
8
Author: Kureha
Illustrator: Yamigo
The White Cat's Revenge
as Plotted from the Dragon King's Lap


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Jade

The young and wise ruler of the Nation of the Dragon King. Takes Ruri, a Beloved, into his care. In contrast to his cool and suave appearance, he has a soft spot for all things cute and cuddly. Dotes on Ruri, his wife.

Ruri Morikawa

A girl summoned to an alternate world after getting wrapped up in her childhood "friend's" nonsense. She is a Beloved, a person with mana that spirits find especially attractive. By putting on a special bracelet, she can transform into a white cat. Trouble has abounded during her newlywed life with Jade.

Character Introductions




Arman
A lion demi-human and the ruler of the Nation of the Beast King. An enjoyer of combat who often talks assertively. His eyes light up when combat is afoot, and he will jump to join a fight before anyone else.
Celestine
The Nation of the Beast King's Beloved and a bird demi-human with unrequited feelings for Jade despite his marriage to Ruri. She is prideful but well-mannered.
Padparadscha
Arman's proper queen. The news hasn't been formally announced to the other nations, but she is pregnant with Arman's child. Has a calm personality but is frank when she needs to be.



Prologue

In a place some distance from the Nation of the Dragon King, Beryl, Ruri's grandfather, was on a journey with the previous Beast King, Andal.

Near Andal's feet, the supreme-level spirit of earth, Chi, was trotting along. Currently in the form of a shifty-eyed capybara, Chi had made a contract with and been given a name by the First Dragon King, Weidt, in the past, so he had deep ties with the Nation of the Dragon King. He had made a contract with Ruri not too long ago, but after taking a liking to Beryl's unconventional personality, he had casually annulled his contract with Ruri and struck a new one with Beryl.

He was an eccentric spirit even among the supreme-level spirits, with the most contract-bearers in the past, forming new contracts with people on the sole basis of finding them interesting. However, it was easy to guess what kind of personality Chi had, seeing as he readily accepted the name that Weidt gave to him on the spur of the moment.

It was a quality that made even Lydia, the supreme-level spirit of time, exasperated. She had commented that although allowing someone to name a spirit meant that the spirit would serve that person, the way Chi handled it was far too casual.

After making the contract with Beryl, he had set off with Beryl and Andal on their journey. Being a Beloved himself, Beryl was welcomed everywhere he went with open arms. He had no monetary issues, since he'd received a sizable amount of money from the Dragon King, Jade, before leaving the Nation of the Dragon King, but since people welcoming him in would give him piles upon piles of gifts as tribute to the Beloved, he never really had a chance to use any of the money he had on hand.

Then again, the money given to Beryl was a portion of public

funds that were set aside for the Beloveds of the Nation of the Dragon King. In other words, it was tax money. Therefore, it was best to be thrifty with it. Beloveds brought so many benefits to the country that no one would complain even if he did spend it, but unlike Ruri, who had lived in the Nation of the Dragon King for quite some time, Beryl had just arrived, so he felt a tad more hesitant. That was why he was so grateful for the items that the people willingly gifted him.

At the same time, Beryl was very surprised that the majority of people in this world accepted spirits as the norm, since he had never met a person who could see spirits in his own world. There was a certain population of people who didn't believe in spirits here, mostly because of not being able to see them due to a lack of mana or not being compatible with them. However, the majority of nations and races worshipped them.

Not seeing spirits was commonplace in Beryl's world, which had made it a difficult place to live in, since he not only could talk to spirits but had superhuman abilities that allowed him to charge into a hail of gunfire completely unprotected. The same was likely true for his daughter and Ruri's mother, Riccia. That was, after all, one of the underlying reasons for their promptly agreeing to go to the other world upon hearing the news that Ruri was there.

Beryl and Riccia felt somewhat sorry for the person who had ended up getting wrapped up in all of this—Ruri's father, Kohaku. Unlike them, he was a completely normal human being with no mana to speak of, so he was undoubtedly hesitant about going to other worlds and whatnot. However, the more time Kohaku and Riccia spent as husband and wife, the more he was able to see spirits, even though he couldn't converse with them.

The shock when Kohaku saw a spirit with his own eyes was so funny that the mere recollection made Beryl chortle. However, thanks to that, Riccia had been able to make him acknowledge that spirits existed, and Kohaku was finally able to share in the same world as her—a fact that greatly delighted her.

Although he was a regular human and was seriously conflicted about coming to the other world, according to the spirits, he was

doing a fine job working in the castle by utilizing the skills he had picked up from being a former diplomat.

Being able to verbally communicate was another reason Beryl was able to enjoy himself in peace, but he wasn't very sure of the science behind that and did not intend to put any deep thought into it. Accepting things as they were was typical for him. The same could have been said of Riccia, as her optimistic and flexible personality resembled his to a tee. Ruri was optimistic in some ways as well, but she had a serious side from Kohaku; the fact that she differed slightly despite being from the same bloodline was interesting.

According to the spirits, Riccia was enjoying her life in this other world just like Beryl. Not wanting to be outdone, Beryl continued journeying day after day. Andal was amazed at Beryl's physical strength, which allowed him to fight on equal footing with the dragonkin despite being human. He steadily continued journeying with his never-waning supply of youthful stamina.

It wasn't uncommon for them to camp in the wilderness since they didn't always have access to lodging. However, Beryl had mastered the art of outdoor survival in his home world, so he never once complained. In fact, he seemed to enjoy himself.

There were still a host of things that he wasn't used to due to the different advances in this world's civilization, but with Andal, an experienced traveler, accompanying him, he found himself with zero issues. And he had extra security with the spirits, which were very strong allies in their own way. He could even use magic as much as he wanted, allowing him to stay comfortable to a certain degree while camping outdoors.

Up until now, in his home world, Beryl would have been instantly treated as a wacko for trying to engage in pleasant conversation with the spirits in public, but now he could talk to them without having to worry about prying eyes. Here it was the exact opposite—people actually envied him.

Not only did that make things less stressful for Beryl, but he found himself pleased with everyone else around him experiencing the same world and things he himself could see. He was so glad that

he had decided to come to this world. In fact, he'd thought that so many times that he'd lost track. With the satisfaction of making the right call in his heart, he spent each day in high spirits.

During their journey, they stopped by a certain town.

"I guess we'll stay here for tonight," Andal said.

"Our first time at an inn in a while, eh?" Beryl replied, breathing a sigh of relief. Even though he had become accustomed to camping outdoors, naturally he would rather sleep in a bed. And even though the beds at the inns were hard compared to the ones in his world, he wasn't going to whine about it. He'd been prepared for that before leaving the Nation of the Dragon King on his journey. It was a tad inconvenient, but this world afforded him the freedom to live without fear of those around him. That alone was a luxury.

"We're about out of food, so we'll have to stock up."

"We're already out?"

Thanks to the townspeople of any town they visited giving them tributes, they should have had food stocked in their pocket space—enough that it wouldn't easily run out. Beryl's eyes were wide in shock, but Andal gave him a side glare.

"And whose fault is that? You eat way too much."

"Really?"

"You don't eat the same amount as a normal human. You consume as much as a damn dragonkin. What the hell kind of body do you have?"

"That so? Sorry. I'll cut back a bit."

Beryl's apology was genuine, causing Andal to lose steam.

"No, I mean, most of it was food that you got, so I have no right to complain even if you do eat it all up," Andal said, unable to bring himself to be stern since he knew that Beryl's presence alone was a great help. "I suppose we'll stay in this town and stock up for a while."

"Sounds good."

They weren't in a hurry and were free to set off when they wanted to, so they and the spirits looked for a place to stay in the meantime. The town was not as big as the capital of the Nation of the Dragon King. From Beryl's perspective, knowing the metropolitan

cities lined with buildings in his home world, he saw it as being rather small. However, it seemed to be a flourishing town all the same.

Upon seeing Beryl with his giant entourage of spirits, some passersby froze, while others did double takes in shock. Having grown accustomed to these reactions by now, he focused on his search, unperturbed.

"Now, which inn to choose?" he pondered.

Since Andal was an experienced traveler, his opinion took priority when it came to picking the right inn. Although it was prohibited in the Four Great Nations, human trafficking was tolerated in some countries. For that reason, there were many unsafe places to stay; just because the lodging was upscale didn't mean that it was necessarily safe. Being able to judge legitimate inns and establishments was extremely important. That said, if anyone were to target Andal, the Beast King who had become king through sheer strength, and Beryl, a Beloved protected by the spirits, there would be a world of pain in store for them. Because of that, safety wasn't really a factor Andal considered when choosing a place to stay.

"M'kay, we'll stay here," he decided, picking a place that was not too expensive yet not too cheap—somewhere right in the middle—despite there being more upscale offerings.

"I always wonder why you, the former king of a nation, choose to stay in such ordinary inns. Don't you want to stay at a more luxurious place?" Beryl asked. While he wasn't dissatisfied with Andal's choice, he did question the man's decision as a former king who likely lived in the lap of luxury in the past.

"You don't get it, do you? These middle-class inns actually have better food and provide a more comfortable experience. Those upscale hotels just make you feel ill at ease."

"Huh, is that right?" Beryl replied, recalling that the food in the inns Andal picked out hadn't failed them so far. The fact that he could discern that just by inspecting the outside of the inn was an incredible feat.

"*Whatever; let's go in! I'm starving!"* Chi said as he entered the inn first, prompting the two men to follow him.

"Chi, you're a spirit, so you *can't* be hungry," Beryl quipped, but the spirit wasn't listening.

Andal wasted no time and addressed the concierge. "We're looking for a short stay. Any rooms open?"

The concierge didn't reply. Upon looking at Beryl and the others, they froze with a look of utter shock on their face.

"Heeeey," Andal said with a raised voice and a wry smile, attracting the stares of those who were in the dining hall on the first floor. Ignoring the stares, he waved his hand in front of the concierge's face, snapping them back to their senses as they started to reply.

"Oh, we have openings! However...are you certain you'd like to stay here, sir? There are higher-class offerings nearby," the concierge said to confirm, taking quick peeks at Beryl all the while. Just from their reaction, it was clear that the concierge had caught on to Beryl being a Beloved.

"Yeah, it's fine. We're staying here. That okay with you, Beryl?"

"If it's okay with you, it's fine with me," Beryl agreed. He had traveled with Andal long enough to know that wherever he picked was fine, so he had no complaints.

"Very well, sir!" said the concierge in a delighted tone as they handed over the room key.

After safely securing an inn, Beryl and his party decided to grab a meal. Despite all eyes being on them, the meal they ate was fantastic.

After they had stayed for several nights, word of Beryl spread rapidly through the town, causing some people to go out of their way to find the inn and bring him tribute. He had no reason to refuse the offerings, so he accepted them, stocking up for his journey.

One day, as his breather in the town continued, he overheard something from the table next to him in the dining hall. Judging by their attire the speakers seemed to be merchants. They either had no mana or were incompatible with spirits, because they showed no signs of caring about the many spirits floating around Beryl's head, likely meaning that they couldn't see them.

However, they could see Chi, who had a physical body, so they were initially a tad surprised to see him sitting at the table with them, but aside from that, they conversed normally without really keeping their voices down.

"Hey, did you hear? They say a human suddenly showed up in the castle of the Nation of Furgal."

"Ah, yeah. I *did* hear that. And I heard that there were *multiple* people, not just one. All of them had dark hair and dark eyes."

"Are they all related somehow? Dark hair and dark eyes are already a rare color, but *all* of them with the same color?"

"Nah, apparently they're not."

Andal, who was also secretly listening in on the conversation, turned to Beryl, his face screwed into a grimace upon hearing the news. "The inside of a castle should have been reasonably well guarded, so for *that* many humans to just show up there... Are they transmigrators like you?"

"Not sure, but it's certainly not uncommon to see people with dark eyes and dark hair in my world. Kohaku is a prime example," Beryl replied as he turned to Chi, sitting in the chair next to him. "Chi, do you know anything?"

Chi had been standing in his chair, front paws on the table, and scarfing down his food like no tomorrow. Upon being asked, he stopped and tilted his head, puzzled.

"*No clue. No use asking me,*" he replied indifferently.

"Don't spirits share information with each other?" Beryl asked.

"*I don't share information all the time. The little spirits stockpile all kinds of information and talk a lot, so it gets annoying. That's why I usually make it so I can't hear them.*"

"Oh, really?"

Seeing as Beryl didn't know how it felt to share memories and information with other spirits, he had no choice but to accept what he was told. However, he couldn't deny that the spirits around him on a regular basis tended to get too chatty and noisy. If that was the case with just the few spirits that followed him around, the voices of *all* the spirits scattered across the world had to be noisier than he could ever imagine. Thinking of it like that, he couldn't really blame

Chi for shutting them all out.

Just as they were about to leave, they overheard more of the merchants' conversation.

"And get this—I heard that there's a Beloved among them."

Beryl's and Andal's ears perked up. They looked at each other and listened quietly so as not to miss anything.

"Yeah, but that's just a rumor, isn't it?"

"Not sure. I can't attest to the validity, but I heard the Nation of Furgal has been rushing to prepare for war."

"The hell? That story took a pretty tense turn."

"I can't believe they would, but you think they're gonna use the Beloved for war?"

"I don't know about all that, but it might be good to stay away from Furgal. If that person does end up being a real Beloved, who knows what kind of disaster could occur."

Perhaps it was because they had alcohol in them, but the merchants continued on with their boisterous talk. Beryl's crew ate in silence so as not to miss what they were saying, but Andal's brow was creasing more and more by the second.

"Is there some kind of issue?" Beryl asked.

Andal gave a sour grimace and replied, "The Nation of Furgal is a neighbor of the Nation of the Beast King. It's a country that also has many demi-humans, which might be the reason they've been on bad terms for so long. They've disputed and warred many times over territory. Then again, it has basically been *them* stoking the flames of hostility, and we've brushed them off. They don't keep to the fact that the Nation of the Beast King is considered one of the Four Great Nations." Andal took a sip of his glass of wine and whet his whistle before continuing. "They continued to wage war even after control of the throne went from me to Arman, but once that Beloved named Celestine showed up, they finally stopped their crusade. It seems that even they are afraid of Beloveds."

Andal chuckled for a second, but his expression soon turned serious. "But now that a Beloved has appeared in the Nation of Furgal and they have a means of fighting back, I wouldn't be surprised if they launched an offense."

"I see," replied Beryl.

"So...preparing for war..." Andal trailed off, seemingly worried about his homeland as the former Beast King.

Beryl decided to lend a helping hand to his first friend since coming to this world. "Chi, can you gather some information? About the Nation of Furgal and the Beloved there?"

"*Hmm... Well, I'm not all that great at doing research like Wind is.*"

"Can you at least try?"

"*Well, I guess I can for you. But why don't you contact Ruri just in case? Wind could probably do a bunch of research."*

Beryl put his hand on his chin. "Good point. Ruri seems to be on good terms with the Nation of the Beast King's Beloved, so maybe I should tell her to keep an eye out. But I'm not sure how to relay the message..."

The lower-level spirits were extremely bad at playing telephone. The more difficult the story, the likelier it was to be weirdly misinterpreted.

"Couldn't you just relay the message to Kotaro or Rin, Chi? Both of them are usually next to Ruri, so they'd likely tell her."

"*Aah, hmm, yeah, but...I'm not very good at explaining things either, so I don't know if they'll get the full message. Why don't you just write a letter, drop it in your pocket space, and have Lydia deliver it for you? I'll make sure she knows. That should be simple enough.*"

"I didn't realize that was an option."

Beryl had never met her personally, so he only knew about Lydia's existence in the pocket space from Ruri. He had tried to enter his own pocket space since he was interested, but everyone vehemently stopped him, stating that it was dangerous for anyone besides her contract-bearer, Ruri. When warned that he would suffer a mental breakdown, he'd tried to smooth things over by saying that he would just tough it out the old-fashioned way, but once even Chi had stopped him, stating that it wasn't something you could just tough out, he'd had no choice but to give up.

"Okay then, I guess I'll whip something up." Beryl wrote down

the situation, including the supplementary information from Andal, on a piece of paper and placed it in the pocket space. "That should do, right?"

"*Yep. Now I'll tell Lydia to deliver it.*"

"Andal, why don't you write your son a letter too? Even if you're on bad terms, you're still worried about the nation, aren't you?"

"Even if I did that, he would just rip it up and toss it without ever looking inside," Andal swiftly replied with an awkward smile. Beryl had still never been told how Andal's relationship with his son had become so strained. "Well, anyway, even if anything does happen, the Nation of the Dragon King and Nation of the Spirit King are allied nations, so there shouldn't be any need to worry."

"I sure hope so," replied Beryl, having a bad feeling about all of this but keeping it inside, as he was reluctant to say it aloud to Andal.

Chapter 1: Sango's Work

Some time had passed since Ruri returned from the Imperial Nation. Although concerned about the direction that the Imperial Nation would take, there was nothing that Ruri could do as a Beloved. The rest was in the hands of the people of the Imperial Nation. She decided to keep an eye on the developments from afar and take it easy in the Nation of the Dragon King.

At the moment, Ruri was within Sango's embrace, having transformed into her white cat form.

"Omigosh, so *cute*!" Sango exclaimed as she mercilessly hugged and took big, exaggerated whiffs of Ruri's fur.

"Fgaaah!" Ruri screamed, thrashing about. Although she looked like a cat, she was still Ruri on the inside. She struggled to the best of her ability to remind Sango not to forget that fact.

Kotaro and Rin stood nearby, not sure whether they should intervene. If Sango had been hostile toward Ruri, they would have exterminated her without a second thought, but since this was a show of affection, they looked on, conflicted.





Perhaps unable to keep watching Ruri scream to no avail, Rutile awkwardly smiled and interjected from the sidelines. "Sango, please, that's enough. I'm willing to turn a blind eye to you being intimate with Ruri to a certain extent since you're both from the same world, but she is still a Beloved and the Dragon Queen."

"Okay, as you wish, milady..." Sango replied with disappointment, at long last placing Ruri gently on the floor out of her loyalty to Rutile.

Ruri breathed a sigh of relief upon being released. The reason this had happened in the first place was that Sango had ended up finding out about the cat that had sat upon Jade's lap when she'd first visited the castle. The existence of the bracelet that transformed the wearer into a cat had greatly intrigued Sango, which was natural since she had been born and raised in a world where magic was not integrated into society.

When Ruri had come to this world, met Chelsie, and learned that she could also use magic, she'd used it in excess. She had then been scolded by Chelsie, but that was a digression.

Sango's eyes had lit up and she had begged to see the bracelet after learning about it. Ruri could understand her feelings and transformed into her cat form to appease her. While she didn't mind that, she *did* mind getting compressed in Sango's arms and petted all over. She had immediately regretted her decision.

"Come here, Ruri. I'll remove your bracelet," Rutile offered.

"*I appreciate it, Rutile-san,*" Ruri thanked her, holding out her hand to Rutile since she couldn't remove the bracelet with her paw.

Sango looked at her with intense interest as Ruri reverted back to her human form the moment the bracelet was removed.

"A person transforming into a cat is so amazing. It really does give off the vibe of being in a different world," Sango commented.

"Yeah, there is an element of wonder, isn't there?" Ruri agreed, knowing how Sango felt.

However, Rutile offered a slight correction. "It's amazing even to *us* to see a human transform into a cat by putting on a bracelet." She was likely used to seeing demi-humans like the dragonkin with human and dragon forms, but it was said that a human with

transformation abilities was simply unheard of. For Ruri and Sango, however, there was not much of a difference. In their home world, they never saw magic, let alone life-forms like spirits. Yet in this castle, magic was used as an expected part of everyday life.

While the list of demi-humans who possessed mana was long, the list of regular humans was overwhelmingly short. In the Nation of the Dragon King, the ratio of demi-humans to humans was about fifty-fifty, so they went about their lives while striking a balance, but in countries such as the Imperial Nation, with a human majority, they were forced to lead lives that were considerably more inconvenient than in nations with those capable of using magic. Perhaps that was inevitable, seeing as science had not advanced to the degree it had in Ruri's home world.

That said, those with no mana could apparently still utilize magic by using magic tools—one of those tools being the cat-transforming bracelet owned by Ruri. It was something that Weidt the First Dragon King had received from the First Queen of Yadacain.

"Want to try it?" asked Ruri.

"Can I?!" Sango replied excitedly.

"You have to give it back, though."

"Why, of course!" Sango replied, taking the bracelet she was offered in glee and putting it on without a moment's hesitation. She transformed into a cat form in the blink of an eye. Unlike Ruri, who turned into a white cat, she was a black-and-white tuxedo.

"Mreow!" Sango yelped, extremely excited upon seeing her front paw pads.

Finding Sango's reaction adorable, Ruri giggled, pulled a large mirror from her pocket space, and put it in front of her. Sango's eyes were glued to the sight of herself as a cat. However, Ruri, now in an awkward spot since Sango showed no sign of leaving the mirror anytime soon, reluctantly pulled off the bracelet from her excited friend.

Sango turned back into a human, much to her disappointment, and stared with wistful eyes at the bracelet. "That's so cool. I want one too."

"It was made by the first queen of Yadacain and is said to be

thousands of years old, so this is the only one," Ruri replied.

"You can't make one?" asked Sango.

"Unfortunately, it's a very advanced magic tool, and not even Seraphie, a witch herself, can make the exact same thing. She was able to make one you can use a limited number of times, but Euclase-san confiscated it because they said it'd be dangerous if it was ever misused," explained Ruri. She didn't mind selling it to the dragonkins, but she had no choice but to give up if Euclase said no.

"Ugh, that sucks," Sango remarked, easily backing down, showing huge growth from when she had first come to the castle. "But Ruri-sama is the Beloved child, so why don't you take it back by force? A Beloved is allowed to be selfish, aren't they?"

"Euclase-san is scary when you make them mad. If you don't listen to their directions as much as possible, you'll come to regret it. In a way, they have more pull than Jade-sama, and he's the king," Ruri explained, noting that Euclase was such a glib talker that they could even defeat Jade in an argument.

It wasn't that she thought that the Dragon King should be like that, but unlike the Dragon King, who was chosen through a contest of strength, the Chancellor established themselves by showing their ability as a civil official. It was no wonder Jade was no match for Euclase, who occasionally dabbled in diplomacy.

"Yes, Ruri-sama, you have a point. They scolded me viciously after the bad things I did to you before, and they were *very* scary doing it," said Sango, her face turning pale, as she had already been subject to Euclase's wrath in the past. Once you experienced that, it was common to never try to disobey them ever again. "But thanks to Lady Euclase, I've been able to live in this world without worrying about food or a place to sleep, so I am nothing but grateful."

Sango really was leaps and bounds more humble than when she'd first arrived. Maybe she had always been a docile girl, and her mind couldn't catch up to the bizarre experience of being transported to another world. It was enough to bring a smile to Ruri's face.

"I heard you're working very hard too. Honestly, I don't feel comfortable eating for free all the time and want to work myself, but

no one will allow me to," Ruri said with a sour expression, shooting a quick glance at Rutile to gauge her reaction.

"Of course we wouldn't," Rutile replied with an awkward grin. "What nation would make their Beloved work? Beloveds make nations prosper just by being around, so there is no need for them to work."

"Even *you're* against it, Rutile-san?" Ruri slumped her shoulders in disappointment. She'd thought that Rutile would be a little bit more accommodating than the others, but it seemed to be a lost cause. "Still, I'm pretty confident in my abilities, since I did a lot of chores when I lived at Chelsie-san's house—cooking, cleaning, laundry, and so on," Ruri said. Chelsie had taught her enough to confidently cut and fillet the game caught during hunts efficiently.

"Making sweets for His Majesty and the spirits is the most we're willing to compromise on," Rutile stated.

"Yes, right..." Ruri said in resignation. She knew that but was testing the waters just in case.

"Being a Beloved is more constricting than I thought. While I do envy you for being able to live in the lap of luxury, I might be glad that I'm not a Beloved because it seems like a pretty boring lifestyle," Sango stated. Seeing as Sango had arrived at the castle stating that she was a Beloved, she had a completely different mindset nowadays.

"Sango, what kind of work do you do?" Ruri asked, not knowing what her work actually entailed.

"Thanks to milady and Lady Euclase vouching for me, I've been assigned work that isn't too difficult. Most of it is chores, but since I have Chibi around, they ask me to do work that involves water magic," she explained. The squirrel that had been riding on her shoulder for a while now was actually an upper-level spirit that Sango had named and subjugated after arriving in this world.

There were a few of those who were beloved by the spirits, but even fewer who were beloved by the spirits enough to subjugate them. Subjugation was something that bound the spirits, preventing them from disobeying the orders of the subjugator. However, it was said that which orders they prioritized between a supreme-level spirit

and a contract-bearer depended on that spirit and contract-bearer's relationship.

Having been named by Sango, Chibi seemed to very much like her. If push came to shove, they might even disobey the orders of Rin, the supreme-level spirit of water. But even if they were to disobey, Rin had said that since she was much stronger, she would suppress Chibi if they ever showed problematic behavior. That being said, Sango worshipped Rutile, so she would likely never give an order that would inconvenience Rutile. After all, she was the founder *and* president of the Rutile fan club. She was steadily gaining like-minded members even now.

It was hard to tell which was more amazing, Sango's power to propagate a following or Rutile's popularity. Then again, Ruri was pretty sure the latter was greater. By the time Rutile had returned after her stay in the Imperial Nation, all of the girls in the castle were excited beyond belief. Even now, they came up with any reason they could concoct to stop by Ruri's room and were delighted to see Rutile. In the castle, her popularity among the women was so overwhelming that she was probably more popular than Ruri, a Beloved.

"Oh, I need to get back to work. My break is almost over. Let's chat again some other time, milady!" Sango said.

"Sure, do your best."

"Aah, what a pity I have to leave..." Sango lamented, not wanting to leave Rutile but giving a big wave goodbye before heading back to work.

However, before she could leave, Ruri flagged her down. "Oh, wait a second. Can I come with you?"

"You, Ruri-sama? Why?"

"I'm genuinely curious about what kind of jobs people who use magic are entrusted with. Also, I really have nothing else better to do..." Ruri replied with an awkward grin.

"Why not go to the king? You're newlyweds, aren't you?"

"Jade-sama is too busy with work and doesn't have the time to entertain me. Since we took that trip to the Imperial Nation, his desk has been covered with paperwork that he has to sign off on," Ruri

said, explaining that their long stay in the Imperial Nation had resulted in Jade's work getting backed up. Jade had given Euclase, the chancellor, a certain degree of discretionary authority, but there were apparently many tasks that required the king's personal input. "I wish I could help him, but Beloveds are not supposed to participate in political affairs."

A Beloved involving themselves in politics would reflect the will of that Beloved, no matter what, potentially giving rise to dictatorships and chaos. Therefore, it had been decided by the Four Great Nations that no country would involve a Beloved in politics. And others had followed in suit, respecting the Four Great Nations' decision. Then again, the only other country outside of the Four Great Nations that had a Beloved was Yadacain.

"I've been told by Euclase that I distract Jade-sama in the office, so I should go elsewhere. But Jade-sama won't allow me to go into town, so I have nothing but time on my hands..." Ruri explained.

"Being a Beloved sure is rough, isn't it? Okay. You can come along with me," Sango replied.

"Thank you," said Ruri.

Sango was basically allowed access to Sector 5 and lower. Having discovered that she possessed mana ever since coming to this world, she opened up a pocket space and started tossing the laundry of the training soldiers inside. Ruri just stood and observed, as she would be stealing work from Sango if she joined in. She was impressed by how Sango was working so effortlessly, like an old pro, despite the fact that not much time had passed since she'd first arrived at the castle.

"So, did you learn about mana after coming here?" asked Ruri.

"Yes, that's right."

"You never saw spirits in our world before, then?"

"Not at all. The first time I saw Chibi was when I came to this world."

"Ah, I see. I was only able to see spirits once I came here too. But my grandpa and mom have been able to see them for a long time, and there were a lot of spirits in our world."

Apparently, spirits sometimes traveled back and forth between

the two worlds and had even learned about tools that only existed in Ruri's world. Cell phones and batteries, like the one in the digital camera that Riccia brought with her, were their forte.

"In a way, it's a good thing that we weren't able to see them, right? If we said we could see things other people couldn't, we would have been labelled freaks immediately," Sango stated.

"Good point," Ruri agreed, not being able to deny that.

Neither Beryl nor Riccia had ever uttered anything about the existence of spirits in their home world, most likely because they'd known exactly how others would judge them. However, after coming to this world and recognizing their existence, Ruri had become able to see the spirits. Sango must have gone through the same change as Ruri since she also carried mana. There was also Asahi, who was using the power of Bewitchment without even knowing it. There might have been more people with mana in Ruri's home world than she thought. It was likely that some people could even see spirits. However, pondering the possibilities was pointless, since she had no way of confirming them anymore.

Once out of the building, Sango took out the laundry she had collected and called for Chibi. "Take it away, Chibi."

The squirrel jumped off Sango's shoulder. In the next moment, a large body of water appeared, swallowing the laundry and lifting it into the air. The water then began to swirl around and around.

"It's like a big washing machine," Ruri noted, impressed.

"Chibi's water has purifying effects, so no matter the stain, the clothes come out squeaky-clean," Sango explained.

"I can't believe they can do such a large load of laundry all at once. The power of upper-level spirits is simply incredible," Rutile remarked.

Sango blushed. "If you need your laundry washed, feel free to call me at any time, milady. I will make sure there isn't a single spot."

"Thank you very much for the offer," Rutile replied with a sweet smile.

That beautiful smile was enough to deal a blow to Sango' heart that nearly sent her down for the count. However, when it came to

the dragonkin, as long as you didn't have mana quality hated by the spirits like Ewan, it was quicker to just use purification magic yourself. Sango was currently washing the dirty clothes of those who couldn't use magic.

As she was skillfully using her upper-level spirit's power, Ruri asked her, "Have you gotten used to life here, Sango?"

Unlike Ruri, not even a few years had passed since Sango had arrived. She also hadn't been living in the castle for very long, so it was possible there were many things she wasn't yet accustomed to. Ruri was worried precisely because she had experienced what it was like when she was transported here. Sango was a teenage girl young enough that she would still need her parents' supervision in their world.

"Well, to be honest, there's a lot I'm still not used to. I mean, I did just find myself in this strange new world. It would be weirder if I wasn't lost, wouldn't it? I heard you had it the same way, Ruri. Plus, you initially wound up in a nation far more dangerous than the one I did."

Ruri wondered where she'd heard that. If she had to guess, she could probably point the finger at Euclase or someone close. "It certainly was dangerous. I was abandoned alone in a forest full of magic beasts," Ruri clarified. She had basically been told to die. However, she'd been lucky since she was actually a Beloved.

"A person by the name of Chelsie-san saved me, and I lived in the forest from that point on, but the rules here were so different and none of my logic applied, so if Chelsie-san hadn't been around, I'm sure that I would have died in the wild." Ruri chuckled awkwardly. She could laugh about it now, but at the time, she had been in so much turmoil, so much anguish, and bore so much resentment that she couldn't control her emotions.

Sango hesitantly murmured somberly, "I was also told that me showing up in that village was lucky. They said I could very well have been enslaved or eaten by beasts otherwise. I was sad about the fact that only I was going through all of this, but you must have had just as much trouble as I did, Ruri-sama."

Ruri felt sorry for Sango's struggles, replying, "I didn't have as

much trouble as you, Sango. In my case, my parents and grandpa came to this world. I never thought I would see them again. I think that alone makes me blessed. So much so that I'd get struck down if I said I was dissatisfied." Ruri could no longer return to her home world, but she had her family with her. That alone made a huge difference.

"I wonder if they're worried..." Sango whispered under her breath with a dour expression.

Despite it being very, very quiet, Ruri could hear her utterance clearly, and her heart ached just considering who she might have been thinking of.

"I can...never go back, right?" Sango asked.

"Right..." Ruri answered, presenting her with the cruel reality of the situation despite it filling her with sadness to do so. The wish that Ruri herself had made a million times would never come true.

"I asked milady and Chibi if there was any way to return, but they said it's impossible," Sango said, looking up with both hands covering her eyes. "Ha ha... Now that I hear it again, it's sad... Never being able to see my mom and dad again..."

Her laughter was listless, and her words made it seem as though she was ready to cry at any moment. The spirit named Chibi looked up at her with concern. Not even Rutile had words to offer as she stared at Sango pensively. What could they do for her? That was the question on Ruri's mind.

That was when she suddenly had a spark of inspiration and exclaimed, "Oh!"

"What is it, Ruri?" Rutile asked, puzzled.

"I came to this world from my world. But apparently, you can't go to my world with your physical body. So it's not like *no one* can go back, since the spirits, who don't have physical bodies to begin with, can come and go between worlds as they please."

"Yes, so I've been told," Rutile agreed, having been given details about Ruri to a certain extent as her guard.

"Right, so when I heard about this from Kotaro and Rin, I asked if they could both go to my home world to tell my mom and the others that I was safe. As a result, my family all came here..." Ruri

elaborated, but neither Sango nor Rutile seemed to understand what she was getting at. "My point is why don't you ask the spirits to tell your family that you're safe? Being able to go back might be a lost cause, but it would help cheer you up a little, wouldn't it?"

"Oh..." Sango's eyes widened in an instant. She leaned forward and latched onto Ruri's offer. "I'd want to, if possible! I want to tell them I'm okay, at least."

"In that case, I'll have the spirits help out," Ruri said, but just as she was about to proceed, Rin cut into the conversation.

"*Wait just a minute.*"

"Huh? What's wrong, Rin?"

"*You're forgetting something important. In your case, Beryl and Riccia were capable of telepathic communication, so it was possible for us to deliver your message. But as far as I know, there were no humans other than your family who could see spirits in your world. How do we tell Sango's family? Would a human who's never seen a spirit before believe talk of other worlds and whatnot?*"

"Oh..." Ruri stopped moving as if she'd just remembered that fact.

"In that case, it's hopeless!" Sango yelled, clutching her head as her joy instantly turned into despair.

"No, wait... There should be a way," Ruri interjected, the gears in her head spinning as fast as possible. She stammered in panic, not a single good idea coming to mind. "Erm... Erm..."

Rutile, her hand on her chin, said, "That 'cellular telephone' thing that you showed me once before—does everyone in your world have one?"

"Yes. They're pretty widespread, so I think the majority of people have one, but..." Ruri trailed off, looking over at Sango.

"Yes, *both* of my parents do," Sango replied.

"In that case, why don't you have a spirit on the other side enter a physical body and have them type out a note using that 'text message' feature?" Rutile suggested.

Ruri gasped in realization. "That might be a great idea, Rutile-san!"

It was an idea that was only possible because Ruri had described

every single feature of the cell phone to Rutile, who had a great interest in items from her world.

"B-But what would they enter? If they don't choose wisely, they might actually scare them instead..." Sango replied timidly.

She had a point. Depending on what body they were in, it could be a horror show. "Rin and Kotaro are using the corpses of living beings, but I can't believe they'll be able to conveniently find something like that..."

"*Oh my, it doesn't have to be a living being. We can enter inorganic things too. Like a stuffed animal or something like that.*"

"Really?" Ruri asked. That was news to her.

"*For a powerful spirit, upper-level or higher, that is.*"

"Upper-level or higher..." Ruri, Sango, and Rutile uttered as their eyes all moved to Chibi.

"Would a stuffed animal be borderline okay? They might not be that afraid if it's something cute. How about it?" asked Ruri. "I have a stuffed teddy bear in my room. It's a cute teddy bear, so it might be good enough. Though it might *still* be scary, regardless..."

Regardless of how cute the stuffed animal was, it would definitely be creepy if one suddenly started moving on its own, but they had no other choice.

"Want to try it?" Ruri asked.

Sango nodded hesitantly and had Chibi stand in her palm.

"Chibi, can I ask you for a favor?"

Chibi fervently nodded their head.

"Thank you, Chibi!"

"Looks like they've agreed, so let's start by teaching them how to type a message," said Ruri.

"Okay, let's do it!" said Sango.

At a later date, Chibi returned home after hearing the message from Sango's parents.

"How did it go?" Sango asked.

Chibi gestured and explained the situation to her. At first, they had frightened Sango's parents, and her mother had screamed so loudly that the neighbors had probably heard it, while her father had gone weak in the knees. But as Chibi had proceeded to type into the

cell phone in the awkward stuffed animal's body, typos and all, their curiosity started to triumph over their fear and they had drawn closer to the visitor.

Looking at the message from Sango typed out on the screen, her parents had found themselves in disbelief, but after witnessing a feat as unbelievable as a stuffed animal moving on its own, they'd *had* to believe the utterly far-fetched story of there being another world, whether they liked it or not.

Her parents had never stopped worrying and looking for Sango, so upon hearing that she was safe, they had breathed sighs of relief. However, they couldn't hide their shock over not being able to see her again. The option for them to come to this world like Ruri's family was technically on the table, but Sango had told Chibi in advance not to tell them that—a decision she had made out of consideration for her parents, since they didn't need to go out of their way to place themselves in an unfamiliar world for her sake. The fact that she was acting tough despite her urge to see them was proof that she had matured.

After telling Sango's parents that she was safe, Chibi had been given a letter to take back to her. The letter must have detailed their concern, because as Sango read it, she started to bawl. Ruri watched over her warmly, hoping that it would at least help to relieve her depression, even slightly.

The next day, Sango's eyes were puffy, but her face was somewhat chipper. "Thank you so much, Ruri-sama. I think I can do my best in this world without any regrets now," she said. It looked like her face had grown a little sharper than usual—a face so confident that it would make you believe that Sango might have a heart stronger than Ruri's.

Chapter 2: Crisis in the Nation of the Beast King

Meanwhile, something terrible was happening in the Nation of the Beast King. Among the retainers who came to greet Arman from his trip to the Imperial Nation was the Nation of the Beast King's Beloved, Celestine.

"Welcome back, Master Arman."

"Hey, there," Arman greeted her as usual with a raise of his hand. It wasn't long before he found the girl he was looking for and rushed toward her. "Oh, Padparadscha!"

The girl with the long, loosely braided hair hanging from either side of her head smiled sweetly and opened her arms to him. "Master Arman."

His lips curled into a broad grin as he gleefully took her into his embrace. Despite being in front of his other vassals, he showed no sign of caring. He normally had his chest puffed with a haughty demeanor, so to see him with a dopey, lovestruck smile on his face was an instant strikeout for him as the dignified ruler of a whole nation.

Celestine and the other retainers all wore exasperated expressions. Oblivious to their reactions, Arman's eyes could only see the woman named Padparadscha before him. He was probably able to unwind since she was his most loyal and trusted subject among those present, but the disparity between this and his normal behavior—or rather, the difference in how he treated his other wives versus her—would make any of them go on a jealous rampage if they saw it.

"Have you been doing well while I was away?"

"Yes. The child inside of me is doing fine as well," Padparadscha said with a big, swollen belly. Anyone could see what her status was

from a single glance. “They’re moving around a lot as of late.”

“That’s my child. They’re probably chock-full of energy,” Arman said, staring at her soft smile as she rubbed her belly. The similarly kind smile on his face screamed that he was on top of the world.

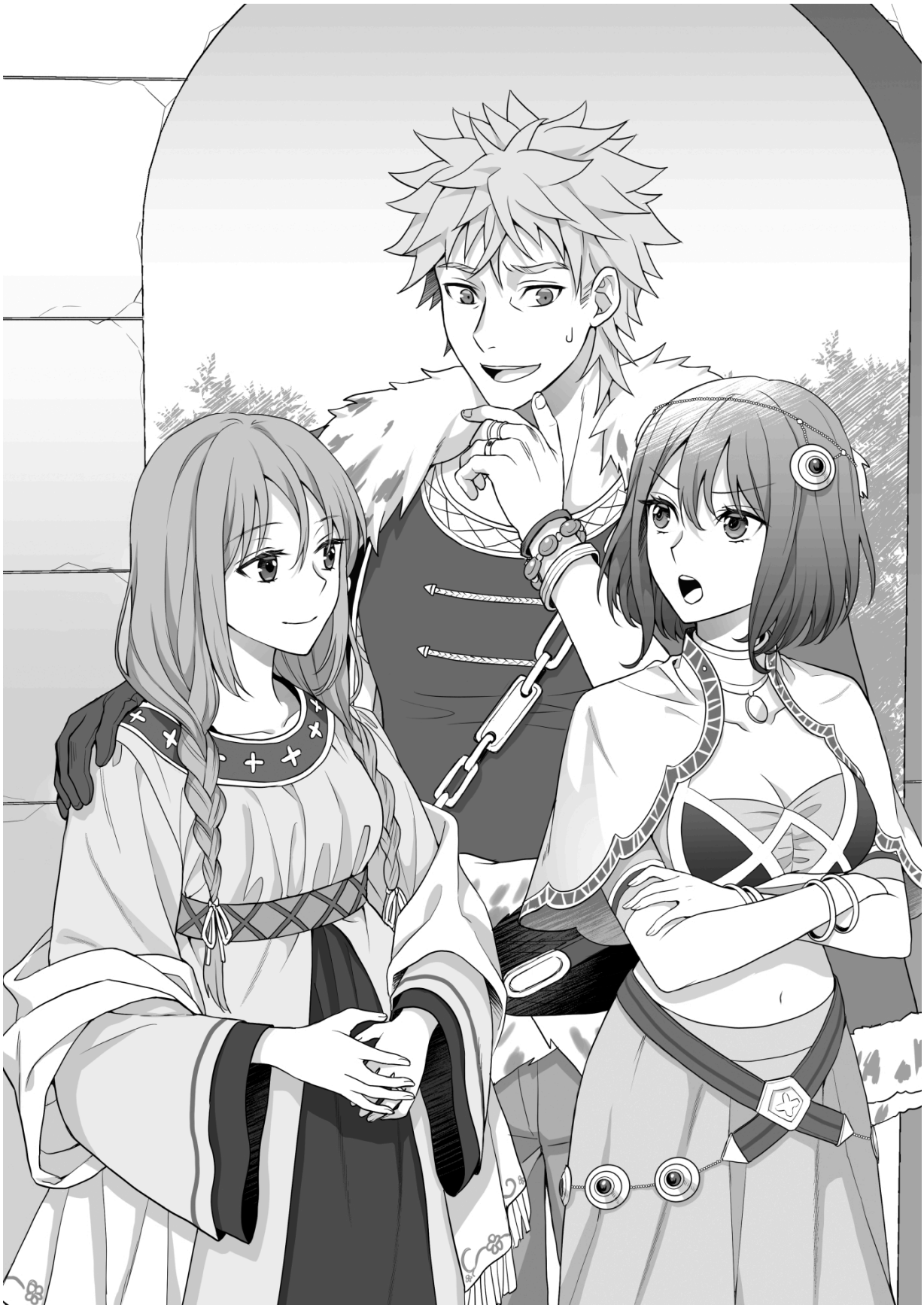
Despite Arman having many wives, Padparadscha was the one who had filled the once-vacant role of his main wife and queen. Her eyes went from her own stomach to Arman with a sweet smile, and he couldn’t help but take her into his embrace.

“My wife is just too cute...” Arman said, letting his thoughts leak out loud as he squeezed Padparadscha.

Seeing that the girl seemed to be losing her breath in his arms, Celestine and Padparadscha’s caretakers panicked. They were skilled individuals who were strictly and thoroughly screened to take care of the pregnant queen. Any of them could have easily been chosen to serve as the caretakers of a Beloved.

“Master Arman! If you hug her that hard, you’ll harm the child! Please let go of her!” Celestine warned him, pulling the two apart to save Padparadscha. He looked worriedly at the queen, who was sighing in relief. “Are you all right, Lady Padparadscha?”

“Y-Yes, I am, Lady Beloved. I just found it a tad hard to breathe.”





Celestine turned from Padparadscha to Arman, glaring angrily as she scolded him. “Master Arman! You know that you’re ridiculously strong, so please try to hold back! What if something happens to your wife and child?! She is about to enter her final month, so being overly cautious is a must!”

“Sorry!” Arman replied, flinching at Celestine’s intensity despite his station. When it came to the Nation of the Beast King, where the king had more authority than in the Nation of the Dragon King, the only one who could tell off the Beast King was a Beloved like Celestine.

Rebuking Arman had inevitably turned into Celestine’s role. Despite the fact that he had never been seriously involved with anyone else before, he had been doting on Padparadscha as if he had lost all self-control. And since he would very often dote so much that he couldn’t hold back, he needed someone to stop him.

“Um...Lady Beloved, please don’t scold Master Arman too harshly,” Padparadscha pleaded sympathetically, warming Arman’s heart.

Celestine shot a cold sideways glance at Arman, crossed her arms, and said, “Lady Padparadscha, you mustn’t coddle him. You’re in the midst of an important time, so unless I discipline him, he will end up crushing you and the baby.”

“Celestine, what do you take me for?” Arman asked with a puzzled expression. “As rash as I am, I wouldn’t be *that* damn thoughtless.”

“I certainly hope not, though I would like to ask what *deep thought* went into bringing Lady Padparadscha here,” Celestine shot back with an icy stare in his direction.

“Urk...” Arman choked on his words. He had married a multitude of wives ever since ascending the throne as Beast King, but had never decided upon a proper queen.

Despite that, one day, when coming back from a tour, he’d brought Padparadscha back with him and declared on the spot that he would make her his proper queen. The uproar that had ensued had been akin to poking a beehive. Apparently, he had met Padparadscha in the location he toured in and fallen in love with her

at first sight.

Celestine had suspected that the tour was taking longer than usual, but after learning that Arman had neglected the tour in favor of courting Padparadscha, she was left exasperated and questioning his actions.

Normally, accepting a marriage proposal from the Beast King would be a no-brainer, but Padparadscha was a very modest and reserved person and had been put off by how many queens he had and rejected him. Arman's queens weren't women that he ushered in of his own volition; they were women who had wished to become his wife out of the pool of women suggested by his retainers while trying to maintain a balance between different tribes and factions in the nation. Arman treated all of his wives equally, but it was an undeniable fact that he was a lusty womanizer.

Celestine had repeatedly admonished him, telling him that if he didn't get his relationships with women in order, he would lose the trust of whoever he decided was his main object of affection, but he had always turned a deaf ear to the advice. Much to Arman's chagrin, her worries became a reality.

However, he had finally found true love, so he was not going to gracefully bow out just because he'd been turned down. In the end, he'd won through persistence, and although she had not accepted his marriage proposal, she had somehow allowed him to bring her to the palace.

Arman had explained the situation to Celestine, bemoaning the fact that Padparadscha still did not trust him even though she had agreed to come to the palace. Upon hearing that, Celestine had coldly replied that it was karma for all of his bad deeds up until then. Still, Arman simply couldn't ignore the woman he had fallen in love with. With Padparadscha having earned a place as Celestine's caretaker, he had continued to approach her, undeterred, until he'd eventually succeeded in having her agree to his advances. That was one of the few times he had expressed childlike glee. However, it was then that a problem arose.

Arman had naturally intended to make her his proper queen, but more retainers had expressed disapproval than he'd imagined. One

of the reasons raised was that Padparadscha was an immigrant. It wouldn't have been a problem if she'd been an ordinary immigrant, but her being from the neighboring nation, Furgal, was considered a big issue.

The country of Furgal had been created by the siblings of the Beast King and their supporting factions, who had been exiled following their defeat in the strife for the Beast King throne. While they shared the same blood, one was known as a minuscule nation and the other was known as a powerhouse. From the Nation of the Beast King's perspective, the people of Furgal were lucky they had managed to skate by with exile rather than being permanently purged, but from Furgal's point of view, the Nation of the Beast King was a hated foe that had run them out of their homeland.

That was why Furgal had repeated skirmishes with the Nation of the Beast King in order to reclaim their land. Because of this history, it was a well-known fact that the Nation of the Beast King and Furgal were on bad terms, and Arman was flooded with dissenting opinions on making Padparadscha his proper queen, since that was where she came from. The situation was so tense between the Nation of the Beast King and Furgal that Arman's retainers had flat-out decried his actions despite the fact that the Beast King was a figure with a lot of sway in the kingdom. Some had even unjustly suspected Padparadscha of being an assassin from Furgal.

Padparadscha herself had felt in her bones that she wasn't welcome and expressed a desire to back out of the role because she wasn't fit for it, which had caused Arman to panic. Unable to watch any more of that, Celestine had decided to persuade the retainers to change their minds. She had asked the spirits to investigate and prove that Padparadscha was not an assassin, explaining how serious Arman was and supporting their relationship. She was skirting the rule that Beloveds were not to get involved in politics, but thanks to her persuasion, Padparadscha had been safely recognized as Arman's proper queen.

This had naturally led to a formal announcement, but it had also been revealed that Padparadscha was pregnant with child at the same time—Arman's child, of course. Celestine had scolded him for

his lack of planning, getting her pregnant before the official announcement, but since Arman had never had a child before, the retainers had done a complete about-face and become far more welcoming. Celestine had been a tad angry with their good mood, questioning if she had even needed to convince them in the first place given their behavior now.

Arman's first child could be the next Beast King. Once his many other wives had found out that Padparadscha was pregnant with the potential heir to the throne, they'd grown concerned. They were assertive women who had practically volunteered to marry Arman, strong-willed and often fighting or bickering with each other. Arman used to find it amusing that these women would fight over him, but he knew those strong-willed women wouldn't pick a fight with Padparadscha while she was pregnant with his child.

Realizing that harm might befall his queen, he regretted not disciplining his wives sooner, but it was too little, too late. At that point, Padparadscha could have been subject to a concentrated barrage of harassment. In fact, it would have been good if it had stopped at only harassment, but there was a real possibility of her *and* their child meeting their doom if not careful.

While this meant that Arman needed to take sufficient precautions, that wasn't enough to ensure that he could protect her. If the worst-case scenario happened, it would be meaningless to regret it after the fact. For that reason, until the baby was born, Padparadscha's existence was being concealed, and she was to be taken care of at Celestine's palace—a fact only known by especially trustworthy individuals such as Arman's retainers, Celestine herself, and both of the girls' caretakers. Not even the other kings from the Four Great Nations had been informed yet. It wasn't that he suspected or distrusted Jade and the others, but the fewer people who knew the secret, the better. There was no telling what crack the truth of Padparadscha's existence could seep out from, after all.

Since Celestine's palace was filled with devout spirit worshippers, there was nary a soul who went against her wishes, meaning it was far safer than leaving her with Arman. As such, with the birth of their child drawing near in secret, Arman had found a brief period of

free time to visit her palace—to meet Padparadscha, of course, and not Celestine.

He now knelt beside Padparadscha, who comfortably sat in an armchair, and softly touched her belly. He looked so dopey and lovestruck that it made one wonder where his Beast King majesty had gone. Feeling his child's presence as it sporadically moved in its mother's belly made emotions he never felt before well up inside of him.

"Now I can see why those dragonkins only love one partner," he admitted with a gentle look in his eyes as he gazed at his wife. He was undoubtedly a womanizer, but he loved Padparadscha so much that he felt he could devote his entire life to her. It was totally different from the feelings he had for his other queens, whom he'd married to fulfill his role as Beast King. The fact that he was so at ease meant that love wasn't anything to trifle with—a fact that was sinking in for him. Arman had always scoffed at the dragonkin being so obsessed with one person that they would even risk their lives for them, but now he had cast those feelings to the far winds.

"Oh, come now, Master Arman," Padparadscha said with a giggle. If any of the other queens had seen the look on his face, they would have been burning in jealousy and hostility toward Padparadscha. The decision to leave her in Celestine's care had been the right one. There was no doubt that blood would have rained otherwise.

In the midst of this serene sight, Celestine interjected, practically rolling her eyes at the display. "Master Arman, it seems the court wants to hold an emergency meeting."

"Huh? What the hell? They're using you, a Beloved, as a messenger now? Who do they think they are?" he said, tensing his brow. His response was understandable enough; it was conduct unthinkable for a nation that worshipped Beloveds.

"Who do you think is to blame? They asked me because if they interrupt your private time with Lady Padparadscha, you'll stare daggers into them and get into a hissy fit."

Celestine was the one person who wouldn't incur Arman's wrath. Or no, perhaps it wasn't safe to say she was the *only* one now that Arman had found the love of his life, but since Padparadscha was

soft on him due to her docile nature, Celestine was essentially the only one who could make him act without earning his ire.

"It seems to be an emergency, so you should hurry over there."

He clicked his tongue a bit before reluctantly standing up and stroking Padparadscha's cheek. "I'll have this wrapped up and be back in a jiffy."

"Good luck with work."

When Arman reached the meeting room, he looked disappointed. Without even hiding his sour mood, he took his seat at the head of the table, joining his main retainers, who were already present.

"What's this about? I'm busy, you know. If this is something stupid, I'll bash your heads in."

One of his followers, dripping in a cold sweat, timidly started to talk. "The neighboring nation of Furgal has started preparing for war and is massing troops along the border."

The room went abuzz. The unrest spread quickly, as it seemed that many of the retainers hadn't heard of this news.

Arman, however, wasn't too surprised. "This isn't the first time they've tried to start a war."

"This is the first since Lady Beloved's existence was made public, sir."

"Is that a fact?" Arman asked, tilting his head.

"Starting a war with our country when we have a Beloved is akin to suicide. I wouldn't assume that they are *that* stupid."

"I see."

Celestine, the Beloved, was a big deterrent, and ever since her existence had become public knowledge, no other nation had dared start a war with the Nation of the Beast King. However, before that, Furgal had frequently launched wars against them, so Arman's memory had become fuzzy.

"Why are they trying to go to war now, then?"

"We do not have that much information, but what should we do? They might have already crossed the border."

"In that case, we'll send troops too. How many are there?"

"About ten thousand."

"Then we'll send *thirty* thousand," Arman instructed without a

moment's hesitation and swiftly continued on. "Sheesh, the Imperial Nation was in turmoil, and now us? Do they really think they stand a chance when we have Celestine?"

"They seem to know that it's impossible, but..." the retainer said as the others smiled wryly. The presence or absence of a Beloved was huge. Not a single person thought that the Nation of the Beast King would lose to them.

"I feel bad for the people who were forced to participate, so if you have the leeway, just drive them away from the border."

"Very well, sire."

The meeting ended there for the day.

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As Arman went about his work as usual, neither caring about nor interested in a war with a very obvious result, one of his retainers ran up to him in a panic.

"Your Majesty, terrible news!"

"What is it?" Arman stopped what he was doing in surprise upon seeing his retainer's panicked state.

"The troops that we sent to fight Furgal the other day have been wiped out," the retainer said, out of breath.

"What do you mean?!" Arman asked, unable to wrap his head around it. He slammed his hands on his desk, stood up, and leaned forward. "Our troops *lost?* Are you sure you're not mistaken?!"

"I am positive. Our troops were crushed. I heard it straight from the mouth of a soldier who somehow made it back from the battlefield, so it is no lie."

"What...did you say?" Arman stammered, struggling to produce the words out of sheer shock.

The result should have been a given. Furgal's ten thousand troops versus the Nation of the Beast King's thirty thousand... Although Furgal was a nation with a large populace of demi-humans like the Nation of the Beast King, there was so much of a difference in forces that the Nation of the Beast King should have easily won. That was why Arman had taken such a nonchalant stance and had been in the

middle of talking about throwing a party to reward the troops after they came back home victorious. Yet that wasn't the case.

"Quit joking around. How did those Furgal bastards do it?" Arman asked, pale and still in disbelief.

"Well..." the retainer started, "according to intel from the troops, there was a Beloved on the Furgal front lines."

"What did you say? Which Beloved? The only Beloveds in this world right now should be Celestine, Ruri, Lapis, and the Queen of Yadacain." There had been one other Beloved in the past, but that person had inflicted harm upon Ruri and incurred Kotaro's wrath, so he had taken away her power as a Beloved. And now, Beryl and Riccia had been added to the mix from the other world. All together, there were currently six Beloveds in the world.

There was no way that a Beloved of an allied nation would cooperate with Furgal, even the Queen of Yadacain. Not only did she not have diplomatic relations with Furgal, but since Quartz, the previous Dragon King, was in Yadacain, she would never lend a hand to them. And even if she *were* to lend a hand to Furgal, Jade would have informed Arman, which was why none of this made any sense.

"They said that it was a different Beloved, not from among the current pool," the retainer explained.

"A different Beloved? I've never heard anything about that," Arman shot back.

"They said it was a young girl with dark hair and dark eyes. When I heard that, I recalled getting word of a few humans suddenly appearing at Furgal's castle not too long ago. And they said all of them had dark eyes and dark hair."

"Transmigrators?" Arman wasn't familiar with the other world, but he knew that Ruri had come from there. He also knew that the two worlds would occasionally link and people would fall into this world. He had initially doubted that such a thing was possible, but the various machines that Ruri's mother had brought with her couldn't be found anywhere in this world. Once he had been shown the pictures of the other world in a camera, he was convinced that it was true. The spirits asserting this truth had also been a huge factor. After all, spirits never lied.

“If a Beloved is taking part in the war, then it’s no wonder we lost. Dammit!” Arman said, regretting that he had neglected to gather information, assuming the opposition was too weak to bother with. He scratched his head furiously and then forced himself to calm down. “Where are the Furgal troops moving?”

“They are heading straight for the royal capital. They should reach us in a day or two. Since the spirits are one their side, we haven’t been receiving any intel and didn’t realize they were so close. We assume they plan on keeping that momentum to assault the palace.”

“That’d be a disaster.”

“What do we do, Your Majesty?”

“If we’re up against a Beloved, then no matter how much more mana we have, we’re fighting a losing battle...” Arman said, a shade of despair falling over the room.

That was when Celestine entered without knocking. “Master Arman, I will go to the front line.”

“Are you stupid?! No way would I expose a Beloved to danger.”

“But the only one who can stop a Beloved is another one,” Celestine argued.

Arman’s face contorted in frustration. He knew as well as she did that without her help, they would surely lose. There was no hope of a mortal triumphing over the spirits.

“Master Arman.” Celestine called out his name once more, as if urging him to make a decision.

“But if they’re a higher rank, then you’ll be at risk,” he reminded her. Beloveds had rankings and whoever was beloved more by the spirits was considered superior. If the other Beloved was higher in rank, then the spirits would obey them instead. And if that happened, Celestine would be in danger.

“It’s better than doing nothing, isn’t it? I simply cannot sit idly by while this nation is decimated,” Celestine said, her eyes steely.

Being forced to make a decision as king, Arman desperately tried to come up with another plan, but nothing came to mind. Upon considering that the Furgal troops were approaching even as they spoke, he had no time to waver. It was a painful decision for both

Arman and the Nation of the Beast King.

"Fine...but if they're higher rank, then I'm bringing you right back," he relented.

"Of course."

"Just in case, make preparations to extract Celestine and Padparadscha," Arman ordered his retainers.

"Sire!" they replied, then burst into movement in a hectic rush.

Less than two days later, the Furgal troops had formed outside of the royal capital's walls. Among them were dark-haired individuals who stuck out like sore thumbs with several spirits attending them. It seemed to be a young man and woman.

"Hey! No one told me there were *two* Beloveds," Arman said, unable to stay still while danger was afoot, looking down at the situation from above. He had heard about *a* Beloved but received no information that there were *two.*

"Please calm down, Master Arman. This is not all that strange. Lady Ruri's family has two Beloveds as well," Celestine reminded him.

"Ugh...well, you're not wrong," he reluctantly agreed, unable to claim that it was unprecedented in light of Ruri's family. That said, he had never heard of three generations of Beloveds before, so Ruri's family was definitely unusual no matter how you sliced it.

Amid this tense touch-and-go situation where combat could break out at any time, the two presumed Beloveds stepped forward.

"Evil beasts tyrants who control this land, drop your arms and surrender now. Do that and we will not do anything bad to you!" one said.

"We do not want any pointless bloodshed. If you do as we say, we will speak to the higher-ups to forgive your past atrocities," said the other.

Arman, Celestine, and the other soldiers all looked at each other, unable to hide their confusion. They had no idea what the strangers were talking about.

"Tyrants?! This land has always belonged to the Nation of the Beast King! You are the ones invading us, so cease this and leave

now!" Arman shouted in a booming voice.

"It seems that it's difficult for beasts to understand human speech," said the young man.

"And here we were trying to show you mercy, you ingrates!" the young girl cried.

The dark-haired duo were saying whatever they wanted, unfiltered.

"You're the ones trying to spark a war, and you call *us* ingrates?" Arman replied, exasperated and at a loss.

As Celestine stood next to him, a thought suddenly popped into her mind. "If those two are transmigrators, there is a chance that the people of Furgal have given them false information. I seem to recall there being a previous incident with the person who came with Lady Ruri becoming the 'Priestess Princess' and being fed lies in a similar fashion to help spearhead a war."

"That's true. You've got a point," Arman said, recalling that incident as well. It had been a situation that had later made the kings of the Alliance of Four Nations tremble in fear at the idea that Ruri might have waged war with the Nation of the Dragon King. But thanks to Ruri's calm and rational mind, she hadn't participated in the war. In fact, she had been exiled to the forest instead, where she had been taken in by Chelsie. It was a good story in retrospect, but at the time, it had been a terrifying incident that could have resulted in the downfall of the Nation of the Dragon King.

While Arman and Celestine conversed, the dark-haired duo prattled on incessantly. They were kicking up a fuss, convinced that the Nation of the Beast King was evil, like they were a couple of heroes who had come to vanquish some insidious demon king.

"It's almost like they've been brainwashed," noted Celestine.

"There's no 'almost.' That's *exactly* what happened. Furgal probably took advantage of their ignorance and spun a story that worked in their favor. I wouldn't put it past them," Arman replied, his loathing for Furgal permeating each and every word.

"Prepare for battle!" cried the Furgal troops as they finally started to move their troops forward to engage. "We are counting on you, Lord and Lady Beloveds!"

Upon hearing that from the troops, the dark-haired duo looked forlorn.

"I wish we could have settled this without fighting," the girl said.

"They leave us with no choice. This is our mission," the boy answered, putting his hand on her shoulder.

Their exchange felt like two actors on a stage, making Arman and Celestine question their grip on reality.

"Everyone, please go forth," the dark-haired girl said, clasping her hands together as though in prayer. The spirits that were around her started to make their way forward.

"They're coming, Celestine," said Arman nervously.

"Yes." Celestine's face tensed as she gazed at the spirits making their move.

Hoping that she could avoid the worst-case scenario, she took a step forward. And then...

Chapter 3: The Letter from Beryl

One morning, Ruri entered the pocket space in order to help Lydia.

Lydia, the spirit of time and space, was in charge of managing the pocket spaces created by a multitude of people. A space could only be opened by the person who created it, and once that person died, that space could no longer be opened by anyone else.

It was Lydia's daily routine to erase such spaces that had served their purpose, but since Ruri's previous contract-bearer, the First Dragon King Weidt, had passed on some rather unnecessary knowledge, she had developed a habit of collecting items that might be useful when she found them in pocket spaces with deceased owners.

Those items were stored in Weidt's pocket space, a space she had not deleted after his death, but she had stuck it all to Ruri's pocket space, Weidt's treasure and all. As a result, Ruri's pocket space had become a storage area. Since Ruri's mana reserves were as large as that of a dragonkin and her pocket space had been combined with Weidt's, it was quite spacious, as the capacity of these spaces depended on the size of one's mana reserves. It still had plenty of room even after inheriting Weidt's treasures and was steadily growing with more things even now.

At first, Ruri had felt timid about taking things out of other people's pocket spaces despite them being unopenable by anyone else, but now she was willing to help out, taking the initiative to sort through rooms before Lydia deleted them. It was almost as though that guilt she'd initially felt had gone out the window.

The doors that lined an infinite spiral staircase were the entrances to each and every pocket space. This was the backstage area that only Lydia and her contract-bearer could enter. Ruri came out of a room and closed the door after not finding anything of particular

interest.

"Lydia! I'm done checking this space, so you can take it away."

"*Got it,*" replied Lydia. She held her hand over the door of the sorted space, and it dissolved into thin air.

The space beyond the door that she had eliminated could no longer be brought back, not even by Lydia herself. Ruri stared at the now blank patch of wall, finding it to be as strange of a sight as always. That spot was going to be someone else's room before long.

"*Now, let's move on to the next.*"

"Okay."

There were countless spaces that had lost their owners and needed to be erased. You needed mana to create a pocket space to have one, but over half the people in the world possessed mana, which basically meant *that many* pocket spaces existed.

From what Ruri had heard from the spirits, the world's population was smaller than her home world, but it was impossible for Lydia to manage it all alone. While there were plenty of lower-level members of spirit families—such as wind spirits aside from the supreme-level spirit, Kotaro—Lydia was the lone spirit of time and space. If there had been a lot of other spirits of time and space, Lydia would not only have had an easier time, but she wouldn't be lonely even if she were able to go outside the pocket space realm.

What a sweatshop operation. Ruri could only wonder why Lydia was the only of her kind. However, when she asked Lydia and the other spirits about it, she couldn't get a clear answer. Perhaps it was some sort of secret that could only be revealed to spirits, but Ruri couldn't help but be worried about Lydia whenever she left.

If it was an issue she could deal with, then she would spare no expense to resolve it, but maybe there were some areas Ruri wasn't supposed to tread. The only thing she could do was to come see Lydia as much as possible until their eventual goodbye came.

Ruri then opened another door to a pocket space. Naturally, it was a space without an owner—the space of someone who had already passed away. The moment she stepped inside, she blinked.

"Whoa, amazing."

"*This is the first score we've had in a while.*" Lydia had a hint of

excitement in her voice.

Ruri understood how she felt. She shared those feelings. It was truly a spectacular sight. The pocket space was packed to the brim with gorgeous clothes, elaborately designed statues, elegantly painted portraits of a woman, and a blinding sea of gems and jewelry. While many spaces with vacant owners were almost always duds with nothing but trash, this one was not only a score; it was a *huge* score.

The fact that the room was such a treasure trove was actually scary.

"Lydia, almost all of this is useful stuff, so what do we do?" asked Ruri.

"*Why not just move it all to your space instead?*"

"Oh, can I?" Ruri asked. She knew that anyone who would have gotten angry at her for doing such a thing was long gone, but she still felt a bit guilty.

"*I mean, if you're not going to claim any of it, I'm just going to erase it anyway,*" Lydia explained.

"Hmm, good point." In the end, her desire not to let things go to waste outweighed the guilt, and she asked Lydia to move the majority of the haul into her room.

After the move was complete, Ruri checked each item one by one to find out that the owner was a considerably high-class woman. It was nothing more than a guess from the tiaras, dresses, and jewelry, but it was hard to think otherwise. Some of the jewelry was engraved with a crest of some kind.

"Lydia, do you know where this crest here is from?"

"*Not sure. Spirits don't concern themselves with things like that*."

"Figured." Ruri naturally didn't have the foggiest, but maybe it was something that fell under Euclase's area of expertise. She picked up one of the brooches to find the same crest engraved on it. "Would you mind putting everything we brought over from that last space in one location for me?"

"*Not at all.*"

"I'll have Euclase-san check this, so I'll be heading back for today."

"*Right. Even if you are my contract-bearer, staying here for too long is bad for your mental health.*" Despite showing that she knew that, Lydia looked somewhat sad.

With a sense of reluctance in having to leave, Ruri said, "I'll be back. I'll bring some snacks, so let's have a tea party next time."

"*I'll be waiting,*" Lydia said with a smile and a wave.

Ruri turned away to exit the pocket space and was greeted by Kotaro and Rin on the other side, their body language making it clear that they had been patiently waiting the entire time.

"*Welcome back, Ruri,*" Rin greeted her, fluttering around the air.

"*Did you get a good haul?*" Kotaro asked, wagging his tail.

"Glad to be back. I got a great haul this time around, but I think I need Euclase-san's advice," replied Ruri, showing the brooch to Kotaro and Rin.

"*Oh my, how beautiful,"* Rin replied with interest. Kotaro, on the other hand, wasn't too impressed.

"I'm going to go to Euclase-san's right now. Do you two want to come?"

"*Of course!*" Rin answered promptly.

"*Wherever you go, I go, Ruri,*" Kotaro said just as fast.

Wasting no time, Ruri headed to Euclase's office with the two in tow. Braced for Euclase to give her one of their patented lectures, exasperated sighs, or nitpicks, she knocked on their office door. But it was Gibeon, Euclase's current errand boy, who opened the door and poked his head out. His eyes lit up when he saw Ruri.

"Oh, my dear sweet Ruri! Did you come to see me?" he asked, coming up to her for a hug, only for Kotaro to blow him away with his wind powers.

However, since Gibeon had a blessing from the spirit of light, Kotaro couldn't inflict any major damage to him—just enough to knock him over.

"*Come now, Kotaro. You have to give it a little more power or it won't work on him. Light gave him too much of a blessing, after all."*

"Indeed, I'll keep that in mind for next time."

Neither Rin nor Kotaro were being subtle about their hostility, practically clicking their tongues after each of their remarks. They

both hated Gibeon because their first encounter with him had put Ruri in a dangerous situation, and despite quite some time passing since then, neither of the spirits had forgiven him just yet.

"You're terrible!" whined Gibeon on the floor.

However, it was immediately drowned out by Euclase's ferocious roar. "Hey, Gibeon! Quit slacking off or I'm taking it from your pay!"

"You saw that, didn't you?! I was *attacked!"*

"No doubt because you tried to make a pass at Ruri. You ought to be thankful His Majesty isn't here. He would make sure your head and body went their separate ways, no questions asked," Euclase said, also in the camp of being cold toward Gibeon.

"You're all terrible..." Gibeon said, sniffling. But one look at his dry eyes confirmed it was nothing but crocodile tears.

Ruri ignored him and approached Euclase. Their desk was stacked with towers of papers and documents as other officials in the room busily assisted with the work.

"Is now a good time, Euclase-san?"

"Yes, I was just thinking of taking a break," Euclase replied, shooting a look at the others in the room, who all stood up at once and bowed before exiting.

Ruri felt bad that she had made Euclase go the extra mile for her sake. However, as if to dispel any feelings of guilt Ruri may have had, Euclase arrogantly barked an order at Gibeon.

"Gibeon, go brew some tea. Use those top-grade tea leaves I had you buy when I asked you to run errands the other day. And *don't* steep them too long."

"Overbearing much?" Gibeon grumbled, but he went off to prepare the tea as he was told. It was hard to believe that he had once been the prince of a whole nation.

Not that his status as a prince meant much of anything now that his homeland had been destroyed, but if it had still been around, he wouldn't have been serving people—he would've had people serving him.

Euclase stood from their chair and moved to the sofa. Ruri sat on the other side, across from the table in the middle. Kotaro plopped down next to her, and Rin perched on Ruri's shoulder. Euclase

rotated their arm to shake off the stiffness, looking a bit tired.

"Seems you've had a tough day," Ruri commented.

"Well, we're dealing with the fallout of that nasty Imperial Nation business. They're in turmoil because their top brass still haven't been ironed out. If they were an unrelated nation, it wouldn't be an issue, but since they're an allied nation and we do a lot of business with them, it's a complete mess."

"You're doing good work."

"You better believe I am. So...what did you need?"

"Yes, you see, I was helping Lydia sort through pocket spaces earlier, and—" Ruri started.

Euclase grimaced. "You didn't get into *more* trouble, did you?"

"No, not quite. I found a room that was chock-full of treasure, but it was all engraved with what seemed to be a crest, so I figured that you might have knowledge of it."

"A crest, eh? I'll have to see to be sure."

"Here it is." Ruri handed Euclase the brooch she had brought from the pocket space. It had a large gem in the center with silver around the edges, and the crest was engraved on the back.

"Quite a quality gemstone. A fine item with impeccable craftsmanship," Euclase noted.

"I agree. There were a lot of other pieces of clothing and jewelry left there, so I believe the pocket space belonged to someone very high-class..."

"Yes, no random upstart could obtain something like this," said Euclase. The item was good enough to gain their seal of approval.

"Do you know this crest, then?" asked Ruri.

"Not even *I* know everything. But I have seen it somewhere before. Now, where was it again?" Euclase mused with a contemplative groan.

Just then, Gibeon came back with the tea. "Okay! Sorry for the wait. Here's the tea, personally brewed by yours truly. I made sure to put a lot of love for you in it, Ruri!"

That little comment made it *so much* harder for Ruri to drink. Kotaro wasted no time in putting his snout up against the teacup placed in front of her. After some diligent sniffing, Kotaro walked

away, satisfied.

"*Yes, well, there doesn't seem to be anything dangerous in it.*"

"*Seems to be okay to drink,*" added Rin.

Gibeon whined yet again at the duo's remarks. "You're terrible. I would *never* poison Ruri. I'm Ruri's lover, after all!"

"*I don't trust you,*" stated Kotaro.

"*You can say that again*," Rin chimed in.

They both glared at Gibeon warily. Ruri couldn't hide her strained smile from the two overprotective spirits. As they continued their back-and-forth, Euclase searched their memories while looking at the crest engraved on the brooch.

Gibeon took a look at the brooch in Euclase's hand, and his eyes widened. Extremely panicked, he blurted out, "Huh?! Wait a second. Where did you get that?!"

Ruri looked over at him. "I got it from a private source, and I'm having Euclase-san inspect it."

She didn't mention Lydia. Her ability to enter other people's pocket spaces should be kept as secret as possible. However, there was a case, due to unforeseen circumstances, of her entering one of the Imperial Princess's pocket spaces and leaving with a key piece of evidence out of necessity. This had inevitably led to Ruri telling Arman and a handful of people that she could interact with other people's spaces.

She'd gotten off the hook because it was something that she'd *had* to do, but she'd been warned by Euclase to keep the circle of those in the know to a minimum. As a result, she had to hide the facts from Gibeon.

"Do you know where this brooch comes from, Gibeon? There's a crest on the back," Ruri said.

"Lemme see that for a sec," Gibeon begged her.

Euclase looked at Ruri to check if it was all right, and Ruri nodded to indicate that it was no problem. Gibeon took the brooch carefully, as though handling a fragile item, and slowly ran his fingers over the crest. His face contorted, on the verge of tears, as if trying to hold something back.

"Gibeon?" Ruri prompted him.

“Are there...any more items like this?” he asked.

After a slight hesitation, Ruri answered truthfully. “Yeah. There was a lot of stuff—dresses, jewelry, you name it.”

As soon as she finished her sentence, Gibeon had dropped to the floor where he stood and pleaded with Ruri on his hands and knees. “I beg of you, if you have anything else similar, please give it to me.” His tone was more serious than anything she had heard from him before, and his desperation was palpable. Puzzled, she turned her gaze to Euclase, but they seemed to be just as perplexed by the strange outburst.

That was when something hit Euclase, and they exclaimed, “Oh! I remember now. That crest—I saw it while running a background check on you, Gibeon. If memory serves, this is the crest of your homeland’s queen.”

Ruri, unable to hide her surprise at Euclase’s words, replied, “Huh? Is that true?”

“Yes. That is right, isn’t it, Gibeon?” Euclase asked.

Gibeon simply nodded with his head still bowed low.





"Yes, that's right. This brooch once belonged to my mother. It was her favorite, and she would wear it all the time, so I'm positive."

Ruri was surprised. That meant the space that she was sorting through belonged to Gibeon's mother.

"Please, I beg of you! I'll pay you for it even if it takes my entire life, so please sell it to me," Gibeon continued, sinking even deeper into his bow.

Ruri, at a loss, turned to Euclase for help. "Euclase-san..."

"It's your decision, Ruri. Those are your possessions now, after all."

"I mean, that's easier said than done," Ruri protested, since they were items she had sort of illegally obtained while helping Lydia. As far as ownership went, Gibeon was the last owner's son, so he had the right to inherit it.

"I beg of you, please!" Gibeon pleaded again, serious in a way Ruri had never seen him. She couldn't just tell him no after that. She didn't have any real emotional attachment to the items, so it didn't take long to decide to forgo selling them and just give him everything.

"Okay. Wait just a second," Ruri said, bringing out all of the things she'd taken from the pocket space now believed to be owned by Gibeon's mother. Thanks to her telling Lydia to keep everything together, she was able to bring out all of it without hesitation.

As Gibeon checked them each one by one, his gaze was drawn to the portrait of a woman, and he murmured under his breath, "Mother..."

Ruri and Euclase, with their superior dragonkin senses, could hear him. What could he be thinking now, staring at that painting with those lonely eyes? He was the prince of a nation that was no more. There were people dear to him whom he had lost along with said nation. He had no doubt experienced hardships that Ruri couldn't even begin to fathom.

"Gibeon, they're all yours. You don't have to pay me back," Ruri said, not minding because she was never hard-pressed for money as a Beloved. In fact, she'd started to feel bad that she had tried to lay claim to all of it of her own accord.

"Ruri..." Gibeon stared at her, overwhelmed. "Thank you."

Ruri smiled back at him as he bowed so deep that his lower half made a perfect right angle. And *that* was the note she wished it had all ended on.

"But I would feel bad if I didn't repay you at all for this, so I'll pay with *my body*!" Gibeon said, coming toward Ruri and flinging off his top, but he was immediately blown away by Kotaro's wind yet again. "Gwah!"

The attack was a tad stronger this time around, and Gibeon was sent tumbling across the floor, eventually stopping when his head met a wall, which sent his eyes spinning.

Seeing that, Ruri and Euclase simply let out a deep sigh.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

A few days later, Ruri entered the pocket space with tea and snacks. However, there was a twist this time around. While they usually had their tea parties in Ruri's pocket space, they were holding it in Quartz's space instead today. Quartz was still in Yadacain to create a cure for the poison that had taken the life of the Emperor.

There existed a cure via Pearl, the Queen of Yadacain, but it not only proved ineffective unless administered in the early stages, but it also tasted so horrid that it caused fainting. He said he would be assisting Pearl with improving the formula for a while.

As for why they were having a tea party in Quartz's room, it was because that was the only way to invite Seraphie. A living being staying in the pocket space for an extended period of time would experience adverse effects, but Seraphie had no such problem since she was a ghost. However, unlike Ruri, who had a contract with Lydia, she wasn't able to move between other people's pocket spaces; she could only enter Quartz's since she was always by his side.

The logical conclusion was to have the tea party in Quartz's room, but since pocket spaces were also a place where you hid your private items, Ruri wasn't sure if Quartz would give her permission.

There might have been things that he wanted to keep secret. But after Lydia had passed the message to the Spirit of Light and the Spirit of Light had passed the message to Quartz, he had given her permission more easily than she'd expected. Apparently, Quartz wasn't very concerned about privacy. It was possible that he didn't have anything substantial inside in his space. Since he Quartz didn't mind, Ruri didn't mind either as she entered with tea and snacks.

As expected of the previous Dragon King, the room was far bigger than any room she had sorted so far. It reflected the size of Quartz's mana reserve. Although she'd never seen it before, Ruri wondered if Jade's room was about as big as this one. As she looked around the space, extremely interested, she locked eyes with Seraphie, who was already there.

"Seraphie! Hello. How have you been?"

Seraphie giggled in reply. "*Oh, Ruri. It's odd to ask a ghost how they're doing.*"

"You have a good point," Ruri admitted, realizing that was a stupid question for a person with no corporeal form.

"*But Quartz and Pearl are doing well. I do feel like Quartz is getting bossed around by Pearl, but they're getting along, regardless. They also have the Spirit of Darkness as a chaperone.*"

"That's good to hear." As Ruri and Seraphie continued their harmless conversation, they made sure not to look at a certain spot, but you could tell that they were actually extremely anxious just by looking at both of their eyes. Lydia, not reading the room, approached them.

"*So, this is Seraphie?*"

"Lydia, I was *trying* not to point that out," Ruri said, her concern put to waste.

"*I mean, it's right in your face, so you'll see it even if you don't want to*," Seraphie replied.

"Yeah, but I tried not to touch upon it because I knew that..." Ruri trailed off, looking over at Seraphie, who was now wearing an awkward expression.

They were talking about something that had stood out to Ruri ever since she'd first entered Quartz's room. It was Seraphie herself,

encased in a huge glass cube. Her face was pale and lacking the vigor of a living being, and she was clad in a dress and jewelry, making her look like some sort of doll.

However, since Seraphie was in front of Ruri as a ghost, the figure in the glass case both was and wasn't Seraphie. It was her remains. Seraphie had been buried after her death, but she had a history of being pillaged by grave robbers.

Ruri had heard that Quartz had made it so that Seraphie's grave would never be ransacked again, but she never would have guessed that she would be kept like a decoration. Judging from the shock in Seraphie's eyes, not even *she* had expected her body to be so heavily guarded. Her grave had been ransacked, but the culprits had only been after the jewelry that had adorned her body, so her form remained pristine.

"*It's kind of weird to see your own corpse like this...*" Seraphie commented.

"Yes, it's not something you see every day," Ruri agreed, knowing that she was dealing with the dead. She grimaced as she realized she was getting a glimpse at the level of Quartz's obsession with Seraphie.

"*Ruri, sorry, but do you have a blanket or something?*" asked Seraphie.

"What are you going to use it for?" Ruri replied, not sure what Seraphie was getting at.

Seraphie pointed her finger at her own body. "*To hide* that*, obviously! We can't have fun chatting together with* that *along for the ride, can we?! Don't you mind it ruining the taste of the tea?!*"

It was a harsh way to talk about her own body, but Ruri couldn't envision enjoying food and drink in front of a dead body. The fact that it was in such immaculate condition, as if it could start moving at any moment, made it all the eerier.

"Lydia, there was one in my space, right? Can you bring it here?" Ruri asked.

"*Yes,*" Lydia replied, and in the blink of an eye, a pure white sheet appeared from thin air.

Ruri carefully covered the glass case so that the inside couldn't be

seen. With Seraphie's body out of sight, she felt a little more at ease. "Do you think Quartz-sama is planning on keeping your body here forever, Seraphie-san?"

"*If that's the case, we'd erase her along with the space after his death.*" Lydia raised an eyebrow, putting her hand on her face and tilting her head slightly. "*Wouldn't it be better to bury her in the world where the humans live?*"

"Fair point," Ruri said, turning to Seraphie.

The ghost let out a deep sigh before replying, "*No, you're right. I'll talk it over with Quartz later. I personally would want to be buried next to his remains after he meets his end...*"

"In that case, I'll talk it over with Jade-sama and Euclase-san. I would like to be buried next to Jade-sama too, so I know how you feel. I mean, I'm definitely going to die first, but you know what I mean," Ruri said.

Dragonkins lived a very long time. They aged at such a slow rate that a human's lifespan would pass in the blink of an eye. When she looked over at Lydia, the spirit looked sad. Spirits didn't have long lives—in fact, they didn't have lives at all. No matter what Lydia did, she was always the one seeing people off to the grave.

"Lydia, I still have a lot of time before I'm gone. Chelsie-san gave me her guarantee that I'm going to live longer than normal humans because of all the mana I have," Ruri assured her.

Despite her best efforts to act cheerful, Lydia's face remained glum. "*From where I stand, dragonkin or not, your lives still pass in the blink of an eye...*"

"Lydia..." Ruri stood in front of the spirit and held her hand. "Just like you made a contract with me after the First Dragon King, I'm sure that someone will show up who wants to make your next contract."

"*Maybe, maybe not,*" Lydia replied.

"Then just make a contract with my kid!" Ruri said, blurting out the first thing that came to mind, but her face brightened as if she had just proposed a great idea. "Yeah, that's the ticket! I was an only child, so I always wanted siblings of my own. I hear that childbirth is tough, but I'll do my best to have a lot of kids, and you

can make a contract with any of them that you like. Right?!"

Bowled over by Ruri's momentum, Lydia blinked, dumbfounded. But before long, her lips curled into a smile. "*You're quick to decide things when you haven't even had one child yet,*" Lydia pointed out.

"But with people in this world, it's not uncommon for girls my age to have children. I'm pretty confident in my stamina too, so just leave it to me! After all, I am my grandpa's granddaughter." The words "my grandpa's granddaughter" held a lot of weight considering Ruri's grandfather could go toe-to-toe with dragonkin unarmed.

Lydia broke her gloomy expression to let out a giggle.

"*Heh heh, I'm looking forward to whenever that happens.*"

"Leave it to me!" she said confidently, but still hoping that Lydia wouldn't be sad even when she went away.

After chasing away the dour mood in the air, the three finally began their tea party. The first thing Ruri did was give a status report. Of course, Quartz gave regular reports on the status of Yadacain, but Ruri wasn't really involved in that. Even if she knew about it, there wasn't anything she could do about it. Therefore, while they were called status reports, the content wasn't all that difficult to follow. It was mostly just harmless talk about life in Yadacain and what kind of nation it was. Ruri's status reports were mostly humorous—about things popular in the capital and trouble in the castle.

"*Oh?*" Lydia suddenly exclaimed, making Ruri and Seraphie turn their heads toward her.

"What's the matter?" asked Ruri.

"*It's a message from Chi. That's unusual.*"

"What did Chi say?"

"*Just as second,*" Lydia said, looking into the distance for a bit before spawning a letter in front of her. She took the floating letter and handed it to Ruri without reading it. "*From your grandpa, apparently.*"

"From grandpa?" Wondering if he was in an extreme rush if he had to go through Lydia to give her a message, Ruri worried that something had happened to him before tearing the envelope's seal.

The note inside was lined with sentences written just as powerfully as Beryl's personality. "Grandpa's party seems to be in a region near the Nation of the Beast King."

Ruri was relieved to find out that Beryl was fine, but as she read on, wrinkles started to form in her brow.

"*Some sort of issue?*" asked Seraphie, also looking pensive after seeing Ruri's reaction.

Ruri shook her head. "Not an issue necessarily, but he said that there might be a number of transmigrators in Furgal, the neighbors to the Nation of the Beast King."

"*By transmigrators, does he mean people like you?*" asked Seraphie.

"It doesn't seem that he's looked that far into it, but according to the rumors he heard, there is a Beloved among those people."

"*Isn't that a pretty* big *issue, then?*"

"Hmm..."

The presence of a Beloved could enrich a nation, but it could also threaten to destroy it if handled incorrectly. There was Ruri, Celestine of the Nation of the Beast King, and Lapis of the Nation of the Spirit King. While each of them had slight character flaws, none of them would ever do something as irrational as harming another nation. Even Pearl of Yadacain, who had tried to wage war with the Nation of the Dragon King in the past, was fulfilling her duties as a queen thanks to the Spirit of Darkness pulling the reins on her.

Yet here was a new Beloved—one who was very likely to be a transmigrator like Ruri.

"*Did he write any more details?*" Seraphie asked, possibly worried as well.

Ruri gave the letter another read, but the words remained the same. "That's all the information here. It wouldn't have killed him to put in a little bit more detail..." The letter was fitting, given Beryl's loosey-goosey ways, but it was severely lacking in information. "He said that maybe Kotaro could look into it." That detail was included at the end.

"*Well, Wind's power* is *best suited to investigation out of all the spirits,*" Lydia said. She would have difficulty gathering information

since she couldn’t leave this realm.

“He said that the Nation of Furgal is at odds with the Nation of the Beast King. That’s why I might need to report this to Jade-sama just in case,” Ruri explained, also ready to ask Kotaro to gather information while she was at it.

If these were ordinary transmigrators, the power of the great nations would likely resolve the issue, even if Ruri simply sat back and watched from the sidelines until trouble arose. But if a Beloved was among them, she couldn’t just sit tight.

Perhaps Seraphie fully comprehended this fact, because she readily allowed Ruri to skip their tea party. Lydia seemed slightly dissatisfied but settled down once Ruri promised that they would have another party in the near future.

And with that, Ruri walked out of the pocket space with Beryl’s letter in hand.

Chapter 4: Seeking Rescue

After ending the tea party abruptly, Ruri headed for Jade's office. Understanding the impact that Beloveds had in this world, she was hurrying to report the news of the new Beloved right away.

In addition to giving a direct report, Ruri also wanted to have Kotaro investigate the Nation of Furgal, the Beloved in question, and the transmigrators. However, she couldn't find Kotaro or Rin, so she asked the lower-level spirits around her to pass on the message to the pair to come to Jade's office.

Telepathic communication over long distances was such a convenient trick. However, once you considered the fact that they could even hear the other spirits' noisy chatter, it was difficult to gauge whether that was a positive or negative. Then again, they were well-adjusted to simultaneously listening and not listening, so it was probably nothing to worry about.

Ruri knocked on the office door and opened it. Not only was Jade there, but Euclase, Claus, and Finn were as well. Ruri realized that saved her some trouble.

"Jade-sama, do you have a moment?"

"Yes, of course. What did you need? Weren't you having tea with Lady Lydia and Lady Seraphie?"

"Well, something came up, and I couldn't nonchalantly drink tea while it's happening."

"Something like what?"

As Ruri was processing things in her head, deciding where she should start, Kotaro and Lin came into the room.

"*You called, Ruri?*"

"Yeah. I have a little favor to ask you, Kotaro. But first, let me explain to everyone," Ruri said, turning to face Jade and the others. "I received a letter from my grandpa via Lydia. And according to it, a lot of transmigrators appeared in the nation bordering the Nation of

the Beast King."

There was some mild shock, but no one interjected, waiting for her to continue.

"And there seems to be a Beloved among those transmigrators."

Euclase was the first to react, unable to contain their shock at the new revelation. "A Beloved? Are you sure about that?"

"Grandpa said that he doesn't have any definitive proof and that he only heard it as a rumor. They tried to get Chi to look into it, but he said that it wasn't his forte and turned him down. He said that Kotaro would be better at investigating since he's the spirit of the wind."

Ruri accepted that Chi saying it wasn't his forte meant that he *couldn't* do it, but she assumed that he had no interest in making the effort. That was very Chi-like. It was no surprise that Lydia said he operated on mood and instinct.

"*That is why you called for me?*" asked Kotaro.

"Yeah, that's right. The transmigrators seem to have shown up in a nation called Furgal, which is next to the Nation of the Beast King, so I figured it'll be an issue if they have some sort of impact there, and it won't hurt to investigate whether the newcomer is really a Beloved," Ruri replied. A Beloved was like a bomb that might go off at any time. "Kotaro, can I ask you to handle it?"

"*Indeed. I mean, if that is your wish, Ruri,*" Kotaro said, showing little interest like Chi but never being the one to refuse a request from her. "*It is just going to take some time.*"

"Okay. That's okay, right, Jade-sama?" Ruri said, turning to Jade for a decision. She found him and the other retainers with grimaces all around. "Jade-sama? Was it bad that I started making plans on my own?" she asked. After all, Beloveds were not supposed to get involved in politics. However, Ruri wasn't quite sure what was safe and what wasn't. Was asking Kotaro to investigate another country safe or not? Where did that fall?

Jade, so deep in thought that wrinkles formed on his brow, snapped out of it. "No, there's no problem. In fact, I would like to ask you to do so myself, Lord Kotaro. There is no entity more skilled at information gathering than the Spirit of the Wind."

"*If* Ruri *wishes it, I'll do it,*" Kotaro replied.

He was only taking action because Ruri asked. It felt as though he was saying that he wouldn't act because the *Dragon King* asked—that spirits wouldn't simply obey the will of a mortal. However, Jade and the rest of his retainers were fully aware of that already, so Kotaro's reminder was unnecessary.

Kotaro walked to the window and opened it. Wind flowed from him, softly spreading. It barely took a few seconds and then Kotaro was right back at Ruri's side.

"*This will do. I sent the order to the wind spirits, so information will gradually come in.*"

"Thank you, Kotaro," said Ruri, petting his fluffy head in appreciation.

Kotaro went along with it, fairly pleased. Rin watched with a raised eyebrow.

In the midst of this, Jade said, "Claus, bring Joshua here."

"Very well, sire," Claus replied as he bowed and exited the room. He soon returned with his son, Joshua, in tow.

Joshua's face tightened upon seeing all of the people gathered in the office. "Uh-oh, I've got a *really* bad feeling." That feeling was correct.

"Joshua, I need you to go to Furgal and gather intel about the transmigrators there at once," Jade ordered him.

Ruri tilted her head, perplexed. "But Jade-sama, isn't Kotaro doing that for us?"

"Yes, he is, but nuance might vary when it comes to info from a spirit versus a mortal. The senses of a spirit aren't easy for a mortal to understand," said Jade.

"Now I see. So, it's sort of like...if you ask two groups to gather information on food, one group will look for restaurants that serve ramen and the other will look for restaurants that serve rice," Ruri concluded.

"Uh, what? I'm not sure we're quite on the same page here, but I suppose that's close enough," Jade replied, her example being hard for him to grasp.

Whatever the case, Joshua's trip to Furgal was unavoidable, and

his face could not get any more melancholy.

"I'm counting on you, Joshua," Jade told him.

"As you wish, sire."

The mood of the room dictated that any reply other than an affirmative one would have spelled disaster, so Joshua walked out of the office, saddled with his "I don't want to go" aura.

"Supposing there actually is a Beloved in Furgal, will the Nation of the Beast King be all right?" Claus asked, concerned.

Ruri couldn't wrap her head around his reaction. "Is a Beloved being in Furgal that much of a problem? I've come to understand that Beloveds have a huge influence on the world."

Euclase answered her question. "It's a *big* problem. Furgal has been openly hostile to the Nation of the Beast King for a long time. They are a dangerous nation that always schemes to overthrow them. Lady Celestine's presence has been a deterrent so far, but if Furgal has a Beloved themselves, I wouldn't be surprised if they figure this is their chance and engage in war."

"Then will they be okay?" Ruri asked, images of Celestine and Arman running through her mind.

"I'd like to *think* they'll be okay with Lady Celestine around, but..." Euclase trailed off ominously as the conversation ground to a halt.

Since there was only so much that they could do from far away, they had no choice but to wait for more information.

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With news of the transmigrators and Beloved delivered, Ruri took Rutile to the hot spring facility that she had built in a town in the royal capital as a change of pace. The facility had been established under Ruri's leadership, but nowadays, she was hands-off and left operations up to the staff.

It had taken her a pretty long time to realize that a Beloved trying to start up any kind of business enterprise was a mistake in the first place. She had neither the experience or know-how to run an establishment, so that wasn't surprising. Leaving everything to

Amarna had been the right choice in the end.

The children from the slums were cheerfully working, a stark contrast to the dead eyes devoid of dreams or hope from when she'd first met them.

Amarna said the general pattern nowadays was that once the kids had acquired enough knowledge and education at the facility, they quit and found employment elsewhere. In doing so, she had been able to educate one motivated child after another.

Whether Amarna was a strict teacher or the kids had an eagerness to learn, those who worked there were acquiring customer service and clerical skills that they could be proud of no matter where they worked next.

As the person who had started this project on the spur of the moment, Ruri felt both sorry to see them go and happy to see how much those boys and girls had grown. She would be even happier if this momentum kept up and the slums ceased to be, but from her observations of her home world, she knew that it wouldn't be that simple. Even so, all she could do was hope that as many of them were able to stand on their own feet as possible.

As Ruri watched the kids all working energetically, she couldn't help but be amazed by the inside of the hot springs. It had been a very, *very* ordinary hot spring with just a pair of men's and women's baths, but it had eventually gained more features, like private baths.

When Ruri flagged down a nearby employee and asked him, she was told that the man formerly of the Nation of the Beast King who put in a lot of passion into designing the facility had installed a few private rooms because he wanted a place to soak without worrying about anyone watching him. Ruri had a blank stare, as this was the first she was hearing about it, but he had received permission from Amarna. There was no way she could complain since she had left Amarna in charge. Also, the rentable private rooms were all given unique designs that captured Ruri's bath-time-loving heart, so she had even *less* of a reason to interject.

The private baths seemed to be by reservation only, but upon hearing that one was open, Ruri decided to go in without a moment's hesitation. She invited Rutile to join her, but the other

woman refused, saying that a bodyguard couldn't be seen defenseless, so Ruri left her on standby outside of the room. Lynn and Kotaro were not in the mood, so they decided to wait outside too.

Though she felt a little sorry for Rutile, Ruri thoroughly enjoyed her private bath time. As she leisurely soaked in the hot water, she suddenly noticed a weird feeling in her stomach. The lower part of her abdomen felt awfully warm. It almost felt as if mana was accumulating around there. It wasn't unpleasant at all, but it was a sensation she had never felt before.

"What could this be?" Ruri asked herself, patting her stomach but not feeling any pain or discomfort.

This was the first time it had ever happened to her, so she wondered if she should talk it over with someone but hesitated once the faces of the overprotective people around her flashed through her mind.

"I feel like they'd make a big deal out of it..."

There was no way they wouldn't make a fuss if something happened to a Beloved's body. Besides, Ruri was already in tune with Jade. Once in tune with a dragonkin, even human bodies become as sturdy as a dragonkin's and less susceptible to colds and illnesses. In fact, when she'd crushed an apple-like fruit with one hand after the tuning was done, she'd been shocked by her newfound strength. She was proud of having attained such a powerful body.

"Well, whatever. I'd feel bad if I made them worry over something small like this," she said, deciding to keep it quiet since it wasn't causing her any pain.

She would later be severely scolded by Euclase.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

A few days later, the heat Ruri felt in her stomach seemed to be growing into a larger and larger mass. One night, she was beginning to worry about her own health and decided it was time to consult someone about it.

"Jade-sama, I need to talk to you about something..." she said as she sat next to Jade while he lay down, placing a hand on her stomach.

"What's the matter?"

"It's probably not a big deal, but..."

"Hmm?" He looked back in confusion.

Just as Ruri was about to explain, a loud *crash* could be heard. Ruri jumped at the sudden sound, and Jade leaped up.

"Huh? What?!" Ruri exclaimed.

"No clue. It sounds like something broke," Jade said, getting out of bed and putting on his shoes. "Ruri, come with me. I can't leave you alone here, just in case."

"Oh, yes!" Ruri followed him out of the room.

Kotaro and Rin followed soon after. There were other soldiers on duty running around too, but there were fewer people present now than in the daytime.

"Kotaro, Rin, do you know what happened?" Ruri asked.

"*It sounds like the spirits are making a racket,*" Kotaro answered.

"Spirits?"

"*You'll see when we get there.*"

Ruri and Jade followed him to a room nearby that was normally unused. Troops had already gathered there and were making a fuss, but they weren't attempting to go inside; they were only watching.

"What's going on?" asked Jade, as the troops opened a path at his arrival.

Ruri peered into the room as soon as she was able to and found a huge bird.

"Wow, I've never seen a bird *this* big before. So, this is what crashed in here," she deduced, looking at the broken window.

The bird had to have rammed into the window at great speed, since there was shattered glass all over the floor. Although not as big as a dragonkin in their dragon form, the creature was limp and covered in scratches.

As Ruri stood, unable to wrap her mind around the situation, Jade shouted out, "Celestine!"

"Huh?!" Ruri exclaimed, unable to believe her ears. She looked

back and forth from the bird to Jade.

She was shocked, but then she remembered that Celestine was a bird demi-human. That meant it wasn't strange for her to take the form of a bird just like Jade turned into a dragon. Upon closer inspection, her plumage was the same tender green as Celestine's hair.

"What is Celestine-san doing here?" Ruri asked, baffled that not only was the other Beloved here, but she was covered in scars.

However, that question would soon be answered.

"Celestine-san, we have to tend to your wounds at once—"

"Wait, Ruri!" Jade quickly grabbed her arm to stop her from running over to Celestine. That was when a fireball hit Celestine's body.

Celestine unleashed a pained scream as she spread her giant wings as if to protect someone or something. Ruri had been so focused on her that she had neglected to see there was a person underneath her wings. Although someone else being there was shocking enough, the more shocking thing was *who* was attacking Celestine. It was the spirits—the beings that were usually allies of the Beloveds.

"But why?" cried Ruri, shocked. She made a frantic dash between Celestine and the spirits trying to attack her, standing between them, arms raised. "Stop!" Ruri yelled at the top of her lungs, causing the spirits to halt abruptly. She was both relieved that the spirits had stopped and enraged at the same time. She yelled as though scolding them. "Why are you doing this?!"

The spirits informed her, as if it were perfectly normal, "*Well, 'cause we were asked to.*"

"*They said not to let 'em get away.*"

"*And to attack them but not bad enough to kill them.*"

"*Uh-huh, uh-huh, we had a majority vote!*"

The spirits innocently nodded, as if they hadn't done anything wrong.

"Majority vote?" repeated Ruri, confused about what that meant.

Kotaro and Rin came over to her side.

"Get a doctor here at once!" Jade ordered as he stood behind

Ruri. Not having to worry about Ruri's safety now that Kotaro and Rin were by her side, he decided to prioritize tending to the injured Celestine.

"*Perhaps there was a dispute between Beloveds,*" Kotaro said.

"*You've seen it before, haven't you, Ruri? Spirits don't fight among each other. They decide which wish to grant through discussion,*" added Rin.

"Oh..." Ruri blurted, her memory jogged. Back when Cerulanda's Beloved and Celestine had fought, the spirits had decided whose side they would take by majority vote. "But Celestine-san is a Beloved."

"*If it's the wish of a Beloved higher in rank, then the spirits will attack, Beloved or not.*"

Ruri was so taken aback that she couldn't speak properly. She could only imagine how terrified Celestine must have been, being attacked by the spirits she thought to be her friends. It was likely a huge shock to her system.

"If I ask you all to stop attacking Celestine-san, will you all listen?" Ruri asked timidly.

The spirits laid down their arms with no resistance.

"*Sure!*"

"*You're number one, Ruri!*"

"*Yup!*"

There was no malice in any of these innocent spirits' replies—they were just trying to grant the wishes of a Beloved. That made it all the more terrifying. However, the issue was the one who asked for this in the first place.

"There shouldn't be any Beloved who would want to attack Celestine-san..." Ruri trailed off as she jogged her own memory mid-sentence. "Was it the Beloved said to be a transmigrator that grandpa wrote about in his letter?"

"Urk..." groaned Celestine.

The noise snapped Ruri back to reality. "Celestine-san, you're all right now."

Celestine stared at Ruri before closing her eyes in relief, turning back into her more familiar human form at the same time.

"Celestine-san?!"

As Ruri panicked, the doctor Jade had sent for ran up and checked Celestine. "Looks like she just fainted. However, these wounds are bad," he stated, turning to Jade. "Your Majesty, may I use the dragon's blood?"

"Yes. Heal her right away," Jade replied.

The secret medicine made from dragonkin blood was never used outside of special exceptions. Since it cured any wound or sickness, they took the utmost care in using it. However, there was no need to be frugal when using it to heal a Beloved—a literal world treasure.

"Hurry!" said one soldier.

"Be careful with her!" said another.

"Easy does it!" said yet another.

The few soldiers carefully placed Celestine on a stretcher and carried her away. Ruri and Jade were left in the room, their eyes converging on a single point.

"Are you okay?" Jade asked, kneeling in front of the woman sitting on her knees on the ground.

This unfamiliar person was the one Celestine was so desperately trying to protect from the spirit's assault. With her big belly, it was clear at a glance that she was pregnant. Unlike Celestine, who was covered in scars, she had no noticeable injuries to be found.

"I'm fine... Lady Beloved protected me," she replied. Celestine had endured attacks from the spirits, which had left her in her current state, so the look on this woman's face was far from fine.

"Jade-sama, let's go to a different room. There's glass all over, and it's dangerous to let someone pregnant sit on the floor."

"Right. Can you stand?" Jade asked, holding out his hand to the woman.

She immediately took it and leaned on his arm. "Please! Please save Master Arman!"

Both Ruri and Jade were shocked by the woman holding on tight to Jade's hand with desperation in her eyes. However, Jade's expression turned serious immediately. He was able to guess that something was afoot in the Nation of the Beast King from their guests' conditions.

"First, let's switch locations," he said.

"I'm fine here. It's a race against time!" the woman insisted.

"Okay. Tell me what happened."

"Of course. My name is Padparadscha. Although it has not been officially announced, I will be Master Arman's proper queen."

Ruri's and Jade's eyes went wide.

"Huh?! That means the child you're carrying..."

"It's Master Arman's child."

Ruri was about to ask when that had happened, but restrained herself. Now was not the time.

Padparadscha continued. "It was all so sudden. Do you know of a nation called Furgal? It neighbors the Nation of the Beast King."

"Yes," Jade replied, nodding.

"Then you know that they don't have good relations with the Nation of the Beast King. They suddenly crossed the border and invaded us."

"Couldn't the Nation of the Beast King troops destroy them before they got the chance?"

"Everyone thought so. But the vanguard were Beloveds."

Ruri and Jade looked at each other, thinking the same thing—these invaders were likely the transmigrators that Beryl mentioned in his letter.

"When up against a Beloved, no matter how strong one's mana is, it is ultimately pointless. Our troops were almost all wiped out, and their troops marched straight for the royal capital. Given the dire circumstances, Lady Beloved said that only she could stand up to another Beloved and joined in the battle."

"I'm surprised Arman allowed that. Well...if they were up against a Beloved, then I suppose he had no choice but to rely on Celestine." Jade accepted the fact with a furrowed brow. "However, if Celestine was attacked by spirits, does that mean she was facing a Beloved of higher rank?"

"That is correct. There were actually a male and female Beloved on the Furgal's side. The woman was lower in rank, but the man was higher. The spirits around Lady Beloved turned against her, and without any way to fight back, the royal capital fell in the blink of an

eye," Padparadscha said with anguish on her face. "Once a spirit turns against you, you can no longer employ their power. If they used magic on us, we would have to fight with a handicap. Also, the enemy army is protected by the spirits due to having two Beloveds... How could we possibly win?"

If the spirits turned against someone, defeat was certain, even if they were a dragonkin. No matter how strong Arman was, he'd stood no chance.

"What happened to Arman?" Jade asked.

Padparadscha bursted into tears, covering her face with both hands. "Just before the Furgal troops besieged the palace, he stayed behind to buy enough time for me and Lady Beloved to escape."

"Is that so..." Jade trailed off, his face twisted. Ruri's face also stiffened as the worst possible scenario came to mind.

Padparadscha tearfully continued. "With a few guards capable of flight, we headed to the Nation of the Dragon King. We figured that since supreme-level spirits accompany the Beloved here, they would surely help us. However, we were immediately pursued. The army was one thing, but the Beloveds from Furgal were after my unborn child, who will become successor to the Beast King, and they sicced their spirits on us."

"They're awfully thorough. Not even I knew about Arman having a pregnant wife," Jade replied.

The newcomers had likely had the spirits gathering information before the invasion, much as Ruri had asked Kotaro to do. She hadn't heard back from Kotaro yet, possibly because he was still compiling the information. Besides, she had only asked him to investigate the transmigrators and the Beloved, not to find out if Furgal was using their Beloved to wage a war on the Nation of the Beast King.

While the possibility of Furgal misusing a Beloved was on the table, no one had actually thought that they would go through with it. The Nation of the Beast King was an ally of the Nations of the Spirit King and Dragon King, both of which hosted Beloveds and supreme-level spirits. Even if Furgal overthrew the Nation of the Beast King, they would be making an enemy out of the two other

great nations.

No one had expected Furgal to do something so stupid. No one had thought them to be *that* foolish. If they had known this would happen, they should have been a little more careful. However, there was no point crying over spilled milk.

"You said you ran off with some guards, but where are they?" Jade asked, seeing that Celestine and Padparadscha had come alone.

"They stayed behind, one by one, to try to stop the spirits so that Lady Beloved and I could escape. In the end, we were left with no one, so Lady Celestine put me on her back and flew all the way here while protecting me from the spirits' attacks, even though it would normally be *me* shielding her from harm..."

Had Celestine prioritized Padparadscha and Arman's child over her own well-being? It was abundantly clear how desperate Celestine had been just from the extent of her wounds.

"I beg of you! Please save Master Arman and the people of our nation!" Padparadscha bowed to Jade and Ruri while holding her swollen stomach, desperate because she knew that there was nothing she could do but rely on them.

They fully understood her feelings, but they had no idea if Arman was still alive or not. Ruri turned to Kotaro, who stood there, motionless, eyes fixed on something outside.

She hesitated to address him at first, but then called his name anyway. "Kotaro, do you know what is going on at the Nation of the Beast King's palace?"

"*Hmm, I hesitate to tell you, Ruri...*" he said reluctantly.

"That phrasing makes me even more worried. Is it a particularly bad situation there?" she asked, searching for the precise information she wanted.

"*Not only has the capital already fallen, but the palace has as well. The Beast King and his troops have all been captured by the enemy and imprisoned. To be honest, the Beast King could be killed at any moment. Looks like he's being tortured as well.*"

"Oh no!" Padparadscha screamed upon hearing Kotaro's report, the strength leaving her body and causing her to tilt over.

Jade caught her before she fell to the glass-covered floor, preventing her from being injured, but the news wasn't something a pregnant woman prone to emotion should hear.

"Take her to a guest room. And get her a doctor."

"Sire!"

Jade entrusted Padparadscha to a nearby soldier and ordered another to assemble the royal retainers in his office. Then Ruri followed him as he headed there himself.

Chapter 5: Time to Infiltrate

The retainers gathered in the royal office were all stone-faced. None of them had expected the Nation of the Beast King to fall to invaders.

"That blasted Furgal; I can't believe they're doing something so foolish. They must know that our nation and the Nation of the Spirit King will not take them overthrowing the Nation of the Beast King sitting down," Euclase stated, pressing their temples. "The Nation of the Spirit King has the supreme-level spirit of the trees, and we have Ruri, who has the supreme-level spirits of wind and water under her control. A tiny nation like Furgal stands no chance."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Nothing Euclase says is wrong. Finn, get ready to send reinforcements to the Nation of the Beast King at once," Jade commanded.

"Right away, sire," Finn replied before rushing out of the office.

"I can only hope that Arman hasn't been killed by then..." Jade muttered, causing Ruri great concern. That was when Agate entered the room, and Jade immediately asked, "How is Celestine?"

"She is free of wounds due to the dragon medicine. But I'm afraid *mentally* it's a different story..." he replied, frowning. "She is a Beloved who has always been under careful guard. She has most likely never been injured so badly or felt her life to be in danger while being chased and attacked. Not only that, but she was attacked by the spirits—the entities she thought were her allies—so she seems to have been terrified. Despite that, she managed to keep Padparadscha safe until they arrived, so she really is quite strong."

"Yes, right..." Jade trailed off.

As a heavy and somber air fell over the room, Ruri said what had been on her mind the whole time. "I will go."

All eyes focused on Ruri—all of them reproachful. Although she felt overwhelmed by their stares, she had no intention of changing her mind.

"Ruri, what do you mean you'll go?"

Ruri faced Jade's disapproving gaze head-on and replied, "Only a Beloved can oppose another Beloved. Isn't that why Celestine joined the fight in the first place?"

"I won't allow it," Jade replied, trying to shut the idea down.

Ruri wasn't necessarily surprised by this, since it was obvious he would be opposed to her getting involved, being his mate and a Beloved. Ruri had been prone to act out of impulse so far, but she was so collected right now that it was surprising even her.

"This is urgent. If we don't go save him soon, the Beast King's life will be in jeopardy. The same goes for the other people of the kingdom."

"I know that. But we can't afford to let you go there."

"Jade-sama, even if you're opposed, I'm still going," Ruri said, shooting him a glare.

"Ruri!" he shouted. He rarely ever yelled so loudly.

However, Ruri did not back down. Her determination was probably a huge shock to Jade's system. But the spirits had mercilessly attacked and inflicted so much pain upon Celestine. Feeling the unprecedented aura from Ruri, not even Euclase was able to interject.

Amid this tense atmosphere, Kotaro spoke up. "*I can just give them orders. Either Rin or I will do. If either of us give them orders, we can stop the spirits far away in the Nation of the Beast King. Spirits prioritize the words of a supreme-level spirit over a Beloved.*"

Kotaro's words brought a look of relief to Jade's face, but Ruri's remained grim.

"That would be the fastest option, so I would like you to do that, but how effective will your orders be?" she asked.

"*What do you mean?*" Kotaro replied, tilting his head in confusion.

"I've been in this world for a few years now, and I've learned a bit about the spirits in my time here. You and the other supreme-level spirits have your own will and thoughts and, in human terms, a

more *adult way* of thinking, but lower-level spirits aren't the same, are they? Just as they attacked Celestine-san earlier, if they are asked to do something by a Beloved of higher rank, they'll do it. No particular meaning or malice behind it—they act on their whims, just like small children."

Jade and the others must have felt the same, because not a soul in the room denied what she was saying.

"You can't give them any difficult orders, right? If you don't give them simple orders like 'stop siding with Furgal' or 'don't attack people from the Nation of the Beast King,' they'll end up getting confused, won't they?"

"*You have a point...*" Rin replied, convinced. Kotaro couldn't deny it either.

That was the answer.

"This has happened so many times in the past. The spirits will obey any request that Kotaro, Rin, or I ask of them, without any question, but if you take your eyes off them for a second, they get distracted and forget their objective."

"*Well, I can't deny that. Some of those spirits just don't listen sometimes,*" Rin added.

The lower the level of the spirit, the weaker their will. They had the mind of children and were easily swept up in the heat of the moment. Hence, they would do things that seemed terrible from Ruri's perspective without giving it much thought.

"Don't help the Beloveds of Furgal, save the people imprisoned by Furgal, including the Beast King, help the Beast King, and apprehend the forces of Furgal. Do you think the spirits could carry out such complicated orders?"

"*Nope. The spirits don't care about anything but Beloveds anyway. They'd soon get bored and start doing something else entirely,*" Rin answered immediately.

"*That's true. It'd be nice if there was someone there to give orders on the spot, but since we're so far away, we can't give them any minute instructions with no idea of the situation. It would be easy to order them to destroy everyone in the palace, but it'd likely be difficult for them to work on the fly to identify people,*" Kotaro

elaborated.

They knew how the lower-level spirits operated because they were spirits themselves.

If there was an upper-level spirit like the one who'd made a contract with Sango, it would be a different story since they would have a stronger sense of individuality, but most upper-level or higher spirits rarely showed themselves in public. In fact, there being this many supreme-level spirits in the Nation of the Dragon King was an oddity, to say the least.

"*I could get them to obey if I just told them not to lend those people a hand, but...*" Kotaro trailed off.

"If the palace has fallen with the Beast King and troops imprisoned and you just make the spirits back off, the Furgal troops will inflict harm on the Beast King. That's why I will go and order the spirits directly," Ruri said, her resolute eyes looking at each and every person who was against her idea.

"What if...you gave them the order to kick out the Furgal troops? They should be able to manage without the troops there, right?" Euclase suggested.

Rin shook her head. "*They might not be able to tell the difference, and they might even drive out the wrong people from the Nation of the Beast King.*"

"*To the spirits, they can't tell the people of the nations apart,*" Kotaro clarified.

"Urgh... Well, that's an issue," Euclase groaned, their idea quickly rejected by the two spirits.

"Going there is the best way to mitigate damage," Ruri desperately pleaded with Jade.

He seemed indecisive. Barely any time had passed since the death of the emperor and Arman was in dire straits. There was no way Jade *didn't* want to help his longtime friend. However, Ruri was his number one concern. And for the Nation of the Dragon King, the safety of Beloveds was the number one priority.

Jade wavered in his decision, not wanting to expose Ruri to danger. After a short silence, he said in a hoarse voice, "But the Nation of the Beast King is considerably far from here. By the time

you arrive, it could already be too late, Ruri."

"Yes. You might wind up witnessing some gruesome sights," Euclase said, also trying to stop her in a desperate attempt.

However, Ruri, being who she was, had a trick up her sleeve. "That won't be a problem. I can be in the Nation of the Beast King in less than a minute."

Everyone's eyes widened in shock.

"How? Even if you had Lord Kotaro use his wind powers to send you there, it would take you several days," Jade protested.

"That is right, Ruri," Euclase added.

"Jade-sama, Euclase-san, you're both forgetting something. I'm Lydia's contract-bearer. Don't you remember that I had a tea party with Seraphie-san, who's far away in Yadacain, just the other day?"

"Oh!" gasped everyone as if they had either forgotten or not realized.

"We had it in Quartz-sama's pocket space. I can enter other people's pocket spaces. Which means that I can also exit from that person's pocket space. If I cross one space into another and enter the Beast King's room, all I have to do is exit from there and I'll be right in the Nation of the Beast King," Ruri said with confidence.

"But that would mean only you could go since you have a contract with Lydia. That's too dangerous!" Jade pointed out.

"If there are spirits over there, we'll be fine."

"But..." Jade was not easily convinced. Or maybe "belligerent" was a more accurate description.

"Jade-sama, we have no time to debate. People are in mortal peril as we speak."

"Urk!" He had no counterargument.

"Say, Kotaro. The Beast King is still alive, right?" asked Ruri.

"*Indeed. He's imprisoned in a cell with magic-sealing shackles, but he is alive.*"

"Then could you order them not to listen to the Furgal's Beloveds' requests beforehand? And then tell them to follow my instructions. That way the Furgal forces won't be able to use magic and we can save the Beast King and the others with the spirits' help."

Kotaro grimaced, resigned, and reluctantly agreed to help. "*Fine,*

then..."

That left just one issue left.

"Jade-sama, there's no time to be picky. You should understand, right, Jade-sama? There's a baby involved. We *can't* let them be born without knowing their father's face!" Ruri told him as if to land the finishing blow. "Plus, would you let Celestine-san's efforts go in vain? She risked her life to save that mother and her child's life. She turned to me, bruised and battered, because she thought I was the one person who could help her. I can't just betray the trust she has in me!" Ruri exclaimed, seeing Jade react with a tiny twitch.

"Fine, then... Just try not to overdo it," Jade warned.

"Of course," Ruri replied, aware of the danger.

Jade took a number of vials from his pocket space and left them in front of Ruri. Following suit, Euclase, Claus, and Agate put bottles of the red liquid in front of Ruri as well.

It was the dragon medicine. This was the secret medicine of the dragonkins that could heal any wound or illness.

"Take these with you. Who knows how many people are injured over there," said Jade.

"Thank you so much!" Ruri said, bowing her head to everyone who had provided the medicine. She put the bottles into the pocket space first and then stepped in herself.

Kotaro and Rin called out from behind her.

"*We will tell the spirits to protect you and follow your orders,*" said Kotaro.

"*Make sure to be careful. Come back as soon as you're done,*" *added Rin.*

Wind and water mana wrapped around Ruri's body, as if added for good measure. Kotaro and Rin seemed satisfied with the build of their barriers, so even without having a spirit to protect her, it was impossible for anyone to lay a finger on her.

With a feeling of reassurance in her heart, Ruri plunged into the pocket space. Once she left, the royal office became as dour as a wake, with Jade being the most depressed of them all.

"Is my only option to rely on Ruri?" he asked, distressed.

Kotaro growled at him. "*You just do what you need to as the*

Dragon King. That will benefit Ruri too." After saying that, he and Rin left the office.

Jade wiped the pained expression off his face, lifted his head, and returned to looking like a king before giving Euclase and the others orders.

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Ruri found Lydia waiting for her after diving into the pocket space.

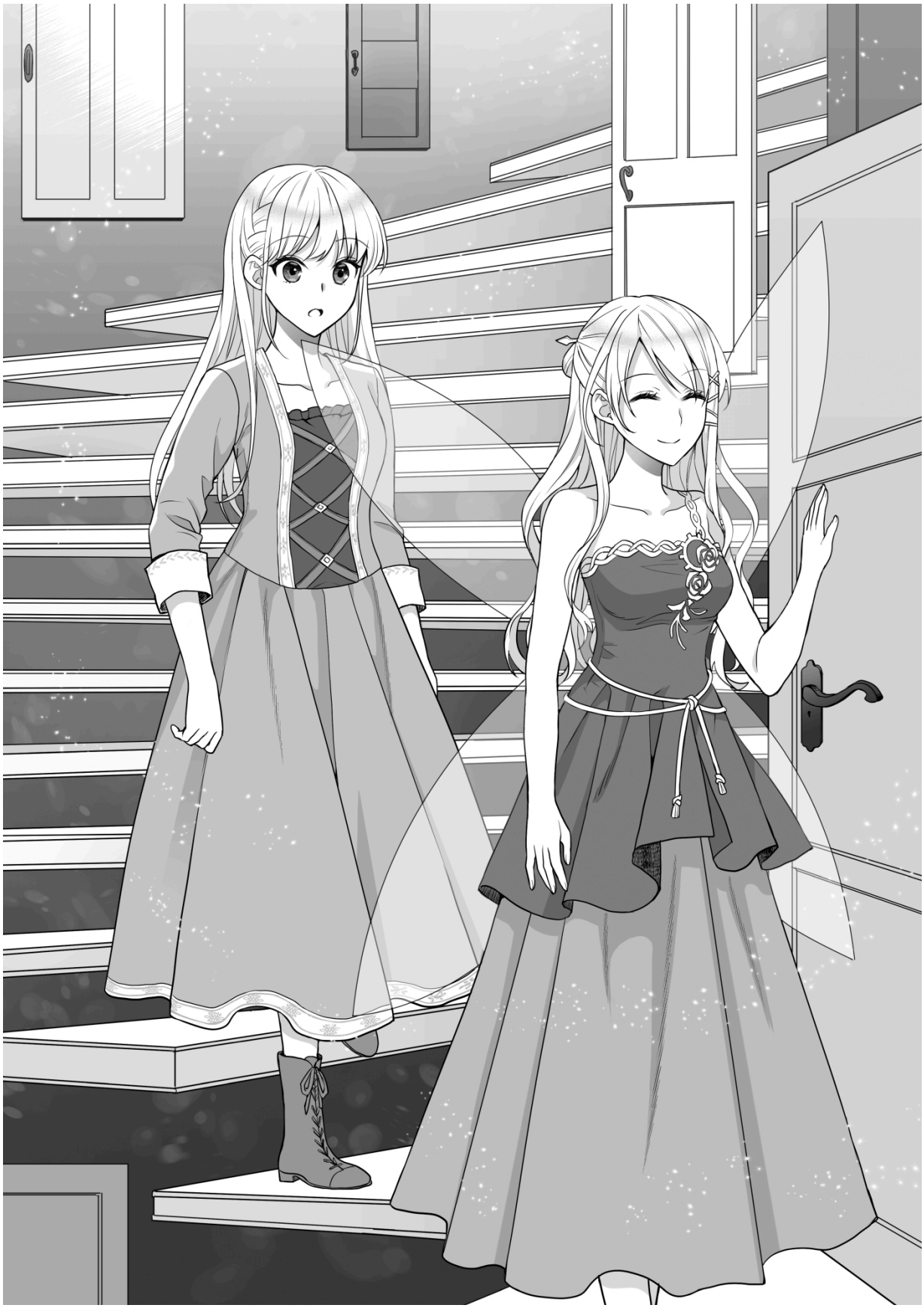
"Lydia, I need a favor," Ruri said, cutting to the chase, looking more serious than usual.

Lydia simply smiled. "*It's okay. No need to explain.*"

She snapped her fingers, transporting them to the world behind the pocket space where only she and her contract-bearers were allowed. A spiral staircase with countless rows of doors appeared, and they teleported to the front of one door in the blink of an eye.

"*This is the Beast King's room.*"

Ruri knew Lydia was the Spirit of Time and Space, but she was amazed that she had found a specific room out of the countless number of rooms in here.





"Thank you, Lydia." The fact that Ruri didn't have to give her any detailed explanations was extremely helpful, since she was pressed for time, and wasting that time could cost Arman his life. She had never felt more grateful for the spirits' ability to share information even from far away.

She opened the door in front of her and stepped inside without a moment of hesitation—there was no time to do otherwise. Every part of the room's interior was covered in precious metals. It was a dazzling sight worthy of the space of a major nation's king, but the space itself was smaller than Quartz's room, where Ruri had dropped by for a visit the other day—and it was *much* smaller by far. Then again, it was definitely more than accommodating when compared to a normal person's pocket space. That was how big Arman's mana reserves were.

However, now was not the time to worry about the space of the room or the items inside of it.

"Lydia, make an exit to the outside," Ruri asked, urging her to hurry.

Lydia didn't act immediately. She paused, eyebrows slanted into a disappointed look. "*Personally, I'd rather you not go off into danger.*"

"I'm the only one who can do this. You know that deep inside, don't you?"

Spirits who had existed since the world began were not to be underestimated just because they were lower level. Even lower-level spirits could easily destroy a whole country if they joined forces. The only people who could stop them were Beloveds. And if a Beloved went rogue, then one of a higher rank would have to deal with them.

Since Celestine had been defeated, Ruri had no choice but to go. It had to be her, since she had contracts with supreme-level spirits. Perhaps the supreme-level spirit of the trees in the Nation of the Spirit King was aware of the situation and Spirit King Awain and his Beloved son, Lapis, were on the move, but it was going to take time before they reached the Nation of the Beast King.

Ruri was the fastest to go into action, since she could use the rule-breaking technique of crossing time and space. It's not that she

wasn't afraid, since she was going there in the middle of a war, but what she felt more than fear was *anger*. They had hurt Celestine so badly and, even worse, used spirits to do it—that was what enraged Ruri the most.

Even though Celestine was a Beloved, she never took advantage of her position and always remembered to respect the spirits. Maybe that was because she was from the Nation of the Beast King, a highly spirit-worshipping nation. However, siccing those same spirits on Celestine, who had such strong faith in them, was despicable. Even if those spirits turned on her and attacked her, she wouldn't fight back against them because that would be like drawing a blade on God from her perspective.

"I am *really* pissed off right now. At those Beloveds who ordered the spirits to attack Celestine-san and at the people who used those Beloveds from the other world to incite a war."

"*I swear, you are so reckless.*" Lydia looked exasperated, but she wasn't going to stop her. In fact, she created an exit to the outside with her power—an exit with Arman on the other side. "*It looks like a dungeon out there. It seems Wind ordered the spirits to move and there are no guards in sight.*"

"Ah, good." Kotaro's aid instilled Ruri with courage. "Beast King, I hope you're safe..."

Just thinking about the treatment the king of a defeated nation would receive was terrifying. However, considering the fact that Lydia had not said anything about him, he was still alive. As long as he was alive, at worst, he could be saved with the dragon's blood she had received from Jade and the others.

Ruri slapped herself on both cheeks to psych herself up, gritted her teeth, and proceeded toward the exit.

"*Be careful, Ruri.*"

"Yeah. Thank you, Lydia," Ruri replied before jumping outside.

The exit led out into a dungeon, just as Lydia had said. It was dim, cold, and heavy with stagnant air. Three sides were surrounded by stone walls, while one was lined with iron bars. The construction was sturdy—she would have no chance of breaking the bars without using magic.

Ruri grimaced at the piercing iron smell in the air. She looked around through the bars and could see soldiers in other cages. There were enough people stuffed into cages that she had to assume all of the nation's soldiers were being imprisoned in this basement. Everyone's faces were painted in despair and no small number of people were lying limp on the floor. When one of them noticed Ruri, he looked astonished.

"Lady Beloved?"

"What are you talking about? Lady Celestine wouldn't be in this hellhole."

"No, not that one. Lady Beloved from the Nation of the Dragon King!" a soldier whose eyes locked with Ruri shouted in surprise.

"Say what? Are you finally starting to hallucinate?" said another with an exhausted tone and an annoyed sneer.

"No, look," the first soldier said, pointing at Ruri. The annoyed soldier, along with several others spotted her in the dark, and their eyes opened wide.

"Am... Am I hallucinating too?" asked one.

"No, I can see her. Am *I* hallucinating? Dreaming? Someone, hit me," said another soldier, prompting his neighbor to sock him hard. The punch made a painful *thwack*, and tears started to stream from the soldier's face—whether it was from getting hit or the joy he felt was unclear. "Ouch... So this *isn't* a hallucination or dream?"

"It's the real Lady Beloved..."

Those words caused the soldiers' forlorn moods to completely flip on their heads.

"Lady Beloveeed!"

"Are we saved?!"

"Yes! Yes!"

The soldiers' cries conveyed a combination of joy and relief.

However, Ruri panicked at the noise and warned them, "Shh! Quiet. We don't want the guards to come!"

Their clamor stopped immediately. But soon, a few started to speak up again, their voices impatient.

"Lady Beloved, please help Master Arman!"

"He can't take any more. At this rate, even His Majesty won't

survive!” Seeing the soldiers show unanimous concern made Ruri feel that Arman was truly adored.

“That’s what I came to do, but where is he?” she asked. She had exited Arman’s pocket space, so he should have been nearby.

“Behind you, miss! Look behind you!”

Ruri turned to see Arman with his arms and legs affixed to the stone wall in the back with restraints in a crucifix position. It would have been better if he had only been restrained, but his clothes resembled old rags, shredded in places and with blood pouring out from between the pieces. He was the definition of beat up. It was so bad that the soldiers were desperately pleading for Ruri to help him. The mere sight of Arman conveyed the unthinkable treatment he had endured whether she wanted to imagine it or not, leaving Ruri speechless and pale.

“Beast King?” Ruri whispered to him, timidly.

Arman was unresponsive. He appeared to be unconscious while restrained upright. Ruri couldn’t put an optimistic spin on this and say he was just sleeping. It was more accurate to say that he had completely blacked out.

“*It’s Ruri!*”

“*We were told to follow your orders!*”

“*What should we all do?*”

Spirits came out of nowhere, and their innocent tone snapped her back to her senses. She remembered what she had come to do. There was no time to space out.

“Lift up the Beast King’s head. I’m going to give him this medicine.”

“*Okaaay!*”

“*Right on it!*”

The spirits shuffled over to Arman’s hung head and propped it up. Ruri was looking at him anxiously, but he showed no sign of waking up from the treatment he had received.

She hurried to pull out some dragon’s blood from her pocket space, pried open Arman’s mouth, and shoved the opening of the bottle into his mouth for him to drink. All of the contents disappeared down his gullet. It was only after she saw this

happening that Ruri's eyes shot wide open.

"Oh, I think Joshua said before that dragon's blood is too potent and too much of it could be toxic..."

However, it was too late. The bottle was already empty.

"Oh no! What should I do? Should I make him spit it out?!" Ruri was panicking. She had been briefed on this before, but it had been a long time ago. She had been rushing to get there, and Jade and the others, perhaps in a hurry to help as soon as well, had not reminded her. Everyone must have felt so pressed for time that they'd forgotten to warn her.

Despite Ruri being shaken up, the scars started to disappear from Arman's body and his eyelids slowly opened.

"Urk... Did I pass out? Those bastards, doing whatever the hell they want..." Arman woke up complaining, still crucified on the wall. He froze upon seeing Ruri standing before him. After a pause, a confused gasp escaped his mouth, and he looked as if he had seen a ghost. "Huh? Hey, what are *you* doing here?"

"I'm here to save you, of course!" Ruri said with a smug look, her chest puffed out.

Arman couldn't wrap his head around any of this. "No, I meant how did you *get* here?"

"Have you forgotten when I smuggled the evidence from the pocket space of the fourth prince of the Imperial Nation? I went through your space and exited here."

"I forgot that was an option..." Arman murmured, shocked, finally realizing the condition of his own body. "No scars?"

"I had you drink the dragon's blood. Um...does anything feel off?"

"I see. I appreciate it. My physical condition is fine. In fact, I feel like I've become young again," Arman replied.

"That's good to hear."

The production method for the dragon's blood was kept secret, and Arman knew that it couldn't be immediately shared. That was why he was so grateful. However, he hadn't noticed that Ruri was secretly relieved that he hadn't overdosed.

Someone of the Beast King's position was nothing to scoff at. It seemed that downing a bottle of the dragon's blood—which one

normally only needed a few drops of to take effect—did not affect him negatively at all.

"Your Majestyyy!"

"We're so glad you're safe!"

"Thank you so much, Lady Beloved!"

The soldiers were sobbing in joy over Arman being safe. Arman himself looked on with a raised eyebrow.

"Beast King, can you remove those shackles?"

"No, these are magic-sealing shackles. I can't muster any strength, so I can't break them myself."

"Really?" Ruri asked, touching them to see.

Not only were they magic-sealing devices, but they were also very sturdy shackles, and breaking them with human strength seemed impossible. Or rather, if it had been Ruri *before* tuning with Jade, that would have been the case. But when Ruri pulled with all of her might, the shackles embedded in the wall made snapping noises and shattered.

Ruri wasn't the only one who was surprised by what she had done. Arman was surprised too, albeit only slightly.

"I've heard that even humans can become physically strong when in tune with dragonkins, but *that much*?" he said, genuinely impressed.

"I'm surprised I pulled it off myself."

"Well, in your case, your mana is already as strong as Jade's for a human. That's probably playing a part too. Anyway, go ahead and break the rest of these shackles for me."

"Yes," Ruri replied, snapping the magic-sealing shackles restraining Arman as she was told.

With his limbs freed, he rubbed his wrists with a renewed look on his face.

"Still, I'm surprised that they managed to restrain a person as strong as the Beast King," Ruri commented.

"It's because they have a Beloved using spirits. I couldn't use magic; they threatened me with taking soldiers hostage, so I had no choice but to let them restrain me. Then those Furgal bastards started torturing me. I think they wanted to demean me and

demoralize the soldiers by making them watch the torture," replied Arman.

Ruri looked at the soldiers to see that they were all in magic-sealing shackles.

"It's revolting, isn't it?"

"You said it," Arman agreed, extremely exasperated. He then hesitantly tried to change the subject. "Anyway, I'd like to ask... Aah, you know..."

Despite Arman saying he wanted to ask Ruri something, he couldn't quite spit it out. However, Ruri quickly guessed what was on his mind and shot him a smile.

"They're both fine. Celestine-san reached the castle seriously injured, but the dragon's blood completely healed her. Padparadscha-san was protected by Celestine-san the entire way, so your wife and child are safe and sound. They were terribly worried about you, Beast King. Please reclaim the palace and let them see you in good health."

"Oh, great," Arman said, the tension melting away; he was also concerned. "Still, I'm surprised Jade allowed you to come alone."

Perhaps relieved to know that Celestine and Padparadscha were safe, he finally had the mental leeway to focus on other things and had realized that Ruri was alone.

"He *didn't* actually allow me. It was more like I kept bugging him until he had no other choice but to give in because there was no better option."

"What if something had happened to you, coming right in the middle of an enemy occupation? You need to be more aware as a Beloved! You're way too willy-nilly. I'm starting to feel bad for Jade," Arman scolded her.

Ruri, on the other hand, felt she'd done nothing wrong at all. "Then who else could have alleviated the situation? A king is usually the first one killed if taken captive! Celestine-san and Padparadscha would have been so sad. Is that what you want?"

Arman couldn't disagree with Ruri's biting, annoyed statement.

"You shouldn't worry an already stressed-out pregnant woman!" she continued.

"Yeah, I get it. I was in the wrong," Arman said, raising his hands in surrender. "It sort of feels like I'm being scolded by Celestine."

In the Nation of the Beast King, where there were clear divides in status and the Beast King stood at the top of the nation, the only ones who could scold him were Beloveds like Ruri and Celestine.

"Because I'm speaking for how Celestine-san feels," Ruri huffed, knowing that Celestine would have said the same thing if she had been there. "I am well aware of the risks. I comprehended that and figured that it was best if I took action. I have no regrets about it. Jade-sama thought it was the best course of action as well, which is why he ultimately did not oppose me going."

Then again, Ruri had no intention of bending to others' wills even if she was going to be met by either Jade or Euclase lecturing her about being reckless.

"Well, I kind of feel bad for Jade not being able to object because that was actually the situation," Arman said with a sour face. He then looked at all of the spirits around Ruri and breathed a sigh of relief. "Looks like the spirits are obeying you too."

"Yes, Kotaro and Rin ordered them to follow my instructions," Ruri explained.

"No better aid than help from supreme-level spirits, huh?" Arman replied.

"Apparently, they prioritize supreme-level spirits over Beloved rank. With Kotaro and Rin on our side, defeat won't be an option!" Ruri said, clenching her fist with vigor. "They should follow my instructions over the Furgal Beloveds', so don't you worry!"

"I know this is long overdue, but I feel like I'm starting to realize that you're *not* a normal Beloved," Arman said, his face conveying that Ruri's comment was reassuring but he just couldn't bring himself to rejoice.

"Well, it may seem that way since I have technically subjugated a couple of supreme-level spirits, but I believe Lapis could do something similar. The supreme-level spirit of the trees is in the Nation of the Spirit King, after all," Ruri mentioned. Although Lapis couldn't take interdimensional shortcuts like she could, he could strip the authority of Furgal's Beloveds.

"True. Come to think of it, it seems like our nation is the one that gets the least amount of blessings. I mean, I'm not trying to blame Celestine or anything, of course."

"That sounds like an envious dilemma to have considering the Imperial Nation doesn't even *have* a Beloved. If the people of the Imperial Nation heard that, they would say, 'Well, in that case, hand Celestine over to us!"

"Aah, yeah. From their point of view, I guess so."

The Imperial Nation, the only one of the Four Great Nations without a Beloved, had made a rather roundabout request to the Nation of the Dragon King to share as many Beloveds as they could with them since the Nation of the Dragon King had Ruri, Liccia, Beryl, and a great number of supreme-level spirits in their midst.

The fuss over sharing didn't come from the nation's leader, the emperor, but from the Imperial Nation's nobles. However, upon learning about that, Beryl had decided to go off on an adventure with Chi and Andal.

Even without the incident in the Imperial Capital, Beryl leaving for a journey wasn't much of a problem since it was pretty much a given based on how he operated, but it did act as a deterrent for the Imperial Nation and their unreasonable requests.

Also, now that the Imperial Nation had lost Emperor Adularia, there was a dispute over who would succeed the throne, so they had their hands too full to meddle with the Nation of the Dragon King's affairs.

"Let's leave the chatting for later. Reclaiming the palace comes first," Ruri said.

"You're right. This isn't something I should be asking you, but please, O Beloved of the Nation of the Dragon King, provide your assistance for the sake of my people," Arman said, taking a knee in front of Ruri and lowering his head.

He was making a formal request to a Beloved as the Beast King. There was no reason for Ruri to refuse such a request from an allied nation.

"Of course! I can't let the people who hurt Celestine-san that badly go unpunished!" Ruri was brimming with motivation, wanting

to end everything and give Celestine peace of mind before she woke up. "To do that, we'll have to get out of here first."

"Right," Arman agreed.

That was when a surge of voices came from the cells.

"Take us with you, please!"

"Give us a chance to redeem ourselves!"

"We can't just let those Furgal bastards keep us down like this!"

"We must avenge Lady Beloved!"

The soldiers pleaded with them, grasping the iron bars as if vying with one another.

"Right, we'll need the soldiers. But they're bound with magic-sealing shackles, so we need to do something about those first..." Arman stated, glancing at Ruri meaningfully.

Ruri immediately caught on. That was Arman's idea of a plea to have her help out.

"Yes, yes. I just have to break the shackles, right? Still, I'd appreciate it if *you* helped too, Beast King," Ruri answered, sounding exasperated.

"Leave it to me," Arman said heartily with a grin.

Freed from the magic-sealing shackles, he could easily break those same shackles on his soldiers. Although they'd decided on what to do, Ruri and Arman looked at the slew of soldiers inside several cells.

"We have our work cut out for us if we have to remove *everyone's* shackles," Ruri commented.

"I have to agree."

As they pondered, the spirits gathered around them. Arman flinched reflexively. Since the palace had been taken down by spirits, he couldn't act like nothing had happened, especially considering how much the people of the Nation of the Beast King revered the spirits. It was no surprise that he felt betrayed.

"*Ruri, we'll help you!*"

"*We're gonna help! We're gonna help!*"

"*Yippie!*"

Seeing the spirits looking so cheerful, Arman and his men grimaced as though smelling spoiled milk. Then, something

happened.

"No, you were the ones who put those magic-sealing shackles on us!"

"Hey, they can hear you!"

"What's the point of pissing off the spirits, you dumbass?!"

"Shut him up!"

The one outspoken soldier's comrades tried to cover his mouth and smack him to keep him quiet. Ruri watched the exchange and turned to the spirits, but there seemed to be no problem since they were totally indifferent to the comment.

"We need to get out of this cell to do anything."

"That's right. I'll bust it down, so stand back," replied Arman.

"Okay," Ruri said, stepping back a little from the bars.

Even if debris were to fly at her, Kotaro and Rin were meticulously protecting her, so it would likely bounce right off her, but better safe than sorry.

Arman looked at his hand and wrapped it in fire magic, feeling a wave of relief come over him upon confirming it had worked.

"I can use magic again. All thanks to Ruri, huh?" he muttered to himself, glaring at the bars. As if to wipe out all of his frustration, he punched the bars at full strength. The fire instantly blazed and started melting them.

The soldiers in the cells across the way felt the heat and started to scramble to the back, screaming about the heat in a panic, but Ruri didn't feel warm in the least despite standing right next to Arman, likely because Kotaro and Rin were protecting her.





Once Arman melted the bars and made an opening large enough for people to pass through in the blink of an eye, the captive soldiers waltzed out. Even in tattered clothes, he still had the dignity of a champion.

After leaving his own cage, Arman destroyed the bars of the other cages one after another until all of the soldiers were free. Ruri and the spirits then split up and started busting the soldiers' shackles.

"Thank you very much!"

"We will never forget this kindness, Lady Beloved!"

The soldiers were fatigued, not having been given enough food and water during their imprisonment, but their eyes were alive.

Ruri left breaking the shackles to the spirits and passed out food that she'd stored in her pocket space to the men. They were able to provide their own water since they could employ the power of the spirits again.

"Hmmm...I might not have enough food for all of these people," Ruri said, taking advantage of the large space she had to herself, where she put more food than she could ever eat by herself. She'd figured that Lydia would eat it but wasn't sure if she could pass out all that food to the hungry soldiers. They needed to fight against the troops from Furgal, so they had to build up their strength.

"Do not fret, Lady Beloved. Now that the shackles are off, we can open our own pocket spaces. There are some of us who have food stored in there," said one soldier. "Being a soldier means physical work, so a good number of us keep supplies on hand."

"I see. I'm glad to hear it," Ruri said in relief, checking on Arman's situation now that the matter of sustenance had been resolved.

Arman seemed to be having issues with the sheer number of cells.

"Are you all right, Beast King? You must be using a lot of mana."

"Yeah, I am, but I don't see myself running out anytime soon. In fact, my body is heating up like I've got *too much* mana in me. Pretty weird, huh?"

Ruri stood there, unable to utter a word. In her mind, she was sweating bullets over his vigor being a result of her giving him a

whole bottle of dragon's blood. However, he seemed to be as fit as a fiddle, so she decided not to ask him about it.

As she continued to free the soldiers, an angry yell could be heard echoing throughout the basement out of nowhere. "What is this?! Why are the prisoners out of their cells?!"

Ruri looked in the direction of the voice to find a middle-aged man in a military uniform unlike that of the Nation of the Beast King's usual garb. From his outfit, she could tell that the man who was red in the face from shouting was high status.

"Huh? Who's that?" she asked, knowing full well it wasn't a member of the Nation of the Beast King.

"The general leading this war," Arman replied. "The highest-ranking soldier among the Furgal forces and the one who put me through all that hell." A smile came over his face that would make the most hardened of criminals flee, and his devious snicker made Ruri's expression tighten at the sound of it.

The resentful gazes of the soldiers were just as piercing. She even started to feel sorry for the enemy for a brief second. But as the thought crossed her mind, she noticed the boy and girl behind the man, probably around Sango's age. They had young features—almost grown but not fully reaching adulthood, their dark hair and eyes a combination very familiar to Ruri.

They were decked out in garb that was fine but not too glitzy. Ruri could tell that they were good-quality clothes from her time receiving the highest grade of treatment as a Beloved.

"Beast King, are those two in the back...who I think they are?"

"Yeah. They're the Beloveds."

"I knew it."

They were the transmigrators from Beryl's letter. It was quite the twist of fate that there were *two* Beloveds among them.

"Hey! Don't leave your cells! What are the guards doing here?!" the girl exclaimed in a shrill and grating tone.

"They're incompetent to the extreme. Fire all of them," the boy said in a languid voice.

Ruri could instantly sense that they weren't the kind of people she would get along with. Their every word was rife with arrogance.

"You fiend! How did you escape?! We put you in magic-sealing shackles!" the enemy general shouted hard enough to burst a blood vessel as he looked at Arman standing before him without a scratch.

Arman wasn't perturbed. In fact, he chuckled mockingly. "Ha, what a pity. You shouldn't have thought you could keep me tied down with those little trinkets. Don't ever underestimate the Beast King."

"*I'm* the one who broke the shackles, though," Ruri murmured under her breath.

Arman heard her hushed jab and momentarily froze, the corners of his mouth flattening, but he immediately recovered. "I'm going to be sure to pay you back for what you've done," he threatened the enemy.

The general's tantrum was being overridden by Arman's mounting pressure. "What do you think you can do?! We have Beloveds higher in rank than yours!" he said, almost as if gloating over something he'd done himself before looking back at the pair behind him. "Hey, put these guys back into their cells."

The pair furrowed their brows at the pompous instruction. Then the girl spoke up. "You seem to have the wrong idea, don't you? Don't give me orders."

"Hey, what did you say?!"

"*Who* do you think helped you win? If you want me to do something, bow your head and ask for it."

"*Bow?!* I'm the one in charge of this war!" the general snapped, dissatisfied.

The boy glared at him, as condescending as his companion. "So what? That's got nothin' to do with us. If you want us to lend our help, you better ask nicely, old man."

"*Old man?!*" the general repeated in shock.

Ruri had assumed they would be on amicable terms since they'd helped Furgal incite the war, but it seemed they were very much not —or maybe they just didn't get along with this particular soldier.

"Well, what will it be, old man?" the boy asked.

"C'mon, c'mon. Lower that head," said the girl.

Faced with the duo who had a total grasp on their own

superiority, the general clenched his fists in frustration so tight that they were shaking. Even Ruri was uncomfortable with their attitude as she watched from afar with a furrowed brow.

As the general of an army, the man must have had a certain amount of pride, but he obediently bowed his head to the boy and girl who seemed younger than his own children.

"I beg of you, lend us your help."

"Lend us your help *please*, right? You're an adult, but you don't know how to use your words?" said the boy.

"Grk... *Please* lend us your help..."

"That's more like it. You should have done that from the start, but your pride was just too big."

"Seriously. You know you couldn't do a thing without *us* around," the girl added.

As the pair scoffed at him, the general pursed his lips and desperately contained his humiliation.

"To think that these cretins ravaged our nation makes me sick to my stomach," Arman commented.

"I agree," Ruri replied, relieved that she wasn't alone in the discomfort she felt. Tolerant as she was, she was so angry now that even she felt that holding back was unnecessary.

"Now then, let's get this over with," said the boy.

"Right," his companion agreed.

The two walked forward, pushing the general out of the way. The soldiers of the Nation of the Beast King tried to cover Arman and Ruri, but Arman waved his hand to halt them.

"What? You think you can beat us?" the boy stated. "We're Beloveds. You weaklings should bow your heads in reverence."

"You wretched brats. I'll show you how harsh the world can be. Do you have *any* idea how much damage you've caused?" Arman snapped.

"Nope! I'm the human chosen by the world. I'm not like any other rando. Do *you* understand *that?*" the boy replied.

"That's right. We are special. If you weaklings do as we say, we'll spare your lives," the girl added.

Ruri groaned as she looked at the two. "So, this is what they call

a chuunibyou...”

She was taken aback by their arrogant and childish line of thinking and gave them both a dirty look. She knew that in a decade or so, they would be writing on the ground in shame at their behavior. The pair was trying to mark a page in their dark chuuni histories.

The boy from the embarrassing pair instructed the spirits around him, “Hey, nab those guys and put them back in their cages.”

Seeing the way he ordered the spirits around like a power-hungry boss was hard for Ruri to accept. To her, the spirits were friends. Celestine respected the spirits like gods and Lapis had similar feelings about them as Ruri, interacting with them as friends or family. Because of that, she had never seen anyone try to operate them like tools. She didn’t even think the former Beloved of Cerulanda had treated them that badly. If Celestine had been here, she probably would have yelled at them for their impudent language toward the spirits. Even Ruri wanted to give them a good dressing down.

The guy ordered the spirits as he had done so far, but not one of them budged this time. After receiving direct orders from Kotaro and Rin, there was no way they would. However, for the pair who couldn’t possibly know that inside fact, it was mystifying that the spirits were ignoring their orders.

“Hey, hurry up!” the boy prompted them.

“Yes, hurry and do what you’re told,” the girl agreed.

Despite their yelping like untrained dogs, the spirits ignored them.

The general, not the Beloveds, seemed to be the most perturbed. “What are you doing?! Hurry and move the spirits!”

“We know already. Quit shouting!” the girl said, her voice rising higher in turn.

However, as soon as Ruri stepped forward and asked the spirits for a favor, they did a complete about-face.

“Guys, free the soldiers still in cells and remove their shackles.”

“*Okay!*”

“*Got it!*”

“*We’ve gotta do what Ruri says, after all!*”

"*Uh-huh, uh-huh! Lady Lydia was real mad!*"

"*Because Ruri got wrapped up in this. She was super-duper mad!*"

From the chattering spirits, Lydia had apparently been giving them orders as well. The spirits immediately responded to Ruri's instructions and acted.

It was then that the general's group finally realized Ruri was there. Since she was next to Arman and his large frame, it was no wonder why she'd gone unnoticed all this time.

"Who are you?!" the general asked in a threatening tone, pointing a finger at her.

Since she had the protection of two supreme-level spirits, she was invincible. Knowing that not even Jade could hurt her, Ruri took a confident stance, folding her arms and holding her head high.

"I am the Beloved of the Nation of the Dragon King."

"Beloved...of the Nation of the Dragon King..." The general instantly turned pale before uttering, "How did you get here so quickly?"

It seemed that he had expected the Nation of the Dragon King and Spirit King to intervene. So why had they even started this war in the first place?

Unlike the general, the transmigrating Beloveds didn't seem to realize the severity of the situation from Ruri saying she was the Beloved of the Nation of the Dragon King. Not much time had passed since they'd come to this world, so they probably lacked the knowledge. That was understandable considering there was a lot that even Ruri still didn't know about this world.

"Who is this woman?" asked the girl.

"Oh, she looks like my type. A little old, but still," the boy commented.

"A little old?!" Ruri repeated, a vein popping up on her temple. "I'm only in my twenties! Guys, catch that older man and the two Beloveds! No need to hold back *at all!*"

"*Aye, aye, sir!*"

"*We just have to catch 'em, right?*"

"*Lady Lydia told us to eliminate anyone who harms Ruri.*"

"*Let's focus on catching them first!*"

"*Yeah!*"

With a somewhat ominous conversation, the spirits charged at the Beloveds they'd been obeying up until then. Ruri and Arman looked on nonchalantly, figuring that the spirits would easily capture the group, but the general pulled out a dagger from his breast pocket and drew it from its scabbard. The moment the dagger was pointed at the spirits, they turned tail and ran.

"*Eeek!*"

"*Weeeh! It's Spirit Slayer!*"

"*Run!*"

"Spirit Slayer?!" said Ruri, aghast.

"Are you serious?!" Arman exclaimed. They were both shocked that it still existed.

The general smiled deviously at the spirits' flight and laughed. "You think I didn't plan ahead for something like this?"

In response to the spirits distancing themselves from the haughtily grinning general, Ruri swiftly plunged her hand into her pocket space and pulled out the first thing she randomly grabbed—a ball small enough to be gripped in her hand.

"Of all things, I grabbed *this?!*" she cried, recalling some bad memories. However, there was no time to second-guess. Knowing it should be doubly effective on a demi-human, she chucked it at the general.

"What is that paltry toy?" he scoffed. However, his disdain was short-lived, as in the next moment, the ball dropped to the ground, split, and erupted in smoke and light. Knowing the smoke's effects, Ruri had deployed a wind barrier to surround the general and the duo at the same time she'd thrown the ball. As a result, she and her group were unharmed, but agonizing screams could be heard from inside of the bundle of smoke.

"Eek! This smells terrible! What is this?!" the girl yelled.

"Augh!" heaved the boy.

"Gaaaah!" the general screamed.

Ruri let out a dry laugh, feeling slightly bad for them since she had experienced the smoke firsthand before. She'd thrown a tool

that released an intense odor from a bunch of street thugs when she'd first come to the Nation of the Dragon King from Chelsie's forest. Their enemies were likely in agony from the unthinkably foul odor. Furgal was said to be a nation with a large demi-human populace, just like the Nation of the Beast King, so chances were high that the general was also demi-human. To a demi-human with impeccable senses, the odor released by this ball would be utterly unbearable. Even a mere human like Ruri had almost been knocked out by the intense stench.

Unable to hear the general's voice anymore, she bundled up the smoke tighter in her barrier of wind. There, on the ground, was the general, lying unconscious.

"Whoa..." Ruri grimaced as she was reminded of the power this ball's odor held.

Arman and his men, however, looked on with blank stares, clueless as to what the ball even did or why the general had passed out.

"Ruri, what did you do?"

"I just used a pretty dangerous tool that Lydia recommended to me. I think it's better if you don't know," Ruri explained, worried that Arman, also a demi-human, would faint in the same way. They were about to reclaim the palace, so that would just muddy things.

With the general unconscious, Ruri released the barrier and let the Spirit Slayer dagger fall to the ground. She retrieved it and put it into her pocket space, figuring she would have to put it in a room slated to be erased later, where it would be disposed of along with the rest of the room's contents.

"Hey, guys. I took care of the dagger, so you're good to go," Ruri called to the spirits, causing them to poke their heads out of hiding one by one.

"*Is it safe now?*"

"*Really?*"

They gathered around her timidly. Once they knew it was safe, the rage could be seen in their eyes.

"*These guys have to pay.*"

"*Yeah, they gotta.*"

"*Charge!*"

Enraged after being threatened with Spirit Slayer, they mercilessly captured the three.

"What are you doing?!" yelled the girl.

"Let go!" said the boy.

The two rampaging Beloveds and the unconscious general were thrown into a cell with the help of the spirits and the liberated Nation of the Beast King troops. Despite the enemy's yelling and screaming, Ruri told the spirits not to lend them any help, so neither could use their magic. They also placed an extra set of magic-sealing shackles on them just to be sure.

"Keep an eye on them. Don't listen to what they say, no matter what, okay?" Ruri instructed them.

"*Okaaay!*" replied the spirits in unison, raising their hands.

Arman put a few of his soldiers on guard duty in addition to the spirits. The soldiers who'd been ordered to keep watch looked envious of their comrades gearing up to reclaim the palace.

"Grrr... I wanted to go too..." said one soldier.

"Yeah, same here. But we drew the short straws, so not much we can do about it. Just accept it," said another.

"Aaaargh! This was supposed to be my chance at payback!"

As a few of the soldiers lamented their luck, Ruri's group rushed out of the dungeon.

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The palace was completely under Furgal's control. Seeing the Furgal troops walk around as if they owned the place, the Nation of the Beast King troops' faces started to scrunch and contort in rage, resembling hannya demons.

Arman and the others were not sneaking around. They charged from the front, gallantly. And the only reason they could was because Ruri was with them. The Nation of the Beast King had a clear strength advantage, and they normally wouldn't have lost the war. They'd ended up being decimated because of the irregular element of the otherworldly Beloveds being on their side.

"Go! All of you go north! I'll take the east side!"

"As you wish!"

"Leave it to us!" the soldiers said before dispersing under Arman's orders.

The Furgal troops were in shock and started to panic at the sight of Arman and his soldiers out of their cells.

"How did the prisoners get out of their cells?!"

"They should've had magic-sealing shackles on!"

Despite being slightly shaken up, many of the Furgal forces tried to intercept the escaped Beast King's men based on their confidence in having won a one-sided battle before. However, there was one problem.

"Why?! I can't use magic!"

"Me neither!"

"What's going on here?! Where did the Beloveds go?!"

The soldiers fell into mass chaos as they realized they couldn't utilize magic. Meanwhile, the soldiers of the Beast Kingdom wiped out Furgal's soldiers with a bang using their own magic. Arman stood at the head of the group, mowing down more Furgal troops than anyone else.

The spirits, who were only heeding Ruri's wishes, took away the magic from Furgal's forces, and the Nation of the Beast King's men were using magic via the spirits instead. The balance of power had done a one-eighty.

The soldiers of the Nation of the Beast King, led by Arman, were recapturing more and more of the occupied palace. In the process, they were also rescuing civilians who worked at the palace, who had been rounded up and confined to a room. Some had been seriously injured as a result of resisting, but Ruri used Jade's dragon's blood to heal them right away. Unable to handle it all by herself, she handed bottles of the medicine to the spirits and ordered them to tend to the injured. The people of the Nation of the Beast King took priority, of course.

It might have been a soft way of thinking, but Ruri was repulsed by the concept of people dying, even if they were enemies. Therefore, she used the medicine on anyone with serious injuries,

even those from Furgal, though she restrained them first so they wouldn't run amok after they recovered. Nearby, Arman seemed like he wanted to say something, but she ignored him.

Arman did not complain about Ruri's actions, but it was easy to imagine that he was exploding in frustration on the inside. Of course, Ruri had not forgotten that Celestine had been badly injured by these people either, so there was a part of her that whispered to just leave them be. Even so, there were some things that not even she wanted to yield on.

The recapture of the palace went bafflingly smoothly. There was no shortage of soldiers who were terribly wounded and extremely exhausted due to lack of food and water, but their morale was abnormally high. This was likely because Ruri had told them about Celestine's condition. The people of this nation absolutely cherished their Beloved. Their attack on the Furgal forces was so intense from their desire to get revenge that Ruri feared they would overdo it and kill all their enemies.

Worst-case scenario, the dragon's blood would take effect if the patient was still drawing breath, so Ruri tried to subtly suggest that the soldiers beat their enemies but not kill them, though it was doubtful if they were even listening.

Ruri didn't know if it was the effect of downing a whole bottle of medicine, but thanks to Arman, who showed no sign of running out of mana, they succeeded in reclaiming the palace with frightening speed. And when they entered the throne room, a royal member of Furgal sat atop the throne as if he owned it, leaving Arman looking dumbfounded. A vein then popped in his temple.

"Who gave you permission to sit on that throne, you bastard?" Arman demanded in a low, gravely tone.

The Furgal royal's legs shook like a newborn fawn, and he cried for help, but his soldiers had already been eliminated.

"Get off—*now*," Arman said, grabbing the collar of the man who was too afraid to resist. He dragged him off and tossed him away.

"Yeeeeek!" the invader screamed. He was acting so cowardly, you would never have expected him to be a royal of an entire—albeit small—nation. Then again, most people would react the same way if

faced with Arman pissed off to the max. The exhilaration of battle caused an overflow in raw vigor that was so intense that Ruri didn't want to face it head-on even though she was protected by Kotaro and Rin.

Arman tied the foreign royal with rope from head to toe, sat on his throne, used him as a footrest, and let out a long sigh.

"Good work," Ruri said, handing a cup of hot tea to the still-excited Arman. Even the soldiers of the Nation of the Beast King were afraid of what they saw, despite being allies, so Ruri wanted him to calm down as quickly as possible.

"I'd rather have booze, but oh well," Arman grumbled as he chugged the tea down, oblivious to Ruri's concerns. "Sheesh, losing to such a minor nation will be a dark part of this kingdom's history," Arman said, grinding his heel into the man-turned-footrest.

"Yeek! Please spare my life!" the royal said.

"Footstools don't freakin' talk," snapped Arman.

"Sorryyy!"

Arman ground his heel into him again to shut him up. The sight made it hard to tell who the invader was in this situation.

"Ruri, we're going to go clean up the soldiers in the royal capital. There are Furgal troops occupying there too. We need to sweep them out and give peace of mind to the civilians."

"Was there much harm done to the civilians?" Ruri asked, remembering her time in the royal capital before. Everyone there loved and revered the spirits and cherished the Beloved. She couldn't really shop comfortably because she was a Beloved and the townspeople were so very religious, but it was a nice town that was lively and filled with kindness.

"I've heard little harm came to the citizens. It proved fortunate that they didn't openly oppose due to the Beloveds of Furgal having spirits in attendance."

"I see. We have their deep faith in the spirits to thank, then."

"True. Even so, it's best if we get them back as quickly as possible. Could you tell the spirits to continue shunning Furgal, Ruri?"

"Understood," Ruri replied as she proceeded to tell the spirits the

characteristics of the Furgal soldiers and instruct them not to lend their help.

After seeing that the deed had been done, Arman and the soldiers headed for town. Ruri wanted to go along with them, but there were two Beloveds in the palace's dungeon at the moment. Arman asked her to keep an eye on them, since there was no telling what they might do. He was also probably reluctant to take a Beloved like Ruri onto a battlefield filled with danger. It was no problem for her to come along, but Arman wouldn't approve of it even if she did plead her case.

As a result, Ruri stayed put and waited at the palace with the soldiers that Arman assigned to guard her. He returned around sunset without any major issues having occurred.

The people of the royal capital had spent their time worrying about what would happen, with only a surface-level understanding of the situation, but relief started to spread once Arman and his forces began to apprehend the invaders. It seemed that a distrust of Arman was beginning to grow among some people in the capital—they worshipped the spirits so much that they thought it was wrong to keep a Beast King without the favor of the spirits around as their ruler. However, now the spirits were on Arman's side and the Furgal troops were being ignored by the spirits no matter what magic they used, which helped restore their confidence in Arman. It was a terribly self-centered state of affairs, but that probably showed just how anxious the people were about all of this.

Upon hearing that the harm to the people was minimal, Ruri was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

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It had been a day since the palace was reclaimed. Though traces of the invasion remained, Arman had taken everything back, so it was a satisfying outcome.

Every Furgal soldier was arrested and thrown into the dungeon, restrained with magic-sealing shackles.

Arman had a scary look in his eyes as he planned to torture the

generals just as they'd done to him, but Ruri stopped him. Dissatisfied though he was, she adamantly refused torture, as the mere thought of it was painful to her. Seeing as Ruri was the linchpin of the entire operation and was so opposed to the idea, Arman reluctantly agreed to drop it.

He clicked his tongue loudly in disappointment, but Ruri was relieved that the matter had been resolved peacefully. She had no intention of butting in on how Arman dealt with things as king. Not only was Ruri from another nation, but she was also a Beloved. She wasn't about to involve herself in political matters between nations.

The people of the palace were breathing easier now that it had been reclaimed from Furgal and their fortunes had completely turned around. Slowly but surely, they would resume their duties.

Walking through the palace, Ruri was praised with tears in the eyes of every person she passed, which made her feel a little uncomfortable, but they wouldn't stop even if she asked. To the people of the Nation of the Beast King, she was literally their savior.

Ruri was talking with Arman in the throne room, which was in pristine condition.

"Ruri, you really saved us this time. On behalf of the nation, I thank you," Arman formally announced.

"Oh, you don't have to do all that," Ruri replied bashfully.

"However," Arman started, causing her to look at him with a startled stare, "a Beloved plunging into a dangerous area right in the middle of a war is beyond asinine. You need to learn to have more concern for yourself. If a Beloved were to ever get wrapped up in a situation where they wound up dead, the Nation of the Beast King itself would be wiped off the map. Especially since you have so many supreme-level spirits attending you," Arman elaborated, going into sermon mode for some reason and leaving Ruri unable to catch up.

"But... But...you couldn't have stopped them without me, right? Did you forget the shape you were in when I arrived?"

Arman was in clean, good-quality clothes now, but when Ruri first got to the palace, his body and clothes had been in shreds. Anything could have happened to him at any time back then. In fact, in the middle of freeing all the soldiers from their cells, the general had

come to the dungeon with the two Beloveds in tow. They had undoubtedly visited to inflict harm on Arman. If Ruri had arrived any later, something terrible might have been in store for him. She felt sort of slighted, being on the receiving end of a sermon after all she'd contributed.

"Be that as it may, don't be too overconfident in yourself. For Jade's sake as well," Arman continued.

For Jade's sake... That hit Ruri's weak spot. She thought it was unfair bringing him into it, but she obediently nodded. "Okay..."

She didn't think that her actions were wrong in regard to the incident, but it was a fact that she'd made Jade worry. Not only Jade, but Kotaro and Rin too. Considering all of that, it became harder for her to loudly proclaim that she was right with any confidence.

Arman awkwardly smiled at Ruri, who was visibly down on herself. "I'm not attacking you for coming to save us. Against a Beloved, I'm nothing more than an ordinary person. Only one Beloved can take on another. No one is arguing that, but just keep the people who really care for you more in mind."

Ruri understood his argument but was miffed. "Is that something *you* should say, Beast King? You were the one who stayed behind so that Celestine-san and Padparadscha-san could run away. I feel like what you did was no different from what I did," said Ruri, realizing that they were no better than each other in terms of making people worry.

Arman's eyes started darting around the room. "Uh, okay, Ruri; it's about time for you to head back home, isn't it? Jade is probably worried sick."

Ruri squinted at Arman in response to his blatant attempt to switch topics.

"Things will be hectic here for a while, so may I ask you to take care of Celestine and Padparadscha?" he continued.

Ruri was reminded of Padparadscha's stomach. "Yes, Padparadscha-san's belly was quite big when I saw her. It would probably be hard for a pregnant woman to travel a long distance in that condition, so how about you let her stay in the Nation of the

Dragon King until she delivers the child?"

"Right, that might be a good idea. I'll send Jade a letter later."

"Yes, please do so," Ruri said before something suddenly sprang to mind. "What about the Beloveds in the dungeon right now? Strictly speaking, they're transmigrators, so they aren't citizens of the Nation of Furgal."

"Yeah, I've got the Furgal royal in custody, tied head to toe, so I'd like to talk that issue over with Jade, if I could. Personally, I can't send those two back to Furgal, but I can't keep them here either. The girl is one thing, but the boy is a higher rank of Beloved than Celestine, so we'd be flat out of luck if something were to happen."

"Indeed."

"I feel like it would be safest to have either the Nation of the Dragon or Spirit King take them since there are supreme-level spirits in both of those kingdoms."

Even Ruri thought that being arrogant enough to consider yourself invulnerable was dangerous. It was only natural that Arman was wary.

"But we'll have to keep them here until I'm finished talking things over with Jade, so could you hold back the spirits for us again?" he asked.

"Yes, it would be a disaster if those Beloved got out of their cell by making the spirits obey them as soon as I left," Ruri said, giggling and turning to those by her side. "Don't listen to any orders the Beloveds in the dungeon give you. For any reason. And if anything happens, make sure to contact Kotaro and Rin before doing anything, okay?"

"*Got it!*"

"*We were told to only listen to you, Ruri, so don't worry!*"

"*We'll do it because you asked, Ruri!*"

The spirits obediently followed her orders. Kotaro and Rin had a lot of authority. While that was what you should expect of supreme-level spirits, those same two supreme spirits had both been named and subjugated by Ruri, so that would likely grind the gears of the nobles of the Imperial Nation.

"Okay, I'll be going back now. I know everyone is worried."

"Right. Give Jade my regards."

"I will. See you again."

Ruri entered her pocket space in the same way as when she'd come to the Nation of the Beast King and found Lydia waiting there. She used her power to move her in front of Jade's pocket space instead this time around. She'd always wondered what kind of space Jade had, and once she opened the door, she found it far tidier than she'd imagined.

It might have been a given that it was so vast since he had so much mana, but it was totally different from Ruri's room, awash with treasure. Jade likely sorted his things regularly. The room reflected Jade's diligent personality well.

Since staring too long would be an invasion of privacy, Ruri had Lydia exit and go outside. Before her body was all the way out, Ruri could feel herself being pulled into an embrace. From the familiar warmth and scent, she could instantly recognize that she was in Jade's arms.

"I'm home, Jade-sama," she said in greeting.

"Yes. Welcome back, Ruri," he replied, hugging her tight as if to confirm she was in one piece. Ruri didn't even stop him. "You're not hurt?"

"There was not a single iota of danger this time around," she replied.

"Lies are easy to catch, you know."

"How would I be lying?"

"Think back about everything until now."

Ruri thought back as she was told and smiled, leading to a very dry chuckle. Since she generally encountered some kind of problem every time she went somewhere dangerous, it was an accomplishment to have gone off on her own and not found herself in any peril. For once, she felt like she didn't have to complain to Ewan.

Then again, there was a dangerous moment when the Spirit Slayer dagger had come out, but Ruri had responded immediately, so there was no need for her to intentionally bring up a subject that would upset Jade. She had already asked Lydia to dispose of that

dagger, so it had long since been deleted along with a space on the chopping block.

"What happened to the Nation of the Beast King? And Arman?"

"He's safe..." Ruri said, averting her eyes.

"What happened in between?" asked Jade.

"Erm, well...by the time I got there, I was shocked to see that he was pretty hurt. I gave him a bottle of the medicine you and the others gave me..."

"The whole bottle?" Jade asked, his brows lifting. From the look of it, that had been way too much.

Ruri nodded awkwardly in response.

"What is Arman's condition?"

"He's doing fine—too fine, in fact. That means he'll be okay, right?" Ruri asked, having no choice but to ask Jade, since she had no idea what the medicine was capable of.

"If he was all right when you left, then he'll be fine," Jade replied somewhat half-heartedly.

Ruri instantly worried. "Whuuh?! Please give me a more definite yes."

"I don't know for sure."

"Oh no. What do we do, then?"

Ruri racked her brain for a while before asking Kotaro to observe Arman's condition. She was relieved when he did not report any change in Arman's condition after a few days' time.

Chapter 6: The Transmigrators

Jade informed Ruri that Celestine had awakened but fallen back into slumber, so she decided to go see Padparadscha. When she entered the room, Padparadscha looked at Ruri, eyes beset with worry.

"Lady Beloved..."

Ruri smiled to calm her down. "The Beast King was safe. We reclaimed the palace and the capital from Furgal."

"Thank you! Thank you so much!" Padparadscha's eyes started to mist up with tears upon hearing the news. She knelt before Ruri as if praying to God, her hands locked together, bowing repeatedly.

Ruri panicked after seeing this display. "Whoa, please stand up! No, actually, sit on the sofa!" That was not the kind of position a pregnant woman should be in. Ruri lent her a hand so that she wouldn't strain herself and then led her over to the sofa. "You can just take it easy."

That may have been an impossible task for those who lived in the Nation of the Beast King, since they were so overboard in the way they treated Beloveds, but Ruri wasn't a fan of being treated so formally. She would like the other woman to treat her normally while in the Nation of the Dragon King, at least, but it seemed to be a tough expectation right away.

"There's something else I need to tell you, besides the fact that the Beast King and the nation are safe," Ruri admitted.

"What would that be?" Padparadscha asked.

"The Nation of the Beast King is in disarray, so the Beast King requested that you remain here for a while," Ruri explained, knowing it would likely be easier for her to relay the news since Arman had asked her to handle things directly as opposed to Jade telling her instead.

"Oh, is that...so?" Padparadscha's gleeful expression immediately

began to fade.

"Besides, moving from the Nation of the Dragon King will put a strain on your body, so I think this is best for you and your child," Ruri added.

"Right..." Padparadscha nodded, looking sad because she knew it was the best course of action considering the child in her belly.

As such, she gave no objections and obediently accepted the situation.

"Let's make sure you have a healthy baby that you can show the Beast King."

It was clear from the expression on Arman's face when he spoke of Padparadscha that she was not just one of his many wives. If she had been, Celestine probably wouldn't have risked her life to protect her. Ruri felt ineffectual, as she could only give Padparadscha cliché pleasantries.

The next day, Celestine could finally have visitors, so Ruri went to visit her with Rin and Kotaro in tow.

"Celestine-san, are you okay? I think you should still be lying down..."

Celestine, who was now sitting in a chair after spending the majority of her time in bed since her arrival, replied, "I'm fine. My wounds have completely healed."

They'd used the dragon's blood on her, and as far as Ruri could see, there wasn't a scratch on her body. Her complexion was good, and she had an appetite as she was munching on the sandwiches and scones prepared as snacks for her tea.

Relieved that everything seemed to be okay, Ruri informed Celestine that Arman and the country were safe, just as she had told Padparadscha. Upon hearing the good news, relief came over the Beloved's face and she expressed her gratitude.

"Thank you so much, Lady Ruri. I cannot begin to tell you how grateful I am."

"What are you talking about? I think you're the one who worked the hardest in this whole ordeal, Celestine-san."

"Me?" Celestine repeated, her eyes widening upon hearing the surprising sentiment.

"That's right. You fought against the Beloveds of Furgal and safely escorted Padparadscha-san all the way here," Ruri elaborated. Naturally, there were also soldiers who had fought for the nation and guards who had fought for the two to escape, but she decided not to say that part aloud.

"But all I could do was run away. I'm the Beloved of the Nation of the Beast King, but I couldn't protect the nation..." Celestine said, dejectedly.

It was rare to see her so vulnerable when she was usually so determined and bold. That must've been how much that incident had done to her mind and body.

"You risked life and limb to protect Padparadscha-san. If you weren't around, who knows what would have happened to the child she's carrying. Also, we might've learned of the situation there too late to save the Beast King. It's all because of the hard work you put in," Ruri firmly assured her.

Celestine, with an expression that seemed more pessimistic than joyful, answered, "This was the first time I'd ever feared a spirit..." She paused, tried to think about her next words, and continued. "Of course, I knew they weren't as cute as they seemed. I respected and was in constant awe of them. However, I think I was somewhat conceited about being a Beloved. I was completely helpless against their merciless attack. Despite the fact that I am a tawdry, powerless entity from the spirits' perspective, years of being pampered as a 'Beloved' made me forget that. Should someone so arrogant even be a Beloved? I'm afraid I'd shame my entire tribe..."

Ruri awkwardly smiled at Celestine as she continued to feel down on herself. Perhaps this was indecisiveness brought about by her significant religious faith in the spirit. She seemed to have a strong sense of responsibility as a Beloved. Ruri, who had neither, couldn't really understand how she felt.

However, Ruri simply stated her own feelings. "You're thinking about things *way* too hard. I mean, the same spirits you'd always shared smiles with not only attacked you with an intent to kill but chased you down no matter how far you fled, so *of course* you'd find the experience scary. In fact, I think it was even scarier because of

their cutesy appearances. It was traumatic enough to show up in your dreams. I don't consider that being conceited."

"Yes, but..." Celestine trailed off.

"Do you hate the spirits now?"

"No." She answered Ruri's question swiftly, without hesitation.

"In that case, there's nothing to worry about," Ruri answered with a grin.

Rin flew in front of Celestine. "*Ruri is right. Besides, despite what you think, spirits gather to a Beloved of their own accord, so it's useless to think about you being 'worthy' or not. Useless, useless,*" Rin said, her words being meant as encouragement despite them sounding harsh.

Celestine's expression softened slightly, as if she understood Rin's sentiments. "You have a point."

"*Right, right. You don't need to think too deeply about it. Spirits don't think deeply. We stay by your side because we like you. We grant your wishes because we like you. That's it.*"

"But that's a problem in itself, isn't it? Hopefully, things work out in the end as they have now, but... Hmm..." Ruri said, ending with a troubled hum.

"*There's no way around it. That's just the kind of creatures spirits are.*"

Ruri recalled the day that Rin had come to her out of nowhere and demanded that Ruri give her a name. It felt like eons ago, but barely a few years had passed since then. Ruri found herself surprised by that fact—which was a little late coming, all things considered.

"I wish that pair of Beloveds had even a fraction of the respect for the spirits and shame toward themselves that Celestine-san did," Ruri commented, but she knew that whatever she said to the adolescent chunibyo duo would fall on deaf ears After all, not doubting that the world revolved around them was what being afflicted with chunibyo—the delusions of seventh-grade grandeur—was all about.

"What happened to those Beloveds?" asked Celestine.

Ruri had prioritized telling her about Arman and the palace and

hadn’t gone into detail about the Beloveds. “We arrested them and threw them in the dungeon. I made sure to tell the spirits not to obey them under any circumstance, and I made Kotaro and Rin emphasize that after I got back to the Nation of the Dragon King, so I believe things will be all right. Still, it seems that not even the Beast King really knows how to deal with them.”

“Yes, I would imagine.”

A sensible country would have followed the rules set by the Four Great Nations and wouldn’t have allowed their Beloveds to meet, but Furgal had used theirs to incite a war. If Arman sent them back to Furgal, they might raid the Nation of the Beast King again. In fact, both he and Jade thought this was highly likely.

The really bothersome part was that the pair outranked Celestine. Beloveds essentially had no restrictions on what they could and could not do. However, the captured Beloveds had taken things too far and ordered the spirits like they were playing some sort of game.

The spirits ignored their orders now that Ruri was around, but it was terrifying to consider what could’ve happened if she *hadn’t been.* Such dangerous people couldn’t be left to their own devices.

“There are apparently talks about it being safer to have the Nation of the Dragon King or Spirit King take them in,” Ruri informed her.

“Right, the Nation of the Spirit King has the Spirit of the Trees, and this nation has multiple supreme-level spirits in its midst, so they won’t be able to do as they please,” Celestine surmised, looking convinced.

The truth of the matter was that Jade didn’t want to take in those problem children either. Nevertheless, the consensus of Arman, Awain, and Jade was that they should definitely avoid leaving the two in the Nation of the Beast King.

Rin raised her voice in anger. “*Then bring them here! I want to see what kind of people they are with my own two eyes.*”

“*So do I!*” Kotaro chimed in.

As soon as the two finished speaking, they charged straight into Jade’s office and both shouted, “*Bring them here!*”

Kotaro and Lynn were probably furious with those disruptive

Beloveds—because they'd gotten Ruri involved, of course. Pressed by the spirit duo, Jade looked extremely perplexed. However, despite the demands coming from supreme-level spirits, his retainers looked hesitant to undertake such a hellacious task.

The room went silent at Rin's next words. "*You can toss them into Riccia's place. She'll be sure to train them well.*"

Riccia, who could keep the supreme-level spirit of fire eating out of the palm of her hand, could easily train a couple of adolescents. That was the general direction of everyone's opinions. As such, an agreement was reached that the Nation of the Dragon King would take in the otherworld Beloveds, but it was also decided that they'd take in the other transmigrators who had gathered in Furgal as well.

As expected, Furgal declined, but the people of the Nation of the Beast King—including Arman, who had to deal with Celestine being hurt by their forces—were furious and put down an ultimatum, saying, "If you refuse, prepare for your nation to be wiped off the map."

Furgal using their Beloveds to inflict harm upon Celestine was a well-known fact at this point, and both nations made it clear that they had no intention of stopping the Nation of the Beast King if they decided to go to war themselves. Arman also used the tied-up royal of Furgal as a bargaining chip. Apparently, the bound guppy was the king's nephew. Whether because he valued his family member's life or succumbed to the other nations' pressure, the negotiations went smoother than expected.

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Euclase was sent from the Nation of the Dragon Kingdom to negotiate with Furgal. Perhaps thanks to the combined intimidation with Arman, the deal was sealed easier than expected. The agreement was made that Furgal wouldn't have rights to the transmigrators, no matter what the reason, going forward. Not too long after negotiations, the transmigrators came to the Nation of the Dragon King. All of them were dark-haired and dark-eyed—a color combination that was familiar to Ruri.

Then again, it seemed some had dyed their hair, since their roots were black, making their heads look like the gradient you would see on a plate of flan. Ages varied from children who looked like they were still students to middle-aged adults, with no particular gender bias.

Also, upon close inspection, there were even children as young as *grade* school. From the leather-shelled randoseru backpacks they were sporting, they'd probably been on their way to or from school. All of them had worry painted on their faces.

That was understandable. When Ruri had first come to this world, she'd been just as confused, unable to wrap her head around things very quickly. From there, she'd been abandoned in the woods, chased by an excited Kotaro, met Chelsie, and started to live in the Dragon King's castle, and was now the wife of the Dragon King. One could never tell what life had in store.

Fortunately, in spite of everything that had happened to her, Ruri had come to accept the circumstances of living in this world to the point where she could say with certainty that she was happy now. However, it was going to take time before the transmigrators who'd just arrived started feeling that way. There might even be some that *couldn't* accept the situation even with time.

Jade said that he would give these people as much consideration as possible. Therefore, it was necessary to speak to each person individually. The two people selected as supervisors in charge of dealing with the transmigrators were Ruri's father, Kohaku, and the girl who'd wound up in this world on her own, Sango. They were given the positions with the idea that they would be able to sympathize with the transmigrators' confusion and worry as fellow inhabitants of the other world. Sango, being younger in age, was perfect, since there were small children.

That was when Ruri put her name in the running. She wanted to know what their stories were as well and asked Jade to let her join in. Much to her surprise, she was given permission. Normally, she would've been prepared for a resounding no and concocted a way to convince him otherwise, so Ruri was left stunned. It was so bad that she seriously worried if Jade was running a fever.

However, once Ruri saw an excessive number of guards load up her perimeter as a means to compensate, Ruri mildly regretted her decision. Kohaku mainly took the initiative, asking questions about what had happened when they were teleported, their lives in Furgal, and their hopes for life going forward. At first they were apprehensive, but when they heard that Kohaku was also from the same world and had worked as a diplomat, their shoulders relaxed to a state of half worry, half relief.

The communication skills Kohaku had cultivated as a diplomat were being used to great effect. Those who felt relief ended up being more chatty and divulged all sorts of information. What they learned was that every one of them had been riding the same bus at the time of being transported.

"*The path opened up, and everyone on board got rolled in, then*," Rin commented.

Apparently, it was very unusual for such a large number of people to come to this world. People who came here from the other world were rare in the first place, and *multiple* people coming over was such a rare case that not even the spirits could remember such an incident.

Kohaku's team had no choice but to convince them that they were simply unlucky. After all, there was no way to return home. Many of those who heard this could not hide their shock and started crying. The children, in particular, combined with their anxiety, were crying inconsolably, leaving Sango and Ruri flustered.

Nevertheless, Coral knew how they felt better than anyone else, so she took up the role of comforting them. Seeing as Ruri's entire family was living in this world without any issues, she left the job to Sango because she knew that she shouldn't speak up, since her consolation would come across as sarcastic. However, she couldn't let them stay depressed forever. She had to have them work with her to come up with a plan to ensure their livelihoods going forward.

The transmigrators were normal humans without any considerable mana. Except for the boy and girl referred to as Beloveds, none of them could even see the spirits. For those who were used to an easy life with electricity in the other world, they

were going to have quite a hard time in their daily lives if they couldn't use magic.

Although that was their general worry, the group's treatment in the castle of Furgal wasn't what you would call good. Ruri was shocked when she learned that even the grade school kids had learned how to do chores well enough to manage their day-to-day lives. But aside from that, no one seemed to have a clue about the way of the world here.

Kohaku, Jade, and his other retainers shared the same opinion—the upper echelon of the Nation of Furgal had likely been thinking of ways to make use of the transmigrators and decided to keep them in captivity, preventing them from acquiring any unnecessary knowledge in the meantime. It was a method all too familiar to Ruri, which only helped bolster the negative image she had of Furgal.

With that being the case for the transmigrators, Ruri and the others planned on supporting them until they could stand on their own two feet, but seeing as they wouldn't be able to make ends meet in their current states, it was decided to give them rooms in the castle, teach them the rules of the world, and give them jobs that fit each individual person. They were even encouraging families to adopt the small grade-schoolers and minors.

The only problem left was the pair of Beloveds. They were both high schoolers, the same age as Sango. Jade and the retainers were naturally present for their questioning.

Kotaro and Rin clung to either side of Ruri, exuding a threatening aura that said that they would thrash either if they tried anything funny. Ruri tried to talk to the two while under the absolute defense of the supreme-level spirits, but the newcomers were whining up a storm. They were not happy about their treatment in the castle.

"Hold on! I can't possibly sleep in this big common room with others! Get me a private room! I'm a Beloved, you know!" said the girl.

"That's right! The meals are meager, and I can't stand the snoring of the old guy sleeping next to me. I'm very sensitive. Improve this at once!" said the boy, both of them yelling in anger right off the bat without even taking a breath.

“We are the chosen ones!” stated the girl.

“Don’t think you’ll get away with treating us like this! If you want to avoid trouble, give us top-class treatment on the double!” the boy ordered.

The two made selfish claims, not having a doubt in their mind that they were special.

While Ruri and the others were just exasperated, there was one person who was taking some heavy damage from this display—Sango.

“Is this how *I* came across in the beginning?” At first, Sango had been self-indulgent and spouted off about being a Beloved and someone special. “That was a dark period. One of the worst in my life...” Sango had a chance to look at herself objectively due to the duo being close in age with her, causing her to fall into a depression.

“You’re doing your best right now, and you’re good at it, so you don’t have to worry about it, Sango,” Ruri said with a wry grin.

“True. I shudder to even think what would have happened if milady hadn’t straightened me out. She really is a great individual. In fact, she’s my god,” Sango said, reaffirming her faith in Rutile.

While Sango had been changed by Rutile, could the same happen for these two? Truthfully, even though they thought they were special, much like Sango had, they were totally different from her.

In Sango’s case, it felt more like a way to escape from reality.

Her normal personality wasn’t bad. In fact, it was because she was so modest that she’d listened to Rutile and changed her ways. However, Ruri couldn’t sense an iota of modesty in either of the two that stood before her. As far as this pair went, Kotaro and Rin were wary of them because they seemed likely to put Ruri in danger, and they’d told all the other spirits that the pair weren’t Beloveds anymore—the two were basically in the same position as the Beloved of Cerulanda. To be accurate, they were Beloveds but *not* Beloveds at the same time. That was the verdict of the supreme-level spirits.

Kotaro reported on the situation, stating that in addition to Rin and himself, seven of the twelve supreme-level spirits who had ties with Ruri—Time, Earth, Trees, Light, and Darkness—unanimously

agreed, so there was likely no possible way to overturn their ruling.

That made everyone scratch their heads, wondering why the rulers hadn't just kept them in the Nation of the Beast King in that case. However, Rin responded by saying that it was a personal vendetta against them for treating spirits as mere tools.

Jade, Euclase, and the rest of the retainers massaged their temples as the nation had no choice but to accept the undesirable role. While they all wanted to complain, they would be doing so to supreme-level spirits. It was a pitiful sight to see them have no choice but to swallow their pride and accept.

The two Beloveds hadn't been able to see the spirits at first, but they'd gradually come to see them as they lived in this world, mirroring Ruri's and Sango's experiences. Ruri hadn't been able to see the spirits at first either.

The two Beloveds had been given the royal treatment in Furgal, according to the testimonies from other transmigrators. Unlike the other transmigrators, who were given jobs and forced to work, they'd been treated like distinguished guests and had never worked, living every day in complete leisure.

As far as food, clothing, and shelter went, the way both parties were treated was like night and day. Perhaps the blatantly different treatment the pair received had caused them to gain a superiority complex and rapidly strengthened the idea that they were special. However, a Beloved *was* indeed a special entity, so in that sense, one couldn't necessarily blame Furgal. Beloveds were dangerous beings who were capable of destroying an entire nation, so it was typical to treat them courteously.

Therefore, according to the other transmigrators, the Beloveds were hated because they grew more arrogant by the day and looked down on everyone else from the same world. A constant stream of complaints about them came from the majority of the transmigrators, exasperating Ruri, Sango, and Kohaku. However, that was all a matter of the past. Since they were no longer able to employ the power of the spirits by order of the supreme-level spirits, they were in the same boats as the other transmigrators, unable to use magic even though they had mana.

There was no need to give them any special treatment now. Not even the normally gentle Jade was going to show mercy to the pair who had hurt Arman and Celestine, and they planned to treat them like all the other transmigrators.

No, it would technically be the same, but since those two had had a taste of how sweet the nectar could be, they probably felt way more dejected than any of the others.

Jade decided to put the pair, who had been going on a wild tirade, on sewage cleanup. Normally, it would be a task that could be done quickly with a sprinkle of magic by those with mana, but this was simply harassment. None of the retainers opposed the idea, and Ruri couldn't help but feel a little smug that the pair was getting their just deserts.

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Now that dealing with the Beloveds was wrapped up, Ruri was filled with questions. In Jade's office, Jade and the retainers were having a tea break.

"So, wait, why are so many Beloveds coming here?" Ruri asked, noticing how odd the overabundance of transmigrators, which included two Beloveds, was.

"You have a good point," agreed Jade, who had the same question.

It was the supreme-level spirit, Rin, who provided an answer, having the most knowledge of the world. "*It could be that Nadasha's forced summoning has had a lingering effect.*"

Ruri's eyes went wide, not having expected to hear Nadasha's name mentioned nowadays.

"*They forced the path open, making things looser. As a result, it's become easier to make a path here. And it's not irrelevant to the whole Beloved matter either. Because Beloveds have mana compatible with the spirits, it's far easier for their souls to be drawn into this world, where the supreme-level spirits dwell. And two such Beloveds were in the same place. I'm guessing that, combined with the fact that the loosened path is easier to open, they brought all*

the people who were there with them along for the ride."

"*That seems very likely.*" Kotaro agreed with Rin's analysis.

"Omigosh..." Ruri said with a grimace.

"They're totally victims of circumstance, then," Euclase said, pitying the transmigrators.

It made them both wonder how many lives those people had to change before they were satisfied.

"I think that the transmigrators should be allowed to slug the former king and head priest of Nadasha," Ruri proposed.

"Absolutely," Euclase agreed, nodding deeply.

"Hey, Rin. Does this mean we might see another big batch of transmigrators? From now on? Always?"

"*Not always. The path will repair itself little by little. It may take some time, though.*"

"Ah, I see."

Given that, the only thing they could do was pray as much as possible that no Beloveds ran into each other in Ruri's world.

Chapter 7: New Life

Ruri thought that the discomfort in her stomach she had been feeling for a little while was indeed strange. While she had planned to talk to Jade about it, not only had Celestine fled into the nation at the worst time, she'd had to deal with the Nation of the Beast King and the transmigrators shortly after, which meant she completely lost her opportunity to mention it. But now that the situation had settled down considerably and Jade had gained some breathing room with work, Ruri wouldn't be disturbing him by bringing the topic up.

When she visited Jade's office with Rutile as her guard, she found Euclase there along with some other retainers: Claus, Agate, and Finn.

"Jade-sama, is now a good time?"

"Yes, what's the matter?"

"I'd like to talk to you about something."

"I recall you saying that before. It completely slipped my mind with the situation in Furgal. Is there something troubling you?" Jade asked, putting down his pen and preparing to listen while the retainers continued work as usual.

"I've had a funny feeling in my stomach for a little while now. But when you tune with a dragonkin, you stop getting colds or illnesses even if you're human, right?"

"That's right, but funny *how*? I'll give you the medicine if need be."

"Well, it sort of feels like there's a mana-like heat gathering and clumping up. But I'm not running a fever and it's a bit different from a stomachache. Also, I feel movement, like some sort of twitching on occasion," Ruri said, patting the lower part of her stomach.

Everyone in the office froze in place. After a pause, they all turned to stare at Ruri.

"Huh? What?" she asked. Silence fell over the office, and a strange air hung overhead, causing Ruri to tense up.

"Do you happen to have any weird illness, by chance?" Euclase asked, making Ruri wonder if she had a curable illness or not.

"Ruri, when did those symptoms show up?" asked Jade.

"About a month ago, I suppose. Before Celestine-san arrived." Ruri gave a very rough date since she didn't remember the details well.

Euclase was astonished to hear this. "One month?! Rutile! You didn't notice *at all*?!"

"No! My apologies," Rutile said, visibly shaken by Euclase's angry, accusatory tone. She put her hands on Ruri's shoulders. "Ruri, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because there was nothing wrong. I was fine, and had an appetite..." Ruri replied, not knowing why she was being reproached but sensing that everyone in the room was on edge.

Jade was particularly flustered. The pen in his hand had been crushed, and the ink was spilling out onto his hand. With him frozen in place like he hadn't even noticed what had happened, Euclase reprimanded him. "Your Majesty! This is no time to space out! If she is a month in, she might give birth at any moment! We must prepare quickly!"

"Oh! I...uh...yes. Prepare... Prepare? What should I do?" Jade answered.

Euclase gave up on him, seeing that his mind was not working at full capacity, which made him worthless in their eyes, and started giving orders to those around them. "Agate, prepare the doctors. Clause, you will serve as aide for the royal office while His Majesty is out. Finn, strengthen security. Rutile, gather the court ladies!"

Everyone rushed off at Euclase's orders, leaving only Ruri behind.

"Euclase-san. What is going on? 'Prepare the doctors'? Am I sick after all?" Ruri asked, growing worried after seeing that this had made even the people who possessed the dragon's blood panic.

"No. You're *pregnant*!"

"I'm...what?" Ruri uttered, her brain struggling to catch up. After a long pause, she tilted her head and screamed at the top of her

lungs. “Whaaaaaaaaat?! Hold on a second! Pregnant?! But my belly is flat!” She was right. Unlike the currently pregnant Padparadscha, her belly was as flat as a board.

“That’s common for dragonkin.”

“Huh? What?! But the strangeness happened a month ago...”

“The pregnancy period for dragonkin is about one month! Normally, you start preparing as soon as symptoms show. What were you thinking, waiting this long to tell us?”

“You should have told us sooner!”

“This is the first time I’m hearing about *any* of this!” The reprimands were unreasonable to Ruri. Why hadn’t anyone told her? Well, she’d forgotten to tell anyone, but being snapped at didn’t sit right with her. “One month... Does that mean I’m already due?!”

“Yes! The child might come at any moment. Dragonkin go through pregnancy and birth faster than any other race.”

That is way too fast! Ruri thought, feeling the most intense culture shock so far, but there was also a part of her that agreed with the rules of this fantasy world.

“No way! What should I do?!” she asked, unable to rely on childbirth knowledge from her own world.

Her panic was understandable, considering she had suddenly been told that she’d be giving birth without time to rejoice in her pregnancy.

“Jade-sama...” She turned to Jade for help, but he was so pale that it was concerning in itself. “Are you okay, Jade-sama?!”

“If it happened before Celestine arrived, that means that Ruri was pregnant when she went to the Nation of the Beast King. I can’t believe I let her go somewhere so dangerous...” Jade muttered to himself, too shaken up to even respond to Ruri’s cries.

“Even if Ruri didn’t notice, you should have noticed yourself now that you’re in tune with each other, Your Majesty,” Euclase said, shifting the blame to Jade. “Anyone who doesn’t notice changes in their own wife is a failure of a husband!”

“Failure...” Jade repeated, the words landing a critical hit, causing him to curl up and clutch the sides of his head.

However, Euclase ordered Jade into action as well, as if to say

time was of the essence. “Your Majesty, please finish your current work quickly—and I mean super express quickly. Prioritize any matter that can only be sanctioned by you personally, as quickly as possible. You have no time to sleep.”

“R-Right,” Jade replied, doing as he was told, picking up a new pen, his hand still shivering. However, as if it had just come to mind, his head jerked up. “Oh! I have to come up with a name for the child!”

“Work comes first!” yelled Euclase.

Jade started working, spurred on by Euclase, but he was so flustered that it was doubtful he would retain anything from the paperwork.

“Ruri! You *have* to rest in your room!” Euclase ordered.

Ruri returned to her room as instructed and was soon greeted by the doctor Euclase had dispatched. She let the doctor examine her, skeptical, but the results showed that Ruri was indeed pregnant. It wasn’t until she was told that the baby would be born in a couple of days that she realized how serious the situation was. It was no wonder Euclase and the others were in panic mode. They had to prepare for the birth in only two days.

Since her belly wasn’t swollen, reality hadn’t sunk in for Ruri. Nevertheless, the surrounding area was kept on high alert to deal with the child who would be coming at any time. A doctor had been stationed to watch over Ruri, not only because she was the king’s wife, but out of concern for the nation’s Beloved.

As she took it easy in her room and pondered whether she was really going to have a child, her parents came to visit her. Ruri had been ordered to remain on complete bed rest and was forced to lie around despite feeling nothing was wrong with her. She was now sitting upright with a stack of pillows behind her.

“Ruri, I heard you’re expecting? Kotaro-chan came up to me and said a child was on the way, so I had no idea what he was talking about at first.” Riccia was all smiles, not very perturbed, possibly because she already knew the struggles of childbirth.

Kohaku, on the other hand, was different. “Are you sure you’re okay? From what I’ve heard, dragonkin give birth in a month’s time.

Can a child grow properly in a human in such a short period of time?" Kohaku asked, his concerns being valid in terms of human logic. Ruri had had the same thought herself.

"Yep. They said it's normal. I'm due in a couple of days or so, but it doesn't feel real yet. Am I really about to give birth?" Ruri asked, putting a hand on her abdomen. Riccia's and Kohaku's gazes fell upon her hand.

"It's as flat as a board. Wow, dragonkin sure are mysterious!" Riccia said in an easygoing tone. "Can I touch it for a second?"

"Sure."

Riccia reached over to her daughter's abdomen, her eyes brimming with curiosity. However, no matter how much she touched it, she couldn't feel any movement inside.

"This really is mysterious," Riccia commented, still cocking her head as she removed her hand.

"I don't see His Majesty here, but what's he up to? Leaving his pregnant wife like this..."

"Euclase-san has him confined to his office. They want to let him finish up his work while he still can. He will be with me when I deliver, so they want him to get through any work exclusive to the Dragon King."

"It's not easy being a Dragon King, huh?" Riccia commented.

Ruri smiled wryly, fully agreeing. She really wanted Jade to stay by her side, but considering his position, she couldn't afford to make any selfish requests.

"Are you ready for this?" Kohaku asked worriedly.

"Yeah. Euclase-san is taking the initiative to get things in order. I wouldn't know what to do on my own, after all," Ruri replied. When it came to childbirth in another world, and dragonkin childbirth to boot, Ruri's knowledge, based on childbirth in her own world, wasn't going to fly.

"You have a point," Kohaku replied. He must have been surprised to hear the sudden news. He was basically being told that his grandchild was coming without warning. Kohaku's gaze then fell upon a stack of books on top of a chest of drawers near Ruri's bed. "What are these?"

"Books on raising dragonkin children. Euclase-san prepared them for me and told me to study them, but it's just gibberish." Ruri shrugged with a smile. "For dragonkin children, mana is food. That's what they have written in them, but do you know what that means?"

"If you have no idea, then we'd *definitely* have no idea," Riccia replied.

"Yeah, I bet." Ruri hadn't expected to gain any answers from her parents. She'd tried to ask around, but everyone was busy preparing for the birth and she didn't want to disturb anybody by flagging them down.

"Well, I'm sure it'll all work out. Euclase-san has been preparing doctors and stuff for me."

"True. I feel more relieved with Euclase-san around," Riccia replied.

"True," Kohaku echoed.

Euclase and Riccia seemed to get along well, so they would often pop into Riccia's shop, order custom clothes, and mingle. Therefore, Riccia knew Euclase's disposition well.

Perhaps because Kohaku had seen Euclase's excellent work at the castle as chancellor, he had a lot of trust in Euclase and had no objections to Riccia's opinion.

"Yeah, that's right. I'll have to inform my dad that you're expecting, Ruri," Riccia brought up Beryl, as if she'd just remembered him.

"Oh, Kotaro apparently contacted Chi, so I think Chi already told grandpa."

"Oh my, is that so? That's good to hear. But I'll send him a letter just in case. I'm sure he'll be rushing back," Riccia replied.

It might have been difficult for Andal to keep up with him, but Padparadscha was in the castle, also in her last month of pregnancy. Andal probably wanted to see the birth of his grandson and possible heir to the Beast King throne. Ruri thought that both of them returning together would be killing two birds with one stone.

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Riccia exited the room with Kohaku, who returned to work. Before she left, Riccia excitedly stated that she was going to make some baby clothes for the newborn. They were apparently staying at the castle until Ruri delivered her child.

Ruri was very grateful to have her parents by her side, since it was reassuring. It was her first child and had come out of nowhere, so her feelings hadn't caught up to her yet. She was acting cheerful, but she was extremely nervous.

As if swapping in for her parents, Celestine and Padparadscha came to offer their congratulations.

"Padparadscha-san. How are you feeling?" Ruri asked.

Padparadscha smiled awkwardly. "That should be *my* line. I can't believe that you were pregnant as well, Lady Beloved! When I think of how I entrusted the Nation of the Beast King's matters to you in your condition, I cannot help but feel absolutely terrible," she replied, looking sad.

Celestine nodded. "You can certainly say that again. What would you have done if something had happened to Jade's child?!" Celestine was clearly upset, not because Ruri's child was in danger, but because *Jade's* child was in danger, which was very much like her. "So? How are you doing, Lady Ruri?" she asked.

"They put me on complete bed rest, but I'm doing just fine." She was doing so well, in fact, that it was hard to believe she really was expecting a child.

"That's good to hear, but I still can't believe you're going to be giving birth *before* Padparadscha, Lady Ruri." Padparadscha nodded quietly in agreement.

"That's so true. I'm the most surprised."

"You can't be ignorant of dragonkin biology if you're married to one! You should have studied it much earlier!" Celestine complained like a sister-in-law.

"I mean," Ruri started with a wry smile, "I thought it was the same as human beings. No one told me either. I never thought it'd be *this* different..."

"Well, it's true the dragonkin are a tad special among demi-humans, like giving dragonhearts when they get married and

whatnot."

"A *tad*?" Ruri repeated, wanting to quip about it being far from a *tad* special.

"Anyway, since you're due any time now, it'd be best if you drilled some of those facts into your head."

Ruri glanced at the books by her bed for a second, meekly replying to the warning. "Yes, ma'am."

Since Padparadscha could give birth at any moment as well, the two did not stay long. The resident doctor came to check on Ruri frequently. Jade was tasked with finishing his work quickly and was forbidden by Euclase to even go check on Ruri until it was done. By Rutile's account, he was almost ready to cry as he processed the paperwork.

Two days passed in that manner until Ruri felt a sudden pain, which made her clutch her stomach. The court ladies noticed this change right away and went to bring the doctors. Those on standby in the next room came in right away, throwing the chamber into chaos.

Ruri's stomach felt heat more than pain. As the people around her moved in a flurry of activity and she fought against a heat stronger than pain, she gave birth to a tiny, tiny dragon. It was so small that it was worrying, but it was apparently a normal size for dragonkin children. Ruri, now seeing why a baby of this size wouldn't make her stomach swell, placed it softly into the palm of her hands as though handling something fragile.

"Hmmm. That's a world of magic for you... I guess I'm glad I didn't lay an egg."

She hadn't expected the baby to be born in a dragon's body, but seeing as it probably wasn't weird in the fantasy world she inhabited, she accepted the fact surprisingly easily. She often saw cat-eared or beast-tailed children playing gleefully in the capital, so that helped her to accept this all the quicker.

Most importantly, the baby was absolutely adorable. It was correct to say that she didn't care whether it was in dragon or human form. She wanted to touch her child more, but she was so limp, as if she had been robbed of all her mana and stamina, that it

was difficult for her to get up. Not wanting to drop her newborn, she hurriedly handed it over to Jade himself, who had tossed aside his work and rushed over once he'd heard Ruri was giving birth.

He looked worried but was relieved to know that his wife and baby were safe. With that relief taking him over, he felt overwhelmed by the sight of the child nestled in his hands.

"It's so small," he commented.

"It really is," Ruri replied.

"I never thought that I'd suddenly become a father."

"Same here. Why didn't anyone ever tell me?"

If Ruri had known about the biology of the dragonkin, she wouldn't have been in such a rush, and both she and Jade could've had more time to be aware of being future parents, so knowing a little bit further in advance would have been ideal. Nevertheless, from the moment they saw their newborn child, a never-ending stream of parental love and affection poured out of them both.

"It seems Euclase thought that either I would notice or that Rutile explained it to you. Since pregnancy can cause mana instability, if the woman is not a dragonkin, the in-tune husband would usually notice. However, Lord Kotaro and Lady Rin said that there likely wasn't a major change in your mana since you have a contract with both of them on top of being a Beloved."

"Ah, is that so?" If that was the case, then Ruri couldn't blame Jade for not noticing.

"Even so, it's my fault for not catching on," he admitted dejectedly. He had apparently been scolded by Euclase quite a bit for that blunder.

"Let's just drop it. The baby came out as it should, and that's all that matters. And it came out absolutely adorable."

"You're right." Jade gazed at his palm-sized child with a very gentle smile.

Ruri's lips naturally curl into a smile as well. "I'm sure Agate-san and the others are jumping for joy."

Agate and the elders wanted a child more than anyone else, so there was no way they weren't positively ecstatic.

"Yes, they're making a huge commotion. Apparently, they're

throwing an impromptu party to celebrate the birth."

The idea of them throwing a party when Ruri, the one who had done the most work, was confined to bed and couldn't even participate made her raise an eyebrow.

"By the way, what is the little one's sex?" Ruri asked, unable to tell just by looking.

"I was told it's a boy."

"Oh, a boy, huh? I'm sure he'll grow up to be a stud."

Though she couldn't tell from the child's dragon body, he was bound to be handsome, considering Jade was his father. Ruri couldn't wait for him to grow up.

"Ruri, I've been thinking about a name for him. But only if it's okay with you."

"I'd love to hear it."

"Citrine. What do you think?"

"Citrine..." Ruri repeated, ruminating on the name. It felt familiar and comfortable, as if it had been the only choice from the very start. "I think it's lovely."

"You do?!" Jade exclaimed, his face lighting up.

Seeing the joy on his face, Ruri giggled.

"Ruri..." Jade spoke his wife's name and brought his face closer to hers. "Things have been so hectic that I forgot to say this to you: Thank you for becoming my family. I love you." He kissed Ruri on the forehead.

"I love you too."

Although the days leading up to the birth had been tumultuous, the sight of Jade, now looking more like a father, and her newborn child, firmly cemented the fact that they were a family. Filled with an indescribable sense of dreamlike bliss, Ruri flashed him a very tender and peaceful smile.





She was so happy that she wished she could stay in this dreamlike wonder forever.

Chapter 8: Citrine's Growth

For a week after giving birth, Ruri spent most of her time in bed. She'd had a conversation about the child's name immediately after the baby was born but had passed out asleep soon after. When she woke up on occasion, Jade would bring a porridge-like food to her mouth and she would eat it, but it was an unconscious action that she could barely remember after the fact. By the time she fully awoke, she was flabbergasted upon finding out that a week passed.

Since the child was far smaller than a human baby, Ruri had assumed the burden on the mother would be small, but it seemed that was also linked to dragonkin biology. As Ruri drank the highly nutritious soup with tons of stewed ingredients, her eyes were drawn to the basket near her bedside, where Jade was pumping mana into their sleeping son.

"Are you sure we really don't have to feed him milk or food?"

"Yes. It may seem strange to a human like you, Ruri, but mana is basically food for a newborn dragonkin."

"Dragonkin really are mysterious beings, aren't they?" Ruri said, referring to the fact that they didn't need to be breastfed like human babies. Instead, their parents provided them with mana.

The baby grew by way of that mana, but in the week that Ruri was bedridden, Citrine had grown to three times his original size—to the size of a kitten. Ruri was both startled by this rapid rate of growth and shocked that she wasn't able to see her child grow in real time, but Riccia had asked the spirits to record him with a camera. Thanks to her readiness, the first thing Ruri did now that she was recovering and awake more often, was check the footage of Citrine's growth.

Fast-forwarding through the video, she could see how abnormally fast he grew. Dragonkin were a complete mystery—physically growing by eating mana made little sense to Ruri. However, the

doctors assured her that her child was growing up fine and healthy, which gave her some relief.

Besides, dragonkin babies were similar to human ones in some ways. He spent most of his time sleeping, and he whined and cried when hungry—only he wanted mana instead of milk. The sounds of his cries were so adorable that it made her want to squirm. It was almost like the mere sound soothed her heart and cleansed anything bad from her. Of course, that had also been caught on camera.

After finishing giving mana to Citrine, Jade took back the bowl and spoon that Ruri was holding and proceeded to feed her. Feeding their partners by hand was a sign of affection for dragonkin, and though it had confused and embarrassed Ruri at first, she had gotten used to the process by now and opened her mouth for the incoming spoon without an ounce of shame.

"Are you feeling okay now?"

"Yes. I'm fine now," Ruri answered, swallowing her soup and smiling.

Jade looked relieved. "I heard the reports, but I never thought that you would use up so much of your mana when you normally have so much," he said, diligently scooping more soup up and bringing it to Ruri's mouth.

"You and me both," she griped as she ate.

The birth of their child had forced her into a near weeklong sleep, with her barely waking up. Although the dragon babies were small, they stole a large amount of mana and life force when being born. If the mother was a dragonkin, she would have a strong body and stamina to compensate for her mana, circumventing days of sleep. However, if she was a human or a demi-human who wasn't as strong as Ruri, she would end up sleeping for a considerable amount of time due to her mana and stamina being siphoned away.

Birthing a dragonkin, the top of the hierarchy in this world, was that much of an ordeal. In Ruri's case, however, it had been assumed she wouldn't be as bad as other humans, since she possessed mana more powerful than even the Dragon King himself. However, when she'd opened her eyes, she had slept for a whole week, which had left Jade, Agate, the retainers, Kotaro, and Rin

worried enough to hound the doctors for answers. She couldn't help but pity the healers being pressured by the Dragon King and a couple of supreme-level spirits.

Apparently, Euclase and Rutile had managed to step in and settle them down. Ruri was grateful to have a couple of levelheaded individuals in her midst. It was probably hell trying to stop Jade, Kotaro and Rin. She sighed, imagining the foolishness that had ensued while she was sleeping. Even more so because she'd heard that Agate and the elders were making a fuss with the doctors as well.

However, as retainers to the government, it was understandable that they would be more concerned than necessary about her condition. After all, Ruri was an irreplaceable being—a Beloved.

Although she couldn't label everyone who had raised a fuss out of concern for her as being bad, she knew that the doctors were feeling an inordinate amount of pressure. In fact, it may have been they who were most relieved by Ruri's recovery.

After finishing her soup, Ruri stepped out of bed and peeked at her little one in the basket. He was sleeping safe and sound. Just looking at his sleeping face naturally curled her lips into a smile. Jade's dragon form bore pitch-black scales, but Citrine had golden-yellow ones that would likely shine like the sun in the daylight. Every time Agate and the others came to check on him, they went wild over it.

"That's His Majesty's son for you."

"His scales hold exceptional beauty."

"I am sure he will be quite the handsome fellow with a promising future. I bet the ladies will be all over him."

That was the sort of high praise they gave him. Perhaps he was overjoyed about Jade finally having a child, but Agate and the others were excitedly bustling around every day, looking for educators for Citrine—neglecting their work in the process. Euclase warned them that it was too early to be doing any of that, but they wouldn't listen. The other retainers were getting fed up with their incessant chatter and lack of progress at work.

One of the reasons Agate's group was so enthusiastic was that

Jade's child possessed enough mana, even as a baby, to secure a promising future for himself. Citrine's mana wasn't just strong because he'd inherited Jade's blood, but also because he'd taken a great deal of mana from Ruri at birth. This was due to dragonkin biology feeding on mana. She might have had to stay in bed for a week, but if it meant him growing up to be big and strong, she felt it was worth the effort.

According to Rutile, the birth of a child between the Dragon King and a Beloved was an auspicious event, and the royal capital was reveling in festivities on par with Agate and his cohort. The celebration was expected to continue for some time, and even Finn, who usually stayed at Jade's side, was keeping watch over the capital in order to maintain the peace.

After hearing about how lively the city had gotten, Ruri wanted to go see what it was like for herself, but there was no way they would give her permission to go outside. Rutile shut her down before she could even utter a word.

"Not a chance."

Although Ruri was finally able to get out of bed, she had not yet made a full recovery and was under doctor's orders to remain on complete bed rest, so it was difficult for her to even get a chance to leave her room. As unfortunate as that was, Ruri herself knew better than anyone that she wasn't well enough to stroll around the capital, so she couldn't object.

Just after that, Riccia came in with the baby clothes. Initially, she'd made them for a human child's body, but the baby had come into the world with a dragon's body instead. Ruri thought her mother would be shocked to see a nonhuman grandchild, but one would expect from Riccia, her ability to adapt was so outstanding that she was thrown off for less than a second before quickly growing overjoyed.

"Omigosh, so cute!"

At the time, Ruri had still been out of sorts from the effects of childbirth, so she hadn't seen her mother's initial reaction, but she could easily picture it in her head. Kohaku, the epitome of a normal man, had been a bit perplexed at first, but he was the same person

who'd come to this world as Riccia's husband. He accepted the surprising situation much faster than Ruri had expected and rejoiced in the birth of his dragon grandson.

The only problem was the error that Riccia had made. It was for a human figure, so the size and shape didn't fit the baby at all. Still, she wasn't about to give up and pulled an all-nighter to make a pillow for Citrine to sleep on more comfortably, as well as a onesie that would fit his dragon body.

It didn't take much time, because Citrine was so small, but she used cloth that she had scrupulously selected based on information she'd gathered via the spirits. Riccia said that she would eventually be launching a baby brand for other demi-human children as well, so this was partially fueled by her business acumen. But since Citrine was growing faster than she'd expected, she'd left Heat to tend to the store in the capital and was holed up in her room to make clothes that fit.

Even though she didn't need to go that far, Ruri knew that her mother was thrilled about Citrine's birth, and that made Ruri happy. Knowing that, she wouldn't dare stop her mother. Riccia's motivation would probably remain at full force for a while.

While Riccia went into overdrive, healed-up Ruri looked at Jade with envy as he cradled Citrine. "I want to feed Citrine mana too," she said.

Jade had always given Citrine mana, and Ruri had never done it even once. It wasn't like he was unaffected by Ruri's mana, since he'd taken her mana during childbirth, but that was a different experience altogether.

Since many humans lacked mana, it wasn't absolutely necessary for both parents to give it to their child, but after sitting back and watching Citrine beg Jade for some, it was only natural that Ruri wanted to play a part in helping her son grow as well. From Jade's troubled look, however, it was clear that he was opposed to the idea.

"I can't?"

"I'm not saying that, but you're still recovering. You should wait till you're back in shape."

"Sure, I'm still a little sluggish, but my mana has recovered more

than enough."

"Since I'm in tune with you, I can sense that just fine, but it doesn't change the fact that I'm worried."

"But..."

"Just be patient until we know you're completely fine. For my peace of mind as well."

"You're too overprotective," Ruri said with an awkward smile. She could sense that he was firm about not backing down no matter what he said.

Jade had only ever known about childbirth as a concept. He knew that it was hard, hard work from what he read and from secondhand experience, but he had no idea that Ruri would sleep as much as she had. Now that it was his turn to actually experience it firsthand, he learned what childbirth truly meant.

That was why Jade was in such shock and why he was staying with Ruri the entire time she was confined to bed. The reason Euclase had been in such a big rush to have Jade finish any work that required his personal seal was that they had assumed Jade would be attached to Ruri at the hip once the baby was born. Euclase had many friends who were dragonkin women, so they probably knew how hard the effects of childbirth would hit a dragonkin husband.

Sure enough, that had been the right call, as Jade had turned out to be deadweight—too concerned about Ruri to do anything. Even now, he was clinging to her, leaving most of the work to his retainers, and no matter how many times she told him he could prioritize his work, he wouldn't budge.

But since no one was complaining about the king abandoning his work to tend to his wife, it was probably totally natural behavior to the dragonkin. It seemed to be common knowledge among them that it was more for the sake of the mate than the baby.

"I'm totally fine, though..." Ruri assured him.

Jade was a real worrywart. Ruri smiled exasperatedly and gently petted Citrine. Since he was a dragon, he wasn't as soft and pudgy as a human baby, but he was softer in a more elastic way than an adult dragon. His scales weren't hard and slippery like those of an

adult, and the smooth texture made her want to keep touching them.

As she petted him, he nuzzled his tiny nose against her fingers. The adorable gesture struck her through the heart. "That was *so cuuute!* Did you see that little thing he did, Jade-sama? It was too cute!" Ruri was tempted to pick him up and nuzzle her cheek against his, but he was sleeping so comfortably that she didn't want to wake him up, so she abandoned the idea with a sigh. "My boy is the cutest in the whole world."

Ruri was in full doting parent mode. She looked over Jade, who looked dissatisfied.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"While I'm happy our child was born, I'll be honest that I'm not a fan of you giving Citrine too much attention, just looking from afar," he replied, exposing his jealousy.

"Are you seriously jealous of Citrine?"

"Grk..." Jade didn't deny it.

Ruri giggled. "It's not very mature of you to be jealous of your own child."

"That is one thing and this is another. I dislike it when your attention goes toward anyone else, regardless of who it is."

"Well, *that* is an annoying trait."

"That is how dragonkin males are. Just accept it."

"Sure, sure," Ruri said, smiling in a bemused yet joyful way. She said it was annoying, but she also found it cute that Jade was jealous of a child.

Ruri suddenly wondered something as she removed her hand from Citrine.

"So, wait, how long do dragonkin children have to grow before they can change into human form?"

Ruri didn't know if this was the case for all dragonkin, but as far as she knew, they lived their daily lives in full human form, indistinguishable from humans. They only changed into dragon form if there was some reason to do so, such as flying or fighting. It was common to see demi-human children with imperfect human forms, or those who weren't able to take human forms and had left over

demi-human features. But these dissipated as they grew up, and adults were able to successfully take on complete human form.

Beastmen were an exception, as they retained the appearance of beasts without taking on full human form, but Ruri wasn't quite sure of the differences between races who could and couldn't assume human form.

Joshua had once told her the shocking fact that dragonkin's age of adulthood was when they reached a hundred years old, so she had a hunch that dragonkin childhood was long, but she didn't know how long it would take before he could change form. She had been given books to study the biology of the dragonkin, but she'd hardly read them because of how fast everything had gone from realizing she was pregnant to giving birth. Basically, she barely had any knowledge of dragonkin children.

Jade had been by her side since giving birth, so Ruri asked him, assuming it would be quicker than going through any required reading.

"Let's see... He'll probably be able to assume human form in another two weeks. In human terms, he'll be as big as a three-year-old."

Ruri was filled with a surprise that she'd felt countless times by now. "Is his growth a little fast?"

Actually, "a little" wasn't the half of it. Jade was saying their son would grow to the size of a three-year-old in only three weeks, including the week Ruri spent in bed.

"A dragonkin doesn't reach adulthood until a hundred years, right? I feel like if they kept growing at that rate, they'd hit old age quickly..."

The dragonkin were said to have the longest lifespans in the world. A lot of that had to do with their mana, but even excluding that, they lived long lives. That was exactly why Ruri had thought it would take a long time for them to grow up, but she received the exact opposite answer, which confused her.

"Dragonkin grow quite quickly until a certain point. But after that, the aging process gets slower, and when you reach a hundred—the age of dragonkin adulthood—you age even slower."

"Oh, wow."

"Which is why you only have to take care of a child for a short time. At first, they grow phenomenally fast compared to other races, so even without their parents taking care of them for years like humans, they will grow on their own if you leave them be."

"On their own?" Ruri repeated, suspicious. Even if that was true, it seemed like an overstatement. Still, Jade had no reason to lie to her.

"Dragonkin are different from other races in many ways. It's usually a surprise when they marry outside their own race."

"Yes, I can only imagine," Ruri replied. There were way too many things about dragonkins that were out of the norm. "So, from what you've told me, Jade-sama, do children leave their parent's care early?"

"Yes."

Ruri was visibly shocked. "No way! But I was going to take care of the baby and give it lots of love and attention!" she cried, knowing that Citrine wouldn't need her care if he learned to be independent early. It was a huge departure from the way human babies were raised.

Ruri clutched her head, worrying about whether she could raise him properly.

Seeing this, Jade put his hand on his chin as if thinking about something. "You probably don't know a lot of things, and I doubt Lady Riccia would know about raising a dragonkin either."

"I doubt that too," Ruri agreed.

Up until she heard Jade's explanation, she'd thought she would learn from Riccia's teachings on parenting, but dragonkin were so different from humans that it didn't seem like her mother's lessons would serve any purpose. She was at a loss. Even if she crammed knowledge from the books into her head, it was unlikely that she could put any of it into practice. And even if she was to talk things out with anyone, it was easier to talk things out with women than men, and most of the women working around Ruri were unmarried. Rutile also only had information and had never actually raised a child.

Ruri thought that Jade's retainers would be somewhat easier to speak with, but according to him, Claus, Agate, and the other elders were too busy working in the service of the king to participate in childcare. She was tempted to complain about that being a problem in itself. Work was important, but so was family.

Then again, Jade had said their children "would grow on their own." The way they raised them must have been fundamentally different from how humans did things—with humans, it was a risk to ever let your young out of your sight.

"Hmmm..." Ruri hummed, worried about whether she would be able to handle being a dragonkin parent.

Jade then suggested, "How about we summon Chelsie?"

"Chelsie?"

"Despite appearances, she is a veteran who birthed and raised three children, including Claus, all by herself. You would have an easy time talking things over with her, wouldn't you?"

"Ah, I see now. Good point."

It would be a great help to Ruri if she had Chelsie, a dragonkin parent, there for her. She'd raised three children, so she would likely be able to provide accurate childcare advice if Ruri was ever in a bind.

"But will Chelsie-san come?"

"I'll try to get in contact with her personally. We've already talked about you giving birth, and according to Claus, she was going to come by soon to check on you."

"Thank you very much. Having Chelsie-san around would be extra helpful!"

"Then sit tight for a bit. I'll go talk to Claus," Jade said, exiting the room.

He came back soon after, as though saying he didn't want to be away from Ruri for even a second. He had a ton of documents in his hands. Euclase must have pushed them on him. He placed the documents on the table with a dismayed look on his face. Then, as if nothing had happened, he came to Ruri's side and embraced her, turning away as if trying not to look at the documents.

Ruri smiled awkwardly, sensing that he was trying to escape

reality. She decided not to say anything and let him procrastinate in peace.

"Nevertheless..." Jade spoke up, looking down at Citrine. "I had expected it to a certain extent from Lord Beryl, Lady Riccia, and you, but to think that even Citrine is a Beloved too..."

"Yes, I know what you mean. The Imperial Nation might raise a fuss again."

"Yes, well, I'm sure that Euclase and Claus will handle that."

"Worst case, Rin said that she would threaten them or something."

"Ruri, I beg of you—*don't* let her do that."

"I think Rin was half joking, so don't worry."

"Then does that mean the other half *wasn't* joking?"

Ruri quietly looked away. Yes, a number of small spirits were sticking around Citrine's basket, smiling and watching him sleep. At first, even more spirits had come in droves to see him, but Rin had rebuked them for being too loud, so they'd ended up deciding on an order for visiting. And in the process, there'd been a bit of a kerfuffle.

"*'Kay, I'm first!*"

"*No, I am!*"

"*I wanna go ahead!*"

"*Let me!*"

"*No, let* me*!*"

They fought over who would go first, causing Rin to yell at them for being noisy again. Weren't spirits supposed to be able to share information? Regardless of who was first, they shouldn't have had any problem if they shared what they saw and heard with each other.

Ruri asked them about it, but Rin exasperatedly replied, "*Yes, but they still want to* see *him.*"

Rin and Kotaro were away right now. Even though they'd scolded the other spirits before leaving, the lower-level spirits who had been clinging to Citrine ever since he was born launched a vehement protest.

"*Not fair!*"

"*That's terrible!*"

"*Give us a turn! Give us a turn!*"

"*Yeah!*"

They banded together to speak out against the supreme-level spirits in a rare display. That was how much the newborn Citrine was beloved by them. He wasn't just favored by spirits of one element like Sango and Joshua—those of multiple elements were assembled in the room. That basically proved that he was a Beloved.

This only further intensified the celebratory mood both inside and outside the castle in the capital. As a parent, Ruri was happy to see so many people celebrating her child, but she also worried about whether it was safe to have *this* many Beloveds in a country.

Ruri wasn't the only one to think this; beside the overjoyed Agate and elders, she could see that Euclase and Claus looked perplexed. They were probably happy to have another Beloved, but they were likely racking their brains over how to deal with so many being gathered in one nation.

The benefits to the nation were great, but they probably couldn't get too happy when they considered the negatives that came along with them. It wasn't a problem that Ruri, who couldn't involve herself in politics, could do anything about. The most she could do was watch and control the spirits so that they wouldn't go berserk over Citrine's birth.

Fortunately, Ruri had Rin and Kotaro, who could tighten the spirits' reins to prevent them from going overboard. Since Citrine was a Beloved, he had to be properly educated so that he wouldn't grow up to be an arrogant tyrant. As far as Beloved ranking went, since Ruri had supreme-level spirits like Kotaro and Rin under her control, she was higher than him.

That was a relief, since it was a very important issue when it came to educating Citrine. If his rank were higher, there was a chance the spirits would spoil him, and she wouldn't be able to scold him if the occasion called for it. She couldn't allow him to become a selfish Beloved like others in the past and felt a sense of duty to raise her child to be a worthy son of the Dragon King.

As Ruri was filling herself with determination, the spirits were

fighting to decide their spots in line. However, they ended up settling things peacefully with rock-paper-scissors. The spirits who were sent to the back of the line because they lost booed and complained, but they followed the rules and left the room. After that, there were no further disputes, and they visited in the order decided by their game. They did nothing in particular and basically just watched him.

Citrine himself was a newborn who spent the majority of his time sleeping, only waking up to eat, and he was unable to talk. Yet the eyes of the spirits quietly observing him glimmered with joy.

Riccia, who had just arrived herself, took in the sight and was reminded of when Ruri was born, bringing back fond memories. Apparently, spirits had flocked around Ruri in the same way when she was born, vying with each other to secure a spot.

"When I saw the spirits flocking to you, I laughed with your father and said, 'She's definitely our daughter.'" Riccia chuckled and continued. "The spirits were disappointed because you couldn't see them. I consoled them by saying that you would be able to see them in time."

Ruri was listening with interest. She never heard that anecdote before. She wished that her mother had told her about the existence of spirits sooner, but seeing as she couldn't see them until she came to this world anyway, even if her mother had told her, Ruri would have shrugged it off as a fairy tale. However, as she watched the spirits viewing Citrine, part of her was glad to know that she'd had the same experience as an infant. Knowing that the spirits had watched her with joy brought a smile to her face.

"By the way, Ruri. Where are Lady Rin and Lord Kotaro?" Jade asked, noticing the absence of the two spirits. Rin and Kotaro had been permanent fixtures before and after the birth, but now they were nowhere to be seen. There was a reason for that.

"Ah, right. They said they would go to the Nation of the Spirit King. I doubt they'll be back for a while," Ruri answered.

No matter how fast Kotaro, the Spirit of the Wind, could move, it took time to make a round trip to the Nation of the Spirit King. They wouldn't be back in a day or two.

"What business do they have there?" Jade asked, curious about

why Rin and Kotaro would leave Ruri's side when she hadn't fully recovered, given they were even *more* overprotective than Jade. It was only natural to question that, since they normally wouldn't leave her side even if they were told to.

"They said they're going to get berries from the Spirit of the Trees."

"Berries?"

"Yes, special berries that only the Spirit of the Trees can create."

"Berries that they'd leave you behind to obtain?"

"It's apparently for me. They said eating the berries restore both mana and vitality." They'd both gone all the way to the Nation of the Spirit King in order to obtain them.

"Such a thing exists? That's the first I've heard of it. Awain never mentioned that to me." Jade was astonished. Dragon's blood was also special, but it only cured wounds and illnesses; it didn't restore strength or magic.

"I told them that I didn't need it, but..." Ruri trailed off. Rin's and Kotaro's desire to have Ruri heal as quickly as possible was so strong that, after carefully placing a barrier around her, they had set off in spite of Ruri's attempts to stop them. She looked at Jade with a wry smile. "They sure are overprotective..."

She hoped to get him to agree, but she received an answer she wasn't expecting.

"No. If that will make you better, then I'd love to have it."

"Right, you're just as overprotective as they are..." Ruri said, weakly chuckling. "I've told you, I'm fine."

"But you haven't fully recovered, have you?" Jade prodded.

"Well, I won't say I *have*..."

Jade knew she still needed more time because he spent most of the day by her side.

"Everyone cares about you that much, Ruri."

"Yes, I know," she answered with a grin.

Although there were many hardships that accompanied coming to this world, many more important things had happened as well. In the other world, Ruri had had no one she cared about aside from her family, but now she had more people she cared for than she knew

what to do with. She had initially lamented her misfortune in coming here, but now she realized that she was much more comfortable in this world. Even if she were told that she could return to the other world, she would choose to stay. She could say that with certainty. Ruri felt that this world was where she belonged more. She had gained more here than she'd left behind.

Once Ruri thought about how blessed and fortunate she was, she wanted to thank God, if one existed. Then again, it would be funny if there was a God in a world with spirits roaming around.

Ruri giggled.

"What's wrong, Ruri? You seem awfully giddy," Jade asked.

"I was just reminded that a lot of people love me."

"A little late for that," Jade replied, lovingly caressing her cheek. "'A lot' doesn't cover the number of people who love you. Then again, the one who loves you the *most* is me."

"I'm sure Kotaro and Rin would *vehemently* disagree with that," Ruri said, giggling. She could easily picture them hounding Jade.

"I won't cede that fact, even if I'm against supreme-level spirits," he said with conviction. When it came to Ruri, he always showed a childlike stubbornness.

"What are you trying to prove?" Ruri asked, momentarily exasperated.





However, that feeling was soon replaced with joy and love.

Epilogue

With the celebratory mood still in full swing, Chelsie arrived at the castle after receiving a message from Jade.

"Chelsie-saaaan!" Ruri exclaimed, not having seen Chelsie in a long time. She was so happy that she went to hug her, as if to say that she missed her dearly.

Chelsie rolled her eyes with a smirk as she accepted the overly excited Ruri's hug without dodging her. She looked like an old woman, but she was a dragonkin all the same. Ruri pounced on her at full speed, and she didn't even budge.

"Sheesh, you may be a mother now, but your self-control needs work."

"I'm just so happy to see you, Chelsie-san."

"I was worried when I heard you were bedridden for a week, but you look pretty darn healthy now. You had me worried for nothing."

"Aah, yeah. I think that's thanks to the berries Kotaro and Rin brought me."

"Berries?"

"They said they're rare berries that the Spirit of the Trees in the Nation of the Spirit King can make."

"Well, I've never heard of that before."

"Oh, you neither, Chelsie-san? Jade-sama also said he'd never heard of it."

Even Jade, who had a long relationship with the Nation of the Spirit King, and Chelsie, who served the previous Dragon King Quartz, were clueless about the berries, so it must not have been a very well-known fact.

"It was super effective. I feel like I recovered all the mental and physical energy I lost up till then. In fact, I feel like I have *too much* energy now," Ruri said, moving away from Chelsie and swinging her arm around and around to show how much energy she had.

“You don’t have to prove it. I can see for myself,” Chelsie said, exasperated. “Where is His Majesty?”

Jade was nowhere to be seen in the room; only Rutile stood guard near the door, along with Kotaro, Rin, a few other spirits, and last but not least, Citrine.

“Euclase carted him away because the fruit put me back in proper shape. They said that work had badly piled up,” Ruri explained.

Including the week that Ruri had been bedridden, Jade had stayed by Ruri’s side, leaving all of his royal duties to his retainers. It was only natural that work had piled up. Even with Euclase, the chancellor, there were many decisions that couldn’t be made without his permission. He had been bringing work that could be done into Ruri’s room, but the Dragon King couldn’t just stay cooped up and away from his duties forever.

This entire time, he’d been let off the hook because Ruri’s recovery process came first, but that consideration wasn’t necessary now that Ruri was feeling better. Despite him throwing a tantrum like a child and refusing to leave, Euclase had dragged Jade away kicking and screaming. Chelsie’s arrival was probably another reason Euclase had felt comfortable doing so. After all, she was like a parent to Ruri in this world.

Nevertheless, Ruri couldn’t help but secretly think that Euclase’s strength to drag away the Dragon King—a position decided by brawn—was quite impressive. Euclase had never even participated in the tournament to decide on the king. Jade might have been holding back, but it was clear that Euclase was quite strong nonetheless.

Then again, even being a royal official, they would likely be looked down upon by other dragonkin if they didn’t have a certain level of strength. Considering that, it felt necessary that Euclase possess especially formidable strength among the dragonkin.

Chelsie peered into Citrine’s basket. “Oho. So this is your and His Majesty’s child?”

“Yes. His name is Citrine.”

“That’s a fine name.”

“Right? Jade-sama gave it to him,” Ruri said, smiling from ear to ear, as if she herself received the compliment.

"He has quite the mana reserve too."

"It seems a lot of my influence shows in him."

"So I see," Chelsie said, understanding without much explanation.

Ruri felt Chelsie's dependable aura as a veteran child-rearer. Dragonkin fed on mana from the moment they were born. And mana from their parents was their most important source of nutrition as children. That was why, with some exceptions, the parents' mana greatly influenced the growth of their offspring. The more magic power they gave, the stronger their children became.

Citrine had been feeding off the mana of the strongest of all the dragonkin, the Dragon King Jade, so he was naturally going to be strong. However, the influence of Ruri, a Beloved, was even greater. Quantity was important, but quality even more so. Beloveds had the highest-quality mana in the world, and Citrine had received Ruri's mana at birth. Also, after Ruri had regained her strength by eating the berries from the Spirit of the Trees, she'd been taking turns with Jade giving Citrine mana meals.

Moreover, Ruri possessed mana that rivaled Jade's. Given an abundance of high-quality mana that even the spirits favored, Citrine's own mana was growing stronger at a pace that made all the other dragonkin nervous. That was likely influenced by the fact that he had the qualities of a Beloved himself.

His future looked promising. But the only ones happy about that were Agate and the other elders; Euclase and everyone else were a tad worried about Citrine's future.

"I've been waiting for you to come, Chelsie. I wanted to ask you all about dragonkin child-rearing."

"Child-rearing? What's there to ask?"

"Well, the specifics of raising them and whatnot."

"Just leave them alone and they'll grow up on their own."

"Huh?" Ruri uttered, freezing at the haphazard advice.

"If you give them magic at first, they'll take human form in two weeks, so after that, they can do whatever they want."

"No, no, no. I mean things like how to educate them or what to watch out for to raise them properly."

"I don't remember paying attention to any of that."

“Arghhh... You’re saying the same thing as everyone else!”

Ruri was truly shocked. Chelsie had been her only hope. The female dragonkin court ladies around Ruri were all unmarried. Generally, dragonkin didn’t work outside the home after marriage because they were a race that didn’t like to leave their mates.

However, that didn’t mean they didn’t work at all. They said that they simply utilized their pastimes to work at home. Also, they didn’t stay completely indoors either; quite a few worked in the castle even after getting married and having children. When Ruri had asked those women for child-rearing advice, the only response she’d received was “Just give them mana when they get hungry.”

That was *barely* advice. It was no help whatsoever. She’d even asked several other people, and they’d come back with almost the same answer, leaving her at a loss. After that, Ruri had reflected on the situation once again. When the pregnancy had been discovered, Euclase had quickly made preparations—more for Ruri’s safety during childbirth than for the baby itself.

Of course, the mother’s health was important for humans, but humans spent more time on preparations to raise the child. Honestly, the only things that had been prepared for Citrine were a basket to sleep in, a cushion to line it, and a single blanket.

When Ruri first saw that, she had asked, “Huh? This is it?” She’d been surprised, and anyone who wasn’t familiar with dragonkin child-rearing would have had the same reaction. That was how little they’d prepared for the child.

Citrine ate mana, so he didn’t need a bottle. Since he didn’t eat food, he didn’t need diapers either. No one wore clothes in their dragon form, so clothes weren’t necessary either. Granted, Riccia had made clothes that could be worn in his dragon form, but nothing really needed to be specifically prepared for Citrine. It was natural to feel anxious about whether this was truly enough.

Chelsie spoke as if to laugh off Ruri’s worries. “Claus told me that doctors check on him regularly and court ladies come to check on him every few hours, right?”

“That’s right.”

“They wouldn’t do that much for an ordinary dragonkin child.

They're giving him special treatment because he's your child and a Beloved himself, but they would leave a normal dragonkin child be."

"This is special treatment? *This?*" Ruri repeated, her eyes saying she didn't believe it. However, no matter what Ruri thought, dragonkin logic wasn't changing.

"When I gave birth to Claus, I only gave him mana once a day as a meal and worked in the castle the rest of the time," Chelsie explained.

"Once a day doesn't sound good..."

"It's normal, I assure you," Chelsie replied as if it were common sense.

Ruri began to feel like she was the one talking crazy. However, Rutile, who had been on the sides, interjected with a very complicated expression.

"Pardon me. It would mean trouble if Ruri believes what you're saying, so I must interject with a correction. Lady Chelsie, your child-rearing method was unusual even for the hands-off style of the dragonkin. Clause often complained about your extreme lack of care for your children."

"Chelsie-san..." Ruri glared at Chelsie. But the other woman didn't look particularly embarrassed, maintaining her usual aloof expression.

"They grew up just fine, so it's all right."

"No, it is *not* fine!" Rutile shot back.

While Claus had grown up to be a capable aide to the king, in Ruri's world, it definitely would have been reported as abuse.

"No way Clause could be built that soft when he's got Beast King blood flowing through his veins. It's not a problem." Chelsie had three children with Andal, including Claus. However, being a dragonkin, bound to only have one love in their life, she'd had no intention of joining the Beast King's harem and sharing her husband with other women, so she'd raised her children as a single mother in the Nation of the Dragon King.

She was quite the independent woman. While that was admirable, it was clear that her child-rearing methods weren't worth emulating.

"Incidentally, I heard that the reason Claus grew up without any issues was because the hired help took good care of him. After all, Lady Chelsie, who served the king at the time, was apparently a workaholic and rarely had time to be at home," Rutile tacked on as an aside.

"I thought Chelsie-san could have been someone to consult me about child-rearing..." Ruri slumped her shoulders dejectedly.

"There is no need for consultation. Dragonkin may take forms that appear indistinguishable from humans, but they are the race that stands at the top in this world. The two are not the same. Dragonkin infants are not so weak that they need constant supervision like human young do," Chelsie stated.

"Yes, I understand that, but..." Ruri peeked over at Rutile.

Rutile then said, "I don't fully agree with what Lady Chelsie is saying, but I don't think getting too involved will do any good either. You are worrying too much, Ruri. Dragonkin aren't weak, so you don't have to care for them as much as human infants. Then again, I do think Chelsie is *too* hands-off, so I don't think you should use her as a frame of reference..."

"Urk..." Ruri hadn't expected Rutile to agree with Chelsie too. She found herself clutching her head over the stark difference between human and dragonkin thinking.

Citrine didn't cry at night, didn't cause any trouble, and only gently reminded them when it was time to eat. The rest of the time, he slept. He was that easy to care for. There was so little to do for him that it left Ruri feeling disappointed. She had to accept that this was how dragonkin were, but she wondered if there was a tad more she could do for her son, though any more would be excessive by dragonkin standards.

Humans and dragonkin—they were similar yet different races, so Ruri was the one who needed to be flexible with the way things worked. If the child had been human, Chelsie would have understood her concern, but the child was a dragonkin with Jade's blood. That meant Ruri had no choice but to adapt to the dragonkin child-rearing method.

That said, Chelsie didn't seem to be reliable, so it would be better

for Ruri to recruit someone who knew how to properly raise dragonkin children.

"Rutile-san, I'd like to hear from someone knowledgeable about dragonkin child-rearing."

"What? You sound like you have a problem with me," Chelsie said, furrowing her brow, displeased that Ruri was seeking help from others despite having an experienced person like herself around.

"Hearing that your child-rearing methods were extreme from Rutile-san has obviously made me afraid to take your advice," Ruri explained.

"There's not gonna be much difference," Chelsie replied.

"I don't even know if there *is* a difference or not, so I want to get other people's opinions as well."

Chelsie still looked dissatisfied, but Rutile seemed to agree. "She has a good point. Ruri has become His Majesty's mate, yet she still seems to know so little." Rutile perhaps knew that all too well because she was always by Ruri's side as her guard. "I think it might be a good idea for her to learn about dragonkin."

Since arriving at the castle, Ruri had been taught by Agate and others to learn the basic ways of the world, but it had been one issue after another since her arrival, leaving her with the bare minimum of knowledge. Even though she was the mate of the Dragon King Jade, there were still many things she was clueless about. Then again, there was also the fact that she was a Beloved and couldn't be involved in politics, so it was not entirely her fault.

However, Chelsie agreed that the habits and biology of the dragonkin wouldn't be a heavily restricted topic for Ruri to delve into.

"That's right. Seems she should probably learn a bit more about dragonkin. I've been worried about when she's going to accidentally push His Majesty buttons enough to make him confine her," said Chelsie.

"Agreed," Rutile concurred.

"Chelsie-san, you're saying some awfully ominous things without batting an eye, and I have no idea how to respond. Rutile-san is even agreeing with you and everything."

“Underestimate a dragonkin man and you’ll get hurt,” Chelsie warned her.

Those threatening words even made Rutile nod sternly in agreement. Ruri had heard countless times about how dragonkin obsessed over their mates, so she thought she wouldn’t have any issues, but apparently she wasn’t equipped for the dangers. She hoped Jade didn’t turn into a yandere—a person with a dangerous obsession with their partner.

Ruri didn’t sense enough danger in the air just yet, but the seriousness in the two ladies’ eyes made it impossible to simply laugh the advice off.

“I just want to talk about child-rearing, though...”

“Yes. This is very relevant to raising children. Dragonkin men hate having their mate’s attention taken away, even if it’s by their own child,” replied Rutile.

“Especially because this child is a boy. He’ll get extremely jealous, so you best remain cautious. It wouldn’t be as bad if it were a girl, but still.”

“Just as Lady Chelsie says, I understand that you value your son, but it’s not a good idea to pay too much attention to him. Do you understand, Ruri?” Rutile warned her with a stern look.

“Aww, what?” Ruri whined, naturally dissatisfied with what she was hearing. However, what Chelsie told her next forced her into silence.

“If you’re not careful, the child will cease to be.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?!” Ruri asked, startled by the ominous words.

“It’s common among dragonkin who marry outside their race. Once the male dragonkin gets jealous because the female dragon gives the child too much attention, he considers the child a nuisance and...” Rutile said with a suggestive pause in her sentence.

Ruri’s face twitched. “And...? What do they do with the child?!” She was afraid to ask but wanted to know. Her conflicting feelings were overcome by her curiosity.

“Kicking them out of the house would be the best option. Worst-case scenario, he might kill the child or kill his mate and himself.”

"You're joking, right?"

"Do I *look* like I'm joking?"

Ruri hesitated, shifting her gaze from Chelsie to Rutile. Like Chelsie, Rutile didn't look like she was joking either, which left Ruri unable to suppress the twitch at the corner of her mouth. "The dragonkin are wild..."

Yes, she was reminded that the dragonkin were a dangerous race in more ways than one. That also jogged her memory. Ewan's parents had met a tragic end due to a dragonkin's obsession, and he'd been taken in by his cousin, Finn.

She didn't think Jade would harm her. Besides, Jade *couldn't* harm a Beloved like Ruri, who was constantly protected by Kotaro's barrier, so there was no real need to worry. Nevertheless, hearing such perilous warnings filled her with myriad complicated feelings.

If you asked Ruri if she could exercise self-control around her child, she probably couldn't. Not when Citrine was *this* cute. That was all there was to it. Still, she did think she should have a better understanding of the biology and habits of the dragonkin—for her and Citrine's sake.

"For now, could you introduce me to someone who can explain dragonkin child-rearing methods in an easy way? If possible, I'd prefer a human woman like me, who can sympathize."

At first, Ruri had planned to ask Chelsie, a veteran mother who'd raised three children, but her feelings had changed greatly in the short period since then. The perceptions of dragonkin and humans were totally different. Normal things to Ruri weren't normal, and illogical things to her were logical to them. She felt that she'd learn more from someone who could properly understand the shock caused by this species disparity.

"Right, there are things that only someone of the same race would notice. I'll speak to His Majesty about it."

"Thank you, Rutile."

They reached a good spot in their conversation to break, so Ruri chatted with Chelsie over tea. She asked Rutile, her bodyguard, to also join them at the table. Normally, a bodyguard should always be ready to protect the person they were assigned to, but Ruri didn't

really need a bodyguard since she was being protected by Kotaro.

Truthfully, Rutile remained by her side as a bodyguard in more of a chaperone capacity due to Jade's overprotective nature. That was why she was usually involved when Ruri had tea time. Ruri was grateful to have her, since Rutile was an excellent conversation partner.

"Rutile-san, are you and Finn-san going to get married?" Ruri asked, remembering Rutile and Finn had been together for quite some time and finding it strange that they weren't married yet. After all, Ruri and Jade had met later and married before them.

Rutile just smiled in response.

"Could it be that Ewan is getting in the way?" Ruri asked, thinking it possible.

Knowing the brazen brother complex extraordinaire, Ruri could easily picture him yelping like a miffed puppy to stop the wedding.

"Ewan raising a stink doesn't mean much to me."

"Good point," Ruri admitted, knowing Rutile wasn't the type to let Ewan's antics prohibit what she did. "Then why?"

When Ruri saw them together on occasion, they looked like a perfect couple. It was odd that they weren't married yet. Not that she was rushing for them to get married or they *had* to get married right away, but from what she saw of Jade, she felt that dragonkin men were eager to get married early and keep their mates to themselves. Yet those two were still just lovers. It seemed they weren't making any progress to go further either.

"There are reasons," Rutile said with a smile, as if saying that she wasn't going to divulge any more than that.

"I see, then," Ruri replied, smiling awkwardly and quickly backing off, as she wasn't going to pry if Rutile wasn't planning on talking. She then totally switched topics. "Chelsie-san, can I clear out the land next to your house? Just enough space to build a largish house."

"Sure, but what are you going to do with it?" Chelsie questioned.

"I want to build a house Jade-sama and I can live in after he steps down as king in our later years," Ruri said, giddy with joy.

In contrast, Chelsie seemed a bit displeased. "You really plan on

living next door?"

"Of course! I'll take care of you in your old age too!"

"No, you don't *have* to take care of me," she replied, annoyed.

Ruri pursed her lips. "Why not? It's going to be tough for you if you keep living by yourself in a barren part of the forest. And I'm not sure of the exact age of dragonkin, but you must be pretty up there."

"You are *so* rude. Quit treating people like they're over the hill!" Chelsie barked back.

She looked old no matter how you looked at her. However, Ruri knew that speaking her mind would only make her angrier, so she didn't object.

"Either way, once Jade-sama stops being king, I want to live in your forest, Chelsie-san." Ruri had talked about this with Jade several times in the past.

"Why don't you just stay in the castle? You're a Beloved, so they'll take care of you here and give you everything you could ever want, right?" asked Chelsie, looking utterly confused.

"Well, yes, that's true..." Ruri trailed off with a wry smile as she remembered her life in the forest. As she did, a smile naturally drew across her lips. "I really miss living with you in that forest, Chelsie-san. I know that I'm being well taken care of here. The capital is fun and host to a lot of things, but the peaceful life I had with you and the spirits felt so much freer and more relaxed."

Every day she could be *Ruri*, not a Beloved. The forest didn't have all of the shops or goods the capital had, but it had certain things wholly unique to the location. Ruri longed for that life again. At night, when she was alone with Jade, she would often talk about those days. She talked about the life she'd led in the forest and what kind of experiences she'd had, among other things.

Since Jade was born and raised in the capital, he had no experience with life beyond, so he listened with great interest. When Ruri said she wanted to return to that lifestyle someday, Jade didn't try to stop her; in fact, he actively agreed, much to her delight.

Jade had always led a busy life, so while the slow pace of forest life might feel lacking, they would cross that bridge when they came

to it. He seemed to be in full agreement about building a house next to Chelsie's and discussed what kind of house they wanted. Although she was still young and unlikely to leave the throne anytime soon, Ruri enjoyed these moments when they could talk about the future. And if possible, there would be children other than Citrine there as well—she hoped so, at least. But maybe that made her a failure as a Beloved.

"Then again, as a Beloved, shouldn't I stay in the capital?" Ruri eyebrows sank as if she was waiting to be scolded.

Chelsie sighed and Rutile smiled gently.

"Being a Beloved doesn't matter. What *you* want is all that matters, Ruri," Chelsie insisted.

"Indeed. No one in this world would dare to object to a Beloved's decision. If you want to live in the forest, no one will stop you, even if you wanted to do so right this instant," Rutile added.

"I won't do it right this instant. Jade will definitely come with me. And Euclase might get angry if I did that," Ruri said with a chuckle.

"That's right. Euclase doesn't hold back—not even against you, Ruri." Rutile smiled slightly.

Chelsie sighed in resignation. "Good grief. My hands are tied, so I'll just have to make room next door so you can come over at any time."





Despite her reluctant tone, Chelsie's eyes were affectionate.

Ruri's eyes lit up in an instant. "Chelsie-san! I love you!"

"Okay, okay." Chelsie replied casually, trying to hide her bashfulness.

Ruri shrugged off the cold response since she understood that well. Chelsie said she'd sent Ruri to the capital because she was a Beloved. It was probably because she thought it would be better for a Beloved to meet the king, but Ruri had also been a tad shocked because it felt like she'd been kicked out. Chelsie welcomed her with open arms when she went to visit, but it made her happy, in the truest sense, that she would allow her to move back home.

Ruri was about to hug Chelsie out of joy, but a furious knocking on the door interrupted them. Rutile shot up from her chair with a stern look.

Quickly opening the door, a panicked court lady quickly stammered, "My apologies! Lady Padparadscha has just gone into labor!"

"Huh?!" Ruri sprang up, startled. "Is she about to give birth?"

"No, Lady Padparadscha is having her first child, so it probably won't be right away," Rutile answered.

Ruri had given birth to Citrine in what could only be described as the blink of an eye. Considering how small Citrine had been at birth, that made sense, but Padparadscha's stomach was as big as Ruri's vision of a normal pregnant woman, completely different from her own flat stomach. Padparadscha looked far more normal for a pregnant woman from Ruri's perspective.

"Is their childbirth process the same as humans?" Ruri asked, looking at Rutile for confirmation since she didn't know how childbirth worked for other demi-humans.

"Yes, dragonkin are a bit special, but other demi-humans and humans are mostly the same," Rutile replied.

That "bit" part seemed like an understatement, but Ruri let it go. Rutile's answer overall gave her some slight relief. After all, Ruri had been in terrible condition after giving birth, completely drained of her magical and physical strength and bedridden for a whole week.

However, just because her birth was different from Ruri's didn't

mean that Padparadscha was out of the woods just yet. Medical care wasn't as advanced as in Ruri's world, so Ruri could predict that the rate of deaths during childbirth was higher. There *were* limits to what medical treatment was capable of.

There was always the dragon's blood, but that wasn't supposed to be used on others lightly. It had been used during the invasion of the Nation of the Beast King as a special measure for the allied nation in crisis and for Celestine, a Beloved. While using dragon's blood for an allied king or Beloved might be approved with little opposition, using it for Padparadscha would be a trickier call.

Even though she was Arman's main wife, giving too much of it could cause discontent in other nations since dragon's blood had been used heavily for the Nation of the Beast King already. There were more people who wanted the cure-all dragon's blood than could be counted on one hand. Many would be willing to pay any price or do anything to obtain it.

That was why they couldn't play favorites with the Nation of the Beast King, even if it meant that Arman's main wife or the child in her womb might die. Jade and Euclase had told Ruri something to that effect in advance , since she had previously used dragon's blood on the soldiers of Furgal who had invaded the Nation of the Beast King. This was to prevent the naive Ruri from showing mercy and suggesting the use of dragon's blood.

If a Beloved like Ruri wanted it, Kotaro and Rin would pressure Jade and the others to fulfill her wish. Not even the strongest dragonkin could defy supreme-level spirits, which was why they'd given her a reminder beforehand.

Ruri felt guilty about Padparadscha because she wasn't able to use the dragon's blood on her as a result of using it to save the Furgal soldiers. However, in the midst of that war, she couldn't have turned a blind eye to badly hurt people just because they were enemies. That was a testament to her unwavering optimism.

If she was faced with the same situation on repeat, she would still choose to save them each and every time. While she had some regrets, she didn't think she was wrong. After all, the soldiers were merely following orders from their superiors.

However, Ruri wondered how Padparadscha's side felt. She might have been considered irredeemable because she helped the very soldiers who had invaded their nation. Padparadscha, Arman, and the other people of the Nation of the Beast King had every right to feel resentment and anger toward Ruri. She knew that if anything happened to Padparadscha, she had to be prepared to take the blame.

In reality, there was no one who could punish or criticize a Beloved's actions. If anyone could do that, it would be a spirit, but not only did Kotaro and Rin, supreme-level spirits, cherish Ruri the most, but Lydia was also on Ruri's side, so her resolve to take the blame was ultimately meaningless.

Yet even if no one blamed her, if something happened to Padparadscha, Ruri would end up blaming herself. Although that wasn't the only reason, Ruri had been pacing around the room ever since hearing the other woman had gone into labor, feeling antsy and worried. She prayed that nothing went wrong with each step.

"Ruri, sit still. Your pacing isn't going to help a damn thing," Chelsie advised her. She had no connection to Padparadscha, so she was calmly sitting and sipping tea. In fact, she didn't even understand why Ruri was so flustered.

"I *can't!*"

Admittedly, Ruri had only met Padparadscha a handful of times, but the baby she was carrying was that of a good acquaintance, Arman. Combined with the fact that she was barred from using the dragon's blood, she couldn't sit still in her chair.

"Actually, is it still not time? Isn't she running a little late?" she asked, several hours having passed since the initial news.

"Your panicking won't help the child come out sooner," Rutile assured her.

"Great, now *you're* saying the same thing as Chelsie-san," Ruri commented, seeing that Rutile wasn't looking flustered either. Ruri was the only one restlessly pacing.

"His Majesty has arranged an excellent doctor and midwife for Padparadscha, so everything will be fine. There is nothing that you can do," Rutile explained.

"Urgh... I know that, but..." Ruri trailed off, wanting to go help even though she'd just get in the way. It was so frustrating not being able to do anything but wait for a report.

"*Just leave that girl be. I swear, you're such a softie, Ruri,*" said Rin.

"*You're right, but that is just like Ruri,*" Kotaro replied.

"*Yes, but she's not someone Ruri should even worry about. I mean, they're not particularly close.*"

"*Hmm, you have a point.*"

Ruri frowned as she overheard the two spirits chat. "But I *have* to worry about her since the Beast King asked us to take care of her. She's the queen of an entire nation."

"*If that's your argument, then you are a Beloved, Ruri. And you subjugated me and Kotaro to boot. You're worth far more than some insignificant queen. If she were the Beloved of the Nation of the Beast King, it'd be understandable.*"

"Rin..." Ruri trailed off, awkwardly reeling at Rin's harsh words.

However, Kotaro and the other spirits nodded in agreement at Rin's side. She looked at Rutile, hoping the guard would object, but Rutile only smiled wryly.

"Sounds perfectly logical to me," Chelsie chimed in, falling in line with Rin.

"No one is on my side..." Ruri slumped her shoulders.

Suddenly, the sound of crying could be heard. Ruri rushed toward the basket where Citrine had just woken up, frantically flailing his tiny hands.

"You hungry, Citrine? Just wait a second, okay?" she said, holding out her hand to give him his mana meal.

As she did, the spirits all crowded around them. Even Chelsie rose from her seat to see the event. Citrine only woke up for a short time each day, so if they missed this chance, there was no telling when he would wake up again. Several spirits were snapping pictures with their cameras to capture this precious moment on film.

Riccia had instructed them to make sure to record his growth. Though the lower-level spirits easily lost focus, it was odd that they faithfully obeyed and remembered this specific request. Maybe they

were just as eager to see Citrine grow as everyone else.

Riccia planned to eventually compile the records into an album. Ruri looked forward to that as well. She had the idea that these growth records could serve as a textbook for outside races who become dragonkin mothers in the future.

"I wonder if mana tastes good," Ruri murmured as she watched Citrine accept her mana blissfully, as if savoring a first-rate dessert. "What do you think?"

She looked at Rutile for an answer, and the guard smiled awkwardly. "We can only consume mana as food in the very early stages of life when we're not able to assume human form, so I don't think there's anyone who remembers that time. I've forgotten, at least."

Rutile looked at Chelsie, whose body language told it all—she was in the same boat.

"Dragonkin really are mysterious..."

"*Ruri's mana is sooo yummy!*"

"*Yup, yup!*"

"*It's the best of the Beloveds around!*"

"*It's sweet, creamy, and makes you happy!*"

The spirits gave her straight answers. Beloveds became Beloveds because they produced mana beloved by the spirits themselves. Attracted by the first-rate mana of Beloveds, spirits gathered and lent them their powers. And apparently, Ruri's mana was delectable to them. Granted, she didn't know if that applied to dragonkin as well.

"Oh, he fell asleep again," Ruri noted.

"Sleeping is a baby's job, after all," Rutile replied.

"Yes, *that* is something humans and dragonkin have in common," Ruri said with a chuckle. She let go of Citrine's hand and was about to catch her breath when there was a knock at the door.

Ruri jumped out of her seat, but Rutile opened the door and talked to the court lady standing there. Ruri nervously waited for Rutile to return. After the court lady bowed and left, Rutile closed the door.

Ruri rushed up to her and asked, "Rutile-san, what did she say?!"

With Ruri right in her face, Rutile gave a strained smile and said, "It's the news you were waiting for, Ruri. It seems that Padparadscha has given birth to a girl."

"And Padparadscha herself?" Ruri asked with bated breath.

"She's fine. Both mother and child are in good health."

Relieved, Ruri exhaled so deeply that it practically emptied her lungs. "Thank goodness..."

"Yes, thank goodness indeed, Ruri," Rutile said, more concerned about Ruri than for Padparadscha. As a soldier of the Nation of the Dragon King and Ruri's bodyguard, it was clear who she was prioritizing, so no one pointed out the obvious.

Ruri felt like she was the only happy one in the room, but when she went to check on Padparadscha, she saw that people from the Nation of the Beast King, fresh off relief work for their recovering kingdom, were outside her front door, and they couldn't help but be in a festive mood.

As soon as they saw Ruri, they tried to play it cool, but their uncontrollable joy seeped through.

"Lady Beloved, this is all thanks to your incredible help. On behalf of the people of the Nation of the Beast King, I offer my deepest gratitude," one of the men said, triggering a round of thanks from everyone present.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, Ruri looked around for Celestine. "Where is Celestine-san?"

"She is inside. Padparadscha was so exhausted that she fainted, so the doctor said to stay with her until she awakens."

"You could have left everything to the lower people, but you truly have a strong sense of responsibility, Lady Beloved."

"Indeed. As expected of one beloved by the spirits."

From the smattering of praise, the love and respect the people of the Nation of the Beast King had for Beloveds was the same as usual. If there was a numerical scale to measure how much they adored their own Beloved, Celestine, it would likely go off the charts —maybe a thousand percent.

"If she's asleep, I should probably come back another time. Please give this to Padparadscha in my stead," Ruri said, handing the

man a small bottle she was holding. Inside were small, round, red berries.

"What are these, miss?"

"Special berries that Kotaro and Rin gained from the Spirit of the Trees in the Nation of the Spirit King. Eating just one restores both mana and physical strength. It helped me heal up quickly, so I can guarantee the effects."

"Is it...okay for us to take something so rare?!" It must have been because she had name-dropped three supreme-level spirits, but the man from the Nation of the Beast King trembled as if he'd received a national treasure.

Ruri couldn't help but awkwardly smile. "It's all right. Kotaro and Rin brought back a lot, so there's no need to worry."

They were special berries made by the Spirit of the Trees, which even Jade hadn't known existed. While they could be even rarer than dragon's blood, Kotaro and Rin had brought back so many that they could barely carry them home, so it somewhat depreciated their value. Therefore, the amount she gave to Padparadscha was negligible, but it would be impossible for spirit-worshippers like the people of the Nation of the Beast King to wrap their heads around that. She regretted mentioning the Spirit of the Trees, but it was too little, too late. Everyone gathered around the bottle of berries, sparkles in their eyes, as if they were looking at uncovered treasure.

Ruri worried whether they would actually hand it off, but she later found out that they had. Celestine informed her that Padparadscha had made a quick recovery and Padparadscha herself sent a letter showing her gratitude.

It wasn't long before Arman came to the castle as well. He'd heard that Padparadscha had given birth and rushed over. The giddy, dopey expression he made upon learning the baby was a girl was not becoming of a king in the least. Not a trace of his usual dignity. The baby had only been born, but he was already a doting father.

"I will *never* let this child marry!" Arman blurted without an ounce of shame, saying what any doting father would say at least once in their life.

Celestine looked at this, unamused, while Jade turned to Ruri and

earnestly pleaded, “Please don’t have a girl.”

It took everything Ruri had not to burst into laughter. It seemed he got jealous of their hypothetical daughter having a hypothetical lover. Celestine also looked at Jade, unamused.

It was so peaceful that it was hard to believe a war had taken place not too long ago. There were concerns about the Nation of the Beast King now that Arman was here, but he’d apparently fulfilled his duties as a king before coming.

However, given the slight unrest in his eyes, it didn’t seem like his trip had come without *any* issues. Just to be sure, Ruri asked Kotaro to let either Jade or Arman know if there were any disturbances in the Nation of the Beast King. Ruri was barred from politics by virtue of being a Beloved, so she struggled to decide how far she should get involved in situations like these.

However, she had recently learned to leave everything to either Jade or Euclase since they usually took care of things well enough. Part of that being that she was too busy caring for Citrine to do so, of course.

Speaking of Citrine, when Ruri returned from chatting with everyone in Padparadscha’s room to welcome Arman, he had changed forms from a dragon to that of a three-year-old boy. With his round, yellow eyes and golden hair, he was adorable enough to be mistaken for an angel sent from above.

Instead of rushing over to hug him and tell him how cute he was, Ruri fell to her knees in despair. “I missed it again...”

She had been bedridden for the first week and couldn’t watch him grow, so she had been determined not to miss the moment when he transformed into his human form, and yet here he was. Ruri was so shocked by her failure to witness such an important part of her son’s growth again that she couldn’t get up.

“*It’s okay, Ruri!*”

“*We filmed it!*”

“*Yeah! Got everything!*”

“Right...thanks,” Ruri replied, wanting to praise the spirits for a job well done, but she had really wanted to see it with her own eyes instead of on film. “Dragonkin grow so fast. Literally...”

She'd been told that he would be able to take human form in a few weeks, but why did it have to happen when she wasn't there? It wasn't anyone's fault. If she had to blame anyone, it was herself for not being by his side. She should have brought Citrine with her when she went to visit, but she'd left him in the room because he was fast asleep. The basket was small enough for Ruri to carry, so she could have brought him and showed Arman and the others. That way she wouldn't have missed the moment he grew up.

Ruri couldn't vent her frustration to anyone and beat herself up on the inside, but those feelings weren't around for very long.

Citrine cried out. It wasn't clear if he recognized Ruri as his mother, but by the way he outstretched his arms toward her as if begging to be held made her heart skip a beat.

"Grk...so cute..."

Ruri lifted him up to find out he was lighter and softer than he appeared.

"Citrine." Ruri's expression was so gentle as she said her child's name.

Jade came into the room after a while, possibly hearing that Citrine had grown, and smiled upon seeing Citrine in human form.

"Look, Jade-sama. Citrine has grown up," Ruri said, ecstatic as if it had happened to her. She handed the baby over to Jade to share in the joy.

"Hearing about it and seeing it in person are totally different indeed," Jade said, savoring the moment.

Lifted in Jade's arms, Citrine stared back down at his father's face before breaking into a bright smile—one that was absolutely adorable.

An indescribable feeling filled Ruri's heart. Unable to express her emotions, she hugged Jade, who was holding Citrine. As Citrine was sandwiched between them, he giggled happily, his tiny voice soothing her heart even more. Jade held Citrine in one arm and pulled Ruri closer with the other.

Ruri looked up at Jade with a broad smile, happy as could be. She was grateful to him for teaching her what it meant to be a family—no, for being more than that.

In Jade's arms was his newborn son. Ruri's heart was filled with a sense of happiness that filled her entire being. She had never even imagined this kind of future for herself. In the other world, all of her time had been spent thinking up ways to avoid Asahi, but now, she rarely even thought about the past. That was the proof of how fulfilling her new life really was.

As time marched on, she would think even less about her homeworld. She had Jade, Citrine, the spirits, and a bevy of other people near and dear to her. She was only going to gain more moving forward as well. This was where she belonged now, and she felt like she could say that with her head held high if anyone asked her.

"Jade-sama... I'm so glad I came to this world." Ruri looked up at Jade and smiled. "This world, where I met Jade-sama and everyone else, is where I belong."

He smiled gently and embraced Ruri. She wrapped her arms around him, as if to check if he was really standing before her. She got her answer as the warmth that radiated from him was real, not an illusion. It felt like the world had finally accepted her existence within it.

Bonus Stories

#1: Inheritance from Gibeon's Mother

Gibeon was cooped up in the room he'd been provided in the castle. Normally, he would be working around this time, but he managed to snatch some time off just for today after bargaining with Euclase. It was because Euclase knew the reason. Euclase normally worked him to the bone, but they'd easily authorized his time off this time without a word—so simply that it left Gibeon in utter surprise.

After losing his home country, Gibeon lived every day with just the clothes on his back. During the time he spent with his Reaper friends, he'd at least managed to keep sadness at the back of his mind, but after the leader had died and the Reapers disbanded, the way he lived and the way he felt had hit a rough patch.

Despite their beautiful appearance, Euclase was as terrifying as a magic beast when someone angered them or when it came to work, but they had a penchant for seeing people for who they were. They evaluated Gibeon without any preconceptions and treated him as any other person. Euclase could be scary but also just as kind.

That was why, despite his bellyaching, Gibeon didn't mind being used for menial tasks by them. But Euclase wasn't the only one who was kind; the people who worked at the castle were also soft enough to worry about Gibeon.

People like Jade accepted Gibeon even though they knew he was a criminal who kidnapped a sacred beast and had to worry that he might swindle them down the line. The same could be said for Ruri.

"Ruri is a softie too—she just plopped over all of this to me and said it's because it's an inheritance from my mother."

Gibeon's room, which wasn't cramped by any stretch of the

imagination, was filled to the brim with lavish and luxurious wares, all keepsakes from his late mother and all marked with his mother's crest as queen.

Gibeon didn't know how Ruri had obtained these items, but it didn't matter. Even though his home country wasn't a great nation like the Nation of the Dragon King, the items belonged to the queen of a nation nonetheless, so they would have fetched a fine price if sold, but Ruri had given it all to Gibeon without asking for anything in return.

"I'm starting to owe Ruri more and more..." Ever since he first met Ruri, he couldn't help but feel that everything was heading in the right direction. "I can't just take this all and do nothing in return..."

However, he had no idea what to actually *do* for Ruri. That was because, for Gibeon, these items were irreplaceable treasures that reminded him of his beloved mother. He had offered to pay her back with money, but she had firmly refused, saying that it was because they were his mother's. If money wasn't an option, what *could* he give her?

Gibeon groaned to himself, but then a light went off in his head...

"I should ask *Ruri's* mother."

Riccia was like Euclase, beautiful but a bit intimidating, but Gibeon decided that desperate times called for desperate measures, so he braced himself and took a trip to her shop.

#2: The Beloved's Attending Physicians

"Listen, you must do everything in your power to ensure that nothing happens to Lady Beloved."

"Hokay!" the doctors who'd been called to assist with Ruri's delivery replied, their answers almost incomprehensible as they trembled in fear.

Standing before the doctors was Agate and the other elder retainers. They had initially jumped for joy at the news of Ruri being

pregnant with Jade's long-awaited child, but they soon came back to their senses. Childbirth was a matter of life or death.

Agate and the others had no personal experience with it, but they knew that childbirth was extremely taxing on the mother, especially for someone from a different race like humans.

Truthfully, they weren't worried at all about the baby. A child of a human and a dragonkin was most likely going to be a dragonkin. Since they had sturdy bodies even as newborns, there was no need to worry about them. The real problem was Ruri. She had a sturdier body thanks to being in tune with Jade, but that didn't mean that she was completely out of the woods.

After all, Ruri was a Beloved. She had subjugated supreme-level spirits like Kotaro and Rin, both as overprotective as Jade, and if anything happened to her, they would both bring the nation to its ruin. This all simply *had* to go off without a single hitch.

That was why Euclase had taken the initiative to make preparations, but the anxiety still remained. Although parents with children themselves, Agate and the others had no medical knowledge, so all they could do was put pressure on the doctors, but it was honestly counterproductive.

The team of skilled doctors, midwives, and court ladies were assembled quickly to assist with the Beloved's delivery, but due to Agate's team's intimidation, they were all scared out of their minds.

"The fate of this nation rests in your hands," Agate said. The group turned pale, looking as though they might collapse under the immense pressure cast upon them.

"She'll be delivering any moment now. Make sure to keep your eyes peeled for any problems with Lady Beloved."

"And if anything *does* happen to her..." The elder deliberately cut his sentence short, leaving the team to dream up the worst possible outcome.

Their faces screamed "get me out of here right now." However, under the vigilant eyes of Agate and the elders, they weren't allowed to squirm away, so preparations steadily chugged along.

The doctors, anxious about when Ruri would go into labor, couldn't put down their stomach medicine. They were a group of

veterans who had experienced this many times before, but they'd never imagined that one delivery would shape the fate of the entire nation.

They had been gathered because they were trusted to handle the birth of a Beloved child, and they had agreed without hesitation, considering it an honor, but they soon regretted their choice.

Amid the many people suffering stress-related stomachaches, Ruri went into labor and gave birth. She was so spent that she couldn't even get out of bed, but both mother and child were declared healthy.

Needless to say, the ones most elated by this successful birth were the *doctors* delivering the child.

#3: The Two Grandpas

One day, a letter from his daughter, Riccia, arrived at the place Beryl was staying.

Since the letter had been sent through Lydia, the Spirit of Time, Beryl assumed it was from his granddaughter, Ruri, but he was wrong. He wondered why the letter had been sent by Riccia instead of Lydia's contract-bearer, Ruri.

"Why didn't Ruri send it?"

"Maybe Riccia has business with you?" Andal suggested.

"But shouldn't she have gone through Ruri since she's the contract-bearer?"

"Fair point. Well, maybe it'll be clear once you read it. Open it up," urged Andal.

Beryl took the paper out of the envelope and began to read. The more of the letter he read, the less capable he was of containing his excitement.

Beryl shouted his lungs out.

"Keep it down, will you?!" Andal shouted back, covering his ears. "What in the hell is it?"

Andal glanced at the letter Beryl was holding, but all he could see

was a series of mysterious characters that he couldn't read. It was only natural that he couldn't read the writing from the other world. Giving up quickly, he decided to ask Beryl for an explanation.

"What did Riccia say?"

"That...Ruri is pregnant."

"Wow, that's wonderful news. I'm sure you're in store for a strong grandchild. Right, that's why Riccia contacted you instead of Ruri, huh? She's probably busy preparing for the delivery."

"She says to come back quick."

"Well, yes. Your grandchild is going to be born, so you should get back there for it. Dragonkin children grow fast, after all. If you dawdle, you'll miss them growing up, you know," Andal said, like it was Beryl's problem to deal with alone, but Beryl stared at him.

"What?"

"Riccia's letter that *your* grandson is going to be born soon too."

"Huh?" Andal's voice cracked. He had no idea what Beryl was saying. He uttered again, "*Huh?*"

He snatched the letter from Beryl's hands and tried to read it, but the otherworldly characters populated the page. "Grk, I can't understand this damn thing!"

"Swearing at the letter isn't going to accomplish anything," Beryl said.

"What do you mean?! Me with a grandchild?! When?!" Andal went from an uninterested party to being more flustered than Beryl.

"It says, 'Andal's son's wife is pregnant. She is waiting delivery at the Nation of the Dragon King castle, so bring him along with you.'"

"Which of his consorts?" asked Andal.

"Says his main one," replied Beryl.

"He wasn't supposed to *have* a main one. What is going on? No, it'll be faster to see with my own two eyes. We're heading to the Nation of the Dragon King at once!"

"But it's already getting dark."

"You're a Beloved. As long as you're around, we'll be fine, even if we travel down an animal trail at night. Let's hurry!"

"R-Right."

Pressured by Andal, they rushed out of their inn. A few days later,

they received word that Ruri's baby had been born. Beryl complained about it being *way* too fast, carried Chi and Andal in both arms, and made a mad dash to the Nation of the Dragon King.



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The White Cat's Revenge as Plotted from the Dragon King's Lap: Volume 8
by Kureha

Translated by David Evelyn Edited by RSN

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