
THREE CHEATS from THREE GODDESSES:
The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a RELAXING LIFE!
auth HANMENKYOUSHI
illust KILTUKAIKI


THREE CHEATS from THREE GODDESSES:
The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a RELAXING LIFE!
auth HANMENKYOUSHI
illust KILTUKAIKI


Chaos Goddess
Cult
War Goddess
Aruna
Light Goddess
Fouré
In that moment, I knew beyond a doubt that my destiny had changed.
This new, shocking revelation sank into my mind, consuming it. This news about my power—or, well, my synergies—drew my attention even over the fact that I just met the three goddesses of this realm.
"I...can use all three powers?!"
"I-I see... So I *do* have power."
The Baron's Youngest
Hisui
Belcoure
Clematis


After I'd finished clearing out the dungeon on our lands, I returned home... where Azalea and Cosmos had been waiting for me in the foyer.
The former, who prided herself on her strength, didn't move her arms an inch. The latter, who looked to be on the verge of tears, couldn't be pulled away from me either.
In the end, I was hauled off to Armeria's room like some kind of alien who'd fallen into human clutches.
"A-Azalea? And Cosmos... It'd be nice if you two could let go of me."
Dastardly Brother
Glenn
Youngest Stepsister
Cosmos
Reliable Eldest Stepsister
Azalea

Table of Contents

1. Cover
2. Color Illustrations
3. Prologue: Reborn in Another World
4. Chapter 1: A Crash Course in Magecraft
5. Chapter 2: Birthday
6. Chapter 3: A New Family Member
7. Chapter 4: Dungeon
8. Chapter 5: Dire Straits
9. Chapter 6: Basilisk
10. Chapter 7: Farewell
11. Extra Chapter: Karma
12. Afterword
13. Bonus Textless Illustrations
14. About J-Novel Club
15. Copyright

Prologue: Reborn in Another World

“I’m so tired.”

I couldn’t contain my exhausted whining as I plodded down the dark street home. Lately, I’d been working ceaseless nights of overtime. They’d become so common, in fact, that everyone had started assuming overtime was the norm, so what was there to complain about? And of course, since no one complained, the company kept piling it on. It was a vicious cycle.

“Screw all this unpaid overtime. I don’t need to wait on my job hand and foot like that,” I groused.

I hadn’t had a single break in two weeks. But wasn’t the government pushing for work culture reform and better work-life balance? Hah, don’t make me laugh. The Labor Standards Act was a joke if companies could get away with making people work two solid weeks in a row.

Even if I’d gotten a pay bump, it wouldn’t have been worth this. It still wouldn’t have been worth it even if I’d gotten rich—I knew it was all over the second my body broke down from stress. If I had friends or a significant other, I might have had opportunities to go out on the town. But sadly, I wasn’t that lucky. Day in and day out, my life was a revolving door between home and work.

I didn’t have anything to spend my money on aside from fancy dinners and booze. I would’ve loved to go traveling, though. TV programs featured a lot of famous sightseeing places all the time—I wished I could see them in the flesh, just once.

“Yeah, that’d be nice. I wanna go traveling.”

The moment I expressed my wishes out loud, ardent hopes began to fill my mind one after another. I didn’t have a family I could lean on, nor did I have any friends close enough to hang out with. No partner to coddle, no clear goal… I needed something to fill the void in my completely empty life, and I had now decided travel would satisfy that need. I wouldn’t have to go on a full-blown vacation. As long as I could go somewhere that would heal me mentally and spiritually, that was good enough.

What if I just changed careers? Nah. At my stage of life, I

doubted I'd be successful at whatever job I hopped to. How could I, when I was already scrabbling to find any sliver of good fortune?

"Just gazing out at the gorgeous scenery, eating good food, and taking it easy," I continued. Man, what a blessed time that'd be. I'd love to just rest in an environment where I wouldn't have to run the rat race, working myself into the grave. I guess I was basically describing what some people call "the slow life."

I was born and raised in the city, so farming sounded like heaven. To me, those TV shows where people get set up with a farm out in the countryside were honestly a dream come true. I'd be happy to move out where the pastures were green and there were no obligations, and I only had to tend the fields.

Unfortunately, a humble office worker like myself didn't get to make choices like that. Besides, I didn't know the first thing about agriculture, and I needed money just to survive. Without any friends to call on, I lacked the means to purchase a plot of land anyway.

But that was exactly why I wanted to go traveling—I could experience the slow life during my excursion. Even if it were merely a fleeting dream lasting only a few days, that'd still be a few days of happiness. I didn't need more satisfaction than that to fill my empty, hollow heart. If I became too full of joy, the hard drop back to reality would probably curse me with the flu.

A self-derisive chuckle slipped out with that thought. Then, right at that moment, a car coming down the street ahead of me swerved unnaturally to the side—and slightly to the left. The glaring headlights filled my vision with a brightness so blinding, I couldn't help but squeeze my eyes shut.

That was the last thing I remembered.

☆

Eyelids heavy, I cracked open my eyes.

The first thing that leaped into my vision was an unfamiliar, lumber ceiling directly above. I grimaced at the overwhelming scent of wood and looked around at my immediate surroundings, which gave me an idea of where I was, even if only vaguely.

I was inside a wooden building. It was moderately spacious, and the interior design and upholstery was on the old-fashioned

side. I'd once visited my grandmother's home in the countryside, and it had been a lot like this.

"Wha?"

Huh? Someone had spoken at precisely the same time I had. Their voice sounded an awful lot like that of a baby...and the very second that thought crossed my mind, my confusion was instantly solved. The answer was right in front of me—or rather, my body *itself* was the answer. I was stunned into silence.

My limbs had shrunk. The bottom half of my torso had also shrunk—or, well, that wasn't quite accurate. It was more like I'd actually become a baby!

Then my brain finally caught up with a realization: I'd been struck by some sort of interdimensional incident. My mind and memories were still intact, as far as I could tell, but for some reason, my body had become that of an infant. That explained why everything around me looked ridiculously huge. It wasn't that the room was spacious—it was just that I was small, so I was perceiving things as bigger and wider.

"Da-ba-bwah? Ah-wha!"

I desperately tried to scream for help, but the words that rolled off my tiny tongue were indecipherable. But what exactly had happened to turn me into a baby, though? Had I been reborn? Or had time somehow reversed? I couldn't understand what was going on, and I therefore also had no idea what had caused it. Panic began to consume my thoughts.

But just before hysteria gripped me, the door to the room opened. A blonde girl walked in, perhaps because she'd heard my babbling. She strode directly toward me, then gently cradled me in her arms as I cried. Looking young enough to be in her teens, she was a stunningly pretty girl. I could tell she'd one day become a gorgeous woman.

She looked tenderly down at me, then spoke. "What's wrong, Hisui? Did a ghost spook ya or something? You started wailing outta nowhere."

Wow. Her rough way of speaking definitely wasn't what I expected, considering her refined features. If she dressed like a guy, you could mistake her for quite the handsome fellow. But still, the way she spoke was giving me some serious whiplash.

Hang on, though... "Hisui"? Who was that?

Judging by the fact that she was speaking to me, I could probably guess who she meant. But my name was Midori Osaka. The character in my name was used in Hisui too, I guess, but it still wasn't my name.

"Ahw-ah. Ahw..." I burbled.

"Heh heh. Sorry, but I got no clue what you're saying. Don't worry, though. Your big sis'll protect you, no matter what," she responded.

My "sis"?! But I don't have a sister! Both of my parents just up and vanished, and I never had any siblings at all. For the longest time, I'd really wanted a brother, but I'd never entertained the thought of having a sister as charming as this; that would've just been creepy. Was this a dream born from my unconscious desires or something?

But the tactile sensations against my skin, the visual information captured by my eyes, and the sounds that drifted into my ears were all distinct and realistic. I seriously doubted this was a dream.

"I'd love to keep chatting, but I gotta get to work. If I get some free time, I'll come back to see you again. Till then, keep your crying down, all right?" And with that, she laid me back on the swath of fabric that was my bed and left the room with a wave.

The door closed with a clack, and I cried out—but only in my mind this time, of course. What the heck was going on?!

However, I was left in the dark.

☆

Five years had passed since I, once a thirty-year-old office worker, was reborn. During that time, I found I was now in a place that wasn't Earth. I was essentially in another world.

There were two reasons I'd come to this conclusion. Firstly, the geographical and political names of places: I'd never heard of any of the countries or towns. Secondly, and the main reason for my hypothesis: there were three types of magical powers that existed in this world.

One was magecraft, the ability to strengthen the functioning of all creation. Another was godcraft, the ability to revert things to their natural state for all creation. Lastly, we had spellcraft, the

ability to transform and alter all creation.

All three had been passed down since antiquity in the Twylite Kingdom where I now lived. It was commonly believed that these were the powers of the three goddesses who supported the country and who were worshipped by the people of the kingdom. One of my older sisters wielded magecraft, while one of my older brothers had awakened in spellcraft.

Having grown up on anime and manga in my previous life, the prospect of gaining powers really excited me, even though the development of magical aptitude wasn't guaranteed—they wouldn't quicken in just anybody. But if I was dissatisfied with anything about the situation, it wasn't that. What really bothered me was that these latent powers awoke in people at the age of ten at earliest. As I was only five years old, I still had at least another five years' wait to see if I'd be blessed.

"And that's if I even get any powers at all. But never mind that," I sighed to myself. Right now, there was something else that was even more pressing. My home, which belonged to Baron Clematis, was in an area far removed from the royal capital. The surrounding lands were vast and verdant, and despite the baron's status as a lesser noble, his territory was exceptional.

It did have one huge problem, though.

This world was inhabited by monsters—violent creatures far more dangerous and fearsome than simple wild beasts. These monsters roamed the Clematis lands in droves, making further development of the countryside nearly impossible. Precious few wanted to live there despite the sweeping expanse of pristine land—the only settlement was a single village.

As these lands produced nothing of value whatsoever, my house had very little money remaining after we'd paid our taxes to the kingdom. We could do nothing to help ourselves, much less the villagers, and they suffered all the more for our impoverished state.

Though I was the third son of a baron, I lived just as the villagers did. I broke bread just once a day—literally. I was only given a single rock-hard bread roll for my daily meal. If I was lucky, I might get some inexpensive fruit to go with it, but they never tasted any good. Those were additions certainly made for their nutritional value and not their flavor.

I was in hell. My entire life before I'd been reincarnated had been nothing but working incessantly to the point of exhaustion, and now, in my second life, I had neither money nor food. On top of that, my parents gave all the love they had to my two older brothers, who bullied me relentlessly. The only people who showed any concern for my welfare were my three sisters.

My new life in another world was ending—in fact, it was practically over already. At first glance I'd thought I had been blessed with the perfect fantasy RPG world I had always longed for, but once I'd gotten a deeper look, I realized I'd been cursed with a mediocre story route full of destitution.

I had a lot of time on my hands too. Being a five-year-old child, I had little to do beyond helping in the fields every now and then. It was nothing like the pastoral work I'd always dreamed of.

"This sucks! I hate this new life!" Frustrated, I couldn't help but vocalize my dissatisfaction. Dropping to my knees, I hung my head low with my hands splayed on the floor. Since my reincarnation, I'd long lost count of the number of times I'd fallen to the ground like this, which just went to show how utterly wretched my lot in life had been. I'm sure I would've perished long ago—if not from starvation, then almost certainly by my own hand—if it wasn't for my three sisters.

My sisters were not family by blood—it would be more accurate to call them my stepsisters. Some time ago they—along with a substantial sum of money—had ended up in the family when their house fell, as father had been on friendly terms with their lord. But the lack of blood relations didn't stop them from caring for me. Honestly, they were the only people who treated me kindly, so they had nothing but my utmost appreciation.

Azalea, the eldest of the three, would often do things like giving me meat to eat behind father's back. I'd always share that meat with Cosmos, my youngest sister, and that was the one ray of sunshine in my life.

"If only there was something that'd turn this hellhole around," I mumbled. After a moment, I got to my feet. No matter how distraught and irritated I was, no amount of bellyaching was going to prevent my belly from *actually* aching. It rumbled incessantly, well aware that it was nearly time for breakfast. A pall of melancholy hanging over me, I left my room with a grimace and

headed down to the dining room on the first floor.

☆

Except for me and Armeria, the middle of my three sisters, my whole family was already assembled by the time I arrived at the dining room. I sat in one of the empty seats across from my two brothers, who took the opportunity to engage in snarky banter.

"Hey, Hisui. You took ages getting down here today, so we thought you didn't want your breakfast," laughed one.

"You'd *better* be thankful! If Azalea hadn't saved some bread for you, it would've been long gone," sneered the other.

Glenn and Mikhail grinned as though they'd told the funniest joke in the world, seemingly unaware of the cruelty behind their words—or perhaps they just didn't care. Their smirks were made all the more irritating by the brown hair and general appearance they'd gotten from father. But if I picked a fight by talking back, it would be a fight I couldn't win. My brains wouldn't help me in an outright brawl.

Laughing nervously, I decided to simply thank Azalea, who was sitting two seats away.

"Don't worry 'bout it. Glenn and Mikhail are just messin' with you. Eat up, Hisui," she replied, then cut a little meatball into two and gave me and Cosmos one half each.

Seeing this, father spoke, his voice low and commanding. "Stop that, Azalea. That's *your* breakfast."

"Yeah, and I can do what I want with *my* breakfast, can't I? Hisui and Cosmos are still growing. They won't get big and tall without any food."

"You have work. You need to conserve your energy for your duties."

"I've got plenty of that, don't worry," she retorted without missing a beat. I could tell she was lying, though. Anyone could, really, considering she was wrapped in bandages.

Magecraft had manifested in her at the ripe young age of ten. Following her awakening, she'd undergone intense training and, at father's behest, began culling the monsters on our lands when she was only twelve—when she was still a child, not even a teenager.

It was widely understood that magecraft was exceptional in

combat, but regardless, fighting monsters was no easy task. My heart went out to her every time I saw how haggard she'd gotten, dragging her injured body home day in and day out. Azalea worked harder than anyone else, and she did it for all our sakes. I could do nothing to help, and that fact made me hate myself more than anything else.

"No. Don't make me repeat myself. Hisui and Cosmos have more than enough food, so pipe down and eat your breakfast." Father's tone was harsh, clearly indicating he would brook no further resistance...not that it mattered, of course.

"What?! You're telling me *that's* enough food?!" Azalea snapped.

"Azalea..." I stopped her, my voice even. She looked as though she were ready to hit father. If she dared to do so and threw some power into her punch, he'd be grievously injured, especially as he had no magic of his own. Magecraft was overwhelmingly powerful. If Azalea wasn't careful, her actions would be tantamount to assault at the very least; even if she did manage to pull her punch, her standing within the social hierarchy of our house would come crashing down. I didn't want that to happen, so I had to stop her whenever she was about to get herself into this kind of mess. At least I could be useful that way, since I had no power otherwise.

Azalea suddenly came to a sharp halt. The stupidity of punching father's lights out must've occurred to her too. Instead, she clenched her fist in frustration, and crimson began to seep through her bandages. She must have been squeezing her hand so tightly that it had reopened her wound, but she paid it no mind and returned to her breakfast. Though her attempt at kindness had been shot down in the end, at least Cosmos and I each still had the little piece of meat Azalea had given us at the start of our meal.

Across the table, Glenn and Mikhail were still grinning nastily, although this time it was directed toward Azalea. I really hoped those two got what was coming to them one of these days. Then father spoke to me, tone unaffected and indifferent, despite everything that had just happened.

"I'd nearly forgotten—Hisui, bring some bread to Armeria once you finish your breakfast."

"I will," I responded obediently, despite my silent disdain. All they were willing to give to a sick child was a single piece of bread.

Armeria had fallen terribly ill about a year ago, and she was usually confined to her bed. Fearing contagion, father had quarantined her in her room, and the rest of us were forbidden from seeing her outside of mealtimes. Since I was the one who brought Armeria her meals, it was plain that father thought nothing of the possibility that I might fall ill, of course. His thoughtfulness was oh-so-*very* touching.

"I-I'll go with you, Hisui," Cosmos, who was sitting next to me, said in a faltering voice. I shook my head.

"You can't. It would be awful if you got sick too."

"But still…" she mumbled.

"It's okay. I'll tell Armeria that you wanted to see her."

She paused before quietly following up with an apology. "Okay, then. I'm sorry, Hisui."

"It's okay. Don't worry about it," I gently reassured her. Cosmos was physically much weaker even than me; the lack of nutrition from having nothing but bread for her meals had clearly taken its toll. I didn't want her to overexert herself, given that she was mere skin and bones. Father would never allow her to come with me anyway—he must have thought it was safer to limit contact with the ill to just one person.

Considering illnesses tend to have an incubation period, though, even if I visited her alone it was entirely possible I might still contract Armeria's illness and spread it to others before anyone realized I had it. But in this entire past year, no one in the family had shown any symptoms of the disease afflicting Armeria, so I was pretty certain it wasn't an airborne illness.

Or maybe there just weren't enough nutrients in my body to sustain bacteria.

At any rate, I still had to bring Armeria her breakfast. I hurriedly finished my piece of bread and stood up from my seat. Flashing a tender smile at Azalea and Cosmos, who were clearly worried, I grabbed a piece of bread for Armeria and headed to her room.

The nasty smiles plastered on Glenn's and Mikhail's faces never faded even as I left, even though their own family was suffering.

☆

I left the dining room and headed upstairs. Armeria's room was

at the end of the hall on the second floor. I softly rapped on her door a couple times, and a feminine, soprano voice issued from the room in response.

"Yes?"

"It's me, Armeria. I brought you breakfast. Can I come in?"

"Oh my, Hisui? Please do."

"Sorry for barging in like this." Having received permission, I turned the doorknob and entered her room. Much like my own, Armeria's room was bare-bones—its main (and only) remarkable feature was a bed, on which lay a pretty girl with blonde hair and amber-colored eyes. She studied me, cleverness apparent in the depths of her gaze, until she finally spoke.

"Good morning, Hisui. I do apologize—you always have to bring me food like this." Her tone was polite and delicate.

"Don't worry about it. It's no big deal. Can you eat?" I asked.

"I can. One can't live without eating, after all. Even a single piece of bread is an invaluable treasure to each and every one of us. Wouldn't you agree?" She pulled herself up into a sitting position and quietly giggled. Just like Cosmos, she was all skin and bones—and her illness had made her malnourishment all the more pronounced.

"Yeah, I do. So you really need to eat up, especially since you're so sick."

She giggled again, but only briefly. "Thank you. Rather than me, though, *you* should be the one enjoying the bread."

"I'm pretty sure we talked about that already, Armeria." I tried to keep the exasperation from my voice, but I'm not entirely sure I managed it. On one occasion when I'd brought her breakfast, she told me: "I wish you and Cosmos would eat this bread instead. It'd help you two live just a little longer, and besides…it's wasted on me, seeing as I don't even know if I'll live to see tomorrow."

It was the first time I'd ever snapped at her. Just as she wanted us to survive, we all hoped she would live too, so she'd dropped her usual habit of being self-deprecating. I'm pretty sure this was the first time I'd heard her say something like that in a long time.

"I know, I know," Armeria said. "I won't tell you to live in my stead. But I really don't know how much longer my body will last…" She'd scarcely finished her sentence when she fell into a coughing fit. Clutching her chest, she curled up in agony.

Rubbing her back as she lay wracked with pain, I tried to offer words of comfort as well as I could manage. “Maybe they’ll find a cure someday. You can’t give up, Armeria! If we save up, go to the royal capital, and see a healer, I’m sure they could cure you…”

Honestly, that was a far-off future I wasn’t confident would ever come to pass. There was no guarantee she’d even survive until then, but I wanted to give her hope. I wanted her to smile, even if it was only for a little while.

“Heh heh. You’re right. I mustn’t stay negative about these things forever. Let’s talk about something else then, since you’ve come to visit me after all.”

To change the topic and keep the conversation going, I encouraged her to continue. “What do you want to talk about?”

Armeria brightened up as soon as I asked, and launched into a fairly involved discussion concerning a book about the Clematis lands. The book had once been in father’s study, so it must’ve been a difficult read. Puffing up her chest out in pride, she showed off the depth of her knowledge with a self-satisfied smile. Her confidence was wholly deserved, though—she truly was the brightest person in our entire family. She was only ten years old, but the extent of her knowledge and analytical abilities even put adults to shame.

Precocious as she was, she loved to show off her knowledge. She was the super nerdy type who could talk for ages about a topic that enthralled her, and I listened to her nearly every day. It was the least I could do—lending an ear was my only way of supporting her. Hanging onto her every word, I couldn’t help but notice the way her eyes sparkled merrily as she discussed her opinions and hypotheses. Reflecting on my own thoughts, I planned the rest of my morning under her joyful glow.

☆

Once Armeria had exhausted her list of things to talk about, I left the manor and headed for the outskirts of the forest. This wasn’t a choice I made frivolously—I’d been secretly sneaking out there regularly for my strength-building regime and long-distance runs. I’d give Glenn and Mikhail the beating they deserve one of these days, and to do that, I needed to bulk up.

That wasn't the only reason, of course—farmwork required physical strength, after all. Whenever I had some free time between working the fields, I'd run into the forest to see if I could find something to eat. The Clematis lands were still untouched by industry, so the forest was bursting with fruit. I'd even found several varieties of herbs that seemed likely to have medicinal uses.

Collecting the bounty of the forest was my daily bread and butter. I had no choice, seeing as my energy would never last if I chose not to go—but of course, the forest was fraught with danger. If I ran into a monster, I'd likely be killed on the spot, seeing as I wasn't capable of fighting. But since I'd die anyway if I didn't get enough to eat, the risk of encountering monsters did little to deter me. Besides, with Azalea thinning their ranks on our lands, I'd never seen hide nor hair of one.

So I went about my morning, resolutely searching for fruits and nuts as I worked on building up my body. I was determined to find enough for Cosmos and Armeria too, knowing they were starving.

At times, I ran. At times, I walked. And at other times, I rested. As I repeated this cycle, an hour passed, then two, and the day gradually reached its peak brightness. It was probably about time for lunch now. Slowly and steadily, the day had grown warmer.

Wiping copious amounts of sweat from my face with the ragged cloth I kept on me as a handkerchief, I sat down on a tree root. Looking down at the armful of food I'd managed to gather, I broke into a smile.

"Wow, I really found a lot today. I guess the edge of the forest is getting barren now, though, so I'll have to go deeper into the woods," I mused to myself. But going any farther into the forest meant there was a higher risk of encountering monsters. As I sat debating whether I should head deeper, I suddenly heard a voice.

"Oh, what do we have here? There's a wee child in this forest."

I gasped in astonishment. What was that just now? I'd heard a feminine voice, but it came from above. *There's no way*, I thought, as I looked upward. There, my eyes were met by a woman with light-pink hair...and she was floating.

"What the—?!" I was so shocked that I couldn't form a cohesive sentence. My mouth flapped open and closed, but no sound came out. All I managed to do was point at the woman with a trembling

finger.

The woman's eyes opened wide when she realized I was gazing at her. Putting a hand to her mouth in surprise, she spoke. "How is this possible? Can you…actually see me?"

Reflexively, I nodded emphatically in response. When I did, the pink-haired woman shouted without an iota of restraint.

"Whaaat?!" Her shrill voice echoed through the surrounding area. "But how? How can you see me?" She alighted, bending her knees to crouch next to me, and stared unblinkingly into my face.

"U-Um, who…are you?" I finally managed to squeeze some words out through my shock.

But the woman didn't seem to hear me. Instead, she continued her own rapid-fire questions. "You can hear me, and…feel me?! Why? How!" The mysterious woman squished and tugged at my cheeks as she repeated her questions at an uncontrolled volume. I was terribly confused, but it was clear she was just as confused herself.

"Come now, Fouré. You've been making so much noise! What is there to be screeching about?" Oh. Another voice sounded through the air, presumably scolding the first woman, and along with the second voice came a woman floating down from the sky just as the first one had. This newcomer had white hair instead of pink.

Unlike the first woman, who was quite lively, the white-haired woman had a sharp glare—a glare that was pointed directly at the pink-haired woman who was still tugging at my cheeks. Then, coming to a late realization, she pointed unsteadily at me.

"Huh? How? How…are you able to touch the boy, Fouré?" she asked, surprise obvious in her tone.

"No clue! But I *can* touch him. He can see and hear me! I'm sure he can see you too, Aruna," replied the pink-haired woman.

"I don't believe you… That's impossible. We've never encountered a human like this before."

"At first, I thought it was some silly trick too. But it's clear as day—just touching him like this is proof enough." As the pink-haired woman said all of that, she began squishing and tugging my cheeks again. I was wishing she'd stop, as it kinda hurt.

The white-haired woman turned her attention to me. "Who are you really, boy? Are you actually a human?"

“Y-Yes. My name’s Hisui Belcoure Clematis,” I responded through the pain of my cheeks getting tugged on.

“Clematis? That’s the name of this area. You must be the baron’s son,” she surmised.

“Yes, the youngest of three.”

“I see. Then you really *are* a human. I can hardly believe this, but your very existence appears similar to ours.”

“Um, what do you mean?” I stumbled over my words, not quite comprehending. What was she saying? I couldn’t grasp the implications at all.

“In short, well… Hm, how do I explain this?”

“Couldn’t you say we’re like goddesses? That’s the easiest way for him to understand, right?” Fouré interjected.

“Ah, now that you mention it…humans *do* call us goddesses, don’t they?”

I could scarcely believe my ears. “G-Goddesses?” I mumbled, mulling over their words. Then it struck me—I had the feeling I’d heard their names somewhere before. The pink-haired woman had called the white-haired woman “Aruna,” and Aruna in return had addressed the other as “Fouré.” When they brought up the fact that they were called “goddesses,” I arrived at the one and only explanation.

The white-haired woman spoke to me once more, breaking me out of my thoughts. “Let us introduce ourselves. I’m Aruna.”

“And I’m Fouré.”

“A-Are you two…of the three goddesses?” Having come to my conclusion, I had to ask. Twylite Kingdom had a very deep-rooted faith in the three goddesses. Two of these three goddesses were the War Goddess Aruna and the Light Goddess Fouré—the exact same names as these women.

“You’re one smart cookie! You’re not just any normal kid, are you? The color of your soul’s different and all.”

Confused, Aruna cut in before I could reply. “What do you mean, Fouré?”

“The color of his soul’s completely different from any human I’ve ever seen. Maybe he came from another world.”

At that point, a surprised squeak escaped my mouth before I had time to even register it. How did she know I was from another world?! I was at a complete loss, given that I’d never once

expected anyone to discover my secret.

Seeing my reaction, Fouré smiled knowingly.

“Looks like I was right. Wow, this is the first time I’ve ever seen a soul drift here from another world. I guess you were reincarnated in this realm? Your body’s a part of this world down to the core—it’s just your soul that’s different.”

“I’ve never seen a soul from another world before… That explains the strange aura about him,” Aruna said in response.

“And probably explains why he can see us too,” Fouré agreed.

“Perhaps. But this child certainly has an aptitude for my power; I imagine that’s the real reason he can see me, at least.”

“Ohhh! That makes more sense.” Suddenly turning to look toward a nearby spot where there seemed to be nothing at all of note, Fouré spoke. “Hey! Come on, Cult, join us!”

Shortly after Fouré’s earnest call, another woman appeared from the empty space like a ghost. Her hair was stunningly long, both in front and behind. From the space between her bangs, deep red eyes peered out at me. A strange anxiety settled over me, clutching me in its embrace. Considering the identities of the other two women, she must be the last of the three goddesses.

“This is Cult. She’s a member of our family,” Fouré announced.

I knew it. She was the last goddess, the Chaos Goddess Cult. Of the three, I’d heard her powers were the most dangerous—and it was that very woman who now stood among us, silently gazing down at me. After a moment, she muttered, “It appears he has synergy with spellcraft as well.”

“I thought so! Wow, I’ve never seen a human who had synergy with all three powers before!” Fouré seemed thrilled.

“His existence is quite a rare treasure indeed. He’s fundamentally of a different nature than us, but similar in infinite other respects,” Cult observed.

“How wonderful! No one’s ever been able to see us before, much less actually interact.” Fouré’s pokes and pulls intensified to the point where she was practically hugging me—she gave me the distinct impression of someone who’d found a doll she adored. But that was of secondary importance right now, as something else had caught my attention.

“Um, can I ask something?”

“Hmm? What is it, cutie?”

“When you say I have synergy with all three powers, what exactly do you mean?” Among all their chatter, this was the point that interested me the most. If my assumption was correct, then this might be the huge turning point that I’d been needing in my short life.

“It means exactly what it says—you can use all three powers. Normally humans can only use one,” Fouré said plainly.

“A-All *three*?!”

“Yep!”

Silence. I didn’t know how to respond, but this new, shocking revelation sank into my mind, consuming it. This news about my power—or, well, my synergies—drew my attention even over the fact that I just met the three goddesses of this realm. I laughed in spite of myself.

“I-I see… So I *do* have power.”

“Is that important to you? You certainly seem happy.”

“Yes! Thank you for letting me know, Lady Fouré!” The light of hope finally had finally shone down on my life, and it was all thanks to these women.

“I can’t say I fully understand, but I’m glad for you! Did you want power?”

“Yes—no matter what. I’m so weak, and I have to change that—to become strong.” I clenched my fists tight.

If I had magecraft, I could help Azalea. I’m not sure how well I could hold my own against monsters, but I’d be happy to try as long as I could ease her burdens.

If I had godcraft, that would give me the opportunity to cure Armeria’s illness. I’d heard it was a difficult task, but as long as there was a chance, no obstacles or complications would stop me from trying to help her.

And lastly, spellcraft—the power to create something from nothing. More precisely, spellcraft encompassed the ability to change and alter things at will, and according to what father had once told me, it could even create the food that me, Cosmos, and Armeria so sorely lacked.

I was beyond thrilled. I would have been happy to have been granted any one of the three powers, but now *all* of them were within my grasp. With enough training, I could save each of my sisters by myself. Elated, I thanked Fouré effusively.

“I didn’t do anything!” she said. “But I see… It looks like you’ve suffered a lot,” she sighed. Embarrassed that it was so obvious, I chuckled.

“Yeah… My family is really poor.”

“Then this must be fate! I’m sure with your aptitude, you’ll be able to handle our powers. Now that our family’s gotten one member larger, I’ll give you a present to celebrate!”

“Huh? A present?” I mumbled to myself. What was she planning on giving me?

“That’s a lovely idea. In this world, the more power you have, the better. It would be such a shame to part with a human who can talk with us, given we’ve never met one before,” Aruna agreed.

Cult chimed in as well. “Very well. For my part, I am also curious.” She quietly giggled before continuing, “I shall grace you with spellcraft.”

I could do nothing but sit, perplexed by their intentions. Pulling away, the three goddesses stood before me side by side, then held out their hands all at once. In that moment, they each radiated an aura that was uniquely theirs, flowing from their bodies and into their hands.

“I grant you the power of battle—magecraft,” said Aruna.

“I grant you the power of tranquility—godcraft,” said Fouré.

“I grant you the power of change—spellcraft,” said Cult.

“We give these powers unto you,” they all intoned at once.

Aruna’s hands glowed violet, Fouré’s hands glowed gold, and Cult’s hands glowed red. Then the shining lights, each embodying their own different energies, shot straight into my body. As soon as they did, I was overwhelmed by an inexplicable feeling of…omnipotence.

“Now your body houses each of our powers.” Aruna nodded.

“Do your best to learn how to use them!” chirped Fouré.

“I’m quite excited to see how things turn out,” giggled Cult.

The three goddesses laughed gaily as they looked down at me, glowing as I was with their three colors of light.

In that moment, I knew beyond a doubt that my destiny had changed.



Chapter 1: A Crash Course in Magecraft

And so, I met the three goddesses of this world in the middle of the woods, and they had awakened within me the powers I so desperately wanted. My eyes shone with the mystical energies that now threatened to overflow from within my body.

“So this is…magecraft, godcraft, and spellcraft,” I muttered.

“Mm-hmm. I’m sure it’ll be super useful eventually! But you’ll have to train very hard in order to use our powers,” nodded Fouré.

“We’ll help you with your training, though. It’s not like we have anything better to do. You— Hold on, it feels like we’re still strangers when I don’t call you by name. Hisui, you want to learn how to use our powers, yes?” Aruna asked me, following Fouré’s comment.

My throat tightened at the sudden question, my words tangling up in my excitement to explain.

“Of course! It’s fine by me if the training’s harsh. Please, teach me how to control and manipulate these powers!” I asked Aruna, putting on the most serious face I could manage.

She responded with a bemused laugh. “Very well; give me a challenge! But you needn’t stand on ceremony with us. Though humans call us goddesses, we are not actually deities.”

“Huh? I see… Wait, really?”

“Yup. We’re actually fairies. Humans call us goddesses because we are very powerful—after all, there *have* been a few humans who could sense our presence,” Fouré explained.

“You’re the first who could speak with us and physically touch us,” Aruna followed.

“Right? Hisui—oh no, let me call you Huey—you’re really special.”

“H-Huey?” I balked at that, cheeks tingling at the way Fouré addressed me.

“Yep, Huey! Cute nickname, right?”

“I-I guess…”

It wasn’t a name I thought I could get used to, but no matter. There was something even more important than that right now—

something related to the tempering of my powers.

“By the way, would it be possible for me to start by learning godcraft and spellcraft?”

“Oh? You’d like to learn one of those two first?” questioned Aruna.

“Yeah.” Godcraft and spellcraft were the two powers I needed to prioritize. If I learned godcraft, I could save Armeria. If I learned spellcraft, then we wouldn’t have to starve anymore, and that would be an incredible blessing for Cosmos. Magecraft could come to me over time. I felt bad for Azalea, but Armeria’s and Cosmos’s lives were on the line.

“Well, I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it’s best if you start with magecraft.”

“Huh? R-Really?” I was a little thrown off by Aruna’s answer.

She nodded, then began to explain. “Magecraft is the easiest to manipulate of the three. Start with magecraft, then move on to godcraft, and finish with spellcraft—learning them in that order is the real shortcut. You’ll learn the skills you need more efficiently that way.”

“All right. I guess we could start with magecraft, then.” I was upset that I couldn’t help Armeria, but it wasn’t like I could solve this issue with a temper tantrum. It was far more important that I learned to use my powers properly, and rejecting Aruna’s advice wouldn’t make things any better. Resigning myself to this new course, I bowed my head to Aruna.

“Leave it to me. I’ll see that you become the finest of mages.”

“Thank you, Aruna.” If I left things in her hands, I was sure I’d become stronger in no time or at least strong enough to help Azalea. Of course, I wouldn’t be doing that openly—or more accurately, I couldn’t. I had no idea how father and my brothers would treat me if they discovered I’d come into my powers at the age of five.

If father knew, I have no doubt he’d name me successor to the house and exploit me as such, and who knew what jealousy would drive my brothers to do. The nail that sticks out gets hammered down, after all. No, it was better that I help my sisters while hiding my own powers as much as possible.

It was going to be a rough and bumpy road, but I was determined to tackle it head-on. I was going to grasp happiness

with my own two hands, no matter what. At the moment, that was my ultimate goal.

"Then head on home for today. We'll wait for you here tomorrow," said Aruna.

"What? We can't go with Huey?" lamented Fouré.

Cult softly chuckled. "If we did that, Hisui would have a hard time. His family would be suspicious if they saw him talking to thin air, after all."

"Oh! That's right—I nearly forgot! No one can see us except for Huey, after all." Fouré laughed in embarrassment as she scratched the back of her head, rendered sheepish when Cult pointed out the obvious. But Cult's comment was true; now that she'd said that, I definitely knew that I couldn't let any of my family members see me talking to myself.

"Sorry, Fouré. I want to hide my powers from my family, so it'd be better if you didn't come with me."

"Hm? You want to hide your powers? But I'm sure they'd all be happy to know you have them," replied Fouré, quizzical.

"The situation with my family's kinda complicated. I don't want just anyone knowing I've got these powers."

A short, low hum escaped Fouré's lips, its tone clearly indicating her doubt. "Well, if that's how you want it, then okay. Your family affairs have nothing to do with us, after all."

With that, Fouré gave a little wave of her hand as she said "bye-bye." Aruna and Cult both waved at me as well, and I parted ways with the three goddesses.

On the way back, I ran through the forest until I reached the edge. Curiously, my body felt much lighter than when I'd initially entered, and I decided to return to the manor with as little delay as possible.

☆

Panting and out of breath, I finally made it back to the manor. The day was still far from over and I had plenty of time—I'd finished all the farmwork I was meant to do, so I decided I'd head to my room and do a bit of off-the-cuff strength training. With that settled, I headed into the manor, but something wet hit me from behind with a splash just as I was reaching for the entrance

doorknob.

It was freezing—probably water or something like that. I reached behind me to see what it was.

“Mud?”

Loamy brown mud was stuck to my back. It was moist. Why had mud of all things ended up on me? I turned around with a sinking feeling in my gut.

Standing behind me were the last two people I wanted to run into right now: Glenn and Mikhail.

Glenn chuckled darkly. “So sorry, Hisui. I was just practicing spellcraft, and you know, I guess I accidentally launched some mud at you.”

Mikhail quickly followed up. “He didn’t do it on purpose, honest. Every now and then stuff just appears from outta nowhere. That’s how it goes with basic spellcraft training.”

Not a shred of repentance to be found between them, Glenn and Mikhail snickered. It was clear that Glenn had conjured earth and water—mud, in other words—and thrown it at me. It was just my luck that they’d find me right when I was about to enter the manor.

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it, Glenn. It’d be great if you guys could make some water to wash the mud off me though.”

“What? Don’t think you can order us around,” Glenn snarled. He was awfully offended by my request for someone who’d supposedly thrown mud on me by accident.

Stomping toward me, Glenn glared down at me as he threw a kick, putting strength into the motion. His foot struck my abdomen, and although it didn’t hurt too badly, the force of the blow knocked me backward and I tumbled to the ground.

I coughed, the wind knocked from my lungs. “Wh-What was that for?”

“For being a little brat,” Glenn answered, not missing a beat.

“Yeah, exactly!” Mikhail jumped on the bandwagon. “You deserve to be rolling in mud, so stay down there where you belong.”

Then the two left, probably to return to their spellcraft practice. In the end, they’d practically admitted to throwing mud on me deliberately. I was sure they thought they could do whatever they wanted to me, since I couldn’t fight back. Those two brats were

irritating as hell—though I guess I couldn't call them brats, since I probably counted as one too.

"Yeesh, those two are such a pain," I mumbled to myself. I got to my feet, continuing my musing as I slowly brushed the dirt from my body. "Weird, though... Glenn went easy on me today." His kick had been less forceful than usual. One time when he'd kicked me, it had hurt so badly I'd nearly passed out from the pain.

"Just making sure my little bro learns some respect," he'd said at the time, waving it off with the excuse that he didn't want me doing something juvenile—like throwing mud on him, for example.

At any rate, I dutifully stayed outside and killed time until the mud hardened; it was basically sand once it solidified, which made it easy to brush off. If I didn't get it all off before going inside, my parents were sure to be angry with me for dirtying the manor. Besides, it wasn't like I could relax covered in dirt and muck.

This was malicious harassment, plain and simple. I swore deep in my heart that once I learned magecraft, I'd get my revenge on them.

☆

The next day, I dashed out of the manor as soon as I finished eating my breakfast roll. I did my chores diligently, watering the fields and weeding the garden before heading into the forest. Since yesterday, I'd felt as though I was in perfect condition. I had energy to spare, even though all I'd eaten was a single roll of bread—in fact, I was practically overflowing with strength. This wasn't something I could just brush off either. Maybe awakening to the three powers I'd been granted had affected me, so I decided to ask the goddesses for answers.

After a little while of running through the forest, I finally caught sight of Fouré, Aruna, and Cult. They noticed me as well and waved. I'm not sure why, but just seeing that warmed my heart immensely. I ran all the way up to them, and once I'd caught my breath, I greeted them.

"Good morning, everyone."

"Morning, Huey!" Fouré chirped. "Lovely weather today too!"

"Good morning. You've already warmed up, I see. That's

perfect," Aruna observed.

"Good morning," Cult said.

All three welcomed me in order, their sincerity apparent.

"I'm ready to go. Should we start training right away?" I asked.

"Yes. We've hardly got anything else to do, after all. Let us begin with a lesson on what magecraft really is," said Aruna.

"Please do, thank you." I straightened my posture, ready for the lesson, and waited for Aruna's lecture. After a brief pause, she began to speak.

"Essentially, magecraft is the excess power that has overflowed from me. In keeping with my particular attributes, it has the ability to strengthen the functioning of all things."

"Does that mean it can also improve physical ability?" I'd heard this from Azalea once.

"It can. You can use it to run faster than usual, and carry heavier things than usual. It can also be used to sharpen your senses, so you can see farther than your sight would ordinarily allow, and likewise pick up noises from farther away."

"Hearing that makes me think magecraft must be incredibly powerful."

"It is. If you fill something with magecraft energy, you can increase its durability. If you improve a person's physical ability, their natural healing also improves—in other words, injuries will heal faster."

"But godcraft is much better for healing, so I'd say pretty handy too," Fouré interrupted. A pout crossed Aruna's face.

"Be quiet, Fouré, or I'm kicking you out."

"Okaaay." Aruna's steely eyes and low, threatening tone put an end to Fouré's interference. The War Goddess was truly intimidating.

"Now, continuing on: That's why, if you honed your magecraft ability, even you could defeat a monster."

"A monster, really? But I'm still only five years old."

Malevolent creatures known as monsters roamed this world, and there were many different varieties of them. Some could be killed by the average person with nothing but an ordinary weapon, but there were some that couldn't be defeated unless subjugated using the goddesses' powers. The beasts that roamed the wilderness in my previous life were nothing compared to some of

these creatures, so could they really be driven off by a mere five-year-old child?

"Aye, a whole five years has passed since your birth, which is more than enough time. But you needn't worry. I won't ask you to fight a dragon or anything like that without due preparation."

"Oh, I dunno about that. You totally would," Fouré quipped, interrupting Aruna once more.

Then, right after a moment of Aruna glowering in silence... *Ker-thwack!* A sharp noise rang out, and Fouré vanished entirely. Standing right where she'd been was Aruna, her pose clearly suggesting the use of force. Her fist was even still raised mid-punch.

"H-Huh? Where'd Fouré go?" I squeaked in surprise.

"Never mind that. Let's get back to the lesson," said Aruna, settling back into her usual composed self. Still, I was terribly curious. I got the impression that something truly horrific had just happened right in front of me...I think, anyway.

"B-but..." I tested the waters.

"*I said*, let's get back to the lesson," Aruna asserted, her tone brooking no argument. After a short pause, I spoke.

"Yes, ma'am," I nodded. Aruna was just too intimidating.

All things considered, Fouré had most definitely gotten punched. It must've been a merciless strike, considering she literally blipped out of existence. Swallowing the words that rose unbidden to my throat, I silently waited for Aruna to begin the lesson again, which she did in short order.

"Firstly, Hisui, I want you to start by sensing the magecraft energy within your body."

"You want me to...sense it?"

"The same energy that courses within me also courses within you. So you can start with just perceiving its presence."

"How do I do that?"

"The fastest way is to have someone else who can also use magecraft to impart their energy unto you. If you can feel their power, then you'll also pick up on the flow of your own."

"So basically..."

"That's right. I'll pour my magecraft energy into you, Hisui. I'll be the one controlling and manipulating it, so there's no danger. Are you ready?"

“Yeah. I trust you, Aruna.”

She paused. “Thank you.” A small, happy laugh escaped her lips as she slowly came closer to me and put her delicate hands on my tiny shoulders. A violet light enveloped me, flowing from her hands, and I could feel something cold circulating throughout my entire body like water.

“Is this…magecraft?”

“Indeed. Your physical ability has now been heightened—try jumping, for example.”

“Okay.” Following her instructions, I focused my strength into my legs and jumped.

Whoosh.

“Whoa!” I yelped in surprise. I’d jumped ridiculously high—by my estimation, it must’ve been at least three meters.

“Wow… So magecraft really *can* boost your physical ability, huh?”

“If I transferred more power to you, I could make you even stronger. It would be unfortunate if you got hurt by accident, though, so I won’t do that for now.” Aruna paused for a moment, then continued. “More importantly, you understand what magecraft is now, right? Now, try releasing the magecraft energy from your own body.”

The purple aura that had been wrapped around me vanished. Aruna released her hands and fixed her gaze on me.

“Sure, I’ll give it a shot.”

Fumbling a bit at first, I closed my eyes to focus. I searched for the ice-cold energy that was sleeping somewhere inside me, and I found the magecraft faster than I expected. It felt like my body temperature had dropped a little.

“Huh! This must be it!”

“I knew you could do it! I could tell you had a natural talent for this from the start, but I hardly could have guessed you’d figure out how to release magecraft energy that quickly.”

I opened my eyes at Aruna’s words, and I was met with the sight of a faintly purple aura—it was a marginal amount of magecraft energy wrapped around my right hand. But regardless of the amount, what she’d said was true: I was able to release magecraft energy.

“Wow! That was easier than I thought.”

“It’s usually far more difficult than you’re imagining. The average person…takes about a month before they can do it, if I recall,” she mused.

“A whole month?!” But I’d been able to do it in just a moment!

“That just shows how much of a natural you are. This is wonderful, I’d say. There’s nothing wrong with learning to do something fast, after all.”

“That’s true, but I’m still surprised.”

“Believe me, I am too. But since you’ve got a knack for it, I’ll teach you some more skills. I’m certain they’ll help you reach your goals.”

“Yeah, I’m sure they will. I’ll do my best, Aruna!”

She chuckled. “I have to admit, I do like children who try their best. Be sure not to complain, okay?”

At the time, I had no idea that Aruna’s methods of training were harsh and relentless, and that she was the type to recklessly run rampant when her passions were ignited.

☆

“Now then… Since you were able to release magecraft, let’s go to the next step.”

“What would that be?” I inquired.

“After releasing magecraft, you need to actually be able to *control* it.”

“What happens if I can’t?”

“The effects of magecraft normally don’t manifest in any visible manner, so you’d just be expending your energy with no results.”

So basically…

“Learning to strengthen something is the same as learning to control the magecraft energy in the first place?” I ventured.

“That’s right. All the crafts are like this—the most essential skill involved is control. If magecraft, for example, isn’t well controlled, the strengthening effects will become unstable. Just now, when I wrapped your body in energy, it stayed inside you because I forced it to stay there.”

“Oh, gotcha. Keeping it within, huh?”

“You needn’t worry. Compared to the other powers, the level of control you have to exert for magecraft can vary. It’s quite unlike

the focused pinpoint precision that godcraft requires."

"What do you mean?"

"Basically, just controlling your powers is simple. The actual difficult part is narrowing down the power's range of effect. The broader the desired effect, the easier it is to use."

"I would've guessed the opposite."

"A common assumption, but no. Using powers over a broad range tends to be showy, which in turn tends to command more awe and respect."

Wait, hang on...

"Wouldn't that mean it'd actually be better to use powers over a broader spectrum, then?" If broadening the scope of the powers produced more impressive results, I couldn't imagine why you'd ever want to narrow the range.

Aruna shook her head. "It wouldn't be very energy efficient, though. Besides, if you perfect your control, you can compress your powers to achieve truly overwhelming results. Wasting energy on a scope that's far too broad is a major trap for beginners."

"So in the end, your ability to control your power really does mean everything," I conjectured.

"That's right. So do your best to manipulate your magecraft energy, Hisui."

"Understood. What should I do?"

"To start, try to control the energy you've released. It'd be amazing if you could wrap it all the way around your hand—maybe even your whole arm—but first I want you to focus it into your right palm and manifest a strengthening effect."

"I'll give it a shot."

I once again attempted to draw out the magecraft energy that I'd released. Compared to my first attempt, it was much easier to draw out on this second try. I don't know if it was because my reincarnated body had unusual properties or if I'd been blessed somehow in this world, but at any rate I focused the energy into my right hand. Next, I tried to harness the accumulated magecraft so it wouldn't disperse.

"Oh! It feels like...there's some sort of resistance?"

When I tried to control the magecraft energy—or rather, tried to contain it in my hand, it rebounded instead, beginning to

disperse as though it were trying to escape my grasp. But I did all I could to hold it in. While doing this, I noticed I was focusing strength into my abdominal muscles. I bet my abs were gonna be real chiseled after this.

"There will be resistance when you try to control magecraft and godcraft power, yes. Godcraft requires fine control, but you can use brute force with magecraft. Try *making* it do what you want."

"Ngh! This is really tiring!"

"It's like that in the beginning. Once you're more experienced, your body will be more used to having all that power in it. Until then, you'll just have to keep practicing."

I continued to control my magecraft as instructed. But even when I focused for a full five minutes, then ten, Aruna never gave me the okay to stop. Despite the haze of agony that seemed to last forever, I never let go even when I began to drip with sweat. Still, the energy eventually did vanish like smoke.

"Oh, I guess my control finally broke..." My whole body felt like a ton of lead. I couldn't even stand any longer, so I fell to my knees. The cold sensation that had been swirling around inside my body had mysteriously disappeared. What was going on?

"It's not your control that's the problem. Simply put, you ran out of magecraft energy."

"That can happen?"

"Yes. Your body feels really heavy now, right?"

"Yeah," I affirmed.

"That's what happens when you expend everything you've got. Your physical condition deteriorates considerably. If you push yourself too hard, you're seriously going to faint, so hold still," she admonished.

"I see. I guess the amount of magecraft power I have runs out after ten minutes or so."

That was a little depressing. The three goddesses had said I had talent, but on the flip side, I didn't have much magical energy. That was a bummer.

"The amount of power a person has varies between individuals, but the base level can be increased as with practice. You're still only five years old, and you've only just begun training, so your absolute upper limit will be much higher than this."

"Really?" I was relieved to hear that.

“Yes. As far as I can tell, your capacity for magic even rivals ours. So don’t worry—you’ll become the most powerful of us all one day.”

“All that aside, I’m glad I won’t be stuck with a tiny amount of magic. Having powers is pretty convenient, after all.”

Cult giggled, then added her commentary to Aruna’s own. “If you can learn to use the same powers as we have, you’ll be able to do much more than this.”

She didn’t speak much—she was the exact opposite of Fouré, who was very expressive. But considering that, Cult was definitely more sociable today, talking a lot more compared to yesterday when we’d just met. Maybe that was because I had her power of spellcraft now? Did she see me as one of them…or maybe like family?

I had no idea, really. But I did take the opportunity to converse with her. “Your power was spellcraft, right?”

“Yes,” she affirmed. “Please look forward to it.”

“Okay. When I start learning that, I’ll be in your hands, Cult.”

Spellcraft was truly an all-mighty energy. It could create any physical object from nothing—manufacturing and production all in one, in other words.

“That’s enough chitchat for now, Hisui. Get back to your control training,” Aruna cut in.

“Huh? But I don’t have any energy left,” I said, astonished.

“I’ll give you some. Fouré will take care of your physical and mental exhaustion.”

“Yep, sure will! Just leave it to me. A single zap from my powers and you’ll be all better,” Fouré chirped. Having returned uninjured as if she’d never gotten punched at all, she raised her hand to volunteer.

“Wow—so you can already handle the transfer of magecraft power, huh?!” asked Fouré.

“He *will*,” Aruna corrected, “once he can expertly control and manipulate it as we can.” Then, she touched me. Energy flowed into me, with her hand as a conduit. In just one moment, my once-drained reserves were back to full.

“Do your best, Huey! No matter how tired and hurt you get, I’m here to patch you up!” Fouré cheered.

“R-Right… Thanks, Fouré.” She’d worked her godcraft, and my

exhaustion had completely vanished, but the way she spoke was so unsettling that I wanted her to stop. Was I really being exposed to something that dangerous?

"You're all good to go now. So get back to your control practice," commanded Aruna.

"Understood." I focused my magecraft into the palm of my hand. Then I took hold of it and held it until my energy ran out. Control was just like release—no matter which one I was doing, I managed to handle it more smoothly on the second attempt.

However...

"This really does wear you out, though," I groaned through haggard panting. The fatigue was diminishing little by little, but still... Doing something so mentally tiresome would wear anyone down. I sighed deeply as I wiped the sweat from my brow with my sleeve.

"Here, magecraft. Fouré, remove his fatigue," Aruna once more commanded.

"Gotcha! One shot of godcraft, coming right up!"

"Um, could I have a short break? I've done it twice already," I moaned.

"If I recall correctly, the average person can only drain their energy a maximum of once or twice per day," Aruna said, thinking out loud.

"Then—"

"Don't worry about that! As long as we're here, you can continue training endlessly."

I was at a loss for words. I saw a hint of something fearsome in Aruna's smile this time. Rendered momentarily speechless, I unconsciously took one step back—but I didn't get far. Cult leaned on my shoulder from behind, giggling.

"You mustn't run. You wanted to learn magecraft as quickly as possible, right? You'd best keep in mind that training comes before anything else, and that's true for all of our powers."

"C-Cult? You won't let me go either?"

"You'll have to put up with this. It's for your own good."

"Okay..."

Cult was right, of course. All this hardship was for the sake of my future. Quietly, I swore I'd train until I started vomiting blood, if that's what it took. This was all for Azalea, Armeria, and Cosmos.

I didn't anticipate I would *actually* end up vomiting blood when I swore that, though.

☆

Several hours after I'd started training in magecraft, I dragged myself back home, feeling dead both inside and out.

"That was awful," I couldn't help but groan aloud.

"Are you okay, Huey? Aruna can be such a demon, huh?" Fouré asked.

"You're saying that like you didn't just heal me over and over again, Fouré. You're complicit."

"Huh? I don't know what you're talking about, silly." Fouré looked away from me as she attempted to whistle, but the notes came out all flat.

The main reason I'd gotten stuck in Aruna's never-ending cycle of training was that Fouré had kept recovering my physical strength. If Fouré hadn't been there, I'm sure Aruna would've had to give me a break after the first attempt. But since she was there, I ended up emptying all my magecraft energy at least five times. Just remembering how much running out of power had hurt made me feel sick to my stomach.

"Still, that suffering was worth it. You learned to control magecraft rather well, even though it was only your first day of training," remarked Cult.

"Yeah, that's right. The total magecraft energy you can handle has gone way up, and you can control it pretty well too! Even if it's just in your right hand," Fouré said encouragingly.

"That's not what I was trying to get at." I wish they'd told me this training was going to be so grueling from the start. Humans need to mentally prepare for these things, sheesh.

"By the way, are we doing this again tomorrow?" I asked.

"Of course. A single day of rest will put you three days behind in your training," Aruna responded.

"For real?!"

Were they even *aware* of the concept of breaks?

"You can do it, Huey! As long as I'm around, you'll never get tired!"

"Thanks, Fouré. Your kindness really says a lot about you..." *In a*

bad way, I added mentally.

She giggled, not noticing the hint of sarcasm. “I’m everyone’s big sister, after all.” Fouré puffed out her bountiful chest. It bounced, then jiggled ever so slightly.

Fouré and Cult both had rather generous bosoms, so it was tough keeping my eyes off them. Cult’s breasts were especially large—so big, in fact, that their size was obvious even though they were completely covered by her clothes. I was honestly panicking when she’d grabbed hold of my shoulders earlier, since she had them pressed right up against me.

“By the way, Hisui… What are you going to do now?” asked Aruna.

“Now? I’m gonna go home, of course… Though all I’ll do is just sleep.”

“So you do have a home to go back to after all.”

“Yeah. Even though I don’t have many good feelings about it,” I groused.

“Really? Why not?”

“I’m the youngest son of a baron, that’s why. I have two older brothers, and my parents already pinned all their hopes on those two. I’m basically good for nothing in their eyes, so I get treated like dirt.”

“Wow. Humans are so weird. They’ll even rank their own family members, huh?”

“Exactly, Fouré,” Cult agreed. “If they really start to bother you, I could transform them into frogs just for you, Hisui.”

“You can do that?” I asked, astonished.

“Yes. It’d be a trifling matter for my spellcraft.”

“In that area, her powers are more potent than even my godcraft. Spellcraft deals with curses, after all. Godcraft is simply the power to return things to how they were,” explained Fouré.

“Nah, it’s fine,” I cut in. “I don’t care much for those two either, but I don’t want to cause a fuss.” I’d had terrible experiences with their nasty bullying, but I wouldn’t go as far as getting them turned into frogs. Besides, if Glenn and Mikhail disappeared, I’d be automatically made the heir to House Clematis, a role I absolutely did not want. The guilt would be hard to live with too.

“A shame.” Cult sounded disappointed.

“You’re so nice, Huey.”

“You think so? I mean, I *do* think about how I’d get back at them…”

“What would you do?” Aruna tilted her head in curiosity.

“Well, I went to all the trouble of learning magecraft. Glenn and Mikhail—oh, those are my brothers—can only use spellcraft.” I didn’t really want to send them flying with a powerful punch to the face, but at least from now on, it wouldn’t hurt as much when they hit me. It might be funny to trip them and send them tumbling to the ground once in a while, though. Having more options made my heart feel light and airy.

“Hmm… Well, do as you like—that’s your power now. However you choose to use it, I won’t mind.”

“Even if I killed someone?” I ventured.

“Mm-hmm. That’s got nothing to do with us. Although if *you* died, we’d resurrect you.”

“And I’d do the honors!” Fouré once more threw her hand up as a volunteer.

“You’re oh-so-reliable,” laughed Aruna. At that moment, I felt as though I caught a glimpse of why the three goddesses were known as *goddesses*. I’d have to be ultracareful not to give them any reason to abandon me.

As I walked back to the manor, I swore that deep in my heart and committed it to memory.

☆

After several dozens of minutes of walking, I finally reached the entrance of the manor. The goddesses had already taken their leave; partway through my walk, they’d disappeared off somewhere. I couldn’t be seen talking to them in front of others anyway, so I entered the manor alone.

Just as I opened the entrance door, I caught a glimpse of Glenn and Mikhail darting out of a room farther inside.

“Ugh.” The groan slid from my mouth reflexively.

They’d realized I was back as well, and for some reason their expressions grew grim.

“Ugh, it’s Hisui,” Glenn spat.

Yeesh… He really didn’t have to sound *that* disgusted. Did something happen while I was out? He was very clearly pissed off.

I was a little curious as to why he was so irritated, but even if I tried asking, I'd only end up getting bullied. So I didn't say anything in particular, and tried to just pass him by instead.

Then, at that very moment, Glenn swung his fist at me without a word. "Ghk!" I yelped. I instantly used magecraft to protect my head, and Glenn's fist, swung as hard as he could muster, landed squarely on my temple. The blow failed to kill me, but it sent me tumbling to the floor.

"What was that for, Glenn?!" Thanks to my magecraft, I'd barely taken any damage at all. Mikhail's expression twisted into one of confusion as he watched me get to my feet with nary a scratch.

"Hey... Are you seriously okay after *that* hit?"

Glenn, on the other hand, didn't register the strangeness of the situation—maybe because he was so angry. But Mikhail rested his chin in his hand thoughtfully, calm and collected, as he pondered something. Did he realize I'd used magecraft? Nah—by conventional logic, a five-year-old child using magecraft was unthinkable.

Ignoring Mikhail, I glared at Glenn, who immediately started yelling.

"That stupid—! Acting like she's better than me! Just because she can use magecraft!"

Considering his words...

"Are you talking about Azalea?" She was the only person who could get Glenn so riled up out of all of us. Because Azalea could use magecraft, Glenn and Mikhail couldn't bully her through violence. That probably made him extra angry. Served him right, though.

"Yeah, damn straight I'm talking about Azalea. If only she weren't here, then no one would be safe from us, especially not a dunce like you."

"Whether she's here or not doesn't have anything to do with your bullying."

These ugly feelings of rancor had taken root in Glenn because Azalea had outstripped him in terms of ability, and she was kind in order to protect me. While it was true that if she weren't around, the bullying would just escalate, that was totally irrelevant to the situation at hand.

"Shut up!" Glenn snapped. "Or should I give you all the beatings

she's missing out on?" He stomped over until he was right in front of me, steps thundering with the threat of violence. Clearly, he'd been ready to beat me up from the beginning.

He raised his fist, then swung it down again and again. I cloaked myself in magecraft energy to block his strikes. One. Two. Three. Four. If I included his kicks in the count, I'd been hit six times. I tried blocking all his attacks with just my legs and arms, but the fact that I came away uninjured from all that must've triggered a sense of unease in him despite his rage.

He stared at me through his ragged breathing.

"Huh?" He'd punched and kicked me so much, but I didn't have so much as a single scratch. He stared at me, confused. "Y-You should be rolling on the floor in pain! Why aren't you on the ground?!"

"I dunno. Maybe I blocked your attacks pretty well? More likely you're just bad at throwing punches," I snarked, smirking as I did.

Naturally, I couldn't tell him about my magecraft. Still, now that I was able to use my powers, even just a little, he couldn't simply beat me down one-sidedly anymore.

I'm sure this wouldn't tip them off that I'd awakened in magecraft. No matter the physiological difference between us, Glenn was still just an ordinary person with no magecraft to augment his attacks. He couldn't punch a tree and knock it down like Azalea could.

Seeing his face filled with so much frustration made me feel a little better after all the abuse he'd shown toward me.

"S-Screw you!"

After that, he flew into a fit of rage and continued raining punches down on me. I shudder to think what would've happened if I didn't have magecraft.

☆

"Oww... I can't believe he went all out hitting me just because I could withstand it." Rubbing my arm, I got to my feet. Glenn and Mikhail had left, the former having grown tired of hitting me.

I'd only just learned to use magecraft mere hours ago, and I hadn't released much power either. My ability to control it was low, and even though Glenn hadn't been strengthened with magic,

being hit that many times was bound to hurt. I couldn't see any bruises forming, at least. I breathed a sigh of relief for that blessing.

Just then, a familiar voice rang out from the direction opposite of where Glenn and Mikhail had gone.

"Hisui? What are you doing?"

Casting a quick glance in the direction of the voice, I saw Azalea coming down the hall. She strode directly toward me. I broke out in a cold sweat, internally lamenting my bad luck.

"Oh, Azalea... I'm not doing anything, really. I was just about to go to my room."

"I see. Still... Hm?" Sharp-eyed as ever, Azalea took notice of my injuries. Even though they hadn't bruised, my arms and legs were colored a faint red with welts. Seeing those, Azalea got her answer pretty much as soon as she'd asked.

"Glenn and Mikhail were hitting you again, weren't they?! They're so horrible!" I could hear her grinding her teeth in anger. She then rushed past me with a singular intent, but I immediately grabbed her arm to stop her. I was certain it would've been a bad idea to let her go.

"Huh? What? Let go!" she demanded.

"I won't. You can't go after them, Azalea. Violence won't solve anything."

"They were the ones who got violent first! I won't be satisfied until I give 'em a good punch."

"I'm okay—don't worry. I'm pretty sturdy myself, as you can see," I remarked, trying to calm her.

"That doesn't make me any less angry! How could they do that to their own little brother?!"

"Stop! You'll get in trouble. Glenn already has a grudge against you, so if you hit him, you might get kicked out of the house." And it wouldn't just be Azalea gone—Cosmos and Armeria were sure to go with her. I wouldn't put it past my stupid father to do something like that. He *was* stupid, after all.

Azalea heaved a sigh. "Okay. Sorry, Hisui...for giving you trouble." Azalea forced herself to calm down, and her expression returned to her usual seriousness. Seeing that, I let go of her.

"Nah, it's okay. Besides, if someone's gonna smack them, I want to be the one to do it. I owe them a lot of payback."

“You’ve gotten pretty strong, Hisui.”

“Maybe just in spirit. I have to try harder…”

I balled my right hand into a fist and stared at it. I’d received magecraft from the War Goddess, Aruna. Even though it was just a stroke of luck that saw me blessed with it, I had to put it to use and get stronger so I wouldn’t lose to Glenn and Mikhail. So I could survive in this world and live a fulfilling life. And most of all…I had to get stronger for the person standing right next to me. All of this was for Azalea’s sake as well. Seeing the bandages still wrapped around her arms and legs, I once again made a promise in my heart.

“All right. Never mind Glenn, then. It’s bath time, Hisui!”

“Urk!” I grimaced at her words unintentionally. I took a step back, about to break into a run, when— *Fwap!* In a single swift motion, Azalea grabbed my arm. Her mood was completely different from how it had been just a moment ago.



“You’re not getting away, Hisui!”

“A-Azalea! I’m okay with just a quick rinse,” I said, trying to convince her.

“Nope. The dirt’ll come off way better with some hot water. Plus, it’ll save on water if we take a bath together. No need to hold back,” she insisted.

“It’s not about holding back—”

“Hush, and just come. I’m not taking no for an answer.”

“Aw, really…” I groaned.

With that, Azalea dragged me off to the bath. Ordinarily she’d at least wait until after dinner, but today she’d gotten the jump on me, so I couldn’t get away! Still, that was kind of depressing. I’d spent all that time practicing magecraft, but, experienced as she was, I still couldn’t escape Azalea.

☆

“That was harrowing,” I moaned. Wobbling on unsteady legs, I returned to my room. Closing the door, I flopped into bed. At that moment, the three goddesses appeared.

“Hey there, Huey! You look pooped,” Fouré observed.

“Oh, Fouré… Yeah, I’m beat. My sisters made me take a bath with them…”

“Aren’t baths supposed to be relaxing?” Aruna asked.

“Maybe if I were an actual kid. I’m mentally an adult, you know.” I shook my head at Aruna, who was clearly confused.

“I suppose having memories from your old life comes with its own problems,” Cult laughed.

“Don’t say that like it hasn’t got anything to do with you…”

“But it doesn’t.” She laughed coquettishly. Hearing her so amused at me, I couldn’t help but feel kind of hurt.

“Those boys are the biggest problem here, though.” Aruna didn’t sound impressed.

“Oh, you mean Glenn and Mikhail?”

“They’re just like beasts, bereft of mind and manners. Quite displeasing.” From the way she spoke, I could imagine they’d all seen what had happened between me and my brothers. The idea that they’d watched me get a sound beating without putting up a fight made my cheeks flush in embarrassment.

“Well, I agree. Glenn’s a jerk with a heart of coal. He’s the source of all my mental and emotional exhaustion.”

“Let us spirit him away,” offered Cult.

“Nah, I don’t need that. If I just get stronger, I’ll have a fighting chance anyway, and that’s fine by me.”

“So we heard. It’s good that you have the drive to train,” Aruna laughed. Ordinarily, her resting expression was much like Azalea’s—serious. Even the way her eyes peaked upward at the corners was the same, so the sense of intimidation I got from her was overwhelming. Her laughs, though, were frightening in their own way. A chill ran down my spine, as if my body knew my training from now on was about to get harder.

And it was right.

Without my realizing, the Light Goddess Fouré appeared behind me with a puff of smoke, and she placed her hands on my shoulders.

“Oh nooo, now you’ve done it, Huey.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m pretty sure Aruna loves hardworking, straitlaced kids like you, Huey. I can tell by the look in her eyes… You’re going to see hell starting tomorrow.”

I was stunned into a moment of silence before I managed to form a response. “You mean what I’ve gone through so far wasn’t hell already?!”

“It’ll be *way* worse.” She giggled, seemingly finding amusement in my situation. But I wasn’t feeling happy about this at all, so I didn’t return the laughter.

Either way, my body knew what it wanted—the bath had washed away my fatigue, and now I’d gotten sleepy. I sank into my bed, my consciousness leaving me in the wake of the three goddesses’ words, which I could hear from somewhere nearby.

“Good night, Hisui.”

“Nighty-night, Huey. Sweet dreams!”

“Pray enjoy your lovely repose.”

“Good night, everyone…”

☆

Dawn broke the next day, and I left after finishing breakfast,

flashing Glenn a broad grin after seeing his unconcealed surprise at the fact that I was still up and fit as a fiddle.

I helped out with some light farmwork for a couple of hours, and then when I was off the hook from my chores, I headed into the forest. Using the magecraft energy coursing through my body, I plunged steadily into the woods.

After a short while, Aruna and the other two appeared. We stopped at a clearing a good distance from the manor, and there I learned more magecraft from Aruna.

“Good. In just one day, you’ve managed to refine your skill with handling a small amount of energy.”

“Really?” It’d been three hours of single-mindedly releasing my power and controlling it. Fouré had healed me the countless number of times I’d ended up in excruciating pain after exhausting my magecraft, and I’d spent what felt like an eternity tempering my abilities. As a result, I was now able to use a moderate amount of magic. I got the sense that I’d leveled up.

“Just a tiny amount,” admitted Aruna. “But you can use the same powers I can now. The starting bar’s pretty high, I’ll have you know.”

Hearing that got me elated. “Awesome! How much magecraft does it take to be able to fight monsters?”

“Considering your age and physique, I estimate it will take a year of training at the very least,” she replied frankly.

“A whole year, huh…”

I knew very well that I wasn’t in any position to ask for things outside my means, but just knowing it would take that long left me lightheaded. I knew life was long, and a year was basically no time at all in the grand scope of things, but given that I wanted to get strong and start learning the other powers as soon as possible, a whole year seemed unbelievably long.

“Don’t panic. That’s just for you being able to fight monsters. If you just want to defeat that bumbling troll—ah, your brother, I mean—then you won’t need nearly as much time.”

“That makes me feel a bit better.”

“Good. Then hold this.” Aruna tossed something pole-like to me, which I caught.

“This is…a wooden sword, isn’t it?” It was fashioned from a relatively sturdy piece of wood. For that reason, it was actually a

bit heavy.

"Cult made it just for you. I'll be instructing you in swordplay starting today."

"S-Swordplay?"

But I'd never so much as set foot in a kendo hall in my previous life! Not to boast or anything, but this would be my first time I'd be learning any martial art. Feeling the wooden sword in my hands, it felt all the heavier considering the *other* meaning of the phrase.

"Magecraft is the power to fight, so swordplay is a perfect companion art. Learn it well; you'll be using a real sword eventually, after all."

"I-I see. All right. If you say so, I guess I don't have a problem with that." I tried getting into a stance with the sword. Supporting its weight with both my hands made my body really lean over. The tip of the sword wavered to and fro.

"Start by swinging the sword. Keep swinging it until I tell you to stop."

"Urk…"

This was shaping up to be some hard, ruthless training too. A sinking feeling overcoming me, I began to swing the sword as per her instructions.

My arms started screaming in pain almost immediately. It was rough, given it was exercise I wasn't used to, but Aruna never gave me the signal to stop. I kept swinging the sword wholeheartedly, even as sweat started pouring out of my body.

It was really hard…to become strong.

☆

I didn't know how much time had passed, but I kept on swinging the sword. I'd lost feeling in my arms. Covered in sweat, I collapsed onto the ground. I had thought that for humans, if there was a will, there was a way, but at the same time, I realized that humans stop moving like this once they'd reached their limits.

It was impossible to do anything other than breathe heavily. I stared up at the sky, bereft of strength, and Fouré appeared next to me.

"Good job, Huey! You're drenched in sweat… That must've been a lot of hard work!" She touched me, and I was enveloped in a

golden light. All of a sudden, my stamina, which had been completely depleted, was back to its usual state. The absurd amount of pain and leaden fatigue I'd been suffering vanished, and I slowly got to my feet.

"Thanks, Fouré. I'm sorry you have to heal me all the time."

"Don't worry about it. When I see you trying your hardest, I feel a strange warmth in my heart. Besides, watching you keeps the old boredom away." With that, Fouré laughed. Well, okay. If I was any help to her, I didn't mind.

"Good work, Hisui. You did your best until the very end," I heard Aruna say from behind me. I turned to see her there; her expression was relaxed, which was uncommon for her. Looked like I'd managed to meet expectations.

That made me happy.

"I just barely managed to hold on. Honestly, even if you told me to do it again, I'm not sure I'd be able to see it all the way through a second time."

"That's fine. You'll be able to draw out your full strength when you need to. Good old reliable strength—that is, *physical* strength—comes after everything else, after all."

"Really?"

"Yes. In actuality, your torn flesh is still growing even now as it repairs itself. If this continues, you'll be strong before you know it."

"I see. You're really a whiz at persuading me. I'll do my best."

It was nice to have the vivid, tactile experience of my growth. Honestly, I still didn't totally understand what Aruna was trying to get at, but if she said so then I was sure it was true.

While I fought to keep my heart from racing excitement, a satisfied smile floated to my lips. When it did, Aruna squeaked in surprise, and she turned her back to me, cheeks slightly red.

I tilted my head in confusion.

"Huh? What's wrong, Aruna?"

"Oh, you know... It's just, well... Your smile just now...was kind of unfair."

"Huh? Wh-What do you mean?" I didn't get what she was saying.

Though I'm sure a huge question mark was practically floating over my head, she was completely determined not to explain. Instead, Fouré, who was standing next to Aruna, giggled.

“Oh, Aruna, sweetie! Your reaction just now was *so* obvious. Huey is just so earnest, honest, and genuine that you’ve fallen—”

Thwap!

Before Fouré could finish her sentence, a sharp noise not unlike a violent explosion once again rang out.

Fouré vanished in an instant.

“She needs to learn to stop running her mouth… Honestly.” Aruna stood in front of me, fist still out in mid-swing. Her eyes were narrowed and looking decidedly more icy than usual. Unbeknownst to me, I’d begun to tremble with a surprise.

I wonder if Fouré had said something to offend Aruna just now. I mean, she must have, given she was sent flying again…

“Ngh… That damage pierces through everything, even defensive powers… I mean, it doesn’t *hurt*, but think of the damage it does to my heart!”

Oh, she was back.

Fouré’s ability to shrug things off like she didn’t even feel them was astounding as usual. Due to the explosive edge of the noise and Aruna’s speed, her attack hadn’t been something I could even register. I’m sure that if I’d been struck by it, soft and mortal as I was, I’d explode on impact even if I tried defending with magecraft. Just thinking all this was a testament to the fearsomeness of Aruna’s attack.

But Fouré didn’t have a single scratch on her—and considering the speed of her return, I now didn’t think it was a stretch to consider her a true goddess.

Cult, who was standing a short distance away, giggled and called to Aruna as she watched the War Goddess glare daggers at Fouré.

“Fighting aside, what will you do about training? We still have time.”

Aruna was still furious with Fouré, but Cult’s words managed to dispel her rage. After sighing deeply, she picked up the wooden sword from the ground and tossed it to me.

“Of course we’ll continue training. You’re healed up now too, Hisui, so I take it you have no problem with that?”

“Yeah. It’s actually kinda fun for me.”

“Then swing your sword until you reach your limit again. You are still nothing but a child who’s barely begun to start training, so

you must start with the basics.”

“Understood. Fouré, can you heal me when I fall again?”

“Of course! Go for it, Huey!”

When I’d readied myself, Aruna and Fouré stepped back so as to not disturb me. Then, I passed the time delving into hell once more—a choice I made so I’d be able to swing the sword more forcefully, frequently, and accurately than before.

☆

The seasons changed in the blink of an eye.

As I learned swordplay and magecraft from the War Goddess, I continued swinging my sword in training through the heat and cold. Since Fouré was around, the temperature didn’t make a difference at all. If there was a problem, Cult would solve it. Even if a monster happened to attack, Aruna would dispatch it in an instant. It was the perfect circumstance to hone my abilities—I had the best teachers.

I spent my days away with these three goddesses, who were sometimes harsh and sometimes doting—and soon enough, a year had passed by.

Chapter 2: Birthday

A year had passed since I'd met the three goddesses. Today was my sixth birthday.

"Happy birthday, Hisui! I'm so sorry we can't celebrate your birthday with a big fancy party or anything," Azalea said as she hugged me. It was early in the morning and she was about to set out for "work," but she'd still set aside time to wish me a happy birthday. Azalea really was a saint.

I wrapped my arms around her and returned the hug before replying.

"It's okay. I'm just glad you wished me a happy birthday."

Besides, it wasn't like anyone other than my sisters would go out of their way to celebrate it. Both last year and the year before, neither my brothers nor my parents had celebrated. That was just how things went at House Clematis.

"Hisui…"

Azalea's arms tightened around me. It hurt a little, but times like this were honestly pure bliss—I knew Azalea was wishing me a happy birthday from the bottom of her heart.

"Come on. You gotta get to work soon or father will be angry, Azalea."

She held me for a short moment longer without saying a single word, then finally responded. "You're right. Let's celebrate once I get back."

Azalea released me from her hug and stood up. She looked and acted coolly nonchalant, but I could tell a hint of sadness lurked beneath. Honestly, she really didn't need to get so hung up about leaving me on my birthday; I really was happy just to be in her thoughts.

"Stay safe, Azalea," I said in farewell.

"I'll be back before you know it." Azalea then turned on her heels and left. I waved at her as I watched her depart. Before long, she was gone, and then—

"Hisuiii!"

"Huh?!"

This time, Cosmos came barreling at me from behind. She threw herself at me with enough force to knock me over, but due to the training I'd received from the War Goddess Aruna, I managed to stay upright.

"C-Cosmos! You can't come flying at me like that! It's dangerous."

"Huh? I was so sure I'd bowl you over! You've gotten pretty sturdy."

I gulped. She was right on the money, which startled me into silence.

This past entire year, I had trained my body, honing my muscles. Between Aruna's strict training that pushed my physical limits and Light Goddess Fouré's constant healing to recover my energy, my physique was entirely inconceivable for my age. Cosmos was right—before, her tackle would have certainly knocked me down. The fact that it hadn't meant I'd grown enough that it couldn't even budge me.

"You shouldn't be knocking people to the ground anyway, Cosmos," I chided her.

"I'm sorry. But today's your birthday, isn't it? I wanted to make it exciting and cheery," she explained.

"You're always so nice and considerate."

Cosmos was especially bright and sunny among my sisters. Out of the three of them, I'd definitely say she was the life of the party. Azalea was mature and responsible, so at times like this, it always fell to Cosmos to get things fired up. A year ago, our food shortage had meant she was always starving, which had taken a severe toll on her health. Since I'd begun sharing the meat I obtained from slain monsters, though, she'd gotten healthier over time.

Of course, I wasn't the one defeating the monsters—all the credit for that would have to go to Aruna. The best I could do was secretly share the extra meat I couldn't finish myself with Cosmos and Armeria, and I didn't exactly go hunting with Aruna every day. The War Goddess also wasn't interested in any humans aside from me, so there was little point asking her to cull monsters on anyone else's behalf. Even if I asked, I was certain she'd decline.

Cult was the same—she could create food from nothing at all, but like Aruna she didn't have the slightest bit of interest in any

other humans. It didn't feel right to just casually ask her to make food for my sisters. To make up for that, though, I had plans to master spellcraft later.

"Well, let me wish you a happy birthday again, Hisui. I'm so glad you were born," said Cosmos.

"Thanks for celebrating my birthday every year, Cosmos," I responded.

"Did Azalea already wish you a happy birthday?"

"Yup, just now."

"What about Armeria?"

"I was just about to go see her."

"Oh, gotcha. Well, how about we go together? You only have one birthday a year, after all." With that, she grasped my hand, and together, we went up to the second floor, heading for the room farthest down the hall where we'd find Armeria. Two years ago, she'd contracted a terrible illness, and because of that my parents had placed her under permanent quarantine. We were ordered not to see her aside from mealtimes, but once in a while I would break that rule and visit her anyway.

"I wonder if Armeria's awake," Cosmos mused aloud.

"Probably. I came around this time earlier and she was up then," I assured her.

"That's a relief. I'm gonna make her smile today too!" Reenergized, Cosmos knocked on the door to Armeria's room with me, and a reply came from within.

☆

One hour later, Cosmos left to do work after we'd wrapped up our chat with Armeria. Once she was gone, I too left the manor. The forest was my destination, and specifically I was headed to the usual clearing for my training with the three goddesses. Before I made it into the woods, however, the voice I least wanted to hear in the whole world stopped me in my tracks.

"Hey, wait, Hisui."

"Ugh..." *Ugh* was right—his whole situation was really a mood-killer. The person who'd stopped me was of course my eldest brother, Glenn, and I caught sight of Mikhail skulking just behind him. They'd both grown taller this past year. I was jealous.

“Did you need something, Glenn?”

“It’s your birthday today, isn’t it? I thought I’d give you something special to celebrate.”

“You’re…celebrating my birthday?” What was he babbling about this early in the morning? His words were so ambiguous and hard to understand in light of his personality that I froze, completely befuddled. Taking advantage of the moment, Glenn pulled something from his pocket.

“Here, you can have this,” he sneered.

The object he’d pulled out was one of our daily rolls of hard bread, which he tossed on the ground without a moment’s hesitation. It rolled to a stop right between me and Glenn, and my brothers grinned wickedly. Surely they didn’t mean for me to pick it up and eat it? That would be juvenile, even for them, and I didn’t need the bread these days anyway. Still, who knows what abuse they’d put me through if I didn’t pick it up.

Feeling aggrieved by the situation, I impassively went to pick up the bread. When I did, a hole opened up in the ground right in front of it. To be more exact, it was as though something had jammed itself into the ground in that particular spot, displacing the dirt in piles around it.

This was…spellcraft!

The culprit was obvious, what with the way Mikhail was hiding behind Glenn. He was messing with the ground, casting his magic on it. Spellcraft was the power of change and alteration—it could freely manipulate any target. And now, Mikhail was manipulating the earth to instantly create a hole.

I gasped as I slipped in, but I quickly assessed the situation. The hole was about four to five meters deep—I guess that must’ve been the extent of his powers. Even if I didn’t catch myself, I’d come out of this with only a minor injury. There was no need to panic.

Retaining my presence of mind, I calmly imbued my legs with magecraft. I landed in the hole more-or-less unharmed, then kicked off against the dirt—the hole was narrow, so it was practically begging me to bounce off its walls to escape. I got out within seconds.

“Wha?! Falling into a hole that deep didn’t even faze you!”

“And you got out of it? That’s impossible!”

Glenn and Mikhail were both visibly thrown for a loop after seeing me climb out of their hole so nonchalantly. They were some real jerks, dropping me down a hole in the expectation that I'd get hurt—that was basically a criminal act.

What were they planning to do if I couldn't get out of the hole? If Azalea found out, I had no doubt she would have beaten them within an inch of their lives. It was worrisome how stupid those two were at their age—they're supposed to be the next heads of the house, after all. The idea of them managing the estate was so ridiculous, I couldn't help but laugh.

Showing them the bread I'd snatched as I fell into the hole, I flashed them a smile as I turned on my heels. I thought maybe I should leave them with some parting words too... Actually, I had just the thing.

"Thanks, Glenn. What a fun present!" I smirked.

"H-Hisui!" He shouted after me. I didn't bother turning to look back at him, even though I knew he was probably about to explode. Instead, I sprinted into the forest, just like I'd meant to do from the start. Glenn and Mikhail chased after me, but with all the training I'd done, they were no match for either my stamina or legs. I soon lost them.

And I didn't even need to use magecraft to do it.

☆

After ten minutes of dashing through the forest, partway through my run to the forest clearing, the three goddesses appeared before me. There was still a lot of distance to cover before I reached my destination, so I stopped, thinking it was curious that they'd appeared early today.

"Huey! Good morning!"

A woman with pink hair and golden eyes—the Light Goddess Fouré—appeared directly in front of me, and she pulled me into an embrace. Behind her, two other women—one with white hair, and one with black—both issued their own morning greetings.

"Good morning, Hisui. You met with quite a bit of trouble just now, didn't you?"

"Good morning, little one. Lovely weather today as well, wouldn't you say?"

“Morning, Fouré, Aruna, Cult. Today’s my birthday, so I did end up having to deal with some creeps,” I ruefully acknowledged.

“So it seems. Things are certainly lively this morning.” Aruna gently smiled. I wouldn’t have exactly described the mess with my brothers as *lively*, though.

“We were itching to start celebrating as soon as possible too, Aruna,” said Fouré.

“I suppose that’s true. Well, no matter,” responded Aruna, before she turned her attention to me. “We thought interacting with you where other people might see would cause undue stress, Hisui, so we waited out here.”

“I see. Thanks, everyone.”

“You needn’t thank us. It’s normal for families to celebrate together, after all,” Cult giggled. I was surprised Cult had decided to join in on the festivities. Unlike the other two, she tended to keep a bit distant from me. That was the impression I got, at least, but I admit I didn’t have any basis for this assumption. Maybe she wasn’t keeping me at arm’s length after all—and that prospect made me happy.

Fouré spoke, distracting me from my thoughts. “We planned a party for you, Huey!”

“A party?” I echoed.

“We *have* been family for a whole year. Such a momentous occasion ought to be celebrated,” said Aruna.

“Honestly, I feel that a year might as well be the blink of an eye, Aruna,” Fouré interrupted. Her perspective was understandable—the three of them were goddesses who’d lived thousands of years, after all.

“I agree. It *did* pass in the blink of an eye, but this year was the most entertaining one we’ve ever had. And we have you to thank for that, Hisui.”

“Aruna…” I said quietly, feeling humbled. Aruna beamed at me, the corners of her mouth curling upward into a rare, genuine smile.

“‘Tis true. Our days, once spent in dreary ennui, were colored a lush, vivid green and brought to life by our beloved artist,” remarked Cult, who was smiling as well.

Still hugging me, Fouré planted a kiss on my cheek, and a radiant smile spread across her lips.

“You’re irreplaceable to us, Huey.”

Fouré’s earnest praise drew a bashful chuckle from me. “Thank you everyone. I’m so happy.” I had a feeling this would happen—a feeling that they’d celebrate my birthday, I mean—and that hunch was how I managed to blow off my brothers with a smile.

I’d been able to keep smiling this past year, through all the suffering and abuse, because I believed the three goddesses would be waiting here for me. I was so overcome with happiness…that tears began to roll down my cheeks.

“Hisui?”

“Huey?”

“What’s the matter?”

The three were startled at seeing me cry and hurried to my side, fretting over me. I simply smiled as I wiped away my tears.

“Sorry, everyone. I was so happy I started crying,” I managed to explain.

“Hisui…”

“Huey…”

“Dear soul…”

The three goddesses, looking somewhat relieved, all embraced me. Even Aruna and Cult joined in the hug, though they usually weren’t big on getting close and cuddly.

“We’ll celebrate together every year from now on, so you’ll never feel lonely again,” said Aruna, comforting me.

“Yeah! You’ve got us, Huey, so you’ll never be alone! We’ll always be with you, forever and ever!” chirped Fouré.

“We won’t let you go. Even should you perish, we shall revive you. You shall have no need to feel such sorrow, my dear,” Cult assured.

“I’m so happy to hear you say that, but…it’s impossible to be together forever. I’m human, after all, so I’m going to be gone one day. I don’t *want* to leave you three behind, but that’s just the natural end for mortals,” I sighed.

“Huh? You won’t die, Huey. You’ll completely stop growing or aging at about twenty years of age.”

I took a long pause to process Fouré’s comment. “Come again?”

What? That was the first I’d heard of this. The tears that had been rolling down my cheeks stopped at once.

☆

“I-I’ll stop aging when I’m twenty years old?” I repeated the new information I’d received in a loud voice. Fouré, who’d been the one to drop this bombshell, nodded emphatically.

“Yep! It’s the result of my power. Right now, you’re still growing, since you haven’t completely synchronized with my powers yet, but your body will stop aging when you’re around twenty. After that, you’ll live forever!”

“I-I had no idea… Can godcraft can do that?” I asked, flabbergasted.

Fouré shook her head. “Not usually—you’re special. It’s a side effect of having my powers planted directly in you.”

That made me wonder about the other two powers, of course. “Is the magecraft and spellcraft going to affect me too?”

“No. To living creatures, godcraft is the energy of life, and it’s fundamentally different from magecraft and spellcraft. They won’t affect you so dramatically,” Fouré clarified.

“If I had to say,” Cult interrupted, “my spellcraft’s influence would make it easier for you to resist physical manipulation or influence from others.”

“So I can use spellcraft, but it can’t affect me?”

“That’s right. It is possible to overwrite even the physical composition of humans using spellcraft. Godcraft can also accomplish this, and that *will* work on you, but any attempts to manipulate you with spellcraft will likely be repelled.”

“So I’m basically resistant to spellcraft, then. That’s amazing.”

Godcraft prevented me from aging, while spellcraft prevented my body from being compromised by others. Maybe magecraft had some effect on my physical attributes? Though considering what Aruna told me earlier, magecraft probably didn’t manifest quite like that.

“Indeed. You needn’t worry—we can be together forever,” Cult reassured me.

“All right. I’m happy to hear that!”

I’d become such good friends with the goddesses over this past year, and it looked like death wouldn’t be parting us after all. I still couldn’t quite wrap my head around the fact that my aging would completely stop, so I wasn’t sure what that would be like… It would

probably be fine, though. Or at least, that's what I assumed.

"Okay, that's enough chatting for now. Time for training!" Aruna announced.

"Huh? Weren't we going to have a party?" I asked, confused.

"It's much too early in the day for festivities. If you keep up with your training, we can start the party past noon."

"Okay. Slacking won't help anyway."

"Right. Brace yourself; today's training is special."

I turned her words over in my head. "Special" wasn't a word Aruna used often, and a chill reflexively ran down my spine. Gulping, I awaited her next instructions.

With her lips curling into an amused, knowing smile, she continued.

"Today, we will begin practical training."

☆

The grass crunched crisply underfoot as I walked through the woods. I looked down at the sword in my hand—a real sword, nestled in its scabbard—and mumbled, "Am I really...going to fight a monster?"

My question was meant for the War Goddess Aruna, who was gently floating in the air above me.

She responded in her usual tone. "That's right. You've been hard at training this past year, so I'm sure you'll be victorious."

Fouré cut in, encouraging me. "You have the sword and armor Cult crafted for you, after all! There's nothing to worry about!"

"I'm going to worry anyway! There's no way I wouldn't. This is my first real fight, so of course I'm going to be nervous," I sighed. That's right... I was going to fight a monster now, as Aruna had dictated. My armaments had been created by Cult's spellcraft: an ordinary iron sword and light armor.

They were tools to protect me and to kill my enemies.

I meant to steel my resolve a bit as I walked, but anxiety set in more and more with every step. Then Aruna spoke as though she could see right through me.

"There aren't any powerful monsters nearby. All the really strong ones are a little ways away, and you wouldn't be able to defeat those as you are anyway. So don't worry!"

I balked at that. “Huh? Was that meant to help me feel better?”

Didn’t that mean there were monsters roaming the Clematis lands that would still be able to kill me after a full year’s worth of training? My heart began to beat even faster, my hand shaking with fear.

“If a monster you can’t handle appears, I’ll kill it. Should you die, as long as Fouré’s here you can be revived.”

“Now that you mention it, yeah. I guess that’s true.”

The Light Goddess Fouré was a part of my new family. The godcraft she commanded was not simple healing but complete restoration. Healing and restoration seemed like the same thing, but they weren’t—restoration implied actually manipulating time. No matter how physically injured I got, she could return my body to its original state. As long as she was around, I could never die. I was sure dying would hurt, but knowing it wouldn’t be permanent relieved a bit of my fear.

I wondered how it felt to be eaten by a monster. Today, I finally, truly understood what it was like for Azalea to face all those dangerous creatures.

“Ah, here comes one, Huey. Get ready,” Fouré suddenly said, as she was able to sense the location of living creatures. As soon as she issued her warning, I gasped, and a terrible tension seized my entire body. I immediately pulled the sword from its scabbard and stood poised with it directly in front of me, ready to strike.

Just as Fouré had said, a single monster shortly emerged from the thickets.

Save for its sable pelt, it looked much like a wolf. A monster like this was unmistakably a creature of darkness. I’d seen this variety of beast countless times before, but Aruna had always defeated them. Now that I had to fight it myself, I was gripped by a fear I had never yet experienced.

The lupine monster let out a deep growl upon seeing me. Its eyes blazed red, evidence of its wrath and bloodlust.

So this was what it meant to truly stand before a monster. Azalea had prevailed over her fear and fought monsters for years, hadn’t she?

Fear. Terror. My legs were frozen, rendering escape impossible. Still, I gripped the sword with all my strength.

That’s right. I had reasons why I couldn’t run. If I abandoned

this fight, I could never hope for a decent life in this world. Right now, I needed the strength of will to vanquish the terror that threatened to overwhelm me.

I'd sworn I'd do my best for Azalea, hadn't I? I was going to become strong, and give Glenn and Mikhail their just deserts. If I stayed weak, they'd just continue bullying me. I hated being helpless.

Move. Move! *Move!*

I knew I could win. I believed in myself...and kicked off against the ground, breaking into a run.

The battle began.

Seeing my reaction to its presence, the monster also leaped into action, snarling viciously. With the both of us racing toward each other, the distance between us was soon closed.

My opponent was the faster one, slashing at me with a rake of its claws. I jerked to the right, just barely managing to dodge. A thin line of red cut across my cheek, dripping blood.

I didn't have time to agonize about it, though. Focusing, I spun around and turned back toward the monster, slashing at it from behind. It couldn't keep up with my movements and, even though it attempted to evade my strike, my sword cleaved straight through its body. The blade swept through its body all too easily, with barely any resistance at all.

With a dull thud, the monster's body fell to the ground. Silence permeated the air as I stood dumbfounded, staring at it. The first to break the silence was Fouré, who was looking down at the scene from her perch in the sky.

"You did it! Congrats, Huey!" she cheered, then wrapped her arms around me in a tight embrace.

The fact that I'd won finally sank in.

"I-Is it...over?"

It had been a quick battle, which surprisingly made the victory rather unsatisfying. I'd been slow to attack out of fear at the beginning of the fight, but once I conquered my anxiety, it was over in a flash. With magecraft augmenting my abilities, I was stronger and swifter than the monster.

"It's over. You did well, Hisui. I knew you'd win," said Aruna. She patted my head and hugged me as well, even though Fouré was still wrapped around me.

“Are all monsters this weak?” I asked.

“It wasn’t weak at all. You’ve grown, Hisui. There’s no way the average human could’ve defeated that monster.”

“I’ve…grown…” I repeated her words to myself. For the past year, I’d single-mindedly dedicated myself to training.

Day in and day out, I’d swung my sword.

Day in and day out, I’d released magecraft and controlled it.

Day in and day out, I’d been trounced by Aruna during training.

But I’d never once *felt* even a sliver of growth. Now, I saw… I really had become stronger. The realization finally sank in, hitting me palpably. Clenching my fist, my expression relaxed—but the feeling of victory was short-lived.

“It’s fine to bask in your achievements, but I’ll be having you fight many more,” Aruna said, rousing me from my thoughts. “Monsters ordinarily attack in groups, and those kinds of fights tend to turn chaotic. Once you can easily deal with those situations, I’ll consider you a fledgling.”

“I’m not even a fledgling yet?”

“Of course not. You’ve got so much more to learn, Hisui.” Aruna quietly laughed, then released me from her hug.

In her own way, she must’ve been telling me not to get too full of myself and to aim for greater heights. I nodded, and once Fouré let go of me, I began to plod through the forest again.

The monster’s corpse was placed in Cult’s “Bag of Holding” for safekeeping. A strange curio, it could apparently fit an unlimited number of things inside it, no matter their size—which made it an awfully convenient bag.

☆

Afterward, with Fouré’s help I managed to defeat over ten monsters. Once I was certain I could handle fights against two or three monsters, my confidence grew a little, and I decided I’d be more proactive about engaging monsters going forward. This way, my sisters and I could have meat, and if it was well stored and well prepared, they could cook with it. Meat had the vital protein and calories they needed, so I couldn’t miss the chance to bring some home.

“Good job, Huey!” Fouré cheered.

I returned the sword to its scabbard and sighed, exhausted. Fouré, seeing this, gave me a pat on the head as if to soothe me—even though I was an adult on the inside.

“Thanks, Fouré. You helped so much by healing me and finding my opponents today,” I said in appreciation.

“Oh no, you were so strong that you didn’t even need healing at all.”

“Still, I’m happy you were there with me. It really gives me peace of mind.” I thanked her from the bottom of my heart with a wide grin. When I did, she suddenly blushed and backed away from me. Putting a hand over her cheeks, she seemed to be lost in thought.

“Th-That was so destructively powerful! Now I get why Aruna was done in by it.”

“Quit making up nonsense, or I’ll knock you into next week,” Aruna snapped. Despite the sharp quip, however, Fouré didn’t appear particularly bothered by Aruna’s comment and simply stared at me without another word. I tilted my head in confusion, not fully grasping what they were talking about, and refrained from replying.

“I’ve finished collecting the corpses. We can start the party now,” Cult called over.

“Oh, right. We were going to celebrate my birthday.”

Her words incidentally reminded me of the original plan. Having been fighting monsters for hours, I’d completely forgotten.

“Yes. Let’s move a little ways away from here. I’ll create a table and some chairs where we’ll hold the party. You can leave everything to me.”

“Thanks, Cult.”

Aruna and Fouré, who had been on the verge of fighting, returned to their senses at Cult’s reminder. With the three goddesses in tow, I picked a random direction and headed deeper into the woods. Honestly, I had no idea where we were. I made a mental note to ask Fouré later.

☆

“All righty, I’m gonna get some food just for Huey!” Fouré loudly announced, her voice full of vim and vigor, after we found

ourselves at another clearing. However, Cult interrupted her before she could set off.

“If we need meat, we have some from the monsters Hisui defeated.”

“Oh! Then what about farm-fresh veggies and stuff?”

“We won’t exactly find those lying around out here. I’ll create some.”

Slightly put off, Fouré thought for a moment before exclaiming. “What about decorations?!”

“I’ll make those too,” Cult countered.

“Isn’t there *anything* I can do?”

“Sometimes you ought to let others handle things and just rest, Fouré.” Cult, having command of almighty spellcraft, gently refused Fouré’s help, despite the latter’s excitement. There really wasn’t anything to do about this situation; Cult was perfectly capable of doing everything on her own.

“Please stand back, Hisui. It wouldn’t do for you to get hurt.”

“All right.” Just as instructed, I distanced myself from Cult. Right after I did, she extended her right hand, and a table and some chairs appeared from thin air. She had converted spellcraft energy itself into physical objects.

Next, she arranged food on the table. Using the meat from the monsters I’d defeated, she transformed them with spellcraft. The arrangement of the food was relatively random, but it appeared she could create even complex dishes on her own.

Finally, she created drinks, and adorned the trees around us with various glittering decorations and chains. The party arrangements were finished.

“Come, it’s time to eat. Please have as much as you like, dear.”

“Thank you, Cult. You’re always so kind and helpful.”

“Not at all. I’d do anything at all if it would please you.” Cult threw her arms around me in an embrace, which was rare for her. Her body was the most developed of the three of them, and it was embarrassing feeling the squish of her massive breasts against my body. This was exactly the type of thing that made me want to hide my head.

“All right, stop messing around over there. Hurry up and eat, or the food will get cold,” Aruna growled.

“If it gets cold, I can simply warm it up.”

“Yes, of course. Now take your seat.”

Cult flashed a cold glare at Aruna, then both she and I scooted away from each other. She seemed a little disappointed.

“Okay, let’s get this party started! Let’s make sure Huey really enjoys this!” The moment I sat down, Fouré raised her voice, cheering up the atmosphere. Aruna fed me her favorite of the dishes, then Fouré swapped with her and teased me into opening my mouth so she could feed me as well. Even Cult put all her effort into pampering me.

This day had been the single liveliest day of my life as Hisui.

☆

“Whew… I’m stuffed.”

Having eaten more than half of the massive amount of food that had been prepared, I leaned against the back of my chair. My stomach was bloated with food. As I sat sipping a drink, I looked up to watch the sky that was gradually being steeped in an orange glow.

Today had been such a blast.

As I reflected on the day, Fouré’s chest suddenly entered my vision from behind. It was very obvious she was resting her breasts on my face.

“F-Fouré?! What?” I squeaked, flustered. She returned a light giggle.

“I was just admiring the sunset,” she answered.

“Well, I was thinking back on my life.”

“You sound like such an old man when you say that.”

“I *am* an adult on the inside, you know,” I reminded her.

“Oh, that’s right. You were reincarnated here, so you still have memories of your past life.”

“Yeah. So I was thinking, this has been the best time of my life—including my old one. And it’s thanks to you three.”

“Huey…”

I really wanted her to get her chest off me as soon as possible, though. My one-liners were never going to sound as cool as I wanted in this position. Then, as if my silent wish had gotten through to her, Fouré slowly pulled away from me, sat down, and began to work her godcraft.

“Fouré? What are you doing?”

She was releasing an incredible amount of power. Given what was visible to the naked eye as she worked her magic, I could tell a colossal amount of energy was being consumed relative to what she’d released.

Seriously, what was she doing?

“Whew… I made a birthday present just for you, Huey! It’s not all that exciting to just eat and drink on your birthday, right?”

“Huh? No, that was enough. I was really happy.”

“Nuh-uh! Even if you’re happy with just the party, I’m not! We had a lot of fun because of you too, Huey.”

Fouré gently smiled, radiating a golden light. Her expression was maternal, and I was dazzled by it. As she smiled, the energy she was releasing intensified, then finally converged. Light settled in her open palm, the size of a… Huh? Was that some sort of living creature?

In her hand, a tiny chick had appeared.

Chapter 3: A New Family Member

A tiny chick was born in the cradle of Fouré's open palm—she must've created it through her godcraft powers. It was incredible to see that she was capable of creating a life.



Despite my surprise, I managed to recall what she'd said earlier.

"Um, Fouré? Don't tell me *this* is my birthday present…"

She shook her head at my question before responding, her tone playful. "Heh heh! It sure *is* your present!" And with that, she held the newborn chick out to me. I wasn't sure if I should accept, though. Was I supposed to be happy about this? I really had no idea how to respond to her gift.

"Th-Thanks, Fouré."

"You're very welcome! While I was creating it, I poured a ton of my power into this chick. If you feed it and take good care of it, it'll grow big and strong—just like you!"

"Will it grow up to be a chicken?" I asked.

"Who knows! How you raise it will determine what it becomes, so that's something to look forward to!"

"I do wish your gift wasn't quite so incomprehensible…but thank you. And I do mean it."

"Oh, by the way—it feeds on godcraft energy! So let's get you started on learning it!" Fouré cheerfully exclaimed.

"What? Hang on. What do you mean by that?"

I wasn't the one who'd responded to Fouré's. Aruna, who'd been watching our exchange from a short distance away, had blurted out in surprise.

"I mean exactly what I said. Huey's been training his magecraft abilities for a full year already, so I think it's about time he started learning godcraft!"

"He can't! He's still weak—far too weak!" Aruna protested.

I couldn't help but groan at her comment. She hadn't held back, and her sharp words stabbed me straight in the heart. The shock sent me to my knees, though I was careful not to harm the chick resting in my hands.

Aruna hurriedly apologized. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Hisui. I swear I didn't intend to belittle you."

"I-I know. You're not a mean-spirited person," I said, sighing.

"I am sorry, truly. I'm well aware you're working hard. But still, you agree that you need to be stronger, don't you?"

"Yeah… I do. I know I still have a long way to go. I'd love to start learning godcraft, but I want to make sure I've covered everything in my magecraft training."

"See, Fouré? Even Hisui agrees with me. You're getting far too

ahead of yourself," Aruna snapped, taking advantage of my approval for whatever it was worth in an attempt to pressure Fouré into standing down.

But Fouré didn't yield. In fact, she did quite the opposite: Puffing up her cheeks, she began to throw a tantrum.

"You got to teach Huey your powers from the very start, so you can deal with swapping! I wanted to teach Huey too, and I've been patiently waiting for a whole year! It's my turn now! My turn!"

"For once, I admit I am in agreement with Fouré," Cult cut in.

"Cult?! Now *you're* taking her side?" said Aruna, taken aback.

It was uncommon for Cult to wedge herself into their arguments, and she'd come off like she wasn't interested in the topic at hand, so her speaking up was especially surprising.

"Hisui should be able to study godcraft while he continues his training in magecraft. Simply split his time between the two arts. Besides, he won't have a chance to start learning spellcraft if he doesn't finish learning godcraft first. I am also waiting to teach him, you understand."

"See?! Even Cult's saying to let me teach Huey godcraft! You're stubborn as a mule, Aruna; let me have some of his time too, you tyrant!" Fouré shouted, invigorated by Cult's support.

A vein bulged at Aruna's temple, but she remained silent, and after a short while and a deep sigh, she finally relented. "Very well. We'll have Hisui learn godcraft alongside his magecraft training. Learning how to heal is never a bad idea, after all."

Yeesh. They hadn't even bothered to get permission from me, the actual person they were all talking about, before arriving at a foregone conclusion. Well, I wanted to learn godcraft anyway, so I wasn't exactly going to complain.

"Yay! Did you hear that, Huey? Aruna said I could teach you now!" Aruna threw up both her arms in utter joy. Watching her childlike exuberance curiously stoked a similar happiness in me.

I replied to her with a soft laugh. "So she did. I'm really happy too."

I was a step closer to curing Armeria's illness now, plus I'd be able to heal any injuries Azalea and Cosmos might suffer. This would be a power I could use to help others—of course I was excited.

"*Chirp*, *chirp!*"

“Oh? It’s big enough to make noises already?” I mumbled to myself, surprised. The bird in my hands chirped again as though it could read my mind, then licked at my palm. As I watched, I couldn’t help but be enchanted by how cute it was. In my old life, I’d only ever had pet goldfish. As I watched this tiny bird, my first pet in this life, my expression softened tenderly. Reaching out to it with my pointer finger, I gently stroked its head.

“By the way, Fouré,” I started, prompting her attention.

“What is it?”

“You said it feeds on godcraft energy, but what exactly do you mean by that?”

“Ohhh, that? Well, this chick isn’t like an ordinary creature; it *only* feeds off godcraft energy. So if you channel your power into it, it’ll gradually grow. But keep in mind that there’s only so much it can consume in one day, just like with humans. If you don’t limit your feeding to a certain amount, you’ll be in trouble.”

Ah, I got it. Evidently it was important to Fouré that the chick and I grew up together—hence the daily restriction. Honestly, I just hoped it wouldn’t develop in a weird way.

“Well, I don’t know whether it’ll end up being trouble for me or not, but thank you. I’ll do my best to raise it.”

“Go for it! I made sure it would get attached to you, so you two get along, okay?”

She could even control how her creations imprinted on others? Fouré was amazing. When it came to living creatures, she was really second to none. As I took a moment, silently impressed by Fouré’s immense skill, Cult spoke up from where she stood a short distance behind me.

“Hmm… It’s not fair if Fouré’s the only one who gets to give you a present. I’ll make you a weapon that can cut cleanly through anything,” she mumbled.

Aruna immediately put an end to Cult’s awfully violent-sounding musing. “Don’t, Cult.”

“Why not? Weren’t you just saying that Hisui needs to be stronger?” Cult complained.

“You can’t give him a weapon like that—power isn’t something to be brandished about recklessly. It’ll be best if he uses something that actually suits him,” Aruna admonished. Unimpressed but also unable to disagree, Cult huffed before

folding.

"Grrr... I *guess* I can see the logic." She bit her lip, frustrated, but she wasn't about to give up from a little lecturing. "But in that case, I'll create a weapon that suits dear Hisui perfectly—"

"Don't. Leave that for next year. Hisui will be overwhelmed if we give him a whole bunch of gifts at once."

"What?! Are you telling me to be patient, since Fouré is refusing to be?" Cult snapped.

"Cult! You're being awfully prickly..." Fouré whined.

"You're just overreacting." Cult flatly denied Fouré's allegation, cutting down the latter's suspicions without a hint of reservation. Despite Cult's insistence, however, I found myself siding with Aruna. Honestly, even just having a pet chick was more than I could handle.

"Cult, I'd actually like to wait until next year for your present. Can I?"

She groaned, clearly conflicted, but then relented. "If you insist...then very well. I'll concede. I *can* be patient—you'll see."

"Thanks, Cult. I'll be looking forward to it!"

"Yes, do be excited. I shall create a weapon worthy of its yearlong construction! It will be an incredibly special weapon, mark my words," she promised with a quiet giggle.

Her comment struck me as unnerving, and a bad feeling sank in the pit of my stomach, but I didn't say anything. It was better if Cult remained in good humor.

☆

Finally, the birthday party hosted by these three goddesses came to a close. The Light Goddess, Fouré, had gifted me a curious present, which was currently resting its wings on top of my head. It was still just a baby, so I supposed it couldn't fly yet anyway, but it was already making itself at home on its newfound perch. The chick, which I'd named Dandelion, wasn't very heavy, so I didn't bother removing him—uh, her? I wasn't too sure, but either way—from my head as I made my way home.

Little by little, the manor came into view. I couldn't wait to get to my room and go to sleep, but with such desires comes the worst timing: As I was dreaming of my bed, I happened to bump

into Glenn.

I could only sigh.

"Well, if it isn't Hisui! You really pulled a fast one on me this morning, huh? Thought you could make a fool out of me, didja?" He sneered as he looked down his nose at me. Considering the surprise I'd given him earlier, he'd evidently managed to regain his composure after the fact. Time had done little to quell his anger, though.

He strode toward me, cracking his knuckles as he went. He was probably planning on punching me…but it wasn't as if that mattered, since my magecraft would prevent it from hurting. After developing my abilities over the course of a year, I was well beyond being injured by Glenn's physical attacks. Honestly, if it came to a brawl, I was certain I'd come out the victor.

But if our parents heard that I'd given Glenn an absolutely one-sided thrashing, my secret was sure to be discovered. Even if they didn't, they'd at least be furious that I'd laid a hand on the family heir.

If that was all they were mad about, though, it'd be fine. The only punishments they could conjure up were throwing me out of the house or refusing me food. But if they found out about my magic, I'd *really* have a problem on my hands—it'd be a total disaster, especially if they knew I had the ability to channel magecraft specifically, seeing as our lands were overrun by monsters.

Knowing the stakes, I couldn't fight Glenn fair and square, which frustrated me beyond belief. He was aware I couldn't lay a finger on him as well, so it was no surprise that he bullied me to blow off steam, secure in the knowledge that I wouldn't fight back.

"Hm," he grunted, "You've got something on your head."

His gaze was directed toward Dandelion, who was still perched atop my head. He snatched the little chick up in his hand, gripping him firmly.

"Hey! Let go of him, Glenn!" I shouted, but he was undeterred.

"Shut up, you! Just keep your mouth closed!"

"Ngh!" Glenn kicked viciously at me as I scrambled to try to get Dandelion back. Though it caught me off guard, his blow didn't land—I pulled back and neatly dodged his attack, all the while panicking over how easily he'd managed to steal my new pet. No,

Dandelion was a new family member, created by Fouré herself! I hated the idea of Glenn even just touching him!

I gritted my teeth in frustration, since my hands were tied. I couldn't resort to violence to save Dandelion, who was trapped in Glenn's clutches; if I used force, my secret would be discovered. But on the other hand, I didn't want to see Dandelion suffer. This was the worst possible situation.

I prayed Glenn wouldn't do something rash. And just as I did—

"*Chirp chirp! Chirp!*"

"Argh! What the hell's up with this thing?!"

Neither me nor Glenn had foreseen this: Dandelion forced his way out of Glenn's grip. Was he really that strong? Well... I suppose he *was* created by Fouré, after all, so it wasn't particularly surprising that he was stronger than other creatures—especially pitted against Glenn, given that he was just a human without the ability to command magecraft.

While I stood, thoroughly impressed by Dandelion's unexpected strength, he chose not to return to me right away. Instead, he was flying about, flapping his tiny wings, and he glided around behind Glenn.

"You dumb bird! Get away from Glenn!" Mikhail, who'd been watching the whole game, reached out to try to catch Dandelion on Glenn's behalf. However, Dandelion moved with a nimble grace. Mikhail's chances of catching the bird were practically zero, since he had even less physical prowess than Glenn did.

Dandelion dodged his clumsy swipes easily, then delivered a decisive kick. Perhaps he'd been holding back all this time—or maybe he just hadn't had that much strength initially—but the kick hit Mikhail squarely in the eye.

"Aaaaagh! My eye!" Mikhail screamed, falling to the ground and rolling around pathetically. Seeing his embarrassing state, I laughed in spite of myself.

"Pffft! What are you doing, Mikhail?" I said. He was seriously a loser. But never mind that—more importantly, Dandelion was genuinely incredible. He'd faced off against Mikhail, who was several times his size, and managed to not only dodge an attack, but also land a decisive blow to one of his opponent's eyes.

Glenn, seeing Mikhail sobbing and shouting on the ground, swallowed nervously.

“Damn it… Damn that stupid bird!” Mikhail shrieked.

Oh, he’d really snapped now. That was rare for him. Compared to Glenn, he tended to be rather calm and collected, despite his conniving, scheming ways. But I guess he couldn’t keep his cool after getting kicked in the face.

Tears were streaming out of his injured and bloodshot eye, and he was glaring right at Dandelion. Mikhail then channeled spellcraft energies into his right hand, transforming it into a fireball.

“What?!” What the hell was he doing, spellcrafting a fireball *here* of all places? He’d only just learned how to do this a short while ago, and he was still incapable of controlling it! Maybe what they say about the quiet ones really *is* true.

Panicking, I was preparing to leap in front of Dandelion in order to protect him when I heard a voice from behind me.

“Don’t worry, Huey. Just watch.”

“F-Fouré?” I squeaked her name out under my breath.

Stopping mid-stride, I focused on watching Dandelion and my brothers. At this point, there was no way I’d make it to Dandelion in time anyway. Before I could do anything further, Mikhail let loose his fireball.

Why did Fouré stop me?! I was well aware this was a perilous situation for Dandelion, but now I couldn’t even protect him.

The fireball sped toward the little chick with a burning roar…and Dandelion dodged as though it was nothing.

“Oh.” Of course. Had I remained calm, I would’ve realized Dandelion was going to dodge the fireball with ease. Given Mikhail’s low level of spellcasting, his spells weren’t any faster than if he’d simply thrown a punch. Considering he’d already failed to catch Dandelion, he was never going to hit. Given his tiny size and mobility, as long as Dandelion kept his distance from Mikhail, he’d be able to dodge my clumsy brother.

Dodging wasn’t all that Dandelion was capable of either. His wings seemed to have been imbued with godcraft energy, and at the very moment the fireball passed by him, he struck it with a flap of his feathers, making a sort of *fwack* noise. Still, it was only an attack using godcraft, so all it did was knock Mikhail’s spellcraft-based fireball very slightly off course.

“Huh?”

The fireball suddenly turned. It then sped toward Glenn, who was staring at it in abject shock. The spellcrafted fireball zoomed along its impossible trajectory, and Glenn's reaction was a hair slow, and although the fireball missed hitting him in the face, it did graze his hair...which immediately ignited.

"Aaagh! My head!" Glenn was on fire—or to be more precise, his head was. The fire wasn't exactly big, but having never experienced this before, Glenn was thrown into a panic. He dropped to the ground and rolled about as well, desperate to put the fire out.

"You could just cast a spell to make water..." I let slip a chuckle watching Glenn roll about on the floor, and Dandelion returned to his roost on my head.

"*Chirp!*"

"Oh, you're back!" I exclaimed.

"*Chir-chirp!*" Dandelion chirped as though sighing, and I imagined he was expressing his incredulousness at my brothers. Dandelion nestled back into his seat atop my head. Feeling his light weight on me, I set out—not toward Glenn, of course—and, casting a sidelong glance at the two shrieking boys on the floor, I casually strode into the manor.

☆

"Ha ha ha! That was a fine show, Huey!" Upon arriving at my room, I found Fouré there, clutching her sides as she laughed. Pulling Dandelion down from atop my head, I gave her a half-hearted smile.

"Was it really that funny, Fouré? You're laughing your head off."

"Yes, it really was! Not only were those boys completely at the mercy of my little bird, they began fighting among each other in the end! Your family is really something, Huey."

She was talking about what had happened after I'd left. Evidently, Glenn was furious at Mikhail, whom Glenn was certain had hit him with that spell. Although there was no way Mikhail could manipulate his magic with such precision, Glenn was convinced he'd done it on purpose. Apparently, the wrathful look on Glenn's face was so terrible that Fouré couldn't help but burst out laughing.

I wish I'd seen it, honestly.

"I agree Glenn's pretty dumb, but seriously, Dandelion's really strong." He'd dodged Mikhail's spell with ease, then used his godcraft abilities to deflect the fireball. He was incredible.

"Just for the record, I didn't make the bird strong enough to grow in power by itself. The child's spell was just so terribly weak," laughed Fouré.

"Heh heh. I agree with Fouré's assessment—the boy didn't seem to have much of an affinity for spell casting, given the poor extent of his control," Cult chimed in.

"Really, Cult?" Being the originator of the craft, it was Cult's turn to take the stage on matters of spellcasting. She peered through her long bangs to gaze at me with her red eyes, and nodded slightly.

"Yes. While I don't know how mortals would generally describe his ability, I personally assess him as incapable, to put it in a single word. What has he been doing with his training?" She mused.

"According to my parents, Glenn and Mikhail both have talent, though." Compared to the goddesses, they were powerless, but those same goddesses had at least acknowledged that I had magecraft powers. Was that because of the daily, hellishly rigorous training Aruna put me through?

"Eh heh heh. Since he has such a juvenile grasp of spellcraft, I'm certain you could immediately overtake him. Please, allow me to begin teaching you right away—"

"No, no, no! We're doing godcraft next! You can't cut in line, Cult!"

"But Hisui wishes to learn spellcraft. I should be next to teach him."

"No! Spellcraft is way harder to control than the other two types! It's best if he gets used to godcraft first!"

"Ngh... Fine, though it pains me to give up." Cult's shoulders slumped, the very picture of dejection. I tried cheering her up.

"It's okay, Cult. I really do want to learn spellcraft, so I'll do my best with godcraft. Just wait a little longer, okay?"

"Thank you, my dear. I look forward to the day I can start teaching you." I barely made out the hint of a smile from between the locks of her long bangs.

Cult was the very image of Japanese beauty. She clearly had an

extraordinarily pretty face—when I could see it behind her bangs, that was. But according to her, the way she kept her hair now made things easier for her. Maybe she was a bit of a wallflower.

That aside... I sat on my bed and after straightening my posture, I began petting the chick's head. "Now then, I gotta get to sleep and get my energy back up so I can start learning godcraft."

"Nighty-night, Huey!"

"Good night, Hisui."

"Rest well, young one."

"*Chirp*..."

I drifted into slumber with three goddesses and one little chick watching over me. Starting tomorrow, more days of hustle and bustle awaited.

☆

Two days after my birthday party, I was back to practicing my swordsmanship with Aruna as always, training in magecraft. I'd gotten used to combat with monsters, and I'd engage them in battle whenever I found one. Time passed in the blink of an eye, and morning disappeared into noon. Just before we broke for lunch, I got my first lecture on godcraft.

"Okay! So Huey, before we eat, I'll teach you a little bit about godcraft!" Fouré announced cheerfully.

"Thanks, Fouré." I straightened up attentively and listened to her talk.

"Now let's begin our class, *Godcraft with Fouré*!" Fouré clapped, her action reminiscent of the clapping that welcomed people onto talk shows. "First of all, let's review the basics. It is an energy created by Fouré—that's me—and it can heal all living creatures as well as cure them of their ailments. It is also filled with a purifying power, so it can deal a vast amount of damage to ghost-type monsters and the like."

"Ghost-type monsters?" I repeated the term, curious.

"Oh, you know, things like zombies, ghouls, and liches," Fouré explained.

"Aren't zombies and ghouls the same thing?"

"Not at all. They're similar, but they're still different types of monsters. Zombies are created when ghosts come to possess a

corpse. They have no mental faculty and simply move on instinct. Their stats are basically zero—that's how weak they are—and they're weak to fire too. Honestly, they're not capable of anything but violence."

"Huh, I see..."

"Now, ghouls on the other hand, are living creatures under a particular curse. Basically, they're monsters created by a status condition. They have very low intelligence, much like zombies, but their physical ability is far higher. Once fully grown, ghouls can develop their mental abilities and learn things, and they can even have regenerative abilities. They're also not necessarily weak to fire, unlike zombies. They're practically a whole monster upgrade over zombies, to be honest."

"Then what about liches?"

"Liches are a very high-level monster. They can actually create ghost-type monsters like zombies and ghouls themselves, and they can also cast very high-level curses that are similar to spellcraft. If you fought one as you are now, you'd die," she explained.

"They're that strong, huh..." It sounded like the low-level monsters I'd been fighting up till now were nothing compared to liches.

"From what I've heard, some countries have actually been conquered by liches."

"What?" I never would've guessed they'd have enough power to topple entire nations. I gulped.

"Well, liches are awfully rare monsters, so you'll probably never run into one," Fouré assured me.

"I-I see."

"Mm-hmm. Compared to other types of monsters, the population of ghost-types is pretty minuscule."

"How come there are so few?"

"Because they're weak to daylight. It causes their numbers to dwindle naturally."

"Oh."

This world sounded pretty well-balanced to me.

"But you still need to be careful—there have been cases of individual high-level monsters that overcame weaknesses like that."

“Got it. You really do know a lot, don’t you, Fouré?” I remarked.

“Heh! I’d have to know at least *that* much!” She puffed up proudly.

“You’re truly a monster maniac,” Aruna interrupted.

“Aruna… I’m not sure I like the way you put that.”

“All right, sure.”

Fouré stared at Aruna reproachfully. But Aruna ignored her, as cool as a cucumber like always.

“Never mind that or the monsters—let’s get back to discussing godcraft, or we’ll end up having a late lunch,” Aruna prodded.

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have butt in with your pointless comment, Aruna. Gosh,” Fouré huffed. “Anyway, where was I?”

“You were saying something about godcraft having powers of purification,” I reminded her.

“Oh, that’s right! Exactly—while godcraft is well-known and respected for having the power of healing and restoration, it can be used for offense as well!”

Cult chuckled. “Instead of attacking with godcraft, I imagine it’d be faster to throw a magecraft-augmented punch, or cast a spell using spellcraft.”

“Hush, Cult! This is *my* class time!” Fouré scowled at Cult, who’d butted in once again. Cult quieted down, but her smile remained splayed across her lips.

Fouré began to speak once more.

“While it’s true that godcraft’s offensive power isn’t as efficient as magecraft or spellcraft, it’s second to none when it comes to healing. I could even revive the dead if I wanted!”

“Wow, that’s incredible. Would it be possible for me to reach that level one day?”

“Of course! You’ll get there lickety-split with me guiding you!”

“That’s reassuring.” Her infinite positivity and brightness prompted an embarrassed smile from me, but her words *did* boost my confidence a bit.

“Now then… That’s enough explanation. How about we try putting it into practice? You’ve been healed through godcraft plenty of times already, so you basically understand what sort of power it is, right?”

“Yeah, thanks to you.” The energy that felt like warm water must’ve been godcraft, while magecraft had been like icy water. It

felt rather different, so I could tell them apart easily.

“Now, try focusing godcraft energies into your hand, just like you do with magecraft. Compared to that, godcraft is harder to control and manipulate, so take it slow. It’s perfectly fine to get used to it little by little.”

“Okay.”

Just as Fouré instructed, I attempted to focus godcraft energies into my right hand. When I did, I found its resistance was indeed stronger than that of magecraft, and it was even more difficult to manipulate it.

I gasped from the effort. “It’s really not going as well as I imagined it would.”

“Well, godcraft is more delicate and tenuous than magecraft. Focus it like you’re gently scooping it up.”

“Gentle… Like I’m scooping it…” I repeated.

I envisioned a spoon in my mind. Relaxing the amount of effort I was exerting, I slowly scooped up godcraft energies…

“Mm-hmm!”

“Very good! You’ve managed to channel godcraft energies into your right hand, Huey!” Just like that, my right hand was emitting a faint golden light. This must’ve been Fouré’s godcraft energies, which I’ve seen countless times. I’d just barely managed to make it form.

“W-Wow, so godcraft can be seen with the naked eye too?” I spoke to Fouré, careful not to break my concentration.

“Yup, that’s right. Magecraft and spellcraft are both invisible unless you deliberately increase the density, but godcraft can be seen even in very small amounts. Isn’t it pretty?”

“Magecraft’s pretty too. You agree, right, Hisui?” Aruna interjected.

“And that also goes for spellcraft. Look here, Hisui,” Cult followed up, vying for my attention. As if competing with each other, the other two goddesses began showing off their powers in response to Fouré’s words.

Fouré puffed out her cheeks again in annoyance.

“Stop it, you two! Don’t interrupt!”

“You really don’t think I’d let disparaging magecraft slide, do you?”

“Same for me when it comes to spellcraft. I would like you to

amend your statement."

"You two normally wouldn't even bat an eye at what I said! I wasn't disparaging anything!"

The three goddesses nattered on. I couldn't let it break my concentration, so I ignored their chatter and focused on the energies in front of me. Gradually, I increased the amount of godcraft I had channeled into my hand.

"Hm? Wow! You're really good at this, Huey! You can already manipulate godcraft?"

"Kinda? I've had plenty of training from magecraft, so maybe I've gotten a little better at controlling energies."

Aruna chuckled proudly. "So he can thank me for his skill."

"How could you take credit for his hard work like that, Aruna!"

"I only speak the truth. I'll admit Hisui also worked very diligently, though."

"Didn't I help at all, Huey?" Fouré sounded shocked, but I couldn't find the words to respond to her—and of course, my concentration shattered. The godcraft energies dissipated. I sighed.

"Compared to magecraft, I really can't keep it going for long."

"That's no surprise. You've only just begun to learn godcraft, after all. Honestly, you're incredibly quick compared to ordinary people! I'm sure you'll learn to heal in no time flat!"

"Really?"

"Yup. Most people need a lot of time before they can release godcraft energy, after all."

"So what Aruna said was true, then. By learning magecraft first, I got a head start on godcraft compared to other people."

"That's not all. You're also far more talented at it than others." Aruna let slip a chuckle as she corrected my assessment.

"Thanks, Aruna."

All of a sudden, I was motivated to keep going. I focused my mind into my hand again and channeled godcraft energy. This time, I was able to manipulate it far more smoothly than my first attempt. With that, I knew the day I could cure Armeria wasn't too far off.

☆

After I began learning godcraft, a whole month passed in the blink of an eye. I learned the foundations of godcraft well, especially with Fouré's direction. Now I was able to heal light wounds by myself.

"How was that?"

I tried channeling godcraft into my right hand. Looking at it, Fouré clapped her hands. "Very good! You can even heal while holding a conversation!"

"Thank goodness. I was pretty shocked when you said it would be more effective if I just got injured so I can heal an actual wound. I guess it was worth pressing on even though my hand was getting torn up."

"Hm… When you put it that way, it sounds like you're making me out to be some kind of demon." She puffed out her cheeks. Her anger was self-evident, written plainly on her face like a book.

"I do think it was a really cruel method of teaching," I admitted.

"I'm telling you, it was the fastest way to learn! You agree on that, don't you?"

"It didn't actually hurt, but think of how I feel *watching* my hand get torn to shreds every time, Fouré…"

Fouré's godcraft had cut off and compartmentalized my sense of pain as I sustained injuries, so I didn't feel anything. Still, it was a terrible experience, visually speaking. It was no surprise that the sight made me sick.

Fouré sniffled. "Sorry." Chastised, she hung her head as she apologized to me. At first, she hadn't brooked any complaints, which had surprised me—but I was the one who'd pushed to continue the training, after all. I apologized in return with a small laugh.

"I'm just messing with you, Fouré. I shouldn't have been so harsh. I'm sorry. You're the one who enabled me to learn godcraft so quickly. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

"R-Really? You're not mad at me or anything?"

"Not at all."

"You don't think I'm being a pest, do you? Or that I'm a pain in the butt, right? And you don't actually think I'm as scary as a demon, I hope? Or that you'd rather I stopped talking so much—"

"Whoa, calm down!" The glow disappeared from her eyes. She was rambling, but I could sense actual fear from her.

“I could never hate you, Fouré. I’ll always love you no matter what happens.”

“Huey… I wub you too!”

“Whoa!” Fouré knocked me over, climbing on top of me. Her breathing was wild and ragged as she spoke.

“Th-This is for your own good, Huey. You’re a boy, after all, so you probably have a hard time keeping it bottled up, right?”

Excuse me? Bottling *what* up?

“I know it’s rough for boys who can’t get relief, and I can’t have children because I’m a fairy. So you don’t need to hold back.”

Just what, exactly, did she think we were going to do?

Fouré kept mumbling to herself in a truly spine-chilling way. Her clothes began to glow, then dissipated into fine motes of light —or they would have, if a shock hadn’t run through her before she was thrown to the side. A large tree was knocked down with a creak and vanished from my line of sight.

Standing in front of me was Aruna.

“Good grief… How could she get horny like that all of a sudden?”

“H-Horny?”

“If we let her continue, she would have eaten you up…in an obscene way.”

“What…?”

I never imagined Aruna would ever utter words like that. At the same time, I now understood that was how Fouré saw me.

My heart started pounding like mad, for multiple reasons.

☆

“Owwie… Aruna, you really don’t hold back when it comes to butting into things.” Fouré finally returned, rubbing her head all the while. Unsurprisingly, she was completely unscathed.

“Ah, welcome back, Fouré. Don’t do anything weird, okay?”

“What do you mean? I have the same feelings as any living creature… I just got a little carried away, that’s all!”

“And I’m telling you that’s not okay, you dunce,” responded Aruna, exasperated.

“Why not? Fairies can’t have sex now?”

“Hisui’s still a child. You need to think of these things from a

mortal's point of view."

"Oh." Fouré nodded her assent, as if to say she'd forgotten that fact.

I could hear Aruna sigh deeply.

"I admit I understand where you're coming from, though. He's spiritually and mentally an adult, after all."

"That was my bad. It's true—Huey's so mature that I completely forgot. Besides, for us fairies, it doesn't make much of a difference if someone's ten or a hundred or a thousand years old."

"Quite an extrapolation," reflected Aruna.

I should have known that, given they were goddesses who commanded entire faiths. I'm sure they'd lived for more than ten thousand years—for much longer than I could even imagine.

But regardless, I was still a human child. I couldn't be doing naughty things with girls at my age. Besides, my age really dragged me down in that department anyway; it was practically impossible to get into the mood in the first place.

"Anyway, let's get back to my godcraft training."

"Okaaay."

Aruna spoke up. "Don't forget about your magecraft drills either, okay? I'll be sure to let you know when it's time."

"He already did his magecraft drills for today!" Fouré pouted.

"What? He didn't do even half of what he usually does. And during combat, the chick helped by taking out some of the enemies."

Aruna and Fouré were beginning to fight again, face-to-face. Watching the two of them, I awkwardly chuckled in an effort to allay their misgivings.

"Since I'm learning both, wouldn't it be nice if I could actually practice both at the same time..." As I spoke, a thought popped into my mind. I looked at both my hands with a gasp.

"Huey? What's the matter?"

"*Chirp?*" Noticing the sudden change in my demeanor as she was arguing, Fouré and her tiny charge asked after me, confused.

"Oh... I just had a thought," I explained.

"About what?"

"Whether I could combine magecraft and godcraft."

"You want to combine magecraft..." Aruna said, questioningly.

"And godcraft?" Fouré followed up, just as confused.

They both tilted their heads in bewilderment, their doubt writ plain on their faces. Since each of the three goddesses only controlled their individual powers, I didn't think they'd have the answer to my question, so I proceeded to explain my idea.

"Yeah. For example, magecraft can reinforce all things, right?"

"Yes. Both flesh and inorganic matter," Aruna nodded.

"And godcraft can create life, impart life, and return life to the fallen."

"That's right. Healing, restoration, and purification are all within the realm of light."

"Then couldn't we pour magecraft energies into godcraft to reinforce it?"

"Huh?!" Fouré and Aruna echoed each other, and their expressions both immediately changed to one of abject shock.

Cult spoke up, joining our conversation after watching over us from a ways away. "Oh, was that what you were thinking? You're right that we've never really considered that. Theoretically, it's possible—Aruna's powers are pretty much omnipotent, after all."

"How interesting! I never would have thought to try combining our powers to strengthen them."

"You three have perfect control of each of your powers, so you don't need to combine them, but I'm still weak. So while I was reflecting on how to become stronger, that idea came to me."

"Oh Huey, you're always so smart and inventive!"

"Oof!" Fouré tackled me. Her soft, puffy pillows squished against me as she patted me on the head over and over again.

"I didn't think of that either. But I see... By using magecraft as a fulcrum to strengthen other powers, maybe we can create something even stronger," Fouré mused aloud.

"Can we try it? I'm sure it'll be tough, but I feel like it's worth a shot."

"I agree! Don't worry, if your arm goes flying off, I'll patch you right up!"

"Please don't say stuff like that..." I felt a measure of fear just imagining my arm flying off like Fouré had anticipated. Even if I could be healed, it was still a scary thought.

"I am also in agreement," Aruna acquiesced. "But I imagine it's incredibly difficult to activate multiple powers at once. The resistance will also be stronger, so please be careful."

“Understood. What do you think, Cult?”

“I too am curious to see the results of your idea. I have no objections.”

“Thanks, everyone. Let’s try it now.”

Fouré pulled away from me, and I began channeling godcraft into my right hand under the watchful eye of the three goddesses and one little chick. A faint light glowed gold, and from there, I channeled magecraft energies into my left hand and slowly brought my hands together.

However…

“Guh! Th-This is really hard.” I’d already been controlling magecraft for over a year. I thought I’d gotten fairly used to it given how long I’d been at it, but the resistance from trying to mix it with godcraft was extraordinary. Furthermore, this was just from *activating* two powers at once. Who knew what would happen when I tried to actually combine them? I got the sense that I already knew what would happen.

I released both energies at once, letting them disappear.

“Huey?”

“No can do. I’ll just fail—I can tell without even trying it. I don’t have enough skill or experience to combine them.”

“Very observant of you, Hisui.” Aruna clapped a hand on my shoulder for just an instant. I was thoroughly fatigued from my attempt at combining the two powers.

She smiled gently at me, then spoke. “You’re right—your arms might have gone flying off if you’d continued your trial and failed to control the two powers. It was a wise decision to stop.”

“S-Seriously?”

I hadn’t predicted things would end up quite *that* badly. Good job, me. An incredible relief washed over me knowing that stopping had been the right choice. But I was still curious.

“By the way, everyone, do you think you could all work together and activate your powers at once?”

“Work together?” A visibly disgruntled look flitted across Aruna’s face. The expressions of the other goddesses did the same. They looked away from each other with pursed lips, each looking displeased.

“Looks like that’s a no,” I observed. “My magecraft is already perfect. There’s no need to cooperate.”

“Well, my godcraft is perfect too, okay?”

“*Chirp!*”

“And my spellcraft is all-powerful. It needs nothing more.”

“R-Right…”

I didn’t have to wonder why they all looked so disgruntled for long, as it immediately became clear: They each thought their own power was already at the apex of perfection—and perfection didn’t need anything contaminating it. They sure were stubborn, these three goddesses. Shrugging in exasperation, I changed my phrasing. “Well, that’s too bad. I just wanted to see if my guess was right, but if you three don’t want to do it, then that’s okay. Besides, if I practice enough then I’ll be able to do it myself eventually.”

“Huey…”

“Hisui…”

“Darling child…”

All three of them looked at me, and I smiled a little sadly to pull at their heartstrings.

“O-Oh, fine… I suppose I could compromise.”

“I’ll help as well, just for Hisui. Though I can’t say I like the idea at all.”

“Heh heh heh. It is my duty to fulfill your every wish. Please, allow me.”

And just like that, the three goddesses were on board with my plan. I showed my appreciation with a smile. “Thanks… Aruna, Fouré, Cult.”

Now we could see if my hypothesis was correct. First, I had Aruna and Cult combine their magecraft and spellcraft. Their energies mixed into a reddish-purple light and a wave of pressure burst forth, but it didn’t faze the goddesses at all. They forced their combined energy to obey.

“Whew. So this is two kinds of magic combined…or rather, spellcraft that’s been augmented by magecraft.”

“I’m not pleased about this, but it’s true that there is an incredible power hidden here. Perhaps, if we use this…” Cult mumbled.

“What was that? Did you say something, Cult?”

“Not at all; don’t mind me. Now that we’ve tested your theory, might I dispel my energy now?”

“I’ll release my magecraft as well.”

They both stopped channeling their powers at the exact same time. I clapped for them. “Wow! You pulled it off so well—not that I was expecting anything less. I bet with spellcraft like that, you could create anything.”

“Okay, it’s my turn now! I’ll use my godcraft!”

“You’re oddly excited to try this, Fouré,” Cult commented.

“I imagine she just wants Hisui to praise her. She’s a simpleton,” Aruna sighed.

“Hey! Shut up, seriously,” Fouré snapped peevishly at Aruna and Cult, given their rude, but not entirely untrue, remarks.

It was Fouré’s turn now. Switching places with Cult, she released her godcraft magic overhead. The golden light of her power formed a massive sphere, into which Aruna channeled her magecraft without a single word. Though the mixed energy had been reddish purple when Cult had attempted to combine her energy with Aruna’s, this orb was purple interspersed with gold.

As I stood wide-eyed at the strangely fantastical colors, Aruna finished augmenting Fouré’s godcraft. Maybe it was just my imagination, but I felt like it was over more quickly than it had been with Cult.

Fouré smirked. “Heh! Godcraft strengthened faster than spellcraft, and there weren’t any problems whatsoever!”

“Are you trying to imply something, Fouré?” Cult cast a sharp, sullen glare at Fouré.

Fouré merely looked away and attempted her terrible whistling. *Fwee.* “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You’re ridiculous.” Aruna didn’t hesitate to take a stab straight into Fouré’s pride, which had definitely taken enough damage to stagger her. Seemed like her defensive powers didn’t extend all the way to mental damage.

I clapped even as I laughed humorlessly.

“That was awesome, Fouré! So that’s what strengthened godcraft is like. But you can already revive the dead, so I guess it can’t really get any better than that.”

“Y-Yeah. My powers are already perfect, so I suppose that is a little disappointing.”

“What? Magecraft is perfect too, you know.”

“And so is spellcraft. It doesn’t need to be enhanced to be

useful. Strengthening it merely improves the result commensurate with the amount of energy used…”

Ah… Of course things ended up this way again. Dandelion, who’d been nesting atop my head, flapped his wings and stared at the three goddesses before us, who were starting yet another fight.

“Do you think they only get into fights because they’re such good friends, Dandelion?”

“*Chirp*…” As if to say he didn’t know.

I didn’t really get it either.

☆

Leaving the bickering goddesses to their own devices, I returned to the manor. I was reaching for the front door when it suddenly struck me that I could hear some sort of conversation unfolding in the foyer beyond the doors. There were two voices, one male and one female.

Opening the door to reaffirm my guess, I saw two of my siblings arguing up a storm in front of the central staircase.

It was Azalea and Glenn.

“Quit bad-mouthing Hisui already. How many times have I had to tell you?”

“Oh, shut up. Since when do I have to listen to you? I’m a free man. And besides, Mikhail says the same stuff anyway.”

“And I’ve told him off for it just the same. But you’re both dumb, so I guess you don’t even bother trying to get it into your thick skulls.”

“Hmph! You sure talk a lot for a worthless leech. Don’t forget *we’re* providing for you, so you need to just shut up and do your job. You whine at me every single time you see me. You’re so damn annoying.” Muttering under his breath, Glenn attempted to push past Azalea, but she wouldn’t let him off the hook that easily. She grabbed his arm.

“Hold on. I’m not done talking to you yet.”

“Don’t order me around! Know your place!”

Glenn shook Azalea’s hand off violently, his face twisting in anger.

“You girls would have been dead by now if it weren’t for father

and I. Who do you think gave you the chance to even grow up at all?"

"Well..." She sounded pained. Unsurprisingly, Azalea couldn't put up a fight against that unfortunate truth. She knew more than anyone else how much she relied on our family.

"Hah! You should've been hanging your head low from the very start. Then I might've even been nice, y'know? If nothing else, you've got a great body."

A conniving grin spread across his face. His eyes were clearly focused on Azalea's ample, bounteous chest.

"I can just say the word at any time and you sisters will be out of a house and home. So you'd better shut up and listen to me. As long as you do that, I'll take real good care of a looker like you." With that, Glenn reached his hand out.

Straight toward Azalea's breasts.

At that point, I started sprinting. I raced toward Glenn and grabbed his arm.



“Huh?” He growled.

“Hisui?” Both of them turned to look at me, but I was angry. I ignored their stares and growled out a warning, voice low.

“Don’t touch her.”

“Hisui, you twerp… Don’t think you can just grab my arm like that—”

“I *said* don’t touch her,” I interrupted. My eyes narrowed into a glare as I scowled at him.

“Urk!” Glenn recoiled from me ever so slightly. He attempted to shake me off, but I had imbued my hand with magecraft. Glenn, who couldn’t use anything but spellcraft, would never be able to loosen my grip.

“Y-You… How the hell are you so strong?” Glenn’s arm began to creak with a slight grinding. I’d been slowly increasing my grip strength. There was no way I’d let him get away with this. How could he say those vile things to our dear sister?! I was seething. I was about to channel more magecraft into my hand when a voice called to me.

“Stop, Hisui!”

“Azalea…”

Azalea smiled gently at me, even though she’d nearly been subjected to Glenn’s vulgarity. Her sweet expression took the edge off my anger, and a wave of relief washed over me. Relaxing my grip, I sighed. At that moment, Glenn shook my hand off.

“Y-You stupid, incompetent brat! Don’t you dare try to order me around! I’m an adult!” Glenn had instantly flown into a rage, and he thrust out his left hand in front of him, beginning to channel a spell.

“Hisui!” Panicking, Azalea moved to defend me, but I thrust a hand out to stop her.

Everything was going to be fine, after all.

I took the full force of Glenn’s spell in front of Azalea, who hadn’t moved once I’d stopped her. Something sticky coiled around my right arm. Given how it felt…it must’ve been a curse. This was the pure manifestation of spellcraft energy, meant to place a status effect on its target.

It felt like my arm was burning. Looking down, I saw that my right hand was slightly inflamed as if it really had touched something hot. So these were his true colors—I was honestly

aghast that he'd actually try attacking me with a spell, regardless of how angry he was at me, given I was his brother. His temper was far too short.

I hid my hand behind my back so Azalea and Glenn wouldn't notice and used godcraft to heal myself. Limiting my power to the very lowest level I could manage so it would fly under the radar, the telltale glow of godcraft was dim, and I dispelled Glenn's effect. I healed the wound and returned to my normal state with the curse broken.

"Ha ha! How do you like that taste of my power? That's how you really use a spell!" Glenn thrust his finger at my face, so close it was practically touching me.

Beaming radiantly at him, I waved my right hand to and fro. "There was *something*, but it kinda disappeared on its own."

"What?" Glenn's eyes went so wide that they practically popped out of his face when he saw I was unaffected.

"If you can't use spellcraft all that well, you don't have to force yourself." This was the perfect time to ridicule him. After looking between my face and my hand a countless number of times, Glenn's cheeks turned a deep red.

"N-No way! There's no way! My spell was perfect! What the hell did you do?!" He glared savagely at me, but before either of us could act, Azalea threw her hand between us.

"Stop, Glenn. Hisui's still just six years old—what can he even do? Don't blame your brother for your own incompetence—that's just shameful."

"Ngh! Grrr..." I could hear the sound of Glenn grinding his teeth as hard as he could without breaking them. Face still beet red, he turned on his heels and left. He certainly was a free man—one who didn't hesitate to mouth off anywhere and everywhere, who'd attempted to assault his own sister, and who, in the end, had even tried to place a curse on me.

Once he disappeared from view, I breathed a sigh of relief. Evidently, Azalea felt the same way, since she also sighed.

"I can't believe him. He's always such a pain, isn't he?"

"Yeah. But I'm glad you're okay."

"Never mind that! You sure had a stroke of luck that Glenn accidentally messed up his spell. What if something had actually happened?"

Azalea hadn't realized I'd used magecraft and godcraft. I guess she couldn't be expected to. In this world, abilities didn't manifest in people until they were at least ten years of age. Azalea's own affinity for magecraft had awakened just three years prior, once she'd turned ten.

She never would expect her six-year-old brother to be able to use both magecraft and godcraft. If I were in her shoes, I'd think the same—that all this had just been a happy coincidence.

That was for the best. I couldn't tell her about my powers yet, so it was a good thing I managed to keep it hidden.

I grinned ruefully at her as I apologized. "Sorry, Azalea. When I saw he was about to get rough with you, I just lost my mind."

That much was true. Even though I was a full-fledged adult on the inside, sometimes I just had to act on impulse. And it was always my family that would trigger those moments. While I didn't care if my brothers got a little bit hurt here and there, I would never let my sisters go through that pain.

I scratched the back of my head as I hung my head in apology. When I did, Azalea put her hand on my head and patted me. She was smiling gently again.

"Next time, make sure you think about your own safety first, got it? I'll let you know right now—I'm happiest when I know you and my sisters are safe."

"Sure, but I want you to be safe too."

"Please! You're the youngest. Don't get ahead of yourself now." With a quiet giggle, Azalea pulled her hand back. Then, as she turned to leave, she left me with one last comment.

"I'll tell you as many times as it takes. You're my little brother, and I'm your older sister. It's the elder's job to protect the younger. Don't forget that, okay?"

With a little wave of her hand, Azalea left. Watching her walk away, I let slip a little laugh.

"She's always...treating me like a kid."

I'll catch up with you one day, so wait for me.

I swear I'll be strong enough to save my sisters one day. That's the reason I'm training now. I reaffirmed my goals and decided I'd train even harder.

☆

“Damn that woman! How dare she get on her high horse when she’s just a freeloading witch?!”

After he had left Azalea and Hisui, Glenn, who was the eldest of all the Clematis children, was still seething with anger. The cause of his anger was his talented sister, with whom he had no blood relations, and his talentless brother, who was his own flesh and blood.

Azalea had always thrown her weight around, and seeing as she wielded magecraft, Glenn wasn’t able to lay a hand on her. She was a meddler who always stepped in whenever he was busy bullying Hisui. That was the impression Glenn had of her, anyway.

As if that weren’t enough, for the past year Hisui had gotten more arrogant despite Glenn’s efforts to bully him into the ground. He’d even begun to talk back—and sharply at that. Having thought Hisui was inferior to him in every way, seeing his little brother’s newfound attitude brought Glenn even more stress. He needed to make both Hisui and Azalea pay, no matter what. As of late, his thoughts had been consumed by nothing but revenge.

“There’s gotta be some way…” Mumbling to himself, Glenn made his way to the dining room. On his way there, he caught sight of Mikhail.

“Oh, Glenn! You’re late for dinner today.”

“Hey, Mikhail. Azalea and Hisui were being a pain in the ass. I swear I’ll make them suffer.”

“I don’t think you could with Azalea. Even if we both ganged up on her, we probably wouldn’t win.”

“I know that already. That’s why she pisses me off so much.” Glenn clicked his tongue in disgust. His annoyance was clear as day on his countenance. Seeing Glenn irritated, Mikhail racked his brains for an idea, and after a moment he clapped his hands together in sudden inspiration.

“I got it. It’ll be rough to get everything ready, but I think I have an idea that’ll give Azalea a real bad day.”

“Oh? How do we do that?”

“There’s actually a pretty interesting monster on our lands. We’ll use it.”

“A *what?* How are we supposed to use a monster? Besides, I don’t want to do anything that’d be dangerous for me.”

“It’s not a strong monster, so don’t worry about that. It’s just

sorta trouble.”

Grinning wickedly, Mikail described a monster he’d once seen. Hearing his description of the beast, the fury slowly left Glenn’s face, replaced by a smile.

“I see… That’s not a bad idea at all.”

Chapter 4: Dungeon

"*Groooar*!"

I slashed at the lupine monster that leaped out from the underbrush. My blade cleaved straight through its vitals, and with that single strike, I ended its life.

"*Chirp*, *chirp!*"

Dandelion—the little yellow chick atop my head—chirped without reserve. Shaking the blood from my sword with a deft swing, I returned it to its scabbard before gently stroking Dandelion on the head.

"Good job, Dandelion! You've got a serious nose for other creatures, don't you?"

This was my third battle today. I'd been hunting monsters since daybreak, and Dandelion had detected beasts hiding in wait no less than three whole times. The wolflike monster I'd killed just now was another that Dandelion had spotted in the underbrush.

I had no idea whether his ability was an inborn talent or whether it was because he'd been born from godcraft, but it didn't change the fact that he'd been blessed with a mysterious power—and it made him the best hunting partner.

"Nice work, Hisui. Looks like you've gotten used to felling those foul beasts," Aruna praised me as she gently floated down from the sky above. The other goddesses were with her too.

"Thanks, Aruna," I replied, "though it *has* been over a month since I started hunting monsters, so I'm not surprised that I've learned a thing or two."

"Yes, of course. But you mustn't let your guard down. The monsters you've been fighting aren't anything much in the grand scheme of things. A much stronger enemy might show up," she gently chided.

"If I *do* run into something like that, I'll be sure to size up our differences in strength and bail if it's bad. As long as I don't die, I can try fighting it again later."

"Good. I'm glad you're keeping my lessons in mind." Aruna, having come closer, gently patted me on the head. It felt strange

to receive a gesture like that from someone who, by all appearances, looked even younger than Azalea.

But it wasn't a *bad* feeling exactly.

"You know," Fouré started, "we're ignoring the elephant in the room here. How is he supposed to get more combat experience? There are lots of monsters in these lands, but none of them are very strong."

"True, but supposing he made the trek somewhere else, he'd have a difficult time with the monsters there. What a conundrum," Cult laughed. Having listened in on my conversation with Aruna, Fouré and Cult offered their own thoughts on the matter.

"I'm worried about how powerful those monsters are too. If only some *slightly* stronger enemies would show up, or if the weak monsters would at least come in bigger packs..." Fouré mused.

"Please don't jinx it." I finally cut into their conversation. While I might be able to handle the former, if the latter happened and I slipped up even once, my death was basically guaranteed. I didn't think I could manage a huge pack of anything, considering I hadn't been attacked by any groups of enemies numbering larger than five. But, I supposed these three *were* goddesses. Maybe they were so nonchalant about my mortal peril because they could just revive me if I died.

"You've learned the fundamentals well. All that's left for you is to gain more practical knowledge, which you can get through fighting me or more monsters. Outside of continuing with drills, combat is the most efficient way of building up experience," Aruna said, nodding.

"You can keep learning godcraft at the pace you're going at, by the way," Fouré interjected. "Plus, if you injure a monster, you can get as much practice as you want by healing it!"

"Excellent idea. Let's capture one for that precise purpose, then. Even if you grievously wound it, a monster should be able to survive," said Cult.

"That...kinda makes me feel bad though, surprisingly." I sighed. Cult was talking about training my control over godcraft. Practically speaking, godcraft mainly concerned the healing of wounds, but there was a certain limit to what I could do just healing my own injuries.

To use a specific example, no matter how well I'd blocked off my

sense of pain, and even assuming I had the skill to heal myself from such a grievous injury, I was still terrified to lose an arm or get disemboweled.

So now we would have monsters take on that burden. Objectively speaking, I'd be able to observe the wounds as I healed them, something I couldn't guarantee when healing myself. I might end up doing a sloppy job on myself if a wound threatened to make me lose my lunch. So just in case I ended up dealing with the worst-case scenario, experimenting on a monster would be the best way to prepare for that. Besides, controlling and manipulating godcraft energies would probably be harder with a monster.

"Healing's all about exposure, Huey. If you keep complaining about how grotesque it is or how painful it is to look at, you'll never make any progress!"

I paused before responding to Fouré. "I know. This is for my own good too."

"*Chirp*," Dandelion followed, as though in agreement.

It's incredible that you could use godcraft from the start, Dandelion. I thought. *I gotta do my best too.* One day, if I learned how to cure illnesses and not just heal injuries, I could save Armeria. And even beyond that… Once I learned godcraft, I could help anyone who was suffering—even whole families at once. I was much more motivated to learn godcraft than I had been with magecraft.

"Now, you should go back to the manor soon. After you've had your lunch, of course."

"Okay, got it—"

Before I could finish responding, my entire field of view suddenly wavered slightly. My feet were shaking—no, the shaking wasn't my feet. It was where I was standing… The earth itself was trembling.

"Huh? What *was* that just now?"

"It wasn't very strong, but the ground certainly did shake." Fouré followed my question with her own confusion, and Aruna and Cult were quick to answer. Perhaps they'd experienced this before.

"This shaking is most likely…"

"A dungeon, I imagine."

"A dungeon?" I cut in. That was a term I knew, but just knowing

the term didn't mean I clearly understood what it entailed. Cult nodded back at me when I parroted her words, then began to explain.

"That's right. A dungeon is an unexplored realm, which some mortals refer to as 'another world.' They simply appear one day out of nowhere."

"You guys don't know what causes them?"

"No one does. According to one theory, they appear when someone is called upon by the gods to undertake a trial."

"A trial…issued by the gods?" I turned to stare at the three goddesses. In this world, there were only three divinities, and they were the women standing before me. Strictly speaking, their faith wasn't the only one—I'd heard that in other countries, other practiced faiths favored their own gods—but in this area, at least, they were the dominant divine powers.

My eyes naturally snapped to the three goddesses, a sneaking suspicion consuming my thoughts. But Cult, who must've realized I had something I wanted to say, simply shook her head.

"Apologies, my dear, but the dungeon has nothing to do with us. As we've told you before, we are not truly gods, but fairies."

"Oh, but that doesn't really make much of a difference to us mortals, you know?" I'd been with the three of them for over a year, but this was the first time I'd decided to dig deeper on the issue. Cult laughed quietly at me as my head tilted in confusion.

"Gods and fairies are different. Though you might consider us similar, gods are far more powerful than we are," she explained.

"Wow, I had no idea… I honestly thought you were just being humble," I replied.

"Well, in this world, we're the strongest things around. Practically speaking, you really *could* call us gods!"

"Fouré's the weakest of us in a fight, though."

"Wah! You can't say things like that, Aruna!"

"But it's true."

"Grrr!"

Fouré ran after Aruna in an attempt to catch Aruna, who evaded her as the very picture of nonchalance. Watching the two, Cult began to speak once more.

"Well, there isn't much to say about us, honestly. It's better if you learn over time."

“But I’m curious about you—all three of you, I mean.”

“Wh-Why, thank you. I would also like to know more about you.” Cult’s cheeks unusually flushed red. Just like with Aruna, it seemed straightforward, honest admissions of affection hit her right in the heart. If I let her know I cared for her directly, without concealing it, she would return my feelings in kind.

“But that’s not important right now; let’s return to the matter of the dungeon. Aren’t you curious, little one?”

“Well, I guess.” She was right on the money, actually—I was definitely interested in this dungeon thing. I’m pretty sure I’d heard of dungeons before from Armeria. She’d been happy to explain that they were unknown vistas—places of heart-racing excitement. But from what Cult said, they seemed to be a bit different from the wonderful world that had set Armeria’s eyes all aglitter.

“Let me give you a proper explanation. I’ll tell you everything I know. Firstly, dungeons *are* another world. Just as their name implies, dungeons basically appear as labyrinths, and most are subterranean.”

“Are they big?”

“Yes, very much so. While there are some relatively small ones, you can expect most to be at least ten kilometers in length.”

“Whoa… That sounds extra annoying, considering it’s a maze down there too.”

“If you ask me, dungeon expeditions *are* immensely annoying, but they do have certain uses.”

“Meaning?”

“The same reason dungeons are called ‘trials of the gods.’” With a single clap, she continued.

“Monsters appear nigh endlessly within dungeons. It’s unknown why the monsters show up or where they come from, but certain kinds of items appear alongside them.”

“What items, exactly?”

“Magical artifacts.” Cult’s lips curled into a small, secretive smile.

“In dungeons, you can obtain magical artifacts that were originally created through spellcraft.”

“What exactly are these…magical artifacts?”

“Have you not heard of them before? They’re items imbued with unique effects.”

“Well, my family’s poor after all. We don’t have anything that sounds nearly that useful.” At the very least, I’d never laid my eyes on one.

“I see. Well, for example, consider a lantern that could create light without a candle. Or a flask that could purify any water. Or iron that can emit heat. These would all be magical artifacts.”

“They all sound like they’d be handy for day-to-day use.”

There was no need to explain how useful light is. With a flask that could purify water, it would be possible to survive outdoors safely for a while. And a heat-emitting iron could be worked into a cooking tool. Honestly, they were all things I wanted.

“Magical artifacts are indeed very useful. I’ve heard they’re commonly used in large towns.”

“Could I create an artifact like that too?” I asked.

Cult nodded. “Once you learn spellcraft and practice, then yes, you will be able to.”

“Really? I can’t wait.” I’d always loved making things by hand, even back in my past life. Maybe I could use the knowledge I’d obtained over the course of my old life in Japan.

“However, it’s a very difficult process. There are precious few artisans in the entire world that are capable of creating them.”

“So that means…there aren’t many to go around, huh?”

“Correct. In mortal society, magical artifacts apparently command very high prices.”

“You sure know a lot about our society, Cult.”

“I’ve lived a very long time, after all.” She giggled in a somewhat ominous way. The look on her face told me all I needed to know: *Don’t ask how old I am, okay?* I’m sure she was unimaginably old. Yeah, let’s leave it at that.

I decided to move the conversation along.

“I-I see. But I can’t imagine there’d be anything that would fetch a high price in a dungeon…”

“Most of the artifacts found in dungeons have combat-related uses. In other words, they’re equipment.”

“Ohh! I didn’t know stuff like that existed.”

“Yes. In fact, most of the artifacts in circulation around the world are the aforementioned equipment.”

“Gotcha.” Well, considering there were only so many ways of obtaining these magical artifacts, it didn’t surprise me that a lot of

them were from dungeons. Compared to the work of skilled artisans, plundering dungeons must be a relatively common way of securing artifacts. That was good, though—actually, it was perfect.

Lips curling into a smile, I tested the waters.

"In that case, the knowledge I have from my past life might come in handy."

"Knowledge? Do tell." Cult tilted her head in curiosity. I'd already told the three goddesses that I'd retained my memories from a world called Earth, but it looked like Cult hadn't realized why those memories would be useful. That wasn't surprising—things like memories from another world were, from their point of view, strange and unknowable, just like dungeons. And that's why I could now put these memories into action.

"To be honest, civilization in my old world was far more advanced than that of this world. We had plenty of things there that were similar to these magical artifacts."

"Well, well... That's wonderful. Could even common folk obtain them easily?"

"Yep. We had stuff like a tool that could cool or heat the air at will and an item that could obtain news from anywhere at all *and* could also be used to converse with people far away. We had things that could amplify sounds...all sorts of different tools."

"And you say you could obtain *any* of those if you wanted?"

"Well, at the very least, I could buy them whenever I wanted even though I was basically a commoner. There were plenty of them on the market."

Even ordinary folk could easily buy an air conditioner, phone, or microphone. Cell phones were a bit more expensive, but there were cheaper models as well, so it wasn't too difficult to buy one if you wanted. Considering the difference in quality of life, I thought the civilization of my previous world was overwhelmingly better developed.

"And so, since I know about those things, I bet I could make a lot of great items if I learned to use spellcraft."

"That's a wonderful idea." Cult agreed without a moment's hesitation. "I am also curious to see what sort of magical artifacts you'll create. If you'd like to learn the basics, how do you feel about trying out some spellcraft practice?"

“Hey, hey! What’re you guys chatting about, Huey?” Fouré and Aruna, who appeared to have finished arguing, came to join my conversation with Cult. I doubted Aruna would agree, but I told the two of them my plans as well.

“I’ve heard about magical artifacts from Cult as well. The subject came up while talking about dungeons, I take it?” Aruna inquired.

“Magical artifacts? You mean those funny toys?” Fouré sounded disinterested.

“T-Toys?” Is that how Fouré thought about them? Well, I *had* just heard that most magical artifacts were combat gear. Maybe they really did seem like toys to the goddesses, who were strong enough that they didn’t need any equipment.

“We were mostly discussing the magical artifacts used for daily life.”

“Daily life? Why?” Fouré tilted her head in puzzlement, deeply mystified. I guess the goddesses didn’t quite grasp the concept of “daily life” either.

“I was just thinking it’d be nice if things got a little easier for me.”

“That’s why you were talking about artifacts?”

“Yeah. Apparently, they’re created from the power of Cult’s spellcraft.”

“That’s right. I’ve heard they’re a product of high-level craftsmanship, but you’ll probably be able to make them eventually, Hisui,” Aruna affirmed. If she’d already thought ahead, then that made things quick.

“It’d be nice if I could. So…that’s why Cult suggested I try practicing spellcraft a bit right now. At least the fundamentals.”

“Spellcraft, huh?” Aruna hummed to herself as she thought. Her answer was almost immediate. “Sure, why not?”

“Huh? I-I can?” I was surprised at her response, given that I doubted she’d agree. I hadn’t cultivated my skill with either magecraft or godcraft to a level they found acceptable, which is why I thought it was a waste of time to ask about spellcraft. But Aruna gave her permission much more freely than I’d expected.

“I don’t mind. You’ve continued training all this time, after all; I doubt you’d do anything as silly as shirk your lessons. Besides, it’s just the basics, right? That’s the kind of thing you can easily practice before you sleep at night.”

“Thanks, Aruna!” Feeling like I’d just been rewarded for all the work I’d done, I was honestly overjoyed.

I might’ve been getting ahead of myself, but I was now going to begin training in the third kind of magic, spellcraft. It was said to be the most difficult of the three, so I was a little excited to find out how exactly it would go.

“You’re very welcome. Now, have you all finished discussing dungeons?”

“Oh!” I’d completely forgotten. My mind was stuffed full of magic artifacts.

“I suppose we’ve digressed. Let’s see… Where were we?” Cult mused aloud.

“Dungeons are unknown worlds, and they’re known as trials from the gods. That’s because monsters can endlessly spawn inside of them, and magic artifacts can also be found there?” I supplied.

“I knew you’d remember, Hisui. You have an amazing memory.” *Pat pat.* Cult pet me on the head, making my ability to recall sound like a huge accomplishment. Dandelion, who’d been chased from his usual perch to my shoulder, had a look of mild irritation on his face—so I patted him in turn.

“Since you’ve already spoken at length about it, the rest is simple. Just quickly clear the dungeon. To do that, you must destroy the core sustaining the dungeon, or else you’ll be in trouble.”

“Trouble?” I had the sudden impression that the mood had darkened. Cult’s explanation was nonchalant, even as I gulped nervously.

“That’s right. I told you just now, didn’t I? Dungeons spawn monsters infinitely.”

“Yeah.” She *did* tell me that.

“If too many of those monsters spawn, they’ll eventually reach the surface.”

“Oh!” I immediately grasped what she was implying.

If this land in the middle of nowhere with nothing to its name suddenly saw an increase in monsters, that *would* be a disaster! We had basically no truly capable warriors around. I could see everyone getting killed.

“What should I do?” I asked, anxiety creeping over me.

“Destroy the core. Go through the dungeon, and when you arrive at its deepest reaches, you’re certain to find the core,” replied Cult.

“That’s perfect, then.” Aruna clapped her hands together, and the mood shifted again. She grinned and declared, “Since we have the opportunity, you will now delve into the dungeon, Hisui.”

“Wh-Whaaat?!”

☆

My cry echoed through the forest. Voice shaking, I asked Aruna if she was serious, given how casual she sounded.

“D-Do you really mean that?”

“Of course. I don’t tell jokes.”

“B-But…it sounds like it’s way more terrifying a place than anywhere aboveground.”

“At the very least, the number of monsters you’ve fought up till now are nothing compared to what’s down there.”

“And you’re telling me to go?”

“Yup.”

“To fight them?”

“Yup.”

“And by doing that, clear the dungeon?”

“You got it.” Aruna threw me a thumbs-up without missing a beat. The severity of her rigorous training regimen went way beyond that of a strict taskmaster. She was basically declaring I was about to be thrown into a nest of fearsome monsters, after all.

It was an important task, though. I was certain I could clear the dungeon without much trouble if I asked the three goddesses to help, but if I did it myself then I’d gain a lot of experience very quickly. The dungeon was the best opportunity I had for growth. Aruna clearly knew that and had suggested it as a method for me to get stronger a little faster.

But more importantly, I had no idea if they were willing to help anyone besides me. At the end of the day, they weren’t human. While they had a certain amount of fondness for me, they were absolutely uninterested in any other mortals. They weren’t even a little bit curious about my own sisters. To prevent a worst-case

scenario, I had no choice but to take care of the dungeon myself.

I was a little afraid, but if I let this chance escape, then my development would be that much slower. Besides, Fouré was with me—and so was Dandelion, and he excelled at detecting monsters.

It was all going to work out…probably.

Given that Aruna had said it was okay, I could do this by myself, right? She wouldn't have told me to do it without knowing how difficult the dungeon would be, right?

My anxiety worsened, but I couldn't just ignore the problem. I swallowed my desire to run away and nodded, acquiescing to Aruna's proposal.

"O-Okay. I'll give it a shot."

"I knew you would, Hisui. That's a very good mindset to have. Now go, and protect these lands with your own two hands."

"Ah ha ha… You're making it sound like some grand undertaking."

It wasn't as though I was invested in protecting the Clematis lands per se—I was just going to fight for my sisters and all the innocent villagers who had nothing to do with the dungeon.

And for my own benefit, of course.

"Now, let's be off to clear that dungeon, wherever it is," proclaimed Cult.

"Now that you mention it… How are we supposed to find the dungeon?" I didn't have the ability to locate it. Maybe my faithful buddy Dandelion could? I glanced at the chick, still seated on my shoulder, but he merely shook his head glumly, as though he could read my thoughts.

Wow. The more I thought about it, the more I realized the extent of his incredible intelligence. Not only could he understand our speech, he could figure things out from our expressions.

But regardless, he didn't have the ability to locate dungeons.

Aruna answered my question. "If you just walk around, you'll find it soon enough. Besides, you might be able to observe the energy that maintains the dungeon."

"Are dungeons created through your powers?"

"Not at all. They come from something entirely different. You can feel their immense amount of energy through your skin, though. I imagine it's probably over this way." With that, Aruna

floated high into the air and began to move.

Fouré, Cult, and I followed.

After a short while of walking through the forest, we found a hole that opened up into the earth—most likely the entrance to the dungeon. Wow, Aruna... I was honestly and openly surprised.

"I-Is this...the dungeon entrance?"

"Looks like it. I can sense the presence of monsters there," replied Aruna.

"Yup, yup. Now that we've gotten up close and personal, my detection powers are telling me it might truly be another world!" Fouré said, bemused.

"Or rather, it *must* be a different world—considering you couldn't sense it until we got this close to it, Fouré," Cult said, before turning her attention to me. "Be careful, little one. While we will enter its depths at your side, you'd rather not experience anything distressing, would you?"

"P-Please don't scare me..." It really wasn't funny when she said things like that.

"I am not. I am simply warning you, for beyond this entrance is truly an unknown realm."

I gulped at her comment, hearing the gravity in her tone. I was planning on being careful from the start, but now I'd be moving on high alert. At the forefront of the group, I made my way into the depths of the dungeon.

☆

I stepped into the dungeon. It seemed to be a completely ordinary cave, which was honestly exactly what I expected of something called a dungeon—the landscape that spread before me was pretty predictable, given that the dungeon itself was a hole that had opened up in the earth.

"So this is a dungeon. It, well...doesn't really *feel* like a different world," I mumbled.

"It does appear to be a simple cave—but there is a vile aura in the air," Aruna warned.

"I can't quite get a good grasp of the creatures in here either," Fouré sighed. "But their forms don't seem to be much different from their counterparts on the surface."

“There’s a certain vibe in the air that’s similar to my spellcraft. But it is only similar, not the same—I believe it to be a different power altogether.”

“So that means, you’d best steel yourself for danger.”

Did that mean the three goddesses weren’t necessarily all-powerful within the confines of a dungeon? Although I had no idea what would happen, I carefully continued deeper into the cave.

From what I could tell of the feeling of the ground against my boots, it was perfectly ordinary earth. A little scraggly, but it wasn’t difficult to walk on. What really caught my attention was the cave’s ceiling.

As if they’d been deliberately placed there, there were glowing crystals in the ceiling at regular intervals. Looking at them, the Chaos Goddess Cult mumbled in a subdued voice, “Those stones… They’re strikingly similar to the luminicite that’s found aboveground. I imagine they’re one and the same.”

“Luminicite? If I recall, those are…crystals that glow with godcraft energies, right?”

“You got it, Huey! My power transformed them from ordinary stone, and they’re super-duper handy.”

“But how are there crystals here that have the same properties as luminicite, which can be found on the surface? This is an unknown realm, after all… The things down here should be entirely unique.” Cult was clearly perplexed.

“True. Maybe the dungeon just copied it,” Fouré ventured.

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

Though doubt lingered on our lips, not a soul present could answer our questions, and so we remained in the dark. While Fouré’s suggestion that the dungeon had been somewhat lazily cobbled together could be true, it was also entirely possible there was some other reason behind it.

Either way, it had nothing to do with me right now. I steadily continued deeper into the dungeon. As I did, I finally encountered a living creature—and it was a monster I’d seen countless times in Clematis territory. Wielding a sword in its right hand, it turned to look at us with a face somewhat reminiscent of a human’s.

“A goblin!”

It was just an ordinary run-of-the-mill goblin. While these monsters had a high reproductive capacity and greater

intelligence than the lupine beasts, their physical strength was extremely low. How weak, exactly? Well, I could defeat them even without using magecraft.

“Our first enemy is a goblin? What a letdown.” I heard Aruna sigh from behind me. What sort of monstrosity had she imagined? If Fouré knew, she didn’t say anything. Instead, she only gave me cheers of encouragement. Cult was as silent as ever. I guess she didn’t even have a sliver of interest in goblins.

While I weighed their reactions to the monster, I unsheathed my sword. The enemy goblin came charging at me, sword in hand, and we crossed steel. My blade sliced the goblin’s head clean off.

It was an unsatisfying victory. The goblin hadn’t been any stronger than those up above. Was this all dungeons were capable of? I swung my sword to get the blood off, then went to sheathe it—but I was stopped by Dandelion, who’d been sitting on my head. He began flapping his wings against my head, each hit giving off a light slap.

“*Chirp! Ch-Chirp!*”

“Huh? What is it? Did something happen?”

“*Chirp*, *chirp! Chirp!*”

“Sorry, I don’t really get it… Is there something straight ahead?”

Dandelion left his perch on the top of my head and adroitly pointed forward with his wings. I didn’t see anything there, though I could faintly make out a fork in the road ahead. Was there something off about it? Curious, I asked Dandelion.

“What’s the matter with that fork?”

“*Ch-Chirp! Chirp*, *chirp*, *chirp!*”

“Umm… Do you mean to say I shouldn’t take the middle road?”

“*Chirp!*” Dandelion nodded, as though to assure me I was correct. Though I couldn’t tell the reason, Dandelion had gone out of his way to warn me, so I swerved onto the left path.

While we were hunting earlier, Dandelion had detected monsters before I did a countless number of times. If he was using that power now, then there was likely a horde of enemies down the middle path.

“Oooh. That little sweetie is pretty handy, huh?” Fouré patted the chick on the head from behind. To confirm my suspicions, I decided to ask her.

“Would it have been a terrible idea to have gone on the path

straight ahead just now?”

“Yes. There were an awful lot of monsters that way, and there were other creatures there besides goblins.” I took a moment to absorb the weight of her words before responding.

“Thanks, Dandelion. You’re the best.” Just as Fouré had done, I reached up and pet Dandelion on the head.

By coincidence, he had the power to detect other creatures. According to Fouré, godcraft was capable of a similar ability. Was Dandelion using such godlike powers? Or were his levels of godcraft energy and its manipulation still just higher than my own? Either way, Dandelion’s support was a great help, given I was still an amateur. He was a heartening friend to have.

As I pondered, I proceeded apace—and this time, rather than a goblin, a much larger monster loomed into view.

“Whoa, what *is* that?” It was a hideous creature that looked a little like a goblin, but much bigger. Its body was huge—large enough that I estimated it easily to be two meters tall.

“That’s an orc. They’re a type of monster that are built physically tougher than goblins. But they’re quite slow.”

“Orcs, huh? For another world, that’s pretty basic fare.”

Now that she mentioned it, it did have a sort of orcish look to it. The sword in its right hand looked on the small side compared to the swords wielded by the goblins I fought earlier. The creature sized me up with its red eyes.

“Groooahr!” A war cry issued from the orc’s maw, and it swung its sword upward before thrusting it straight ahead at me. I supposed these monsters didn’t have much variance to their behavior—they recklessly rushed at an enemy whenever they caught sight of one, as if they had no concept of restraint or vigilance.

This was especially true for the humanoid types. Goblins and kobolds aside, even the more intelligent monsters couldn’t overcome this instinct to attack. The wolflike monsters, on the other hand, had low intelligence, but their physical senses were much more developed than those of humanoid monsters, so by relying on their instinct, hearing, and smell, they could be far more aware of their opponents.

When it came down to which I’d rather face, they each had their pros and cons. As I ruminated on this, I buffed myself with

magecraft and settled into a combat stance with my sword at the ready.

Just as Aruna had said, orcs were slow. The monster didn't appear to be all muscle as I'd initially surmised—while it was still better built than goblins, it might as well have been standing stock-still to me, since I'd been imbued with magecraft.

I dodged the downward swing of the orc's sword, then slashed at its unprotected neck. However, considering the magecraft I'd used was meant to be a defensive, preventative safety measure, I didn't quite manage to cut its head off. My blade broke skin for a surface-level scratch and didn't go any further.

"Ngh!" I hurriedly hopped backward. The orc attempted to fight back, but rather than defending against my attacks, it instead dodged them, leaping farther back. We both distanced ourselves from each other, then reestablished our stances.

"Looks like you're having trouble piercing its hide with the magecraft you're using now," Aruna remarked. "Think of it as though your enemy were also using magecraft. Stronger enemies have tougher bodies."

"I see," I said, as I mulled over her advice. "Then I should put my full strength into my swings." I hadn't yet reached the limits of my magecraft, so I made myself even tougher and stronger. According to Aruna, if I used a technique to concentrate and compress the energy, the effects would improve accordingly. She'd mentioned that the technique of compression was a fundamental skill required of godcraft, so as long as I trained, I could also use it with magecraft.

But, of course, talk was cheap. Actually *doing* it was way harder than discussing theory. When I had attempted to compress magecraft energies in the past, I'd failed and injured myself pretty badly. I hadn't yet successfully used the technique, but I needed stronger magecraft to cut the orc's head from its body.

"Think you can do it?" Aruna encouraged me.

"Shouldn't be a problem. No way I'm gonna get stuck in a place like this." I buffed my body once more and kicked off against the ground to go on the offensive. The orc's response speed wasn't fast enough—and the first to strike usually won the fight.

I cut its head from its shoulders right then and there.

The monster fell with a dull thud. Looking down at its corpse, I

breathed a sigh of relief.

"It was pretty tough, but once I boosted my strength, it wasn't so difficult after all."

"For the average person, it'd be a terrifyingly powerful monster," Aruna reminded me.

"Really?"

"Yes. I don't know the details, but a lot of mortals have probably been killed by orcs. I'd guess the victims were people who couldn't use magecraft to the same extent as you."

"I'm still only six years old, you know."

"And you have both natural talent and the effects of my power."

I'd say of the two, Aruna's powers were much stronger. The goddesses praised my skill, but in the end, my abilities all stemmed from them. In an odd way, that meant I never really felt proud of my affinity for any magic.

"Well, then it really will be trouble if I don't clear this dungeon. If one of these monsters managed to make it outside, Azalea would be forced to fight it..." I shuddered imagining what might happen.

"Azalea? She's your sister, if I recall correctly."

"Yup, that's right."

"Given the amount of magecraft reserves she has, I'm certain her attacks could pierce an orc's hide...if only barely."

"Wow, she really is strong, then. She's such a stellar fighter." Even without the goddesses' direct blessing, she must be an incredibly powerful warrior to be able to hunt orcs at her age. And unlike me, she was evidently self-taught.

"More importantly..."

"Hm?"

"While we were chatting, more enemies arrived."

"Ah!" Crap—I'd totally forgotten I was in a dungeon. Exactly as Aruna said, just beyond the corpse of the orc I'd felled were even more orcs emerging from the deeper reaches of the tunnel. Were they friends of the one I'd defeated? It looked like there were three of them, so it'd be a three-on-one fight. For this to have been the *better* choice of paths, the rest of the dungeon must be truly terrifying.

Maintaining my energy and intent for combat, I pointed my blade at the oncoming orcs.

"Sorry. I know you've just been born, but I'm cutting you down

here. My perfect life doesn't include you." Not only were they unnecessary, they were actually likely to *destroy* any kind of happiness I could create.

Matching my quip, the orcs roared their battle cries and began to sprint toward me. I'd already killed an orc. I doubted I'd have trouble slaying them this time.

Our swords met, and the sounds of our skirmish echoed through the cave.

☆

"Whew... Man, I'm beat."

After making my way deeper into the dungeon, and having fought and defeated a countless number of monsters, I took a break with Aruna's blessing. That being said, I was still in a dungeon. There weren't any places safe enough for a real rest. I sat down, resting my back against a boulder even as the sounds of monstrous groans and howls echoed all around me.

"You've done well, little one. Be sure to take your repast."

"You're right. I should eat something light." Now that Cult had mentioned eating, I realized that I was indeed hungry. I nibbled on some meat, which I'd brought with me knowing how well it replenished energy, and drank water to fill up my stomach.

As I did, Cult sat in front of me with her legs neatly tucked under her and conversed with me.

"Now's as good a time as any. Let's have you try out a little spellcraft. Once we return to the surface, you'll be starting your spellcraft drills in earnest."

"Oh, that's a good idea. Could you please begin, Cult?"

"Gladly. I'll start with a simple explanation." Clearing her throat, she began her lecture with a single clap of the hands.

"Firstly, spellcraft is so named because it is the power to cast spells, or curses, on a target. Godcraft is the exact opposite, being the power to restore a target to its former state."

"The power of curses... Yeah, I've been on the receiving end of that." I'd been cursed by Mikhail before. Because of my godcraft abilities, I managed to block it, but it left me with the impression and knowledge that spellcraft was a terrifying power.

"Then, as I'm sure you know, spellcraft is the power to

transform or alter. The fact that a spell can even change reality itself shows the true worth of spellcraft."

"How is stuff like creating fire related to spellcraft?"

"It's simply the transformation of spellcraft energies. It's the difference between targeting another person and targeting the energy itself."

Saying this, Cult opened her palm, and on it danced a procession of elemental energies: fire, water, wind, and earth. She could conjure multiple elements at once? Amazing.

"Of course, spellcraft can also alter human bodies and change their properties. For example, I could change your hand into a liquid if I so desired."

"Huh?! S-Seriously?"

"It's certainly possible for a spellcraft user of my caliber. While it's easy to transform your own energies, a significant amount of control and power is needed to transform someone else's."

"Right. So basically, from easiest to hardest, goes...transforming the caster, then the environment around them, then other people?"

"That's right. You're a quick learner." She patted me on the head encouragingly. Both she and Fouré liked to pat me on the head a lot, but I had been a thirty-year-old man in my previous life, so it was weirdly embarrassing. Still, it seemed strange that such a kind soul was widely feared as the Chaos Goddess.

A question bubbled up in my mind that was only marginally related to spellcraft. Was it that old adage—people fear what they don't know?

Cult continued speaking, pulling me from my thoughts. "By the way, you have my powers of spellcraft within you. Due to my blessing, your body is far more difficult to manipulate than that of an ordinary mortal."

"You did mention that no one could tamper with my physical attributes."

"I imagine it'd be impossible for anyone save myself. Unless they were my equal, I suppose."

"You could do it, though, Cult?"

"Mm-hmm. As an experiment, let's try to change you."

"Huh?" Before I could protest, Cult extended a hand to me. She grasped my shoulder, then in the next moment...my left arm

transformed into that of a frog's.

"Whaaat?!"

"*Chiiirp?!*" Dandelion, astride my head, chirped in shock at the same time I exclaimed my surprise. Though my right hand was still normal, my left hand was a massive frog's hand!

My heart began to race—it felt like it was about to burst, and not in a good way. A scene from a foreign found-footage mockumentary I'd watched in my past life rose to the forefront of my mind, where frog people had startled passersby. I didn't remember if that movie had been based on a true story or not, but I immediately started to wonder—that was how surprised I was.

"So what do you think? Spellcraft is pretty fun, right?"

"F-F-F-Fun?!"

"Heh heh. Don't worry—any effects suffered by spellcraft can be cured with godcraft."

"You can't fix it yourself, Cult?" *Whoops, I shouldn't have said that*, I immediately thought. *I wouldn't put it past her to leave my left arm froggy for the rest of eternity.* As I shuddered in fear at my newfound realization, Fouré strode over to us, cheeks puffed up.

"Honestly! What do you think you're doing, Cult?! Huey's frightened within an inch of his life!"

Cult chuckled in the face of Fouré's disdain. "I only wanted to show Hisui what my powers were truly capable of. Besides, I actually can reverse the effects of spellcraft anyway."

"Huh? Y-You can?" I stuttered.

"While the method of reversion via spellcraft isn't as foolproof as godcraft, spellcraft *does* command change and alteration. To mend something twisted, you need only twist it back. Although, to be more precise, I suppose it isn't so much mending as it is recreating what it once was."

"I guess you can't exactly call that *restoring* it, no."

So basically, spellcraft was the ability to take unshaped clay and mold it into something else. Then that creation could be squished back into a shapeless lump of clay—truly recreating what the object once was. It was slightly different in certain ways from godcraft, which returned the state of something to its rightful form.

I was certain that using spellcraft to change something that'd been changed back to the way it was would result in some strange

imperfections, and I finally understood how terrifying Cult was.

"Okay, that's enough. I'll fix you up now, Huey," said Fouré.

"Thank you."

She wasted no time in getting over to me and returning my arm to the way it was—a perfect job, and superfast at that.

Seeing my old arm, which had only been gone for several minutes, caused an odd surge of happiness in my heart. Tears began to well up in my eyes.

"There, good as new. Don't pull any more crazy stunts, Cult!"

"That was hardly crazy. You're here, so everything will work out in the end no matter what I do."

"I can't say that's a laudable stance to take, Cult," I sighed.

"But it *is* true that as long as I'm around, everything'll be just fine!" Fouré conversely chirped.

"Huh?!"

Fouré sure changed her tune at the drop of a hat. Dandelion was also at a loss for words. *You're my last remaining ally, Dandelion...* I pulled him down from atop my head and we clung to each other. Because he was small, it must've looked more like we were rubbing our cheeks in affection.

"Come now, Hisui, you needn't be so frightened," Cult said, soothingly.

"You turned my arm into a frog's! It'd be even weirder if I *weren't* freaking out!"

"But now you understand the difference between spellcraft and godcraft, yes?"

"Yeah, it's literally muscle memory now, after that..." I never imagined something like that would possibly happen to me. I'd be sure not to offend Cult in the future...ever.

"At any rate, that's spellcraft. Even if you're manipulating element types or something's inherent nature, it'd be faster to cast the spell directly on the target."

"I thought only masters of spellcraft could do that."

"Well, more accurately...most humans can't do it at all, actually."

"Really?"

"Yes. Spellcraft can be repelled by methods other than godcraft or spellcraft. That is, even magecraft can protect against it."

"Ohh... So in that sense, directly targeting an enemy would have a worse rate of success... Huh? Hang on..."

“What is it?”

I suddenly remembered an impossible truth.

“Earlier, Glenn—my eldest brother—cast a curse on me. But if what you’re saying is true, isn’t it pretty much impossible to curse me?”

“Currently, there is no one who can threaten your physical integrity. But… Ah, you’re talking about the other day, when he cast a spell on your right hand.”

“Yeah, that.” Back then, Glenn had definitely hit me with an attack. I was sure it had been a curse—

“That attack wasn’t actually a curse.”

“Huh?”

“That was spellcraft energy transformed into acid that he threw at you. In other words, he manipulated the energy around you, not your body. That’s why you appeared to be covered in a dark mist.”

“Oh… I see.”

“The curse I had cast on you just now had changed your flesh, but you didn’t see me cast anything *at* you, correct?”

“That’s true.”

When Glenn had attempted to curse me, something had been flung at me. But when Cult had cursed me, it was like nothing happened. I didn’t even realize anything was changing until it had already taken hold of my entire arm. So that meant…

“With spellcraft, it’s not immediately obvious that anything happened?”

“That’s right.” Cult replied with a contented smile, and I felt a wave of deep dread seize my heart. That seemed to be the really horrific thing about spellcraft—a person wouldn’t be able to tell if they’ve been transformed until after the fact. Without enough training in spellcraft, it was entirely possible that they would *never* be aware of the transformation.

When the properties of fire and water change, the result is a visible phenomenon. But while the change itself might be seen with the naked eye, the actual spell always remained invisible.

Spellcraft…was a truly dreadful power.

Even if other powers could defend against it, it was absurdly powerful even at low levels. And I could use the same powers as Cult. With enough training, maybe I could even change my shape.

Cult, who was observing me in thought, suddenly laughed. “That expression on your face tells me you’re as fascinated by spellcraft as you are afraid.”

“Ah, you could tell?” It was then that I realized the corners of my lips were curled into a smile. How could I not be intrigued, really? I had the groundwork to use this power to its maximum potential, thanks to the basics Cult had laid out for me. More than anything else, spellcraft had the power to surpass imagination. I’m sure that with its power, I’d be able to create anything I wanted.

“Spellcraft’s great. I bet I could even recreate the appliances I used in my past life.”

“‘Appliances’?” Cult repeated, the word unfamiliar.

“They’re tools that work using electricity. In my old world, there were tons of things like that.”

“Electricity, you say? They sound like rather interesting contrivances.”

“Yeah. Electricity hasn’t been harnessed yet in this world, so the best substitutions for it are probably spellcraft or dark monstrite.”

Dark monstrite—the core taken from a monster’s heart. It acted as a secondary heart and was the source of the creature’s power. In other words, it functioned much like a battery. Monsters had lifespans too, and it was said that the amount of energy contained within the dark monstrite indicated its length.

There were also magical artifacts that made use of dark monstrite as their energy source. If I were to remake appliances here, I’d definitely need some.

“Then would I be correct in supposing that your current goal is to create such ‘appliances’ from your world?”

“Yeah. They’d definitely improve my quality of life, and you’re interested in them too, aren’t you, Cult?”

“I do see the appeal. If you wish to see them recreated, I’m sure we could…but I’ll leave the actual creation to you.”

“Thanks, Cult.”

She must be taking a step back to give me space to grow and develop. Mortals feared her, but she was honestly a very kind goddess. When I sincerely thanked her, Fouré suddenly opened her mouth to comment.

“By the way, those appliances of yours… Are there any that might make interesting weapons?”

“Weapons? What do you mean?”

“Useful tools are all good and nice, but I think it’d be best if you made a unique weapon that only you could create. Considering it’d be a product of knowledge from another world, I bet it would be impossible to copy.”

“I see… You have a point.”

So basically, something like a gun or a missile launcher? In a world where battles were fought using swords or magic, a weapon like a gun, where the user would be able to easily attack from a large distance, would be considered incredible.

It was worth thinking about, at least.

“I’ll keep it in mind. My knowledge is biased and I’ve never used a deadly weapon from my old world before, so I’m not entirely sure I’d be able to make one.”

“You didn’t have monsters there?”

“Nope.”

“You didn’t have powers like our crafts either, did you?”

I nodded in response to Cult’s question. “I’ve heard folktales and stories of how people had abilities like that in the far distant past, but at the very least, in my own era I never saw anything resembling magical powers at all.”

“Sounds like a peaceful world,” Fouré murmured, expressing her thoughts aloud. But I disagreed with her impression.

“Compared to this world, there was probably less fighting, but there were still a lot of cruel people. Humans still fought other humans. And we also had extremely dangerous weapons known as military ordnance. When those were used, hundreds of thousands—even millions—of lives were lost in an instant.”

“I guess that means conflict is eternal, no matter what world.”

“As long as people exist, it’s impossible for everyone to get along.”

I know people have their own thoughts and feelings on the matter, but that was the one thing I couldn’t let slide. I know exactly how foolish and impossible a dream it was to imagine everyone in the world could just join hands and get along.

“That’s the truth. Well, that aside, we should resume clearing this dungeon soon. If we don’t, you’ll be getting home rather late,” Aruna warned.

“Oh! Right.” Crap. If I was late getting home, I’d make Azalea

and my other sisters worry. I got to my feet and continued my foray. I needed to destroy the dungeon's core or whatever it was as soon as possible and move on to learning spellcraft—that was what I kept in mind as I continued.

☆

It had been several hours since I'd begun my dungeon adventure. Keeping my thoughts from straying to how much I wanted to go home as time went on, we finally reached the core of the dungeon. At least, a spherical mass of *something* was floating in the air, and I guessed it must be the core.

Before it stood a single massive monster.

"Aruna, is that…" I trailed off.

"Indeed. It is exactly as you've surmised," she nodded.

"Of course there'd be a boss that protects the dungeon."

"This one's called a goblin king. That's not its real name, but humans have taken to calling it that."

"It does look like it's a ruler of goblins."

Before me stood a monster that looked like a truly gargantuan goblin, and a much stronger one at that. The orcs I encountered in the dungeon resembled pigs, but this monster gave me the impression of a goblin that had literally been blown up in size. It was a goblin that was more powerful than orcs—that's why it was called their king.

"It looks really strong."

"Certainly stronger than an orc, at least. I know you're strong, Hisui, but if you take a hit from that axe, you're bound to die," Aruna warned, looking at the axe slung over the goblin king's back. The axe was larger than my entire body, and I was certain I'd be in for a messy death if it hit me. Magecraft alone wouldn't be enough to protect me.

"That being said, it's not a monster that's impossible for you to defeat. Luckily, for something that's meant to protect the dungeon, it's on the weaker side. Now go take care of it."

"That's supposed to be 'weaker'?" I groaned, doubtful. "Well, I'll do my best." Drawing my sword from its scabbard, I approached the goblin king, who placed a hand on the axe at its back in response.

It was at least three times larger than me. I steadied my breathing as I faced the goblin king, which was so tall I practically had to strain my neck to look up at it.

I'd be fine, I told myself. I had a little experience dealing with large monsters after fighting those orcs. While the goblin king wasn't really comparable to orcs, I noticed that unlike the smaller monsters, it remained deadly calm at my approach. We stared each other in the eyes, and then at nearly the exact same time, we broke into a sprint toward each other.

"Graaagh!" Moving at a speed unimaginable for its size, the goblin king reached me first. It swung its axe horizontally, and my sword couldn't block it. I neatly evaded its attack by jumping over the lurching axe blade, then pivoted around the goblin king to its rear, swinging my weapon.

Scrrrsh!

My sword, imbued with magecraft, sliced through the goblin king's thick hide. It was just as Aruna had said—if I buffed myself with the maximum amount of magecraft energy I was capable of releasing, I'd be able to wound the goblin king.

It would take some time before I could actually cleave its head from its shoulders, but I struck many times over to inflict minute wounds, aiming to cause massive blood loss.

The goblin king's attacks were, on the whole, wide swings...which worked terribly against a small opponent.

Little by very little, I continued my assault with the goblin king under my heel. The boss's chamber was rather spacious—with more than enough room for the goblin king to swing his axe freely—which made it all the easier for me to avoid his attacks. Honestly, the battles had been a lot worse when I was surrounded by other monsters in the cramped passages of the cave, but as long as I had a certain amount of strength, I had no need to fear the goblin king or any other creature in the dungeon.

I landed a clean hit on its neck, and massive amounts of blood streamed from its wound. My blade had dug halfway through its neck.

The goblin king finally fell—that had been the killing blow. The fight ended in a surprisingly easy victory.

"Good job. I see you're unharmed." Aruna drifted slowly toward me, floating gently in the air. Glancing all over me to check for

wounds, she grinned, flashing a victory sign. I grinned back at her.

"Heh! That was actually easier than taking out a pack of weaker monsters. The matchup worked out in my favor."

"Your victory was truly the result of your hard training."

"*Chirp!*" Dandelion, who'd been separated from me, returned to his throne atop my head. During the battle, just as the goblin king was about to make a wide swing with its axe, I'd occasionally heard Dandelion's chirps. I was sure he'd been trying to tell me to run. What a good boy.

As I stroked Dandelion on the head, I turned my gaze to the floating sphere in the background. "So...if I cut down that ball, the dungeon will disappear?"

"Yes. Its functions will all cease, and the dungeon itself will eventually vanish. Destroy it right away and return to the surface—it's nearly nightfall."

"Oh, no!" I didn't have the time to relish my victory. I poured all of my remaining magecraft energies into my sword and cleaved the dungeon's core in twain.

Afterward, I received an infusion of magecraft energy from Aruna, and defeated all the monsters I encountered on the way back. I returned to the surface much more quickly than I had traveled into the cave's depths.

The sky was now thoroughly dyed the dark blue of night.

Chapter 5: Dire Straits

“A-Azalea? And Cosmos… It’d be nice if you two could let go of me.”

After I’d finished clearing out the dungeon on our lands, I returned home…where Azalea and Cosmos had been waiting for me in the foyer. The former, who prided herself on her strength, didn’t move her arms an inch, and the latter, who looked to be on the verge of tears, couldn’t be pulled away from me either.

In the end, I was hauled off to Armeria’s room like some kind of alien who’d fallen into human clutches.

Azalea rapped on the door, which made a slightly muffled *knock, knock*.

As soon as she did, Armeria’s voice—which was the most soprano of all three sisters’—sounded from within the room in response.

“Yes? Who is it?” She asked.

“It’s me, Armeria. I’m coming in,” Azalea replied.

“Azalea? Go ahead.”

Having gotten permission to enter, Azalea pushed the door open.

Armeria was resting in her bed as usual, tucked into the corner of her room. Rousing herself upright to a sitting position, her eyes opened wide when she saw me.

“Oh, my… What happened, Hisui? You’re in quite an amusing bind.”

“I don’t think it’s very funny though…” I mumbled.

“He’s being punished,” Azalea explained, bluntly.

“Punished?” Armeria repeated.

“Hisui got home only just a moment ago, even though it’s already pitch-black outside.” Azalea glanced out the window. Given the darkness, barely anything could be seen. I wasn’t surprised my sisters were worried, but I was able to light my way using godcraft. Not that I could tell them that, of course.

This situation was entirely my own fault.

“Oh, dear… What were you doing out so late, Hisui?”

“I went for a walk and I got really absorbed in it…but look! I found your favorite fruit, Armeria!”

Being in the middle of nowhere, it wasn’t surprising that there were plenty of fruit-bearing trees on our lands once you got into the deeper neck of the woods. I’d meant to make a triumphant return bearing a cornucopia of fruit…but just as I thought, I wasn’t going to be forgiven that easily. Rather—

“If you have time to pick fruit, you have time to get home before dark, dummy!” Azalea snapped.

I couldn’t blame her. Our territory was overrun with monsters. Having slain them on the daily, Azalea knew more than anyone else how fearsome they were, so she was unsurprisingly angry for being made to wonder if something had happened to her dear little brother. Her rage was enough to make me feel guilty for dawdling so long in the dungeon. On top of that, Azalea and Cosmos were silently imploring Armeria to be angry with me too, given that they’d dragged me all the way to her room when they were ordinarily forbidden to go. But of the three sisters, Armeria was the most amicable.

She was a lovely young lady who could easily pass for someone from a much more well-to-do family, and though she could be a little bit self-centered at times, she was also very kind. I was certain she wouldn’t kick me while I was down, given I was already being raked over the coals.

That’s why I was relatively calm. These fruits were meant to be a decoy for Armeria as well, as I knew they’d draw her attention. Predictably, she took the bait.

“I’m pretty sure I’ve read about these fruits before. They’re called oranges, and although they’re composed mostly of water, they can be quite tart. They’re not something you’d want to eat all the time. But these ones over here are bananas, and they’re quite tasty. I’ve read they’re very popular in cities,” Armeria explained.

“Um, that’s not exactly what I was hoping you’d say…” The pall of anger that had been hanging over Azalea dissipated, and all that remained was complete bewilderment. *Give it up, Azalea*, I thought. Having the most time on my hands out of all of us, I got along well with Azalea, and I knew exactly how she felt.

When Armeria got like this, she wouldn’t stop, and anger wasn’t an emotion that came to her often in the first place. After all, she’s

never gotten angry at me, ever! I looked at Azalea as a self-contented grin bubbled up in my heart.

Meanwhile, Armeria prattled on in a display of her knowledge. “Still, where did you manage to find these? We hardly ever hear about fruit being found on our lands,” she prodded.

“Probably because you have to go pretty deep into the woods. I found them on the northwest side of the forest.”

“I see. I did hear that there aren’t many monsters in that area. Maybe something especially powerful lurks deep in the forest there.”

“I don’t know… Sounds kinda far-fetched to me— Oh!” Crap—I realized my mistake far too late.

Two of the three weren’t about to let my slip of the tongue go—Azalea and Cosmos, of course—and they glared at me in unison. I often responded to Armeria’s questions when I spent time with her, so I ended up admitting I’d gone deep into the forest as soon as I opened my mouth. Explaining that had been a terrible mistake.

Azalea and Cosmos’s anger was now a raging conflagration.

“Hisui! You know I told you not to go that deep into the woods!” Azalea barked, livid.

“Why don’t you listen to your sisters?!” wailed Cosmos.

“Well, I… I’m sorry.”

That day, my sisters lectured me for well over an hour. Through it all, Armeria continued her explanations and deliberations, trundling along at her own pace.

☆

As soon as Azalea and Cosmos finished scolding me, I dragged myself to my room, exhausted. When I flopped onto my bed, the three goddesses appeared from the ceiling. Fouré, occupying the center of the group, giggled quietly.

“They really chewed you out, huh, Huey?”

“Seriously… But I guess it was my fault for getting so absorbed in clearing the dungeon.”

“All’s well that ends well, really. You did manage to clear it in the end,” Fouré reassured me.

Aruna sat down on my bed and stroked my head. Her touch

was soothing, and I felt my eyes closing. I was sure I'd fall asleep soon.

"Indeed. Had you ignored the dungeon and left it alone, the forest would become overrun—and worst of all, your family and the villagers would have been exposed to danger. I would say the scolding is much better than the alternative."

"But would it not have been all right to leave Hisui's two brothers to the mercy of the beasts? They are a nuisance."

"Well said, Cult."

They agreed on that awful topic without a moment's hesitation. The old superstitions said that you sneezed when someone was talking behind your back, and if you believed that, I bet Glenn and Mikhail were sneezing right now.

Following Cult's comment, I raised an objection.

"That would be bad, though. If Glenn and Mikhail died, I'd have to take over the house as heir. I don't want to be the successor for a family like this."

And my sisters would probably all be cast out of the house too. I'd be the last one standing, forced to manage these backwater lands on the furthest reaches of nowhere under the watchful eyes of my parents. Screw that.

I felt for the peasants on our lands, but Glenn and Mikhail could probably do *something* for them with spellcraft. At the very least, with those two around, they could provide food for the few villagers...I'd hope, anyway. If worse came to worst, I wouldn't mind helping out a little either.

At any rate, I didn't want to take over these lands at all. That's why I was hiding my powers and sticking with the role of ostracized youngest son. But lately, my mask was beginning to slip in minute ways because my brothers were being so utterly annoying.

"Mmm... True. We do not wish for you to be bound to these lands either."

"I mean, we wouldn't mind either way, but it really seems like you don't want that."

"Personally, I believe it's best to travel and enrich yourself by experiencing many things. The world is a big place, after all, and I'm sure you'll find a lot to enjoy out there, Hisui."

"Aaand, we'd have so much fun too if Huey went traveling!"

Upon hearing Fouré's cheerfully excited tone, I responded with a smile of my own.

"That sounds nice. I'd love to travel around the world with you three. I'd like to see foreign empires, imperial states, and even other little kingdoms."

"We've done a bit of traveling ourselves, so we might be able to act as your guides, dear one."

"Oh... But wouldn't you three get bored doing that?"

"Not at all. I think seeing the sights with you will bring yet a different form of amusement."

"Cult's right! We have fun when you're around, so you don't need to worry about that at all."

"Thanks, everyone. I have a lot of fun with you too. I...really want us to be together forever." According to what Fouré had told me, my physical aging would stop at around twenty years of age. After that, I'd never get any older, and as long as Fouré was around, I was essentially immortal. So long as I wasn't suffering mentally or emotionally, I could be with them for all eternity.

This was a concept that most would consider terrible—I kind of doubted that living forever would be all sunshine and roses. But curiously enough, I wasn't frightened by the prospect. As long as I had Aruna and the others, I was convinced that I would never go down the wrong path.

My consciousness slowly drifted away as I listened to the three chat, their voices lively and animated. Embraced by slumber, even my thoughts began to fade—but before they did entirely, I heard Cult quietly giggle and whisper, "Starting tomorrow, do your best to practice spellcraft too."

☆

Dawn broke, and night turned to day.

Roused from sleep by Cosmos, we headed down to the dining room together. There, I had my breakfast even as Glenn and Mikhail, in oddly high spirits, heckled me relentlessly. Afterward, once I'd finished my farm chores, I went outside.

Given what had happened yesterday, Azalea and Cosmos were especially keen to keep their eyes on me. They tried monitoring my movements, but I hid myself from them with magecraft,

careful not to reveal my powers. Between setting up my own obstacles and getting help from Aruna, Fouré, and Cult, I managed to shake them off my trail and headed into the forest.

There, I sparred with Aruna and honed my magecraft. Once the morning had turned to the afternoon, I began practicing godcraft, and when the day turned to dusk, I wrapped up my training and headed back to the manor. I innocently greeted Azalea and Cosmos, who were waiting in the foyer for me, and then went to my room.

There, a new training regimen awaited me: my education on spellcraft.

"Are you ready, Hisui?" Cult asked, her long bangs draping down over her face as she looked at me, seated on the bed.

I nodded with a gulp of nervousness. "I am. Thanks for teaching me."

"You're very welcome. Now, let's begin your first real lesson on spellcraft—but keep in mind that it is the most difficult to learn among the three powers. First, let's start with simply feeling spellcraft energies."

"What do you mean by that, exactly?"

"I will let my power flow into you, just like yesterday. Just try to sense it."

"Y-You're not going to turn my arm into a frog's again, are you?"

She laughed. "I can if you wish."

"I don't! Please don't do anything crazy!" I vetoed Cult's suggestion as fiercely as I could. Even if it were only for a moment, I didn't want to go through that experience again. I'm sure just seeing that would make me lose it.

"All right. This time, I will do nothing but stream my power. Feel the spellcraft energies, and grasp the sleeping force within you." With that, Cult reached out to me. Touching my shoulder, an energy I supposed must be spellcraft flowed into me little by little from her hand.

I'd thought the same thing yesterday, but it really was a strange sensation.

"Spellcraft feels kind of...fleeting? Like crystal clear water—no, wait, it's more like a gentle breeze." Both water and wind were impossible to catch hold of, no matter how hard you tried. In the same way, when I attempted to grasp spellcraft, it slipped through

my hands and disappeared. I couldn't even tell if I'd really felt it or not.

"I imagine so. You'll get used to it eventually; that's what makes humans wonderful."

"Will I? It does feel like this first step is different from the other powers."

This part had been easy for both magecraft and godcraft. Spellcraft was the only one where I was uncertain, which solidified the notion that manipulating this power was truly difficult.

"But I kinda think I get it now. Trying to gather the energy by scooping it up doesn't work like it did with the others. I shouldn't be scooping it, but collecting it instead..."

Water would just run through my fingers no matter how hard I tried grasping it by hand. So, knowing that, I suspected I should collect the spellcraft energies more like a vacuum cleaner—by sucking it in. My handling was terribly rough, but I pulled the flowing energies into me—and quite a lot of it.

Right after I did, my body felt strange, and in my right hand, spellcraft energies pooled.

"Very good. I never imagined you'd be able to grasp spellcraft this quickly. My, no wonder Aruna was so surprised."

"Magecraft is far easier to pick up as well. In fact, I was also surprised at how easily Hisui learned spellcraft," Aruna cut in. But despite the praise, her face remained a blank slate. She seemed to be closing her eyes to my success, as though it were an obvious result.

On the other hand, Fouré was clapping up a storm.

"You're amazing! Now you know spellcraft too! How about you make something to commemorate?"

"Like what?"

"Well... You were saying earlier that it'd be interesting to recreate appliances from your old world, weren't you?"

"I mean... I've only just learned spellcraft, so I doubt I could make an artifact just yet." If it were that easy to make magic artifacts, no one would struggle with the use of spellcraft at all. But they did, so it had to be pretty difficult. Learning a desired skill and actually putting it to use were worlds apart.

Cult shook her head too.

"That will not be possible. While I'm interested in Hisui's old

world as well, his ability to manipulate spellcraft isn't at a viable level for crafting yet."

"Aw, you think? I bet Huey could pull it off really easily."

"And what reason do you have for that?" Where'd her confidence come from? I stared at her reproachfully, but she only laughed.

"You're special, after all. You'll be just as powerful as us soon—no, since you can use *all* our powers, you will be much stronger than us."

"Even Aruna and Cult?"

"You have three people's worth of ability, you know?" She remarked amusedly, "But whether that's equal to one of us depends on what it's used for. Either way, you might surpass us someday—that's what I'm getting at."

"I see... Well, even if I become that strong, it's not like it would matter much."

I doubted there were other entities in this world that were as strong as the goddesses. At least, if there were anyone powerful enough to go up against them, not a single person had ever run into them before. Or at least, if they had, they'd never mentioned it to me.

"Putting that aside, let's have you practice spellcraft now. I'm sure that if you practice, you can make even a simple weapon in short order."

"Huh? A weapon?"

"That's right. Next year, I will give you a weapon. So until then, it'd be best if you learned to use a wide variety, right?"

"Just in case, huh?"

"There's that too, yes. But also because Aruna frequently breaks your weapons during your training."

"Ngh... Sorry." I'd actually had Cult create a countless number of swords already. Because Aruna was so strong, the weapons broke down quickly.

"Personally, I suggest something a little sturdier. It'd be a pain to keep making a new one if it broke every time Hisui and I train," said Aruna.

"Stop snapping my weapons like they're dry twigs, then. You need to learn to hold back! I've been making the exact weapons you requested."

“I *have* been holding back, and they still break. Maybe you’re losing your edge?”

Cult took a moment of silence before responding, her rage slowly building. “I won’t let that insult go. Are you suggesting my weapons are poorly crafted? Do you not understand that those were the finest weapons it’s possible to create without imbuing them with special abilities?”

Cult and Aruna began to fight, face-to-face. This was an uncommon sight—ordinarily, Fouré was the only one who fought with Aruna, while Cult looked on in disinterest.

“C-Calm down, you two. Fighting’s not okay.”

“That’s right. Aruna always breaks things right away, and Cult’s way too prideful. You’re both in the wrong, you know.”

“Oh no, Fouré…” Before I could tell her not to add fuel to the fire, Aruna made her move. Grabbing both Cult and Fouré, they vanished into thin air.

A silence settled over my room, and I sighed deeply.

“They…must be fighting right now.” I didn’t see them anywhere and I couldn’t hear any noise from them, but I knew they must be fighting. Since Cult was gone, my spellcraft training was put on pause, and I rolled into bed.

I was surprised at how calm I was as I wondered whether it was all right to leave things this way. No answer came to me, though, and I drifted into sleep.

☆

“Ugh… That was just awful.”

Morning came before I knew it, and the three goddesses had returned without my noticing. Considering how ragged Fouré and Cult looked, I could tell that it must’ve been a vicious fight.

“You three sure took your time,” I said.

“Fouré and Cult kept running while they hurled insults at me,” huffed Aruna. “Just how many loops around the world did you two make us do?”

“But, I mean… You had zero mercy, Aruna! You cut my head off and stabbed me through the heart with no hesitation at all! It didn’t hurt, but it still felt awful!”

“You heal immediately anyway.”

“It still makes me feel sick! Aruna, you dumb meathead!”

“Indeed. I can’t use godcraft, so I do feel pain, you know? And you *knew* this, but you still slashed at me without reserve.”

“What’s that? Do you two want to feel the edge of my sword again?”

“No, absolutely not,” they responded in unison. The moment Aruna set her steely glare on them, her murderous mood palpable, Fouré and Cult hung their heads. Remaining ragged in appearance must have been part of their penitence. A small, awkward laugh escaped me, seeing them behave as per their usual. Then, since Azalea was calling me down to breakfast, I left my room.

☆

Right after breakfast, Hisui—the youngest of the siblings—left the dining room in high spirits. Watching him go, the eldest of the Clematis children, Azalea, called to Cosmos, her youngest sister.

“Cosmos, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Cosmos turned to look at Azalea.

“What is it? I was planning on following Hisui, so if you need something, can it wait?”

“No, it’s really important. And it’s related to that too.”

“So, let me guess… You want me to keep an eye on Hisui?” Cosmos was a clever girl, and she deduced Azalea’s intent immediately.

Azalea nodded.

“That’s right. Hisui’s been staying out way too late lately. The other day, he didn’t come home until after night had fallen.”

“I was planning on tailing him because I was worried about that too. Leave it to me, Azalea.” Cosmos dashed out of the dining room with a wave.

Watching Cosmos’s departing back, Azalea let her feelings out with a murmur. “What happened, Hisui? I hope you’re not getting into anything dangerous…”

Azalea’s worries were right on the mark. The youngest of the Clematis siblings, still a mere six years old, was fighting vicious monsters, hanging out with goddesses, clearing dungeons…and Azalea, not knowing any of this, finally left the dining room.

☆

Where are you going, Hisui?

Cosmos pondered this question as she chased after Hisui, who had left the manor in a rush.

Lately, Hisui's actions had been obviously suspicious. She never saw him anywhere near the manor outside of their chores in the field, and he returned home oddly late even though he was never injured in any way that might have kept him from getting home on time. For a six-year-old child to stay outside of the manor, where it was quite dangerous, and not return until evening was by and large terribly strange.

That's why Cosmos had tried to tail Hisui countless times. If she could determine what exactly Hisui was up to, then she could ease Azalea's worries as well.

But Hisui was awfully fast for a six-year-old. He would quickly put distance between himself and Cosmos, and she'd lose sight of him before long. Today was no different. Though she'd sprinted as hard as she could, Hisui suddenly sped up and shook her off his tail.

Darn it! He's getting faster every day! I can't believe he's younger than me.

It was obvious that Hisui's athletic ability was far above average. Just a year ago, Cosmos had been faster of the two, but now she couldn't even keep him in her sight, much less actually catch up.

Hisui was clearly up to something—a hunch that had only grown even stronger in Cosmos's mind over time.

But right now, Hisui had already disappeared.

As she walked through the forest, Cosmos frantically searched for traces of Hisui's passage. By looking at the faint tracks and snapped twigs she managed to notice, Cosmos was more or less able to follow his trail. It was her job to find Hisui, no questions asked, and drag him back home for Azalea's sake. After all, he'd ignored their warnings and gone deep into the woods.

Cosmos honestly wasn't sure how far their lands extended into the forest, but at least she managed to make headway into the woodlands without much issue. The nearby sounds gave her pause as she nervously headed deeper into the underbrush.

Th-There's something wrong... My body's shaking.

Cosmos had no idea that her trembling was due to the instinctual sense of fear possessed by all living beings. She'd never encountered a monster face-to-face before, after all. At most, all she'd seen were the carcasses of beasts Azalea had put down.

Azalea had done much for the Clematis lands in her work culling monsters—but conversely, it had given Cosmos a distorted view of the threat monsters presented. She knew they were strong and terrifying, but because Azalea had thinned out their population, their remaining nests would be deep in the forest…or so she had assumed. Her lack of awareness made her negligent. That would be her downfall.

The encounter was abrupt.

Hearing the snap of a twig, Cosmos at once turned to look in the direction of the sound. From the shadows of the trees, she caught sight of a lupine monster. It growled viciously, staring straight at Cosmos's face with red, bloodshot eyes.

Cosmos squeaked very, very quietly in shock, and her heart nearly leaped into her throat. Her entire body felt as though it were being pricked by ice-cold needles. Trembling as she realized what was happening, her body grew cold as her strength fled.

Unable to keep standing, she fell to the ground, her backside hitting the dirt. Seeing this, the wolflike monster crept closer to Cosmos, all the while never once dropping its gaze from her.

Her teeth chattered. Fear subsumed her mind, turning it into an empty slate. In this state, all of her movements were mostly by reflex. Just as there was a biological sense of fear, so too was there a biological attachment to life. That attachment was what drove Cosmos to automatically move her body—she pulled backward, as though trying to escape. Standing was beyond her, however; her legs simply didn't have the strength.

Oh no… No, I need to run or I'll be killed!

Her heart hammered even louder, pounding like the beating of a drum. The throbbing in her ears was a cacophony, and it quickly became agonizing. She slowly drew away from the beast, but the slight movement didn't go unnoticed by the monster. Leaping toward Cosmos, it swung its sharp claws at her.

"Aaaaahhh!" Her voice, suppressed until now, tore out of her throat in a searingly painful shriek. Her scream echoed through the forest, but soon disappeared, and all that remained was the

growling of the wolf.

She'd just barely managed to throw her arm up as a shield to block the wolf's attack—no, it was more accurate to say that, rather than consciously blocking the attack, she'd coincidentally shifted her body in a way that let her avoid taking a fatal wound. And now, blood was gushing from Cosmos's arm.

Her arm hadn't been sliced through to the bone, so in a way, she was quite lucky. But she'd only narrowly avoided being killed by its first attack. The beast was still directly in front of her, and it wasn't done yet.

Warily, she stared into the eyes of the monster that was watching her, and Cosmos suddenly realized something horrific that she wished she could have gone without knowing: She was stuck in this situation with no way out.

There was no one around. She had nothing on her that would help. She didn't even have the option of calling for someone to save her.

"No... No! Wh-Where are you, Hisui?!"

Pain. Fear. Desperation.

Amid the negative emotions flooding her mind, the first and most precious thought that rose in her mind was that of her dear little brother's face. What if Hisui had been killed by this monster too? Struck by the thought, tears reflexively sprang to her eyes.

She couldn't accept it. She *wouldn't*. She had to believe that Hisui was still alive—Cosmos had sworn to herself that she would do everything she could for him.

"Ngh!" She silently struggled to her feet, pushing through the pain. The wolflike monster ground its teeth with a sharp scraping sound as it gazed at Cosmos.

"No... You can't! I have to protect Hisui!"

She had her pride as an older sister. The love she felt for her little brother spurred her to move—but she was at the end of her rope. Still only seven years old, she didn't even have the energy to flee from the monster. Even so, she forced herself to her feet and turned to run.

From behind her, the monster mercilessly attacked. Knocking Cosmos to the ground, it opened its jaws to reveal rows of sharp fangs.

Then...

“What the *hell* do you think you’re doing?”

Cosmos had the faint impression that she could hear the very familiar voice of a young boy.

☆

Back at the beginning of the entire situation, around when Cosmos had lost sight of him, Hisui—who hadn’t even realized he was being tailed—had already started training diligently at his swordsmanship and magecraft, just as he did every day.

He strengthened himself with magecraft as he swung his blade. This was second nature to him by now. Suddenly, Dandelion, who was in his usual perch, chirruped.

“*Chirp?*”

“Hm? What’s the matter, Dandelion? Did something— Ow! What was that for?” Dandelion pecked at the top of Hisui’s head. Because Hisui was physically strengthened through magecraft, it didn’t actually hurt, but being pecked by his beloved sidekick still brought him emotional pain. But Dandelion began to chirp frenetically and continued pecking Hisui on top of that.

“*Chirp! Ch-Chirp!*”

“Huh? I don’t understand what you’re saying…though I can at least tell it’s probably an emergency.” Dandelion was trying to tell him something—Hisui was able to understand that much. He just couldn’t grasp the specifics.

Hisui tilted his head in confusion and, as if in response, Dandelion spread his wings and flew from his perch. As though heading straight back down the path from whence they’d come, he disappeared into the forest.

“Dandelion?” Panicking, Hisui raced after his hunting buddy, and the three goddesses also followed suit.

“Gosh, what’s gotten into the little chick?”

“I imagine he’s trying to alert us to something.”

“Let’s follow. He must know something.”

Dandelion flew at an incredible speed, forcing Hisui to physically strengthen himself with magecraft and sprint in an effort to keep the chick within sight.

Neither Fouré nor Aruna knew what had happened, which only confirmed for Hisui that something out of the ordinary had

occurred. Then, after a short while of running, the scream of a familiar voice reached his ears.

“That was…Cosmos!” He would never mistake the voice of a family member. Why was Cosmos all the way here, deep in the woods? The question bubbled to the surface of Hisui’s mind, but it was not the time to stand around contemplating the answer.

Immediately abandoning the question, Hisui pushed himself to sprint even faster. Immediately, Cosmos came into view. She had just been attacked by the lupine monster. Seeing her body dyed a bloody red, Hisui’s mind went blank. His right hand reached for his sword without even thinking, and he approached the wolf within a single breath.

“What the *hell* do you think you’re doing?” Then, with a coldness that surprised even himself, he beheaded the wolf. It only took a moment—the monster perished before it even felt the pain. Its body collapsed to the ground.

Fighting to keep his racing heart calm, Hisui approached Cosmos, who lay on the ground. Realizing she had just narrowly escaped with her life, he pushed the monster’s corpse out of the way and examined Cosmos’s wound.

After a moment, he sighed, relief washing over him. “Thank goodness. Her arm got sliced up, but that’s her only injury.” This was a wound he’d be able to treat with his level of godcraft skill.

Then, he heard Cosmos’s voice.

“Hi…sui…?”

“It’s me, Cosmos. What are you doing in a place like this?” Hisui asked as he channeled his godcraft and began to heal Cosmos’s arm.



Wreathed in a pale golden light, Cosmos murmured as she lay listless.

“Oh… Hisui. It’s okay. It’ll be okay… I promise… I’ll protect you.”

“Cosmos?”

Not a moment after she feebly murmured her oath, Cosmos fell unconscious. She’d lost so much blood that once the monster had been felled, her fear made way for fatigue, which overwhelmed her at once. Realizing this, Hisui gazed at her face for a short while before heaving a long, heavy sigh.

“Thank goodness I made it in the nick of time.”

Finishing his godcraft ministrations without any trouble, Hisui had healed the gouge in her arm.

“There, that should do it.” After checking that Cosmos’s wound had closed up without a trace, Hisui dispelled his godcraft energies and spoke to Dandelion, who was seated on his head once more.

“So, how’d you know Cosmos was here?”

“*Chirp*.”

“Sorry, but I don’t get it.”

Dandelion chirped again, expression smug. But Hisui wasn’t looking at Dandelion’s face—he didn’t know what Dandelion was saying in the first place. Despite this, he understood that Dandelion had somehow determined Cosmos’s location.

Pulling Dandelion down from his seat in his hair, Hisui stroked Dandelion’s head.

“But thank you, Dandelion. You’re the reason I managed to save Cosmos.” Had Hisui gone without knowledge of the danger Cosmos was in…well, he was sure he’d never forgive himself if that had come to pass. Why was he even learning these powers and honing them if he couldn’t protect his sisters? He very nearly lost sight of his answer.

“Your powers of detection really are something though,” Hisui mused, when suddenly the oddity of the situation struck him. “Huh?”

How did Dandelion know that Cosmos was being attacked? And he was in a rush because he knew Cosmos was connected, right? Or does he get like that for anyone at all?

As far as Hisui knew, powers of detection were not almighty. Maybe with the proficiency of someone like the Light Goddess

Fouré, the founder of godcraft, a power like that could learn everything about its target, but Dandelion had only just been born.

Fouré had said that Dandelion would grow alongside Hisui. If that was true, then Dandelion shouldn't have enough skill at godcraft to make observations like that. The situation begging the question, Hisui mulled it over, but a clear answer never came. He settled on the theory that Dandelion would react that way to anyone for the moment; either way, Hisui had managed to save Cosmos, which made him happy. All's well that ends well, he felt.

"There's…something odd about that little one."

On the other hand, Fouré narrowed her eyes in perplexed suspicion as she watched the chick nestled in Hisui's hands, enjoying the sensation of being stroked. But though she too tried to delve into the heart of the matter, she could not find an answer either.

☆

"Sorry, Aruna, but I'm going to go back to the manor for now. I have to get Cosmos to her room." After giving Dandelion a good, long dose of love and appreciation after I finished up with Cosmos's wound, I spoke to Aruna as I gathered my unconscious sister into my arms.

Aruna simply nodded without any complaints. "Do so. You'll return immediately after to continue your training, right?"

"That's the plan. We'd only just begun sparring."

"Very well. We'll wait for you, so hurry back."

"Gotcha," I answered without missing a beat, then hurried back to the manor at full speed. Careful not to jostle Cosmos too much as I ran, I reached the manor in the blink of an eye.

Opening the front door, I headed to Cosmos's room at the end of a hallway on the first floor. Laying her down in her bed, I pulled the covers over her and watched her face as she slept. Maybe it was because she'd been healed through godcraft, but there was no perceptible discomfort in her expression. She continued sleeping, her face tranquil.

"She must've followed me. You can't be doing that, Cosmos… That's dangerous." I had no right to say that—which I was sure

she'd say if she were awake.

I had the power to protect myself though. I didn't want her doing something as dangerous as tailing me when she didn't have any such powers herself. With that in mind, I turned on my heel and left Cosmos's room.

Passing through the foyer, I was about to exit through the front door when I heard a voice I didn't want to hear.

"Well, if it isn't Hisui. You left to go play just a little while ago, and you're back already?"

"I'm about to go out to play *now*, Glenn." Stopping in my tracks, I turned my head back to answer his question.

Glenn had just come out of the adjacent room leading to the den. For some reason, Mikhail had several books in his arms.

Huh? What were those books?

As though he realized my misgivings, Glenn opened his mouth to answer, snickering. "What's the matter? Curious about those books? None of them have anything to do with you."

"Even if you read every single book about monsters we've got, you wouldn't understand any of it," Mikhail sneered with a chuckle.

Considering I have memories from a past life, I'm already smarter than you jerks... I think so, anyway. At least I knew I had to be better off when it came to fundamental education, seeing as I'd gone to school and these two hadn't ever gotten the chance.

But still...

"Books about monsters? Even if you two read them, it wouldn't matter." *Because you're weak*. That was the rest of the thought my statement implied. He must've gotten the message, since his face flushed bright red in an instant.

Heh. Seeing that was enough to cheer me up.

"S-Screw you, Hisui!"

Resisting the urge to slug him when he yelled, I simply waved my hand and left. After learning magecraft, I wasn't remotely scared of Glenn and Mikhail. Because I knew godcraft, I'd be fine even if I got hurt, and now I was going to start my training in spellcraft. With that, I was sure I'd have the opportunity to get my revenge on these idiots.

My heart danced in excitement as I dashed deep into the woods. Unsurprisingly, Glenn and Mikhail couldn't keep up with my pace.

☆

“Dammit! Where the hell did he get to?”

Glenn and Mikhail had sprinted out of the manor, chasing Hisui who escaped into the forest at top speed. But they lost sight of him almost instantly.

Glenn ground his teeth in frustration.

“It actually kinda sucks that he spent so much time running away from us. Guess that made him get really fast, huh, Glenn?”

“Seriously. I’ll beat him blue and bloody when he gets back, but first… Let’s get ready.”

“Right, since we finally found the monster we were looking for and all.”

“Yeah. Azalea’s been using a spot just northeast of here as her hunting grounds lately. All that’s left is to catch its babies and have it bait even more monsters into the area.” Glenn chuckled darkly.

“I hope it goes well.”

“What are you worried about? Even if the plan goes wrong, we’re not the ones who’ll get blamed for it. I’m having fun just imagining Azalea getting upset.”

Erupting into laughter, they returned to the manor.

Chapter 6: Basilisk

“Th-There, I’m done.”

In my trembling hands, a single blade gleamed with a soft glow. As I held the sword aloft, it reflected the light of the moon, and an indescribable emotion welled up in my heart.

A bewitchingly lovely woman sitting next to me chuckled, then said, “Congratulations. You really do learn quickly. I’m amazed you’re already able to craft a weapon.”

The person who’d said this was the Chaos Goddess Cult.

It was nightfall. We were in my room on the Clematis estate, and I had just created a weapon with the spellcraft she taught me—this sword. It was an ordinary sword in every respect, but it was still my very first creation.

Several days had passed since I began learning spellcraft. My progress was going smoothly.

“Wow! And spellcraft’s supposed to be the hardest one, you know. You’re too good, Huey.” The Light Goddess Fouré, gently bobbing in midair, murmured a comment that felt like it was as likely to be exasperation as a compliment.

Chuckling, I replied, “That’s all thanks to you and Aruna.”

“Really?” Aruna didn’t sound convinced.

“Spellcraft really is hard to use, but it’s still a matter of manipulating energy—just the same as magecraft and godcraft. So it’s actually really similar in some respects,” I explained.

Indeed, the most difficult part of learning spellcraft had been grasping the sensation of its energies when Cult channeled it into me. Once I’d figured that part out, it wasn’t terribly difficult to manipulate or control—which might’ve been because I’d had plenty of practice with the others.

“Magecraft taught me control. Godcraft taught me manipulation and honed my ability to concentrate. I was able to apply what I learned from those to spellcraft as well,” I continued.

“Oh, I see.” Aruna nodded.

She understood what I was trying to get at, but I clarified for those who didn’t. “I’m just guessing here, but spellcraft wasn’t that

hard because I'd learned and trained in the other two crafts first. And although I've only made a single weapon so far, it looks like all of that paid off."

"That's not all though—you worked your butt off too, Huey! You're such a good kid." Fouré summed it all up in a rather...haphazard but fitting way, and she patted me on the head. Cult drew close as well—and as if Fouré's patting hadn't been enough, pressed her breasts up against me.

Fouré aside, Cult's actions just weren't something a person should do with a six-year-old child. I politely pulled away from her.

Cult made a strange expression in response. "Hmph. You're so mean to me, little one."

"You should quit doing that kind of thing until I've grown a bit more."

"Oh my, so you're not rejecting her." Aruna joined the conversation—unusual for her, since she wasn't a fan of chats in this vein.

"That's because spending all my time around you three makes me feel that way too. Man, if only I could craft myself a wife."

"A wife for you, huh?" Aruna instantly narrowed her eyes. By contrast, the edges of Fouré's lips curled into a devilish grin.

"I don't want Huey's wife to be some washed-up nobody. She'll have to be someone wonderful who's won our approval."

Cult snickered, somewhat unkindly. "If she's a nasty shrew, I might accidentally turn her into a frog, after all."

"Man, you two are scary," I sighed. Why were they getting so worked up over this joke? It was almost like they were fantasizing about someday having a sister-in-law.

"Well, no one knows what the future has in store. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. For now, Hisui deserves praise," said Aruna, beginning to stroke my head as well.

"You guys are blowing my sword out of proportion."

"I bet you'll make an even better one soon anyway, Huey." Fouré nodded.

"You mentioned those...appliances, did you call them? From your old world," Cult asked.

"Yeah," I affirmed, "I wanna make those and live easy."

An air conditioner that would keep the room temperature constant on both hot and cold days. A kettle that would instantly

heat water when I wanted a hot drink. A microwave that would warm my food when I got hungry. I wanted a vacuum cleaner too, so I could clear all the dirt and dust when cleaning, and maybe a hair dryer would be nice.

I wanted to make those kinds of appliances—things that were completely ordinary in my old world. The standard of living here really divided people into haves and have-nots.

Plus, if I sold those, I could become a real fat cat in the future. When it came to quality of life, you couldn't ever go wrong with having more money. So I was exceptionally enthusiastic about honing my spellcraft.

"Oh, right. Can I ask you something, Cult?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Since spellcraft can create something from nothing—well, to be more precise, things can be produced by manipulating spellcraft energies—is it possible for the opposite to happen as well?"

"You mean, if things can produce spellcraft energies?"

"Yeah."

"No, I don't believe so." She immediately rejected the notion, and a strong sense of resignation welled up in me.

"When we say spellcraft 'creates' things, we are merely describing a change in properties. The transformed objects do not have spellcraft in them, and once something is changed, there is no spellcraft technique to reverse the effect. That would be within the realm of godcraft."

"You did mention that before—that spellcraft is the power to twist things."

"That's right. You remember well." Cult began to pat me on the head alongside the other two. I suddenly felt like I was the baby sibling here among all these goddesses.

"Next, I'll try making a strong shield." That was enough of a break—it was back to my training. I made a big leap forward and created all sorts of equipment.

The only problem was cleaning it all up after.

☆

The next day, having improved my efficiency by leaps and

bounds with magecraft, I immediately finished my chores in the fields. My skill with godcraft wasn't at the level where I could locate monsters on my own yet, so I left the job of finding monsters to Fouré and headed ever deeper into the woods.

"Hm? Odd... It seems the monsters are gathering at the northeast side of the forest today. They appear to be...slorises?"

"What are those?" I asked.

"A sloris is a type of monster that lives in family groups. They have a tendency to stay near each other, and if one of their children is abducted, they'll chase the perpetrator to the ends of the world," Fouré explained, finishing with a giggle that made me feel ill at ease.

Recently, I'd started to feel like I'd been strangely desensitized to danger—but given my situation, that didn't seem surprising. "Huh. Sounds like an interesting monster."

"They're weak, though. Honestly, they wouldn't be much of a challenge for you." Fouré shrugged.

"Maybe he should try anyway, though? It'd be good practice to fight lots of enemies at once," Aruna cut in.

"That's true...but I still don't think it's a good idea," replied Fouré, tersely. Her lips pursed in distaste at Aruna's proposal.

"Why?" I asked.

Fouré answered. "Because right now, there's already someone fighting those slorises."

"There is?"

Wait, could it be? A certain someone's face came floating up in my mind. There was only one person who could face up to the monsters on the Clematis lands. And that person was...

"Azalea? She's there?" I asked.

"I don't recall if that's her name, but yes, she's your sister. She'll probably beat them without much issue at the rate she's going."

"I see. Well, if she's there, then I don't need to deal with them."

"Oh...but things might take a turn for the worse soon."

"What do you mean?"

"There's a very large body of energy heading in your sister's direction. That must be...a basilisk."

"A basilisk, huh? Are they strong?" I'd never heard of that monster before.

Fouré nodded. "Aruna could probably kill it with a broken

branch, but your sister will lose against it, without a doubt. It's probably drawn there by the slorises." Fouré had made her statement so firmly that it was clear it was basically a death sentence. Azalea would be absolutely killed by the basilisk.

"N-No! If she's going to lose, we gotta go save her!" Hurriedly, I sprinted in the direction Fouré indicated. Perplexed, she called after me.

"What? You're going? But I don't think you can win either..."

"Even if I can't, I have to do something! I've been training all this time so I can protect my sisters!"

"Let him go." Aruna urged me to act. "Even if he dies, we can just have Fouré revive him. He needs experience fighting strong enemies too. It's not like he's got no chance of winning at all."

"Thanks, Aruna."

"But keep your wits about you. The basilisk's gaze has the power to turn things to stone. It also has a venomous bite, and it can exhale poison gas."

"Don't forget! Godcraft can repel all those nasty ailments, but at your skill level, you can probably only reduce the effects, rather than outright avoiding them."

"Heh heh heh. Will you still go regardless, little one?"

"Of course," I responded immediately. Even though I knew I might die, I didn't stop running. I'd at least make sure Azalea could escape. Resolution burning in my heart, I strengthened myself further with magecraft and dashed at top speed. Before long, I heard a loud noise from far away.

☆

After about ten minutes of running through the forest, I reached the northeastern part of the forest. Azalea came into view, cutting down some monkey-like monsters. Without sparing a single moment to even consider the situation, I called out to her.

"Azalea!"

"Hisui? What are you doing all the way out here?" Azalea stared at me, her face the perfect picture of astonishment. She clove the last sloris into two, then shot me a sharp glare. There were countless slorises lying at her feet—a rather small one among them. I could sense spellcraft from it, just faintly.

“Huh? What was that?” My gaze was oddly drawn to that particular sloris. However, I didn’t have the time to think about it. My magecraft-strengthened sense of hearing picked up sounds of movement—the approaching basilisk, undoubtedly.

Azalea shouted at me, furious. She must’ve noticed the noise as well. “Hey, are you even listening, Hisui?! You need to go home right now! A huge monster is coming this way!”

“If you know that, then why aren’t you running away?!” I shouted back at her.

“If I run, then who’ll be left to defend our lands? Left to itself, it may well even attack the village. It’s my job to stop it before it does,” she responded, her tone calm as though she were stating an obvious fact.

She was still only thirteen, but I didn’t know anyone with half as much determination as her. She wasn’t doing this because our parents wanted her to—he chose to put her life on the line for the innocents living on our lands. Her strength of will was truly admirable…but I wouldn’t accept it. I couldn’t.

“Then I won’t run either. I’ll fight by your side, Azalea.”

“Are you crazy— Ah!” Right as she was about to admonish me, the trees in front of us toppled over, and a gargantuan snake appeared.

The basilisk!

It was so massive, it made all the monsters I’d fought up until now seem like toys in comparison. It towered over me so much that I had to crane my neck just to keep it in sight.

I settled into a combat stance.

Seeing me, Azalea spoke out in shock once more. “Hisui! Where did you get that sword?”

“It was a present…from a very kind lady.”

“That raises more questions than it answers, but never mind—just run! I’ll buy you time! You don’t have any powers, so this monster is way faster than you!”

“I *do* have powers. I’ve just been hiding them.” There was no point in lying about it now. Then, reinforced by my magecraft, I sped toward the serpent.

I reached the basilisk in an instant. Intending to slice through its scaly hide, I swung my sword, but…

Ker-kling!

I failed to pierce it. My blade was repelled.

“Ngh! It’s so tough!” I gritted my teeth and looked down at my hand. The impact of that strike had caused it to go numb.

“H-How did you…get over there so fast?” Azalea drew closer, eyes wide open.

I grinned at her. “Magecraft, how else? I learned to use it a year ago.”

“No way! That’s impossible. People’s powers don’t awaken until they’re ten years old…”

“But you saw me just now, didn’t you?” I said, then ducked—the basilisk whipped its tail at us as we talked, and I dodged beneath it. “As you can see, I’m using magecraft. I wouldn’t be able to move this quickly if I couldn’t.”

“Right… That explains a few things.” Azalea seemed to be thinking about something. Then, after the briefest moment, she shot me a piercing gaze.

“All right, I get it. I really do want you to run, but even if I forced you to go home, this monster’s now in the way. So let’s work together.”

“I knew you’d come around.”

“But you have to be very careful about its attacks. I won’t be able to protect you.”

“I’ll be fine. I promise I won’t drag you down.” As I said this, we both dashed toward the monster in a synchronized attack. I ran to the basilisk’s flank as Azalea headed straight for it, aiming for the head.

I attacked while Azalea worked to keep its attention. That was definitely the best decision, given that she was more skilled in combat than I…which made me a little embarrassed, since I was her brother and all.

Still, I swung my blade without any further consternation. Channeling more magecraft than I had with my first attack, I swung with all my strength—but despite the increased energy, I only managed to fracture its tough scales. I was nowhere near delivering a fatal blow.

“These scales are way too tough!”

“Don’t worry. Just keep attacking it like that and we can beat it,” Azalea said, striking at its head.

My eldest sister was as dependable as always. The momentum

of her blow knocked the basilisk's head backward ever so slightly, and it bared its fangs. I took the opportunity to attack as well. But while Azalea had managed to deal damage, I could barely scratch it in comparison. Even an idiot could tell the basilisk wasn't the least bit concerned about me.

I had to hurt it somehow—but it'd be hard with the amount of magecraft I was capable of using. I backed off momentarily, my mind racing to try and devise a plan of attack. But as I did, the basilisk began to spew its poison. Exhaling a dark purple mist, its breath obscured the surrounding area.

"Ah!" Azalea cried out in surprise.

"It'll be fine, Azalea! I can reduce the effects of poison!"

"What? How?"

"Like this!" I thrust my empty left hand out in front of me. Channeling godcraft energies from within, I enveloped both myself and Azalea in its light. Godcraft was the power to retain or restore something to its original condition, and my ability was apparently enough to weaken the basilisk's poison. Although we both ended up breathing in a little bit of the poison mist, neither of us seemed to be any worse for wear.

Then, Azalea renewed her attack. This time, though, the enemy had the advantage. The poison mist had only been a diversion—the basilisk wasted no time in whipping its supple tail around for a speedy strike.

Azalea, who'd been watching the poison mist as she attempted to rush through it, immediately took a defensive stance in the fraction of a second before the blow struck.

She just barely managed to block.

Along with her weapon, Azalea went flying backward, cutting through the gloom.

"Gah!"

"Azalea!" She sailed through the mist, flattening the brushwood as she hit the ground. Since she was physically strengthened through magecraft, I was certain she hadn't been fatally wounded—but considering the blow she'd just been subjected to, I could only assume she'd been badly hurt.

I tried to hurry to her side, but the basilisk blocked my path to her. It unfurled its body and coiled itself around my immediate vicinity, entirely walling me off.

“Dammit! Get out of my way!”

Channeling my magecraft once more, I charged at the basilisk with full force, but it blocked my attack with the tiniest of movements. My swing bounced back, completely reflected.

My mind blank with rage, I failed to dodge its attack, much like Azalea had. I took the strike head-on, and although I managed to block it with my sword, I couldn’t entirely prevent the aftershock. My sword snapped in the center, its tip shattering into dozens of pieces, and I was launched into the air and flung back.

“Damn…it!” I crashed into a tree, the undergrowth breaking my fall. A crippling pain flooded my body. I couldn’t stand—not right away, anyway—and at this rate, I was going to be attacked.

Or so I thought—but the basilisk prioritized Azalea instead.

The poison mist cleared, and I saw the serpent dart toward Azalea, its body twisted in the complete opposite direction from me.

“Wait! I won’t let you hurt her anymore!” I cried out. Mustering all of my strength, I got to my feet. The broken sword slipped unimpeded from my right hand, and a dull clank rang out as it fell to the ground. I haphazardly healed my wounds with godcraft, and though my treatment was nowhere near a perfect fix, it was enough that I could move again.

“You can’t do that, Huey! You’re pushing yourself way past your limits. You have to heal yourself properly!” Fouré cried.

“If I waste time doing that, the basilisk’s gonna kill Azalea! I’ve got to save her!”

“Huey…”

“There’s nothing you can say that’ll change his mind.” Aruna, who’d appeared next to Fouré, simply shrugged her shoulders.

She was right. There was nothing the three goddesses could do to stop me. I didn’t want Azalea to get hurt.

Balling my hand into a tight fist, I channeled magecraft into it. Once I’d collected the energy, I released as much of it as I could—then forced myself to channel even more.

“Wha?! Hisui, what are you doing?”

“You’re increasing the amount of power you’re releasing?” Fouré gasped, shocked. “That’s too dangerous, Huey!”

“Little one, don’t tell me… You’re *trying* to lose control of your magecraft?”

Aruna, Fouré, and Cult all realized I was behaving strangely. At this moment, I was forcibly drawing out the magecraft that slumbered within me, and I had already collected more than I could control.

Magical powers were a sort of double-edged sword. If I didn't control it properly, it could affect my body in irreparable ways that even godcraft couldn't cure. For example, in magecraft's case, it might actually cause my body to disintegrate—energy in amounts that went beyond the user's capacity to manage would eat away at their physical form, to the point where they could no longer withstand the power.

The fibers of my muscles snapped one after another in rapid succession as they swelled, tearing my skin as they went, causing me to bleed. As my bones began to fracture under the pressure, I immediately healed the damage with godcraft.

This was the ace I had hidden up my sleeve—a self-destruct skill that I'd thought up while learning godcraft from Fouré. If I couldn't withstand the stress placed on it by the burgeoning magecraft energies, then I would heal myself with godcraft even as I physically buckled under the strain, pushing my body to complete collapse if I had to.

I basically couldn't control the magecraft any longer, but that was fine—I only needed to keep releasing it. Prioritizing healing myself with godcraft, I single-mindedly focused on strengthening myself with power.

Ow... Ow, ow, ow! It hurt—it hurt like hell! I couldn't cut off my sense of pain with godcraft like Fouré could, so I wasn't surprised that my body was screaming as agony thundered through it.

Tears began to spill from my eyes. It hurt so badly I thought I might pass out...but I couldn't do that now. Holding on solely through my desire to save Azalea, I thrust my right arm out in front of me.

I grabbed the hilt of my fallen sword, tightened my grip, and then...

"Grrr-aaah!"

I shouted in an effort to distract myself from the pain. My throat quivered and my entire body trembled, but despite it all, I kicked off against the ground in a mad dash.

The sound of an explosion rocked through the area, and I

crossed several tens of meters to reach the basilisk within the blink of an eye. I could see Azalea—she stood poised with her sword ready to counterattack, blood dripping from her lips.

Flashing her a grin, I swung my broken sword in her stead.

“Hsssss?”

The basilisk reacted far too late.

Its choice to target Azalea had now become its downfall. My surprise attack hit the mark, and I struck the basilisk’s neck with all the strength and power I could muster. Since it was a snake, I couldn’t be sure if I’d really hit its “neck” or not—but nevertheless, it didn’t stay my blade.

The basilisk, surprised, immediately attempted to counterattack, but my sword cut through it faster than it could move.

In an instant, its head was separated from its body.

The basilisk’s mouth was open, but no sound came out. It couldn’t even manage a cry in its final moments. Spraying a fountain of blood that rained down on me and Azalea, the monster went crashing to the ground. Then, the two of us collapsed with a dull thud.

I hit the ground, every last ounce of energy spent. The air stank next to the basilisk, but I couldn’t move even a single finger.

I’m certain that I never could have swung my sword with so much strength without godcraft. All my training had finally paid off a little, I thought as my vision started to fade. Before I fell completely unconscious, I saw Azalea’s face as she came running to my side.

She was sobbing.

☆

Fshhhh…

A comforting breeze caressed my cheek. Were sunbeams filtering down through the trees? All I could see was white. Little by little, my brain began to rouse itself from slumber, and I could sense someone’s presence. Slowly, I cracked open my eyes.

“Mngh… Mmm…” Groaning sleepily as I opened my eyes, a familiar face came into view directly in front of me—it was Azalea. She turned in my direction upon hearing my voice and, in doing so, realized I was awake. The moment she did, her eyes grew wide as saucers.

“Hisui! Thank goodness… You’re finally awake.”

“Is that something surprising? Why would… Oh.” I started to ask

why I'd be sleeping in a place like this when the memories came flooding back. To save Azalea, I'd fought the basilisk in a lightning-fierce death match.

The basilisk was an impossibly strong opponent. If I'd approached fighting it the same way I would with any other monster, I'm sure both Azalea and I would be dead. But thanks to the godcraft I'd learned, I managed to go toe to toe with the monster—and in the end, I lopped its head off after releasing all the magecraft energy I had and more.

Still, I was now suffering from the overuse of my powers. Evidently, I'd fallen unconscious right after defeating the basilisk. When I thought about everything that had led up to that point, I immediately turned and looked to my side. About ten meters away, the basilisk's corpse lay on the ground.

"That monster really *is* dead, right?"

"Yeah. We might want to check just in case, but at least I can say it hasn't moved in over ten minutes."

I felt in my heart that it was dead beyond a doubt.

"But never mind that!"

With a sharp *fwip*, Azalea pointed straight at my face.

"Wh-What?"

"I'm the one asking questions here, not you! Why'd you do something so crazy?! I can tell just by looking—you released way too much magecraft energy, didn't you? You'd better not tell me you didn't know what would happen if you lost control, seeing as you literally just did it!"

"Oh, uh... I'm sorry."

She blocked any chance I had of avoiding the topic before I could even attempt to distract her, so I simply and honestly apologized. When I did, Azalea heaved a deep sigh, then continued speaking.

"You're aware you could have gotten yourself killed doing that, right?"

"Yeah..."

She didn't say anything for a moment, but then pouted with a humph and reached out.

"Ow!" A sharp pain coursed through my forehead. I knew Azalea had just flicked me, but I just lay blinking in embarrassment.

Watching me, she finally broke into an awkward smile.

“That was punishment for your recklessness. Just so you know, I won’t be so nice next time. Don’t ever do something that dangerous again.”

“Azalea…” Seeing her tear-streaked finally breaking into a smile, I couldn’t manage to say anything in response. I’d probably do the exact same thing again if Azalea or any of my sisters were in danger, though. As soon as I knew what had to be done to save them, I wouldn’t hesitate.

But…right now, what I had to do was give Azalea a little peace of mind. An awkward smile crossed my lips as well.

“Okay. I promise.”

A moment later, Azalea nodded, satisfied.

“Good. Let’s get back to the manor right away. There’s a lot I want to ask you.”

“Urgh…” She was definitely going to grill me about my magecraft and godcraft.

Gathering me in her arms, Azalea stood up. I knew my body was only that of a six-year-old, but it still felt a little humiliating to be picked up by my thirteen-year-old sister. Flailing about, I raised my voice in protest.

“A-Azalea! I’ve gotten my energy back now, so I can walk by myself!”

“Don’t even try. You defeated a basilisk—and at your age to boot—so I’m sure you’re still injured from the fight. It’s honestly a miracle you survived, so hush up and let me carry you.”

“Mngh…”

Evidently, she would brook no objections. And she had me in a princess carry, all bundled up in her arms! I was so embarrassed I felt like I could die, but that didn’t change the fact that I’d been incredibly reckless. I doubted Azalea would put me down, so I decided to just put up with it.

Overhead, the three goddesses had gathered at some point. Looking down at me, they spoke.

“Heh heh! You really defeated a basilisk, Huey!”

“This is the result of all the work he put into training.”

“And godcraft was MVP!”

“What? No, obviously it was magecraft. That’s what finished the beast off.”

“But he would have died without godcraft.”

“Quiet, you two. You’re going to stress Hisui out and ruin his health,” Cult warned. Fouré and Aruna gulped in unison.

Those three were chatty as always.

“Hmm? You’re awfully interested in the sky, Hisui,” Azalea remarked.

“Oh, uh… I was just thinking how nice it looked,” I deflected.

“Well, I guess so. It’s still the afternoon.”

“I’m so tired… I feel like I could sleep for a few days.”

“Well, duh. You should take it easy and rest for a while. I’ll just make up some excuse for Glenn and Mikhail. If they complain about you not helping with chores, just ignore them.”

“Yeah. I’m sure Glenn’ll harass me… Huh?” Following that line of thinking, a stray idea suddenly popped into my mind out of the recesses it’d been hiding in. Now that I thought about it, Glenn and Mikhail had been reading a book about monsters together. Ordinarily, those two would have no interest in a topic like that.

Right after that, a huge number of slorises had attacked Azalea. Even if the basilisk’s appearance had been coincidental, one of the sloris corpses had telltale signs of spellcraft. Outside of myself and Cult, my brothers were the only people who could use spellcraft in the area.

Adding in the fact that those two hated Azalea enough to do something like set a horde of monsters on her… In my mind, the puzzle pieces snapped into place.

Did they really capture a baby sloris to bait the monsters into attacking Azalea? Even though it seemed preposterous, that was what the facts seemed to suggest.

“What’s wrong?” Azalea asked, noticing I was deep in thought.

I took a moment to respond to her. “It might just be coincidence, since I don’t have solid proof. But I’ve got something I need to talk to you about.” Now that she knew I had powers, I figured it’d be best to just tell her. Glenn was sure to target her again in the future, so I wanted her to at least be careful around him.

“What is it?”

“Do you think I could tell you in your room? I don’t want anyone overhearing.”

“All right. Let’s get back on the double, then.” Azalea wreathed herself in magecraft and began to sprint. She sure had a lot of

energy, considering we'd just fought a basilisk.

I decided to just relax in her arms, since being carried like this was a rare experience. As I watched the surrounding scenery pass by at high speed, a bad feeling welled up in my heart that I couldn't dispel. If my deductions had been correct, my brothers really were the lowest of the low.

Bile rose up in the back of my throat.

☆

I returned to the manor with Azalea. Thankfully, we saw neither hide nor hair of Glenn or Mikhail. Relieved, Azalea brought me up to her room, and laid me down on her bed.

"Azalea, I can sit in the chair..."

"Not a chance. I'm not going to let you sit in a hard chair when you're so exhausted."

"But you're just as tired."

"Yeah. So I'll sit next to you."

"I guess that's also an option."

As if this were the obvious thing to do, Azalea came and sat down beside me. It was unreal how closely she stuck to me. But since I needed to have a serious chat with her, I decided to put up with the embarrassment.

Azalea immediately got to the heart of the matter. "Now, let's start with whatever you wanted to talk about, since you know exactly what *I'm* going to ask you"

"Hm... To discuss that, I need to give you a proper explanation, so let's actually start with your questions first, Azalea. I'll tell you what I can."

"Okay. Then I'll get straight to the point—you can use magecraft, right? And godcraft on top of that? What's going on?"

I knew that was what she'd want to know. Common wisdom held that powers didn't bloom in people until a certain age. On top of that, Azalea had seen me use *two* powers, which wasn't normally possible. It was only natural that she'd be incredibly curious.

"It's simple. A year ago, all three powers awakened in me."

"A-All of them?" Unsurprisingly, she was shocked to hear the truth.

“Yep, you heard me right,” I nodded.

“So that means you can use spellcraft too?”

“I only started learning spellcraft recently, but yeah, I can at least make weapons.” With that, I decided to try giving her a firsthand demonstration. During the fight with the basilisk, it was all I could do to keep two powers activated at the same time, so I didn’t have enough wherewithal to use spellcraft on top of that. But now, I had all the time and energy in the world.

I created a simple longsword, then handed it to Azalea.

“Here. Yours was damaged in the fight with the basilisk, right? You can use this one.”

“Y-You really *can* use spellcraft…”

“I was surprised to find out too. I thought it was ridiculous when I heard I had an affinity for all three powers.”

“That’s putting it mildly! You’ve got to be the first in history—I just know it!” Azalea didn’t often get excited, but she gushed in delight. A smile came to her lips—a happy one.

“You look pleased,” I remarked.

“Why wouldn’t I be? I’m so proud of my gifted little brother!” Then she wrapped her arms around me in a tight embrace. That just ended up pressing her chest into me, which prompted an awkward silence.

“Th-Thanks, Azalea. But I don’t really want to stand out—at least not right now.”

“I bet. I think I can guess why you went out of your way to hide it. You don’t like our family much, do you?” This was very much like her—honest and blunt.

I nodded. “Yeah. I absolutely, completely, one-hundred-percent despise House Clematis.”

Our lands were basically just lawless wilderness. It was a place where my parents and two brothers tried their utmost to be happy, but that was all it was. For me and my three sisters, it wasn’t a place we belonged. So I hated this house, and I hated the rest of my family who didn’t have a shred of kindness for anyone but themselves. I hated this environment that stifled us at every turn.

“I know how you feel. I think it’s smart to keep your abilities under wraps too. You’ve always been smart, so I’m sure I won’t have to worry about you being irresponsible with your powers.”

“I’ve only been getting back at Glenn and Mikhail every now and then.”

“Serves those dummies right. And they’re stupid, so they’ll never notice. Personally, I still can’t believe you can use all three powers when you’re not even ten yet.”

“Right. I want to do a lot with them.”

“Like what?”

“Well, first of all, I want to help you. I can use magecraft, and I managed to take out that basilisk, so I’m sure I can help you with your work from now on. To be honest, I’ve actually been culling monsters for a while now.”

“H-Hisui!”

“Ow!” For some reason, Azalea’s fist came down on me, rapping her knuckles against my head.

“When did you do that?! That’s way too dangerous, you know! Besides, did you already forget you nearly died fighting that basilisk?!”

“S-Sorry…”

She was right. The fight with the basilisk was hard-won, and our victory came by the skin of our teeth. It’d been bad enough of a fight that I’d lost consciousness after, which was the first time that had ever happened to me outside of being knocked out by Aruna during our training matches.

If I encountered another enemy of that level, I had no guarantee I’d defeat it. I might even die.

“But I trained in magecraft so I could help you.”

“Hisui…” She trailed off, finding the words. “I’m not changing your mind, am I?”

“Even if you tell me not to, I’ll still fight.” I wouldn’t back down.

She sighed. “You’re just as stubborn as Cosmos.” She deeply sighed again a moment later. After being around her for years, I knew very well that sigh was one of defeat. And besides, my stubbornness had never lost—and it never would.

“All right, fine. At least keep your battles to where I can keep an eye on things. And most importantly, don’t you dare die. Promise me.”

“Yeah, I promise.”

The Light Goddess Fouré was with me. As long as she was by my side, I’d never perish. But saying that would just make Azalea

more confused, and it'd be hard to explain besides. For now, I decided to just stick with my promise.

"Good. Personally though, I hope you can master godcraft soon—to save Armeria."

"I was thinking the same."

"Out of all of us, you're the one who's closest to her. If I was the reason you trained in magecraft, then naturally I'm sure you were training your skills in godcraft for Armeria. So spellcraft is to help Cosmos, I take it?"

"Yeah, that more or less sums it up. I want Cosmos to be able to eat decent food, so I gotta hurry up and get good enough at it to make meat."

"Don't overdo it though. If you rush things, you might get found out."

"I know. I'm keeping all that in mind." Even if I eventually got caught, it wouldn't be so bad if Armeria or Cosmos knew, but it'd be a huge problem if my parents or brothers found out. Azalea must've wanted to warn me about that.

I nodded, and switched topics—it was my turn to explain.

"Now, I have a suspicion that I wanted to talk to you about. It's something I guessed using my powers."

"This is what you wanted to tell me about earlier, right?"

"Yeah. So, you see..."

I told Armeria about what I'd noticed regarding Glenn and Mikhail. Their suspicious activities, their interest in monsters... They probably knew about the slorises, and I'd also noticed the vestiges of spellcraft energies on a baby sloris.

After I finished explaining, Azalea's expression darkened. "I see... So what happened wasn't a coincidence, and there's a good chance Glenn and Mikhail were involved."

"I do think the basilisk being there was a coincidence at least. A monster that deadly could destroy the village or manor, especially if they'd aggravated it." My brothers were stupid, but I'm sure they knew how much danger a basilisk presented. Mikhail at least would have stopped Glenn.

They had probably meant to just harass Azalea. Looking for a way to give Azalea even the slightest bit of grief, they took advantage of the relatively weak slorises.

"I'm sure your guess is right on the mark, Hisui. Those two don't

like me one bit, and they know my hunting schedule and routes. Plus…I did notice there was a baby sloris on the ground there. It looked like it was in a lot of pain."

"Then there's no doubt they did something to it with spellcraft and left the weakened sloris near your hunting grounds."

"Those idiots… They don't ever think things through!" She clenched her jaw in irritation, the sharp grinding illustrating exactly how annoyed she was.

Honestly, I wanted to give them both a good punch to the face. But if either of us hit our brothers with the intent to injure, they might actually die. Besides, we had no idea what they'd do or say if we got violent with them. Worst of all, they *knew* that we knew this, so they were free to act as maliciously as they wanted.

Mikhail was probably the one who put the idea in Glenn's head. It wasn't a plan Glenn was capable of coming up with.

"Well, anyway… I'm annoyed, but I'll be more careful about what those two get up to from now on. You should be careful too. They like to bully you over nothing."

"I'll be fine. I can use magecraft, after all."

"Heh, that's true." Azalea gently stroked me on the head. Then, her hand stopped on a dime.

She spoke, her voice a thin whisper.

"Hey, Hisui…"

"Hm? What's up?"

"You have power, even though it's only just enough to protect yourself and your family right now."

"Yeah. I still have a lot to learn."

"Then…could you watch over Armeria and Cosmos for a while? I know I shouldn't ask you to do that, since it's my job as the oldest, but I really need you to do this for me."

"What's going on?" It sounded like she was planning on going off somewhere.

"To be honest… There's a school in the royal capital for people with magic. It doesn't matter if someone's nobility or an ordinary citizen—anyone can get in if they have the ability. There's an entrance exam, of course, but practically speaking they'll allow anyone who has the talent to enroll."

"So, let me guess… You're thinking about going to that school?"

"Yeah. I was thinking that, in two years, once I'm fifteen, I'll

leave the Clematis demesne. I'll go to that school, graduate, and find work in the city with my skills, maybe even become a vassal of the king."

"Wow... You'd be really getting ahead in life!" A daughter of House Clematis, a rural demesne on the borders of the kingdom, becoming a vassal of the king? As a knight, she'd have authority similar to that of an aristocrat—maybe almost as much as a baron? Well...definitely less than that, but still more respected than the average peasant. Though she was from a low-ranking house, she could have real rights. This was monumental.

And I'd back her all the way.

"You should do it. Leave the family to me and go out into the world. You want to live in the capital, right?"

"Yeah. And besides, I'll need money to bring you guys out there."

"Huh? Us too?" Surprise colored my voice.

"I wouldn't leave you three to rot in this house. So I'm gonna work my butt off to get you and Cosmos and Armeria out of here."

"Azalea..."

She wasn't putting her best foot forward just for her own sake. She'd always worked the hardest out of anyone I knew, protecting these lands for its people and her family. She became stronger to help others. Even her plans for school were all for getting her precious family out of this manor.

She...was *so* unfair. Because after she said all that, I had no choice but to do everything I could as well. At that moment, a new goal was added to my bucket list.

"You don't have to come back to get me."

"Wh-What do you mean?" Her face paled. Maybe she thought I was rejecting her offer.

But I continued. "I'll follow in your footsteps! I'll cure Armeria, and make sure Cosmos gets lots of meat to eat, and I'll bring the two of them to the royal capital myself. So wait there for us."

"But...that's still too much to ask..."

"I've always been relying on you, but sometimes, I want you to believe in me instead. It'll be fine; I'll definitely get stronger—strong enough to protect everyone."

"Hisui..." Her mixed feelings were plainly written on her face, but after a moment of thought, she finally nodded.

“I understand. I’ll trust you and wait at the capital, so once you’re fifteen, make sure you head straight there. Even if you can’t bring Cosmos and Armeria, make sure *you* come at least. We can figure out how to get them to the capital, but you need to be there first.”

“Okay. I’ll do my best.”

Everything I’d done up to this point was to help my sisters. I hadn’t had any important goals of my own—I just thought that if I became strong, I could save the three of them. That sentiment hadn’t changed, but now I had a new, itty-bitty goal on top of that.

I was going to live with my sisters in happiness. That was my tiny little dream.

Chapter 7: Farewell

The sloris situation—that was all Glenn's fault—wrapped up without further ado.

Azalea and I left the basilisk corpse where it fell, but Cult apparently "put it away for safekeeping." She was thinking of saving it for materials I could sell once I came of age and could leave home, and I was grateful for her foresight. Then, after hearing Azalea explain her intention to enroll in the royal academy, I trained especially fervently the next day.

I honed all three powers—magecraft, godcraft, and spellcraft—and the entire day passed by in the blink of an eye. Frustrated that their sloris plot had done absolutely nothing to upset Azalea, my two brothers took their rage out on me, but despite their continued harassment, the days and months simply slipped by. Before I realized it, two more years had passed.

☆

"I'm off now, Hisui. Take care of Armeria and Cosmos for me, won't you?" In the dark of the morning, before anyone else had woken up, Azalea slipped out of the house as if she were running away from home. I left the manor with her, only stopping to embrace each other when we were a good distance away.



“Yeah, don’t worry about a thing. You just focus on school and have fun with your new life,” I reassured her.

She shook her head. “I don’t know how much fun I’ll really be having, considering I have to leave you three behind.”

“Well, we can’t exactly go with you. Just think of it as a stepping stone for the future.” I’d long since come to terms with her impending departure.

Taking a moment before responding, Azalea finally spoke. “That’s true. I guess I’ll be waiting for you.”

“I promise I’ll be there in seven years. Don’t forget, okay?”

“I won’t! I’ll always be waiting for you.” Tears streaming down her cheeks, Azalea disappeared into the predawn gloom. If she continued along that path, she’d eventually arrive at the capital. The journey was bound to be hard, and she had a very long way to go.

I’d created a ton of food through spellcraft for Azalea to eat during her journey and placed them into a storage artifact. There was no way she’d succumb to hunger, but I was still a little anxious. Worse than that, however, was the loneliness that filled my heart, born from the feeling of losing part of my precious family.

“Are you sure you’re really okay with this, Huey?” Fouré hugged me from behind.

“Okay with what?” I asked.

“With staying here. You really have gotten stronger—enough that you could leave the manor and these lands with your sister if you wanted.”

“I can’t do that. That’d mean leaving Armeria and Cosmos behind.” I promised Azalea that I’d bring our two sisters with me when I came to fetch her. I’d given my word, and I was going to keep it.

“Gosh, this whole family thing’s got you tied down. Seems like a pain, if you ask me. If I were in your shoes, I would have just dragged everyone along with me.”

“They’re only human, and nowhere near as strong as you, Fouré,” I reminded her, before turning my attention to Aruna. “Anyway, since we’re already awake and out here, how about we get a head start on training?”

She regarded me, then spoke, neither overly compassionate

nor quite cold either. “Are you quite all right to do so? Seems to me you’d rather bask in your sentimentality a bit longer.”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I don’t have time to stop and stand around now.” I drew the wooden sword hanging from my waist. Hopping backward, I put some distance between myself and Aruna as I shifted into a battle-ready stance.

Aruna too drew her sword and prepared to strike.

“Okay, Aruna! Let’s do it!” I dashed toward her, and the light glinting off our swords cut through the dim morning as we crossed blades.

For now, all I had to do was become stronger.

Extra Chapter: Karma

Hisui and Azalea had parted ways. In order to protect her family, Azalea had left the Clematis lands and headed for the royal capital far, far away.

In the royal capital, Azalea would find a place to sharpen her skills, and there were many things she could only accomplish there—this, Hisui knew. So, as if to withstand the loneliness that settled over him, Hisui bit his lip hard, then returned home.

Floating in the air, waiting and watching over Hisui from above, were the three goddesses. They began to speak among each other.

“Huey looks like he just got the shock of his life,” Fouré mused.

“Because he did,” Aruna countered.

“Huh? Is it normal to get *this* sad when parting ways with your family? Doesn’t seem like a big deal to me.” Fouré asked, genuinely confused.

“Humans live short lives. Though Hisui won’t die, that girl eventually will. Humans are especially known for their sensitivity—it’s conventionally understood that humans find being separated from their blood relations to be generally quite saddening.”

“What if I made Huey’s sister immortal? Would that fix this?”

“No.” Aruna shook her head, not hesitating to object. “It’s a mistake to assume that any human who becomes ageless and immortal will be happy, Fouré.”

“Hm… This is all so complicated. But if that’s true, wouldn’t the same go for Huey?”

“He’s special. He has us, after all.”

“That doesn’t guarantee he’ll be happy, Aruna,” Cult said, jumping in with a snarky reply.

Aruna shot her a glare. “Are you saying there exists some greater happiness than being with us?”

“Not at all. I’m simply saying that we are fairies. We may not be able to get close to him in the truest meaning of the word,” Cult clarified.

“We need to make sure that happens, then. We have plenty of

time, after all."

"Oooh! That's surprisingly positive for you, Aruna, considering how you always act so cold and calculating."

"What do you mean, '*act*' calculating?! I don't want to hear that from someone who really *is* an airhead."

"Sure, whatever. Anyway, can I just say something?" Fouré looked at the other two goddesses, her expression suddenly dire. Aruna and Cult nodded, noticing the gravity of her gaze.

"Go ahead," Aruna prompted.

"We completely forgot about something very important."

"And what would that be?" asked Cult.

"Think back, you two. While it's true that Huey's brothers are insignificant, what they *did* wasn't insignificant at all!"

"His brothers... Ah, those beastly little brats."

"Now that you mention it, I had forgotten about them. Those insolent fools tried to harm Hisui! What base cowards!"

"They actually tried to harm his sister, to be more precise. But as a result, Huey was attacked by the basilisk and it was quite troublesome. Well, that's more or less how it went, anyway."

Fouré nodded vigorously, affirming Cult's recollection.

Given their actions thus far, Glenn and Mikhail were nothing more than sinners in the eyes of the goddesses. While they had little concern with what Glenn and Mikhail did to anyone else, harassing Hisui was unpardonable.

Suddenly enraged, the flame of righteous fury burned bright in their eyes.

"Now that I think about it, I'm *super* annoyed. They picked on Hisui so much—and for no good reason!"

"I understand what you're saying, Fouré. We should teach those boys a lesson, right?"

"You're always so quick on the uptake, Cult." Fouré snapped her fingers, the sharp sound ringing out.

"A lesson, hm? Then what shall we do? If we're not careful, Hisui may get angry—maybe even *upset*. Besides, if we use any physical force, they will most certainly perish. Would you revive the two brothers in that case, Fouré?"

"No way. I have the right to choose how to use my powers, and I'm definitely not using them on those two."

"Then punishing them is out of the question. They are such

fragile creatures that a simple poke would kill them."

"Don't worry, then. Leave this to me."

"To you?"

The Light Goddess Fouré puffed out her bountiful chest as she smirked confidently. Seeing this, an ominous feeling came over Aruna and Cult.

"I have to say… I'm a little concerned about doing that," sighed Aruna.

"Why? I won't do anything weird," Fouré said.

"Then how exactly are you going to punish those boys?" asked Cult.

Fouré snickered. "I'm so glad you asked, Cult! Well, you know how I'm the master of all things godcraft? I can do anything at all as long as it involves living creatures—and that's *not* an exaggeration."

With a conniving grin, Fouré continued, voice raising in excitement. "Basically, I can mess with their brains to give them nightmares! How's that for punishment?!"

"Well… For starters, I thought you said you didn't want to use your powers on those two," said Aruna dryly.

"Oh, you don't have to have a comeback for me *every* time, Aruna. Huey won't like you if you keep being so grumpy all the time," Fouré snapped back.

Aruna let out an irritated huff, and a vein began to bulge on her forehead. Seeing this, Fouré took a slight step back. "Whoa, whoa there! Calm down, Aruna! Anyway, I'll just give those two a few nightmares, and that way I can make them suffer!"

"It's a simple plan, but a good one." While Cult ordinarily would have disagreed with Fouré's harebrained schemes, she was honestly impressed by this plan.

"If you give them nightmares, then there'll be no trace of our interference in the physical world—Hisui would never know we had done anything. On top of that, there's no need to worry about our punishment killing them both."

"That's true. It's a shame we can't settle things directly, but Fouré's idea is certainly best for now."

"Right? Then let's put the battle plan into action tonight!"

"What battle plan? Just sneak into their room by yourself and that'll be the end of it."

“What? You two aren’t interested in coming along? Don’t you want to see them suffer?”

A silent pause.

“I suppose I could observe a little…”

“I think I shall go as well.”

Aruna straightened her posture, and Cult’s lips curled into a radiant smile.

That was how the three goddesses decided on a punishment for Glenn and Mikhail. Far away, still in bed and completely unaware of the conversation or their impending fate, the two brothers sneezed.

▼△▼

“Aaaaaah!”

Loud screams rang out, echoing all through the manor, rousing me from sleep.

“What was that just now? Sounded like Glenn and Mikhail…” I sleepily mumbled to myself. The screams I heard were definitely theirs, now that I thought about it, so what had got them so worked up this early in the morning?

I yawned, a sigh leaving my wide-open mouth as I climbed out of bed. Vision still a blur, I rubbed at my eyes with a hand before leaving my room and slowly heading to Glenn and Mikhail’s. When I got there, I found Cosmos and my parents gathered in front of my brothers’ door, no doubt drawn there by the earlier screams.

“Morning, Cosmos,” I greeted my sister.

“Morning, Hisui,” she replied. “Did you hear that screaming earlier too?”

“Yeah. I was wondering what happened. Do you have any idea?”

She shook her head. “I just got here too, so… Nope.”

“Hey, Glenn! Mikhail! It’s barely even dawn. What’s with the racket?!” Father knocked on their door, the sharp sound echoing loudly. Well, it was perhaps too aggressive to be called “knocking”—more like “pounding” on the door—but it had clearly been worth doing, as the two boys immediately came out of their room.

“F-Father! Mother’s here too… Um…” Glenn hesitantly greeted our parents. For some reason, both Glenn and Mikhail were

draped in their blankets. It wasn't *that* cold today, was it?

Puzzling over this, father and mother must have been wondering the same thing, judging by their confused expressions. It was an open, honest reaction.

"Glenn… Why are you wrapped in your blanket? Are you feeling chilly?"

"Did you catch a cold? That's no good!"

"No! This is just… Uh, actually, I *am* a little chilly." Glenn and Mikhail were clearly caught off guard by father's and mother's reactions. Conversely, however, I felt something was off about their behavior.

"You really *did* catch a cold, didn't you! Hold on—don't move!" Mother swooped down on them, bringing her face close. Squeaking in surprise, Glenn reflexively took a step back, but his blanket caught around his legs and he clumsily fell backward. With a loud thud, he went crashing down on his backside, letting go of the blanket.

The fabric gently fell, revealing what lay beneath—which caused everyone in the vicinity to freeze, including me. A deafening silence filled the space. Next to me, Cosmos closed her eyes as if to say, "Really?"

"Your pants…have a wet spot," I finally said.

A large wet stain splayed across the front of Glenn's pants, now exposed for all to see. It was painfully clear that the fabric had absorbed some sort of liquid. That, combined with his behavior up until now and the fact that the two of them had come out wrapped in blankets, immediately told me everything I needed to know.

"Did you…wet the bed, Glenn, Mikhail?"

They both squeaked and turned bright red. That was enough of an affirmative as you could get.

I got it now. They were so embarrassed to have wet their beds at their age that they'd wrapped the blankets around themselves to hide it. That made it particularly obvious that Mikhail must've peed himself as well.

Having gotten their answer, father and mother both simply sighed, their mouths wide open in shock.

"And here I thought it was something serious," said father.

"Don't cause such a fuss this early in the morning, you two," chided mother.

“S-Sorry…” They hung their heads in shame, faces so red they couldn’t possibly get any redder, and simply stood trembling. But why had they suddenly wet the bed anyway? It wasn’t like they’d ever done it before. Maybe they’d had a horribly terrifying nightmare. It was strange that they’d both had one at the same time, but I guessed sometimes these things did happen.

I didn’t think too deeply about it, but seeing them so thoroughly humiliated put a spring in my step. Covering her mouth, Cosmos quietly giggled, so maybe she felt the same way. Glenn and Mikhail glared at us—we were probably making them feel even more embarrassed. But given they’d just peed their pants, their glares didn’t exactly have the effect they were hoping for.

That day, Glenn and Mikhail didn’t even try to bully me. Maybe because they were afraid I’d remind them how they wet their beds.

Afterword

Thank you so much for reading *Three Cheats from Three Goddesses: The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a Relaxing Life!*

This is a story I began posting to a web novel site around summer of last year. At the time, I noticed stories about the slow life gaining popularity here and there, so I decided to take another crack at that theme for the first time in a long while.

I can't explain why, but for some reason, I really wanted to include three goddesses as a plot point. My web novel was fairly well received and even managed to place first in the weekly ranking for a contest that was running when I began it. But after that, it slowly started to decline. So color me surprised when it surged in popularity again!

Despite that boost, it did end up falling out of the contest running. It was highly regarded in the slow life genre, and I thought it had the highest chance of winning among all the works I'd submitted, so I thought that was a little shocking...but I didn't have the time to ruminate over that (lol).

That was because a different work I'd submitted, which I'd expected to fall out of the running early, managed to be short-listed as a finalist and eventually ended up winning an award. Funnily enough, though, this story right here—*Three Cheats from Three Goddesses*—was ultimately the one that was picked up by DRE Novels. Thanks to that, my second work received a novelization at more or less the same time. So many polarizing things happened last summer that I had practically no idea how to feel about any of it.

Regarding the content of this story, I bet readers of the web novel version will be surprised—this version of the story differs vastly from the web novel version.

In the web novel, I breezed through Hisui's childhood in about the length of a single volume, but I decided to expand on it a bit more here. This version also includes some additional lore about the setting and introduces Dandelion as a new plot point. I hope that means even fans who've already read the original can enjoy

this new edition.

The web novel has some unique features of its own, though. I'd be overjoyed if people could check them both out—the setting is slightly different in both versions, after all.

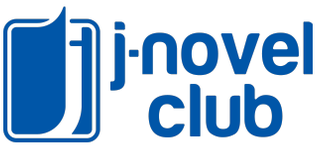
Lastly, I'd just like to extend my thanks to DRE Novels, who picked up this story; my editor, who plugged away with me all the way up to release date on this work; kiltukaiki, the illustrator who drew such wonderful art for this novel; and, most importantly, all the readers of *Three Cheats from Three Goddesses*. Thank you so much!

I hope we'll meet again in volume 2!









Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!
Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters of series like this by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:
J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

Three Cheats from Three Goddesses: The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a Relaxing Life Volume 1
by Hanmenkyoushi

Translated by Melissa Chiam
Edited by Sarah Tilson

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

©2024 Hanmenkyoushi
Illustration by kiltukaiki
All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2024 by Drecom Co., Ltd.
This English edition is published in arrangement with Drecom Co., Tokyo
All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC
j-novel.club
The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.
Ebook edition 1.0: April 2025