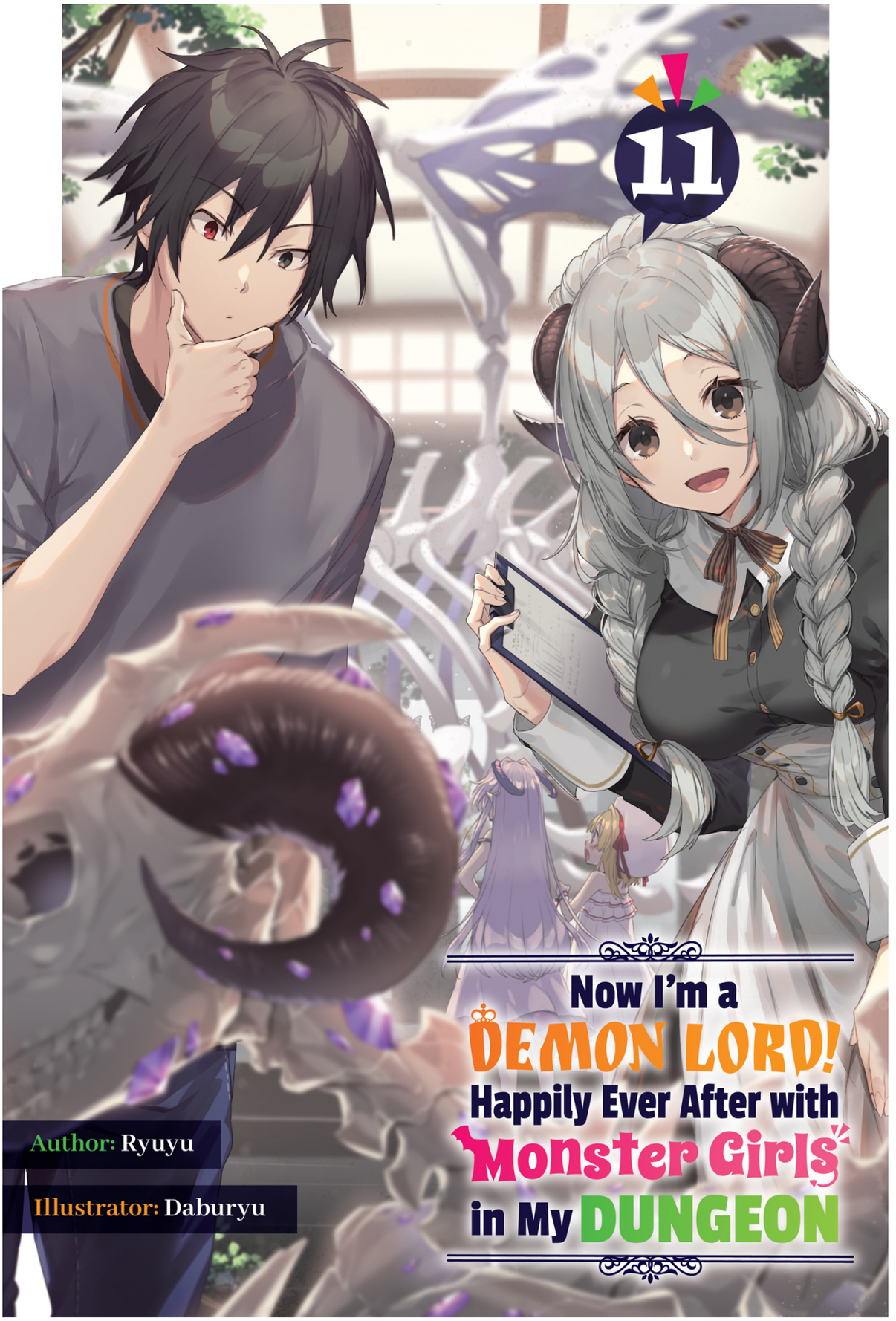


Now I'm a DEMON LORD! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My DUNGEON

Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu


11
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CONTENTS

Prologue — A Promise with the Monarchs

Chapter 1 — Marrying Lew

Side Story 1 — Daughter

Chapter 2 — Aftermath

Side Story 2 — Demon Emperor

Chapter 3 — Getting Ready to Travel

Side Story 3 — Rir Around That Time

Chapter 4 — Sightseeing

Epilogue — I Wish You a Bright Future

Special Story — Shogi Is Fun

Afterword

Prologue: A Promise with the Monarchs

The Human-Demon Axis formed by the Reauxgard Empire and the fiends. The Raceless Allies spearheaded by the various monarchs and leaders of the demon world—a group I'd stood alongside in battle. And what would later be named the Great Corpse Dragon War, in which we of the Allies had claimed victory. Not long had passed since then.

It was late at night. The moon and the beautiful, cloudless night sky cocooned the world in their joint embrace. Because electricity didn't exist here, night fell early in this world, and at this hour, most people would be sleeping deeply. But the fervor emanating from our makeshift campsite had yet to die down.

Spurred by a lingering sense of excitement, the multitude of races drank merrily with their new comrades in arms and talked passionately about the battle. Races of people that had long been at each other's throats now laughed together heedless of their racial differences. The sight of it gave me a glimpse of the future the Allies who'd fallen had fought so hard for.

"Hmm... Yer sayin' ye made this yerself?"

And there I was in the middle of it all, showing one of the members of the Raceless Allies, Dodah the Dwarf King, En's true sword form. He handled the greatsword very carefully, treating her like a precious gem. His eyes scrutinized every inch of what his hands explored of the weapon. I knew damn well how heavy En's sword form was, but he held her like she weighed nothing, which showed me the extent of his physical strength. Of course, I'd asked En for her permission before showing him her true form.

"Yup, with the Weapon Enhancement ability. This is a type of katana called an odachi—uh, I mean, it's a sword. The greatest sword you've ever seen, right?"

"Indeed... Just lookin' at 'er like this is enough ta tell me o' the enormous power hidden inside. Heavier than a mountain 'n' sharper than a dragon's tooth, yet the distribution o' magic is so even. A fine work o' art. Though I ken she's too heavy for any ordinary mon to swing around. Makes 'er the perfect weapon fer a demon lord's strength."

“Grr… I’m not heavy.”

Human-form En spoke, sounding miffed in response to the Dwarf King’s words.

“Ha ha! Yer right, lassie. Forgive me for mah rudeness. And this child is the soul dwellin’ in this here blade, eh? Wee as ye are, never would I have guessed this was yer true form when I first met ye in the demon world. Even with our long history, I dinna think many dwarves have laid eyes on such a unique weapon. Includin’ me, I’d wager only a few o’ us at the most. Ye have my thanks for showin’ me such a superb article.”

Satisfied, the Dwarf King handed my greatsword back to me before he continued speaking as he stroked his thick beard.

“Weapon Enhancement, eh? Many can use the skill, but ye cannae use the magic properly without a rock-solid image of a weapon’s completed form and boundless magical energy. I mahself have heard that maximizin’ its potential can allow ye to create the ultimate weapon instantly. As far as I ken, even among us dwarves, who’ve had smithin’ as our calling fer generations, only the first Dwarf King ever reached such heights.”

According to Dodah, the first Dwarf King’s mastery of Weapon Enhancement meant he was able to produce arms numbering in the hundreds in a day. He had apparently created the finest weapons, considered sacred treasures by the generations that came after him. *Sacred treasures, huh?*

En’s cuteness was definitely on the level of a sacred treasure, so in that sense, you could say I’d created one too. That said, I honestly didn’t think I could create a weapon that surpassed her no matter how much of my life I had left. I had simply lost the desire to do so. Bringing her into existence had genuinely filled me with satisfaction to the very depths of my soul.

No doubt this latest battle would have been rough as hell without the God Spear. But if you were to ask me if I wanted more weapons on its level, I’d say no since I just couldn’t work up the need for any like it. Hell, what I *wanted* to do was bury the damn God Spear at the bottom of an ocean. I’d much rather it stayed asleep in Inventory for the rest of my life, thanks.

“For the truth o’ the matter is, even with us usin’ Weapon Enhancement, the best we can do is swords o’ excellent craftsmanship. The better the blacksmith, the better the product, o’ course, but in the end, weapons made in a kiln tend ta be

superior."

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Well, I cannae speak fer other races—only fer us dwarves. The problem is mana. We simply dinnae have enough ta manifest the completed images in our minds when usin' the ability, so anythin' we create is half-baked ta say the least. But tryin' ta match the ability ta our own reserves of magic means a lower-quality weapon, which is why we cannae use it well. I ken ye've come the closest ta the first Dwarf King in terms o' smithin' skills. That's somethin' ta be proud o', laddie."

No way. He's exaggerating. Or so I thought. Then, I really thought about his words and reflected on my experiences. In hindsight, this ability actually consumed a considerable amount of magical energy. I'd never really considered it a big deal because I used it so often. But now, I realized that the reason I'd never really had to worry about it was thanks to the ample amount of mana in a demon lord's body.

Without magical energy, it would be impossible to activate the ability frequently, which would make it difficult to train *and* raise the skill level. So it made sense that it wasn't particularly easy to craft something good.

"Oh yeah, Dwarf King. This spear is called the God Spear. Would you by any chance know anything about it?"

"Bleedin' 'ell! Th-This is..."

Dodah gingerly took the God Spear from me after I took it out of Inventory. He studied it even more seriously than he had En. After what felt like forever, he finally spoke.

"Laddie...where in blazes did ye get this?"

"Remember how I told you back in the demon world about how my wife is the Supreme Dragon? Because of her, we went to her village, the Dragon Hamlet, and through a series of events, I wound up with it. It's what I used to fight that massive bone monstrosity, but I gotta be honest: there are just too many unknowns to it, so it scares me just having it. That's why I was hoping you knew something."

"Sadly, I donnae. However..."

The Dwarf King hesitated. An emotion filled his face. *Fear?*

"Listen well, Demon Lord. Several weapons exist in this world that have come ta be known as 'sacred treasures.' Yet they were all created by mankind. Masterpieces born once every few centuries with legends o' their own. Havin' said that...this spear is

different. Yer suspicions about its many unknowns are right, because it was likely made by *somethin' else*."

What he said sounded like a tale of cosmic horror. Like, for real. That was deadass how I felt listening to him, no joke.

"Jeez... You can tell all that just by looking at it?"

"Ye daft boy. Have ye forgotten that I'm the king o' the dwarves? This spear may look unrefined on the surface, but this isnae its true form. Magic has been worked inta it flawlessly and precisely, bringin' out the best in the material. Whatever the technique used, it isnae one mankind is capable o' usin'. Moreover, there's somethin' else to it. Some kind o' mechanism. What that mechanism is, though, I cannae say..."

He stared at the God Spear for a few more moments with his piercing gaze, then exhaled before returning it to me.

"You shouldnae use this weapon too much."

"Yeah, that's the plan. I only used it this time around because of that monster. Otherwise, I don't need it since I already have En. Any other weapon is just a bonus."

"Yes... I am Master's weapon."

En puffed her chest out proudly, and I patted her on the head. The Dwarf King chuckled cheerfully at our exchange.

"Bah ha ha ha! Ye are. Ye are indeed. Now, what say ye to visitin' the dwarves' homeland when ye have time ta spare? We'll welcome ye with open arms, ye ken."

"Ooh, sounds fun. I'll try to make time at some point and drop by. Thanks for the invite."

The dwarves' home, huh? I can't wait. Maaan, I really wanna travel.

The Dwarf King grunted, nodding in agreement. At that moment, the Beast Lord approached us and cut into our conversation.

"In that case, ya should come to our country too, Demon Lord. It's close to the dwarves' home, 'n' we'll definitely show you a good time."

"Ha ha! Appreciate it. I'll be sure to take you up on that— Ah."

"Problem?"

"Somethin' on yer mind, laddie?"

The Beast Lord and Dwarf King both looked confused when I suddenly raised my voice. The former's mention of his country reminded me of something very important—wasn't Lew's family due to visit soon since the one-year deadline her father had

given me was coming up? *Crap. I've done it now.* It had completely slipped my mind because of the war, so of course I hadn't made any kind of preparations. I needed a ring at the *very* least. And now that I thought about it, there was a chance they were already in the Demonic Forest. I was fairly confident my ladies would've handled them to cover for me, but...

"Beast Lord, do you know the Groll clan? They're werewolves."

"Hmm? Ah, 'course I do. The clan's led by a young bloke. I already sent 'em home, but a few of 'em actually fought in this war."

Wait, seriously? Which means I should've at least greeted them. Well, that's unfortunate...

"I'm gonna marry his daughter, so he's supposed to come visit us at our home."

"Ya don't say... That'll make him part of yer pack soon, eh? Hmm... Then how 'bout I do ya a favor 'n' work the Groll clan hard, help 'em get ahead in the rat race. Heh heh, what a great way to expand my network."

Those words sounded ominous to my ears, like he had just now decided their future. *I'ma just pretend I never heard that.*

"So, yeah, I gotta go. I'm sorry the timing sucks, especially when things are still such a mess."

Though we'd won the war, victory hadn't automatically tied everything up in a neat little bow. There was still the aftermath to deal with, after all. Postwar negotiations with the empire would take place in earnest moving forward too, so all this and more meant that the various monarchs and leaders on our side would be staying in this nation for a while longer. The Demon King had promised me he'd take care of things on this end, so to be honest, I wasn't all that worried about him or the logistics. Just...these other rulers were different. They were nothing if not good people, so I felt kinda bad dumping the cleanup on them.

"Bah, dinna fash yerself on that score. Ye did more than enough fer our cause, so no one has the right ta complain if ya hie back ta yer family afore the rest o' us. And if they feel the need ta run their mouths, they can damme well eat mah fists."

"He's right. After everythin' ya did, the least we can to do save face is clean up this mess."

"Oh, yeah...? Well, thanks, I appreciate it. Actually, before I forget. Madam Sage!"

I called out to Leila's teacher, Madam Eldgalia, who was

nearby.

"Hmm? What is it?"

"Will you come with us? It would make Leila happy too."

"Hmm, hmm, hmm. A tempting invitation for which I'm grateful. Alas, I'll be heading home for a brief rest. These long journeys are atrocious on these old bones."

You know what? She has a point. As much as I would've loved for her to heal herself in my hot spring, I definitely didn't want to push her either.

"Got it. Then once I take care of what I need to, I'll talk to Leila and we'll figure out a time to visit you in your village, Madam Sage."

"Oh, how lovely. Stop by whenever. We'll be waiting for you."

Guess life's gonna be busy for a while with all these places to visit, huh? A good kind of busy, though. I was looking forward to a lot of things.

"Are you *leaving*, then, Yuki?"

"Truly, I know not what we would have done without you, Lord Yuki."

"Indeed. For a moment there, I feared what would become of us because of that monstrous skeleton."

While we'd been talking, the Demon King, the Elf Queen, and Lemiro, the previous hero, came over after giving orders to various folks. The old butler and I hadn't had much of a chance to talk during the campaign because he'd been ridiculously swamped with duties as the acting supreme commander for the humans in lieu of Alisia's king. I found out later that the man had gone ham thanks to his hero-level power. The news hadn't shocked me at all.

"You're *able* to come to this country *whenever* you please, yes?"

"Yeah. 'Cause of the dungeon's power."

I had already installed a door in a corner of the imperial castle. An enormous door big enough for even Orochi, the largest of my pets, to pass through. As always, to be on the safe side, I'd only connected it to the Demonic Forest. That way, despite not being directly connected to the meadow area or my dungeon itself, I could still commute back and forth every day if I wanted to.

"The fact that you can utilize spatial magic so easily truly makes a demon lord a terrifying creature, hm? Or perhaps we should address you as 'Demon Emperor' henceforth?

Considering you *are* this country's next ruler, after all."

"Heh. 'Demon Emperor.' Has a dashing ring to it indeed."

The Elf Queen and old butler grinned mischievously.

"What can I say? The more the dungeon grows, the more I can do. Also, just keep calling me 'Demon Lord' like normal. At this point, I'm not sure I can even respond to 'Demon Emperor.'"

Yeah, sure, it sounded cool as hell, but knowing me, I probably wouldn't have even realized they were talking about me. Besides, I actually really liked being called "Demon Lord."

"Anyway, Demon King, why do you ask?"

"Right, well, once you *tend* to your personal matters, I'd *like* you to come see me *again* here. You don't need to *rush*, but the *sooner* you can visit, the *better*. Thank you in *advance*."

"Uhhh, okay."

I guess I could do that. I mean, I did *make a promise with that guy...* "That guy" being the former emperor of the Reauxgard Empire. I was planning on dropping in here and there to check on things anyway, so I had no reason not to start as early as possible.

"All right, I'm out. Thanks again for handling everything. Let's go, guys."

After saying my farewells to everyone, I rounded up my pets, whom the soldiers had been doting on ever since seeing them in action. Then, I hefted En, who had already slipped back into her greatsword form because she'd gotten too sleepy to maintain her human form, onto my shoulder and headed toward the imperial castle. I opened the gigantic door set in a corner of the castle grounds and walked through to the Demonic Forest, leaving the Reauxgard Empire behind.

Chapter 1: Marrying Lew

“Thus did I, Yuki, become the emperor. The emperor of the Reauxgard Empire, a nation of humans. Although we’re gonna turn it into a multispecies country moving forward.”

Iluna, who’d been listening to me speak, tilted her head adorably.

“Is an em-pe-ror the same as a king? But Yukiki, you’re already kind of a king since you’re a demon lord. Does this mean you’re a double king now?”

“Weeell… Just to be clear, Iluna, being a demon lord doesn’t actually make me a king of anything. Never mind that the title *does* make me sound like some kind of ruler.”

“Oh, really? But you’re amazing at magic, and you have Rir and the others as your pets. So I just think of you as the king of that kind of stuff.”

Huh. She has a point. I mean, in that way, I was a “king of magic.” A king who conquered and controlled the supernatural.

Hmm… I’d always thought as much, but Iluna really *was* good at perceiving the true nature of things.

“An emperor… Frankly, I’m still having trouble wrapping my head around the sequence of events that led to you becoming one. However, what matters is that you returned safely.”

I had contacted Nell using a Communication Orb: Revamped to tell her that the war was over and I was back home. She’d come to the dungeon right away, and now, she commented with an exasperated smile.

“Thanks for worrying about me. Anyway, there you have it—the war ended on a good note for our side. Having said that, it kinda feels like they don’t really need us at the moment, know what I mean? Did you notice anything different on your end, Nell? Like, did the war have an impact at all?”

I wanted my kids to be able to go out and about freely, but that was still a long way off. I figured it would probably take another five or ten years before true peace reigned.

“A very good question…though I’m not sure I’m the right person to ask since most of my work revolves around maintaining law and order and hunting monsters. Meaning I

personally don't feel like much has changed. If anything, His Majesty must be overwhelmed, don't you think?"

I sure did. The Kingdom of Alisia, the country of humans to which Nell had pledged her allegiance, was a major force. On a list of the most powerful countries in this world, you'd find it faster by counting from the top. The Reauxgard Empire had been on a similar level, but with our victory over it in the war, Alisia's king would become even busier now. I remembered him saying how he planned on quitting his job, but too bad for him, this definitely pushed his retirement off even further into the distance. *Then…maybe I should have Nell give him a bunch more of the Super Potions?*

"Now I've got a question for you folks. We're coming up on the one-year deadline Lew's dad gave me, so they'll be here soon. Did anything happen while I was gone?"

"They have yet to make their visit. We, too, discussed the topic and have been on alert for the presence of any such groups. However, we did not sense any thus far."

I see, I see… Despite me having had my hands full with the war, the others had apparently done their best to take care of stuff like that. I couldn't be more grateful for their thoughtfulness.

Lew, her cheeks a bit pink, spoke after Lefi.

"Um, so… My father is fairly conscientious about things along those lines, so he meant it when he said he'd be back in a year. I think him not being here yet means he and the rest of our clan must've been delayed—probably because of the war. They might already be on their way."

"Oh yeah? Then we better have everything ready by the time they show up. Lew, tell us anything important we should know. I'll do whatever's necessary."

"You got it, my lord. I'm counting on you. Tee hee hee. Now I'll finally, *officially* be your wife too!"

"You say 'finally,' but we have long since acknowledged you as one of us."

"I know, but it still makes me happy. Despite me running away from home, I somehow managed to make such great friends, and find a great husband too. Having my family give their blessing would just be the feather in my cap…"

Lew responded to Lefi with a grin, unable to contain her feelings. The darn cute woman…

"I'm so happy for you, LewLew!"

“Con-gra-tu-la-tions!”

“Yes…very happy for you. We should dance a dance of joy.”

“W-We should?”

“Ooh, great idea, En! LewLew, you should dance with us too!”

“Twirly twirl! Spinny spin!”

And then, the little-girl gang, including the wraith triplets, started dancing. Honestly, I had no idea what kind of dance it was, but it was super-duper adorable. Encouraged by them, a flustered Lew joined in. The rest of us laughed in delight at the heartwarming scene.



After I'd told them everything that'd happened to me and they'd told me everything that'd happened while I was out...

"Oh, right, I almost forgot. Leila, I met your teacher. Madam Eldgalia, right? I had no idea she was so famous."

"Nell actually informed me about her involvement in the war. Normally, she is wont to sequester herself in our village and focus on her research, but due to her eminent magical abilities, she will occasionally be asked to aid in times of strife such as this."

"Makes sense seeing as the Demon King and the other rulers trusted her. A wonderful little old lady, in my opinion. Speaking of, I was thinking we'd go to your village once everything with Lew is settled. Is that okay with you?"

"Ah... M-My village, hm?"

Leila, who usually expressed herself clearly even with her airy way of talking, stumbled a little on her words.

"Hmm? What's wrong?"

"Ummm... I believe visiting my village might pose an inconvenience to you, Master Demon Lord."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, of course. You're aware that most of my race consists of women, with the birth of males being a rarity, are you not?"

"Yup."

She'd told me about it before. The fact that there were hardly any men among the ovine people. While the number wasn't zero, the ratio of females to males being born was ten to one, so the leaders of their race were all women.

"In short, when we wish to birth offspring, it's necessary for us to take a man from another race as a husband. Many of us ovine folk leave our home for the outside world for reasons of our own, whether to satisfy our innate curiosity, find a mate, or something else."

Fascinating. Husband-hunting, huh?

"What's your reason, then, Leila?"

"Well, I would say ten percent has to do with curiosity."

Yeah, sounds about right for Miss Leila.

"Ergo, were I to take you all to my home, you would likely be considered a candidate for matrimony, Master Demon Lord... Mine, that is. They would see you as my fiancé. Do you see the problem now?"

"I-I do, I do. So that's the way the cookie crumbles, is it?"

Basically, bringing a man back to their village meant an ovine woman had found a husband.

“Which is why I believe a trip there would be an inconvenience to you. But I suppose we can devise a way to deflect since we won’t be staying long anyway…”

“I don’t really mind what they think. Now that I know, though, let me discuss things with Lefi and the others. We’ll make a decision after that.”

“Yes, that would be the best course of action. However, we must focus on celebrating Lew first and foremost right now. You simply have no notion of how much she’s been looking forward to this occasion, do you, Master Demon Lord?”

Leila said that with a teasing smile.

“Is that right? Well, I hope it’ll help her stop feeling so inferior to Lefi and Nell, then.”

“Though I personally can sympathize with Lew’s feelings, considering how wonderful both Lady Lefi and Nell are… You really must whisper more words of love into her ear. I think that would be the most optimal solution.”

“I…will give it my best shot.”

She chuckled at my response.

◇◇◇

Night. The women were hosting their umpteenth Council of Wives in the inn located in the meadow area. Today, Leila was in attendance in addition to Yuki’s three wives. The little girls weren’t participating this time.

“Now, let us commence the Council! First on the agenda, I would like to discuss what Yuki told us about the war. Right, then…at the very least, it seems he had no dalliances with other women on this occasion.”

“My lord does tend to attract them in droves, doesn’t he? And then there’s the whole emperor thing. I still don’t really understand how he became one. But I’m glad he’s back safe.”

“The emperor of Reauxgard has been a demon lord since the nation was founded. With his acquisition of that dungeon, he is its new emperor. In reality, however, it simply means he has gained another form of address. Considering his personality, I very much doubt he will actually perform any duties related to governance, for he believes the task a nuisance. Moreover, he

himself said that the Allies do not have any particular need of us."

"Which begs the question, what exactly is Master Demon Lord's goal, hm?"

"To do whatever he wants, of course. After all, my lord lives his life for his own satisfaction."

"Yes, for he is a brainless man. 'Haphazard' is another apt word to describe him."

Nell smiled awkwardly at Lefi's scathing remark and did her best to defend Yuki.

"W-Well, I'd say that's his conviction. He knows exactly what he wants, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, right? We can all feel how determined he is to make sure his wedding ceremony with Lew is enjoyable for everyone involved."

"The master certainly is in exceedingly high spirits, isn't he?"

"Indeed. Even I can feel his powerful resolve to make you happy, Lew."

"Oh, um... I'm starting to feel embarrassed, so can we maybe stop talking about this now?"

Her face flaming, Lew squirmed bashfully, which made the other women laugh indulgently. With that topic laid to rest, Lefi broached the next one.

"Well, there is something I have been wanting to say for quite some time now. I would like you all to listen, as this is a good opportunity for a change in our relationships. Lew, Leila."

"Y-Yes, my lady!"

"You have my full attention."

Lew and Leila straightened their postures in the face of Lefi's formal attitude.

"It is high time you stop referring to me as 'Lady Lefi.' While it did not bother me before, I now find that the use of 'Lady' makes it seem as if I am above you. Our relationship is one of equals, and as such, I think of you both as irreplaceable friends as well as part of my family. Therefore, I ask that you no longer address me in a manner that runs counter to our relationship. Or am I the only one who feels this way?"

A hint of loneliness showed in Lefi's expression. Deeply moved, Lew replied.

"I don't mean it like that, Lady Lefi! I-I think of you as a precious friend and family member too! So... So from now on I'll call you 'L-Lefi'!"

“Ha ha ha! Gosh, Lew, you and Lefi are acting like a fresh new couple.”

“Well, Lady Lefi—I mean, Lefi and I are both married to my lord, so technically speaking, we’re lovers in a sense too!”

“No, your logic is deeply flawed, Le— S-Stop that. Do not cling to me.”

“Tee hee hee. You’re as velvety smooth to the touch as well. Hugging you really is an amazing experience, you know.”

“I completely agree! She makes a fantastic hug pillow.”

Lefi smiled ruefully as she listened to Lew and Nell chat even as the former held her tight.

“Tee hee, I see now. How shall I phrase it? You wished to discuss this in preparation for the birth of children in the future, yes?”

Leila asked that question with her usual beaming smile, and the silver-haired girl answered shyly.

“Y-Yes, correct. That is precisely why. It will not be long before we bring children into this world. When the time comes, any distinction amongst us who will become mothers will influence our children. And that is not good.”

“In that case, I understand your concerns. While I find it a bit embarrassing, I, too, shall call you ‘Lefi’ henceforth.”

“Wow, Lefi. You really thought that far ahead?”

“That’s the first wife for you… I swear I’ll become a woman as open-minded as you, L-Lefi!”

Nell laughed at Lew faltering over “Lefi” since the other girl clearly wasn’t yet used to it. Then, she continued.

“Tee hee. Agreed. Let’s do our best, Lew!”

“Good grief… I myself am starting to feel self-conscious for some reason. Ah, before I forget. Leila, there is something I wish to ask you.”

“Of course.”

“Well…how do you feel about Yuki?”

“You want to know…*my* feelings…about Master Demon Lord?”

Leila asked a question in turn, her words halting as if she found them difficult to say.

“Y-Yes, I do. Based on your interactions with each other until now, I am fully aware that you get along well. But if you have feelings of a romantic nature for him, I will gladly support you and talk to him as well. However, if it turns out I have jumped to the wrong conclusion, then you may consider this conversation

irrelevant…”

“I… I think I want to know the answer too. Though you certainly shouldn’t feel pressured to share with us if you would rather keep your feelings to yourself.”

“Me too… I’d like to know too.”

Leila gave the other three a strained smile in response to their consideration.

“Um, well, you see… If I’m to be honest, I find myself happy when the master is in residence, but I also am not particularly bothered when he isn’t around. My research is progressing regardless, so I think it’s best to maintain the status quo, so to speak…is my thought process at the moment.”

Uncharacteristic for her, the ovine young woman clearly agonized over her words.

“While I acknowledge that the master is an incredibly appealing man…I’m truly happy about my current situation wherein he gives me the freedom to do whatever I wish. Even I’m at a loss at what to do about my contradictory nature in this case…”

Frowning, Lefi pondered the best way to respond to Leila’s true feelings.

“Hmm… I see. This is, in fact, very much like you.”

“I feel the same way. I mean, we can’t say anything since she’s just expressing her honest thoughts…but let me just say one thing, Leila! I hate it! I hate the idea of you suddenly disappearing once you’re satisfied with your research! ’Cause I already think of you as my family!”

“Oh, you needn’t worry on that score. Until I came here, I wandered around aimlessly indulging my curiosity for the sole purpose of acquiring knowledge. However, now, I’ve decided on my lifelong research project, and that is ‘An Inquiry into the Ecology of a Demon Lord and His Labyrinth.’ So long as I’m not a hindrance to you all, I plan on remaining here for the rest of my days.”

“None of us think of you as a hindrance, Leila! We all love you!”

“Indeed. Yuki as well depends on you tremendously, Leila. You are our emotional pillar. Your presence puts our hearts and minds at ease, so it is impossible for us to consider you unpleasant.”

“Darn right! Iluna and the girls are super attached to you too.

And just like Nell said, we love you tons, Leila! So I want you to stay with us forever and ever!”

“I… I don’t know what to say…except that I truly am so blessed…”

Their words made her beam, the smile welling forth from the depths of her heart.

During breakfast, I immediately realized that something was different.

“Lefi, pass the ketchup please!”

“Here.”

Lefi passed the bottle of ketchup in front of her to Lew.

“Hmm. I must say, it still mystifies me…how delicious bread with toppings is despite being such simple fare.”

“Tee hee. It really isn’t so difficult to make. I think you can make it easily yourself, Lefi.”

Lefi hummed thoughtfully while eating pizza bread, and Leila replied with a giggle.

Lew and Leila had dropped the “Lady.” They were just calling her “Lefi” now. I knew they’d held another one of their Council of Wives yesterday, but had something happened?

Noticing my expression, Lefi spoke to me.

“What is the matter, Yuki?”

“Nothing, really. Just thinking that you all sure are close.”

“Heh heh heh! We’re family, so of course we are!”

“On that topic, Lew, you’re still sounding a little shy. Naturally, that’s not a problem for Leila.”

Nell made that quip in a teasing voice.

“It’s only a matter of time, okay?! Just a matter of time! And those in glass houses shouldn’t be casting stones, Nell! I know you actually want to call my lord ‘darling,’ but you said you can’t yet because it’s too embarrassing.”

“O-O-O-Ohmigosh! I-I *told* you that was a secret!”

“Nell, your manners are atrocious.”

“Lady Lefifi is right, Nellie. You shouldn’t stand while everyone’s eating.”

“Bad Nellie!”

When Nell jerked up in a panic from her chair, Lefi, Iluna, and Shii took turns scolding her.

“Grr… Watch your back, Lew…”

“Why, I have no idea what you mean.”

Cheeks red, Nell glared balefully at Lew, who dramatically turned her face away in reply. The rest of us laughed, watching their exchange—and then I suddenly remembered something, so I asked Nell.

“Oh yeah, Nell. How long can you stay this time?”

She cleared her throat in an attempt to pull herself together, then answered me.

“I’ll be here until things are settled with Lew. But after that, I might not be able to return for some time because I actually left a mountain of work unattended to come home.”

“Nell… Thanks a bunch. I’ll apologize too, so can you let bygones be bygones for earlier?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Nooo.”

A lively, normal morning for us as always.

◇ ◇ ◇

A group of people blipped on Maps two days later. When I checked the data, just as I expected, they turned out to be werewolves. Members of the Groll clan, to be specific. I let everyone know that Lew’s family was here and then immediately headed out to meet them.

“I should…probably get a move on, huh?”

They were near the human town of Alfiro, the one I’d been to countless times and also the closest settlement to my dungeon home. The town was sort of exclusionary to a certain extent because of its long history of hostility toward other races. Based on what Maps was telling me, at the moment, there were no signs of battle, and Lew’s relatives weren’t surrounded by soldiers either, so it wasn’t exactly an emergency situation. Regardless, I definitely wasn’t about to take my sweet time.

After I used the Remote Communication function to instruct my pets to gather at the border between Alfiro and the Demonic Forest, I passed through the door set in the Forest and found myself standing near the town.

“Wait, what?”

I spotted the werewolves right off the bat. It looked like they were having some sort of conversation at Alfiro’s main gate. I’d just assumed they’d have their hoods up, but nope. Their ears and tails were out, bold as you please, which garnered a lot of

curious looks from the passing humans.

And much to my surprise, someone else I knew was with them. *Is that Releaux, Mr. Mayor of Alfiro himself?*

“Lord Yuki!”

They noticed me when I approached them, and Releaux called out to me.

“Old man mayor. Long time no see. Lew’s dad, it’s been a year already, huh? Glad to see you’re both doing well.”

“Yes, indeed it has, Demon Lord. I apologize that it took me longer than the year we agreed to.”

Lew’s father replied with a nod.

“No, I’m the one who should apologize. I found out too late that you all joined the war too, but that’s no excuse for not seeing you then.”

“I will not deny that I would have liked at least a word of greeting. However... Well, I heard that you had many responsibilities to tend to, so I shan’t say anything more on the topic.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

I didn’t know if I was imagining things, but it felt like Lew’s pops was speaking a little more formally compared to our last meeting. Almost like he was being evasive. I didn’t know how to describe it. Though he wasn’t exactly treating me like a stranger, I sensed some distance between us.

No way he’s feeling nervous, right? As I mulled over his attitude, the woman next to him spoke.

“Tee hee hee. You see, Yuki, my darling husband’s reputation has grown thanks to you, but his pride won’t let him thank you sincerely. Even though he’s truly grateful.”

“N-No, that’s not it at all... I simply wish to treasure our relationship, particularly in light of the fact that he will, well, soon be my son-in-law...”

Looking a little pathetic, Lew’s dad wound up mumbling a response. The fact that he was perfectly outclassed by the woman next to him made me think she was...

“Um, can I assume you’re Lew’s mother?”

“I am. My name is Rosiela Groll. Thank you so much for looking after my daughter.”

The werewolf woman beamed at me. Now that I got a closer look at her, I realized that her features resembled Lew’s super closely. All werewolves appeared young, and she was no

exception as a lovely woman who definitely didn't look like someone with a child.

"I'm Yuki. Your daughter makes every day in our home fun and lively, so thank *you* from me."

I bowed my head at Lew's mother.

"Oh my, how thoughtful of you. Hearing you praise her like this makes me so very happy."

"Demon Lord, your attitude is much changed from when you and I first met."

"...No it isn't."

I abruptly looked away from the pointed look in her pops's eyes. I mean, come on. I just could *not* treat Lew's mom with anything but absolute courtesy. *That's just how men are.* He should know that too. To smooth over the awkward moment, I cleared my throat before continuing.

"So, uh, what's this about his reputation growing? You said it's thanks to me, but I don't remember doing anything special..."

"You put in a good word for me with the Beast Lord, did you not? Thus, well..."

"Dear, you must express your gratitude properly, or else the other person won't understand."

"Thus...our clan is now eligible to work in key positions amongst the therianthropes. I thank you."

"Ahhh, okay, gotcha. W-Well, I'm happy I could help," I said, smiling wryly at how awkward Lew's dad seemed.

Speaking of the Beast Lord, I vaguely remembered him saying something about working the Groll clan hard. This must've been what he meant.

Then, I turned toward the mayor, who'd been standing there watching us with an amused smile.

"Sooo...how come you're here with them? Also, is it really all right for you folks to expose your race like this? I thought the people of this town didn't get along with other races."

"Ashamed though I am to admit it, you are correct. However, because of your involvement in the war, life here has undergone a monumental transformation."

With that, the mayor began explaining things to me. It turned out that the werewolves were chosen as emissaries for deepening interspecies relationships. In order to initiate connections between the various races moving forward on a serious level, this nation of humans planned to accept folks from

other species. This town had been chosen as one such location.

And apparently, I had something to do with it. Specifically, the fact that Nell and I used Alfiro as an entryway to other places had become a topic of conversation between Reyd and the other monarchs. They thought that if this town was opened to other races as well, I would be able to walk around freely too. Well, to be honest, it was probably just a way to curry favor with me.

For some reason, I couldn't help wanting to chuckle wryly at the whole idea. But I'd just keep that to myself. Especially since I was thankful for their consideration.

On top of that, the reason the werewolves had been chosen as emissaries was because of their connection to me through Lew. Like her dad had mentioned earlier, they would be appointed to more important positions from now on, so since they were headed to the Demonic Forest on personal business, they were instructed to do some work while they were at it. Two birds with one stone and all that. Which explained his meeting with the old man mayor. In short, the reason they'd been late visiting us had to do with their job. Clearly, the effects of that war were already being felt in this city.

"Frankly, Lord Yuki, every time we meet, life becomes more and more incredible. I have no doubt we're entering a new era, and with a demon lord having performed so admirably in the war, there are leagues of people confused about the current state of affairs. Every day, I receive mountains of requests for my counsel."

Dang. It hasn't even been that long since the war ended and things are already this crazy?

"Indeed. On a related note, I was just about to discuss professional matters with Lord Releaux. My apologies, but you're a bit early..."

"Yeah, my timing sucks, huh? No worries. I'll just come back later."

Now I knew why they'd been at the town entrance. They'd literally just arrived.

"Uhhh, should I come back in a couple days? Does that work?"

"Yes, it would. I appreciate it. Let us rendezvous in this spot at the same time two days from now."

After that, I said my goodbyes to them and returned to the dungeon.

I had a good reason for suggesting two days. Namely, I was

hoping it was enough time for Lew's pops to act normal around me again. It was obvious that he had a lot of internal conflicts going on, which made it tough for me to interact with him too. I wanted him to talk to me like he used to—that is, bluntly. But I figured that his thoughts as a parent and his thoughts as the leader of his people were mixing up inside him to create a complicated whirlpool of emotions.

"Parents, huh…"

I muttered to myself.

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Two days later. After going through the usual routine of the werewolves staring at Rir in awe and then recovering enough to nervously greet him, I took Lew's relatives from the Demonic Forest to the meadow area near my castle.

"Mama!"

"Oh my. Lew. It's been much too long."

Lew, who'd been waiting there for us, rushed over and hugged her mom tightly. The expression on her face as she looked at her mother was the same as when the little-girl gang hugged me. A reaction very, *very* different from when her father had first visited us. Back then, Lew'd straight up said "Geh!"

The man himself must've been thinking the same thing because he smiled ruefully from next to me. This was probably the fate of every father.

As for Rosiela, she studied her daughter from the top of her head to the tips of her toes with a smile on her face.

"My, my. Your coat has come in beautifully, and your skin is silky smooth too. Look at how lovely you've grown. Can I assume, then, that you're leading a wonderful life?"

"Tee hee hee! I am! Every day is so much fun thanks to my lord and everyone else here! I can't wait to introduce you to them all, Mama!"

"Tee hee. And I can't wait to meet them."

"Oh, and I'm still in training, but I'm getting better and better at chores and cooking! There's a girl named Leila who's *amazing* at teaching! She's my best friend, y'see!"

Considering how long they'd been separated, it was no wonder Lew had so much to tell her mom. Still, I laughingly patted her on the shoulder and cut in.

“Lew, take it down a notch. I know there’s a ton you wanna talk about, but let’s leave that for later, okay? Your family must be tired from the long journey, so we should show them to the inn first.”

We were still in front of the door.

“Ack! Y-You’re right, my lord! Father, everyone, thank you for coming all this way! I’ll take you to the inn, so follow me, please!”

Then, with her in the lead, the group as a whole started walking.

“Tee hee, see how energetic she is? Darling, you’re always overthinking things. Seeing as our daughter is doing so well, we have our answer right in front of us.”

“Mm… I cannot refute that.”

Lew’s dad replied with a soft sigh.

“While I did wonder what kind of person he was when you told me her partner is a demon lord, it’s plain to see that he’s possessed of a calm and gentle demeanor.”

“Calm…and gentle? You truly think so?”

When Pops glanced at me, I remarked with a charming smile.

“Calm and gentle, at your service.”

“Any way you look at him, there is nothing calm nor gentle about him. I heard a thing or two about your performance in the war, and you’re an out-and-out martial artist.”

Whoa. That’s the first time anyone’s called me a martial artist. He might’ve been spot on since my basic principle was to kill my enemies.

“My lord is extremely carefree when he’s at home! Usually, you can find him doing chores, making things, or playing with the little ones.”

“My, my. How domestic. Werewolf men are positively useless when it comes to chores.”

At Rosiela’s words, the men of the werewolf clan averted their gazes while the women looked at them with warm, amused eyes.

By the way, this time around, a total of twenty members of the Groll clan were here. I knew a few of them from their last visit, and I’d already greeted them.

Laughing wryly, I spoke.

“W-Well, they’re all hunters, so I think we can cut them some slack.”

Men doing chores was essentially a modern value. In this harsh world, men risking their lives to secure provisions for their

families and women handling the household was an unsurprising division of labor. I remembered reading a book a long time ago about how men capable of fighting naturally saw their stocks rise in war-torn worlds.

“Th-That is correct,” Lew’s dad said, nodding his head in vigorous agreement with me before continuing. “Men must hunt! At all other times, they must train their bodies, so it is inevitable that they lack the wherewithal for performing chores.”

“My lord hunts too, you know. Yet he somehow still manages to find the time to do chores practically every day.”

“…”

“Um, M-Miss Lew? I’d appreciate it if you maybe *didn’t* mention that right now…”

I suddenly felt the urge to run away. *N-Not to mention that my demon lord power makes for an uneven playing field, so her dad and other men in general aren’t really at fault…*

Probably realizing that he’d only take more damage if this conversation continued, Lew’s pops cleared his throat and tried to change the subject.

“M-More importantly, what you said earlier reminded me that there were children here on our last visit. How did they end up here? They are not of your blood, yes?”

“Yeah, so, I picked one up in the forest, four of them are dungeon monsters like Rir, and one is a sword. I don’t think I ever introduced them to you last time, so I’ll make sure to fix that later.”

“Goodness, what a collection of children. I’m looking forward to meeting them.”

“Rosiela, it would do you well to be a bit more suspicious.”

“Whyever would you say that, darling?”

“Woman, how is it not obvious…”

Pops looked absolutely dumbfounded.

“Your mom’s the *real* alpha, huh, Lew?”

“Aha ha ha! Everyone always says that.”

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“Good, you are here. I have been waiting.”

Lefi welcomed us when we got to the inn. She’d been waiting there after getting the place ready for our guests.

“Dude, why are you wearing a maid uniform?”

So, yeah, for whatever reason, Lefi was wearing a maid uniform. I was pretty sure she'd been wearing her usual dress when I'd left the dungeon... Not that she didn't look fantastic in this outfit too, though.

"Because Lew is the star on this occasion. To present her in the best light, we decided that we would devote ourselves to our roles as the help. As such, Nell is also wearing a maid uniform."

"Tee hee hee... I wanted to try it out."

Nell popped up suddenly, looking a tad bashful. Too cute.

"Mama, let me introduce you! This silver-haired girl is my lord's first wife, Lefisios. And this human girl is his second, Nell. I think of them both as my precious family!"

"Indeed, I am Lefisios. And you are Lew's mother, I take it? She has told us much about you. Thank you for traveling such a great distance."

"I'm Nell. Lew and I are great friends!"

"Lefisios and Nell. I'll remember your names. My name is Rosiela Groll. Thank you so much for looking after my Lew."

The women started chattering excitedly with each other, squealing in delight occasionally. Next to them, Lew's dad and I discussed what would come next.

"I got everything Lew said we'd need ready. Picked out a location too, so all set on my end. I was thinking you all could rest here tonight, and then tomorrow morning we'd hold the ceremony for the, what was it called again? Blood Oath? Whaddya think?"

"That sounds fine. I am sure my daughter has informed you, so you may already know, but cleanse yourself well before arriving at the appointed location. And by 'cleanse,' I mean that a simple bath in hot water should suffice. Any others who will join us should do the same."

"Roger. I'll let everyone know. Oh, and you remember the bathhouse you all used the last time you were here? Well, I built a new waterfall hot spring—I mean, a much larger bath behind it, so feel free to use that to wash up both tonight and tomorrow for the ceremony. I'll show you where it is when I take you to the location for the ceremony."

"I am grateful. But are you sure?"

"Yup, all good. There's another bathroom in the dungeon, so we'll use that while you guys're here."

The schedule for tomorrow was that we'd wake up in the

morning, eat breakfast, take a bath in the real throne room's bathroom, and meet up with the Groll clan in the meadow area, where the ceremony would take place. The ceremony itself wouldn't take long, so once it was over, we'd eat a light lunch, change into relaxed outfits and whatnot, take a short break, and then enjoy a buffet-style dinner early in the evening.

I'd actually cleaned up the beach we'd swam and played at specifically for this event. Plus, the food prep was all done, meaning we could barbecue whenever we wanted. Lefi had helped me hunt and gather the finest ingredients the Demonic Forest had to offer, and Leila had used her top-notch skills to cook it all. Everything was ready.

Truth be told, the little-girl gang was much more excited about the dinner party than anything else, which wasn't a bad thing at all. Enjoying their happiness in a happy place was what mattered most.

As for me, I was surprisingly nervous. But I was pretty stoked too. Lew would finally, officially be my wife, so there was no way I wasn't looking forward to it.

We're gonna be busy, busy bees tomorrow!

◇ ◇ ◇

"Stone the crows... A demon lord's power is truly amazing."

Belgrus Groll, Lew's father, unwittingly murmured those words as he surveyed his surroundings. Despite the unusual architecture and unknown cultural inspiration, the manor house was of superb quality. A beautiful, well-tended garden complemented it. The endless expanse of the meadow made for a majestic view in the distance. Evidently, said view was a sham, and one couldn't actually traverse that far. Regardless, it held such presence that it was hard to believe the scenery was an imitation.

Even the large bathhouse he'd been shown earlier included facilities he'd never seen before. It had a unique charm of its own and seemed like a place that could easily cure all manner of fatigue.

Who in the world would have guessed that this was the inside of a labyrinth? He would have been more convinced if someone had described this place as a luxurious inn instead. Though he had visited once before, looking at it all again, this place felt like

it was situated somewhere apart from this world.

All of the members of the Groll clan who had accompanied him on this visit were part of his inner circle. But the first-timers stared at everything in admiration, their gazes full of wonder. In contrast, the ones who'd been here before affected proud airs as they introduced the others to the various facilities on the grounds. While he understood their fascination with the unusual objects everywhere, he found himself feeling a bit embarrassed by their thrilled attitudes, so he wished they would confine their excitement to the present.

"I had no idea the inside of a dungeon was this lovely. What a wonderful surprise for my first visit, don't you think?"

Belgrus smiled ruefully at his wife, who'd commented lightly. She was always like this—relaxed and calm. Thinking about it, he wondered which of them Lew resembled. Well, if it was between the two of them, their daughter took after him, eh?

"Rosiela, I think it would be more normal to express a variety of opinions in this case. Also, this place is an exception among exceptions, so take care not to assume that all are like this."

"Goodness me, truly? Well, I'm simply glad that Lew ended up in a good place to spend her days. Although I *did* wonder what it was like after everything you told me... Oh, what a relief as a parent to know one's child has found a suitable match, hm?"

"Yes, it is as you say."

The man was unmistakably a good choice for a husband. Belgrus found his frankness refreshing. Their interactions were so normal that he found it hard to believe that the same person was also the demon lord who, as a result of the war only a short time ago, had become an emperor—the ruler of a nation.

It pleased him deeply that his daughter would marry such a man. Moreover, thanks to him, his own clan's status among the therianthropes would only continue to improve henceforth. Their star was most definitely on the rise.

Was there a better match for his little girl somewhere else in the world? He doubted it.

"Darling, I know how much you dote on Lew. I also know how worried you are that she's in a place far from what's considered normal. But children are destined to one day walk a path different from their parents'."

Rosiela gently wrapped her hand around his and continued with a smile.

“Even if, for example, that path is a bit off the beaten track, she’ll be fine. Our child is strong. She grew up strong enough to choose her own way, and for that, I’m grateful.”

She always sees right through me, doesn’t she?

“Mayhap…I lacked enough resolve as a parent.”

“Tee hee, not at all. I believe this is the fate of every man who fathers a daughter. As for your soon-to-be son-in-law, I’m certain he’ll have the same worries should he be blessed with a daughter of his own. Because just like you, he loves with all his heart.”

“…”

Belgrus had heard more than enough about the war. The appearance of a Calamity-level monster said to be capable of destroying the world. How the armies of their allies had been petrified and dumbstruck at the sight of the creature deployed by the enemy, with everything coming to a standstill for a moment. The shock had been all the greater because up until that moment, the advantage in the fight had been theirs. Thus, it was no wonder that, when faced with a colossal existence capable of flipping the proverbial board upside down, their thoughts had scattered and, for an instant, they had foreseen their utter defeat. One of the officers in the therianthropes’ army had conveyed all this to him. The shock had been so tremendous that even the officer—not just a foot soldier but one who led the charge—had ended up unintentionally despairing of defeat.

But then the man who would be his son-in-law had confronted such an opponent without an ounce of fear. Alone, he had resolutely stood against the creature. Because he was reckless like a demon lord? Because he’d believed he could defeat it with his own strength? No, Belgrus knew that neither was true. It was because the man had known he needed to protect everyone from the very embodiment of death that he’d stood against it. He’d fought because he’d known that if he didn’t, his comrades behind him would surely die.

Since that war had essentially been a struggle for supremacy between countries, as one who did not belong to a nation and made his life in the Demonic Forest, he should not have had any cause to risk his life. Though the man in question remained unaware, to the soldiers who’d fought in the battle, “a young man of demonkind” had already become known as a true hero. A hero across all races.

There could hardly be a better man to be his daughter's husband.

I know all this. I must be feeling sentimental. His daughter was truly going far beyond the borders of their home, so his emotions wreaked havoc on him. However, it was high time that he accepted reality.

Just as his wife had said, children would someday leave their parents behind, and at long last, the day had come for him. *To think I would find myself this shaken at the prospect. Will wonders never cease?*

Belgrus sighed deeply, the sound dragged from the depths of him. Then, he smiled and replied to Rosiela.

"I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

"As am I."

His wife beamed back at him.

◇ ◇ ◇

The day after the werewolves arrived.

"Wooow..." I said in astonishment as I looked Lew up and down.

"Tee hee hee... What do you think, my lord?"

"I can only think of something clichéd to say, no thanks to my limited vocabulary, but...you're beautiful. So beautiful. Just...incredibly beautiful."

Lew was wearing what seemed to be a traditional outfit for her people and handmade accessories. Rosiela had brought it all with her. Apparently, it was a bridal outfit werewolf women had worn for a long time.

Makeup had been carefully applied to her face, which highlighted her smooth, healthy skin. The light color on her lips naturally drew the eyes. Although Lew was someone who took care of her appearance, she never really bothered with makeup, what with being in the dungeon all the time. *But still, damn. I didn't realize how much it could change a person's impression.*



“Wooow! LewLew, you look like a princess!”

Iluna, who was also wearing a formal dress, exclaimed in wonder.

“Oh snap, you’re right… All right, that means it’s my duty as a demon lord to kidnap the princess. Mwa ha ha ha ha! The princess is mine!”

“Ack! M-My lord…”

“Mr. Yuki, you mustn’t touch her right now, or else you’ll ruin her cosmetics and outfit. You can do so after the ceremony ends. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Nell scolded me calmly, and I loosened my arms from around Lew’s waist.

“Grr… I guess I have no choice but to suppress these feelings welling up in my chest… Fine. I’ll control myself. For now.”

“Tee hee. Aren’t you pleased to have found such a loving husband, Lew?”

“Um, my lord? Truly, you’re embarrassing me, so it’d make me happy if you were less enthusiastic in front of my mother…”

“Impossible. Just give in, woman.”

“Whaaat…”

Lew stood shyly next to her beaming mother. *Damn, she’s insanely adorable.*

“He is correct. Resign yourself, Lew, for he is a lost cause. You should know well enough by now that when this imbecile gets like this, no one can stop him. Best to go along with his nonsense.”

“D-Darn it, my lord. You never change…”

“Mwa ha ha ha! Yeah, ’cause I’m a demon lord! And I go my own way!”

“My lord, that has less to do with being a demon lord and more to do with your personality.”

“This fool honestly thinks he can do anything for that reason.”

“That’s just how Mr. Yuki’s brain works, hm?”

Yeaaah, can’t deny any of that.

“Tee hee hee. I simply adore how close you all are.”

Rosiela smiled warmly as she watched us.

As we all joked around, Leila popped in on us.

“Everyone, Master Belgrus has informed me that he would like to start the ceremony shortly since preparations at the venue are complete.”

“Roger. Shall we, Lew?”
“Y-Yes, sir!”

At the inn in the meadow area. I’d built the venue next to it. Well, I called it a venue, but it wasn’t a church-like building at all. Just a tatami floor, no walls or ceiling, with cushions and shelves. I’d done my best to add trees and flowers around the space, making it feel solemn with the sunlight filtering in through the trees, and I thought it’d turned out pretty well.

A few wooden sculptures that the Groll clan had brought with them rested on the shelves. They were carved in the likenesses of their ancestors. Lew and I sat facing them while everyone else sat behind us.

I found out that the Groll clan put a great deal of importance on their ancestry. At the root of their faith lay a belief that who they were today was thanks to their ancestors, who spun their lives into existence. Ancestor worship, so to speak.

That was also the reason they always acted so weird around Rir. Fenrirs weren’t just their ancestors but their originators, so they thought of the creatures as gods—existences in front of whom they should kneel.

Therefore, the weddings they held also doubled as authentic ceremonies to report to their ancestors. The ceremony began with the ancestors descending to the group of statues they’d prepared. Of course, they didn’t *actually* summon any spirits. They just reported to the ancestors that a new bloodline would be added and vowed to continue the lineage to the next generation so that it wouldn’t be lost. Basically, the ceremony was a way to make a pact with the ancestors, asking them to watch over the new bloodline in return.

“Ye who nurture new blood, exchange thine cups.”

Lew’s father, who was the master of ceremonies and was dressed kinda like a senior or chief Shinto priest back on Earth, handed me and Lew both a cup filled with liquor and a small knife. I made a small cut on my thumb and let the blood drip down into my cup.

“Urk… H-Here I go!”

Hesitating for a second, Lew aggressively did the same after seeing me do so.

“Ack! O-Ow!”

“Ah, jeez, you idiot! You went way too hard!”

She'd gotten carried away and cut herself too deeply. When I saw the blood gushing profusely from her thumb, I hurriedly pulled a Super Potion from Inventory and poured it over the injured digit. In a few seconds, the wound started closing, and before long, it was completely healed.

"Haah, that scared the crap outta me... Dang it, woman. Look how much blood is in your cup now."

"Urk. My sincerest apologies, my lord..."

The next step in the ceremony was for each person to take the other's cup and drink from it. Thanks to Lew's overzealousness, though, the booze in the cup I'd be drinking out of had turned red. In reality, just a drop of blood was supposed to be enough for the ritual.

"I-I'll try again, so... Father, would you please prepare a new cup?"

"O-Of course."

Lew looked desponded at having failed during such a vital event—but I stopped her.

"No, this is fine."

"Huh? But—"

Before she could say anything else, I picked up her cup and downed its contents in one go. The alcohol burned my throat on the way down, and the rich taste of blood flooded my mouth. Normally, the combined taste would make anyone grimace, but strangely enough, I didn't hate it at all. Maybe because I knew it was Lew's blood?

"Whoa, your blood tastes good."

"Wh-What am I supposed to do when you say something Iluna would?"

I grinned cheekily and continued.

"Lew, relax. This isn't a big deal at all, so get that depressed look off your face. Here, hurry up and drink mine too."

"Yes, my lord... Thank you."

Having collected herself, Lew gave me a small smile before picking up my cup with both hands and pressing her lips to it.

"Mmm... Your blood tastes delicious too, my lord... Oh, wow, it really is delectable. I get why Iluna says it's her favorite."

"O-Oh yeah? I'm glad, then."

Man, everyone keeps saying how good my blood tastes. Shii and Nell had said the same thing when they'd drunk my blood too. I wasn't sure whether or not I should be happy about having

delicious blood.

Watching us, Lew's father nodded once before beginning the next phase of the ceremony.

"Blood has been exchanged. Now shall ye pledge to walk the path together as mates, holding fast to thine shared blood. If ye do so, our ancestors shall bestow upon ye many good fortunes in thine future endeavors."

Lew and I followed after him, reciting the words we were taught beforehand.

"I hereby pledge to follow this path together with my wife, holding fast to the blood of my ancestors."

"I hereby pledge to follow this path together with my husband, holding fast to the blood of my ancestors."

"The covenant is made. May the new bloodline be blessed and fruitful."

Finally, Pops said a few words of thanks to the sculptures of the ancestors and bowed deeply. The rest of us, including me and Lew, participating in the ceremony did the same.

"And with this, the ritual is over. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you all for joining us."

"Congratulations, LewLew!"

"Con-gra-chu-lay-shuns!"

"Yes... I'm very happy for you."

The little girls' exclamations came first, then the adults from my dungeon and the Groll clan followed suit, wishing us well. After that, I spoke to Lew, who'd been happily thanking everyone.

"Lew."

"Y-Yes, my lord?"

"Now, you're family both in name and in substance."

Tears welled up in the corners of her eyes.

"Yes, I am!"

And then, her face lit up with a smile as beautiful as a flower in full bloom.

The ceremony had ended, and it was the period after a short break.

"Wooow..."

"Ah... Incredible."

"Oh my, what a lovely spot."

The members of the Groll clan sounded amazed by the sight

in front of them. I'd taken them to the beach that was part of my dungeon's territory just like I'd originally planned. Thanks to the fantastic weather, the white sand sparkled, reflecting the sun's rays, and the ocean stretched as far as the eye could see.

Incidentally, my phantom ship dungeon wasn't visible from here since I'd sent it drifting off even farther away. If it ever made landfall in some new place, I'd go off on another adventure then.

"Is this…inside the dungeon as well?"

Lew's father finally spoke after being frozen in silence for a few minutes.

"I guess technically it is. Except that unlike the meadow area from earlier, which I created myself, this place actually exists in reality. We're here thanks to the connecting door we just passed through."

"How…frightening. Then does this mean that your subordinates—the esteemed fenrir and your other monsters—can be deployed instantly within your territory? Should we fight them, it makes me shudder to think of the damage we would suffer… I would not be surprised if aggressors who invade from outside your domain find their country exterminated overnight."

"Ha ha! Well, those guys are the cornerstone of my dungeon's defense, ya know. They *have* to be powerful enough to deal with the stupidly strong monsters in the Demonic Forest."

As he and I chatted, Lew, who'd been scowling, cut in.

"Father, no more of that kind of talk today. Besides, my lord isn't some twisted ruler or anything like that. He likes to relax and laze around instead of going to the trouble of doing things like invading other people, so what you say will never happen."

Ooh! You know me like the back of your hand, Lew.

"Y-Yes, yes, of course… Forgive me."

Pops apologized right away when Lew scolded him. It kinda felt like he'd grown a little more honest than before. Maybe. He must've had some complicated feelings about his daughter's marriage. It got me thinking: would I eventually face the same troubles he was dealing with?

"All right, we're here. We made all kinds of food for today, but don't be afraid to tell us if there's anything you're not used to or don't like. It'd make things a whole lot easier for us too."

"We are indebted to you for everything you have done for us."

"Not at all, especially since you guys traveled so far to visit. It's

only natural we'd set up something like this for you folks. Seriously, don't worry about a thing—just have fun. *That* would make me really happy."

After all, we went all out prepping for today. So do me a solid and enjoy this demon lord-style hospitality to your hearts' content!

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Nighttime at the beach. Though darkness blanketed the world, the stars twinkling in the sky overhead cast a soft glow on the earth below. The only sounds I could hear were the gentle lapping of the waves and Lew's breaths next to me.

Everyone else had already left for the night, so it was just the two of us here now. It felt like we were the only ones left in the world. I spoke to Lew, who was officially my wife as of today.

"Looks like we made everyone in your family happy, eh? Who'da thunk they'd be so excited by the ocean, though."

"Aha ha ha... Probably because us werewolves hardly ever leave our settlements and territories. I get why they were so amazed by the ocean since it was their first time seeing it, but as a member of the clan, I'm a little embarrassed by their behavior..."

Lew smiled sheepishly, her expression a complicated mix of emotions.

I knew my reaction had been super rude, but watching them touch the water nervously and run along the waves as they went in and out had reminded me exactly of how dogs acted. I hadn't been able to help but laugh. Just like she'd mentioned, the sea was an unusual thing for them because their village was far inland. Based on their reactions, it was the first time at least half of them had ever seen it.

While they had enjoyed the food and booze, there was no doubt that this beach environment had been the most fun for her clan. They'd also enjoyed playing with the fireworks I'd prepped ahead of time. And seeing their ears and tails stand at attention at the loud sounds and bright lights had honestly warmed my heart. Humanoid races who possessed animal characteristics were quick to display their emotions through those nonhuman body parts, which made it easy to tell what they were thinking through their expressions. Lew and her family were no different.

“I could totally tell that you’re all related.”

“And what’s *that* supposed to mean?”

“Just that you’re all pure of heart, y’know?”

She scowled at me, and I laughingly responded with a shrug.

After a few more minutes of silly conversation along those lines, I changed my expression to one that was a little more serious.

“Lew. Will you give me your left hand?”

“Okay.”

With an expectant look on her face, she brought her beautiful left hand forward. I opened Inventory to take *it* out—a ring I’d crafted in advance. I slid it onto her ring finger.

“I told Nell the same thing, but…I’m sorry about the design being pretty much the same as the first one I made for Lefi. Although I *did* set different jewels in the cross for each of you…”

I trailed off when I noticed her intently scrutinizing the ring on her finger from all angles. And then, teardrops slid softly down her cheeks, one after another, endlessly. When I gently wiped them away, she suddenly dropped her head onto my shoulder.

“I… I’ve always been envious of Lefi and Nell, you know. I know I talked a little about this before, but they have so much I don’t, and they can stand by your side, my lord. Even when I tried not to let it bother me, it inevitably still would. But…starting today, I’m done with all that.”

“Meaning you feel confident in yourself now?”

“I do. Because I know you love me despite me being so hopeless in so many ways. This ring is a symbol of just how much you do for me… So I managed to work up the confidence to be loved by you, my lord.”

Lew stared up at me with a luminous smile. Her makeup was a bit of a mess on account of her tears, and her eyes were red too. But she had never been more beautiful than she was at this moment, illuminated by the night sky.

“Ha ha. Oh yeah? Also, keep crying like that and you’ll ruin the hard work the women put into your makeup.”

“I don’t care. You’ll still love me even when I’m a wrinkly old woman, won’t you, my lord? So I don’t care about the makeup right now. I’m so happy, and I don’t want to suppress this feeling.”

Her fingertips brushed against my hand before she laced our fingers together tightly. Just that simple touch of skin against

skin was enough to convey her feelings to me as her velvety smooth, slender fingers intertwined with mine. And I knew she could feel what was in my heart too.

“My lord.”

“Yeah.”

“My lord… My lord. I love you. I love you so much. Will you let me stay by your side, now and forever?”

“Of course I will. Like you even have to ask. It’s common knowledge that demon lords are extremely possessive, y’know. So even if you change your mind later, it’ll be too late. Got it?”

“Tee hee… Common knowledge, you say? Then I wonder why I didn’t know until now. But it’s fine. Because I’ll *never* leave you.”

Lew giggled in delight. I turned toward her.

“Lew.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I love you. Stay with me forever.”

“Yes. Together for eternity.”

I pulled her dainty body into my arms. Her warmth cocooned me. Her sighs tickled my skin.

Just how much peace do these women bring me?

Gazing up at me, Lew locked her hands behind my back, then closed her eyes. Slowly, ever so slowly, I lowered my face to hers —and kissed her pale pink lips. A sweet thrill lanced through me.

Everything blurred. An indescribable euphoria overwhelmed me. As if becoming one, Lew and I melted into the waves and starlight filling the world. I wouldn’t have been surprised if our bodies had vanished, leaving only our connected hearts behind.

Staying just like that, we kissed again and again…

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“Right, then. We’ll be taking our leave now. However, do not think you’ve seen the last of us, because we of the Groll clan will be visiting Alfiro often enough moving forward. If you have any messages for us, inform our colleagues there. They will pass them on to us.”

“Got it, and right back at you if anything happens. I hope you don’t mind if we stop by once in a while too. Speaking of, can we visit you back home sooner rather than later once I can carve out time in our schedule?”

Lew’s pops, now officially my father-in-law, and I chatted. Next

to me, Lew said her goodbyes to her mother and the other members of the Groll clan. She hugged her mom tightly, obviously sad to see her go. My guess was that they'd been close even when she'd still lived in their village. It made sense seeing as Rosiela was a wonderful mother. She'd even gotten close to Lefi at some point over the past few days.

"Yes, of course. In light of the fantastic reception we received here, we shall endeavor to welcome you with fanfare as well. Oh, and do let us know if or when she ends up with child."

"Uhhh… R-Right. Will do."

Lew's old man grinned wickedly, and I responded awkwardly, scratching my cheek.

Jeez… I really wish he'd lay off jokes like that since I can't clap back.

Then, his expression turned serious again as he looked directly into my eyes.

"Demon Lord."

"Yeah?"

Unlike the conflicted look on his face when we'd reunited, now, he gave off the air of a stern father harboring strong feelings.

"I entrust my daughter to you."

He suddenly thrust his right hand at me. A hand I couldn't take lightly. But powerful emotions were thrumming in my chest now.

"I swear I'll take good care of her!"

I gripped her father's hand and shook it firmly.

Side Story 1: Daughter

It seems my daughter is a good judge of character after all, hm?

On the gorgeous, sandy beach by the fathomless ocean where they were celebrating with a barbecue, Rosiela watched her daughter enjoying her conversation with the others. Her child had changed since last she'd seen her in their home. She was a smidge taller, her skin more lustrous, and the texture of the fur on her ears and tail sleeker. A single glance told her that she was being well cared for.

Her lively, cheerful personality hadn't changed one bit. In fact, she was even more energetic and thoughtful now. As the daughter of the clan head, Lew had spent her life studying their traditions unhappily. But now, none of that old discomfort showed in her attitude. She was smiling from the bottom of her heart.

That wasn't simply because today was a special day, though. It turned out that experiencing the outside world had done more for her growth than being sequestered in their insular village. Rosiela had been aware of the rigid social structure of their home and had known that her daughter would leave it someday, but she had certainly never imagined that the girl would be hoyden enough to run away... Perhaps, in the end, that had been her daughter's fate.

Then, after being captured by slavers, she had been rescued by a most decidedly abnormal existence known as a demon lord, in whose domain she had begun her new life. The whole thing sounded like some sort of unbelievable tale to her. Add in the fact that a fenrir was part of the young man's family, and she could easily imagine how shocked her husband must have been on his first visit. If someone told her that all of this was the doing of their ancestors, she would likely believe them without question.

Rosiela's gaze then turned toward the young man in question —the demon lord who was now her son-in-law. She had been curious about him since first learning of his existence, and after having met him, it hadn't surprised her to learn that her daughter had fallen in love with the gentle, affable youth.

Though she had heard about his martial prowess, she found it hard to believe because she simply could not see that side of him after their numerous conversations. But one thing her eyes told her clearly was how much he truly loved her daughter.

All this talk about him being a martial artist had likely originated from his conduct in battle. After all, it was normal for those of the male persuasion to run wild during combat. This applied to werewolf men, whose auras were particularly aggressive after hunting and other such activities, as well. That explained why he likely revealed the extremely violent side of his nature on the battlefield. But she saw no problem with it as long as he didn't behave like that in his everyday life. On the contrary, if he was strong yet also gentle in normal circumstances, then he could be considered the perfect husband.

She made her own destiny, hm?

A hint. Rosiela felt just a hint of envy. It wasn't as if she was dissatisfied with her own life. However, she had lived in their settlement, under its rules, for so many years. In contrast, here was her daughter, who had chosen the path to her future for herself. She could only hope that her child would remain free to live by her own wishes.

"I trust you are enjoying yourself, mother of Lew?"

A voice called out to her as she was lost in thought. When she turned her head to look, she found a stunning, silver-haired young girl sporting horns and a tail standing there with a glass in one hand. Despite her youthful appearance, the girl was actually more than a thousand years older than Rosiela herself.

Her fellow clan members had trembled in fear when they had learned of her true identity as the Supreme Dragon…which, in hindsight, had been a bit of an impolite reaction. She made a mental note to admonish them later. In any case, there was no denying the overwhelming aura radiating from her petite frame. In fact, the word "overwhelming" needed to be used countless times to describe her undeniable presence as an individual whose power was unrivaled.

As for Rosiela herself, she only had one question: what exactly did they need to fear? Especially in light of her daughter's obviously deep bond with the girl. That alone was enough to tell her they shouldn't be scared.

"Oh, hello, Lefisios. Yes, of course, I am indeed enjoying myself. Oh dear, don't tell me I've made you worry."

Rosiela had been watching everyone from some distance away, so perhaps she'd given off the impression that she was bored.

"Not at all. Our husband is occupying the men while Nell and Leila are entertaining the women, so I merely thought I would entertain you. And, well...I seek your wisdom on a number of topics."

"Truly? I am of course glad to help you in any way I can..."

She wouldn't call herself well-informed by any means, so Rosiela doubted there was anything she could teach the girl. But if the person herself thought otherwise... While she puzzled over the situation, Lefisios, looking somewhat embarrassed, continued speaking, idly scratching her cheek.

"Hmm, right... I know it has only been a day since we met, and I hesitate to even ask this, however...my unique origin means I have no parents. Consequently, I do not know what a mother is. But someday, the other wives and I will become mothers. Ergo, I wish to take this opportunity to acquire the knowledge I can regarding child-rearing."

Rosiela's eyes widened for a moment before she chuckled softly, charmed by the girl's request.

"I understand now, so let's discuss the matter. Although I'm not confident anything I say will be useful to you considering my daughter ran away from home..."

"Bah, rubbish. You did a fine job raising Lew. There is no one I would consider a closer friend than Lew. Though I suppose she is not simply a friend now, but family."

"Nothing makes me happier as her mother than to hear you say so."

And so, the two of them talked. They started with child-rearing, then moved on to other topics such as the werewolves' home, the dungeon, and more.

She'll be just fine here.

This place and these people would make her daughter happy.

"Mama, what do you think of Leila's cooking?!"

"Divine. Absolutely divine. I wonder how this is made..."

"Tee hee. I'd be delighted to teach you. I'm sure Master Demon Lord would be happy to provide you with the various seasonings as well."

"Ooh! Great idea, Leila! You can take them home as souvenirs, Mama! My lord! Can you conjure some seasonings for my family

to take home as souvenirs?!”

“Yeah, of course. I’ll have them ready for you all when it’s time for you to go home.”

Rosiela watched their exchange with a bright smile.

Be happy, Lew.

Chapter 2: Aftermath

The setting did a one-eighty as I went from the familiar view of the Demonic Forest to behind a deserted building. When I looked up, I saw a castle. Not my castle. Well, okay, it was *technically* my castle? Anyway, what stood before me was the imperial castle in the capital of the Reauxgard Empire.

"All righty… Where should I go?"

With my marriage to Lew now official, I'd come back here just like I'd promised the Demon King. But was it really okay for me to just walk into the castle? I mean, the place *was* the backbone of the empire. What would I do if folks mistook me for someone suspicious—or worse, an intruder—if I just walked in casually as you please without an appointment?

Naaah. That Demon King definitely would've planned for something like this. Right? I was sure things would work out fine if I chatted with some demon soldiers.

Even as those thoughts ran through my head, I started walking toward the castle's main gate, where a bored-looking demon soldier stood guard.

"Hey, got a minute?"

"Hmm? L-Lord Yuki, is that you?! The Demon King has already informed us what to do should you arrive, so please wait here a moment while I summon the person in charge."

"Sounds good. Thanks."

Yup, I was right. The Demon King had already set things up in advance. The man's expression had clearly said "Who the hell is this bozo?" at first, but he'd figured out who I was almost immediately after, and now, he was zooming off to grab someone.

Maybe Fynar had told them about my unique facial features?

The sentry was true to his word because a few minutes later, he came back with another person in tow.

"Lord Yuki, what a pleasure to see you again. I hope you haven't been waiting long?"

"Wait, aren't you…Runougil? How are you holding up, man?"

The demon guard had brought one of the Demon King's subordinates, Runougil. In the war, the man had won a

proverbial gold star by capturing Emperor Shendra. But if I remembered right, they'd said that his wounds had been so severe that he wouldn't be able to use magic ever again…

"Thank you very much for your concern. Though I did indeed suffer grievous injuries, the only real change has been the loss of magical energy from my body. While I admit that being unable to use magic is an inconvenience, I can accomplish anything so long as I have my five senses, so things are just fine on my end. Personally, the lack of magic makes it easier for me as a person whose job is to lurk in the shadows. Simply being alive is the greatest victory, don't you think?"

Huh. What a fascinating perspective.

Most detection-type abilities worked by detecting the target's magical energy. That being the case, it went without saying that those abilities didn't react to the magicless. And wouldn't you know it, he was invisible to my Demon Eyes. The Maps function didn't show him at all either. Not the blue blip of an ally or the red blip of an enemy. With my Demon Eyes, I could see a large, human-shaped hole where he stood, so I could tell that *something* was there, but it would be quicker to see him with my actual eyes.

That's…freaking nuts. Since he was already a member of the Covert Imperial Guard, he could diminish his aura to practically nil. But his loss of magic basically made him the Invisible Man. Anybody else probably would've freaked out at the thought, so the fact that he could say it was no problem was a testament to his strength. No normal person would say that having your arms torn off makes it easy to move because your body becomes lighter, but that was pretty much him right now.

"Therefore, since my body is still very much functioning, I'll be working here in the Reauxgard Empire until things stabilize. Due to the war, spies and criminal organizations from various countries have infiltrated, so this posting makes sense for me, wouldn't you say?"

"Dang. Already with the shady shit?"

"Indeed. All this chaos presents the most golden of golden opportunities for the inhabitants of the underworld. If we allow such individuals to act as they please in a situation such as this, we risk further antagonizing the general public. The Demon King has instructed us to not underestimate the power of the masses. As the victors, we must remain just."

Hmm… Is this their way of trying to convince the people that the previous regime was bad and that we won because we're good, dumbing the whole thing down into an easy-to-understand example of poetic justice?

In other words, it was about creating a framework to win the citizens' hearts. Fynar was trying to make this empire into a multiracial state. That kind of radical reform required completely destroying the values of this human-only nation. So with this as a starting point, he was probably trying to strengthen the sense of "rebirth." Sudden systemic changes always created strife and animosity, but the Demon King understood that too.

Failure to deal with these things often led to revolutionary movements, terrorist attacks, or even the sparks of new wars. And the end result was almost always tragic. I knew that this kind of history had repeated itself over and over again in my previous life.

I didn't care about governing this country. I had less than zero interest in getting involved in politics. Hell, I literally did not give a rat's ass about the empire itself. But that didn't mean I wanted to ruin it either.

My personality wasn't so screwed up that I took pleasure in destruction and slaughter, so of course I thought it was better that we were going full speed ahead down the path of peace. The only point that was nonnegotiable was that we needed to destroy the human supremacy values permeating the country. Everything else was fine to compromise on, in my opinion.

I'm sure the Demon King has thought about all this a lot more than a noob like me, but it probably wouldn't hurt to talk to him about it anyway.

"Maaan… Why the hell do I have to hurt my brain thinking about all this stuff?"

Damn Shendra for dumping all this annoying crap on me.

"Did you say something?"

"No, nothing. Anyway, can you take me to the Demon King? I don't plan on sticking around long."

"Yes, of course. Follow me, won't you?"

"Yuki. Thanks for *coming*. I've been *waiting* for you."

"Sure. Runougil told me shit's already hit the fan. That true?"

"I *suppose* that's *one* way of putting it. *Still*, this is only the *beginning*. Things will become even *more* chaotic moving

forward. Our *enemies* will act to spread *darkness*, and *we* will devise strategies to *counter* them. The *war* may be over, but our *fight* continues."

The Demon King shrugged. To me, though, it looked like he was enjoying himself. He must've been feeling accomplished since he could really shine in a situation like this. *Same ol' scheming Blackheart, ain't ya?*

"Look, I'm glad to see you all chipper and excited, but damn, be careful, will you? If you screw up dealing with this, that'll just light a fire under the masses, which means a pain in the ass for the rest of us."

A surprised expression crossed his face at my words.

"Oh my, so you *do* understand the *gravity*. Forgive my *rudeness*, Yuki, but...you're *quite* learned, aren't you? Demon lords are born in *insular* environments, yet you demonstrate *vast* knowledge. Might I ask *where* yours comes from?"

"I've got a Supreme Dragon who's lived a helluva long time and a member of the ovine race at home. That's where. They teach me all kinds of things."

I shrugged as I lied by omission. He didn't need to know about my previous life or the thorough compulsory education I'd been given. I couldn't deny that I'd never been an honor student, and I definitely hadn't been one of the smart kids either, but I still had knowledge that would be classified as higher education in this world.

I might be showing my true colors as an overly doting parent, but I'd love for my kids to get as much of an education as I did in my previous life. Though Leila's godsent presence meant they were currently receiving a considerably higher level of education than they would've gotten outside our home, there were still limits. So as irresponsible as I was, I felt like my knowledge was helping them. And since my girls were smarter than me anyway, I was sure they'd use that knowledge to enjoy the world to the fullest.

"Then *that* makes things *easier* for me. Because in *truth*, I have a *favor* to ask of you."

"I...don't think I wanna ask, but I guess I will."

The Demon King beamed at me in response.

"Yuki. Would you be so *kind* as to become the Demon Lord of *Terror*?"

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The door opened with a creak, and I stepped into the conference room. Inside were a few folks who looked like this country's leaders, as well as the familiar faces of the various rulers who'd joined the Raceless Allies, all of them sitting around a round table. They seemed to be in the middle of some kind of meeting. The people in the former group all wore strained expressions, while the ones in the latter group looked relaxed. Basically, that was enough for me to figure out the current state of affairs in the empire.

When I suddenly entered the room, it was clear from the imperial folks' expressions that they were wondering, "Who the hell is this guy?" As for my friends from the Allies, their eyebrows twitched inquiringly, like they knew what was going to happen.

It's go time, huh? Cool. Operation commenced.

I strode in arrogantly, taking my sweet time walking through the center of the room before plopping down in the seat left open for me.



“*Apologies* for the interruption, but please allow me to *introduce* this man to the imperial citizens present. He is the *successor* of this dungeon, making him the next *emperor*. Say hello to *Yuki*. Henceforth, you *all* will look to *him* as your leader.”

Whoever inherited the dungeon became the emperor of the Reauxgard Empire. The fact that this country was a dungeon was concealed from the general public, who also didn’t know that each successive emperor was a demon lord. But of course, this group of folks knew all that since they were the empire’s head honchos.

“Yeah, hey. Demon Lord Yuki, at your service or whatever.”

When I lazily wiggled my fingers at them in greeting, the humans’ gazes turned flinty. They were probably thinking something along the lines of, “This stupid punk…”

“Yuki, do you *have* any special *words* for them?”

“Mmm. Yeah, actually, I do. Lemme make it clear from the jump that I ain’t gonna say shit no matter what you guys do. I don’t really care, so just do whatever you want. Why? ’Cause I have less than zero interest in any of you.”

“Wha—”

A few of them gasped in shock, my reckless words stunning them silent.

“I have only one command as your overlord: don’t defy me. You *will* obey me. As long as you do, I’ll give you free rein. Heard? No, you know what? Scratch that. You have my permission to defy me. Just know that when you do, I’ll crush you to dust. So the choice is up to you.”

“To hell with you!”

An old man vibrating with fury stood up. Spit flew from his mouth. He looked formidable, and his aura gave me the impression that he was a military type. I figured him to be older than sixty. He had bags under his eyes and his cheeks were gaunt, maybe from worrying so much.

“You for real? What’s the problem here? I just said you all can do whatever you want as long as you don’t defy me. You should be on your knees thanking me for being so generous.”

“You bastard! You dare mock us?! We’re supposed to just accept a careless man like you as our emperor?! Like that will ever happen!”

“If you really don’t get it, how ’bout you come talk to me *after* you win a war, ya geezer.”

His face got so red that I was afraid the blood vessels in his head would burst when I casually tossed his objections right back in his face. With his jaw clenched hard, he reached for the sword hanging at his waist. All the Allied soldiers in the conference room immediately went on the defensive, ready to spring into action. The Demon King, who wore his usual enigmatic smile, raised a hand to stop them.

"Rrrgh! If we're forced to entrust our country to a ruffian like you, then I might as well make a stand here!"

"Oh, you wanna throw down? Bring it."

A second later, I unleashed my magic and overpowered him. Not by using the Ruler's Might ability I'd acquired after killing that damned black dragon way back when, though. That had a good chance of killing a human opponent, so I just mixed in a truckload of killing intent into my magical energy and checked him with sheer power.

Maaan, I'm too much of a softy. Why do I have to be so kind and considerate all the time?

I wasn't surprised to see my Allied leader homies still looking laid-back despite their stats being lower than mine. On the other hand, their escorts and the humans weren't faring so well. They were frozen in fear, their faces stiff. Though I felt bad for them and the humans on our side, I needed them to hold out just a bit longer.

With my energy still radiating aggressively from me, I climbed onto the round table without hesitation, shoes on and all. Then, slowly, casually, I made my way toward the rigid old man. Sweat dripped down his face, and his sword stayed half drawn. I squatted so we were at eye level.

"You still don't understand the difference in power between us, huh? Emperor Shendra was real quick on the uptake in that department. He joined forces with the demons he hated so much and dirtied his hands with the taboo of war just to challenge us *because* he knew how much more powerful we are. And then, when he realized defeat was inevitable, he accepted it right away, handing us the reins of power over this country to avoid more violence and strife. He was the enemy, yes, but he was also a smart man."

The frozen old man didn't say anything, probably because he was having trouble moving his mouth. So I kept talking.

"What about you? Just some incompetent clown who gets

mad when some punk taunts you? A coward who flees because he can't accept reality? Eh, doesn't matter at the end of the day. Wanna know why? Because like I said, I have less than zero interest in any of you. If you wanna go back to your lands and gather your armies to come at me, be my guest. I'll wait for you. How many do you need? A thousand? Ten thousand? C'mon, spit it out."

"All *right*, Yuki, let's *leave* it at that, hm? We *may* have won the war, but that *doesn't* mean we want to *upend* order in this country. *Moreover*, they need *time* to process the *change* in their status quo."

The Demon King cut in, playing the peacemaker.

This should be good enough, right?

I snorted derisively and jumped down from the table. I didn't even bother going back to my chair, instead just heading straight for the conference room door.

"Let me say this again: Don't defy me. You *will* obey me. As long as you do, I'll protect this country from any threats. That's what I promised your former emperor, and I'm sticking to it. You can ask the monarchs in here for help with anything else."

With those parting words, I walked out.

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"*Much* obliged, Yuki. Thanks to your *performance*, the *rest* of the conference went *smoothly*."

"Yes, indeed. They were mere shells of themselves because of you. We practically have them at our mercy now. Not to put words in your mouth, but I find it a bit sad to see the former emperor's efforts come to this. He was, if nothing else, a man of courage."

"Well, I'm glad I could help, I guess. Just please don't ask me to pull a stunt like that again. Unlike you guys, I suck at acting."

I responded to the Demon King and the Elf Queen, Naforazey, who accompanied him.

"I *must* disagree. *I* thought you made an *excellent* thug."

"Ugh, don't call me a thug."

Although I also kinda thought I'd done a pretty good job at playing a nasty thug.

Speaking of our little farce, I'd gone through with it at the Demon King's request. Since I'd probably rarely visit this country,

my job was to instill fear in them as a “bad neighbor,” while the other rulers, who’d be in charge of most of the politics here, would foster sympathy and camaraderie as “good neighbors.” In other words, the stereotypical “good cop, bad cop” act. The point was to win over the Reauxgard Empire’s key figures since they had countless resentments left in them.

Despite Fynar’s sudden request for a Demon Lord of Terror having thrown me for a bit of a loop, I’d tried my best to play the part. So as long as they’d bought the act, all was well that ended well. The only potential problem was my performance being enough to let their fear and animosity fester to a breaking point and resulting in them trying to turn me into the Defeated Demon Lord. That would be a pain in the ass to deal with. While a reign of terror was effective to a certain extent, it always collapsed at some point and came to an end.

And that was why there was a next phase of Fynar’s operation.

“Sooo, remind me where I’m supposed to go next?”

“Of *course*. Vardroi and Dodah *discovered* a monster *ruling* over this area that *lives* in the mountains nearby. I’d *like* you to *defeat* it.”

“You got it. What kind of monster is it?”

“A *subspecies* of wyvern. Normally, an *army* would be required to defeat it, but I *believe* you’ll be able to manage just *fine* on your own, yes?”

I opened the Maps function and checked the area around the Reauxgard Empire. It had only recently become visible to me. *Let’s see… Yup, there it is.*

I estimated the monster to be medium strong, comparable to the monsters in the eastern area of the Demonic Forest. Based on my power level now, taking down five of them simultaneously would be a piece of cake. Regardless, it was still kinda strong.

“You want me to take care of it today?”

“No. Might I *ask* you to complete the mission in *four* days’ time? I *want* to put your *fighting* prowess on display, which means I need *time* to make the *necessary* preparations. After all, a *show* like this is better off being watched *live*. Wouldn’t you *agree*?”

The Demon King smiled wickedly.

You couldn’t govern using the stick of fear alone. Something else was necessary too. There needed to be some sort of carrot

—that being what the governed stood to gain.

The point of the monster hunt was to demonstrate two things: that the power known as me was a benefit to this country, and that the other monarchs had control over said power.

“Roger. In that case, I’ll come back tomorrow and—”

“Ah, *wait*, Yuki. *Before* you go, there’s *someone* who is rather *keen* on speaking with you. Would you *mind* terribly if I *invited* them here?”

“Huh? Sure, why not.”

So I waited. A few minutes later, an old man wearing a snazzy military uniform showed up. His battle scars gave me a glimpse into his storied past, and he wore an eye patch too. *Hmm…I feel like I’ve seen this human somewhere before.*

Hadn’t he been the adjutant for the humans on our side during the war? Lemiro, the former Hero of the Kingdom of Alisia, had been their general. But he was the type of commander who fought on the front lines alongside his troops, so I was pretty sure this old man had been in charge of everything else. While I scrolled through my brain for memories of him, the man in question politely inclined his head at me and spoke in a rich, deep voice.

“This is our first time conversing face-to-face. My name is Gordon. Master Yuki, I’ve been wanting to thank you for quite some time now.”

“Really? Don’t have a clue as to why, though…”

“You have done much and more for my homeland. If you hadn’t rescued His Majesty, Alisia would no longer exist.”

He had to have been exaggerating. But I smiled at him and replied anyway.

“No, no, no. I just helped out here and there. Definitely didn’t do anything as grand as that. Maybe my participation brought down the number of casualties, but your country was strong too. It was a long road, but ultimately, things worked out.”

There was no denying the surplus of idiot nobles in their country. Even so, I also knew that there were just as many good ones. Dependable, resourceful, capable people.

However, the old general shook his head at my words.

“It is just as you say. Without your aid, our sacrifices would have mounted immeasurably. Had only the core of our nation survived in a different form even after all that, it wouldn’t still

have been the Kingdom of Alisia. The death of its people means the death of a country."

The death of its people means the death of a country, huh…

A lot of shit had gone down in Alisia. When I'd been there, the whole nation had been standing on shaky legs because of its various problems. It'd been so bad that I remember having thought, "Are they gonna be all right?" But once I'd seen members of the armed forces like this man, I'd realized why the Kingdom of Alisia was a major power. Hopefully, there'd be more people like him as things moved forward.

"Which is why I'm grateful to you from the bottom of my heart. Should you ever find yourself in trouble, we will always come to your aid."

"Then…thanks. I'll take you up on that if the time ever comes. As for me, I'd appreciate it if you helped my wife. Not only will that work out in my favor, it'll benefit you guys too."

The more allies Nell had, the better. Besides, her successes would only be pluses for the Kingdom.

"Ah, the hero, yes? We of the Alisian military will do what we can for her."

His eyes burned with resolve as he nodded firmly.

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I took a trip around the country checking things out until the day we were supposed to hunt the monster. The Reauxgard Empire was situated on the southern part of the continent, and a wide sea bordered it on its southernmost edge. In terms of land, it was about as big as the Kingdom of Alisia, of which Nell was a citizen.

On a personal level, I was happy to have acquired a territory with a harbor. It meant I could get my hands on all kinds of marine products, which would let me put more varied meals on our family's menu. *Heh heh heh. I think I'll go home with a boatload of seafood as souvenirs. Like maybe some sashimi. Tasty, tasty sashimi.*

As the emperor, I very much wanted to expand the harbor by doing things like encouraging the development of the fishing industry. No, not "want." *Would*. I made up my mind then and there.

Aaanyway, setting all that aside for the time being, there was

still my dungeon's domain to talk about. It extended all the way to the borders of the empire. The only places not included were the less populated outlying areas.

The previous emperors had to have expanded the territory in order to obtain Dungeon Points from the existence of the populace. Actually, on second thought, it might've been the opposite. In Reauxgard's case, had its expansion taken place concurrently with the dungeon's?

The imperial dungeon was around one and a half times the size of the area mine encompassed in the Demonic Forest, but it only made about two-thirds as much DP per day. Right now, a lot of soldiers from other races were stationed here too, so once things calmed down, it would probably drop down to half.

Despite the incredibly large human population here, each creature inhabiting the Demonic Forest was powerful. And the amount of DP I earned increased proportionally to that strength. Rightfully so, if you asked me.

As far as monsters living in the empire's vicinity went, I'd learned from my travels over the four days that aside from the wyvern subspecies I'd be hunting, there weren't really any that were powerful enough to warrant me fighting them. In fact, the overall monster population here was pretty low. I figured it was because the previous emperor and his predecessors had culled their numbers regularly to avoid any negative effects on the ecosystem.

If anything, humanoid species posed the greatest threat now. Based on what I'd seen with my own two eyes, groups of bandits had invaded the country. Though I'd destroyed any I came across, I knew that bad guys like them would keep showing up for the foreseeable future. This kind of problem really fell under the military's jurisdiction, so I wanted the Demon King and the others to solve it as fast as possible.

Then there were the cities in the empire. They'd turned out to be surprisingly orderly. In the case of the imperial capital, the residents obeyed the soldiers' orders and accepted the rations provided. On top of that, repairs to the parts of the city that'd been damaged in the Great Corpse Dragon War—well, let's be honest, the parts that'd been damaged thanks to the fight between me and the Dark King Corpse Dragon—were proceeding quietly as the imperials and the Allies worked together.

The imperial citizens were without a doubt disheartened by their country's loss in the war. And though the presence of the Allied soldiers probably curbed any discord, even accounting for that, there still wasn't much chaos or confusion to be found. So maybe the people were a testament to the previous emperor's rule.

Uh, sorry for all the destruction. But if we hadn't defeated that monstrosity, things would've been way, way, waaay worse. I wanted to shout that last part out for emphasis. Any screwups on our part and the imperial capital would've been turned into a vacant plot of land. Hell, other regions of the empire too.

An artificial space in this country's dungeon, kinda like the meadow area in mine, also existed. It was basically a shelter connected only to the inside of the castle. Obviously, it wasn't a grassy field like mine, and it didn't have the intricate corridors that first came to mind whenever you heard the word "labyrinth" either. Instead, it was a large facility that resembled a gym. It had a dining hall, a training area, and simple housing. Based on all that, I had to assume they actually used it as an evacuation shelter.

This place had turned out to be where the whole imperial army had retreated to when the Dark King Corpse Dragon had first come onto the scene. There were enough emergency rations inside to support ten thousand soldiers for a month. It also had a massive armory, which we left as is. Considering that the current situation was nowhere near stable, taking any of the gear out carelessly might lead to it ending up in the wrong hands, and that was why we made that decision.

Therefore, I'd given simple dungeon operating authority to designated elves and demon personnel so that they could fully manage this place. I needed them to be able to do their jobs even when I wasn't around, you know? Having said that, the only powers they had were giving others permission to pass through the doors and changing the locations of the doors. They couldn't use the DP Catalog, let alone expand or remodel the facilities. A few levels lower than the authority I'd given the adult gang in my family. Because this place was mine and I damn well wasn't giving it up.

"Hmm... *Incredible.* So *this* is a demon lord's *power*..."

The Demon King sounded fascinated as he stared at the menu floating in midair.

“Too bad for you I only gave you a very simple version to use. That means you can’t do anything dastardly, got it?”

“Oh, *really*? How *unfortunate*. And I was *so* looking forward to playing the *wicked* Demon King.”

“Dude, it doesn’t sound like a joke when you say it, so cut it out.”

Seriously.

“Anyway. I can add more defenses if you want. How about…golems? As long as they stay in the dungeon’s territory, they can run forever on their own. You want a few?”

Golems—inanimate monsters. My Evil Eyes, Evil Ears, and Evil Hands were all helper-type golems, but combat-type golems were also a thing.

“You can *do* that? Then won’t you *create* one for me to *observe*?”

“Sure, you got it.”

I scrolled through the DP Catalog right away and summoned a combat-type golem. Instantly, light condensed in front of us, and a quadruped type appeared. It had the body of a guardian lion and the head of an eagle. The wings unfurling from its back also looked like an eagle’s. It was a size smaller than Rir and its black color had the dull luster of an ore. Its beak was magnificent and its talons were ridiculously sharp, blades in themselves.

The name in the DP Catalog said “Griffin.” Like all other golems, as long as it was inside the dungeon’s territory, it would keep itself alive indefinitely by absorbing mana, making it ridiculously handy. Still, I didn’t use this type at all at home.

The reason I didn’t was that despite their burly builds, Griffins honestly weren’t that strong. They were the most expensive monsters in the combat-type golem category, but they were only as strong as the weakest monsters in the Demonic Forest, the ones that lived in the southern area. They didn’t evolve either. Since they weren’t real life-forms like my pets, their stats wouldn’t increase no matter how many enemies they took down.

A pack of Griffins would probably work well enough, but, like, I just didn’t see the point of trying to find the value in using them. There was no reason for me to go out of my way like that, especially when my pet army led by Rir was more than enough in terms of fighting strength. That didn’t mean they *couldn’t* fight, though, and combined with the fact that they were mean-

looking sons of a bitches, a Griffin would be plenty to defend against humanoid opponents. It would probably lose against someone as strong as Nell, but I didn't see the need for planning the empire's defenses to that degree.

"This is a Griffin. Fairly powerful. Your dude, Runougil, could probably take it down easily enough, but it should hold its own against a humanoid with average strength. Five of them together can take down a War-level monster."

Nodding, the Demon King stared intently at the Griffin that was awaiting orders.



“Very *nice*… Its strength *coupled* with its appearance should provide us *ample* defense. I’m thinking the *best* place to position them would be the *castle* grounds and *this* region. Would you *kindly* summon *ten* of them for me? I’ll *pay* you.”

“Nah, no need. I’ll give you the power to command them, so you can use them however you want.”

“Are you *certain*?”

“This country’s mine, right? So this is just part of the job.”

I wasn’t so hard up for funds that I wanted to do business like this. In fact, I didn’t even need money. Where the heck would I even spend it? After all, a demon lord’s life was a laid-back one.

“Hmm… All *right*, then I *accept* your generous offer. Such a *gift* means that I, *too*, need to work hard to be *worthy* of it, hm?”

“Good shit. That was actually my goal all along. Since you already know how much I’ve busted my ass for you, this puts pressure on you to stop slacking off. Genius, right?”

“Heh. A *clever* ruse *indeed*. One that I *fell* for, hook, line, and *sinker*, as you would say.”

I summoned the golems the Demon King had ordered as we bantered, and while I was teaching him how to use them, a soldier approached us.

“My liege, Lord Yuki, might you have some time to spare?”

It was Runougil.

“*Hello*, Runougil. Can I *assume* everything is *ready* on your end?”

“Right on the mark, Your Majesty. The prime minister of Reauxgard will be arriving in a few hours, so I thought it prudent to ask Lord Yuki to make his preparations.”

“Roger dodger. All right, Demon King, use them just like I showed you. You can also grant others the authority to command them. Basically, you’re the boss here.”

Then, I left them behind.

Time to get to work. Finishing this job meant the end of all the miscellaneous crap I had to deal with for the Empire. I planned on stopping by occasionally in the future, but after this, I’d let Fynar and the others run the show for a while. Maps would let me know if any foreign enemies or monsters invaded, so I’d just sneak in and take care of them if or when that happened. Also, since I didn’t want anything to do with putting down rebellions and whatnot, I had my fingers crossed that the Demon King’s plan had paid off and convinced the country’s citizens that it was

better to obey than disobey. I could only hope that the country the other monarchs wanted, where race didn't matter, would become a reality.

Okay! Let's wrap this up quickly so I can fulfill my promise to Leila's teacher to hang out at the ovine village!

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After the demon lord and his own subordinate left, Fynar muttered to himself as he gazed at the creatures standing still around him.

"*Goodness*... Demon lords are *amazing*, aren't they?"

The knowledge struck him again. Of the power in a league of its own. Yuki had handed these creatures to him ever so nonchalantly. Perhaps because he thought of these *weapons* as nothing more than *trifles* that he could destroy on a whim.

Fynar recalled the five monsters Yuki had brought with him, a fenrir leading the group. The creatures standing before the Demon King possessed strength vastly inferior to theirs, yet to the demon lord, they were sufficient tools for use as protection. In other words, he didn't understand. He had said Runougil could defeat one easily enough, but he simply didn't understand what a feat that in itself would be.

Runougil was essentially Fynar's right hand. With the loss of all of his magic in the war, some might say that his fighting prowess had been halved. Even so, he remained one of the demon world's greatest warriors, if not *the* greatest. If the conditions were right, even the man he was now could fight any army and win.

It had taken Runougil approximately two hundred seventy years to become as strong as he was. Yet the demon lord could summon autonomous weapons possessing the same level of power like it was nothing. Based on the young man's casual attitude, Fynar wouldn't have been surprised to learn that he could produce one or two hundred, perhaps even a thousand more of the golems. He understood now how the Reauxgard Empire, a country that, like Yuki, was in possession of a dungeon, had developed to this extent.

His silent contemplation continued.

There was no longer any nation of mankind capable of matching Yuki militarily. If they were to form another coalition

like they had on this latest occasion, it might lead to fighting, but if that were to happen, everyone would be willing to risk their lives to make peace with him. They would have to be, because making an enemy of him amounted to a crisis that would threaten a country's very existence.

In this world, beings far stronger than mankind existed. Many of them, no less. Some, like his wife, the Supreme Dragon, were powerful enough to destroy several countries on their own. And his influence was now approaching that point.

Several factors likely determined the outcome of that war, yet the biggest was whether he was an ally or an enemy. Fynar knew he was right. Therefore, it had been a wise decision on Shendra's part to cede the country to him the moment defeat had been assured.

The former emperor had undoubtedly foreseen what was to come and taken the necessary steps at the time. As the one who'd started the war, he was destined to be executed. He had already been moved to the demon world, where he awaited his final judgment in a jail cell…

"*Killing* him is such a *waste*, though."

His mind churning with strategies for the future, the Demon King smiled delightedly.

Side Story 2: Demon Emperor

It was a shocking sight.

“Take this!”

The demon man—the demon *lord* swung his sword down, the incredibly long and unusually curved red blade glinting as he did. He didn’t know how much power was in the swing, but with a single stroke, he sliced an arm off the creature. A subspecies of the wyvern, the monster had been a tremendous cause for concern for the imperial army.

The monster’s agonized screech echoed everywhere. Rage suffused its expression as the beast unleashed some sort of magic. However...

“Grr!”

In the blink of an eye, a massive wolf under the man’s command raced toward the monster and tore off a piece of its wing with its teeth. Another shriek rent the air.

The battle was one-sided. One man and one animal were overwhelming the wyvern creature. The fight went beyond any normal mortal’s comprehension, and he—Reauxgard’s prime minister—watched it unfold with dazed eyes.

The monster had settled in the mountains not far from the imperial capital roughly a year ago. As a result, the nearby roads had become impassable, and the country had suffered considerable financial damage. Moreover, the change in the ecosystem had negatively affected other monsters inhabiting the region.

Though not many direct casualties could be attributed to the creature because it resided deep in the mountains, reports had still filtered in regularly. Of course, the empire’s leadership hadn’t sat idly by waiting for more death and destruction. They had dispatched the army on numerous occasions to hunt it down, but it possessed an intellect proportionate to its massive size. Each time, it had fled or destroyed the imperial military units, and either outcome meant that they had failed.

“Now is not the right time. So long as it remains in the mountains, leave it be.” With that order from Emperor Shendra, they had left the monster to its own devices.

That very wyvern-like creature was, at this very moment, being forced to dance on another's palm, overwhelmed by the man's power.

"…"

That man defeated us. That man triumphed over Emperor Shendra, our clever, tenacious lord. That man…is our next monarch.

The prime minister knew that the nonhuman races of mankind had many physical and magical advantages. *That*, however, went far beyond mankind's limits. He had heard the reports from the war, but this far exceeded his imagination.

Devil.

They had to avoid making an enemy of this man at all costs. He could see that now. Emperor Shendra, His Majesty, had surrendered his throne precisely because he had understood that. He had bound the man by using the Reauxgard Empire. With profit and reason, he had forced the man to lower his sword.

If they had been dealing with an irrational beast who could not understand the law or logic, his tactic wouldn't have worked. But he had known that wasn't the case from their previous meeting. At the time, the man had looked wild, and the short-tempered Minister of Military Affairs had been completely fooled by his appearance. However, the prime minister had seen the calmness in the man's eyes simply by looking at him.

Judging by their attitudes, the monarchs of the other races trusted him. They hadn't flinched at all at the sight of his violent behavior. They had left everything in his hands.

If he was truly nothing more than a reckless maverick, he would never show it. So there was no doubt that his presence alone was powerful enough to make anyone break out in a cold sweat. Yet he was likely the type to act with some sort of strategy. Moreover, in order to avoid being preyed upon, one had to always be a step ahead—the prime minister abruptly realized that his thinking was completely misguided.

Tactics didn't matter when it concerned the man. Just like he had said during the conference, if he wanted to crush them, he could do so. Easily. The fact that he didn't simply meant that he found it beneficial to keep them alive instead of having them dead. If there was no longer anything he stood to gain from keeping the nation running, there was a serious possibility of a future in which the prime minister and his fellow citizens would

be exploited and squeezed to death. When it came to national interest, there was no room for lip service.

Furthermore, they were of different races. If coexistence became impossible, the end result for one of them would be extermination. Responding to his schemes with schemes of their own would only lead to him viewing them as a nuisance, at which point he would simply destroy the entire country. They could *not* face such a future.

At present, there was growing dissatisfaction, anxiety, and animosity toward nonhuman races walking around the streets as if they owned the place. There were no problems now because their country had lost the war, leaving the people depressed, but no one knew what would happen as time passed.

No. He could actually say with certainty that *something* would happen.

Originally, this nation had held an exclusionary ideology toward other races in order to increase unity within the country. It had worked especially well during wartime. However, at a time like this, human supremacist values undoubtedly presented a hindrance. If the people were to start some strange antiestablishment movement or engage in acts of terrorism, he wouldn't be surprised to see any resulting tragedies. In all likelihood, they would be crushed without mercy.

"Don't defy me. You will *obey me. As long as you do, I'll protect this country from any threats. That's what I promised your former emperor, and I'm sticking to it."*

The man's words flashed through the prime minister's mind. He didn't know how much faith to place in them, but if the demon lord truly meant them, then this country had acquired a powerful protector. What an easy condition, if all they had to do was obey without question.

"Your Majesty…you were a truly great man."

This country that Emperor Shendra protected. I can't allow it to perish in my generation.

That man, both demon lord and emperor. The Demon Emperor.

Whatever choice we make now, the undeniable fact is that we *are the ones who started the war. For that, we must be the ones to clean up our own mess. The first thing I'll do upon my return home, then, is start laying the groundwork with the aristocracy.*

Chapter 3: Getting Ready to Travel

I gathered everyone in the dungeon together and told them my idea.

“A family trip to Leila’s village?! I wanna go! I wanna gooo!”

“It might be a bit of an undertaking. But! I promised her teacher we’d visit, so I really wanna follow through on that.”

“Hmm. I think it is fine so long as Leila is amenable to the idea. Naturally, we have no objections either.”

“If it’s no trouble to you, Master Demon Lord, I would gladly accept. Living with everyone for so long has made me long to see my younger sister’s face, you see.”

Lefi patted Iluna on the head. The little girl couldn’t contain her excitement as she listened to our conversation. Leila pressed a hand to her cheek as she replied to my first wife, her expression nostalgic.

By “younger sister,” she must’ve meant the girl we’d met in the demon world a while back. She’d been a smart, energetic little thing. Though they weren’t related by blood, I remembered how close they’d been, acting like real sisters.

“Then it’s settled! Let’s start making our preparations after we double-check with Nell about her schedule.”

Nell had gone back to work after Lew and I got married, so I’d decided that we’d go when she could take some time off. But also, now that this esteemed demon lord was a rather important person in a rather important position, I was thinking about abusing my authority if her job dragged on too long! Except I had a feeling she wouldn’t like that kind of thing, so if something urgent cropped up in the Kingdom of Alisia, I’d secretly help out behind the scenes and balance the scales that way.

Having said that, I kinda doubted any new crises would show up. I mean, peace had *just* returned with the war having ended not too long ago. The only possibility I could come up with was monsters normal armies couldn’t deal with. Beyond that, though, things would be fine.

“I’m so excited to see the ovine village! They’re a clan of scholars, so they’ve gotta have all kinds of interesting research materials! And, my lord, I’ve heard they’re in the tourism

business as a way to fund their research!"

"Ooh, that sounds fun. Then, Leila, you'll be our official tour guide. You can take us to all the great spots!"

"Tee hee hee. Understood. I shall endeavor to delight you all when we arrive in my hometown."

"A trip! We're going on a trip! Eek, I'm so happy!"

"It's...the first time we're all going together. I can't wait."

"Is trips that fun?"

The wraith sisters tilted their heads curiously after Shii asked her question. While Iluna and En looked excited, the dungeon summon gang seemed confused since they'd never left the dungeon. *Heh heh heh. You're gonna learn the true joy of the trip once we're actually on it. Just you wait...*

"All right, folks, now that we've decided, let's get a move on. Leila, the ovine village is in a region near the demon world's seaside, right?"

"Indeed it is. A three-day journey if you and Lady Lefi were to fly there. On foot, I would estimate a month or so."

"What say you, Yuki? Such a long journey will exhaust the wee ones."

"Nuh-uh! I'm so excited right now that I feel like I'm gonna explode!"

"You say that now, but trust me when I tell you that a journey spanning many days is tiresome. When you lot play in the meadow, you are half asleep by evening. This would be leagues worse."

"Hmm, hmm, hmm! Maybe you're right. We *do* feel tired after playing lots."

Iluna hummed thoughtfully when Lefi tried reasoning with her. *So cute.*

Lefi was spot-on, though. We definitely needed a comfortable method of travel since the trip would take a while. The adults could put up with some degree of inconvenience, but it would've been awful to force the little-girl gang to do the same.

"Hmm... Hey, wait a sec."

Come to think of it, one of the people I knew from the recent war operated an airship. The military dude we'd run into on the way to the Dragon Hamlet who'd also helped us out in the war itself. *Going forward, it'd probably be a good idea to have at least one vehicle on hand. But for now, should I just use my network and get the ball rolling?*

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I hadn't planned on coming back for a while, but ya boy needed an airship, so here I was again in the Reauxgard Empire.

"Yes, of course."

I'd managed to finagle an appointment to see Genaus Lorraine, a member of the armed forces of the Ellane Allied Federation and the captain of one of its airships. He agreed to my request without hesitation.

"Uh, I know I probably shouldn't push it, especially since I'm the one who asked, but are you *sure*?"

"Even before the war, I was indebted to you for saving my vessel and crew, Master Yuki. Ergo, I have been keen on returning the favor. This is the perfect opportunity to do so, for we have business in the demon world as well. The Lord of the Demon World showed great interest in our airship technology, and after negotiations, we agreed to give him one. Should you be willing to accompany us in transporting it to him, I'd be glad to make a detour here and there for you."

"Whoooa... You guys really sold him an airship? You know he's tenacious as hell, right? You sure you made the right move?"

"It goes without saying that the contract we made with him benefits us a great deal as well. In exchange, he and his people will be teaching us a number of secret arts and magics. The time for humans to look up at the sky is over. From now on, we shall soar through it like the other races."

Then, he grinned happily.

Sheesh. How are the people of this world so dang cool all the time?

"Not to mention that it will be a tremendous honor for my ship to have the Demon Emperor aboard. But best of all, we'll be safe. On the off chance monsters attack us, we'll sail through unhurt because of you, eh?"

"Bet. I'm expecting the VIP treatment, then. You won't have to worry about any Calamity-level monsters either."

Because Lefi was coming with us, of course. She'd been calling herself weak ever since she'd found out that she couldn't go back to her dragon form, but the woman had apparently been training on her own to control her power output. For a while now, I'd seen her pop up here and there as a blip on Maps, monster hunting in the western area of the Demonic Forest.

Having already established supremacy, the dragon had started learning the art of fighting. No matter what anyone said, she was now the strongest for that exact reason. She was beyond anyone's reach. I could search the world from top to bottom and never find another woman as amazing as her. The only ones who could give her a run for her money were my other ladies.

"Ha ha ha! How reassuring to hear. My people and I shall depend on you should the worst occur. Now, why don't we plan our departure."

"Sounds good. Let me know what works for you and we'll take it from there."

And so, the captain and I discussed our schedules in detail.

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"All right, peeps, say thanks to these nice folks. They'll be taking us to the demon world."

"Thank you, uncle and friends!"

"Thank youuu!"

"We…are grateful."

After Iluna, Shii, and En thanked the group, the wraith triplets bowed their heads in gratitude.

"You're most welcome, young ladies. Hmm, you all have such unique personalities. More unique than I'd anticipated… In any case! Men, at attention!"

Following the airship captain's signal, the soldiers of the Ellane Allied Federation lined up behind him saluted us crisply.

"Wooow! So cool! Yukiki, they're so cool, huh?!"

The military personnel smiled in response to Iluna's innocent remark. *Yeah, I totally understand how you guys feel.* My kids were beyond adorable.

At the moment, we were in Alfiro, the frontier city in the Kingdom of Alisia I'd been to countless times. More specifically, we were in the huge field outside the city walls. Genaus and his people had come all the way here to pick us up since he knew we lived in the area.

"Thanks in advance for hosting us for the next few days, Cap. As you can see, we have a whole bunch of kids, so forgive us if things get a bit noisy."

"Heh. Not a problem at all. Though I *do* have a question, if you

don’t mind my asking. Those transparent little ones, what sort of creatures are they? Wraiths, perhaps?”

“Oho, good guess. You’re spot on.”

“Ahhh, I see, I see… Charmed. Absolutely charmed. And what of the light blue young miss? She doesn’t seem to be of mankind…”

“Cute, right? They’re all part of my family, and as you can see, they’re just kids. They would never, ever hurt anyone, so you don’t have to worry on that front.”

“Hmm… I realize it might be a bit late to say so now, but it suddenly truly struck me that you are, in fact, a demon lord, Master Yuki.”

He smiled ruefully before greeting the adult gang of our family.

“Madams, I’m Captain Genaus Lorraine of the Ellane Allied Federation. Master Yuki saved our lives. Though this journey is but a small token of our appreciation, we shall endeavor to make sure it’s a pleasant one for you all. Please don’t hesitate to let us know if we can be of service in any way.”

“Yes, thank you. We will be in your care for the duration. Should you and your people sense something amiss, do inform us. I am certain Yuki has already told you, but we will ensure everyone’s safety during the trip.”

After Lefi replied to him, the airship captain led us on board.

“Wooow! So this is an airship! I’m sooo excited!”

“Amazing! It amazing! Like Master’s castle!”

“Yup… I’m super excited too.”

Thrilled by this new adventure, the little-girl gang oohed and aahed as they checked out the airship’s interior. The mischievous wraith sisters were clearly itching to get up to their usual tricks as they flew around inside, but they also understood that pulling pranks would cause issues, so it was obvious to me that they were holding back. *Might be a good idea to have them possess their dolls while we’re on the ship.*

Not that I didn’t understand their enthusiasm, though. I couldn’t contain my hype either, and I’d already ridden in airships twice. To the kiddos, this place must’ve really felt like an amusement park or something.

“Hey, Cap, this airship is different from the one I was on last time, right? This isn’t for military use?”

“Indeed. It’s a passenger ship. Evidently, the Demon King was

much more interested in the airship's transportation capabilities than its military ones. While its speed is inferior to the ones you boarded on previous occasions, Master Yuki, it makes up for that lack through its carrying capacity and comfort."

The one I'd ridden in during the war had been pretty bare-bones. A single glance at its interior had been enough to tell me it was a military vessel. But this one was different. The piping was hidden as much as possible, and the corridors were fairly wide. Carpets even covered the floors. Plus, there was lots of lighting inside to help make it easier to pass the time during long trips.

"Wow... I can see why the girls are excited. I'm feeling a bit enthused myself."

"Yeah, I agree. Humans sure are amazing for being able to make something this big fly."

"I concur. Humans are very good with their hands, hm?"

"I wonder what principles underlie its ability to fly. While I believe magic is the motive power, there must be something else involved for a vessel this size. Could that elongated sphere be responsible for keeping the ship afloat?"

My family's adult gang chatted with each other as they also inspected the inside of the airship with interest. One of the women's eyes were burning like crazy with curiosity, and I sincerely hoped she didn't actually ask them questions to satisfy her inquisitiveness because I was pretty sure any kind of specs related to the airship were military secrets. We didn't want to trouble our hosts, now did we?

By the way, Nell, the only one in our household who worked in the world outside, had managed to fit some time off into her busy schedule so she could join us on the trip. The only caveat was that she'd been assigned a job to complete during the trip itself, so she needed to stop by the demon world to see the Demon King. He'd been in the Reauxgard Empire until not too long ago, but he was apparently back home now. That must've meant things had calmed down a little there.

"Master Yuki, we'll be taking off soon. Would you like to observe?"

"Hell to the yes! I'd definitely appreciate you showing my kids all kinds of cool stuff."

"Ha ha! Very well. Please follow me."

The captain led us to the airship's bridge. A few of his

subordinates were already there, and they gave us sharp military salutes when we entered. At his “At ease!” they relaxed their postures.

He raised his voice to call out an order, a grin on his face as he watched us looking closely at everything in the wheelhouse.

“Prepare for takeoff! Ignite the engines!”

His crew moved briskly to obey, their movements practiced. With a deep rumble, the airship’s engines growled, and for a moment, it felt like my body was being dragged down. When I looked out the windows, I saw the surrounding scenery get farther and farther away as the airship went higher and higher in the sky.

It isn’t nearly as loud as last time, huh? Maybe they put soundproofing barriers inside.

“Wooow!”

Everyone in my family said the word in unison.

“Incredible… So this is the view you two always enjoy, Mr. Yuki, Lefi?”

“Gah ha! I suppose you could say that.”

“Oh jeez, I just realized that we’re *actually* flying through the sky… Th-This ship isn’t gonna go down, right?”

The captain answered Lew’s question with a chuckle.

“Ha ha ha! While I won’t deny that we almost crashed on one occasion, thankfully, Master Yuki saved us. So fear not, madam, for even if we find ourselves in the same situation again, we’ll be just fine since he’s here. Now, allow me to show you to your rooms.”

He seemed to be entertained by his passengers as he led us away from the ship’s bridge. I got the feeling our airship voyage would be a lot of fun thanks to the captain’s playfulness and energetic, service-oriented mindset.

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“Whoooa… The clouds are *below* us!”

“That one look tasty!”

“Yup…like cotton candy.”

“Yuki, I wish to eat cotton candy.”

“Jeez, Lefi, you’re worse than the little-girl gang… Here.”

“Awww! I’m jelly, Lady Lefifi!”

“Ladies, please, settle down. I have enough for everyone, of

course. Come on, get in line."

"Yippee!"

"Yaaay!"

"Hooray..."

I took out a bunch of cotton candy from Inventory and gave it to the little girls one by one. For the wraith triplets, who couldn't physically eat anything, I'd packed balls of magical cotton candy that Leila and I had made in advance.

"Girls, it's fine to eat your candy, but don't touch anything if your hands get sticky, okay? This isn't our home. We're just borrowing this room for the trip is all."

The girls responded affirmatively to Nell's words before happily chomping away at their cotton candies. She sure did know them well, warning them in case their hands got dirty instead of telling them to avoid letting that happen.

The airship captain had prepared two rooms for us, and we were in one of them at the moment. It wasn't all that spacious, but the interior decoration was beautiful. The bed looked plush and comfy too, like I'd fall right asleep the minute I got in it. I figured this was one of the VIP rooms. Just like Cap had said, this vessel had definitely been designed as a passenger ship.

"Sooo...how are things over there?"

"There was some improvement after using restorative magic. However, I don't think there's much we can do about this other than persevere."

Leila responded to me with a wry smile.

"Ugggh... I'm so jealous you're all fine..."

Lew mumbled groggily from the bed where Leila was nursing her. The airship's shaking and the noise and vibrations of the engines had taken her out earlier. As a therianthrope, her sensory organs were much more sensitive than the rest of ours, so unique environments like this had to be particularly tough on her.

"Lew, you have only yourself to blame for your condition. This is the result of you fighting the ship by tensing your body overmuch. Cease resisting its movements."

"E-Easier said than done..."

"LewLew, I use my healing magic on you!"

"Thank you, Shii..."

I couldn't help but smile sheepishly. She really did look super out of it.

“All right, Lew, how ’bout you and I rest in the room next door? I think a nap should help.”

“Urk… I’m fine, my lord… Go have fun with everyone…”

“I don’t mind being with you either, so don’t worry about it. Lefi, hold down the fort here, will ya?”

“Understood.”

I slid one arm behind her back and the other under her knees to lift her into a princess carry.

“I…think I’m kinda glad I’m feeling sick now. Is that bad?”

“Ha ha! You’ll have even more fun once you feel better. Just like Lefi said, motion sickness usually happens when you tense up too much. Let’s have you take a nap and relax.”

I carried her into the next room, and we lay down on the bed together.

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While Yuki and Lew rested in the other room, Lefi took the rest of the dungeon residents to the viewing deck at the rear of the airship. They had received permission from the captain to tour the vessel on their own.

“Ah! It’s one of the army people! Atteeention!”

“Atteeention!”

“Atteeention…”

One of the airship’s crew members who just so happened to be passing by returned the little girls’ sharp salutes with a smile. They had been doing this every time they saw someone because Yuki had told them it was fine to. Lefi had been concerned that they would be getting in the way of their work, but judging from the soldiers’ smiles thus far, they didn’t mind at all, so she hadn’t cautioned the wee lasses. The crew members seemed to be enjoying the interactions as well.

“Oh, that reminds me. I still haven’t heard the tale of how you and Mr. Yuki saved these people.”

“Indeed, on the way to the Dragon Hamlet. Their vessel was under attack by monsters, so we came to their aid. Is that not so, En?”

“Yup… It was a festival of bugs, and Master and Lady Lefifi squashed them splat.”

“A festival of bugs! That sounds like sooo much fun!”

“Splat!”

Shii and the wraith sisters mimicked En.

“Ha ha ha! Bugs do go splat when you squash them. I’m of two minds. On the one hand, it would have been fascinating to see such a spectacle. On the other, I shudder at the thought.”

“Ahhh… Yes, I understand your reservations. There was nothing remotely charming about that particular festival, I can tell you that much for certain. Though I did not screech in fright like Yuki, the mere act of looking at them repulsed me.”

“Mr. Yuki *does* hate insects, after all. He screamed his head off when maggots crawled on his arm during our raid on the phantom ship dungeon. I found it quite disgusting as well.”

“Master…screamed when he saw a big black bug in the forest too.”

“As usual, a man of many weaknesses, eh? Leila, what *are* you doing?”

“Fascinating. So this is the layout of the interior. What a tremendous feat to build a structure that is the culmination of so much knowledge, and to build it so well using human hands. It wouldn’t be an overstatement to declare this technological progress revolutionary, hm?”

“Ah, you are the same as ever. How foolish of me to have asked such a question.”

Lefi nodded to herself. Leila was clearly enjoying herself, scrutinizing every nook and cranny with sparkling eyes, and that was all that mattered.

Thus, they continued walking through the rest of the airship, making sure not to interfere with the crew’s work. A few minutes later, they arrived at the viewing deck. It was surprisingly spacious, with all the walls and a portion of the floor fitted with glass.

“Wooow! This is amazing! I can see aaall the way down!”

“It so pretty!”

“Yes…magnificent.”

They stared at the sea of clouds below them. Through the rifts, they caught glimpses of the green earth, illuminated gently by sunlight. They could see the same view from the windows in their rooms, but not on this expansive scale. It was no wonder the little ones were awed as they ran to the walls and pressed their faces against the glass.

“Incredible. This is the world those with wings see? An incredibly moving sight indeed.”

“Gah… I-I think I’m a little scared. It feels like I’ll fall out at any second…”

“In the event you do, I shall pull you back, so do not fret.”

“Um, I appreciate it, but I’d much rather *not* go through that.”

Lefi chortled in amusement at Nell, who seemed to have lost her nerve a bit as she stared nervously at the view outside.

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“Such adorable little girls we have on board.”

“I feel the same. It’s my first time seeing children of other races, but they only made me realize that children are children regardless of race. Oh, although the wraith girls *did* surprise me.”

The airship’s crew discussed their unusual passengers while going about their tasks.

“I’m almost positive I’ve never seen such cute ones before. But wait, aren’t wraiths monsters who are born when a person dies but can’t pass on to the afterlife because of resentment? Do you think those children experienced such painful births too?”

“They’re different, apparently. According to what the demon man said, they’ve been wraiths since birth, meaning they didn’t have any prior existences. So no resentments or anything of the sort for them. They’re little girls exactly as they appear.”

“Wow… There’s a lot we don’t know about other races, huh?”

“Isn’t that the truth.”

The pair exchanged meaningful glances and smiled ruefully at each other.

“Honestly, though, life is just full of surprises. It wasn’t too long ago when humans and demons were at each other’s throats, but now, we’re on the path of reconciliation. I mean, look at all of us riding on the same airship at this very moment.”

“You can say that again. I really learned how politics works through all this. Still, thanks to that, we have such cute little ones on board, as well as their beautiful guardians. It makes me happy we can enjoy such an elegant journey for once in our lives.”

The smirking man’s coworker gave him a sidelong glance before piping up himself.

“I…don’t disagree, but you’d better not do anything stupid or weird, even by accident. The demon man may seem awfully

friendly, but don't forget that he's the current emperor of Reauxgard. He's obviously not a bad person since he's on good terms with our captain. That being said, if you blunder, he may very well decimate not just you but your entire bloodline."

"I-I know that! I'm not reckless enough to risk my life like that. I just want the little girls to say 'Attention!' is all..."

"Well, they *are* ridiculously cute when they do that. I'd like my naughty brats to learn from their purehearted ways."

"Ahhh, yeah, your boys are hellions, aren't they? But that's just how sons are, eh? Haah, I want to find a wife soon too."

"Hey, how about one from another race? Human women are always scared to pieces by your face, so why not try your chances with nonhumans? Who knows, maybe one of their good ones will take a liking to you."

"I... I'll think about it."

Those were the last words they said for some time as they focused their attention on their work.

A few years later, the man with the fierce look who had been unlucky in love until this point would find himself happily married to a therianthrope woman. All was well that ended well.

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Our journey through the skies proceeded uneventfully. Though motion sickness had knocked Lew out early on the trip, it gradually went away as I looked after her. She got used to the environment, and her condition improved enough for her to enjoy the view outside. Never mind that we'd been together the whole time because she'd been pestering me to nurse her back to health.

Before we'd made things official with the wedding ceremony, a part of Lew had always been reserved. But she hadn't held back with her need to be spoiled by me since. Let's just say I was beyond glad to have been born a man.

Despite our promise to take care of any trouble on the way, nothing actually happened, and before we knew it, we had already entered the boundaries of the demon world. The monsters had apparently tucked tail and run on their own, frightened by the massive airship. Wildlife tended to be afraid of unfamiliar things, so the attack the crew had suffered a while back was the exception and not the rule. And while belligerent

creatures like wyverns were known to attack occasionally, setting aside the Demonic Forest, it wasn't like demi-dragons could be found everywhere.

"Do you know the first thing I'd like to do when we get off this ship? Take a nice, long bath."

"Ooh. Yeah, I feel you. The trip was great, but man, do I miss real baths..."

I agreed with Nell, who absolutely, positively loved baths. I was pretty sure we were all craving a real bath at this point seeing as we'd just been wiping ourselves down during the journey. Leila's village apparently had a hot spring, so I really wanted to head straight there.

"I wanna rejooberate soon!"

Rejooberate? Ohhh, rejuvenate.

"That makes sense, Shii, since your color is fading a little!"

"Yup, yup! That why I wanna hurry to somewhere with water."

Wait, *was* her color fading? I honestly couldn't tell the difference, sooo...

"Ummm, does Shii really look that different?"

"Yukiki, you meanie! Of course she does! She doesn't look anything like her normal self!"

"Yup... She's not shiny."

The wraith sisters nodded vigorously in agreement with Iluna and En.

"That right, Master! Look close! I not shiny like normal!"

Cheeks puffed in a pout, Shii tugged demandingly on my clothes. *So cute.*

I did as she instructed and discovered that they were right. It looked like the light wasn't reflecting as strongly, making her less lustrous than usual. *Huh. Interesting. Today I learned definitively that Shii does, in fact, rejuvenate in water.*

"You're absolutely right, and that was my bad. You still have the same pretty light blue color, which is why I couldn't tell the difference."

"Reeeally? Tee hee hee. Then I forgive you!"

Shii beamed up at me, and I patted her head, relieved that I'd successfully managed to talk my way out of that. When I looked at the adult gang, they were all shaking their heads with rueful smiles. Turned out that I wasn't the only one who hadn't realized the change in her. But! It'd been easier to notice since the kiddos had insisted that something was different. So I'd leave it at that.

“Right, then. Ahem… Here’s the plan. Once we arrive at Leila’s hometown, the first thing we’ll do is take a bath. Leila, we’re counting on you to show us a good spot.”

“Of course!”

She nodded firmly.

“After that, we’ll spend the night, and then the next morning, Nell and I will head to the demon world’s capital with the airship captain and his crew. Lefi, you take care of everyone while we’re there.”

“You may leave it to me.”

Nell was originally supposed to meet with the Demon King on her own, but I’d decided to tag along. Now that we were in his domain and I’d also become someone of standing in the wider world, I figured dropping by to say hello was the proper thing to do.

“Come back fast, Yukiki and Nellie! We’ll be waiting for you! It’s hard to *really* have fun when we’re not all together!”

“Tee hee. Don’t worry, we’ll be fine. It shouldn’t take more than a few days. Make sure you have lots of fun even while we’re gone, Iluna.”

Nell responded to Iluna’s sweet words with a smile.

There was a knock on the door as we discussed a rough outline of our schedule for the days to come. I called out “Come in,” and the door opened to reveal the airship captain. He gave a slight bow before speaking.

“We’ll be arriving at our destination in an hour. Please prepare for landing.”

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“Whoa. So this is the ovine village, huh?”

The settlement stretched out along a mountain slope. A humongous building that looked like a university stood in the center. The rest of the buildings were built around it, spreading out to the left and right, giving it the vibe of a hidden village. And though I called it a hidden village, the population wasn’t small. It couldn’t be classified as a town per se, but even from the sky, I could tell right away that it was big for a village.

Judging by its architecture, it was clearly a planned area. The technology seemed to be really advanced compared to other parts of this world too. When I’d first learned that they were a

primarily woman-dominated society, I'd wondered if they'd built everything on their own. But then I'd remembered that magic was a thing that existed. Unlike Lefi's and my elemental magic, their magic was probably the theoretical kind that allowed them to build all sorts of things in a flash.

As we got closer, I got pretty conclusive proof of the villagers being the same race as Leila. I looked around and saw women with sheep horns appearing one after another, watching us with great interest. The fact that they approached the incoming airship with curiosity rather than fear of the unknown was a good sign of their race's characteristics.

"Leila. Your people are most…easy to read."

"Well, you already know our inquisitiveness is our raison d'être, hm? It drives everything we do."

"I still think you tower above them all, you know."

"I'm really quite average though, Lew."

I smiled wryly at Leila's usual nonchalant attitude.

Gonna call bullshit on that one. Even your own teacher said you're a handful.

By the way, the airship crew would be spending the night here with us too. Since we were all heading to the demon world's capital anyway, they'd adjusted their schedule based on ours.

After our vessel landed in a clearing a short distance from the village, we disembarked and started walking toward it.

"Wait…is that Leila?"

"That magical energy… I wonder if he's a demon lord."

"H-Hold on. More importantly, the pressure emanating from the girl with the horns and tail…"

The closer we drew to the village, the stronger its residents' curious gazes grew. And then, a familiar old woman approached us.

"My, my. What a dramatic entrance you've all made. I know I'm the one who invited you to visit us, but I didn't think you would come in the same ship we used in the war. Hmm, hmm, hmm."

Eldgalia, Leila's teacher, spoke, an astonished expression on her face.

"Madam Sage, it has been much too long."

"It has indeed, Leila. I always had the utmost confidence in you living your life to the fullest wherever you found yourself. Even so, I never would have imagined that you would serve a demon lord. Still, I suppose that's very much like you, isn't it?"

“Tee hee hee. I used to believe that even if God exists, theory can explain such an existence. However, I can honestly say that meeting Master Demon Lord and everyone else in our family is a miracle that transcends mere theory.”

Leila looked genuinely happy as she answered with a sunny smile.

Sheesh…of course it’ll make me happy too to hear you say stuff like that. A quick glance at the rest of the gang showed them smiling a little too.

“Hmm, hmm, hmm… In any case, what matters is that you’re all getting along famously. Also, make sure you pay a visit to Emyu. She’s been trying her best on her own despite her sadness over your absence.”

“I’ll do just that. I have missed her dearly too, you see.”

Her teacher nodded and continued.

“For now, show our guests around. Since I know them as well, let me know if you need anything.”

“Thank you very much, Madam Sage. All right, everyone, follow me to the hot spring so that you can relieve the fatigue from the journey.”

We did just that, following her into the village.

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“Ahhh… This feels amazing.”

Those words tumbled out of my mouth the second I sank into the hot spring I’d been waiting so long to get into. Bathing was humanity’s greatest invention. Yes, I was exaggerating, but I didn’t care. Like, c’mon, there was nothing that could heal the stress of travel better than this.

“Haah… Yes, this hot water is sublime. Hot springs tend to pop up in mountainous areas, and I, for one, am envious of those who call such places home.”

The airship captain replied to me. He’d submerged himself in the hot spring too, and he sounded totally blissed out right now.

“You *do* know this village is populated only by women, right?”

“Good gracious. Poison for men, eh? As a leader, I can’t help but worry that my subordinates will do something foolish then.”

“Don’t worry, Captain! I’ll be a gentleman just like you when I invite them to spend some time with me!”

“We’ll take inspiration from how you caught your wife, sir!”

“Let me make one thing clear. Do anything strange, and I’ll leave you to the authorities of this nation. Is that understood?”

Laughing, I joined in on their banter.

“Ha ha ha! Great to see such a tight crew. But yeah, having a wife is real nice. From what I’ve heard, it sounds like all the nations and peoples involved in the war are gonna have a lot more contact with each other, so now might be a good time to look for a wife, yeah?”

“Indeed, our country has also received plenty of requests for marriage interviews from citizens of other nations. Men, once this mission is over and we return home, you’ll have as many chances to meet women as you want. So be patient until then.”

The soldiers under the captain’s command let out excited cheers when they heard that.

“Speaking of, I want to know more about you, Master Yuki. First of all, well done on marrying so many lovely women. And the little ones are so clever, well-mannered, and sweet. Please, tell us your secrets.”

One of them called out to me as we were enjoying the hot spring.

“Yeah, my kiddos are the best, aren’t they? The important thing is to always be yourself when dealing with others. Having said that, in most of my cases, all I did was let nature run its course. Go with the flow, na mean? And I guess the *way* you meet someone is also super important.”

I spent my time chatting away in this sweltering sausage fest. Real talk, it wasn’t bad to have some manly man time every once in a while since I was always surrounded by women.

Side Story 3: Rir Around That Time

Right around the time Yuki and the others were enjoying their airship ride, Fluffrir, aka Rir, was relaxing in a corner of the Demonic Forest along with the four other pets.

“Grr…”

Frankly, he was bored. The five of them eliminated monster intruders as part of their daily routine, but without their master, who always came to them with unreasonable requests, and the rest of his family, life somehow felt a bit lonely. The other four had too much time on their hands too, and Rir knew they spent it lolling about with each other.

Things were lively with the master and his family around and lonely without them. What troublesome people they were. Just as he smiled ruefully to himself at his maudlin thoughts, he sensed something.

“A-Awoooo!!!”

Despite its obvious fear, a wolf raced toward Rir and his subordinates, clearly wanting to tell them something. Though it was a wild monster, it was also a member of the group Rir led in the Forest. Except for those in the part that Yuki called the “western area,” almost all of the wolf-type monsters living in the Forest acknowledged Rir as their pack leader.

Other monsters, such as the less aggressive, relatively intelligent ones, were also part of Rir’s monster army. They had joined in order to survive the harsh struggle for existence in these parts. So the reality was that a rather mighty force had been created.

From Rir’s perspective, he’d neither subjugated them nor willingly taken them under his command. They had simply decided to follow him on their own. But he’d also been unable to just casually disregard these creatures who admired him. As a result of simply leaving them to their own devices, the group had naturally formed anyway.

Though he always wanted to clutch his head in confusion at how such a situation had come about in the first place, in the end, he always looked after them. That was his nature as a worrywart wolf.

“Grr?”

When he asked the other wolf what was wrong, it answered him using primitive whines and rumbles since it couldn’t express itself clearly like Yuki’s monster summons.

It had apparently discovered injured humans.

As a general rule, Rir and the other four pets didn’t attack any species of mankind. One reason was because their master had instructed them not to. The other was simple: they were loath to fight anyone resembling Yuki and his family.

Whether the humanoids attacked first or Rir and his gang encountered them, they dealt with the trespassers by driving them away. The end. The other monsters in his pack also knew about this policy, and they, too, had learned to ignore man’s races. Thanks to their intelligence, they understood that the boss of their gang was friends with people, so in order to avoid offending him, they behaved accordingly.

And precisely because the monsters in his pack were aware of all this, the wolf and his friends had been torn on what to do when they saw injured humans unable to move. “If we leave them alone, they’ll just die a natural death…” “But our master’s master is a kind person, so…” Troubled over whether they should attack, this wolf had been sent to Rir to request his counsel on a decision.

In the event Rir or any of the other pets discovered an injured individual, protocol dictated that they scare off any monsters in the vicinity, then contact Yuki for further instructions. However, Yuki wasn’t here right now.

After thinking it over a bit, Rir growled a response back. For now, he wanted the wolf to lead him to the humans in question.

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“Eep!”

“Nh… My lady, please stay behind me!”

When Rir arrived, he found a neat-looking young lady and a woman wearing armor who looked to be what people called “knights” or what have you. Wolf-type monsters, all of which looked baffled by the situation, surrounded the pair. It seemed to him that despite the humans’ obvious enmity, the wolves knew they shouldn’t attack themselves.

In any case, he appreciated their logical, restrained response

to the situation and told them to step back. The monsters moved behind him, awaiting further instructions.

“Oh! I understand now! You’re the head of this group! If I take you down, can we get through this deadlock?!”

The knight woman pointed her sword at him as fighting spirit seethed from her for no good reason. Unbothered by her attitude, Rir sat down.

“Grr.”

Then, he smacked his tail a few times on the ground in a bid to tell her to calm down and encourage them to sit as well.

“Wh-What is this? You won’t attack us?”

“Um, R-Rahyon? I-I think that wolf is saying we should talk about this…”

“Grr.”

He bobbed his head up and down in agreement. His action stunned the knight. After several long moments in which she mulled things over, she finally lowered herself ever so slowly to the ground. However, her hand remained wrapped around the hilt of her sword, likely so she could draw it at a moment’s notice.

Well, in Rir’s eyes, his opponent was one he could kill in an instant. Her having a weapon didn’t really change how much of a threat she posed.

From all appearances, the two women looked like they’d run from pursuers into this forest. There were tears in their clothes, they had small wounds on their arms and legs, and they were generally dirty all over. Moreover, judging by the redness and swelling, the young girl’s ankle was probably sprained. Perhaps it was even fractured.

Had they been chased by monsters while on a journey somewhere? Or had they fled after losing a battle against other members of mankind?

Whatever the answer, Rir decided it made no difference to him and his pack. He called out to Seimi, one of the four pets, and asked the undine to heal the girl’s injury. Seimi, who could use restorative magic, nodded in a relaxed fashion and took the girl’s foot into her light blue body.

“Huh?! Ack!”

“So, monsters are monsters until the bitter end! You dastardly __”

The enraged woman knight stood up, but the human girl

stopped her.

“W-Wait, please! I… I think she means to heal me!”

“Absurd! M-Monsters that can use healing magic?!”

It was annoying to deal with every single outburst, so Rir ignored the startled duo and picked up a fallen branch in his mouth. With it, he carved the words Yuki had taught him into the ground. Perhaps it was because of his blessing of being a dungeon monster, but he could understand his master’s words, which had made it surprisingly easy for him to learn mankind’s writing system.

“Hmm… ‘Human, fighting, troublesome.’ My goodness, are these *words*?!”

“Th-This wolf can communicate with us?!”

Rir scratched out more words.

“‘City, near. Take, both.’ I-I see. You have our gratitude. We were riding in a coach when monsters suddenly attacked us, forcing us to escape into this forest. Our comrades are all dead, and— I don’t actually know if you understand me…”

He nodded to let the knight know that he did, in fact, understand them. He then called out to the humongous snake, Orochi, and asked him to take the pair as passengers. Obeying, Orochi slithered toward them and urged them aboard his trunk with a hiss.

Both the girl, her foot now healed, and the knight woman seemed perplexed. However, they finally, nervously climbed onto his smooth back. Once he saw them safely aboard the snake, Rir started running in the direction of the frontier city, Alfiro. He’d been there countless times by now and knew the route well. All of his followers in the immediate vicinity followed him.

“Wow! S-So fast!”

“Th-This is scarier than I thought!”

None were reckless enough to challenge their pack. Any monsters they encountered on the way heeded their instincts’ warning and fled when the group approached. And an hour later, they arrived near their destination.

“Grr.”

“Th-Thank you…”

“Thank you so much, Mr. Wolf!”

With their escort mission complete, Rir and everyone under his command returned to the depths of the Demonic Forest.

The pair left behind—a young, aristocratic girl and her

knightly bodyguard—spoke to each other as they watched them go.

“I had heard of the decree prohibiting entry into or interference with the Demonic Forest, but… It’s possible the country’s leaders know about that wolf, hm?”

“Perhaps it’s because they know he’s protecting the forest and don’t want to needlessly provoke him?”

“Perhaps. Not to mention the rumors about a demon lord in residence and nests of dragons lurking in there…”

“Whatever the reason, we must be grateful to that kind wolf.”

“You’re absolutely right, my lady. And thanks to him, I avoided the greatest shame any knight can suffer: letting their master die.”

The woman made the finest bow a knight could, then escorted her mistress to the city stretching out before them.

Their people celebrated their safe return home sometime later. During the party, the two talked about the wondrous wolf they’d met in the Demonic Forest. Their tale engendered mixed reactions among those who heard it. “There’s no way that actually happened.” “But what if it did? Considering they made it back alive from *that* forest, what if it isn’t a lie?” Naturally, their story created all sorts of rumors, which spread from one person to another. Eventually, the wandering minstrels regaled their audiences with songs of a “Wolf King.”

As the leader of the Forest Parade of One Hundred Monsters, Rir became a solid fixture in mankind’s pantheon of legends.

Chapter 4: Sightseeing

It was the day after everyone's arrival in the ovine village. After seeing Yuki and Nell off in the airship headed to the demon world's capital, Lefi and the others discussed their plans for the day.

"Now then... With Master Demon Lord and Nell away for a few days, what shall we do to occupy ourselves?"

"Leila, I really think we should show them around the facilities specifically designed for tourism! There are so many interesting things to do there, after all!"

Emyu, a young girl Leila considered her little sister, spoke excitedly. She had joined the dungeon group this morning. She and Leila had talked for hours after their reunion the night before.

"Ooh! I can't wait to see and do all the fun things, MyuMyu!"

"Fun things!"

"I'm...excited."

"Yes! Be excited! I'm sure you'll all enjoy yourselves too!"

It was clear from their conversation that she and the dungeon's little-girl gang were already friends even though, aside from En, less than an hour had passed since they'd met her. Children did everything at breakneck speed, including making friends.

"Then that is what we shall do. Though Yuki and Nell are not here, I have no doubt they will take in the sights together on a date at some point following their return."

"Ha ha ha! You're so right about that. My lord never lets things like that slide. So we should just have fun on our own."

Leila nodded in agreement with their sentiments.

"Understood. Let's see... Why don't we visit the specimen storage facility first?"

With that, they headed toward a large building situated in a section of the town. Leila and Emyu talked to them about their village on the walk. Once they stepped inside, they immediately saw *it*.

"Wooow! So cool! Those bones are sooo big!"

"Oh nooo! It gonna eat us!"

“Yes… I bet it’s super strong.”

A collection of bones from some unknown monster was on display. But it wasn’t the only one. A wide array of specimens were visible from the entrance. What was more, mock-ups of the creatures’ original habitats had been created, such as mountains, a forest, and even a flowing river inside the building.

Yuki would call this facility a “museum.”

“Tee hee hee! This facility was established by the ovine to swindle precious coin from tourists! It’s been updated over the decades as well!”

“Emyu, your vocabulary is expansive enough to use terms other than the horrid ‘swindle.’”

“Urk… I mean, this is a facility where guests are glad to spend their money!”

“Well done.”

“I do not think there is much of a difference…” Lefi said with a sheepish smile.

“You know, I’ve always thought Leila was pretty formidable, but that obviously applies to everyone in the ovine race, huh?” Lew noted thoughtfully.

“Well, since we’re essentially a clan of women, strength is a must.”

Leila beamed at them both.

“Come on, let’s go inside already!”

“All right, Iluna, all right. How much is the entrance fee, Leila? Yuki gave me an ample amount of the demon world’s currency, so I believe I should have enough.”

“Oh, you don’t need to pay since you’re with me and Emyu. We were personally involved in a number of these research projects.”

“Leila crafted many lovely specimens and supplied them to the facility, which allows her to tour it for free in perpetuity! I helped her with a few of them!”

“Wooow! That’s amazing!”

“I want see the ones Miss Leila and Emyu maked!”

“Me…too.”

“That is fortuitous news. And I, too, am curious about the objects you two fashioned.”

“Wow, Leila, you can do stuff like that too, huh? I seriously thought you specialized in sorcery or something theoretical along those lines.”

“Well, you aren’t exactly wrong since I do, in fact, specialize primarily in academic subjects. But there was a period of my life where I wanted to work with my hands, you see.”

“That’s so like you.”

They started walking around the building while chatting with each other. Eyes sparkling, they oohed and aahed like tourists over the various exhibits, which could be considered cutting edge in this world.

“All the specimens in this area are monsters thought to be currently extinct and rare creatures. At the moment, no further research is being conducted on them.”

“How do your people manage to ensure they do not turn undead?”

“A barrier erected around the building prevents even an iota of negative magical energy from forming.”

“Sheesh... It *is* kinda scary thinking about an undead transformation, huh? Wait, didn’t we eat this monster at home?”

“Oh yeah! That’s the one Yukiki hunted with EnEn and the pets!”

“Veeery yummy!”

“Yes...very.”

Emyu froze at their conversation.

“H-Hunted and eaten? Not only is this monster an illusion-type, but it’s also powerful enough to be classified as War-level. So how?”

“Weeell, Emyu, they inhabit the Demonic Forest. Hmm... Now that I’m home after experiencing it myself, I suppose that place *is* a bit...unusual.”

“Truer words have never been spoken. Oho, what have we here? I do believe I fought one of these two hundred or so years ago. How nostalgic.”

“That...is a Catastrophe-level monster, and not one that can be fought so easily. Madam Lefi, you *are* the legendary Supreme Dragon, aren’t you?”

Through her sharp powers of observation, Emyu had already ascertained Lefi’s true form. Now, she spoke with a faraway look in her eyes.

Incidentally, despite hints of fear, a fair number of ovine individuals, unable to hide their curiosity, had already talked to Lefi.

“Tee hee. Emyu, spend enough time with this lot and most

things in this world will cease to surprise you."

"It certainly does not hurt that your personality was never especially timid, Leila..."

The ladies enjoyed their tour as they conversed excitedly.

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Leigeghegg, the capital of the demon world. Nell and I had left Leila's village behind in the airship and reunited with the Demon King in this city.

"*Hello*, Yuki, Mademoiselle Hero. Fancy *seeing* you again so *soon*."

Demon King Fynar addressed us with his usual sunny smile in one of the audience chambers in the demon world's royal castle.

"Sup, Demon King. Blackhearted as usual, eh?"

"M-Mr. Yuki, don't be so rude."

"Heh heh heh. I am *always* myself. Since you, *too*, are now part of the circle of monarchs, I *suggest* you learn to *express* yourself through *sheer* force of personality as well."

Though Nell had worked herself into a tizzy over my casual insult, the Demon King's nasty smile never wavered as he retorted without missing a beat.

This was just how he and I rolled. While there was no denying that he'd helped me out a bunch and I could call him a good friend at this point, I never spoke to him respectfully.

"I'd *heard* you two would be *visiting*, but I didn't *imagine* you'd come by way of *airship*. Tell me, how *was* the *journey* on that vessel?"

"Tons of fun, yo. Traveling by air is the literal best 'cause it's fast as hell."

"I'm sorry we boarded it before you even had a chance to, Your Majesty..."

Chuckling, Fynar replied to Nell, who looked a bit uncomfortable.

"Ha ha ha! No, *no*. I'm not so *petty* as to complain about something that *trivial*. Especially as I *intend* to use it as a *transport* ship."

"Hey, thanks, man. Appreciate the thought. So does this mean you plan on developing airships here in the demon world too?"

"*Interesting* you ask, Yuki, since the *war* made the *superiority* of airships well-known. For a *long* time now, the strength of *winged*

races has been *indisputable*. However, the fact that *humans* have acquired a method to take *flight* means that the *technological* race will enter a *new* era. Once more, I'm *awed* by humans, who put their *intelligence* to the test *precisely* because they lack a *physical* advantage. *That* is what makes them *strong*. *I*, for one, am *exceedingly* glad we strengthened our *bonds* with them during the war."

Hard agree, dude. Humans' bodies were frail, so they *needed* to use every bit of wisdom and brains they had to survive as a race. That was how humans had become conquerors of the world in my old life too.

By the way, the airship captain and his crew weren't here with us. Right now, they were enthusiastically promoting the airship to the engineers of the demon world. Probably even explaining how to operate it.

Since our respective business here in the capital was keeping us separated, I made a mental note to thank them later.

The Demon King, clearly enjoying himself, looked like he suddenly remembered something and kept talking.

"Oh, *right*. Yuki, there's *someone* I want you to *meet*."

"Who?"

With his blackhearted smile, the Demon King said, "Please *enter*." to whoever was waiting outside the room. The door opened, and a man walked in. I knew him. I knew him *very* well, actually.

"Wha— Th-The emperor?!"

"Huh? You talkin' to me?"

"It has been too long, Demon Lord. You have my thanks for doing your duty for our people."

The man was Reauxgard's former emperor, Shendra Gandr Reauxgard. Taken aback by his unexpected appearance, I stood with my mouth gaping next to Nell, who looked confused.

"Uhhh... Didn't you, you know, *die*?"

I'd heard he'd been executed in order to prevent future disasters. I would've been lying if I said I hadn't been bothered by the news. But, like, he *was* the man who'd actually started the war, so there'd been no use crying over spilled milk, so to speak. And yet...

"Haah. Yes, I am technically dead. However, that is true of Shendra Gandr Reauxgard, emperor of the Reauxgard Empire. I am merely Shen, a researcher under the direct supervision of the

Demon King. In exchange for providing my knowledge, he's allowed me the freedom to research whatever I wish. His avarice knows no bounds."

"Now, *now*, Shen. You drove *quite* a hard bargain *yourself*. Well, once I *saw* your *laboratory*, I *realized* it'd be a *waste* to crush your talent. Thus, my *plan* from the *start* was to *recruit* you as one of my *researchers*. So long as you *accepted* my conditions, of course."

The two of them grinned at each other. Apparently, shady people got along real freaking well. In any case, it was obvious that the Demon King had spared the former emperor's life after whatever mysterious agreement they'd come to.

"Right... Well, if you guys have an understanding, then it's not my place to butt in. Good for you, huh?"

"Indeed. You have no notion of how absolutely fantastic it is to live my life how I please, with pesky things like governance left to others. I've learned that I am, without a doubt, a scholar at heart."

His expression looked much more energetic than it'd been the last time I'd seen him. Even I could tell how ridiculously happy he was.

"Ya know, you've got some serious balls to say that to my face seeing as you left those 'pesky things' to *me*."

"I simply entrusted the most suitable work to the most suitable person. Having the right person in the right place is never a bad thing, no?"

A corner of his mouth curled up in amusement as he replied nonchalantly.

Goddammit. Every single king and queen and ruler and whatever is a cheeky-ass mofo. Though this man was no longer an emperor, his attitude made it clear that he used to reign as one.

When I smiled ruefully, former emperor Shendra—no, Shen continued.

"More importantly, Demon Lord. At present, I'm in the midst of conducting research into dungeons. Ergo, my desire to speak to you on the subject."

"Whoooa... Not gonna lie, I'm interested in that too."

The dungeon. A veritable enigma. Despite being a demon lord, there was just so much I didn't know about my own dungeon and dungeons in general. My bet was that this man, as both the former emperor and a demon lord himself, must've had

questions about the enigma too.

His face the epitome of a researcher, Shen started questioning me.

“Demon Lord, what do you think a dungeon is?”

“Hmm… That’s a tough question. I think of it as a type of organism with a different biology than the rest of ours.”

“Ah, yes, a fair point. When I first acquired the authority of a demon lord, I also felt that sort of consciousness from my dungeon. This is pure speculation on my part, but I suspect that dungeons rank one step above us in the hierarchy of life.”

Above us in the hierarchy of life, huh? That might not be a bad way to describe it. A dungeon’s power was enormous. In fact, it was massive enough to be able to create worlds and beings of its own. A dungeon was an unmistakably different organism from my own concept of the word.

“A dungeon naturally exerts pressure on its caretaker, the demon lord, in order to expand the domain under its control. However, it’s natural for living beings to strengthen themselves in order to survive. In that respect, we can say a dungeon’s biology mirrors that of the organisms we’re already familiar with.”

“Yeah. Basically, it chooses to survive by strengthening its demon lord and coexisting with them, right?”

The former emperor nodded.

“Exactly. And yet, there is one thought I’ve always had about this concept known as a dungeon.”

With that as his preface, he stated what he thought.

“In *my* opinion, this world is simply one enormous dungeon.”

“Say what now?”

“To be clear, this is just my hypothesis.”

That was how Shen started his explanation.

“A dungeon is capable of manufacturing both strata and monsters. I don’t know if you and I have the same perception of what is defined as such since it varies from religion to religion, but, there’s no doubt that this is an act of ‘God.’”

God, huh?

“To be honest, I actually had the same thought a while back. That is, by definition, wouldn’t a demon lord granted those powers by a dungeon be classified as a god?”

“I see. Frankly, I’m not surprised we arrived at the same conclusion. Let me continue then. I reasoned that the creator of

this world and everything living in it is the same as what we call a demon lord. The two have equal authority and do much the same thing, although there's a great disparity in scale."

Gotcha... If you consider it strictly from the definition angle, he's not wrong.

"I guess...you're right, in a way. It's funny how those hated by the world are the same as God, depending on how you look at it."

"Heh. Agreed. Perhaps that in itself is due to the conditions under which a dungeon emerges. Dungeons can only be born in areas with high concentrations of mana, and most of the monsters that inhabit such areas lack reason. Naturally, this means many demon lords are likely to bare their primordial instincts. A demon lord such as you is by far the exception to the rule."

"Yeah, about that... How did Reauxgard's first emperor become a demon lord? Did he live in a mana-rich environment?"

Unlike the Demonic Forest, the Reauxgard Empire wasn't in an area where vast stretches of nature existed. My senses weren't sharp enough to let me tell the difference between thin and dense concentrations of mana, so maybe the region had enough mana to have created a dungeon. Then did that mean the first emperor had deliberately founded his nation in a place like that?

"Well, records state that the Reauxgard Empire was first established deep in a forest. From that point on, the trees were cleared out and the monsters exterminated to make way for a proper human settlement. It's highly likely that he used the power of the dungeon to expand his nation until it reached the status of an empire. The low concentrations of mana now suggest a high density in the past."

Whoooa, that's insane. Basically, what he'd done would be the equivalent of founding a country in the Demonic Forest. It was hard to imagine a plan like that succeeding, but the first emperor had clearly managed to pull it off with a bang.

"I have another question, then. Do you know how dungeon cores are created?"

"Yes. When the first emperor and a few of his comrades were in the forest, a throne room suddenly emerged, and a dungeon core appeared alongside it. Truly all very sudden, without rhyme or reason."

I flinched a bit in reaction to his words before speaking.

“To tell you the truth, I thought of something the time I defeated another demon lord—how *deliberate* the appearance of a dungeon core feels.”

That No Life King demon lord had written in his journal about a dungeon core appearing with pinpoint accuracy when he’d been swept out to sea in a boat and cast adrift. The same thing had happened to Reauxgard’s first emperor. Almost the same for me too, after I’d been summoned on purpose from another world to live in this one.

It was all too perfect to be a coincidence.

And that wasn’t all. The existence of the “Titles” category that showed up as a part of something’s stats. Truth be told, when I’d taken up the mantle of emperor of Reauxgard, I’d gained “Demon Emperor” as a new title. This title system left no doubt that there was some will or equivalent higher power outranking us.

“Fascinating… I also read some literature concerning demon lords while in the demon world, and it seems there are still cases of appearances that can’t be chalked up to mere coincidence. In fact, the most recent tome I perused contained an entry on a dungeon that emerged in the ruins of a destroyed settlement. There, a wraith bearing a grudge became a demon lord and caused tremendous damage.”

Which meant there were other examples too.

“Okay, but isn’t it kind of a leap in logic to go from all this to concluding that the world itself is a dungeon?”

“I have no rebuttal, nor do I have any grounds for my argument. However, I strongly believe a close resemblance exists between the concept we know as dungeons and the world in which we live. At the very least, a dungeon is not merely a living thing like the rest of us. I have no doubt it’s an existence that conforms to a higher set of rules.”

He said all this with an awfully serious expression, then continued.

“I’m not a theologian, but if we’re to unravel the mystery of ‘God,’ the quickest route would be studying dungeons.”

Everything he just said…is a guess. It’s pretty much just rhetoric. Plus, there’s no solid logic behind any of it.

But my intuition was telling me he wasn’t wrong. “God” probably existed. Somewhere *beyond* a dungeon.

“I so *hate* to interrupt, but need I *remind* you that I’m currently

hosting this audience for *you*? Hmm?"

The Demon King commented, his smile a bit strained.

"Ah, yes, indeed. Apologies. Thinking is much too fun, and I inadvertently lose myself in the process. Demon Lord. You see before you a simple researcher who has no need to antagonize others. Should you feel so inclined, you're welcome to visit me in my laboratory. In the meantime, I shall further deepen my investigation into the matter of dungeons as well."

"All right. I'll take you up on that. And don't forget to cherish this life you've been given."

"Ha. Indeed. As I have no plans to lead anything ever again, I'll live how I please."

He and I shook hands.

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After Nell finished the job her country had assigned her, we decided to stroll through the streets of the demon world's capital.

"The former emperor certainly was an interesting person, hm? He was very different from all the rumors, as I found him hard to dislike..."

"Yeah. That guy gives everything he does a hundred and ten percent, so it isn't easy to describe him in simple terms of good and evil."

He was a war criminal who'd started a war that had led to the deaths of so many. But that didn't necessarily make him a bad person. *It is what it is.*

Maybe he should've been held responsible for his actions, but the fact that the Demon King had already set conditions for sparing his life meant an outsider like me shouldn't be butting in. Of course, if relatives of those who'd died in the war were to demand, "Sentence him to death!" that would be a legitimate argument. Personally, though, I didn't hold any grudges against him. Anything beyond that point was none of my business either.

"You know, Mr. Yuki, I just remembered something from when we first met."

"Ooh, a story from when you were still a naive greenhorn?"

"Tee hee. That's right. When I was nothing more than a fool and a pawn. Do you think I've grown up a bit since then?"

"I'd definitely say more than just a bit. Nobody can win against

your sass now.”

“Gosh, you’re so mean!”

We grinned at each other. Then, I slid my hand into hers like it was the most natural thing in the world.

I wanted to get back to Leila’s village as soon as possible, but if we left now, we’d have to travel through the night. On top of that, there were no passenger coaches available, so Nell and I would be staying in the demon world’s capital today. We’d be staying at a nice hotel the Demon King and other high-ranking government officials used. Dude had been nice enough to reserve a room for us.

Happy day! I’ll make sure we enjoy it to the fullest.

The airship captain must’ve had a long day today too, so I decided that I’d wake up early and thank him tomorrow, and then we’d leave Leigeghegg behind.

“All right, it’s been a while since we had some alone time. Actually, maybe not. Either way, we’re the only ones here, which means we should enjoy our time together as much as possible.”

Nell smiled happily in response.

“You’re right. I feel bad, but I think I’ll take this chance to monopolize you, Mr. Yuki… You know, for some reason, I end up recalling so many memories every time I come here. Mostly of our time together.”

“Makes sense seeing as we went through a lot in the demon world. The fact that you’re totally fine walking hand in hand like this sure reminds me how much time has passed.”

“The situation here was so unsettled back then, hm? So it makes me incredibly happy to be able to walk with you like this.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

Snuggled together, the two of us disappeared into the capital’s darkness.

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The dungeon gang, sans Yuki and Nell, thoroughly enjoyed touring the ovine village’s various research facilities, taking simple classes geared toward people from the world outside, and eating the food the village had to offer. In short, they were having a blast on their trip.

Curiosity was at the heart of all things for the ovine race. Ergo, its members dug deeply into every single topic until they couldn’t

dig anymore. Because of their obsessive investigative drives, compromise was not a concept that existed for them.

But their inquisitiveness wasn't limited to just scholarship. It manifested everywhere in their village—the architectural styles of their buildings, their cuisine, the furnishings in their hotel, and more. Visitors from the outside world found all this and more unusual, which explained why the ovine village had so many tourists.

"You know, it makes complete sense to me that someone like Leila was born here. That said, she's obviously more curious than usual for her people."

Lefi picked up the conversational thread from Lew.

"Gah ha! Too many like Leila, and this village would fall to ruin eventually."

"Oh dear. How mean-spirited of you to say that, Lefi. While I acknowledge the intensity of my inquisitive nature, I *always* do what needs to be done."

"I am well aware. In point of fact, you are the most responsible of us all. However, should the administration of your village ever fall to you, you would flee from the responsibility, would you not?"

"Hmm, well, I must admit, I likely would. But if any of you were placed in the same position, you would react the same, yes? For example, Lefi, *you* ran from your people when you saw the signs that they would elect you as their next Dragon King. And then we have you, Lew, who also ran away from your home."

"Hmph. You are not wrong. I suppose from that perspective, we may all be more alike than we seem. After all, each of us fled our home to live our life how we please."

"Good point… And I actually am living how I want to! Because I met Nell and you, Lefi. Not to mention the others and my lord."

"I…agree as well. Thanks to my encounter with you all, and of course Master Demon Lord, I learned that I *can* live freely."

"Gah ha! Yes, indeed. If you look at that man, you will know what it means to live life the way you wish to, whether you like it or not. I am certain it is the same for Nell."

"Aha ha ha! You're so right, Lefi. It doesn't take long living with my lord to find out how much fun life can be."

As the adults chatted and laughed, exchanging meaningful glances, the little girls next to them expressed their opinions while enjoying the village.

“The ovine village is amaaazing! They have sooo many interesting things you can’t see anywhere else! Yukiki’s dungeon is super cool, but this place is super cool too!”

“Many, many, many cool things I hasn’t ever seen!”

“Yes…very interesting.”

Once the three finished talking, the wraith sisters floating in the air around them nodded vigorously in agreement. Emyu, the young girl whom Leila thought of as a younger sister, replied to them.

“Personally, I think you all are incredible too. Shii, En, Rei, Rui, and Roh. From my perspective, you’re all such intriguing curiosities. I wonder about your biologies…”

“The labyrinth is a wondrous system. Master Demon Lord used its power to give life to them. And that power is unmistakably worlds apart from the laws of nature we’re familiar with. An indecipherable unknown… Oh, that certainly has a nice ring to it.”

Leila discussed the dungeon with Emyu. Her sunny smile made for an interesting contrast to the fire blazing in her eyes.

“I think I now understand why you’ve chosen to settle down with them, Leila. Frankly, I found it odd that you would even stay in one spot for so long despite your ferocious curiosity…”

“Oh dear. Emyu, I believe I need to clear up a misunderstanding. Though the labyrinth has undeniably piqued my interest, I actually very much like it there. You see, I think of everyone as my precious family.”

Emyu looked a bit saddened by Leila’s beaming smile.

“Somehow, it’s like my big sister has gone somewhere far away. It feels lonely.”

Lefi was the one who responded to her words.

“Emyu. There is no reason whatsoever for you to feel lonely. Your position as Leila’s younger sister makes you a part of our inner circle as well. You are not alone, and you never will be.”

“Tee hee. It’s exactly as Lefi says. No matter what may come, I will always be your elder sister. From now on, it’s *your* turn to dedicate your long life to finding a place you can call home.”

“Yup, yup, MyuMyu! We’re friends too!”

“Friends, friends!”

“Yes…new friends.”

The wraith triplets followed after En, spinning cheerfully around Emyu to express the same sentiment.

“Thank you, everyone. I understand what I must do now. If I’m to be like Leila, I have to improve myself and find somewhere I love too!”

“I’ll improve myself lots too!”

“Me too!”

“Me…too!”

“Then three cheers for us as we all work on ourselves! Hip, hip, hooray!”

“Hip, hip, hooray!”

The little girls shouted in unison after Emyu and pumped their fists energetically in the air.



Watching them, the adult gang grinned in amusement. Then suddenly—

“Hmm?”

Ba-thump. Lefi pressed a hand to her abdomen when she felt something pulse inside her. Unsure of what it was, she tilted her head in confusion—but a few moments later, she figured out the answer. With surprise coloring her face, she whispered into Leila’s ear.

“Leila. Is there a physician in this village?”

“Yes, there is. I’ll take you there. Is something wrong, Lefi?”

“No, that is not quite it. I simply wish to have myself examined.”

Lefi seemed unable to contain the happiness overflowing from inside her. And yet a gentle air cloaked her. All Leila could do was stare at her with a puzzled expression.

◇ ◇ ◇

“We’re baaack!”

“We’re back!”

After finishing our business in the demon world’s capital and giving our heartfelt thanks plus a bunch of gifts to the soldiers of the Ellane Allied Federation, Nell and I parted ways with our allies and returned to the ovine village. It was already evening by the time we got back to the inn we were staying at, and the members of our family had just returned to our rooms too. They welcomed us cheerfully.

“Yukiki! Nellie! Welcome back!”

“Welcome back!”

“We…were waiting.”

“Yes, yes. A fond welcome to you both.”

“Welcome back, my lord, Nell! You guys have great timing! We were just about to head out for dinner!”

“I’ll ask the staff to prepare enough for you two as well.”

“Oh, sweet, thanks.”

“Thank you, Leila!”

Once everyone finished their greetings, they started getting ready so we could grab dinner. But just then, Lefi tugged on the hem of my shirt and whispered into my ear.

“Yuki, I have something to tell you. Might you spare a moment?”

“Hmm? Yeah, of course. What’s up?”

She studied my face closely, clearly looking for some kind of reaction. She seemed kinda hesitant, but at the same time, she was practically bursting with joy. The two extreme emotions duked it out in her eyes. I’d responded to her even though I found her attitude suspicious.

“Well, you see… Not here. Come with me.”

She took me to a spot where we could be alone. No one else was around us. As we stood there facing each other, my dear wife opened and closed her mouth a few times, waffling about what to say.

“So…how did everything go in the demon world?”

“Easy peasy lemon squeezy. We thanked the captain and his crew with both words and gifts.”

I’d given them two dozen bottles of Super Potion, the thing I used on the regular. That should’ve been more than enough as a thank-you gift. I knew it wasn’t the greatest idea in the world to just hand the stuff out willy-nilly, but they’d gone above and beyond in taking care of us. Plus, I didn’t want them to die, y’know? As soldiers of this world, sooner or later, they’d have the opportunity to use the Super Potions.

“How were things here?”

“Quite interesting, in fact. Especially the research facilities we toured. I could not help but think these are most certainly Leila’s people. We also saw many things that cannot be found anywhere else, which pleased the wee lasses tremendously.”

“Ooh, that *does* sound fun. Maybe I’ll take a gander with Nell.”

“Yes, I highly recommend it.”

This definitely isn’t what she wants to talk about. I didn’t rush her though. I let her take her time, and we talked for a while longer about a few other topics. Then, with a determined expression, my dear wife finally broached the subject on her mind.

“Yuki. There is something I wish to tell you. Do your utmost not to be shocked, will you?”

Lefi, usually a straight shooter, hesitated. It was unusual seeing her like this. But she mustered up her courage and found the right words.

“I am with child.”

I froze for a second before repeating the words back to her.

“With…child?”

“Indeed. I only realized myself a short while ago. I had one of

the physicians here examine me, and there is no doubt.”

With child. Pregnant. In short, she and I had made a kid together.

Right when that truth penetrated my brain, an indescribable happiness started bubbling up in my chest.

“Ha ha. Wow... Wow!”

“Gah!”

Without stopping to think about it, I scooped her up into a tight hug and spun her around like a maniac.

“A baby! *Our* baby!”

“E-Enough. You are squeezing me too tightly.”

“Shit, my bad. This means I’ll have to take better care of you from now on, huh? Double shit, a name! We gotta think of a name! Okay, how ’bout, uh... Wait, we don’t even know if it’s a boy or a girl, so—”

“Will you calm down, you imbecile?”

“Ow!”

She flicked me lightly on the forehead with a smile, then continued.

“The child is not yet here. Do not be so impatient, for dragons carry their young for a long time. Moreover, we will not know whether they are a boy or girl until after they are born.”

“Hrk... Okay, okay. How long before the kid’s here, then?”

“The birth will take place roughly two years from now. Although there is a possibility it might be a tad sooner since my current physical composition is not much different from that of a female of mankind. In either case, there is time yet. Even a physician cannot provide a more concrete estimate until I am further along. We must indeed make the necessary preparations, but that is a discussion for when the birth draws nearer.”

I see. At the longest, two years down the road, huh?

I could feel myself calming down as I listened to Lefi. But I still refused to let go of her. We stood there, my arms wrapped around her waist, and I asked her another question.

“Hey. Do you think this is the reason you haven’t been able to go back to your dragon form?”

Lefi had told me that she hadn’t been able to revert to her original form ever since she’d acquired the Humanized Dragon title. Now I wondered if her pregnancy was the cause.

“Yes, perhaps. We have, um, engaged in *that* activity, ahem, numerous times since the first, so in terms of the timing, the

likelihood is high.”

“Gotcha... Sorry. I know this is gonna be an inconvenience for you, but—”

“Stop. Do not say any more. This is *my* wish. All I feel is happiness. The word ‘inconvenience’ and any like it have never once crossed my mind. Of course, I understand challenges lie ahead. However, you will do your best to compensate, will you not?”

She grinned boldly, her eyes on me. It was a very manly smile, full of heart.

“Yeah. Yeah, I definitely will. I’ll go all out and put everything on the line to protect you.”

“Gah ha! But I must insist that you stay alive. Otherwise, I shall be very cross with you. While I appreciate your resolve, I would much rather raise our child *with* you. Do you not agree?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I sure do. Let’s raise the kid together. Okay! When we get back to the dungeon, I’ll make a nursery and strengthen the defense system!”

“Did I not just tell you we have plenty of time?”

She smiled ruefully before continuing.

“Well, there is nothing wrong with preparing early either. Especially when it is entirely possible that Nell or Lew may bear a child before me. If I recall, pregnancy lasts a year or so for mankind, yes?”

“Hmm, y-you have a point. I mean, if we think about it in terms of probability, it’s only natural to come to that conclusion, huh?”

So, um, Nell and I hadn’t, you know...*done the deed* yet because she’d been so busy with her hero work. But Lew and I already had. In other words, if Lefi wasn’t due for another two years, one of the other two could totally give birth first.

“All right, then setting everything else aside for now, I think we should at least come up with a name. We won’t have time to worry about it later.”

“Mm, your logic is sound. A name, eh... We must think of a good one. It is something a child will carry for the rest of their life, so there is no such thing as overthinking it.”

Deep in thought, Lefi tapped a finger on her chin. At that moment, she was so precious to me, and I cupped her cheeks with my hands.

“Lefi.”

“Hmm?”

She looked up at me. The most beautiful, important person in the world.

“I’m…crazy about you. I can’t help it. So much so that words just aren’t enough to describe what I feel. Seriously… Arrrgh! Times like this, I really hate how limited my vocabulary is.”

“Gah ha! I do not mind. What you have just said is enough for me. Your feelings have reached me. And they are the same as mine. The emotions surge inside me to such great heights that I cannot find the right words to express them. Being with you…makes me the happiest creature in the world.”

She wound her arms around my waist like how mine were around hers and laid her head on my chest. The warmth of two—no, from now on, three, right? A father, a mother, and a child.

I’m a father?

I would’ve been lying if I said I didn’t have anxieties out the wazoo. I’d never once thought of myself as good enough, much less superior. On the surface, it might seem like I was a half-assing, selfish guy who looked like he knew what he was doing, but that was just me fooling myself. No matter how much I pretended to act like an adult, the real me was far from being a good man.

Even so, I decided I was done. Enough was enough. Together with these women, I was determined to live a life where we supported each other through thick and thin.

I felt a deep, single-minded resolve hardening within me. *This is where I have to act cool, like a real man would.* I had to go hard, balls to the wall, pedal to the metal, teeth gritted. Risking my body and everything I was.

But all I really wanted to do right now was hold her like this forever.

“Mmm… We should probably head out now. I bet they’re all booing us since we were on our way to dinner and we’re making them wait by not showing up.”

“Gah ha! You are correct. Though I am loath to part now, I suppose we should return before they starve to death.”

With our fingers laced tightly together, we walked back to the rest of our family.

◇ ◇ ◇

After I found out about Lefi's pregnancy.

"Huh?! P-Pregnant?!"

Lew's voice hit a ridiculously high note at Lefi's announcement.

"I see, I see... I was wondering why you seemed so overjoyed, and now it all makes sense. Pregnancy, hm? Congratulations!"

"O-Oh my goodness! A child! It isn't unusual at all when you consider that it's just the right time for us to be thinking of that sort of thing. W-Well, it might be a tad early for *me* to think about it since, you know, I'm still working in the world outside..."

Lefi had confirmed her pregnancy only a few days ago here in the ovine village. Apparently, though, she hadn't told Lew, Leila, and the little girls about it. Turned out that she'd wanted to tell me first no matter what. It'd made me so happy that I'd hugged her over and over again, much to her annoyance.

After she'd told me, we'd gone back to the room where everyone was waiting, then headed out to dinner. Once we'd finished our meal, it was bath time. Letting the little-girl gang go first, we'd asked the adults to hang back, which brought us to now. We'd talk to Iluna and the others later.

"Um, wh-when are you going to give birth, Lefi?"

Lew was the first to ask a question.

"Honestly, I cannot say much on that front yet. Dragons carry their young for two years, but at the moment, my body is much the same as a normal woman's. Thus, I do not know which frame of reference to use for the term of my pregnancy. The only thing I can do is observe how it progresses henceforth."

"Oh, I guess that makes sense. Now that I think about it, you were using a transformation ability thing to change out of your dragon form, right?"

"Indeed. A strange way of existing, is it not? While I intend to learn as much as I can about childbirth and such, I think it likely that much of the knowledge will not apply to me."

Leila chimed in next.

"An excellent point. I realize it might be late to say this now, but I suddenly find myself extremely fascinated by your biology, Lefi. Technically, I could say the same of the dungeon's little girls as well, not just you."

"Well, no one can deny that the biologies of most of my little girls is a mystery for the ages, huh?"

I chuckled at my own quip. I was looking forward to seeing

how each of them grew up.

“Then this means we’ll need to change our lifestyles and be mindful of Lefi’s health! Oh, b-but, um… My lord, I-I’m also ready to have children with you whenever!”

“Good to know… Thanks.”

Her words made me happy from the bottom of my heart. The next person who spoke was Nell, who sounded anxious.

“Urk! I want children as well, but… I’m sorry, Mr. Yuki. I just have so much work left…”

“Nah, don’t look like that. I don’t mind waiting. Besides, that was a decision we made together from the get-go.”

I patted her gently on the head, and Lefi followed up with an affirming nod.

“On that note, let me say one thing. You are more of a worrier than we are, so do not let this facet of our lives make you lose your nerve. You live your life at your own pace. There is no need to rush to match ours. Do not forget that, Nell. Though we are family, you must remember to cherish your individuality as well.”

“What she said! You already have it tough with everything else you have to deal with, so don’t take that on too!”

“Thank you both…”

With tears in her eyes, she wrapped her arms around Lefi’s and Lew’s shoulders and pulled them into a tight hug. As for those two, they laughingly wrapped their arms around her back and stroked her comfortingly.

“Tee hee. Then as the family’s maid, I shall continue supporting everyone from the sidelines. Though I have a smattering of medical knowledge, I shall endeavor to expand what I know concerning pregnancy and childbirth during our time here in the village.”

“Gah ha! With you on our side, Leila, we are invincible. However, moving forward, the rest of us must do our part to match your power.”

“As long as we work together, things will work out! I mean, we’ve been managing just fine one way or another up until now, right?!”

“Mm, that’s true. We should certainly strive to work together even more from now on. Should we increase the number of meetings for the Council of Wives?”

“A grand idea. Just so you are aware, Yuki, you are not allowed to join us whenever the Council is in session. You may wait all by

your lonesome until we are done.”

“Yeah, yeah. I know.”

When I shrugged in response to Lefi’s deliberate shooing gestures, everyone laughed.

They talked a bit more before a comfortable lull settled. That was when I asked them.

“Sooo…what’s the schedule for tomorrow?”

Leila answered first.

“Ah, yes, that reminds me. Master Demon Lord, my teacher wishes to speak with you. If it pleases you, I would like us to visit the academy together.”

“Sure. Sounds good to me. Then…”

“Then we will take Nell on a tour of Leila’s village. Shall we all rendezvous once your business is done?”

“Okay, let’s do it. Look after the kiddos for us too, ’kay?”

◇ ◇ ◇

The next day arrived, and Leila and I were walking toward the building located in the center of the village—the Magic Academy. I found it really interesting that the ovine race had a schoolhouse at the heart of its settlement instead of a government building. That in itself was pretty telling of what kind of people they were, you know?

The Magic Academy contained all of their collective wisdom. So, unlike many of the other buildings designed specifically for tourists, only the ovine and a trusted few outsiders could even enter it.

“Leila, uh, are you sure I can go inside?”

“Yes, because my teacher herself invited you. She’s one of the highest-ranking scholars in the Academy among those with the title of ‘Savant,’ as well as one of the leaders of our village, so it’s no problem at all.”

“Wooow… I had no idea she was such a big shot. Speaking of, where do you rank in the hierarchy of scholars here, Leila?”

“I’m a Savant as well.”

“Dang, you’re a big shot then too.”

“Tee hee. Thank you very much.”

Leila giggled in amusement.

Just as we arrived at the Academy, I noticed a tiny person standing in front of the gate.

“So you came, Demon Lord! Hello again to you after all this time!”

“Oh, hey, Emyu.”

Leila’s younger sister welcomed us.

“I heard you gave my girls guided tours everywhere and played with them a ton. Thanks a bunch, kid.”

“Heh heh. Yes, yes, be grateful! Well, I enjoyed my time with them as well, not to mention that their very existence made my blood as a researcher sing…so is it all right if I spend time with them again after this?”

She sounded a little anxious when she asked me. I nodded with a laugh.

“Ha ha ha! Yeah, of course. In fact, it’d make me really happy if you hung out with them as much as possible while we’re here in the village. Thanks in advance!”

“Tee hee. How wonderful for you, Emyu.”

“Yay! Hee hee hee. You can entrust their enjoyment to me! Ah, but first, work! Follow me to the old hag, please!”

Leila and I followed her inside the Magic Academy.

The best way I could describe it was to call it the exact type of building you’d expect to find in a fantasy world. It was really cool. Apparently, they used spatial magic, because the inside was roughly twice as spacious as it looked from the outside. A bunch of orbs of light floated around to illuminate the place.

The bookshelves, stacked with books, towered almost to the ceiling. Just as I was wondering how they reached the books at the top, an ovine woman fiddled with a book that was on a pedestal down below. When she did, a bookshelf floated off the wall and settled gently onto the floor next to her. *Huh. So that’s how they do it. If you can’t reach the shelf, just move it, eh?*

One thing I’d noticed on the way here was that Leila’s village seemed to have a fairly large population, which surprised me considering their society was basically a matriarchy. Maybe the fact that demons had long lives had something to do with it. Even then, though, there had to be a few thousand of them. Four, probably? In any case, it looked to me like they didn’t lack for people. Another reason could’ve been that more scholars from the world outside lived here than I imagined. This village had to be a dream destination for researchers.

“Amazing… I can’t believe this is actually a school, Leila.”

“Our pride and joy, the world’s greatest institution of

learning.”

She replied with her usual sunny smile as she walked next to me. She looked even more cheerful today. Maybe she was happy because she’d been able to show her home off to us.

“Question, Miss Leila. You know how the other ovine women practically stare holes into me whenever we’re out walking? That’s just, like, a onetime thing, right? Because I’m not from around here?”

“Well, I would say it’s because you are you, Master Demon Lord. And naturally, that makes them curious about you.”

“I also think part of the reason they’re so keen is because you’re walking with Leila, Demon Lord. She’s famous in our village, after all.”

Emyu followed up on Leila’s comment.

“Really?”

“Gosh, you should have seen her when she used to live here. She would visit all sorts of people and pepper them with questions until they were completely exhausted. Then, once she was satisfied, she would visit her colleagues who are also scholars and discuss with them. Truly a slave to knowledge, she is.”

“Tee hee hee. Ahhh, the excesses of my youth.”

“Gotta be honest, I don’t really think you’ve changed much since then.”

“Actually, um, I was always with her, so I can attest that she’s not nearly as bad as she used to be.”

“Wait, the way she is now is ‘not nearly as bad’?”

Then how much worse was *she back then?*

“Goodness, you two are just awful. Is it so wrong to have an innocent desire for knowledge?”

Leila pouted, pretending to cry.

“Leila, sometimes innocence can be cruel.”

“Hmm. Perhaps I should take a turn for the wicked, then?”

“Uhhh... Pretty sure that would ruin my life, so let’s not. I like you the way you are now.”

“Oh my. Such lovely words. Might I boast about them to the others later?”

“Jeez, Leila. Remember when you used to be so nice and reserved? Those days are long gone, huh?”

“Would you like me to revert?”

“Naaah. Like I said, you’re fine the way you are.”

Emyu blinked in surprise as she watched the two of us banter and laugh with each other.

“I’ve...never seen you like this, Leila.”

“Tee hee... I must admit, I feel a bit embarrassed. Now, back to the topic at hand. Master Demon Lord, since we’re here, shall I give you a tour?”

“Ooh. Yeah, that’d be fun. Even though I’m already having plenty of fun as it is.”

And so, we continued on. Leila showed me around the Academy, and we eventually arrived at a room that looked like a laboratory. The two ladies went in without hesitation, so I followed them inside, and wow, was it incredible.

Judging from the height of the ceiling and the positioning of the walls, the room was probably huge, but it was so crammed with books and lab equipment that it was almost impossible to walk in. I was amazed that they’d managed to get all this stuff into it. This hodgepodge of items was proof of spatial magic, at least to me.

Only one person was inside the room.

“Thank you for coming, Demon Lord.”

Madam Eldgalia, Leila’s teacher, welcomed us.

“Apologies for the horrid mess. Let me make some room for you to sit. Give me a moment.”

When she slid her hand to the side, a mountain of books shifted by itself and the sofa underneath appeared. *Damn, that was some cool magic.*

“Madam Sage, please allow me to clean up here afterward.”

“Thank you, Leila. My lab has been like this ever since you left.”

It all made sense now. *Leila* must have kept this place clean before. If you traced the origin of how she’d gotten so good at chores, you’d probably find it in here.

I sat down on the sofa, and the first thing I did was thank her teacher.

“I appreciate everything you’ve done for my family, Madam Eldgalia. Thanks to you, my kids are having a blast every day.”

“Oh, no, not at all. I should thank you and yours too for getting along with our Emyu. I couldn’t be more grateful that she has friends. Her intellect makes her prideful, you see, which in turn means she struggles to build connections with the village children.”

“Goodness, Emyu. You still act like that toward them?”

“Urk… I-It’s not like I’m being mean to them or anything! B-But we don’t really have anything in common either…”

Leila shook her head in exasperation, and Emyu mumbled a response childishly.

“Ha ha! Here’s some advice, Emyu: it’s better to be friends with people you’ve known forever. Though considering you’re thick as thieves with my girls, compatibility is obviously important. You won’t always vibe with everyone, and that’s just a fact.”

“Th-That’s right! My personality is just too different from the other children here! That’s all it is! And I can’t do anything about it!”

Leila sighed softly at the young girl puffed up with pride.

“Master Demon Lord, you mustn’t pamper her too much. As usual, you’re too soft on the little ones.”

“N-No, you’ve got it all wrong. I didn’t say any of that to coddle her or anything.”

“Oho, so you’re the type who’s indulgent with children, hm, Demon Lord? While children are definitely adorable creatures, that is precisely why discipline is also important. I understand one of your wives is pregnant, so you two should take care when parenting.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am. We will. Wait, how do you already know that?”

“Why, because I’m the physician who examined the Supreme Dragon. Sorry you had to find out like this, but considering the circumstances, it was inevitable that I’d learn the truth. Anyway, this is for you. A celebratory gift.”

With that, Leila’s teacher gave me a few talismans.

Hey, I’ve seen these before. They looked just like the ones Emyu’d had on her when we’d first met in the demon world.

“Oh! Talismans custom-made by our teacher! Demon Lord, those are excellent!”

“If you were to purchase something similar in the world outside, they would cost quite a sum. Though not as much as your elixirs, Master Demon Lord.”

Madam Sage shrugged in response to Emyu’s and Leila’s comments.

“Since the child has you and the Supreme Dragon as their parents, I don’t expect that these talismans will be necessary. Regardless, they don’t take up much space, so be a good lad and accept them.”

“Thanks, I’ll definitely put ’em to good use.”

I put the items into Inventory and took out a few vials of Super Potion in exchange.

“Then here, I’m returning the favor. Take them, please.”

“These are…elixirs, hm? Are you sure I can have something this luxurious?”

“Huh? S-So Leila was telling the truth about them?!”

I answered Emyu with a grin.

“I really am happy to receive the talismans. Plus, everyone here has been so hospitable. That’s why I want you to think of them as a thank-you gift.”

I’d heard that my family had been shown around all kinds of places—not just the ones for tourists, but also the private facilities that weren’t open to the general public. Leila was part of the reason for that, and her teacher was the rest. Because the elderly woman had put in a good word for me, we’d been able to enjoy our time here without restrictions.

“What a tremendous gift you’ve given us. We’ll have to put *extra* effort into making sure you and yours are entertained for the rest of your trip, now won’t we?”

“Ha ha! I’ll hold you to that. So, is this why you summoned us here?”

“No. I have one more thing to discuss. Leila, Emyu, leave us for a moment.”

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Madam Sage spoke as soon as we were alone.

“There are two things I want to discuss with you, Demon Lord. The first is the matter of your child.”

“Tell me. Please.”

I got a little nervous when I heard the seriousness in her voice and words.

“It will be cruel for you to hear this, but it’s vital that you do, so listen well—children conceived between parents of different races are more likely to be stillborn.”

“Haah… Is that… I’m guessing that’s because the parents aren’t the same?”

I exhaled deeply and did my best to calm my mind. She nodded in response to my question.

“Correct. I’m not saying such children don’t exist. If you look

for them, you'll find them. We even have a few in our village. Even so, it's difficult for mixed-race children to be born."

"But a lot of the women here get their husbands from the outside world, right? So why would you do that knowing how hard it is to have a child with a man from another race?"

"Hmm, I believe I explained myself poorly. To be more precise, the more distant the races are from each other, the harder it is to have children."

She continued explaining. For example, it was easy for human-therianthrope pairs and therianthrope-ovine pairs to have children. However, that didn't seem to be the case for those of the demon species with animal heads or strange bodies who married those demons with more humanlike appearances. In short, the greater the disparity between a mixed-race couple's physical forms, the harder it was for them to have children.

It made sense. Because in all likelihood, there had to be a huge gap between their genetic information.

"Though the Supreme Dragon is using specialized magic to take on her current human form, she *is* originally a dragon. What makes your situation more complicated is that you, too, are of peculiar birth, even for a demon lord. Since I don't specialize in this field, I can't say anything for certain, but the fact that you two managed to conceive at all is a miracle."

"I see..."

I had to admit, her words made me think. Like she'd said, both Lefi and I had unique origin stories. Just making a kid was hard enough, and on top of that, Lefi and our baby were both in a headlong fight against biology itself. If she delivered our child safely, I'd thank my lucky stars, but there was no denying the inherent danger involved.

"Having said that. This applies primarily to normal families."

She must have picked up on my spirits sinking because Madam Sage spoke in a lighter tone now.

"I... What do you mean?"

"Just now, you gave us elixirs like they were mere trifles, which leads me to believe that you have a veritable trove of them. An elixir is the medicine of the gods. For example, it can forcefully bring someone on the brink of death back to the world of the living. So long as you have those on hand, at the very least, the mother's life won't be in danger, making the birth itself likely successful."

She continued in a reassuring tone.

"The most important factors are adequate facilities and an adequate medical system. I understand you're well-connected, so I suggest consulting with the Demon King. I'm sure he would be more than happy to provide you with the best physician. After all, it's in everyone's best interests to remain on your good side, powerful as you are."

"So what you're saying is…that it's possible to reduce the chance of a stillbirth?"

"Yes. I'm sorry for saying such frightening things. However, as you're the provider for your household, you have to always be in that frame of mind so that you can support them no matter what happens. Which is why I think it's best you start making your preparations now, and that includes finding a proper physician."

"Yeah, I'll definitely take your advice to heart. Thank you. I know it must have been hard for you to warn me, but seriously, you're a lifesaver."

"Heh heh. Think nothing of it. After all, I *am* an old hag who's lived a long life. That makes me an expert on annoying lectures."

She grinned and smacked me on the thigh.

I should've known better than to doubt Leila's teacher. What a cool, powerful old lady.

"Sooo, what's the second thing you wanted to talk about?"

"Oh, yes. It has to do with Leila."

"It does?"

Then, she spoke awkwardly, as if she wasn't even sure she should bring it up.

"Tell me…what do you think of her?"

"Huh? Uh, she's super dependable and our family's ultimate weapon?"

"Your 'ultimate weapon'?"

"Yup, our ultimate weapon."

Without Leila, we'd be lost. She was our home's Ultimate Weapon Maid.

"Ah, I see. Then answer me this: how important is she to you?"

"Hmm… I'd say important enough that I wouldn't mind dying for her."

"Even though she isn't your wife?"

"She may not be my wife, but I pretty much think of her as family at this point. And that's normal to do for family, right?"

I was nowhere near saintly enough to throw my life away for

strangers, but I'd gladly risk it for my family members. That was what it meant to be a family.

Eldgalia lapsed into a thoughtful silence after hearing my answer. A few moments later, she spoke again.

"Hear me, Demon Lord. First and foremost, Leila is driven by her curiosity. Though we've only had a few chances to talk since her return, it's clear to me that she holds you dear. As for her happiness, I'm sure she's interested in having a family of her own. I wouldn't exactly describe her as the proactive sort, however. Leave her to her own devices and she'll remain unmarried for the rest of her life."

Well, everyone in my family knew the depth of her desire for knowledge. As for her feelings toward me, though, I couldn't really say anything, because no matter what I said, I'd end up becoming way too self-conscious. But. I thought Madam Sage's assessment was pretty spot-on. There was no doubt in my mind that Leila had made her quest for the unknown a central part of who she was, which meant everything else had naturally gone down on her priority list.

"She makes all her own choices. That includes her decision to stay with you and dedicate her life to studying the labyrinth. While neither of those things is necessarily bad, as her former guardian, I can't say I'm not worried about her."

"Sorry to go off on a tangent, but were you, like, her foster mother or something?"

"Essentially, yes. Her parents died when she was still very young. Sadly, Emyu suffered the same fate. I took them both in because of their great talent for scholarship. Although any child like them ends up being raised by the whole village, meaning there are many others who can also be considered their foster parents."

Leila had told me that Madam Sage had raised her, but she'd never mentioned a thing about her biological parents. Me and my family's peaceful life always made me forget how life was fundamentally harsh in this world—though if I really thought about it, it wasn't like my life here had been a cakewalk either. For example, I'd fought in a literal war not too long ago.

"Yeah, but I'm pretty sure both Leila and Emyu think of you as their number one parent. Then there's the fact that anytime Leila talks about her family, she's only ever mentioned you and Emyu."

"Heh. Is that right? Well, I'm happy to hear so. At any rate,

that's how, um, things stand. I feel ambivalent even saying this to you since you already have three wives, but be a dear and woo her, won't you?"

"D-Do what now?"

"I can say this as one who has also devoted her life to research: while the pursuit of knowledge every day is indeed fulfilling, sometimes, when I look back on the past, I feel just a smidge melancholy."

Madam Sage's expression took on a serious, maternal cast.

"It may not be this old woman's place to meddle. Nevertheless, I want you to make her happy with your own two hands."

"Mm... So, I don't know how things'll turn out. I can't make any promises since we're talking about emotions here. But I swear I'll think seriously about Leila."

"Good. That's what I want to hear. Thank you."

She smiled, satisfied, and then an "Aha!" look passed on her face, like she'd just remembered something.

"Oh, yes, I almost forgot. There *is* one more thing I wanted to show you."

"Yeah? What's that?"

"Wait a moment. Let's see, where did I put it... I think somewhere here..."

She vanished deeper into the laboratory that was chock-full of stuff. The fact that she could disappear within seconds despite the lack of walls was proof positive of the messy state of this room.

"Hmm? I could have sworn I put it here... Not good, not good. The older one gets, the more one forgets the little things."

Respectfully, ma'am, I think it's less a problem of age and more a problem of clutter. The shelves were crammed full, and some of the mountains of books piled on the floor were even taller than me.

"Um, Madam Sage? I might be overstepping by saying this, but don't you think there's just way too much stuff in here? Isn't that basically a recipe for disaster?"

"You're not wrong. Ever since Leila left, I've often thought that I should do some cleaning up myself. I've put it off time and time again, however, and this is the result. Such are the bad habits of researchers, you know. Aha! Found you. This is it."

She came back, holding some kind of rod-shaped object. It

looked like a staff and seemed to have the texture of bone…

“That’s…”

“Yes, indeed. I wager you have an idea. This is the God Staff.”

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God Staff: ???
Quality: ???
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Just like with the lance, God Spear, in my possession, I couldn’t see squat about this thing using Analysis. In terms of shape, its construction was so unrefined you could just barely tell it was a staff. But it was smooth to the touch, like some kind of bone or bone-like material. The more I scrutinized it, the more I noticed how much its craftsmanship resembled the God Spear’s.

“That staff was excavated in one of the archaeological sites deep in the demon world. One of my people actually discovered it and brought it to me. When I saw you using your spear, which looks similar to it, I knew I wanted to discuss the object with you. Now, pour your magic into it.”

“Y-You sure you want me to do that?”

“Yes. There is no danger, so go on and try it.”

“…”

Feeling nervous, I did as she asked and poured my magic into the God Staff, and it started changing immediately. Just like the God Spear, it grew rapidly and evolved into its second form after sucking up half my mana. Its rough design had transformed into something that looked like the finest work of art, and it now sported a glowing, transparent gem the size of a fist at the top.



I'd never personally experienced the effects of a staff before, but I was sure I'd feel 'em *real* good if I ever used this one. And also like the God Spear, I sensed the presence of something strong now. I'd had the eerie feeling that something was watching me from deep inside it ever since it'd entered its second form.

"Hmm, hmm, hmm, I suspected as much. It took more than a dozen of us using our magics simultaneously just to see any change, but you alone can maintain it in that state. Fascinating."

"Madam Sage, this thing is exactly like the God Spear I have. Does that mean the same person created both? Also, I'm shitting bricks here, so I'd really like to return it to its original form..."

"Ah, yes, that's enough. Here, hand it over."

When I gave it back to her, she stroked a finger down the staff, and I felt my magic inside it scatter. A few moments later, the God Staff was back to normal.

Dang, she really is something else. Instead of letting my power cause an explosion, she'd channeled it to escape into the air. You could say her skill with magic was transcendental. There was no way a dumbass like me could even copy what she'd just done, and I was pretty sure the deed was impossible for Lefi too. Then again, the way my first wife viewed magic was worlds apart from the way humanoid species did. Not to mention how generally sloppy the way she used it was, so it probably wasn't fair to even compare her when it came to more advanced, delicate techniques like this.

"I think you're probably right about the creator of your lance and this staff being one and the same. We don't know when it was created. At the very least, it wasn't created by any civilization we've been able to trace back to. If we had access to records kept by long-lived species, perhaps we might be able to learn more... Tell me, how did you acquire that lance?"

"In the Dragon Hamlet, where the dragons live. One of the elders gave it to me. It was the weapon of the earliest human king, Larren Felgarda. The elder was only following Larren's last wish when he passed it on to me."

She responded with a gasp.

"Larren Felgarda! I have heard that name. In an era when the human race hadn't yet risen to power, he was the man who established an emotional bond with a dragon and built a nation of humans. So are these creations of that time? No, it's possible

the weapons are even older... Still, should I be looking for a connection? Although most of the primary sources from that time have been lost, I know a few remain...”

Madam Sage’s eyes burned feverishly as she lost herself in thought. She looked just like Leila did when something piqued her interest. They might not have been related by blood, but she sure was Leila’s mom, huh?

“Is something wrong, Demon Lord?”

“Nah, I was just thinking you two really are family.”

She looked puzzled by my out-of-place comment.

“I don’t really understand what you’re saying, but that’s neither here nor there. Back to Larren Felgarda. What was his connection to the Dragon Hamlet?”

“Oh, right. I forgot how many generations ago it was, but he was the Dragon King, the leader of the dragons. I’ll spare you the details, but I’m the current Dragon King, which is why I received the spear.”

“I see... Goodness, so not only are you a demon lord and an emperor, but you’re also a Dragon King?”

“Yup. It’s not like I *wanted* the role, though. Let’s just say stuff went down on account of my wife being the Supreme Dragon and I wound up with it anyway. So, yeah, anyway, that human Dragon King from ages ago left behind a message that ‘Should someone wise of human lineage once more become the Dragon King, make sure to give them this spear.’”

“Hmm, hmm, hmm... For now, let’s set aside the matter of your very interesting titles and stick to the topic at hand, shall we? Now it’s my turn to tell you what I know. Although frankly, that amounts to ‘I don’t know much’ even after all the research I’ve conducted.”

She shrugged before continuing.

“The staff’s effects can be summarized thusly—increase magical efficacy, significantly reduce the amount of magic consumed, and even make it easy to cast Maximum Magic. All of which make it a dangerous item. However, it can only demonstrate its effects as a staff in its ‘second evolution,’ the one you saw earlier. An ordinary person would run out of magic before successfully reaching that stage.”

Only a handful of people in the world could even use Maximum Magic. It was so insanely powerful that people called it a “forbidden art.” For example, it was on the same level as

Lefi's Dragon Roar. I had no doubt that the God Staff, just like the God Spear, was an incredibly useful object. Emphasis on "useful." Or at least I hoped so.

"This was the only description of the staff in the ruins where it was discovered—'A staff that contains the power of God. It has fulfilled its role and rests in this place.' What happened? What was the role it fulfilled? We tried to investigate these questions and more, but we have yet to find the answers. However, one thing I can say almost for sure is that it must have been used in times of upheaval, just like the previous owner of your spear did."

"Times of upheaval," huh? Weapons are tools used in combat. Then any weapon that has "God" in its name must've been made for war too.

"Something happened. I know it. Something so far in the past that records have ceased to exist. And whatever that something was, it necessitated the creation of these weapons."

"Madam Sage. The same thing happened when I used my magic on my spear, but I...I felt the presence of *something* when I poured my magic into the staff and it transformed. Like whatever it was, was watching me. I think these weapons are connected to something."

"Ah, yes. Yes, I know what you mean. I felt it too, as did all the other scholars who took part in this staff's research. Which is why... Here."

"Huh?"

She tossed the God Staff to me.

"Uhhh..."

"You should keep it."

"Um, I— No, I don't think that's a good idea. I mean, what the heck am I supposed to do with it?"

"It will become nothing more than a curio if it remains in my possession. It's better off actually being useful in yours."

Madam Sage grinned cheerfully.

"That may be true, but isn't this staff an incredibly valuable item for you and your people? I'm not sure it's something you should just give it away..."

"Now, now. Don't think of it like that. After all, you're taking care of the girl I think of as my daughter. To both show my thanks and save face, the least I can do is give you something of equal value. And there you have it. Take it."

Gaaah… Th-This dang old lady's forcing this thing on me even though she picked up on what I didn't say, which is that I don't freaking need it. Even Leila isn't this high-handed.

"You're not going to make an old woman who doesn't have long left to live beg, are you?"

"O-Okay! Okay, fine, I get it. But just so you know, you're probably not gonna get much useful information by giving this to me."

"We've already collected all the data we can from it. At this point, the only obvious truth is that it would be better off actually in use by someone than displayed in a museum. What's more, I can't travel very far, but *you* can and do. Since the spear is already in your possession as well, taking the staff, too, on your myriad travels means you have a higher chance of discovering the truth about those weapons. Your place, not mine, is by this mystery's side. And if you *do* learn something, be a dear and let me know. We are friends now, hm?"

The way Madam Sage smiled told me what a ball she was having. At my expense.

"Madam Sage… You're *definitely* Leila's mentor."

"Heh heh. Sorry, but that's just how we ovine folk are. The very existence of our curiosity means we spend our lives on a quest to satisfy it. But you already know this because of the time you've spent with Leila, yes?"

"Well, yeah. The way you can't contain your curiosity and how your eyes sparkle when you're on the hunt for knowledge remind me of Leila. She's the exact same. So yeah, I'm used to it."

"Lovely. That means I can also impose on you without any reservations."

She cackled like the seasoned old fox, or should I say ewe, she was. All I could do was chuckle sheepishly in response. Then, I shoved the God Staff into Inventory.

Never underestimate the great and fearsome ovine flock…

◇ ◇ ◇

After Madam Sage and I finished talking, I left her laboratory —and immediately ran into Leila, who'd apparently been waiting for me.

"Master Demon Lord, is your discussion over?"

"Yup. Thanks for waiting. Where's Emyu?"

I didn't see her little sister anywhere.

"She left for school not long ago since it was time for her classes. Though she's been with us these past few days, she *is* a student, and school is still in session. I know she wanted to spend more time with us, but such is life."

"Ohhh... Yeah, that makes sense. I'd love to be able to send my kiddos to a school like this village's too."

Maybe I could send them to a boarding school in a few years, but I knew I'd still worry. Except the dungeon return devices would let them come home anytime they wanted. *Hmm... What if I just expand the dungeon's territory to wherever they end up going instead?* That way, I could install a door so Iluna and the other girls could drop by whenever they wanted.

Yes, an excellent and necessary measure to protect my children in this harsh world. Definitely not the deranged idea of an overly doting parent. Because I for sure wasn't one.

"Well, Emyu has, of course, been going to school here since she was a child. If we factor in Iluna's and the other girls' ages, it might be best to send them to school in another two years or so."

"Huh. Let's do that, then. Where should we send them? The closest school to the dungeon is probably in Alfiro, but maybe a school in the demon world is a better idea for them. Despite the big-picture goal of deepening relationships between races, prejudice isn't gonna disappear overnight."

"I happen to agree with your thought process on the matter. Considering your strong friendship with His Majesty the Demon King, I'm sure he would make the school registration process easy for you and the girls. While I personally recommend my village's school because it represents the pinnacle of education, I can also acknowledge that it's a bit far for us, hm?"

Hmm... Factoring in this topic and Lefi's pregnancy, I decided I'd hit Fynar up for advice. We'd visit the demon world on the way back to the dungeon. Might've been a bit late, but I was just realizing what a huge plus it was for me to have a relationship with that dude. Yeah, sure, he was shady. But like me, he had a long lifespan, so I was sure we'd be seeing a lot of each other over the next few centuries or so.

That line of thinking led me to another revelation—that I was pretty blessed when it came to my network. Not only was I fortunate enough to have met the people who became my

family, but most of my other acquaintances were also super capable folks. My personal connections were a huge asset. I had to make sure to maintain and develop them moving forward too.

“Man, from the bottom of my heart, I’m thankful for all the people in my life.”

“Tee hee. You can thank your natural virtue for that, Master Demon Lord.”

“Jeez, you’re gonna make me blush. I’m happy to hear you say that, but I don’t think of myself as virtuous at all. At my core, I’m a selfish man.”

“I’m not so sure I agree with you. From my perspective, at least, you cherish everyone in our household, and you have a penchant for putting yourself last…”

“That’s ’cause I’m pretending to be a good adult. The truth is, I’m just a hopeless egotist. Which is exactly why all of this is Lady Luck’s doing. I mean, take the events that led you and Lew to wind up with me. That was basically just a series of coincidences, right?”

Yeah, I had no doubt that luck had been what’d bestowed so many blessings on me in this harsh world.

“Ya know, I really am glad I met all of you. That includes you too, Leila. I wouldn’t trade our meeting for all the fortunes in the world.”

“Tee hee. Are you perhaps making advances on me?”

“Huh? Uhhh… I-I guess so.”

That actually hadn’t been my intention, but her words reminded me of my conversation with Madam Sage, so I just mumbled an incoherent response.

“Is something wrong, Master?”

“N-No, not really. Just…”

Somehow, she saw right through me despite me not having said much of anything. She giggled.

“Ah, I see. My teacher said something to you about me, didn’t she?”

“Jeez. I can never hide anything from my army of women, huh? All right, fine, I’ll tell you the truth. She told me to woo you. She thinks you’ll end up alone at this rate, and she doesn’t want that for you, Leila.”

“Good grief, why must she be so meddlesome… My apologies, Master Demon Lord. You shouldn’t be burdened with such trivialities during Lefi’s pregnancy.”

“Okay… Okay, okay, I have an idea. Since you stopped calling her ‘Lady Lefi,’ how about you stop calling me ‘Master Demon Lord’ too? We’ll start from there.”

Leila blinked in surprise before she smiled and answered me.

“Understood. How shall I address you instead?”

“‘Yuki,’ ‘Mr. Yuki,’ ‘my lord.’ Honestly, whatever floats your goat.”

“I find it somewhat embarrassing to call you simply ‘Yuki.’ May I refer to you as ‘Master Yuki’ instead?”

“Sounds good to me. That means I forbid you from calling me ‘Master Demon Lord’ ever again.”

“Noted, Master Yuki.”

The ovine young woman beamed at me.

“Now *I’m* the one feeling kinda embarrassed.”

“Tee hee. Imagine how I feel saying it.”

Our eyes met, and we both laughed.

I didn’t know what to do about Leila. I also needed to discuss her with my wives. That said, I already thought of her as my family, which was why no matter what happened, I wanted to make her happy. My heart swelled with emotion at the thoughts running through my mind.

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“For real though, Leila, your village is so freaking cool. All kinds of stuff I’ve never seen before.”

“Tee hee. If we’re discussing the strange and unfamiliar, you could say the same about our dungeon home, don’t you think?”

Even as she replied to the master she had chosen of her own free will, Leila was thinking about something else entirely.

How do *I feel about him?*

He was the one she served. A fascinating individual. An unknown quantity. A research subject.

Those were the first things that came to mind when she thought of him. No matter how long they were together, he kept her inquisitive mind, the force driving her, tingling because he was the ultimate unknown. The perfect research subject. If she stayed with him, she knew she would uncover a truth no one else, not even those among the lost history of her people, the ovine clan, ever had.

However, as she calmly analyzed herself, she realized that she

wasn’t so sure that was the only reason she remained by his side, in the world he had created.

In that place, she worked every day as a maid. Did the chores. Joked with everyone. Laughed. Took care of the children who came home at the end of a long day of play. It was a life that made her as happy as the search for knowledge.

And this master of hers was the one responsible for creating such days. Consequently, she could no longer deny that she now viewed him as more than a mere research subject. However, every time she took a step toward this new frame of mind to determine whether she desired him as a woman, confusion suddenly swamped her.

When all was said and done, it was her first time experiencing something like this, so she simply didn’t know and therefore didn’t understand. She had never experienced the thing known as love. Part of it had to do with having grown up in a village dominated by women. The bigger reason, though, was how deeply she valued her curiosity. Leila had always approached the unknown with great interest and excitement, but this particular unknown only left her feeling perplexed.

She recalled what the Supreme Dragon had once told her. How meeting him had roused a flood of emotions in her chest that she didn’t know what to make of. Their conversation had taken place when the Supreme Dragon wasn’t yet her master’s wife, and Leila realized she must have been feeling the same storm of emotions as the other woman had back then.

Frankly, the existence of such feelings in this body was a surprise even to her. Because in hindsight, compared to the other residents of the labyrinth, she wasn’t especially charming or lovable. Unlike them, who expressed all their emotions so openly and loudly, all she did was look on, quietly watching over them.

In other words, she kept a distance between herself and them. She did so because she knew herself well. She knew the wall she had built around herself. No… If she was being honest, she’d never really had an interest in others, thus she always wore the same bland expression and let things go. That had been her way.

While she wouldn’t say she didn’t care about things that didn’t interest her, she also couldn’t deny her habit had been to look down on them. But she understood that a part of her had been

gradually changing just by spending time with them. The wall had disappeared at some point, and once the chance to walk past it had presented itself, she had taken her first step forward.

I see.

Her mentor's sudden desire to talk to her master about this topic must have been the woman's way of encouraging Leila. His absence had given Leila the opportunity to talk to her teacher for the first time in a long time, and the older woman must have seen right through her. She had seen that her hopeless disciple had begun to learn the nature of humanity by living in the world outside the village, and it was Demon Lord Yuki who was responsible for this change. That was precisely why her mentor wanted her to know that she should continue to live with them and do her best in her new life.

"Goodness, what a conundrum…"

By the time she realized that the words had escaped unbidden, her master had already heard her. He looked down at her questioningly.

"Leila?"

"Oh, it's nothing… Just having a bit of trouble verbalizing my feelings… I'm struggling to understand what's in my heart…"

She knew he didn't understand her rambling words, but he still smiled at her.

"Ooh. That's gotta be the first time I've ever heard you talk about stuff like that, Leila. But ya know, I think feelings are *always* hard to put into words. 'Cause words are logical and emotions aren't."

Illogical, hm…

"Master Yuki, might I impose on you?"

"Hmm? Su— Uh, L-Leila?"

With a soft *thump*, she rested her head on his chest. For a moment, he sounded confused by her uncharacteristic action, but a few seconds later, she felt him gently patting her head.

The rugged feel of a man. His warm, reassuring heartbeat. His scent cocooning her.

Ahhh, so this is it.

This. This was what she and everyone else instinctually sought. Leila understood now.



She let herself lean against him in silence for some time before speaking again.

“Master Yuki.”

“Yeah?”

“Regarding our earlier discussion… I believe this is a problem I must solve on my own.”

He listened quietly to her.

“Up until now, I’ve lived my life completely divorced from such things. I even used to believe that was how my life would eventually end. And yet, life certainly is a strange thing, hm?”

“Yeah. Complicated and mysterious, full of ups and downs… There are just so many unknowns, which makes it really frustrating sometimes. But it’s fun too, right?”

He grinned down at her.

“Tee hee. Yes, incredibly fun and dear.”

She stared up at him, their faces close together.

“So I ask you, Master Yuki: will you wait for me? Until I understand my own heart.”

Anxiety made her voice shake. He contemplated her words in silence for a moment before answering.

“Leila.”

“Yes?”

“I already see you as family. And it’s not just me. The others do too. So of course I’ll wait. For as long as you need.”

His lips curved gently, affectionately. *Badump.* Warmth bloomed in her chest. Smiling back at him, Leila once more rested her head on his chest.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Look! Yukiki and Miss Leila are back! You guys are done with your errands, huh?!”

After leaving the Magic Academy, we’d headed back to where our family was. When Iluna noticed us, she and the other little girls raced over to us.

“Welcome back, Master! Wait. Is that right thing to say at time like this?”

“I can’t think of anything better, so it’s all right! Welcome back!”

“You right, Iluna! Welcome back!”

“Where…is Emyu?”

“She’s at school, kiddos. She couldn’t take any more days off after spending so much time with us.”

“Aw. Too bad. Will she play with us again?”

“Fear not. Contrary to how she acts, she’s actually quite clever. I’m certain she’ll finish her assignments quickly so she can spend time with us again.”

“Yay! MyuMyu so smart! Can’t wait!”

“Hooray! I’m excited too!”

“Me…too.”

“Ha ha! Glad to see you all getting along so well. So, you guys on a walk right now?”

“Indeed. We decided that a leisurely exploration of the village’s tourist shops was in order, at least until you two returned. Oh? What is this?”

Lefi looked puzzled.

“Hmm…”

She walked over to us and scrutinized me and Leila from up close.

“G-Got a problem, Lefi?”

“Hmmmmm… Well, if you two have arrived at a conclusion, then that is what matters. We shall support you regardless of the outcome. However, I insist that you share information!”

My dear wife said all that with a knowing smirk. Apparently, she’d already figured things out.

“We literally haven’t said a word.”

“How long do you think we have been together? A single glance at your faces was enough for me to surmise what sort of exchange occurred between you two. Therefore, Leila, I know you are likely worrying about your awful timing and whatnot, yes? Only you know what is in your heart, and it is not our place to convince you otherwise. However.”

Lefi smacked me lightly on the chest, then reached up to pat Leila on the head.

“Though this imbecile will always be an imbecile, he is dependable in his own way. Do not be afraid to empty your mind and rely on him whenever you should need to. In any case, what I wish to say is, do not overthink things. Be at ease and do what feels right to you.”

“I… I will. Thank you very much, Lefi.”

Leila’s voice trembled ever so slightly with emotion, which was unusual for her. Lefi replied with an affectionate twinkle in her

eye.

“Gah ha! It is no bother at all. I told you before, did I not? I think of you as family too. No matter what happens, that will not ever change.”

Nell and Lew chimed in after that.

“Tee hee. She’s right, you know, Leila. You’re always supporting us, but we also want to support you.”

“Yeah, especially ’cause you’re always teaching me stuff! But never fear! One day, I’ll be dependable enough to support you too! Just you watch!”

“That’s where you’re wrong. You have both always lifted me up. I couldn’t ask for dearer friends.”

As the three of them gushed over each other, I spoke quietly to Lefi.

“Lefi.”

“Hmm?”

“You’re the best.”

I must’ve had the same thought countless times by now. And I’d keep having it for the rest of our lives. I still couldn’t believe how lucky I was to have met the greatest woman in the world.

“Gah ha! Have you fallen in love all over again?”

“I already hit the limit, then broke through it, so I really don’t think I can fall even harder for you.”

When I answered her with a super serious expression, she shyly jabbed an elbow into my gut.

“D-Do not say those words with such an earnest face! That is exactly what makes you an imbecile!”

Nell and Lew started grinning.

“Well, well! Look what we have here! Lefi’s trying to hide her embarrassment! Gosh, you two are just so darn cute!”

“Agreed. They’re always so lovey-dovey, and it makes me jealous. Leila, you should try to be just like that too! We can work together!”

“Tee hee. You’re absolutely right. Let’s give it our best.”

“Ooh, whatcha guys talking about? Tell us too!”

“Everybody look sooo happy!”

“Yes... I think something nice happened to Leila.”

Next to the three little girls, the wraith sisters tilted their heads curiously. Ridiculously cute little buggers.

“Yup, you’re right, En. We were talking about how we wanna get to know Leila even better. You girls should do the same.”

The little-girl gang answered Nell excitedly.

“Of course! We’ll stick to you like glue today, Miss Leila!”

“Nooo! Like burr! We stick like burr!”

“We…won’t let go, even if it makes it hard for you to walk.”

Then, all the little girls, including the wraiths, charged at Leila, latching on to her.

“Well. It seems I have no choice but to spend all day with you, hm?”

Awkward, amused, and touched. Leila’s smile revealed all sorts of different emotions.

“Hey, Lefi.”

“What?”

“I’m glad we came to this village. I dunno how to say this, but…your news made me happy, and so did a bunch of other things. It’s all been so much fun. I’m just so damn happy.”

“Indeed. It feels like we have taken a step forward.”

“Whaddya say we come back in a few years?”

“With everyone. By then, our child will be here as well.”

She looked a little bashful as she said that.

I pulled her into a one-armed hug and called out to the others.

“All right, ladies and smaller ladies. Now that our official business is done, it’s time to play! Miss Leila, please guide us to all the exciting spots!”

“Understood. Hmm, let me see… How about the excavation experience area? It’s not too far from here.”

“Ooh! Sounds like fun! Listen up, peeps! Starting now, we’re adventuring history buffs on a mission to investigate the distant past!”

“Aaaye!!!” Iluna and Shii shouted in unison.

“Aye…” En echoed, a beat slower.

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We tromped our way to the place that looked like old ruins near the village. Scaffolding surrounded the imposing structures, and temporary tents and a huge variety of tools were set all over the place. It reminded me of an Egyptian dig site or something similar I’d seen in documentaries back in my old life. Everything looked super legit.

“Wooow! Ruins! So cool!”

“A dream are-key-ah-luh-gee site!”

“Yes… It’s like an epic adventure.”

The little girls’ and wraiths’ eyes sparkled at the sight.

“Yeah, this *is* incredible, huh? Leila, are you sure it’s okay for us to be here?”

“I am. The excavation of the ruins and investigation into its history actually ended quite a long time ago. We also finished recording everything we needed to, so my people have no further interest in this site. However, we left it as is because it’s so atmospheric that it’s sure to draw tourists.”

Ohhh, okay. So that’s the sitch here, eh? Man, Leila, your people sure are somethin’.

“We have already seen a few of these ourselves, thus I can say with confidence that the ovine are a formidable lot. Though I would have expected no less of the race that birthed Leila.”

“They really are amazing, huh, my lord?! The rumors about them are so true!”

“Ha ha ha! A very responsible race indeed.”

Well, it wasn’t hard to imagine that everyone in her clan was extremely intelligent, which really came through in all areas. That included money-making. They’d obviously racked their prodigious brains for ways to squeeze every last coin out of tourists, and that explained why they went all out on their facilities, exhibits, and such. I seriously doubted that the word “compromise” was in the women’s vocabularies. Like I’d said before, the awesome and fearsome ovine weren’t to be underestimated.

“So what kind of place is this, Leila?”

“Yeah! Tell us, Miss Leila!”

“Of course. There are actual artifacts buried in the areas with signs, and you can dig for them yourselves using the tools here to experience an authentic excavation. You’ll find all sorts of relics, so please take your time and look for them!”

We went into a nearby changing room and changed into clothes we didn’t mind getting dirty. Then, we all picked up the excavation tools Leila had brought for us, and after she gave a quick lecture on how to use them, we immediately stepped into the dig site. By the way, in order to really ham it up, the clothes we’d changed into were adventurers’ sets. Gotta enjoy stuff like this to the fullest, amirite?!

“All right, folks, let’s do this! Just make sure you don’t hurt

yourselves!”

“Yes, sir! Oh, oh, I found something over here!”

“Dang, that was fast.”

Only a few seconds after she’d crouched down and started digging, Iluna had unearthed something that looked like a medal. She picked it up, then rushed over to Leila.

“Miss Leila, what’s this?”

“Oh my, you’ve found one of the jackpot relics. I believe this is the third most valuable amongst the things buried in this site.”

In order to make the treasure hunt fun, the relics were ranked, ranging from truly valuable to regular old mementos. Well, even if they *seemed* valuable, everything was still just souvenirs, which children would be happy with anyway. All of the items were small ones that had actually been excavated somewhere. Since the ovine already knew what everything was and had recorded all the necessary data, they now used them as prizes.

I guess they really were focused just on their search for knowledge. They clearly didn’t have the desire to keep things solely because they were valuable. *Cultural differences sure are interesting, huh?*

“Reeeally?! Yaaay!”

“Amazing, Iluna!”

“Grr... I won’t lose.”

When they saw Iluna fist pump in victory, the rest of the little-girl gang, including the wraiths, brimmed with determination and started digging furiously. But jeez, color me surprised that our group’s first find was a winner. *Guess that’s just how it goes when you’re the second luckiest girl in our family, right after Nell.*

“I’ll clean this up for you, Iluna, so you can return to your excavation.”

“Thank you, Miss Leila! I’ll find lots more!”

“Wait, Leila, you’re not participating?”

Nell looked puzzled as she questioned Leila, who’d started polishing Iluna’s medal.

“No, because I’m technically part of the staff here in the village. Most of the ovine are quite familiar with the facilities in the area, to the point that we know where basically everything is buried.”

“Dang. That sucks, Leila. Sorry you can’t join us.”

“Not at all! I’m actually enjoying myself tremendously. I’m

overjoyed to see you all truly enjoying what my village has to offer."

Leila replied with a sunny smile.

"Then I guess we have no choice but to have maximum fun! All right, Archaeologist Lefi. I challenge you. Whoever finds the most valuable artifact wins. As for the loser..."

"The loser carries the winner's items for an entire day. But wait. We have the pouches you gave us. Hmm."

"Yeaaah."

There was, of course, the matter of my Inventory. But everyone in my family also had a pouch enchanted with spatial magic, so unless they bought something really big, carrying someone's stuff didn't count as a good punishment.

"Gosh, why do you two always have to turn everything into a game? Can't you just have fun like normal people?"

"Nell's right, my lord. You should learn from Iluna and the others and have pure, innocent fun like they do. Plus, every time you two think of something, you usually end up dragging the rest of us into it too."

"Lew speaks the truth too, Mr. Yuki."

"Nonsense! A battle is essential for true fun! And that's why all of you are participating too. The king has spoken."

"Indeed! Yuki, on occasion, you certainly know the right thing to say! It is only through serious competition that play can truly be enjoyed. Leila shall be the judge, and... Aha! I have thought of the perfect stakes! Whoever comes last shall treat the others to a meal from their personal funds!"

For this trip, I'd given each of them their own wallet, which was separate from the money I'd already set aside for food and entertainment like this. They could use what was in their wallet to buy whatever they wanted.

When it came to situations like this, my family members' individual personalities really shone through. Iluna, being the responsible one, was very careful about choosing what she did and didn't want. Shii, on the other hand, was just like a regular kid as far as shopping went. If something shiny or cool caught her attention, she agonized over whether or not to buy it. I'd already seen Lefi and Nell reason with her a few times.

As for En, she spent all her money on food, food, and more food. Thanks to her bottomless pit of a stomach, if a food looked interesting, she'd buy it and eat it no matter what it was.

Then there were the wraith sisters. I'd actually been curious to see what kind of things would pique their interest, so I'd watched them for a while. But all they'd done was buy a bunch of different dolls. They hadn't really seemed interested in anything else either, which confirmed my suspicion that worldly desire wasn't much of a thing for them. All they cared about were the new dolls they would get to possess.

Like En, the adult gang spent most of their funds on food. No, wait, scratch that. Nell bought weapons, but she was the only one. Since she was a weapons collector, if she saw something even a little bit unusual, she was all over it like a dog sinking its teeth into a bone.

She always tried to make her habit look cooler than it actually was with excuses like, "The glitter of a weapon grabs me and refuses to let go!" But my response was always, "You know what Shii says when she's stuck on a toy? 'The shiny got my heart and not let go!' Which basically makes you two peas in a pod.'"

Except unlike Shii, her impulse weapon buys were waaay more expensive. I'd say Nell was probably the biggest spender in our family. It didn't seem like she spent money at all in her country, but that might've been because she couldn't find anything she liked there anymore.

By the way, most of my demon world currency was the stuff I'd gotten from the reward the Demon King had given me when I'd helped him out that first time. It'd just been gathering dust in Inventory since I had no use for it, so in hindsight, I was glad I'd held on to it. Even if I *were* to run out of money, there was apparently a shop dealing in monster parts in this village, meaning I'd have no trouble refilling my coffers if I sold the bodies of the rare monsters from the Demonic Forest.

On that note, I was actually thinking of donating a few of them later. Figured it'd be a nice way to deepen my bond with the village, ya feel?

"Excellent stakes, Lefi! Let's do it."

"Ugggh, fine. I suppose we don't have a choice. Nothing left to do but try our best, right, Lew? Ooh, what do we have here? A relic, perhaps? Leila, what is this?"

"Goodness. Well done, Nell. This relic is the most valuable one in this excavation site."

"Whoooa! Good job, Nellie!"

"Wooow! Amazing!"

“The…air of a warrior.”

“Nuuuooo! Th-This does not bode well for me!”

“Ah, shit. I completely forgot Nell has the crazy luck of a hero. Hey, wait a minute. Have I ever actually won a match that depends on luck? Dammit… Mrs. Nell, my dear, what say you to joining forces and—”

“Lew, yes. Mr. Yuki or Lefi, no. So how about it, Lew?! Would you like to form a team with me?!”

“Yes, please! Together, the two of us are invincible!”

“Yuki. I will not pair up with you. May the odds be ever in your lonesome favor.”

“D-Damn you! You’re cutting me off from the herd, aren’t you?!”

“There is no mercy in battle. Resign yourself to the inevitable.”

After an hour or so of feverish excavation, each of us had managed to unearth at least one thing, so I’d say we had a good time.

Oh, yeah, I’d ended up being the loser. I-It was no biggie, though. ’Cause, you know, I could see that everyone in my family had had a blast, so really, I’d broken even. In fact, I was of the opinion that I’d come out in the black. Yup, sure had.

But maybe, just maybe…it’d been a huge freaking mistake to play a game where luck was involved. *I dug my own grave on that one…*

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Eldgalia was deep in thought as she drank coffee in her chambers.

When she’d still lived in the village, Leila, her most talented student, had been a very challenging child. Even among the ovine clan, who made their living through research, she’d had an especially powerful desire for knowledge, and high-level abilities to match. In her insatiable quest for knowledge, the young girl had constantly questioned the village’s highest authorities, the Savants. But it was true that they had found her amusing and taught her many things, which explained why she’d become absorbed in research.

However, there was no doubt that she possessed a curiosity that set her apart from the ordinary masses. Eldgalia knew this

better than anyone else because she had taught her disciple many things in all the time they'd spent together. Needless to say, she was proud of the girl and her outstanding talents.

As her teacher, Eldgalia had secretly been pleased to see a child less than half the age of the Savants mingling with them and exchanging opinions like equals. Despite age being irrelevant in the world of talent, she was still in a class of her own. Yet Leila had been a bit *too* focused on her desire for knowledge. Her curiosity had come first, which had created a tendency for her to look down on everything else.

To dedicate one's life to the pursuit of knowledge. One could say that way of life was typical for the ovine, but it undoubtedly deviated from the way the rest of mankind lived. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing, though.

The definition of happiness and the way one lived were both things decided by an individual, and there was no point in others commenting on their choices. It was meaningless and unnecessary to meddle in business that wasn't one's own.

Even so, Eldgalia, who had lived a long life as a seeker of knowledge, knew all too well how difficult it could be. The path of pursuing knowledge was an extremely lonely one. There was no help from others, and one spent their days immersed in the battle between themself and the world. Centering one's life around such a task could be difficult, even if that was what one wished for.

Eventually, her apprentice had become dissatisfied even within their village, which had the most advanced stores of knowledge in the demon world, and fled to the outside world. She had sensed that this would happen someday and had given her the knowledge that would enable her to survive away out there. But to be honest, Eldgalia had been surprised when she'd returned.

The girl had ventured outside the village because she had grown weary of it, which had led Eldgalia to think she would never again return. Sad as the thought had made her, she had accepted it as part of her life—so imagine her shock when her disciple unexpectedly returned home.

Leila, who had previously seemed somewhat detached from the world due to her relentless pursuit of knowledge, now appeared to have her feet firmly planted on the ground, and a calm demeanor to boot. The change had become clear to

Eldgalia when they'd talked in depth with each other for the first time in a long time. She had assumed that her disciple would discuss the results of her research since her departure, but instead, the girl had regaled her with stories about humorous events in the demon lord's labyrinth, her peaceful daily life, the close relationship between the demon lord and the Supreme Dragon, and her precious friends.

The girl had indeed come to know the meaning of warmth. Though her curiosity pulsed as strongly as ever within her, something equally important had grown in her. She seemed not to have noticed the positive changes in herself, but Eldgalia had, and the knowledge brought tears to her eyes. Truly, the more one aged, the more prone they became to crying.

Eldgalia knew that Leila had, during her time in the village, always taken wonderful care of her younger sister, Emyu. Therefore, she knew about her disciple's caring side, but that part of her personality was now more apparent. The young woman had felt the happiness that came from doing things for others and making them happy.

In other words, she had learned of love for others. Evidently, by leaving the village and exposing herself to different values, her own had also transformed completely. There was no denying that the people her disciple lived with were a unique bunch, to say the least. But the most important thing was heart. The sea change in Leila was a testament to the purity of their hearts. Her disciple had been fortunate enough to encounter good people.

I have to thank the demon lord and all those girls.

In a grand mood, Eldgalia continued sipping her coffee. Then, Emyu, her other disciple who was in the room with her, began to grumble.

"Uuurk... I want to play with everyone."

"We have overlooked your frolicking for days now, so you had best buckle down and focus on your assignments, at least for today."

"This is just busywork! It's pointless! I already memorized all this ages ago! Haah... Though if this work was something *you* gave me, I think it would be interesting and worthwhile..."

"Oho, so you're saying you'd rather work on something *I* assign? Such happy news. You'll get your wish, then, because this old woman will think up some new problems just for you."

"Gaaah! I dug my own grave! I was lying! You don't have to

think of anything else!”

“Now, now. There’s no need to hold back. I’ll draft all the exercises in the world for my adorable disciple.”

The young girl waved her arms angrily in response.

“Damn you, you old hag!”

“Gah ha ha! See? You *do* know me. Now then, this old hag will be watching over you, so do your best. If you finish early, I won’t say a thing about you running off to play.”

Eldgalia cackled merrily. Even as she muttered darkly to herself, Emyu focused once more on her assignments.

Compared to Leila, this second disciple of hers was much, *much* chattier. However, she was just as brilliant. If she set her mind to it, she could finish several days’ worth of assignments in less than two hours.

The future, eh?

Soon enough, it would be time for their guests to leave. But if her first disciple had a child of her own, perhaps she would come back to visit. The trip might prove fascinating. By then, her teacher’s innocent and adorable second disciple would be a little older too—old enough to take with her on the journey. And once Emyu saw Leila’s babe, she might even become as caring as Leila.

“Heh.”

“What is it?” Emyu asked with a puzzled stare.

“Nothing at all,” Eldgalia said with a dismissive wave of her hand.

She had lived a decent life. Or so she’d thought. But she never would have imagined that there would be so much more to enjoy. Adding to the peculiarity, now that she was older, she might actually have been enjoying life more than ever.

I suppose I should try to live as long as I can, hm?

Eldgalia laughed happily to herself.

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Evening.

“Hee hee hee! Once I get serious, even homework like that doesn’t stand a chance!”

Emyu had her chest puffed out proudly as she said that. She’d met up with us in the restaurant at the inn we were staying at.

“Ooh, amaaazing! When I try study, I get sleepy, so can’t do

fast. Math ’specially tor-chur for me.”

“Yeah, Miss Leila has a very nice voice, so when we do lessons after eating, I get sleepy listening to her too.”

“What…do you like, Emyu?”

“Anything related to sorcery is my favorite subject! It feels like I’m solving a puzzle, which I find very fascinating!”

“Oh, I totally know what you mean! And when you learn how to use it, you can’t help but go ‘Wooow!’”

“Sore-suh-ree make my head go kaboom like math!”

“Emyu, you should know that Shii struggles with all the other subjects too.”

“Nooo, EnEn! Shhh! Emyu not know that ’bout me yet!”

“Mm. Sadly. I think it’s too late for that, Shii.”

“Oh, well, um… Studying isn’t everything anyway! You’re so cute and fun whenever we’re together, Shii, and I think that’s plenty!”

“Reeeally? Thank, MyuMyu!”

The little girls and Emyu chattered excitedly with each other at the table next to ours while we waited for dinner. Madam Sage, who’d come with her, spoke to me at the same time.

“I hope Emyu and I aren’t imposing overmuch.”

“No, not at all. In fact, you two should just hang out with us for our whole trip. Our girls always have such a blast with Emyu.”

“Indeed. For the wee ones, their meeting with you and the days they have spent in this village will be memories that shall never fade. The same can be said of us as well, of course.”

“Madam Sage! Madam Sage, tell us stories about Leila as a little girl! What was she like?”

“Oh, I second Lew’s question!”

“Hmm, I find myself curious as well.”

“Leila’s past, eh? Why, certainly. I have no qualms telling you all about it.”

“W-Wait. Madam, please…”

Leila pressed her hands to her cheeks in mortification. *An embarrassed Leila? What a rare sight.* And a charming one.

“Heh. You see, the first time I met her, those big eyes were already sparkling with a powerful inquisitive nature. Even back then, her mind was like a steel trap, and her responses were quite uncharacteristic of someone her age. You have no idea how often the Savants of the village found themselves knackered after she insisted on monopolizing their time and attention.”

“I-I wasn’t *that* bad. A-All I did was ask them a few questions.”

“Do you think so? Seems to me there’s a vast difference between your definition of ‘a few’ and ours, eh?”

I, for one, can most certainly imagine little Miss Leila back in the day.

“So Leila’s always been smart, huh?”

“Yes, she has. It would not be an understatement to categorize her as a child prodigy. Moreover, she’s been considerate of others since she was young. Perhaps that’s why the younger children adored her so much.”

“Wooow! Then Leila’s pretty much been the same all this time, huh?!”

Madam Sage shook her head in response to Lew’s comment.

“No, I wouldn’t say that. She has most definitely changed. Anyone who knows her would recognize this instantly. Her values and the way she sees the world transformed because she met you all.”

“Well… You saw right through me, didn’t you, Madam?”

“Of course I did. Who do you think raised you, child? Though I’m a touch surprised Emyu noticed too.”

Madam Sage’s teasing response and cheerful grin made Leila squirm a bit in embarrassment. Clearly, something unspoken had passed between them.

“Curiosity lay at the heart of everything for the old you. No matter what you did, research was always on your mind. Everything else came second to that driving goal. But now you have something that stands equal to your curiosity. Though you’re still perplexed by its true form, that which you did not have before most certainly exists in you now.”

After speaking to Leila, Madam Sage turned toward the rest of us.

“That is why…I’m truly grateful to you all. For changing her, and for giving her so many wonderful things. Thank you. Thank you for being with her. She’s still lacking in many ways, but I hope you stay by her side forevermore.”

She smiled happily then, like she was talking about herself.

“Ha ha! If you think Leila’s lacking, then the rest of us might as well be as useless as teats on a bull. She’s the most responsible and levelheaded of us all. In fact, *we* should be begging *her* to stay with *us*.”

“Indeed. Heed me well, Eldgalia. We all think of her as one of

our own. So there is no need for you to fret."

"That's right, Madam Sage! Leila's my best friend *and* a member of the family!"

"I feel the same way! Just like Mr. Yuki said, we're the ones who want her to stay close forever."

"I see... Thank you. This old woman couldn't be more relieved to know she's part of such a wonderful family."

Leila didn't say anything from next to us. Her cheeks were flushed with embarrassment, but she had the same happiness on her face as Madam Sage.

Then, suddenly, the wraith sisters floated over to me. They'd gone out for a walk because just watching us eat would've been super boring for them.

"What's up, kiddos?"

In response, all three whipped out candies made from magic and showed them off proudly, like they were saying, "Look what we got!" Apparently, they'd gotten them from a few ovine women outside.

"Oh, wow. That's great, girls. Did you make sure to thank them?"

They nodded vigorously and told me telepathically that the women had been curious about their bodies, so they'd "whooshed lots and lots through them." That must've meant that they'd put their ghostly bodies to good use and shown them all kinds of things, huh? In short, the women had acquired research data. *Hmm, hmm, hmm. Okay, gotcha.*

That was all they'd wanted to tell me because they went outside again, spinning excitedly.

"Ahhh... Tell me if my people do anything rude. I'll be sure to inform them to take care. We ovine aren't exactly what you would call reserved when it comes to learning. You should know, eh?"

"Like how you foisted the God Staff on me?"

"Why, I simply haven't the foggiest what you're talking about."

I chuckled ruefully at her nonchalant answer.

"Madam, please don't tell me you asked the impossible of Master Yuki."

"I simply entrusted something to him that we couldn't unravel ourselves, and he was kind enough to listen to an old woman's request."

"Goodness. You've always been so high-handed. My

apologies, Master Yuki."

All I could do was smile awkwardly. Lefi chimed in then.

"Gah ha! Should this imbecile be of use to you, I strongly encourage you to work him hard. After all, you and yours have done much and more for us during our time here. If he can return the favor, you need only ask."

"Mistress Lefi, while you are quite correct, as the person in question, I believe *I* should be the one expressing such sentiments and not *you*."

"You are my husband, are you not? Then the rights of a husband are also the rights of a wife."

"That doesn't even make any sense, dammit. Why are you always like this?"

In the midst of our relaxed conversation, the staff brought our food out. The little-girl gang at the next table exclaimed excitedly over the delectable dishes.

"Wooow! Everything looks so good!"

"What a feast! I'm so looking forward to it!"

"I drool just looking!"

"Master...hurry."

"Okay, okay. Ready? Bon appétit."

"Bon appétit."

The rest of my family echoed the phrase with their palms pressed together. Madam Sage and Emyu watched us interestedly.

"What is this 'bon appétit'?"

"Aha, I think I understand. Is it some sort of ritual prayer before a meal, Demon Lord?"

"Yup. Mmm, delicious! Jeez, I can't get over how good the food here is. Not to mention that they have such a huge variety."

From the various snacks I'd bought along the way today, I'd noticed that the ovine village also had a rich food culture. Local cuisine tended to be pretty homogenous in this world, with many regions relying on the same basic ingredients and cooking methods. It was only natural considering, well, everything.

This was a dangerous world with a nonzero chance of death if you left the village, so all the ingredients that couldn't be obtained locally were luxury items. Monsters, bandits, rival races—the list of dangers was endless.

A vibrant food culture was a clear sign of prosperity, and compared to other places, this village was undeniably wealthy.

Even then, it might've been a tad excessive. While it was probably an exaggeration to say it was as good as it'd been in my past life, the variety of food here was really impressive.

"Yes, it is indeed one of the things we pride ourselves on. We obtained as much data as we could on foodstuffs not bred or grown in our village and used it to make the cultivation of such ingredients possible within our borders. Once upon a time, there was a great woman from this village who devoted herself entirely to food. Thanks to her, we have built a strong foundation when it comes to culinary research, and even now, research progresses steadily."

"Whoooa... That's incredible. Oh, now I know why Leila's so good at cooking. Gotta be because of your village's strong food culture."

"Well, yes, though that's only a part of it. The other part has to do with my undertaking chores, including cooking, because Madam absolutely could not be bothered to. Then, along the way, I suppose I naturally learned the techniques unique to this village."

"Intriguing. So there was a distinct starting point to your culinary journey as well, Leila."

"Gosh, the ovine are so cool, huh?! They're always serious and earnest about everything they do!"

"I couldn't have said it better myself, Lew. I'd love to live my life like they do."

Each of us expressed our admiration in our own ways.

"Heh. The word 'compromise' is not in our vocabulary, after all. If you wish to seek the essence of magic, you must devote your life to walking that path. In the same vein, if you wish to pursue the essence of cooking, you must devote your life to researching it. Well, we're simply a race of eccentrics."

"I certainly can't deny that we ovine are an odd lot. We've been living this way for so long that our unique values have taken root as universal ones for us."

"I concur, to the point that even we ourselves question why the ovine became like this."

Both Madam Sage and Leila were smiling as they spoke.

Why they became like this, huh? As inquisitive as they were, it didn't surprise me to hear that they were curious enough about their own roots to investigate them.

"Gah ha! Well, I am of the firm opinion that the ones who

accomplish things, bring about change, and move forward are those who possess different values. I often think this when I look at my husband. From him, I have learned that the more an individual's values differ from those of others, the more they do the wholly unexpected, as well as things others cannot."

"You're right, Lefi. I've met all sorts of people in my line of work, and I think the more unusual someone is, the more likely they are to behave like that. For example, Mr. Yuki mysteriously acquired all sorts of titles and became inexplicably powerful, but I can accept it *because* he's Mr. Yuki."

"Sounds like a roundabout way of calling me a weirdo and just generally dissing me. But whatever! I accept your words as compliments! 'Cause I'm a demon lord! Which means that instead of being bound by existing values, I will always walk the road not taken!"

"It is all well and good to go on the road less traveled, but I hope he does not fall off the cliff at the end of it. He is such a defenseless imbecile that I worry simply by watching him."

"We'll support you as much as we're able, of course, Mr. Yuki, but Lefi's right. You need to be careful yourself. There are so many dangers in this world, after all."

"N-Never fear, my lord! No matter what you become, we'll always be with you!"

"Hmm, everyone makes excellent points... Considering how you are, Master Yuki, I shall also have to strive to become someone who can support you."

"Um, ladies? Might you be so kind as to cease and desist with the calm rejoinders? Your words sadden me terribly."

Madam Sage burst out laughing as she watched our exchange.

And so, dinner continued.

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The fun days passed by in a flash. Playing, touring, learning. Eating delicious food while feeling the pleasant tiredness from it all, then soaking in the hot spring before bed. Whenever the little-girl gang was off doing their own thing, I took a few lessons in sorcery with Madam Eldgalia and some of the other Savants in the village.

We were having such a blast in the ovine village that we

ended up staying longer than originally planned. Alas, the day of our departure was soon upon us.

“Ngh… You all had better come back soon, understand?!”

Emyu sounded a little teary.

“Yup, we’ll definitely meet again!”

“We friends now, so let’s play ’gain lots!”

“This…village was fun. We’ll definitely come again.”

Following En’s words, the wraith triplets twirled around Emyu, conveying their reluctance at parting. Leila and her teacher exchanged meaningful glances as they watched the girls.

“Leila. Moving forward, I encourage you to spend as much time as you need exploring your inner feelings. That is a type of quest too, hm? Because applying your scholarly leanings toward yourself will rouse your curiosity even more.”

“Yes, Madam. As your disciple, I pledge to settle things with myself once and for all.”

“Very good. I look forward to hearing about your findings the next time we meet.”

As they said their goodbyes, I spoke to Lefi.

“Lefi, I have some new business with the Demon King, so you guys go on ahead. Will you check on the pets when you get back?”

“Understood, leave it to me. I shall treat them to some sort of luxurious feed.”

“Please and thanks. I left them completely in charge, so we gotta show our appreciation somehow.”

Iluna beamed at us when she heard our conversation.

“I wanna cuddle with Rir and the others once we’re home! Especially his fluff!”

“Best fluff in world!”

“Orochi’s…smoothness is also the best in the world.”

Despite having been on the verge of tears earlier, Emyu now looked a bit intrigued as she tilted her head curiously.

“Iluna, you all have pets?”

“Yup! Ummm, let’s see. We have a dog and a cat and a bird and a snake and a water drop!”

“A water drop? But wooow. You have so many! Taking care of them must be a real challenge.”

“Nooope! Not even a little! They’re sooo smart, so they hunt their own food!”

“Super smart! More smarter than me!”

The wraith triplets nodded, agreeing with Shii's remark. *Um, little ones? While I'm the first to admit our pets are incredibly intelligent, it also makes me sad to hear you dunk on yourselves, so let's stop, okay?* I smiled wryly at the thought. Then, after Shii, En spoke.

"Yes...especially Rir. He's the dog and he's *very* smart. He understands everything we say. That's why I want to teach him how to play shogi."

"What's shogi?"

"A...kind of board game. It's very interesting."

"Wow! Many intelligent nonhumanoid species exist in this world, but your pet is so clever that he can play a board game?! Amazing! I want to research him!"

Emyu sounded impressed. Leila murmured quietly in response.

"I believe Rir has taken on mythic proportions in Emyu's mind, hm?"

"My intention was to listen in silence, but I must ask, Demon Lord. The pets your children speak of, are they referring to your followers who rampaged in the Reauxgard Empire? They were certainly intelligent, but hearing all this now, I have to wonder..."

Madam Sage's expression was hard to describe. Until she brought it up, I'd completely forgotten that she'd met them. I wanted to tell her that despite what she'd witnessed, they were actually super-duper cute.

"I think for the sake of Rir's honor, we should tell Emyu that he's a wolf and not a dog."

"Mr. Yuki, if Rir were to hear this conversation, I'm sure his sad eyes would say something like, 'I don't think that's the problem here...'"

"Aha ha ha! You're right, Nell. Lord Rir is definitely that sort of character."

"I do not know what to say except...I feel sorry for him."

Everyone's jokes dispelled the slightly gloomy atmosphere completely. They said their final goodbyes, then the women gang of my family all activated their dungeon return devices and went home.

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After I said my own goodbyes to Madam Sage and Emyu, I left

the ovine village and flew toward the demon world. It felt like I hadn't flown alone in a long time because lately, I always had someone by my side in the air, you know? Yup, I'd sent En home with the others, so I was really, truly alone, which was unusual for me. And in this unusual time, I thought about all the changes in my environment.

Lefi. Leila. The kids. Everything the future held. All of it changing in a flash.

Change had already occurred at a dizzying speed, but I knew it would happen even more dramatically now. Because we ourselves, as well as the world around us, were also changing from moment to moment. This was likely a turning point in history. We were approaching an important time that would be immortalized in the history books of future generations—events students would memorize for their entrance exams while grumbling about them.

For the sake of my family, I needed to surrender myself to this flow. To cast myself into the current without letting the muddy waters sweep me away and always, always move forward.

During my conversation with Madam Eldgalia, one thing she'd said weighed heavily on my heart. "You're the provider for your household." *Yes, I am.* I had to fully embrace that mindset from now on. Even if it was embarrassing, as the breadwinner of my family, I had to make myself look good.

It wasn't like I wanted glory or anything lofty like that. But still, there were a lot more things I had to make an effort on now. I bet every father felt like this. They strove to do everything they could for their children, endured any and every hardship, before finally feeling like a real father. As a man, the time had come for me to do the same.

Hmm... Maybe I should ask a dude friend I know how child-rearing works. In which case, the king of Alisia is probably my best bet, huh? He seems like a good choice. Yeah, let's hit him up on the way home from the demon world.

While thinking about the future, I flew for almost a day straight before I saw the skyline of Leigeghegg, the capital of the demon world. I was back, even though it hadn't been that long since my last visit. Despite not having an appointment, I flew straight toward the castle. I knew the way there now like the back of my hand. On my way, a soldier flew up to me from below.

"You, demon over there! Halt! Flight is prohibited beyond this

— Lord Yuki, is that you?”

“Oh, hey, Haloria! Been a while, huh?!”

I knew the woman who’d come to stop me. Haloria Leiroat. She worked directly for the Demon King as a member of his Covert Imperial Guard. The same woman who’d given me my first opportunity to go to the demon world and guided me there.

“Heh. It had indeed been a while, Lord Yuki! Although I must say, it doesn’t feel so for me simply because I have been privy to your exploits.”

“Exploits? What exploits?”

“The Great War, of course. I, too, participated behind the scenes as an intelligence operative. That aside, do you have business with His Majesty?”

“Yeah. I know I dropped by not too long ago, but something new came up and I wanted to talk to him about it. Sorry, but could you get me in touch with him?”

“I most certainly can do that for you. And since it’s you who’s asking, I believe he’ll see you right away.”

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“What’s the *matter*, Yuki? Haloria *mentioned* that you wished to *speak* with me about something?”

The Demon King stared at me with a puzzled expression. We were in the audience chamber. Thanks to Haloria, I was able to meet with him on the same day I’d arrived.

“Yeah, sorry. This time around, it’s a personal matter. I wanted to get your advice.”

“Oh? How *unusual* for *you* to come to *me* for advice. Go *on*, then.”

“Well, the truth is, my wife’s pregnant.”

My words clearly shocked him for a moment before he smiled broadly at me.

“Congratulations! *Wonderful* news indeed. I *believe* you have *several* wives, though, so would you *mind* telling me *which* one in particular this *concerns*?”

“The Supreme Dragon. I specifically wanna discuss what I learned from the ovine about the difficulty of interracial pregnancy.”

He understood what I’d left unsaid because his usual smile faded and his expression took on a serious cast.

“Ah, I see… Well, *generally* speaking, the risk of *stillbirth* is *much* higher in *interracial* couples than it is in couples of the *same* race. What makes *your* situation more *complicated* is that *you’re* a demon lord and *she’s* the Supreme Dragon. *Frankly*, I can’t even *begin* to imagine the *child* you two would create.”

“Yeah, and that’s why I wanted to talk to you. *You* must know a really good doctor, right? So I’d like you to introduce me to them. Of course, I’ll do whatever you need in exchange.”

“I’m in your *debt* in more ways than I can *count*, so I’d be *more* than happy to make the introductions *without* such a bargain.”

“No. This is a problem of mine driven by emotion. Her pregnancy outweighs everything else for me. In order to balance things out, some insignificant deal isn’t gonna cut it. I have to pull my weight too. Besides, I don’t think you owe me anything.”

Sure, a lot went down during the war, but we settled that account fair and square in another way because he was doing his part. The Demon King chuckled in amusement at my words.

“Heh. All right, I understand. I *suppose* I can ask you to do a *job* for me, then… In *fact*, I have a *sticky* issue on my hands at the moment.”

“Do tell.”

He nodded seriously.

“*Truth* be told, it’s *related* to your *hero* wife and her *meeting* with me when you both *visited* not long ago. *Trouble* is brewing in our *alliance* with other *races*.”

“As in, one or more of them is in danger?”

The other heads of state had been well aware of various problems, and I’d heard they already had countermeasures to enact just in case. Even so, honestly, stuff like this was bound to happen sooner or later.

“No, it hasn’t *quite* reached that point. Overall, *things* are going relatively *well*. The *exchange* between species is proceeding *smoothly*, all things considered. *However*, King Reyd of Alisia has *informed* me that the idea of ‘human *supremacy*’ has seen a *rapid* rise amongst the humans.”

Ahhh, so that’s what he meant.

“Well, I *knew* the situation wouldn’t be *perfect* from the outset since we’ve been at *war* for so long. Nevertheless, there are *signs* of an *organization* orchestrating things.”

“You mean this isn’t just normal, temporary backlash?”

“*Correct*. The *sentiment* isn’t *natural*. Rather, someone is *inciting*

it amongst the humans. Some *power* that prefers the races to be at *war* instead of joining hands in *peace*. Reyd's country is *close* to the Demonic *Forest* you inhabit, yes? I'd like *you* to *help* him as much as *possible*."

"If that's the case, I'm in. Can I ask him for more details?"

"Yes, I *do* believe it may be *faster* if you do that. I *myself* intend to send a few of my *own* people to assist, so I'll be *sure* to let them know they should cooperate *fully* with you should you *need* anything. But *back* to the topic of your *wife*. *When* is the birth *expected* to take place?"

I shook my head in answer to his question.

"Honestly, we don't know. 'Cause she's a dragon who's taken on a humanoid form, y'know? Going by her original race, the pregnancy should theoretically last two years, but physically, she's the same as a regular woman, so we don't know which frame of reference to use."

"Ah, I *see*. Understood. Then I'll select the *right* physician for the task. Though it's a *while* off yet, how about I host a *party* here once your child is *born*? I'll *invite* the other *monarchs* and we'll have a *celebration* for the ages."

The Demon King grinned wickedly, and I chuckled ruefully in response.

"While I appreciate the thought, you should probably take it down a notch. Pretty sure my wife would hate a 'celebration for the ages'... How 'bout this instead? Once my kid is born, I'll introduce you as an honorary uncle."

"Ha ha ha! An *uncle*, hm? Mm, *yes*, I *quite* like the *sound* of that! I *suddenly* find myself looking *forward* to meeting your *child* as well! By the *way*, are you in a *rush* after this, Yuki?"

"Not really. Why do you ask?"

"Excellent! In *that* case, I'll *end* my official duties *here* today! Now, we *drink*, Yuki!"

With a clap of his hands, he stood up from his throne.

"C-Cool, sounds like a plan to me. But are *you* sure about that?"

I hadn't given my family an exact time frame of when I'd be back, so I had plenty of time, but...

"*Heed* me well, Yuki. I'm the *king* of this country. Which means *I* am the most *important* person in it! *Ergo*, if I want to enjoy *spirits* whenever and however the *whim* takes me, *no* one can *stop* me."

“Hey, if that’s what you want, you do you, buddy.”

Dude, were you always like this? I couldn’t help myself from letting out a half-exasperated, half-amused laugh. In the next moment, the Demon King raised his voice, calling to someone outside the room.

“Runougil!”

“I’m here, my liege.”

Another of Fynar’s subordinates whom I knew well appeared immediately. Runougil, also a member of the Covert Imperial Guard.

“Whoa, Runougil. How’s it hangin’? I didn’t know you came back from Reauxgard too.”

He’d been helping with the residual mess in the empire, but the fact that he was here must’ve meant things had settled down enough there.

“I’d say it’s been some time, Lord Yuki, but that’s not true, is it? However, in answer to your question, my sojourn here will be brief, and I’ll be returning shortly. Now then, Your Majesty, how might I be of assistance?”

“We’re going to *imbibe* now, and *you* will be *joining* us. You *don’t* have the right of *veto*!”

“Oh? How very unusual for you to say such things, my lord. Heh, as you wish, then. I humbly accept your invitation.”

“Demon King, that’s called ‘power harassment,’ ya know.”

And so, the excited Demon King dragged us out of the audience chamber.

Epilogue: I Wish You a Bright Future

Late at night.

“I’m hooome.”

“Welcome ba— Hold. You reek of spirits, Yuki.”

Lefi welcomed me with a frown on her face. I’d gone home by activating the dungeon return device. Everyone else was already asleep since it was so late at night. It looked like she had been too, and had only gotten up because she sensed someone.

“Weeell, I went with the flow at the Demon King’s place and we had a few drinks.”

“That does not seem like ‘a few’ to me. I know very well that you do not stop at ‘a few’ when you imbibe.”

“Mmm… Maaaybe… Maybe not.”

My head being pleasantly hazy made it hard for my tongue to work properly, so that was the best I could come up with in response. Lemme tell ya, we’d had a *blast* drinking the day away. The Demon King, usually enigmatic, had let out all his feelings while I’d laughed at Runougil, who’d gotten super drunk because, surprise, surprise, the dude couldn’t hold his liquor for shit. We’d drunk and laughed and talked.

I’d enjoyed learning more about the demon world from them, and I thought they’d had fun hearing me talk about my dungeon. The restaurant we’d gone to only served the Demon King and his people, so not only had the liquor been ridiculously good, but the food had been too. If I had to compare it to someone else’s, I’d say it’d been on par with Leila’s cooking.

But it wasn’t just that the food had been good on its own. It must’ve tasted even better because I’d been having a ball with those guys. I could’ve said the same of our time in the ovine village. The food I’d eaten with my family, Madam Sage, and Emyu had tasted so good that it’d left a strong mark on my memory.

By the way, Fynar had invited Reauxgard’s former emperor, Shendra, now known as Shen, to our little get-together. Except he’d apparently turned the Demon King down with an “Apologies, but I swore to myself that I would never again indulge in such luxuries.” I guess he was trying to repent in his

own way. Made sense, since it *was* his orders that'd led to the deaths of so many soldiers in the imperial army. It seemed he was intent on carrying the responsibility of starting the war for the rest of his life.

We useless, drunk idiots had spent the whole day drinking, drinking, and, you guessed it, drinking some more. Having said that, I had a feeling I'd never forget today.

Seeing how wasted I was, my wife put her hands on her hips and sighed.

"Good grief. You said you had business to take care of and *this* is the state in which you return? Right, then. Off you go to the bath— S-Stop that at once."

"Lefi..."

I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her down into the futon.

"You're the best woman in the world... No, wife... Nooo, hug pillow..."

"Well, I *am* your hug pillow at the moment... Haah, you are too far gone, eh?"

"Nooope. I ain't goin' nowhere... Long as you're here with me, I can do anything."

"Yes, yes, I understand. I shall stay with you, so just rest now."

As she held my head to her chest and gently stroked it, I could feel my consciousness slipping further and further away...

Special Story: Shogi Is Fun

A few days after we returned from the ovine village, we were in the real throne room, our usual living space.

“Lefi, let’s play shogi.”

“Hmm. Fine. As you are sad and lonely without someone to play, I shall deign to be your partner. You may express your gratitude for my magnanimity.”

“What’s this? Is it me, or is someone with just as much free time on her hands as me saying something? I can’t believe she hasn’t realized that I was thoughtful enough to invite her because she seemed so sad and lonely. Man, what am I gonna do with her?”

“Oho, are you certain you wish to make such an assertion? For I have no qualms about abandoning one as pathetic as you for the lure of sleep once more.”

“Hey, look, if you wanna run away from a match, don’t let me stop you.”

“Fool. I am only matching your absurdity with my own. I said naught about forfeiting.”

“Sheesh... Those two sure can say stuff like that without batting an eyelash, huh?”

“That’s because the only thing they’re the best in the world at is riling each other up. Not to mention, it’s just like them to set the shogi board properly even as they bicker.”

Though we heard the voices from the peanut gallery, Lefi and I ignored them, focusing on the game board in front of us.

“Ooh, I just had a great idea. How ’bout we play Extreme Shogi today?”

“Bah. That sounds like some sort of play you and Lew would enact in your usual farces.”

Busted. You know me too well, wifey.

“Allow me to explain, my dear! Unlike regular shogi, Extreme Shogi involves granting each piece a special power, so we can conduct an extreme battle to create an extremely exciting shogi playstyle!”

“Hmm... I do not understand, so you will make the first move and show me.”

“All right, I’ll do that! First up, one of my pawns! My nimble foot soldier, move two squares in one go!”

I placed the pawn two squares forward even though I could normally only move it one.

“Ngh! That is an infraction of the rules!”

“Well, this is Extreme Shogi. While it *is* shogi, it is also *not* shogi! Thus does this game demand flexibility of thought, Lefi.”

“I see… I believe I understand it for the most part. Then it is my turn! A rook is also a type of bird, is it not? So I shall send my rook into the air as a scout! Now I have a full view of your encampment, which allows my army to speed up its march on yours!”

Lefi floated her rook with magic and fixed it in place. I had to say, the way she used her magic was super freaking cool.

“Wh-What?! Well, well, well. Look who’s giving me a run for my money!”

“Hmph. How many times do you think I have observed you playing like this with Lew? Thanks to that, I plotted my strategy well in advance, so I foresee no obstacles. You may have thought you could defeat me, but unfortunately for you, you were wrong.”

Lefi smirked at me. She’d used word association to link “rook” as a playing piece to the bird of the same name, which had led her to float it above the board. I was reluctantly impressed since it made total sense. So Lefi’s move just now was valid. In this sort of competition, it was important for each side to understand the other, and once I understood, I had no choice but to accept the outcome.

“In other words, you’re saying you came up with tactics on your own ’cause you wanted to play with us.”

“N-No, I am not! M-More importantly, make your next move.”

“Yeah, you’re right. My turn! I draw!”

“Draw what?”

“Nothing. Ahem. I move another pawn and build a defensive line here! Now it’s gonna be much harder for you to break through head-on!”

“Then I shall have my airborne rook relay the reconnaissance data to the rest of my army and have this pawn hide! Since your encampment is unaware of this ambush, I will launch a surprise attack from behind on my next turn! After which, your defensive line will collapse.”

Lefi placed her farthest pawn outside the board into hiding. *This little shit…* She really hadn't been lying earlier. She had actually done her research and already understood the reality of how this game worked. *Son of a…*

"Don't underestimate me! 'Cause my army can see your powerful rook flying in the air from its position! So instead of moving my edge pawn, I'll have it launch a surface-to-air strike from its location! Fire the Stinger missile!"

"The Stinger what? Mih-sul?"

"It's an attack. Uhhh, kinda like your Dragon Roar, I guess? You launch it from land, and it pursues a target in the air."

"Is it not unfair for a pawn to be capable of such a powerful attack?"

"Nah. I'm pretty sure it can at least down a wyvern. A rook is almost as strong as a dragon, though, so my Stinger probably can't kill it. But since it's being attacked from the ground, it shouldn't be able to stay in place. Therefore, the rook will temporarily retreat, and the pawn you left hidden there won't be able to get information about our position, so it'll be a dead soldier by the time your rook comes back!"

With a flick of my finger, I repelled the floating rook and sent it spinning in retreat.

"Hmm… I suppose there is a certain logic to that. I am left with no choice but to withdraw the rook and wait for an opening, no? Oh, speaking of pawns. Are you not exploiting yours?"

"Well, pawns are my favorite pieces. I mean, depending on what weapon I give them, I can make them capable of practically anything, y'know?"

"But they die right away. If a rook is a dragon, then a single spell cast from the sky is enough to annihilate the pawns on the ground."

"No duh. That's what happens when you pit yourself against dragonkind. Also, you'd end up killing all the other pieces on the board too, not just the pawns. No, no, time out. We can't have that, so let's scratch the idea of a rook being akin to a dragon. Let's say a rook is as powerful as Yata instead."

Yata, one of my pets. A giant-ass crow, to be exact. He was strong enough to easily kill a wyvern, which folks called demi-dragons, and that made him perfect as a rook analogue.

"Whaaat? Are rooks not the most powerful pieces in shogi? Is Yata not too weak?"

“Whoa, jeez, you’re so mean… You know he’s gotten stronger recently, right? Your standards are just too damn high.”

“Be that as it may, if Yata is at the top of the hierarchy in shogi, it would mean all the other members of the army are below him in terms of power. Would that not make the armies weak?”

“Wow. It’s been so long that I almost forgot you’re the Supreme Dragon. Thanks for reminding me, I guess.”

“‘So long’?! What do you mean, ‘so long’?! I am always and forever the world’s most powerful dragon. If you understand that, then pay me the respect I deserve.”

“Respect, you say? Why, of course, I respect you, O Great and Powerful Supreme Dragon. Ha ha.”

“Hmph. I know very well that you do not mean a word of that.”

“No, no. You’re absolutely, categorically wrong, my lady. Eek! It’s the *real* Supreme Dragon! Can I have a handshake?! Pretty pleeease?!”

“I see. Clearly, you insist on underestimating me. Fine. If it is a fight you want, a fight you shall get.”

So our battle continued. We thought through each of our moves, building positions to our own advantage and invading the opponent’s encampment. War. War in all its glory.

The more we played, the more heated we got. By now, the shogi board was way too small of a battlefield for our needs. We had long since gone beyond it, and now, we were both standing up, facing off with our respective kings in hand.

“I have known this was what it would come to since the moment we confronted each other. Single combat between our kings.”

“Haah… What a coincidence. I thought the same thing. That it wouldn’t be the subordinates but the king—me! I myself who would defeat you!”

“Ha! Such a vivid imagination you have. Allow me to beat reality into you, then!”

“It’s almost dinnertime, you two.”

“You guys can eat first.”

“You all eat first.”

We answered in unison.

“Mm… All right, understood.”

Leila stared at us in warm amusement, then walked away.

Nine times out of ten, this was how things turned out with Lefi and me. We played doggedly without the match going anywhere until Nell or Iluna got mad at us.

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On another day afterward.

“Rir…make your body the smallest you can and sit over there.”

“Grr?”

“Just…do it.”

Rir did as En instructed and transformed himself into his smallest size, then sat across from her on the other side of the shogi board.

“This…is shogi. You move your army with the goal of slaying the enemy generals. A finite, two-person, zero-sum game. I’ll teach you how to play, so remember the rules, Rir.”

“G-Grr…”

In response to her unreasonable request, all he could do was rumble a sound that seemed to say, “Y-You can’t expect me to just take it in stride when you suddenly thrust play equipment designed for humanoids in front of me…” But En was unbothered. She simply continued explaining.

“Don’t…worry. With your talent, you can do it. Master said that learning shogi also helps you learn how to think strategically. You lead the pets in your battles in the Demonic Forest, so that should be a necessary skill for you.”

“Grr.”

“Yes…Master will be happy too if you learn how to play. And me too. A new and powerful enemy… I’m excited.”

En clenched her fists and said those words like the protagonist of a battle manga.

She loved competitive games that allowed her to put her mind to work. Leila and Iluna were the best at these types of games, so she often challenged them to exciting, satisfying bouts. However, she truly did play them all the time, so it was only natural that some of the shine had worn off. It was no wonder, then, that she was thrilled to confront an unknown opponent.

Overwhelmed by En’s zeal, Rir hadn’t been able to refuse her. He sat there and obediently learned the rules of shogi and the pieces’ movements. Plus, he was exceedingly clever. Once he

understood most of the game's mechanics thanks to her explanation, he started asking questions.

"Yes...that's right. That's how it generally moves when promoted. The differences are with the rook and bishop, and the king and gold general. This is how the rook and bishop move. The king and gold general can't be promoted in the beginning."

Rir stared intently at the board as he ruminated on En's explanation. His wise features exuded intelligence. And then, he nodded.

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Lefi burst out laughing at the sight of En and Rir playing a game of shogi.

"Gah ha! What in the world are you doing, En? Did you truly teach Rir how to play shogi?"

"Yes... He's very smart."

En's words combined with the surreal sight only seemed to amuse Lefi more. She couldn't contain her laughter as she continued.

"Pfft. Well, I cannot deny that he is clever. Good grief, Rir. Your skills grow by the day, eh? It will not be long before one of them tries to make you streak through rings of fire or balance on balls."

Rir couldn't smile, though, because he was afraid either or both of those things were possible.

"So tell us, En. Is Rir a worthy opponent?"

"Yes... We just finished a round. He has his own play style."

Rir had memorized all the rules already. Since he lacked humanoid hands, moving pieces was physically difficult for him. But he used the claws of his forelegs adroitly to push them around and asked En to flip a piece anytime one got promoted, so he was managing to play.

"Oho, I see, I see. Then as your mistress, I shall also instruct you in the ways of shogi!"

"G-Grr."

"Lady...Lefifi, are you sure about that? You're not that good at it, you know."

"Nonsense, En! While I admit I am not a great player, I can at least win against Rir. If I could not, I would be too embarrassed to call myself the Supreme Dragon!"

Rir was no doubt smart. *But*. He was still a pet. And one who'd only just learned the rules of the game. There was no telling what the future held once he got better at it, but as of right now, he probably couldn't win.

Lefi, with her long list of losses in these kinds of games, was probably thinking along those lines when she issued her challenge. She had En move aside so she could take her place across from Rir. The bout started, and it...did *not* get heated.

Ten or so minutes later.

"I... I lost?"

"Yes...you did, Lady Lefifi."

Lefi'd gotten her ass handed to her.

"W-Wait, En! Th-That was merely a fluke! O-Once more, Rir! Battle me once more! And... And shall give you a delectable treat later, so let me win the next—"

"Cut it out, you dumbass!"

"Bwah!"

That was when I stepped in and smacked Lefi on the head for trying to sneakily rig the game.

"Cripes... I was wondering what you were gonna say, but you went with *that*? It's one thing to say stuff like that to us grown-ups, but don't do that in front of the kids."

"Lady...Lefifi."

"Urk..."

Unable to endure En's sad expression, Lefi could only groan shamefully in response.

"Here. Put this on. It's your punishment for doing something stupid."

"..."

I opened Inventory and pulled out a small whiteboard. It had "I couldn't accept my defeat against my pet, so I tried to fix a match" written on it. She took it from me silently and hung it meekly from her neck while sitting seiza style.

This whiteboard was a tool used in our household when someone did something naughty, like now. For example, when Iluna snuck vegetables she hated onto Shii's and En's plates, or when Shii melted down and ate things she shouldn't, or when Lefi secretly ate snacks, or when Lew broke plates. Et cetera, et cetera.

Incidentally, Lefi and I were the ones who wore it the most. *Yeah...* Though the fact that the other members of the adult gang

also made good use of it was very...on par for my family.

"Haah. Pathetic. Absolutely, positively pathetic. I feel sorry for someone who can't accept a loss as a loss. You lost against a *pet* too. One who only just learned the rules today. I personally would *never* behave like you did. I just don't get how you could, jeez."

"Ngggh..."

This was a great opportunity for me to taunt her. Since she was supposed to be reflecting on her actions, she couldn't even clap back at me. *Oh yeah. This is way too much fun.* I would've bet that the expression on my face at this very moment was the most gleeful it'd ever been in my life.

"Well, considering my wife completely and utterly failed in her role as teacher, I have no choice but to take you on in her place! Unlike the good-for-nothing Supreme Dragon, I shall teach you the fundamentals of shogi properly, Rir!"

This time, I sat across from Rir, with the shogi board between us. The game began, and this one lasted longer than the one before.

A little over ten minutes later.

"I... I lost?"

"Yup...you did, Master."

I'd freaking lost.

"W-Wait, En! Th-This isn't right! I was just a wee bit careless and didn't show off my full potential! R-Rir, play me one more time! You're my follower, right? You understand what I'm saying, right? So let me win the next—"

"What is this drivel you are spouting?!"

"Dwah!"

That dumb sound tumbled out of my mouth when she smacked me on the back of my head.

"You had the audacity to lecture me, yet now you attempt the same thing I did? Hmm? What do you have to say for yourself? I am listening. Go on. Speak."

"I'm so...rry you seem to be operating under some sort of misunderstanding."

I averted my gaze immediately.

"How deplorable! Imbecile! Come, there is something you must now do as well! After all, you are the one who made me wear this, yes?!"

"Master..."

While Lefi was shoving the whiteboard hanging from her neck into my face, En looked sadly at me.

"..."

I silently took out another small whiteboard from Inventory. Lefi snatched it from me, flipped it around, scrawled something with a pen, then gave it back to me. It said, "I couldn't accept my defeat against my pet, so I tried to abuse my authority." I meekly hung it from my neck and sat seiza style next to Lefi.

Looking a little angry, En stood up in front of us and folded her arms.

"Darn...it. You both need to accept a loss as a loss. Sportsmanship is important."

"I apologize," Lefi and I said in unison.

A demon lord and the Supreme Dragon, both sitting seiza style, being scolded by a little girl. You could search the world ten times over and our home would be the only place you'd see a sight like this.

"Rir...is a very good shogi player. You must respect him, no matter how frustrating losing is."

"Gah, y-you're right. Rir was too tough to beat. But I mean, come on..."

"Nnnh... To think the day would come when I would be duped by him..."

"You...guys."

"Right, I apologize. I will respect him." Lefi and I spoke in unison again.

By the way, the one who looked the most uncomfortable in this situation was Rir.

Maaan, you really are too good at this game, Mr. Rir. Probably on En and Leila's level. It wasn't like I was particularly good at board games just because I was an experienced player. In that sense, it might've been a given that I'd lose to someone as clever as Rir. But still, damn. Here I was, a pet *owner*, *losing* to his *pet*. At a *board game*. Literally un-freaking-believable.

"Omigosh, what are you two doing? Match fixing? Abuse of authority? Seriously, *what* are you both *doing*?"

Nell walked over to us while En quietly vented her anger on us. She read the words on the whiteboards hanging from our necks with a confused frown while furrowing her neatly kept eyebrows.

"We are losers... Thus do we sit here accepting our utter

defeat.”

“Indeed... And as losers, we are taking in the words of a winner. That is all.”

“They...both were naughty, so I said ‘No! Bad!’”

“G-Grr...”

“Hmm, I see. Despite their attempts to make themselves sound heroic, I completely understand that these two acted idiotically.”

Nell looked exasperated now.

“Based on what I see, am I correct in assuming that En taught Rir how to play shogi, then you two challenged him and lost? However, you refused to acknowledge your defeat to your pet and tried to do something stupid. Do I have the gist of it?”

She sure did. Got it right from start to finish. Damn, were we that obvious? Or maybe everyone in my household had ESP?

Lefi and I said nothing. Nell sighed as she looked at us.

“Gosh darn it! You aren’t children, so stop behaving like that! Look. Look at how uncomfortable you’ve made Rir. His face is basically saying, ‘I played properly because it’s a competitive game, but perhaps I should have thrown my matches against them...’ You two did that! You made him worry!”


I couldn't accept my defeat against my pet, so I tried to fix a match
I couldn't accept my defeat against my pet, so I tried to abuse my authority

“G-Grr.”

“I-I didn’t say…” was what Rir’s attitude said as he studiously looked away. *Nell hit the bull’s-eye, huh? Bud, despite being a wolf, you’re way too easy to read.* Even setting aside my ability to understand my dungeon summons, you could tell right away what he was thinking.

“Gaaah! A-Anyway, one more time, Rir! Yeah, sure, you’re a good player, but a match is a onetime thing! And I won’t lose the next one! Of course, you’re not gonna go easy on me either!”

“That is right! We shall show you that Extreme Shogi is not the only game we are good at!”

“Mrr… Only you two against Rir? No fair. I want to challenge him a lot too. His play style is very unique and interesting.”

“Rir, if you don’t want to, you can say as much, all right? En aside, Lefi and Mr. Yuki will pester you to death without any regard for your feelings once they get in the mood for battle. You’re only hurting yourself if you don’t say how you truly feel. Is that understood?”

“Grr.”

His sheepish growl said, “Well, it’s always like this.” He was nice enough to keep playing with us though, never mind his resigned attitude. Later on, the rest of the little-girl gang showed up, along with Lew and Leila. He played them too. It got so late that we all ate dinner together. And that was how we spent the day. Including Extreme Shogi, it was just another typical day in our home.

Afterword

Hello, this is Ryuyu! Thank you very much for buying volume 11!

First, some PR. Volume 5 of the manga, illustrated by Note Tono, is also on sale this month! I hope you check that out too! I wrote a short story for it, so it would make me happy if you enjoyed that too.

Right, then. On to this volume. It dealt mostly with the aftermath of the war and the ensuing changes. Yuki really did become an emperor, huh? Well, technically, *I* did that. Stuff like this will likely continue as the story progresses. You could say it's a haphazard process.

However, now that Yuki's become the Demon Emperor, I've already decided what his final title will be. And that's... If only I could write it. That would make me so happy.

As expected, the most important thing in this volume was the progress of his relationships with Lew and Leila. I knew what I wanted for Lew from the start, so her story progressed smoothly. Leila, on the other hand, was a problem. I'd been thinking about what to do with her for a long time. Should she remain as a housekeeper, or should she move forward with her life?

She actually wasn't part of my original plan. At first, the only people I had in mind other than Yuki were Lefi, Iluna, Lew, and Nell. So to be honest, I was constantly worried about her position while writing the story. Although it was hard to let her stay where she was too... The result of all that worrying was a little bit more progress in this volume, and I have no regrets about it whatsoever.

After talking with her friends and teacher, she made her own choice to consider her own worries. And since she chose her own way of life, there's nothing more I can say. All I can do as the author is to make sure that they all live happily from now on. I'll give it everything I have.

Finally, I'd like to end with acknowledgments. To my editor, Daburyu, and to Note Tono for helping me put this work together. To everyone else involved, and to the readers who read

this story: thank you all from the bottom of my heart.
See you again soon! Ciao!


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"Wooow! This is amazing!
"Yes... magnifi-cent."
I can see aaall the way down!"
Healing Slime
Shii
Vampire
Iluna
Yuki's Weapon
Zaien
(Pet Name: En)
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Now I'm a DEMON LORD! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My DUNGEON
11


Enjoying a family vacation
in the ovine village!
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Of the
Ovine Race
Leila
The Young Man
Reborn in Another World
As a Demon Lord
Yuki
Werewolf
Lewin
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Lefisios
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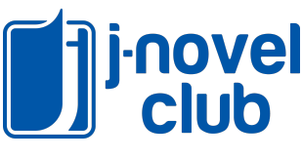

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Table of Contents

Cover

Prologue: A Promise with the Monarchs
Chapter 1: Marrying Lew
Side Story 1: Daughter
Chapter 2: Aftermath
Side Story 2: Demon Emperor
Chapter 3: Getting Ready to Travel
Side Story 3: Rir Around That Time
Chapter 4: Sightseeing
Epilogue: I Wish You a Bright Future

Afterword
Color Illustrations
Bonus High Resolution Illustrations
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Now I’m a Demon Lord! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My Dungeon: Volume 11
by Ryuyu

Translated by Kashi Kamitoma
Edited by Adam Haffen

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MAO NI NATTANODE, DUNGEON TSUKUTTE JINGAI MUSUME TO HONOBONO SURU Vol. 11

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