
THREE CHEATS from THREE GODDESSES:
The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a RELAXING LIFE!
2
auth HANMENKYOUSHI
illust KILTUKAIKI


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I leaped toward it with all my might and spun into a kick—a dropkick, to be precise—and landed squarely on its snout. My body was a well-honed weapon now after so much time training to my very limits, and the magecraft that powered me was equally honed. My kick sent the gargantuan dinosaur flying, despite it being many, many times larger than me.
"Hrraaagh!"
Youngest of a Broke Baron
Hisui Belcoure Clematis
Marquis's Daughter
Rose Mil Lycoris


Light Goddess
Fouré
War Goddess
Aruna
Chaos Goddess
Cult

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Prologue: A Goddess's Advice

Azalea had departed from the Clematis lands. Upon her fifteenth birthday, she'd been accepted to an academy in the royal capital, and so she embarked upon her new life.

One week had passed since her departure. With her skill in magecraft, Azalea very well might have reached the capital by now. Looking up at the gorgeous blue sky that stretched infinitely overhead, I reflected upon recent events.

Azalea was one of the very few people who'd always stood by me, and she was still the only person I'd ever told about my ability to manipulate magecraft. None of my other family members—not even Armeria or Cosmos, whom I got along with quite well—knew about my powers.

And so, with the person I trusted the most now gone, I'd been overcome by terrible grief. When she'd departed, I had watched her go. I was sure she'd make a name for herself in the city.

Considering how much I adored her, I guess it was pretty much a given that once she left our family home, I'd end up feeling lonely—it was like a hole had opened in my heart. But at least I still had people to fill that emptiness and so, on one particularly dreary day, I left the manor to do just that. I put my all into my daily training.

"Huey? Why are you staring up at the sky like that? Are you tired?"

All of a sudden, a pink-haired woman popped into my view. Fouré was her name, and she was known as the Light Goddess who'd brought godcraft into the world. Her golden eyes, more radiant even than the sun, reflected my face. At the moment, though, Fouré was the very picture of confusion.

"It's nothing—I was just thinking to myself. I've still got plenty of energy," I replied.

"That's good at least. So, what were you thinking about?"

"Just... Azalea. It's been a week since she left. It made me realize that time really does pass in the blink of an eye, and noticing that got me all lonely for a minute there."

"She's your sister, after all. Of course you're sad about it."

The person who'd just spoken was Aruna, the War Goddess, who was just as revered as the Light Goddess. She was a little shorter than Fouré, and if I were still in the world of my previous life, I would have guessed she was a middle schooler.

Crossing her arms over the flat plane of her chest, she chuckled lightly and moved to stand next to Fouré. Her orchid hair, so light in color that it was almost white, shimmered as she laughed.

"You're being so nice about this too, Aruna."

"We *are* family as well, after all."

"Heh heh heh. It's just as you say. If Hisui is sad, then we too are sad. If Hisui is happy, then so too are we. That is what it means to be family."

This last voice belonged to Cult, the Chaos Goddess. Unlike the other two, she was quite tall, with black hair long enough to reach the ground. She gave off a strange, otherworldly air.

When I first met her, I thought she was a little creepy, but after being around her for the past three years and some months, I slowly got used to her strangeness. In fact, her reserved demeanor and old-fashioned, ladylike mannerisms were kind of cute. To match her tall stature, she also had the largest chest of the three goddesses, and the distinctly feminine impression she made was certainly one of her strongest characteristics.

Crimson eyes peeked out from the space between her bangs, and they were gazing at me intently.

"Truer words were never said, Cult! We can't really share the same emotions as Huey, seeing as we don't have any direct relation to Azalea; we aren't saddened by her loss, really. But we can *understand* feelings. We'd be terribly upset if we were suddenly separated from Huey, after all!"

"Thank you, Fouré. I don't want to be separated from you all either. We've spent so much time together lately, I probably wouldn't

be able to handle it if you three were gone.” I could still manage with Azalea leaving—and that was because I had two other sisters whom I got along with and who needed me.

Still, Fouré and the other goddesses were different. If the three of them all vanished at once, the time during the day that we’d always spent together would become terrible stretches of emptiness. The warmth that made up the majority of my day would disappear. I might never recover from it. The three goddesses were just that important to me, and occupied that much space in my heart. I’d spent far more time with them than even my two remaining sisters—and especially more so than I had with Azalea.

“You really *don’t* want us to leave, do you?”

“Of course not, Aruna. I’d cry my eyes out.”

“Hisui... Crying...”

“You’d cry for us, Huey?!”

“Why do you seem kinda...happy about that?”

“Heh heh. Such is the clash between heart-wrenching guilt and the desire to monopolize someone. Ooh, I’m getting a shiver down my spine just thinking about it.” Cult hugged herself tightly, the motion greatly exaggerated. Her cheeks were flushed just as red as her eyes. For some reason, my heart throbbed loudly and intensely in my ears.

What was this feeling I was getting from Cult? It wasn’t fear... Maybe embarrassment? It was hard to put into words. But she *was* thinking of me—that much I could understand.

“Don’t worry, Huey! I promise that even if everyone else disappears, *I’ll* never leave your side. We’re together forever! I won’t let you go, even if you try to run!”

Fouré dashed toward me and very nearly bowled me over in her enthusiasm, but she kept me standing upright in her embrace. As if that weren’t enough, her ample breasts pressed against me in her tight hug, burying my face between them.

“F-Fouré, I can’t breathe...”

“I’m sorry, Huey! But let me just have this for a moment, won’t you? I’ve never felt this overwhelmed before!”

“Uh... So you want to keep holding me like this?”

I'd been reborn into this world with my memories intact. Back in my old world, a place known as Earth, I'd been an adult in my thirties. And now, in this new world, I was an eight-year-old boy. Aside from my memories, everything else—including my appearance—was completely different, but being hugged like this was still embarrassing and disconcerting.

Thankfully, I didn't have any physical reactions to her body. I'm not going to say *what* exactly didn't react, but if it had, I would've died of embarrassment—and if that didn't do it, I would've been tying the noose myself.

Not realizing how flustered I was, the Light Goddess, in all her majesty, continued pressing my face into her breasts without budging an inch. I could just barely manage to breathe, but man... Just how long was she going to keep this up?

While I marinated in my discomfort and bashfulness, I heard Aruna's voice from behind Fouré. She sounded annoyed. "Utterly ridiculous. You really didn't need to imply something as outrageous as the rest of us 'disappearing.' Cult and I won't simply vanish on Hisui either."

"That's right! Don't pretend that *you're* so special, Fouré." From beside Aruna, Cult began hurling a barrage of booing. It was kind of cute, considering how she ordinarily maintained an air of maturity.

Cult's fervor here was unusual. Unlike the other two, she rarely ever laughed or became angry. She was more the type to constantly creep up beside me with an unsettling smirk. Well, I supposed that the goddesses did often get into fights with one another. I eked out a response from between Fouré's breasts, awkwardly bemused by their bickering.

"D-Don't worry, I know. I've never forgotten that all three of you will stay with me forever."

"Hmph. I was having such a good moment with you too, Huey."

"So you made that little 'disappearing' comment just so you could do this, didn't you? Cult, I think Fouré needs a little discipline, so stay with Hisui, all right? Make sure he practices his sword swings properly."

"Very well."

"Wait, don't just *agree* to that, Cult! Aruna, you know I disapprove of solving things with viole—"

Fouré's desperate pleas were cut short.

Up until this very moment, I'd been trapped in Fouré's arms, but now I was suddenly released from the overwhelming pressure of my puffy prison. I had to admit—silently, and in the private confines of my heart—that it was kind of a shame those soft pillows were gone, but Fouré had clearly vanished.

This was par for the course, honestly. Aruna had definitely used her terrifying powers to whisk Fouré off somewhere, and looking at the sky was proof enough: A hole had been blasted right through a faraway cloud. The two of them were probably fighting up there.

My gaze drifted from the sky back to Cult, and I resumed practicing my swing. "Um... I'm just going to go back to my sword fighting drills."

"No. Let's have you practice your spellcraft instead."

"Aruna's going to be mad."

"Mngh... Must you refuse?"

"I'm just worried for you, Cult—do you really want to make Aruna mad? We can practice once it's night, so just wait till then."

"Okaaay," Cult finally acquiesced. She puffed up her cheeks—adorably, I might add—then stepped away from me, contenting herself to watch as I concentrated on swinging my sword.

After a short while, Aruna and Fouré returned from their impromptu fight.

Fouré alighted, body entirely covered in blood and dirt, having once again been bested by Aruna. This was hardly a surprise by now. Aruna was very proud of her overwhelming skill at arms, so this was in fact how their fights usually went.

Fouré must've been forbidden from hugging me as punishment. Barely holding back the tears that threatened to spill from her eyes, Fouré sprinted toward me with her arms thrown wide. "Huey!" She shouted, but her advance was halted by Cult, who stepped out from behind me.

"You mustn't, Fouré. You have been touching Hisui far too much; sometimes you must let Aruna and I have him. Furthermore, you're

filthy right now."

"What?! I was just beaten bloody by Aruna, and now you're telling me I can't touch Huey at all?! I refuse to bend to your outrageous rules!"

Fouré whipped out her left hand to object, but her shouts never reached Cult's ears, as Cult had turned away to ignore her. Aruna was shouting at her from behind as well, clearly admonishing Fouré.

"You'd best learn some restraint, Fouré. Especially if you don't want me to slap some into you."

"Rrrgh! You'll *slap* me? You're such a musclehead that I'm pretty sure 'pound' is more appropria—"

"Are my ears playing tricks on me, or did you just talk back?"

Aruna smiled, something she rarely did. The moment Fouré saw that smile, her words died on her lips and she turned white as a sheet. Then, she shook her head so violently I thought it might go flying from her body.

"No, no, no! I wasn't!" she exclaimed, laughing nervously.

Looked like even the nigh-immortal Light Goddess feared the powerful War Goddess, Aruna. But Fouré had once mentioned that even if she used her godcraft to sever her sense of pain, being injured still made her feel sick. That remained the case even if she could heal a severed arm in a fraction of a second.

"Hmph. Whatever. Anyway," Aruna said, turning her attention to me. "Continue your drills, Hisui. It's still too early to be taking a break." Aruna fixed her amethyst eyes on me, and I did as I was told.

"Yeah, you're right. I'd like to keep swinging for at least another hour."

"Good lad. You're so very disciplined. You've never once skipped out on training, and you always exceed my expectations. You're truly a disciple to be proud of!"

"Boo! Boooo! Can't we start his godcraft practice soon? We've already confirmed that magecraft can be used to strengthen other powers, so it's in his best interests to swap over as soon as possible!"

"What are you trying to get at, Fouré?"

That was kind of an odd question, all things considered, and it left me confused. Fouré batted her eyelashes, looking at me. "I mean, don't you want to heal one of your sisters, Huey? She's got some kind of sickness, right?"

"Well, yeah. But I'm still not good enough to... Oh!" Once I'd gotten those words out of my mouth, I realized what Fouré was trying to tell me.

"Are you saying... I'm ready to try curing Armeria's illness now?"

My voice shook. I'd been waiting three long years for an affirmative answer to this very question. I wanted to hear it so badly that I unconsciously leaned toward her in eagerness. Aruna and Cult chose not to say anything, fully aware of the gravity of my question.

Fouré finally raised her forefinger to reply. I drew closer, eager to hear her answer.

"I think you could manage it. You just need a little more practice."

Chapter 1: Illness Cured

I was struck silent. The words I'd practiced in my head for this moment vanished from my mind. There were so many things I wanted to say, but for some reason they all got stuck in my throat. Then, finally...

"C-Can I really...cure Armeria?" Trembling, I looked down at my hands. Fouré would never deceive me over this. She'd never once told a mean-spirited lie, after all. So...it must be true. If I used magecraft to reinforce my godcraft, then I would be able to cure Armeria! The realization finally settled in, and I balled my hands up into tight fists.

"Yes! Finally! All my effort is finally paying off, you guys!" Now, I'd learned what it meant to be overcome with emotion. My feelings were like an unstoppable wave, naturally spilling from me in the form of tears.

"Congrats, Hisui! You've been working so hard with your training all this time, so it's no wonder you've gotten this far."

"Congratulations, dear one. I'm so happy for you, it's as if I were the one receiving this good news!"

"Good for you, Huey! You're really one of a kind."

Aruna, Cult, and Fouré all celebrated for me, which made me cry even more. Happy tears blurred my vision, and though I wiped them with my sleeve, they just kept coming. The three goddesses leaned over where I sat on the ground and hugged me tightly.

Enveloped in their warmth, I cried long and hard for the first time in a while. I just let the tears fall until my feelings settled.

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"Um, hey..."

After a good half hour of letting my feelings out, sobbing my

throat raw, I finally reined in my emotions and called out to the three goddesses.

"What's wrong, Hisui? Do you still need more time?"

"You can cry as much as you want, okay? We're here for you!"

"Heh. Should you have a need for it, you're welcome to use me as a pillow. Feel free to sob into *these* right here."

"No, that's not what I wanted to say... I think I've finally run out of tears, so I was thinking it'd be nice if you guys could let me get up now."

"Finished already? Aww, that's a shame," Fouré sighed as she let go of me. She pursed her lips, puffing out her cheeks. After that, Aruna and Cult let go of me one after the other as well.

"Sorry for suddenly bursting into tears, you guys."

I was a little ashamed to need all that cuddling. In the midst of my crying, I didn't really have the presence of mind to think about it, but my cheeks started burning up in embarrassment the moment I calmed down.

"You don't need to worry about that. You're still a child, after all—crying is well within your job description."

"You do remember I'm practically an old man on the inside though, right?"

"That doesn't matter one bit! No matter how much of an adult you might be mentally, sometimes you just have to let your instincts take over. Besides, I adore how cute you are, even when you're crying."

"C-Cute?" Aw man, now that was just embarrassing. I was getting the primal urge to crawl into a hole.

Using her right hand as a fan, she waved it up and down to cool my face. "So... What do you want to do, Huey? Do you want to start practicing godcraft so you can go help your sister?"

"Hmph. I can't say I'm happy with this, but that's more important than your magecraft and swordsmanship training right now." Aruna clicked her tongue—she really did sound frustrated. But I shook my head.

"No... I'd like to finish my training regime with you properly, Aruna."

"Huh? Are you sure?"

She looked flabbergasted. Was my decision really that surprising?

"I doubt Armeria's illness is easy to cure. I do want to heal her as soon as possible, but haste makes waste—it's important to do things in the right order."

If a single cog in a machine gets misaligned, it'll knock the rest out of alignment too. So if rushing might cause problems down the line, it was better to stay calm and take things one step at a time. Besides, I was going to get into my usual godcraft training in an hour anyway. A single hour wouldn't make much difference.

"If that's what you want, then I've no complaints."

"Heh. You've gotten so mature, Huey."

"You're wonderful, dear one."

"Okay, okay. If you guys keep piling on the compliments, I won't be able to take it, so let's stop right there." I raised my wooden sword in a ready stance to distract them from my reddening cheeks.

I felt light as a feather, buoyed by the knowledge I could help Armeria soon. I couldn't help but smile as I swung my sword. As I promised, I practiced my swings for a solid hour.

Noon arrived. Sitting on a large boulder, I pulled out the lunch I'd made earlier as I spoke to Fouré.

"Can I ask you something, Fouré?"

"What is it? You can always ask me anything, as long as it's something I can help with!"

"Thanks. It's about what you told me earlier."

"Hmm?" She paused in thought for a moment. "Oh! You mean about your sister?"

"Yeah. To cure Armeria's illness with godcraft, I'll need magecraft too, right? What do I need to do, exactly?"

"Well... First, you need to boost the efficacy of your godcraft with the strengthening properties of magecraft. Then you need to destroy the illness that's wormed its way through your sister's body."

"Destroy the illness? What do you mean?"

"Your sister's illness is caused by tiny little creatures that are invisible to the eye. You can drive the creatures out with the light of purification, then heal her damaged cells afterward."

Now that Fouré mentioned it, I recalled hearing that Armeria's illness had been caused by some sort of infection. So there must be some sort of bacteria or virus still in her body—but I had no idea godcraft could be used to kill microorganisms like that.

"I didn't think curing her would call for so much force. I kinda thought it'd be more like...reinforcing her immune system to fight it off, I guess."

"If that were the case, you could do it with just magecraft alone—but you'll need the recovery powers of godcraft. It might be a little heavy-handed, but you want to cure her as soon as you can, right? This method works on any illness!" Brimming with self-confidence, Fouré flashed a thumbs-up. "But you have to be able to control your godcraft *perfectly*. Otherwise your healing powers could damage healthy cells, muscles, even organs, so you have to be really careful."

"Yikes... It sounds really hard just from hearing your explanation."

"It's like taking medication—overdosing will harm your body. No matter how good the medicine is, it has to be taken in proper dosage."

"That makes sense. That means I have to improve my control and manipulation of godcraft energy, huh?"

"Yup, you got it! But as long as you keep the output of your powers under control, you won't cause any damage. You only have to worry about it if you fail to properly regulate your powers, in which case it might get a little messy."

"I'll keep that in mind, even while I'm practicing."

"Great! Go for it!" Fouré cheered.

"Just be sure not to go overboard. Fouré and I will supply you with magecraft and godcraft energies as you need."

"And if you get tired, dear one, you may make use of my lap."

"Y-Your lap?" Am I really going to need that?

"You mustn't say such things, Cult!" Aruna looked askance at Cult. The air grew tense.

"Why not?"

"Because *I'll* be the one to give Hisui my lap."

"Huh?" I blinked in surprise. I hadn't expected that response at

all, especially not from Aruna of all people. I was at a loss for words.

"Honestly, I think the responsibility's a bit much for either of you. So you should leave it to me, the Light Goddess, to handle—"

"No one asked you."

"Be quiet, Fouré."

Last to join their conversation, Fouré had been shot down with concentrated fire from both Aruna and Cult. Ignoring Fouré, the two of them resumed glaring at each other. Sparks were practically flying.

"You guys... Couldn't you at least ask me what I want to do first?" They spoke as if it were just a given that I'd be using *someone's* lap as a pillow. I didn't exactly object to the idea, but I was already maxed out on my embarrassment quota for the day.

I tore through my bread and meat with gusto, and leaving the three of them to their own devices, I began to practice reinforcing my godcraft skills. In the end, Aruna and Cult took turns letting me rest on their laps, finally calming down. Yeesh, what had all that fighting even been for?

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After Fouré had told me I'd soon be able to cure the disease eating at Armeria, my days passed by at a dizzying pace. I focused exclusively on training my ability to strengthen godcraft with magecraft, as well as controlling that amplified godcraft power. It was actually pretty simple—in theory anyway.

First I'd channel godcraft energies into my right hand, then imbue it with magecraft energies from my left. Doing so basically added the "Fortified" attribute to my godcraft energy.

Despite the concept being pretty simple, however, the difficulty of controlling these powers jumped up several levels the moment the two energies were combined. To be honest, when I first started attempting this technique, it went terribly—my godcraft energies would fizzle out right after I strengthened them. My attempts didn't seem to get much better even as time went on.

It was even harder than what I'd done when I fought the basilisk.

"Okay, that's all for now! You're losing focus, Huey. It'd be best to dispel your godcraft energies for the moment and rest up."

I was two weeks into my training with strengthening godcraft energies at this point. I still couldn't control godcraft all that well, but I was at least able to fortify it.

I'd been using the experience I'd had during the fight with the basilisk, when I'd managed to combine energies, as a baseline to aim for. It honestly wasn't too difficult to just fortify the power—the hard part was trying to manipulate the result. The moment I tried, the magecraft energies instantly became much, much harder to control. So, considering how strengthening the energies at all had been pretty hit-or-miss in the beginning, it was a huge step forward for me when I succeeded at that.

"Looks like you're struggling, Hisui." Aruna looked down at me as I rested on the ground.

"I guess. I have to channel two energies, control them, and manipulate them both at once... I wish I could grow another brain to help with this."

"If you asked, I'm sure Fouré would make one for you."

"That was just a figure of speech... If I had a second brain, I'd have to say goodbye to my humanity."

Aruna had made her suggestion so casually, it made me imagine actually having a second brain. That would be a total horror story—but since I was thinking about it, how *would* it actually feel to have two? Would a second head and neck sprout from my shoulders? Or would it be one neck supporting two skulls somehow? Maybe my head would balloon in size, or my brain would shrink to fit a second one into my skull.

All of these options were terrifying. I was definitely never going to ask Fouré to give me another brain.

"Ha ha, I was just joking. I wouldn't want to see you turn into a monster either. You're perfect the way you are now."

"Oh! Thank you, Aruna." I hadn't been expecting an open compliment. That was embarrassing...

"Hey, Cult! Aruna's making a pass at Huey again! She's so shameless!"

"Trying to score some points with Hisui on the sly, Aruna? That's unfair. I never would have imagined you'd try something so underhanded."

"That's rich coming from *you*, Cult."

"Well, I *am* the exact type of person who would do something underhanded, you see."

"Do you *want* to get a thrashing?"

A vein began to bulge ever so slightly on Aruna's forehead at Cult's defiance. I got to my feet in a hurry to defuse their impending fight.

"Guys, please don't fight here. I'm about to start practicing again."

"You're right."

"I suppose we mustn't disturb you."

The two of them looked away from each other in a huff, both still terribly dissatisfied with the outcome. I shrugged in exasperation and returned to my training. I had to save Armeria as soon as I possibly could.

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The days continued their march, and before I knew it another month had passed. With help from the goddesses, and having spent that entire month practicing as hard as I could, my skill improved by leaps and bounds.

"I did it!" Looking at the dense godcraft energies in my right hand, I whooped in joy.

"Oooh! Congratulations, Huey!"

"Congrats, Hisui."

"You've done very well, little one."

Each praising me in their own way, they clapped for me, broad smiles across their faces.

"I only just barely managed to pull it off, though."

"That's amazing in itself! Now that you've gotten the hang of it, you'll be a pro in no time, Huey!"

"Yeah. I'm sure this is all because you were a fantastic teacher,

Fouré."

"Heh heh! I *am* pretty awesome!" Fouré puffed out her chest proudly at my praise, causing her ample mounds to jiggle.

"Now what will you do, Hisui? Will you go to cure your sister right away?"

"Of course. I'm just about done with my godcraft training for the day anyway, so now it's time to put what I've learned into practice."

"I see. Best of luck."

Aruna's smile was so kind and gentle I could've mistaken her for the mother of mercy herself. She gave my back a little push, and I dashed off at top speed. Sprinting through the forest, I hurried to Armeria.

My heart was pounding loudly in my chest as I ran—clear evidence of how overcome with excitement and exhilaration I was. My feelings could hardly be contained.

I single-mindedly dashed straight home, letting nothing distract me. Passing through the entrance of the manor, I noticed a strange silence had settled over the building. Was no one home?

Confused, I crossed through the foyer and climbed the stairs to the second floor. I didn't stop until I got to Armeria's door at the end of the hall, where I put a hand to my chest as I took a deep breath. Once I had my breathing under control, I knocked on the door.

"Yes? Who's there?"

Doing this made me nervous—I couldn't be sure if she was awake, and I never wanted to wake her if she was asleep, but I could hear her moving around within her room. Thank goodness.

"It's me, Armeria."

"Hisui? Is something the matter? It's quite late."

"I have something I need to talk to you about. Is that okay?"

"Certainly."

"I'm coming in, then."

Having gotten her permission, I turned the knob. The wooden door opened with a creak. I entered her room, and saw that she'd been reading a book in bed.

"Welcome, Hisui. You don't often come by in the evening."

"Hey, Armeria. I just wanted to talk to you so badly."

"What about? Did you find an interesting book?"

"No, nothing like that. I want you to listen to me—don't be too shocked or anything." I slowly walked toward Armeria. When I arrived at her bedside, I quietly spoke as I looked down at her.

"I can use godcraft."

"What? C-Can you really? Godcraft, as in *that* godcraft? The power of healing?"

"Yeah. I was thinking of using it to try curing your illness now."

"Is that really possible? I mean, you're still only eight years old. I don't believe powers ever awaken in people until at least ten years of age..."

Armeria was shocked—and she had every right to be. While she usually spoke with a tranquil smile, she was now trembling in a way I'd never seen before, and she glanced to and fro with terrible nervousness. I think she just had no idea how to react, now that she'd been suddenly told her illness might finally be cured.

I tried to keep my tone as even as possible in an attempt to calm her down. "I know it's hard to believe, but I guess you could say I'm kinda special. That's why I can do all this. So... Is it okay if I start healing you now?"

I thought it best to get her permission, just as common courtesy. She was my sister, after all, so I wanted to stay respectful.

Armeria didn't respond right away. Though her brow was soaked with sweat, she didn't seem to be able to arrive at an answer. I didn't think she'd outright refuse the healing, but her disbelief was clearly written all over her face.

Despite her hesitation, she nodded in the end. Then she spoke, voice feeble. "I admit I still don't fully understand, but I can tell how serious you are. Please, make my illness disappear."

Armeria respectfully bowed her head. Somehow, it seemed like I could feel all of the jumbled feelings boiling up inside her. I thought I had my own emotions under control pretty well, but now they surged through me, filling me with determination.

"Just leave it to me! I'll get rid of that illness plaguing you once and for all."

And with that declaration, I thrust my right hand out in front of

me and touched Armeria's shoulder as she sat in her bed. Channeling my godcraft powers into her, I scanned her body to examine the physical state of her insides. A vision reminiscent of an X-ray scan came to the forefront of my mind.

Next, I searched her body for the bacteria causing her illness. After some time spent in careful examination, I could tell my brain was under heavy strain. A concerning sting started to run through my body, but I ignored it as I searched every nook and cranny. And, before long—

"Found it."

Her cells in several places were clearly weakened. Perhaps because I was using godcraft to search, the feedback I got from detecting the illness actually made me feel sick to my stomach. I must've found the source of her ailment, no doubt about it.

"This might hurt a little, but do your best to deal with it."

"A-All right."

I'd said that so plainly that consternation spread across Armeria's face, and she clutched at my clothes in reaction as she gritted her teeth.

"Here I go."

I focused godcraft energies at the sites of the bacteria, letting it flow quickly and smoothly. Drawing a circle around the infected area, I intended to expel the infected cells containing the bacteria entirely. With careful precision, I selected the cells I'd be dealing with, mindful to exclude the healthy cells...and sent a burst of energy for a fraction of a second. A minuscule bullet of cleansing light.

"Ah!"

The illness had caused damage all over Armeria's body. Feeling a stab of discomfort, she clung even more tightly to my clothes, scrunching the fabric up in her hands. But despite the pain, she didn't make a single noise of complaint. Dripping with sweat, she hung her head and simply waited for me to finish.

I tried to hurry as much as I could. I didn't want to put any more stress on Armeria's body if I could help it, so I pushed toward the last step of the treatment. After destroying the cells containing the harmful contaminants, it was finally time for healing. Now I would

restore her injured body to the way it was meant to be: healthy and full of vigor.

The room was filled with a glow brighter than any other I'd seen tonight. It was so intense that I had to shut my eyes to it, even though I'd been the one to conjure it. The golden light wrapped around Armeria, and before long it started to fade little by little. Both Armeria and I opened our eyes at practically the same time. She looked down, examining herself from her shoulders down to the tips of her toes.

"My body...always hurt so much...but now it feels as light as a feather."

"It worked!" I threw my hands up into the air, shouting in joy—even before the very person I'd healed had the opportunity to react herself. "I did it, Armeria! Now there's nothing holding you back—you can run and play outdoors and go anywhere at all!"

"Yes... Right! Thank you, Hisui..."

Armeria began to cry, overcome with emotion. Her tears dripped onto her blanket in great big splotches. Ordinarily, she was so quiet and peaceful. I'd never seen her get angry or cry before, but now she was sobbing outright like any girl her age. Was the simple fact that she was healthy now enough to make her this happy?

Her sobbing echoed through the cramped bedroom, and I gently stroked her head until she'd gotten every last tear out. After a short while, the torrent of emotion that had overwhelmed her gave way to silence. Her eyes were red and puffy. She finally let go of my clothes, biting her lip in embarrassment, then immediately bowed her head once more.

"Thank you so much, Hisui. Really." She turned so her legs dangled off the side of the bed; this way, we were sitting side by side as she offered her words of gratitude.

"You're welcome. How are you feeling now? You don't feel any unusual pain anywhere, do you?"

"I'm fine. Although... I guess there's one ache that hasn't gone away."

"What?!" No way... Had I not gotten everything?

Armeria, seeing how shocked I was at her admission, began to

giggle. “I was just so happy I thought my heart might burst! That’s a sort of pain too, isn’t it?”

“O-Oh, so that’s what you meant... Phew.” For a second, I thought I’d missed healing a spot. She didn’t tease me often, not like this.

“Heh heh. I’m sorry. I suppose that was a little mean.”

“Seriously! Your jokes are seriously bad for my nerves.”

“I’m sorry. But—and I know this is a little late coming—I’m honestly surprised. I had no idea you could use godcraft.”

“I can use magecraft too.”

“What?! Really, magecraft as well?” Since Armeria hadn’t been blessed with the ability to manipulate any of the three powers, she couldn’t sense the magecraft energies I’d used either. Her eyes widened in surprise, though it was long after she’d seen my powers in action. “That’s not possible... There’s never been a person who could use two powers in all of history...”

“Did you read that somewhere?”

“Yes.”

If I told her I could actually use spellcraft as well, I might actually send her into shock. I figured I was probably better off keeping that a secret from her for now. There’s a time and place for everything, and that includes sharing things.

“Azalea told me not to go around telling people.”

“So she knows about your secret as well? That’s a wise decision, if you ask me.”

“The only people who know about this right now are you and Azalea. I haven’t told anyone else.”

“Not even Cosmos?”

“Nope. Azalea only knows because I had no choice but to use my powers in front of her. That goes for you too.”

I hadn’t intended to tell either of them, but circumstances being what they were... Azalea had been in very real danger, so I’d had to save her through magecraft, and I couldn’t just turn a blind eye to Armeria’s illness either. But even though I had been trying to avoid telling them, I didn’t regret doing it at all. It had been the right thing to do.

“I see. I didn’t think you were so cautious, but I suppose you’ve always had an air of maturity. Well, be sure to keep it a secret, just like you have been. Promise me, okay?”

“Of course. I’ll keep it in mind.”

“So, do you mind if I ask you some questions?”

“Huh?”

Armeria suddenly pitched forward, leaning so close to me that I thought she might’ve fallen over.

“I’ve got a real, live specimen of someone who can use two powers! My intellectual curiosity has been piqued like never before!”

“R-Right...”

This spelled trouble. Had telling her about my powers been a mistake?!

Her amber eyes seemed to be glowing more brightly than usual.

“When you actually activate both magecraft and godcraft at the same time, then...”

Fantastically Fun Q&A Time with Armeria had started. Although, “fun” was kind of a strong word in my case.

A fire had been lit in Armeria’s curious brain. She was the very personification of a thirst for knowledge. I didn’t know whether it was something she’d developed from being stuck indoors with nothing to do but read or if she’d always been this way, but once she started talking, there was no stopping her.

Questions cascaded from her like a waterfall, and she didn’t stop at two—or five, or even ten questions. I answered her for as long as I could manage.

Time slipped by, and soon it was late in the night. Stopping our conversation short, I fetched Armeria’s dinner for her, taking the opportunity to rest. Once she finished eating, it was bath time. But Azalea wasn’t there anymore—she’d been the one to draw the bath for us, and now we had no hot water left.

I could create hot water from spellcraft anytime. So, without letting Armeria know what I was up to, I deliberately left her room to heat a bucket of water. That way, I could bathe with a towel.

Honestly, I’d have loved to just stretch out in a big, warm bath for a while and take it easy, but Glenn and Mikhail would notice before

long. They'd realize I could use spellcraft. So, keeping Armeria's convalescence in mind, I made do with the bucket.

"Here, Armeria. You can use this hot water and towel to wipe yourself down."

"Hot water? Where did you get this? It's not exactly easy to do..."

"Don't sweat the details. It's a present for your recovery."

"But what about you, Hisui?"

"I have some for myself too. Now that we're done, I'll head back to my room, okay?"

"All right... But before you go, I have a favor I'd like to ask."

"What is it?"

If she still wanted to chat some more, I'd have to politely but firmly decline. I still had my spellcraft practice to get through—and besides, staying up late was bad for your health. Armeria had just been cured, so she needed to get adequate rest. But her request wasn't anything nearly as innocent and endearing. I was astonished.

"I need help wiping down."

"Sorry, should I get someone?"

"There's no one here but you."

"So... You want me to do it?"

"That's right."

I was stunned into silence. With a clap, I instinctively covered my mouth with both hands before letting out the biggest, longest "*Whaaaaat?!*" I could manage.

If I hadn't been covering my mouth, I'm sure the rest of the family would've heard us, and *that* would be hard to explain. I'd already broken the rule about not entering Armeria's room without a good reason, after all.

"Of course, I'll wipe down my front, but I can't reach my back. We have hot water for once, and you're here already anyway, so it'd be easier if you help me finish my bath."

"You could just ask Cosmos!"

"That would be a waste of time. Besides, I wanted to talk with you some more."

"Well..." She was being *so* unfair. When she put it that way, I couldn't say no to her anymore.

My face reddened, getting so hot I could feel it. But I swallowed the words I wanted to say and simply nodded. Armeria's lips curved into a smile. She'd been smiling before, but now it was as radiant as the sun.

"All right, Armeria."

"Thank you, Hisui! Now then..." Having gotten my permission, Armeria turned around so her back was facing me, and began to undress. I reflexively gasped in surprise and hurriedly turned to face away.

"Armeria! Y-You can't just start taking your clothes off without warning me!"

"Hm? But you're going to wipe me down, so I have to take my clothes off."

"Yeah, but I still need time to prepare myself..."

Just as a refresher, Armeria's my sister, but we don't have any blood ties. Still, even after the long years we'd spent together, we were still two people of opposite genders, roughly around the same age. Uh, well—I was an eight-year-old boy, to be more precise.

Regardless, Armeria really needed to be more careful about these things. Hearing the rustling of clothes coming from the direction of her bed, but not directly seeing it, made my heart pound faster than it had any right to.

"Hisui, can I ask you for help?"

I reluctantly turned toward her when she spoke to me.

Armeria's milky white and supple skin filled my vision.

This was quite unlike the bygone times when Azalea would force us all to take a bath together, before Armeria had fallen ill. Now, Armeria had a clearly feminine figure. I'd heard that women mature more quickly than men, and that appeared to be the truth. I struggled to find a respectful place to rest my gaze.



Holding the plain white towel, and the bucket of hot water, I approached her bed. I placed the bucket on her bedside table, then dunked the towel into the water, and gently wrung out the excess water. The heat rising to my face felt far hotter than the heat in my hands from the water.

"Okay... I'm going to wipe you down now, okay?"

"Please, and thank you."

Gingerly, I placed the towel against Armeria's back. "That feels nice," she sighed, astonished by the pleasant temperature—I'd used warm water, of course, rather than cold.

If she shifted even the slightest bit, I could see her breasts over her shoulder ever so slightly. It was awkward, but I told myself to finish what I started. I emptied my mind, moving only my hand without a single thought in my head.

"Hisui?"

"Hm? What's up?"

"Azalea went to the royal capital alone, didn't she? I'm sure she must have."

"Oh... Why do you think that?" She spoke as if she'd see Azalea depart herself, even though I knew she hadn't been present for any of it.

"It's an easy conclusion to draw. Azalea was extremely good at fighting, and she could use magecraft. Plus, there's an academy in the royal capital that accepts students who have an affinity for magic. She always talked about how she wanted to live with us somewhere away from these lands. A good way to accomplish that is to attend the academy, graduate, and get a job as a knight. I think she'd do very well for herself in the capital, given how resourceful she is."

"I'm amazed you managed to think all that through when you had barely any hints about it at all."

"Most of it was just guesswork—I was thinking about what I'd do in her shoes. I'm sure she's doing her best for our sake. I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yeah, you are. She told me she was leaving first to go make money." I told Armeria about all the things Azalea had discussed

with me.

"Azalea is so unfair. I was happy with all of us here, living together."

The tone of Armeria's voice fell ever so slightly. Just like me and Cosmos, Armeria also felt lost and lonely now that Azalea had left us behind.

"But, now I've changed my mind."

Huh? The vibe of the conversation sure had shifted in a snap.

Armeria went on. "I can go outside now that you've cured me, Hisui! I'll show you that we don't need to rely solely on Azalea!"

"Do you mean... You're going to start working?"

"Of course. We should all do our part as family! Azalea's gone ahead to wait for us, so we should at least try to do as much as she is!"

I laughed, my heart buoyed by her exclamation. "I'm glad that you want to do this too. But don't push yourself too hard, okay? You still have me and Cosmos."

"Thank you. I'll do as much as I can within my limits. That's fine with you, right?"

"Yeah."

At first, I was surprised by Armeria's proposal, but seeing her so full of energy, with a drive to live, filled me with happiness. When she'd contracted her disease, her mind had always clearly been on her inevitable death. But now, she was overflowing with a vibrant liveliness. This was a great improvement for her.

"Um, I'm done wiping you down, Armeria. You can do the rest yourself."

"Huh? Oh, you finished so quickly... All right. I appreciate it, Hisui. I feel squeaky clean thanks to you."

"That's good. Let's chat more tomorrow. You can toss the water out the window once you're done with it. Good night, Armeria."

"Good night."

We waved to each other and I left, shutting the door to her room behind me. I strode down the hall in high spirits, certain I'd have a good dream tonight...but it'd probably be for the best if I didn't

remember it in the morning.

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The sun rose on the next day. I opened my eyes, feeling a heavy weight on my body. Pink flooded my vision.

"Huh?" Perturbed, I pulled myself up. The pink something-or-other was Fouré, sleeping atop me. Her head had somehow slipped as she was sleeping, and now rested against my lap.

Yikes, this was trouble.

I hurriedly tried to move her head without waking her, but—

"Mngh... Ngh... Huh? Huey? Are you awake now?" Her hair fluttered back and forth as she spoke, her tone carefree. She blinked, and for a moment our eyes locked.

"Oh, sorry, Fouré. I woke you, didn't I?"

"It's okay. Sometimes I feel like sleeping with you, so I went ahead and did it this time. It's no biggie that you woke me up. We fairies don't need sleep to begin with anyway."

"So you didn't sleep?"

"I did. My consciousness faded away exactly as it should during slumber."

"But you just said you didn't need sleep."

"I meant that I won't die if I don't sleep, unlike mortals."

Huh. I had no idea being a fairy came with a bonus like that.

"Then get off Hisui immediately. You're giving him a hard time, Fouré."

"Aruna!"

I couldn't see the other goddess anywhere...until she entered, phasing through the wall with Cult.

Fouré stuck her tongue out. "Hmph! I won our game of rock-paper-scissors, so you have no right to complain!"

"Rock-paper-scissors?"

Cult giggled. "Heh heh heh. After you fell asleep, little one, we had a little argument about who would get to sleep with you. So we solved it with a game of rock-paper-scissors."

"Uh, okay?" I wanted to throw a quip back at them like "Why

were you guys even fighting over who gets to nap next to me," but I kept the impulse down with a gulp. Even if I asked, they wouldn't give me a decent answer anyway.

"Bedtime is over. So yes, I do, in fact, have the right to complain."

"I don't think so! You're sure throwing your weight around a lot for someone who lost!"

"I have the right to throw my weight around too."

"How can you say that when *I'm* the caring, nurturing older sister out of the three of us!"

Fouré and Aruna launched into their usual arguments right next to me. Ignoring them, I climbed out of my bed and left my room, despite the invitingly warm glow from the morning sun. Cult followed me; I doubted Aruna and Fouré had even noticed I left.

"I'm sorry, Cult. We didn't get to practice spellcraft much last night."

"I don't mind. You were rather fatigued, and it's unhealthy to push yourself too hard."

"I should have asked Fouré to dispel my exhaustion," I said, as if it were second nature. I hadn't thought much of it, but my outlook must've changed quite a bit if I was saying I *wanted* Fouré to do that for me now.

"You need to take it easy sometimes too. You've been putting everything you have and more into your training."

"True... And I feel great after that sleep. I think I can do a lot more today."

"What are you going to do, exactly?" The moment I reached the stairs, as I was about to descend, I heard Armeria calling to me from my right. When I turned to look, she was standing a few meters down the hall, still dressed in her nightwear. I figured she must've just woken up as well.

"Morning, Armeria."

"Good morning, Hisui."

"Are you feeling well enough to be walking around now?"

"Yes, I'm more than fine. What you did for me yesterday gave me more energy than I know what to do with."

"That's great!"

"By the way... I heard you talking to yourself—about doing more today or something?"

"Oh... Yeah, that's the plan."

Crap. The only people who used the second floor were me, Cosmos, and Armeria, so I'd chatted with Cult without thinking twice. While Armeria didn't seem to suspect I was *actually* talking to someone, I'd have to be more careful from now on, seeing as Armeria could now move about freely. I needed to watch out for her as well, not just for Cosmos.

"I...was going to do my best with my chores in the fields."

"Ah, your farmwork... You're only eight years old, you know. You shouldn't be expected to do so much work."

"Don't worry about it. I have my little trick to help, so physical work doesn't bother me much at all."

"Trick?" She paused, then caught on. "Ah, you mean that power."

She knew I had the ability to use magecraft now—I had an all-powerful ability at my fingertips. I could exert physical power that far surpassed that of any normal human being by reinforcing my physical strength. If Armeria had observed Azalea using magecraft, then she'd know there was nothing to worry about.

"Still, don't overdo it. You're just a child."

"Yeah, I know. I'm heading out for a bit now!"

"All right, take care."

I waved to Armeria, then went down the stairs to the ground floor. Speeding straight through the foyer, I threw open the front doors. A hot wind hit me full in the face, as if it were attempting to scald me. The sunlight threatened to burn my uncovered skin. "Ugh, it's hot."

Though the seasons had reached the tail end of summer, the savage heat still remained—lingering summer heat with none of the joys of summer.

I doubted it was as hot here as the sweltering summers had been in Japan, where the ambient temperature went well over thirty degrees celsius. Still, this was definitely pushing it. When adapting to new environments, people might feel hot even in mid-twenty-degree temperatures. I was pretty sure that if I went to Japan as I

was now, I was practically guaranteed to die from heatstroke.

I began to sprint, as if feeling the wind on my face as I ran would stave off the heat. Channeling magecraft into my body as I went, I made my way into the deepest reaches of the forest.

"You're planning on moving?"

Aruna repeated her question, prompting me for an answer. She stood next to me as I wrapped up a light stretch, chatting with me as I began channeling magecraft into my body to support my training.

"Yeah. I'm planning on leaving these lands, to be more precise."

"Heh. That's a rather abrupt decision." Cult, who had been watching me train, joined the conversation.

"No, I've been thinking about it for a while now. Before I can go to the capital to meet up with Azalea, I need to save up as much money as possible. Every little bit counts."

"Money... Well, I suppose that's important for mortal society."

"Without money, I can't buy anything. Besides, I want to ease Azalea's burden a bit. I can't make her work her butt off for the both of us."

"You're so sweet, Huey. Honestly, the very best! But how exactly are you going to make money? I think it will be rather difficult to do in such a remote area with nothing to its name."

Fouré was right, of course—but recently I'd figured out the answer to this particular problem.

"I'll use the basilisk."

"Huh? How?" The three goddesses simultaneously looked at me questioningly. I guess my line of logic hadn't been clear enough just from that.

"I'll sell materials from the basilisk I defeated with Azalea. Its parts should sell for a pretty good price, right? Considering it's a strong monster and all."

"I see. That's a fantastic idea! Basilisks are quite the fearsome enemy to mortals, I suppose. I've heard that people fashion equipment from basilisk hides and scales, given how tough they are."

"Really? Then it shouldn't take long to find a buyer for the

basilisk. Thanks for keeping its body for me, Cult."

"It was nothing. Your hard work was what made it available to keep in the first place."

"You're so humble, Cult. Thanks, though."

Right now, I didn't have the skill to create magical artifacts that had the same storage capacity as the bag Cult gave me. I wish she'd just take the compliment, but I guess that was one of the reasons she was so charming.

"So anyway, I was planning on traveling to Marquis Lycoris's lands nearby soon."

"Marquis Lycoris's...lands?" Oh? It looked like they didn't know about the marquis or his demesne. The Lycoris lands were rather far from the manor, but they *were* our neighbors, technically.

"The Lycoris lands are directly northeast of our territory. They're so vast that you could call our lands tiny in comparison. The difference in area is like day and night."

Though, to be honest, most of my knowledge of Lycoris was stuff I'd heard from Armeria. She really did know a little bit about everything. According to her, they had well-maintained roads, gorgeous buildings, and a population so much bigger than ours that it was almost ridiculous to try to compare them.

"Hmm, really? So, what will you do once you get there?"

"I'll sell the basilisk parts, of course. The adventurer's guild doesn't have an outpost here, but I'm certain they'll have one in Lycoris where I can off-load the materials."

"The adventurer's guild, huh? Aren't adventurers those people who traverse dungeons and fight monsters? I suppose the guild must be their headquarters."

"Headquarters, huh? That's a really apt way to describe it, I guess—seems like you always know the right thing to say, Aruna." She wasn't wrong in the least.

"So that guild is where you can sell materials to make money? I imagine you're making the trip all the way to Lycoris because there's no such place here, then."

"Yep, you got it. Nobody with enough money to buy basilisk parts would ever be coming here in the first place. Even if I could sell it

around here, I can't afford to have any rumors going around about me killing a basilisk."

"So it's better that you make the trip, then..."

"Yeah. Luckily, there's a frontier town nearby, and that's probably my best bet."

"When will you be leaving?"

"Hmm... Right now, my hands aren't *so* tied that I have to skip training just to go...but probably some time soon."

"I see. Well, that means you can decide at your leisure." Aruna's opinion on the situation was rather casual. When she was relaxed, she was super chill and easygoing.

At that moment I never would have guessed that even if it felt like I had all the time in the world, fate was hurtling straight at me like a speeding bullet.

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After I finished with my training for the day, I returned to the manor. Dusk had fallen. The sky was dyed entirely in orange, and in the distance the deep blue of the night sky had begun to spread out.

What would this be like if I couldn't use magecraft? The thought was terrifying. The tree canopy was so thick that moonlight couldn't penetrate its darkness in the night, and even my sense of direction was warped out here. Only madness would drive someone to try to walk home in these conditions.

Just so I wouldn't worry Armeria and Cosmos, I channeled more energy and sped toward the manor.

"Huh?" Upon opening the door to the manor, though, I saw two people talking in the middle of the foyer—Glenn and Armeria. An odd sense of déjà vu creeping over me, I approached them. Neither of them noticed I was there until I was practically on top of them.

"Oh, Hisui..." For some reason, Armeria was looking pale. She looked away, unwilling to meet my gaze like she was hiding something.

"Oh, if it ain't Hisui. Perfect timing! I thought maybe you could help us with something."

"What do you mean? Did you say something to Armeria?"

"Not anything serious. She suddenly got real healthy, y'know? Just now I saw her running around outside."

"Running?" I glanced at Armeria, my gaze settling on her for a moment. She'd never told me she was going to do that! And she'd been bedridden just yesterday! I wanted to complain, but Armeria still wouldn't look me in the eye, so I stayed silent.

This all gave me a really bad feeling.

"So... Is that all you wanted to say?"

"Hmph! All of you are so irritating. Of course I have more to say—something real important, actually."

"I thought you said it was nothing serious."

"Oh, shut up! What I wanted to say was, now that Armeria's all better, we're going to marry her off to Viscount Geremeigh."

"What?" Seriously, what was he talking about? Glenn's words rocked me to the core, but he apparently wasn't done yet, seeing as he kept yammering on gleefully.

"Well, before we were going to have Azalea marry him, but once her powers awakened, the marriage talks were rescinded. So I had a thought—we've got a pretty girl right here, don't we? She's the right age, so the viscount should accept her with open arms. Especially considering his reputation as a connoisseur of women."

"W-Wait! Isn't Viscount Geremeigh...over forty years old?"

"Yeah? So what? It doesn't matter if her new husband's three times her age. If she becomes a courtesan of the viscount, she'll never have to worry about food or nothin'. Apparently he's got a whole harem of wives though, so who knows if he'd give her any attention."

"You're joking."

"What was that? You talking back?"

I couldn't take this anymore. I had hit my limit. Even though he didn't have any blood ties to Armeria, how could he even consider marrying off his little sister to a middle-aged stranger? And he was talking about it like it was the greatest idea he'd ever thought up. Was there something wrong with his brain? This entire proposal was unacceptable.

I balled my right hand into a tight fist. I'd put up with a lot, considering the hell he put me through regularly, but I was at the end of my rope. Armeria was finally free from her illness and ready to enjoy life too!

"She's not getting married off under my watch! Like hell I'd ever allow that!" I took a step toward him, and raised my fist to punch his face in—

"Calm down, Hisui!"

Just before I smashed Glenn's nose in, Armeria cried out and grabbed me from behind. I could easily shake her off, but I didn't want to hurt her. Since she was holding me back, I managed to cool my seething fury a little.

"Armeria! Why'd you stop me?"

"You don't need to get angry because of a jerk like him. Let's talk things out calmly and intellectually."

"Ngh..." The rage was eating at me, but Armeria was right. Even if I punched Glenn, it wouldn't magically make his asinine proposal disappear. In fact, he was more likely to use it as fuel to convince our parents and the viscount to accept the marriage.

Struggling to get my fury under control, I took several deep breaths and managed to calm down after a moment.

"Sorry, Armeria. Thanks for stopping me."

"Not at all. I'm sure you'd do the same for me if our places were swapped..."

Glenn sneered. "How nice that my worthless baby brother and the ex-invalid are getting along so well." He spat insults at us, and hearing his voice made the anger I'd just gotten under control flare to life again.

Please, just shut the hell up! I thought.

"You'd better pray your precious little sister doesn't get sent off to the viscount real soon, then!" Glenn left us with that parting shot. I bet he'd only said that to piss me off too.

"Try saying that *after* you've taken the proposal to the viscount," I snapped back. He was just the heir to the house, but he was acting like he already owned the place. The big problem right now, though, was that regardless of the viscount's response, my parents were

almost certain to endorse Glenn's proposal. Both Armeria and Cosmos were nothing but nuisances to all of them, so there was plenty of appeal in making Armeria useful in that way.

"Looks like we have a disaster on our hands, Armeria."

"Indeed. I don't wish to be married yet. Even if I were to wed someday, I want my partner to be someone who loves me from the bottom of their heart."

"Don't worry. I'll never let any weird old nobleman take you away. There's gotta be a way to avoid that marriage scheme."

I decided to focus entirely on solving this problem. First, the reason Glenn wanted to marry Armeria off to Viscount Geremeigh in the first place was obvious—he wanted our family to solidify our connection to the viscount.

Once a month, the viscount would dispatch a small mercantile caravan to our lands for the purpose of purchasing natural resources, which we had in spades. In exchange for our raw materials, our family and the villagers could trade for spices, foodstuffs, crockery, and old clothing.

So basically, Armeria would become collateral, indicating our desire for our continued relationship. On top of that, it might convince him to send a larger caravan with more goods. That was probably what Glenn was after.

This was a situation that often happened among the less wealthy nobility. The issue, though, was how exactly I would foil this proposal that had nothing but benefits for both parties involved. I could already tell that just asking would only be met with refusal, even if I begged. But on the other hand, I'd become a wanted criminal if I made the viscount "disappear," no matter how much I wanted to.

So, since I couldn't get rid of the viscount, and I didn't want to make any trouble for Armeria anyway, I struggled to come up with a plan that might work. I was fully aware I was being selfish, but I wanted Armeria to be free, not tied down.

"Wait... 'Free'?" Suddenly, an idea pulled at my thoughts. As if I'd removed some critical snag, the rest of my thoughts fell into place like a sudden glimmer of light. The answer had been so simple.

"That's right! We *should* just do what we want!"

"U-Um, Hisui? What are you talking about?" My sudden shout startled Armeria, flustering her.

"I think I know how to get you out of this situation! Just leave it to me. I'll make sure your problem is dealt with!"

"Hold on, Hisui! Explain it so I can understand."

"Sorry, I don't want Glenn to get even the tiniest inkling, so I can't tell anyone." Actually, I didn't tell her because I knew she'd try to stop me. I was planning on doing something violent and heavy-handed, after all.

"Hisui..." Somehow, she could tell my plan was probably dangerous. She seemed to want to say something, but after a moment of silence, she ended up keeping her thoughts private. Instead, she forced a smile and apologized.

"I'm sorry. I'm making a lot of trouble for you, aren't I?"

"I don't consider it trouble at all. I do the things I do because I want to help you. It's only normal for family to help one another out, right? So just you wait—I'll bring home good news." With that, I turned on my heel and headed to the manor entrance, my eyes fixing on the door.

"Okay, I'll be back!"

"What? Hisui!" Armeria's distraught cries reverberated through the room from behind me, but I didn't turn around once. I kicked off into a sprint, channeling my powers as I fled from the manor.

Everything'll be fine, Armeria. I'll bring home a mountain's worth of money. So until I get back, I hope you can stay hale and happy.

It hurt to shake her hold on me. But I ran, even as the fresh pain settled in my mind. I dashed through the forest with all my might. A terrible feeling of loneliness took hold of my chest, squeezing it tight. A chill reminiscent of the faraway night sky settled in my body, running through it with abandon. I never knew it hurt so much to part with my family even when I knew the separation would only be temporary.

I generated a ball of light above my head with godcraft and single-mindedly cut straight through the forest.

Chapter 2: Dragon Encounter

I picked my way through the trees as I ran. My eyes, strengthened with magecraft, cut through the dark of the night. As long as I had a sliver of moonlight, traversing the forest was a cinch. I dashed over the carpet of green, the undergrowth presenting no obstacle.

Sometime during my journey, the three goddesses descended from above.

"Are you sure this is going to be okay, Huey? Your sister looked very worried." Fouré alighted beside me as she spoke, her awareness of my thoughts clear in her question.

I didn't answer her right away, but I eventually found the words. "It's fine. If I don't do this, then who will? I'm the only one willing to save Armeria, and I have the power to do it. What's the point of having power if not for helping someone, right?"

"Huey..."

"Just let him, Fouré. He was going to do something sooner or later—just think of this as an opportunity."

Aruna, who'd alighted on my other side to sandwich me between herself and Fouré, spoke up in a firm tone. She was clearly trying to respect my wishes.

"An opportunity, huh? Sure, but I'm still worried about Huey's mental state."

"I'm concerned about him as well, you know. But he's more than able to make money. Being overprotective will only cause problems."

"Yeah, uh-huh. Big words for someone who was being a mother hen, all like, 'Am I worrying too much about Hisui? I hope he's getting enough rest. I'm not annoying him too much, am I?' You were *totally* fussing over him!"

"What?! When did I say all of that?!"

"This isn't the time to be fighting, you two. Think about Hisui—

he's hurting right now. You could stand to be more considerate."

Cult cut into their argument, and Fouré and Aruna both gulped at her chastising. They frowned, expressions sour, maybe because Cult had made them feel self-conscious. The situation was so silly, I couldn't help but chuckle, though.

"Ah ha ha... Thanks, Cult. And I'm sorry, Aruna, Fouré, but I'm doing this no matter what. You guys have cheered me up, and I don't have time to waste on regrets—I have to save Armeria and Cosmos as soon as possible!"

"Hee hee. Exactly what I thought you'd say. You're such a sweet boy."

Cult had been trailing behind me as I ran, but now she adroitly matched my speed to gently pat me on the head. She really did have some stupidly good skills.

"By the way, Huey... You're heading to Lycoris now, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Like I mentioned this morning, there's nowhere I can sell the basilisk parts in Clematis."

"The basilisk, huh? I wonder how much that weak little snake will sell for."

"Wait, 'weak'?"

To the War Goddess, I guess the basilisk wasn't much different from the regular snakes in the area—especially considering even a child like myself managed to kill it. Even though I was nearly the one who'd gotten killed... But then again, it had been at least two years since I'd fought that basilisk. I was a lot stronger now than I had been back then, so maybe I *could've* taken on a basilisk without much trouble now.

"If you're trying to get money selling basilisk parts, you'd best be prepared to kill a lot of basilisks. I hope, for your sake, that you find a dragon or something instead."

"A dragon?! I've never heard of any dragons nesting in this area. Can I even beat something like that?"

Among the many and varied types of monsters, dragons were notorious for being the most powerful of them all. Whenever the question of what monsters were the strongest came up, dragons were always the first ones named. They were true juggernauts.

"I don't know. It's not like dragons stay in any particular area—all of them aside from green dragons can fly, after all. Running into one isn't out of the question no matter where you are."

"Please don't say that..."

Didn't Aruna know that saying weird, freaky stuff like that always made it come true? I'd never fought a dragon before, so I couldn't even begin to imagine how it'd go. But given the way Aruna had worded things, it sounded like my chances weren't zero.

"Hmm... But I do want to see Huey fight a dragon! I'm sure you'd cut a real dashing figure!"

"Don't give me a thumbs-up like that, Fouré. I'm not gonna be happy if you end up plotting a way to make him fight a dragon."

Cult giggled. "But materials from a monster like that are considered top class. You could sell them for an exorbitant amount anywhere you go. The money you get from it could help your move!"

"Mngh... When you put it that way, I'm totally picturing a dragon sitting on its hoard..."

What they were saying made sense, though. Materials harvested from a powerful source allowed people to make equally powerful items out of them. I suppose there were a few get-rich-quick schemes out there that worked—not that tracking down a dragon was all *that* quick.

"The real question is whether I can beat a dragon or not." If I wasn't strong enough to kill a monster like that, then all of this was a moot point anyway.

"Flying dragons might be out of your league, but you could hunt green dragons quite easily. They're rather simple creatures."

Aruna gave me an objective assessment of the difference in strength between me and dragons, and according to her, I had a ninety percent chance of beating green dragons. I had no idea whether that was because I was strong or because green dragons were especially weak among their kind, though.

"Since we're on the topic, do materials from green dragons sell for a lot?"

"Who knows? It's not like we'd know the trade value for materials between mortals." Aruna shrugged.

"I figured," I sighed.

Even though they had some knowledge about things, they were still fairies and completely outside the human experience. They weren't very interested in people aside from me, and they didn't actively meddle in human affairs. So, in other words, they didn't care at all.

"Well, green dragon parts are still dragon parts, so I think they'd sell well!"

"Hee hee. Indeed, it's exactly as Fouré says, little one. Green it may be, but it is still a dragon."

"That's true. Then I'll pray I run into one of those—a flightless one, like you guys mentioned."

I amplified the amount of magecraft I was using for a speed boost. At this pace, I might be able to reach Lycoris just after noon, even with breaks. I resolutely pushed onward, chatting with the goddesses along the way.

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I ran through the night, taking short breaks here and there, and before long the night sky began to lighten. Noticing the daylight filtering through the treetops, I came to a sharp stop, skidding across the dirt.

"Oh... It's already dawn? I must've crossed the border of Clematis by now."

"Indeed. You've run a long way from your home—I wouldn't be surprised if you were on Lycoris lands now." Aruna nodded.

"Yeah. But wow... I seriously ran a lot. It's been ages since I spent that much magecraft."

My training had mostly been concerned with the control, channeling, and manipulation of energy—though I trained in swordplay as well as general strength and fitness, of course. So it'd been a while since I last did much long-distance running.

"If you continue training in magecraft, you can use it in place of exerting yourself as often as you need, after all—just like how you're managing now. How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. I've been restoring my stamina with godcraft, so I can keep running."

Even if it were possible to increase stamina with magecraft, actually restoring it once it was gone was out of the question. But I could use Fouré's powers of godcraft as well. With those two powers, there was honestly no real need for me to rest. But I wanted to keep a reserve of energy for both magecraft and godcraft just in case. There was apparently no telling when or where a dragon might appear, after all.

"In that case, run until the sun has fully risen. You can do it!"

"All right." I began to press on through the forest once more, just as Aruna urged me, and I planned on running until she told me to stop.

A few hours later—with breaks here and there—I was reasonably sure I'd reached Lycoris. The sun overhead had already passed its zenith, so the morning must've passed into the afternoon. While I ran, and just as I was thinking about how much I wished I could have some meat for lunch, Dandelion suddenly began to move about on my head, beating his wings against my hair.

"What is it, Dandelion?"

"*Chirp! Chirp, chirp!*"

With a few more chirps and a flap of his wings, Dandelion launched himself from my head to flutter directly in front of my eyes. Completely filling up my field of vision, he urgently pointed his left wing in a direction that was *away* from the path I'd been taking.

"Judging by your behavior... Is there some sort of large creature over there?"

"*Chirp!*" Dandelion confirmed my assessment, and as if to prove him right, a roar echoed from somewhere far away.

"*Grrroooar!*"

It was the low, savage howl of a monster.

"Was that..."

"A dragon, yes. I didn't expect one to *actually* appear." To my left, Aruna grinned fiendishly, arms crossed. This was basically confirmation that I was going to have to fight this thing. I had been worried this would happen, and apparently for good reason.

"Go on, Hisui. You have to take advantage of this opportunity!"

"I guess..." Aruna grabbed my arm and began tugging me along. Personally, I'd have been more than happy to change my plans and make a run for it, but I just couldn't get the words out.

It didn't take long for us to get to the dragon.

"To arms! We must protect the carriage—and the master—at all costs!"

"*Rrraaah!*"

After I'd been running for a while, a green monster came into view; it strongly resembled the dinosaurs of my past life. Squaring off against it was a group of people in full armor—I figured they must be knights. Behind them was a broken carriage that had toppled over. When I squinted, I saw a man and a young woman dressed in elegant finery next to the carriage. They were lying on the ground, unmoving.

"Someone's fighting the dragon already?!"

The situation was clear as day. The dinosaur-looking monster must have been the green dragon, like the goddesses were discussing earlier. Well... Maybe? It *kinda* looked like a dragon, anyway. If you asked me, though, it was closer to a Tyrannosaurus rex. Rows of sharp fangs lined its mouth, each one of them bigger and wider than my arms. On top of that, it was tall enough to flatten all the trees in the surrounding area. Looking up at it made sweat run down my forehead in rivulets.

It was patently obvious that this was far stronger than the basilisk.

"Now draw your sword, Hisui. It may seem intimidating, but it's truthfully a weak beast—you are stronger by far. I believe in you."

"Aruna..."

The goddess gave me a firm pat on the back as I was shrinking away. Her encouragement filled me with courage, even though she hadn't imbued me with a shot of magecraft or anything. Now that she'd expressed her trust and faith in me, I had no choice but to face the danger. Running was not an option.

I drew my sword from its scabbard at my waist. The blade was a dull gray, having been created through spellcraft. Forcing a massive

burst of magecraft energy into the current circulating throughout my body, I pushed off against the ground with full force. The ground cracked with a terrible noise as I did, and the surrounding trees became a blur as I sped toward my target.

I arrived before the dragon within seconds.

"Hrraaagh!" I leaped toward it with all my might and spun into a kick—a dropkick, to be precise—and landed squarely on its snout. My body was a well-honed weapon now after so much time training to my very limits, and the magecraft that powered me was equally honed. My kick sent the gargantuan dinosaur flying, despite it being many, many times larger than me.

The trees behind the monster fell to the sides, flattened, and by the time my kick reached the ground, the dragon itself had been flung far away.

"What... What just happened?"

The dragon that had been standing before the knights had vanished in the blink of an eye, and in its place was an eight-year-old child. It was no surprise that they were thrown into confusion, given they had been prepared to lay down their lives mere moments ago.

At a glance, I could tell their armor was heavily damaged. They must've already clashed with the dragon—there were people lying nearby, bleeding out. I deliberately moved away from them, knowing the casualties would only mount if I fought the dragon in the vicinity.

"I'll take care of that monster, and I'll be back when I'm done with it. Until then, hurry up and heal the wounded!" I dashed off in pursuit of the dragon, not bothering to wait for a response.

Just as I dashed off, I ended up locking eyes with the girl the knights had been flanking in order to protect. She was probably about the same age as me.

"*Grrr... Grraaaooor!*"

Several hundred meters from the knights, I found the dragon just as it was rising to its feet. Its eyes were bloodshot, and the moment I drew near, it turned to me, ready to fight. It unleashed a bellowing roar loud enough to make my ears ache, and spittle dripped from its wide-open jaws in thick splotches.

I laughed nervously. “If I got caught up in its teeth, my magecraft probably wouldn’t provide enough defense to save me, huh?”

“Right. Unlike other dragons, green ones are not blessed with the gift of flight. But to compensate, they have excellent physical strength, especially in the force of its bites. They can tear straight through steel.”

“Are you *sure* I can beat that thing?” Hearing Aruna’s description was enough to drain me of my self-confidence.

“You’ll be fine. Your kick worked great on it, remember? Green dragons might be pretty sturdy and have a vicious temper to match their strength, but your magecraft-powered strength is nothing to sneeze at.”

“If you say so... All right. I’ll show you I can do it, then.”

Besides, if I didn’t deal with the dragon here, it would attack the knights again, and I’d gotten involved in the first place in order to protect them. I *had* to fight.

“Here goes my first strike!”

I eschewed the formalities that usually came with the beginning of a duel and instead dashed straight forward, swinging my sword for its chest. A purple aura enveloped my blade, and I struck the dragon at a dizzying speed, piercing through its hide. Just as Aruna had said, the dragon’s scales were ridiculously tough, but my level of magecraft was more than enough to break through its defenses.

“*Graaaaghhh!*” The dragon cried out in pain. Now that I was right up close to it, I thought its roar might burst my eardrums. Looks like skipping out on strengthening my hearing had been a good idea. If I’d fortified my hearing as well, I was sure I’d be bleeding from my ears.

“I’m not done yet!”

I followed up with another attack. Its reaction to just one strike had been extreme; maybe it had never suffered an injury that bad before. Either way, I was going to take advantage of the openings it was giving me. My attacks were faster than the dragon’s by far—and since it was so big, it was easy to hit. Finishing it off would be a walk in the park.

The flashes of purple light that gleamed from my blade struck

down at the dragon like a torrential rain. My slashes were so quick they looked almost like beams of light. As I continued my onslaught, blood spewed from the dragon's body, splattering everywhere.

"*Grrrhhh... Grroooaaagh!*"

"Whoa!"

The dragon had finally launched its counterattack. It snarled at me, fangs bared, as it shook its head violently...but it seemed to be struggling. That was all it could muster in retaliation. I brought my sword up in front of me and used it to block its attack.

"Huh... I'm surprised. You really aren't much of a challenge at all." The impact of its blow had been softened by my magecraft, and the resulting force wasn't even enough to make my hands numb. I could've blocked these hits all day.

Though the dragon was just as big and aggressive as I'd been expecting, its actual strength surprised me...and not in an exciting way. I'd been scared of it for no reason. Aruna was right—I could probably win against these guys almost a hundred percent of the time.

I channeled magecraft into my blade. Its dull gray now wreathed in energy, it shone with a purple glow that lit up its surroundings. Then, in that very moment, I funneled a vast amount of energy into my sword and pointed it at the dragon.

"It's over for you."

"*Grrroooaaar!*" As if in reply to my words, it rushed toward me, smashing the landscape as it ran. Cracks shot through the ground, and I started wobbling as the earth shifted beneath my feet. But my footing wouldn't be a problem—even if my approach was imperfect, all I had to do was strike at its vital points.

I dropped low to the ground and slid beneath the beast, narrowly avoiding its wide, incoming jaws. From there, I took aim at its left breast and struck with my sword.

No hard feelings, dragon.

I didn't know where exactly its heart was, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to try the approximate location of a human heart. I didn't know how large the organ would be either, so I channeled spellcraft energies into the tip of my blade.

It was entirely possible to use spellcraft offensively. At the very center of the converging purple light, a darkness began to creep from it, devouring all light. This darkness shot straight toward the sky like a beam and, in doing so, left a huge, gaping hole in the dragon's chest as it was blasted into the stratosphere.

"That was the first time I tried fortifying spellcraft with magecraft...and it worked. All that practice with godcraft really paid off."

The left side of its chest and about one third of its torso was now gone, having been caught in the beam. The spellcraft technique I'd used just now was that of changing properties—I'd converted the elemental property of the energy into fire and shot it through the dragon.

I'd just picked black for the beam's color on a whim. I mean, who wouldn't? It was a cool color.

Still, the strength of fortified spellcraft was truly terrifying. I'd prioritized controlling it, so I was able to contain its raw power quite well, but in terms of its destructive capabilities, it far outstripped anything magecraft was capable of on its own. In exchange for this strength, however, I had to consume a ridiculous amount of magecraft and spellcraft energies.

"Done and dusted... Whew." The green dragon pitched forward and collapsed, its strength rapidly fading away. Its corpse rolled and crushed the ground beneath it as it fell. It would never rise again. Somewhat belatedly, terrible amounts of blood spilled from the empty cavity that had once been its chest.

"Aw, that's a waste. I know I didn't really have a choice, but I bet dragon's blood can be used for something too. Maybe medicine? A lot of fantasy settings have that." But for this hunt, I'd focused on defeating the monster first and foremost. The dragon had been terribly worked up, but I'm sure it would have been a long fight if I hadn't used spellcraft.

With a small sigh, I returned my sword to its sheath. When I did, the goddesses and Dandelion gathered around me.

"Excellent work, Hisui."

"Great job out here, Huey!"

"You've done admirably, dear one."

"*Chirp, chirp!*"

"Thanks, everyone."

"You used spellcraft for that final attack, right?" As soon as they'd finished their congratulations, Aruna wasted no time in shooting me a blunt question.

"You got it. That was spellcraft fortified by magecraft. Makes for a pretty good ace up my sleeve, huh?"

"Indeed. To pierce through its hide so easily, I figured you must have used spellcraft, given your current level of strength. It would've been impossible to do so with magecraft."

Cult giggled. "Nothing gives me more pleasure than knowing my powers were of such great use to you, little one." She then clapped loudly and dramatically.

"Thanks, Cult. Your power's always a lifesaver." Compared to the other two skills, spellcraft was frighteningly effective. Combat effects aside, it was indispensable to my daily life. I'm pretty sure I used spellcraft the most out of the three.

"I'm pleased to hear that."

"Hey, Huey? Are you sure you want to take your time gathering up dragon parts instead of going back? If you don't help those knights right away, some of them will probably die."

"Wait, are you serious?"

"Yup! From what I could see, some of them were pretty badly wounded."

"I'm sure you're right. You'd know better than anyone." I hurriedly stuffed the dragon's remains into my storage bag and sped back.

I'd used up most of my magecraft reserves, and though I wanted to save as much of it as I could, that wasn't an option now. If I was stingy about my energy and someone died because of it, their death would fall entirely on my shoulders. I couldn't bear that, even if they were complete strangers.

So I dashed with all my strength along the path that had been

cleared out when I'd sent the dragon flying.

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The greeting that awaited me upon my return, though, was something altogether unexpected.

"H-He's back! Ready your weapons!" The knights pointed their swords and spears—anything they could get their hands on that was feasibly weapon-like, really—at me in unison.

Though I'd gone and defeated the dragon for them, they didn't look like they were in a state to put up much of a fight either. Dripping with sweat and trembling, they stayed at a distance. Behind them, a few knights were leading the man and the young girl away. I guess they were less afraid of me than the dragon, at least.

"Um... You don't need to be scared of me," I offered in peace.

"Lies! Then what of the green dragon?! And you have...far more strength than a child ought. Name yourself, boy!"

"I could, but..."

They were obviously suspicious of me. I'd sent a dragon flying with a single kick, then took mere moments to return after I left to go after it. I looked like an ordinary young boy, but the facts just didn't add up.

There were awfully convenient tools in the form of magical artifacts in this world, after all. I wouldn't have been surprised if there were ones that allowed the user to disguise their appearance. Maybe they thought I was a dangerous individual who had used an item like that in order to get close to them.

Judging from their clothing, the man and the girl hiding behind the knights were both nobles.

"What can I say? I'm pretty sure you wouldn't believe me even if I told you."

I wouldn't believe me if I were in their shoes either. Whether here or on Earth, there's no way a kid could fight a monster like that. My hands were basically tied here. If possible, I would've liked to heal their wounds, but there was no way they'd let a suspicious person use magic on them. At this rate, though, some of the knights were

likely to die before reaching town. Dying in defense of their lord might be a knight's duty, but it seemed nothing short of ridiculous to me. If they really wanted to support someone, they were better off living than dying, if you asked me.

"R-Rose! Where are you going?!"

"Huh?"

I heard the man shout from behind the knights, his tone harsh. Then, weaving through her guards, the girl rushed toward me.

The knights surrounding me weren't the only ones dumbfounded by her actions, though—I was too. Maybe because I'd been so nervous, I didn't react to her right away. Before I knew it, she was standing right in front of me.

"Um... Did you defeat the green dragon for us?" she asked as she gazed into my eyes.

I thought she must be about the same age as me, even though she was a little taller. I couldn't sense a shred of fear in her, though I wasn't sure if she was the calm and collected type or if she just wasn't thinking. Either way, she'd extended an olive branch by coming to me, so I wanted to respond in kind.

"I did—if you're talking about the big one that was here just now."

"That's incredible... M-May I ask your name?"

"My name? I'm Hisui. Hisui Belcoure Clematis."

Urgh. It killed me to name myself a Clematis—I didn't like to be reminded that I shared a name with my parents and Glenn. Then again, it was also a name I shared with my sisters. Until the day they chose another name for themselves, I had to continue being a proud Clematis.

"Clematis? Isn't that the name of the barony neighboring our Lycoris lands?"

Whoa, jackpot! It looked like she had some familiarity with my house name. To top it off, she was from Lycoris, the very place I was headed. From how she was dressed, perhaps she was a lady of House Lycoris? Thank goodness I'd chosen to be polite.

"That's correct. I'm the third son of House Clematis."

"Oh my, oh my! So you're the son of a noble house! I do

apologize for my lack of manners—I'm Rose. Rose Mil Lycoris."

"Lycoris..."

I was right! She was, indeed, a lady of House Lycoris. Did that mean the panicking man surrounded by knights was the girl's father, the marquis of Lycoris himself? What luck! I couldn't believe I'd run into them in a place like this.

"Father! Our visitor says he's from the neighboring lands—a son of House Clematis!"

After we finished introducing ourselves to one another, Rose turned around to shout at the man in the far back and wave her hand, calling him over. The knights who'd drawn their weapons on me seemed to be taken aback by this. They slowly lowered their blades and came closer.

"Er, ahem... I suppose that makes you Baron Clematis's son, I take it?"

"That's right. As I've told the young lady, I'm Hisui Belcoure Clematis."

"I-I see. Then I apologize for the rudeness we've shown you—it was quite terrible of us to have pointed our weapons at the very savior who rescued us from the dragon. I am the head of House Lycoris, Claus Mil Lycoris."

Marquis Lycoris returned pleasantries—and rather politely at that, even though I knew he couldn't be certain I had actually come from Clematis. His behavior told me he was a good person.

"Please don't worry about it. The situation is what it is—it's only natural to be cautious. I'm aware I'm not carrying anything on myself as proof of what I say."

"Still, I'd be glad if you could accept my apology. You're our savior, after all."

"All right, thank you...but right now, there's something more important."

"What do you mean?"

"Some of your guards are injured, aren't they? Please, Lord Lycoris, let me provide aid. I can use godcraft." The fact that they hadn't already healed their own men yet meant one of two things: Either they had no one who could use godcraft, or their healers had

been among the injured.

Letting them know I could use two powers was sure to spell trouble, but I couldn't just turn the other cheek on these grievously wounded knights. It was a bitter choice for sure.

"What?! I was certain you were a user of magecraft! You sent that green dragon flying just now with a single kick, didn't you?"

"I can use both. So please, let me help."

I channeled godcraft energies into my right hand, setting it aglow with a gentle light. Seeing this, Claus and his knights were all so shocked I thought their eyes might fly right out of their sockets.

"Whaaat?!"

"That's not possible... How can one person have an affinity for two powers? Can such people truly exist?" They were thrown into such an uproar, they'd forgotten about their wounded. All eyes were focused on me, and I was starting to feel terribly awkward when—

"Father! If we don't treat the knights right away, they may very well perish!"

Claus gasped, realizing the gravity of the situation. "Yes, you're right," he said. "Apologies, Hisui, but please—could you heal them?"

"Leave it to me. As long as they haven't suffered any fatal wounds I should be able to help." Thanks to Rose's timely intervention, we were able to return to the issue at hand.

Having been officially requested by Claus to help, I hurried to the wounded knights where they lay. Claus's entourage was made up of ten knights in total, and of those ten, four had clearly been wounded by the dragon's attacks. I visited each to check the state and severity of their injuries.

"I see..."

"Lord Hisui, do you think you'll be able to do something?"

Behind me, Rose spoke. It felt odd to be addressed in such a manner when she was a higher-ranked noble, though I guess we were both nobility in the end. It was only proper for nobles to treat one another with the sort of manners and etiquette that our stations demanded. So instead of shooting back a teasing reply, I simply nodded.

"I should be able to, yes. None of these four have been hit in any

vital area, so my godcraft should be more than enough to heal them."

"Oh my, oh my! I knew you could do it. Considering how you defeated that dragon, you must be quite the skilled mage, so I'm truly amazed you can provide such high-level healing with godcraft as well!"

Rose clasped her hands together. A curious happiness came over me at hearing this, but I really wasn't as awesome as she was making me out to be. While it's true that my ability to use two powers was extraordinary, I wasn't exactly a master of either, and I was certain there was a skill ceiling I would eventually hit as well.

The three goddesses regularly reminded me to keep my ego in check—in fact, they said it so often I thought my ears would fall off from hearing it repeated so many times. So I thanked Rose in my heart and promised myself to never get conceited.

Rolling up my sleeves, I healed each of the prone knights, one after another. I didn't have any particular reason for rolling up my sleeves—I just felt that doing so would help get me in the mood to focus.

For some time, all was silent.

I didn't know why, but no one spoke as I was administering care to the knights. I could feel everyone's eyes on my back as they carefully observed me, though. Thankfully, that wasn't enough to break my concentration, and I finished healing all four of them without a problem.

"I'm...all done."

The knights all heaved a sigh of relief. Hearing that, I ended up taking a deep sigh as well—the exhaustion had finally caught up to me.

This was the first time I'd ever used my powers in front of strangers. Not counting the goddesses and monsters, the only people who'd seen me in action were Azalea and Armeria. Since I'd never done this before, I didn't even realize how anxious I was.

I got to my feet. Rose, who had been watching me, started clapping enthusiastically. "You healed them without a single hitch! Your skills are just exceptional, whether you're using godcraft or

magecraft!”

I laughed sheepishly. “I’m not anything that special.”

None of the knights had suffered any wounds too difficult for me to heal. I was sure any other healer could have done just as well. The only thing I was really proud of was how much I’d managed to boost my godcraft energy over the past two and a half years. I bet it took a crazy amount of energy to match the power of the goddesses, though. I was nowhere near that level yet.

“Oh, you needn’t be so humble, Lord Hisui! It would be safe to say your abilities are the best in the country!”

“The best...in the country...” I don’t really know why, but I was getting rave reviews from her, even though this was the first time we’d met. Given that we were basically strangers, she seemed unusually friendly. Was she misinterpreting the situation, imagining me as the prince who rode in on a white stallion to save her from the dragon? I wasn’t anywhere near as cool as that—more of a donkey type, really. Besides, I would’ve had a hard time riding a white stallion anyway. I was still only eight years old, after all.

“Settle down, Rose. You’re making Hisui uncomfortable.”

“Ah... I do apologize, Lord Hisui.”

Rose’s shoulders dropped at her father’s admonition.

“It’s okay—you don’t need to apologize. I’m happy for the compliments.”

“Allow me to thank you for saving us once again. I have no words to express how grateful I am that you were able to administer healing to my retinue as well. If it hadn’t been for you, we all might have been in the belly of that beast by now...”

Whoa, was that supposed to be an attempt at dark humor? I really didn’t know how to respond, so I just laughed—awkwardly, I might add—and simply waited for Claus to finish speaking.

“—and at any rate, let us set the pleasantries aside for the moment. We ought not to tarry here for long, else we might be attacked by another monster.”

Uh, you already spent ages talking our ears off, sir... I thought.

“By the way, Hisui... What are you doing all the way out here, and all by yourself at that?”

"I was traveling to a town in Lycoris," I replied.

"In my lands, you say?"

"That's right. I'm a little loath to admit this, but my homeland of Clematis currently doesn't support an adventurer's guild. I don't have the means to sell monster materials there, you see, so I thought I might have better luck in Lycoris," I explained.

"Ah, so you wanted to deal in materials. You may rest easy then—our towns do indeed host a guild."

"Really? That's a relief..." If Lycoris hadn't had an adventurer's guild, then I'd be forced to try my luck in Geremeigh's lands—the very man whom Armeria might end up married to. I breathed a sigh of relief that this trip to Lycoris hadn't been for nothing.

"By the way, Lord Hisui, what exactly was it that you meant to sell?" asked Rose, who'd been standing beside her father. She was brimming with curiosity.

Was it okay to tell them about the basilisk? I wondered. Well, I supposed it wouldn't hurt. They already saw me fight a dragon, and basilisks were weaker monsters anyway.

"I was planning to sell basilisk materials at first."

"B-Basilisk?!" Not only were Claus and Rose shocked, but even the knights who'd stood guard around us were clearly thrown for a loop. They began murmuring among themselves. I didn't know why they were still surprised, since basilisks were weaker than green dragons.

"You mean to say you fought one of those massive snake monsters? The ones that can turn things to stone with a single glare?" Claus's voice trembled with fear. That gave me an answer, then—I guess it *was* surprising to most people.

"I believe it's the basilisk you speak of, yes."

After a moment of silence to collect his thoughts, Claus spoke. "I suppose it shouldn't be all that surprising to learn you can kill basilisks, seeing as you defeated that dragon earlier. That's very impressive, especially considering that you're still a child."

"Do you perhaps...only *appear* young?" Rose ventured.

"Not at all, Lady Rose. I'm truly and honestly just eight years old."

"Eight?!" Claus was struck dumb once more. His eyes stretched

open as wide as they could go, and his mouth hung agape. Should he really be losing his composure like this? It wasn't very becoming of nobility, to say the least. "You're the same age as Rose, and not only can you use two powers, but you can even take down a dragon on your own... You must be an apostle dearly beloved by the goddesses."

"An apostle?"

A jolt ran down my spine.

"Throughout the kingdom, we call gifted individuals specially chosen by the War Goddess Aruna and the Light Goddess Fouré 'apostles.' For example, suppose a saint is born under the shelter of the church, and her ability to use godcraft becomes known to the public. She would be considered a living incarnation of Our Lady Fouré. The masses would consider you to be one of these blessed individuals as well."

"Ding ding ding! He's got it! Pretty sharp guy. I don't really know about saints or whatever, but he's totally right when it comes to how we feel about you, Huey!" Fouré's soprano tones descended from on high.

Please, Fouré, be quiet! I'm trying to do my best to hide my own shock right now!

"Coincidentally," Claus continued, "Rose's latent godcraft powers also awakened at this age. Exceptional, isn't she? Her early talent aside, however, it remains to be seen if she'll be as skilled as other healers."

"Lady Rose can use godcraft too?" This was a surprise. Just now, Claus had mentioned that Rose was the same age as me—that would mean she was eight years old as well. But ordinarily, powers didn't awaken in people until they were at least ten years of age. Even Azalea hadn't gained her magecraft powers until she was ten. I never would have guessed Rose could use godcraft—and two years ahead of time to boot.

"Please, just call me Rose," she cut in.

"Hm?"

Before Claus could respond to my question and elaborate on his comment, Rose approached me with her request. She was smiling,

but for some reason, her beaming look made me feel tense.

"Um, well... I can't really address the daughter of a marquis without her title..."

"It's fine. I promise. Now, go ahead and say it—'Rose.'"

I couldn't do it. My lips stayed shut. "Come on now, you can do it."

"Um, R-Ro... No, I can't."

She huffed, a little put off by my refusal. "You really aren't going to do it?"

"I'm sorry," I shrugged. "I might consider it if we were better acquainted."

"If that's the case, then I suppose I'll just have to be patient until we are." Rose reluctantly accepted my suggestion, and we returned to the topic at hand.

"So, you can use godcraft as well, Lady Rose?" I asked.

"That's right," she started, then paused thoughtfully. "But in truth, I can only weave together some energy. I can't use it in all the ways you can, though, and I certainly don't have the ability to heal yet."

"She only recently manifested the gift. I've hired a tutor to begin her education soon," Claus explained.

"I've heard my new tutor graduated from the royal academy in the capital. I can't wait!" Rose chirped in excitement.

"Wow..." That was amazing too... At least, I thought it was? It came off that way, but I still wasn't really sure—I'd never been a student in this world myself, after all. But when I thought about Azalea's situation, I did kind of get it. At the very least, it sounded like the tutor was good at teaching.

"That reminds me—you're quite skilled at using your gifts, Hisui. How old were you when powers awakened in you, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Ah!" Another hard-to-answer question came hurtling my way. My words died in my throat as I racked my brains for the answer. Thankfully, while I was wondering what to say, a knight called to Claus. The timing of that distraction was perfect.

"Milord! We must leave this area. There are beasts on the way."

"Ah, that's right. I'd been enjoying speaking with Hisui so much

that I'd forgotten the time. While our carriage has unfortunately been rendered unusable, the town is only a hair's breadth away, so let us proceed on foot. Will you be all right with walking, Rose?"

"I admit I'm a little nervous...but with Lord Hisui here, I'm sure things will be just fine."

"Huh? Me?" I was puzzled that she'd bring me up out of the blue.

"Well, I mean, you're headed to Canna as well, aren't you? It'll be more fun to travel together," she said with a bright smile.

True, it would be nice to have company... I glanced upward. There, the goddesses were casually floating adrift in the sky. I had the goddesses, so I didn't really need to go with Rose's cavalcade. It wasn't like I'd be hurting for someone to chat with, after all. But given that I couldn't tell them that, it would've been odd for me to give them some random reason, decline the invitation, and go my own way. I was sure that would make me come off as cold.

"Besides, you mentioned that you don't have anything on you to prove your identity, correct?"

"Yes, that's right. I left home with just the clothes on my back."

"Then that's more the reason you should come with us."

"Why's that?"

"Father's the governor of Canna. If you come with us, you can be exempted from the tolls."

"Really? Wouldn't that just make people upset?" Considering other people had their papers in order and were paying the tolls as they should, I had no doubt they'd be annoyed if some random kid like me got exempted from having to pay my dues. It didn't sit well with me.

"We couldn't possibly take money from the person who saved us. Right, father?"

"Of course not. Not only did young Hisui save us from the dragon, but he also healed the knights' wounds. It'd be preposterous for us to make him pay the toll after all that. In fact," said Claus, turning to me, "as proof of my appreciation, I plan to see you handsomely rewarded."

"Besides, if we get attacked by a monster as vicious as a dragon again, we're sure to perish. So you'll escort us as a bodyguard...

Won't you?" Rose's eyes glistened with unshed tears as she stared pleadingly at me.

Ugh, I really did get weak-kneed when someone asked me for a favor like that. But Rose's logic was reasonable. If I went with them, then I could get into town without any trouble, and since Claus was offering a reward, I really had no reason to refuse.

After a moment of internal debate, I decided to accept their offer. "I guess...I could accompany your party a little while longer."

"Wonderful!" Rose chirped brightly in response, and we decided to set off for town as a group. Along the way, Rose was happy to chat with me, so I never once got bored.

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We traded stories as we walked, and the woods soon opened up into a grassy meadow. The vast carpet of green spread as far as the eye could see, all the way past the horizon, and it was broken only by a great stone wall—most likely the outer ramparts surrounding the town—which sat serenely among the verdure.

"Is that the town you govern, Lord Lycoris?"

My question wasn't much more than a quiet mumble, but Claus replied earnestly, pride showing in his voice. "Yes, indeed! And it's doing quite well for itself, if you ask me. I think you'll find it quite welcoming."

"I can't wait to find out."

But it wasn't like I was going there to sightsee. It didn't matter if they had jesters whipping up performances in the streets, or stately gargantuan statues, or even the best food in the world; I wouldn't pay them any mind. I couldn't afford to. I needed to sell off these basilisk parts ASAP, book it back to Clematis, and return to Armeria and Cosmos.

Oh, but... I guess it wouldn't have been so bad to spend some time in Lycoris before heading to the royal capital where Azalea was waiting for us. Unlike Lycoris, which was right next to Clematis, the capital was ridiculously far away.

Besides, I probably wouldn't be able to see Azalea until she

graduated and found work, so there was basically no reason to go to the capital right away. If I dropped in out of nowhere asking to see her, she'd probably think something was wrong, and it'd kill me to make her worry over nothing like that. So hanging out in Canna for a while, maybe three years at minimum, might be a decent idea.

If I brought Armeria and Cosmos, it would also be the first time they'd ever left Clematis, just like me. I was sure they'd be overjoyed.

So with that sunny thought in mind, I hurried after Claus, who'd already strode farther ahead. Soon, we came to the massive town ramparts; they must've stood a good ten meters tall. The town gates were directly ahead of us.

In front of the gate were dozens of people, from merchants to adventurers, standing in a long line. Passing alongside them, Claus headed straight toward the guards stationed at the entrance to the town.

"Ah! Welcome back, Lord Lycoris. But...on foot? Whatever happened to your carriage?" inquired a guard. The question drew attention to Claus's presence, and another guard immediately saluted him.

"We were attacked by a dragon mid-journey—a green one."

"A-A dragon! And you're unharmed?!"

"Yes, and we owe it all to young Hisui here. While we lost the carriage, we were at least all able to walk back, hale and hearty."

"Right... You mean to say this boy here saved you, milord?" The soldier's disbelief was evident in his tone, as he looked from Claus, who had made that declaration in full confidence, to me. He clearly didn't believe it, and I couldn't blame him. He hadn't actually seen me defeat the dragon, after all, so he must've been having a field day trying to figure out how I'd actually managed to pull it off. I could sympathize.

"I'll be receiving him as a guest of honor at my residence. There'll be no issue with letting him into town, I presume?"

"N-no, of course not! Please, go on through." Though the guard seemed unconvinced, he nevertheless didn't have the pluck to bar his lord from proceeding with his retinue. Bowing deeply, he stepped

aside to let us pass. With Claus spearheading our group, we passed through the gates and entered the town proper.

Once we passed through the stone gate, my vision was overloaded by a flood of information. No matter where I looked, there were people everywhere! Ahead, left, right, it didn't matter—a throng of people always met my gaze. There was an entire world's worth of difference between this and the village in Clematis, where the population probably didn't even reach a hundred strong.

It was overwhelming how many people there were coming and going in every direction. From far away, I could hear the chatter of merchants and smell the mouthwatering aroma of roasting meat.

"Wow... So this is what a real town is like..."

"Is this the first time you've left your own domain, Lord Hisui?" asked Rose, who was walking beside me. She laughed gaily, seeing my rapid-fire blinking at all the new sights. I felt a little embarrassed—I was a real country bumpkin, through and through.

"Yeah, it is. We don't have any towns this large back home." Clematis was the very picture of super, mega, *ultra* backwater countryside. It had nothing but crop fields and forest, period.

Claus, who was walking a little ways ahead of us, interjected. "That being said, Clematis is rich in natural resources. I imagine you could live without wanting for anything."

I couldn't really agree with him. No matter how abundant our resources were, my father was a fool; he didn't make any attempt at taking advantage of what he had. In fact, he *refused* to—complaining about the danger, he rarely culled monsters himself, and was content to simply work in the fields within the safety of our village.

Regardless of how much fertile land we had or how rich it was in untapped resources, there was no one in Clematis who could work all of it into a usable state. The whole situation was like casting pearls before swine, as it were.

"I'd like to travel to Clematis one day. I want to see the place where you were born and raised, Lord Hisui."

"There's really nothing to see there, though. Unless you're a fan of mother nature." I kept my tone polite, but on the inside, I couldn't

help but lay on the sarcasm. *What a terrible idea. What does she want to do, camp? A proper lady like her, camping*?!

"Why, your home is there, is it not? I really must pay my respects to your family!"

"P-Pay your respects?" Why did she want to do that? An uncomfortable feeling began creeping over me.

"I can't say that's a good idea. I'm actually not on very good terms with my family, so I can't imagine they'd be very pleasant to you. I'm just the third son, after all." Knowing my parents, they'd probably set up some ridiculous scheme, thinking they might be able to form a connection with the marquis. I'd be better off not letting Lycoris know the extent of my family's shamefulness.

"Oh, is that the case? My apologies. Rose can be a little thoughtless sometimes."

"Oh no, there's no need to apologize. It's nothing serious." Claus's intervention was so timely, he must've noticed the conversation taking a turn for the awkward. He was a perceptive fellow.

Rose took a page from his book and mulled over my feelings before changing the subject. "Ah, that's right! Please, take a look over there, Lord Hisui. Do you see that shop there? I've once visited it by myself."

"Isn't it a little dangerous to go alone?" I asked. The number of people here compared to Clematis was manifold. There were doubtlessly more unsavory types among the populace as well, so if she was wandering around alone, she was pretty much offering herself up like a trussed roast.

"I'm glad you agree, Hisui! Don't let her off the hook—I've told her not to go off gallivanting myself, but she always manages to slip out of the manor when I take my eyes off her."

"Please, father, you really needn't make it sound so awful. I *do* make sure to have a knight escort me!"

"Whether you have a guard when you go out is an entirely different issue from whether you have permission to go out at all. You really must be more aware of your status as my daughter," Clause reprimanded her.

She gritted her teeth in frustration, then sighed, conceding

defeat. “All right, I know. I do.” Rose then fell silent, lips pursed and shoulders slumped. Claus’s lecturing must’ve made her reflect on the fact that she had her own obligations to fulfill.

But Claus’s concern was entirely warranted. I was of the same mind—if Cosmos suddenly disappeared, I’d tear my hair out with worry looking for her... Never mind the fact that I was doing the exact thing to her right this moment, of course. She must be worried sick about me, so I shouldn’t really get on my high horse about it.

“The next time I go into town, will you come with me? If you’re my bodyguard, I’m certain father would have no reason to object.”

“Uh, no, wait... I don’t think adding another child into the mix would be much help...”

“If Hisui is with you, then by all means,” Claus interjected.

“Huh?!” My jaw dropped. He hadn’t even hesitated to give his seal of approval. But he’d seemed pretty angry just a second ago! I was half expecting him to say something like “I won’t let you out of the manor ever again!”

Claus, however, went on. “Nothing would be more reassuring than to have someone strong enough to defeat a dragon escorting my daughter. You agree, don’t you?” Claus directed his question to one of the knights attending us, who glanced at my face and nodded.

“Exactly as you say, milord. Lord Hisui harbors such strength that I doubt we could land a hit on him, even if we all attacked him at once.”

“Lord Hisui really is amazing! I’d like nothing more than to have him tutor me in godcraft!” Rose clapped her hands together in excitement as she spoke. It felt a little like they were all buttering me up for something.

“You mustn’t.” Claus shook his head as though exasperated and let slip a sigh. “Your tutor has already been decided. It’d be quite the poor conduct to cancel on a whim, don’t you think? I agree that Hisui might make a better teacher, but changing last minute would bring our reliability into question.”

“That’s a shame... Then, will you come watch my practice once in a while? I don’t mind if all you can do is give me a little advice. I’ll

compensate you as much as I can manage, of course!" Rose pressed me for this favor, expression entirely serious, despite the fact that Claus had just tried to shepherd her away from the idea.

Her insistence piqued my curiosity, though. Why did she want to learn godcraft so badly that she'd ask me to give her advice, even though she already had a perfectly qualified tutor?

"Pardon me if this is a bit imprudent, but...why do you want to learn godcraft so badly, Lady Rose?"

"If I can use it, then I can help my father."

"Oh?"

"I might not be able to do much, but I eventually want to get better at godcraft and save the wounded on my own power. I don't want to see people grieving."

"Rose... You've grown into such a responsible young lady, even though you're still so young." Claus shed a joyful tear at his daughter's mature words. Even the knights seemed to be touched.

They all must be quite close. Rose was leagues more responsible and respectable than me. I was still an adult on the inside, with memories from my past life, but she wasn't anything like that at all—just through living her day-to-day life, a desire to help others had already blossomed in her. I was impressed.

In my old life, when I was eight years old, all I did was run around in the great outdoors without a care in the world. I guess that was the difference between nobility and commoners.

"O-Oh, please, father! And in front of Lord Hisui too! How embarrassing!" Seeing her father crying made her face flush red, and she began smacking him on the back. Honestly, the scene brought a smile to my face.

"It's nothing to be embarrassed about, Lady Rose. I feel the same way as your lord father—your goal is really touching. I think it's praiseworthy, really."

"Y-You too?!" she squeaked. Feeling happiness and embarrassment in equal measure from being praised, Rose could only hang her head as she blushed, her mixed feelings overwhelming. Maybe she was the type who wanted to crawl into a hole when she was embarrassed, even though she wasn't in the

wrong.

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After we'd both apologized profusely to Rose, who'd curled in on herself and was practically withering away from all the embarrassment, we finally arrived at the gates of Marquis Lycoris's estate.

As befitted for a high-ranking lord, his estate was vast. My own home, belonging to a mere baron, could hardly even begin to compare—I'd thought my home was on the large side, but the marquis's manor was easily twice the size. And the grounds were just so open and spacious, I was surprised. Like, what the heck?! The land was pristine—I was sure someone could easily get a game of soccer started here.

"Welcome, Hisui, to our home."

The moment the doors opened, I could see servants lined up in the hall to greet us, and they all bowed in unison. I was startled, to say the least—my own home never employed any servants. The maids and butlers eyed me curiously, as I'd been brought along to their manor by their lord. Noticing their gazes, Claus cleared his throat and explained.

"This is Hisui. He's the savior who rescued us from a vile monster, so please treat him as you would any distinguished guest. Understood?"

"As you say, milord!" Not a single person raised an objection. They all bowed once more, their movements so disciplined they looked like a trained military unit to me. They'd even spoken more or less all together.

"Now then, Hisui, let's head to the parlor. I'd like to reward you for everything you've done."

"All right." I obediently trailed behind Claus.

Clause led me down a hall on the first floor, and soon we entered the room at the very end. My room on the second floor of my house was so small, it might as well have been a storage room, but this parlor in the Lycoris residence was awfully huge. Since it was used to

receive guests, it was probably intended to be impressive, but still... It was several times larger than my own bedroom.

"Please, have a seat." Claus had already taken a seat on a sofa, and I followed his lead. Rose sat down next to me.

I wasn't sure if I should say anything, but in the end, I just had to ask.



“Um, Rose?”

“Yes? Is something the matter?”

“No, it’s just... Shouldn’t you sit next to your father?” That was how it usually went, right? People usually sat next to their family members. So why had she chosen to sit next to me?

“Don’t worry about it. Sometimes it’s nice to have a change of pace.”

“Oh, uh... Okay, I guess.” What had she meant by that? I didn’t get it at all, but I didn’t inquire any further. I figured it would probably be a headache if I did.

On the other hand, Claus, noticing that his daughter hadn’t chosen to sit next to him, hung his head dejectedly, looking a bit like a kicked puppy. This was awkward. “A-Anyway! As I mentioned earlier, let’s discuss your reward for the green dragon. First, is there anything you’d personally like to have, Hisui?” Claus forced his tone to be cheerful. He was probably doing it on purpose to clear up the mood. “I think an amount of money equivalent to the aid rendered is the most proper course. You came to my lands seeking a way to make money in the first place, after all.”

“Thank you very much, Lord Lycoris. Even a little would help me out quite a bit.”

“Now that we’re on the topic, I realize I haven’t asked you *why* you need the money. If it’s not impolite to ask, do you mind telling me while my retainer fetches the money? If you do not wish to discuss it, however, you needn’t tell me.” Both Claus and Rose fixed their gazes on me expectantly.

Claus aside, Rose was full of curiosity. At any rate, I’d already mentioned an issue that was close to the heart of the matter, so there wasn’t much point in hiding the rest. In fact, if I told them, they might sympathize with my plight. With that ulterior motive in mind, I opened my mouth to speak.

“The reason is simple. Do you remember when, during our walk here, I mentioned I didn’t get along well with my family?”

“Indeed. That sounds like a rather uncommon situation.”

“Well, incidentally, I also have sisters—though they aren’t related to me by blood.”

"I've heard. You get along well with your sisters at least, right?"

"Yes. The three of them always do right by me. It's just... My two brothers are both rather hostile toward us, and they think poorly of my sisters. They're clearly planning to marry my sisters off to someone eventually. That's why I'd like to leave my house, and bring my sisters along with me—I want them to live a life of freedom."

"Ah, so that's why you need money." Claus immediately understood what my intentions were. Rose, however, seemed a bit perplexed—the answer wasn't coming to her nearly as readily.

"As you've surmised, I mean to make money to support my two sisters I've left behind at the estate. I was thinking this might be a good opportunity to spend some time in this town."

"It was my understanding that you had three sisters. Where's the last?"

"She's spread her wings already. Now, she's studying at an academy in the royal capital."

"How interesting. That must mean she's capable of using magic as well."

I gave a small nod. There was no need to go into detail about Azalea's magecraft.

"So until we can all reunite with her, I plan to protect my two other sisters."

"What a wonderful sense of responsibility you have, Hisui. Supporting your family is a sign of a strong heart. I understand that quite well."

I bashfully chuckled from the praise. "Personally, I feel like my plans for making money could've used a bit more thought, though."

"Now, now. Taking the first step is the most important thing." Claus was praising me for doing what felt like the bare minimum. I was so flustered, I couldn't help but scratch the back of my head sheepishly.

"Pardon me, milord, but I've brought what you asked for." A knock and a voice came from the door to the room, interrupting our conversation.

"Thank you. Come in."

"Pray excuse me, then." The door opened, and an elderly

manservant entered. In his hands was a weighty-looking bag; I was certain it contained a hefty amount of coins. Exactly how much had Claus planned on giving me? I squirmed in my seat, watching Claus as he took the coin-filled bag from the manservant, then set it upon the table in front of the sofa.

"This is the first part of the reward I'd like to give you, Hisui. But I believe what you did today cannot be repaid in simple coin. There's something else I'd like to give you."

"What? But this is quite enough already," I protested.

The bag of coins issued an audible—and heavy—*thunk* as he placed it on the table. I was certain it was an incredible sum of money, and my hunch was verified when he tugged on the cord holding the bag closed, opening it up to reveal the pile of gold within.

From what I could see at the top of the bag, it was all solid gold coins. I felt much like I would have if he'd opened a suitcase filled with a hundred dollar bills in my past life. This was definitely more than enough for the average person to live off of for decades!

"As the head of House Lycoris, it would be unseemly to simply reward someone who saved my life with a mere sum of money. It's a matter of pride, you see."

"R-Right..." Nobility was just like this, I guessed, even though Baron Clematis didn't have a shred of pride himself.

"So, I was thinking... How would you like to be granted permanent residence in my lands?"

"Permanent residence?" I couldn't hide my confusion—I wasn't familiar with this particular term. Marquis Lycoris nodded and continued elaborating.

"Indeed. In short, I'd like to give you the right to live in Lycoris."

"Is there...something particularly special about having the right to do so?" I couldn't quite grasp how being able to settle here permanently was going to benefit me.

"Ah, let me explain... For starters, no one can live in Lycoris without the right of permanent residency. Those without may stay here for a certain amount of time, but once that time passes, they must choose to either extend their stay or leave. Extending one's

stay costs quite a bit of money, and on top of that, visitors do not have the right to purchase their own home, nor are they allowed to build anything anywhere within our territory."

"So, by having the right of permanent residency, I'll be allowed to have my own house, even outside the town?"

"Exactly. It's quite dangerous outside of town, though, so I doubt anyone would want to build a home out there. But housing aside, the most important thing is work. Only permanent residents are allowed to work a job for an extended length of time. Their lodgings will also not be limited to inns."

"I see... They really are treated as guests, then."

"Right, though there's nothing wrong with being a guest, of course. Residents have a duty to pay taxes, and in return, this town —and I—furnish the population with guards to protect the folks living here, and their livelihoods as well."

"I think I've gotten the picture about permanent residency now. But I do plan on going to the royal capital one day, so I don't think I'll need such a thing."

"But you do wish to live here for some years, correct? Rose has taken a liking to you as well. I'd be more than happy if you chose to stay in Canna. Besides, even just granting you the right is meaningful on its own. We'll issue you identification papers, and you'll be able to call this place home. Of course, you'll still have to find a way to pay for your living expenses, but I believe you're strong enough to do whatever you wish even if you choose to live outside city limits."

"Doing...what I wish, huh?" Had it finally come to me? The slow life I'd been longing for even back in my past life, before I'd reincarnated?

"Lycoris is a vast land, its bountiful wilderness stretching far and wide. It's so immeasurably extensive that even I'm not certain I have a grasp on exactly how large it is. This town is nothing but a tiny part of it. So long as they had the drive to, a person with permanent residency might even build a village of their own outside these walls."

"What? That's allowed?" Now *this* was a surprise. Could I really

start a village from scratch? And was it actually all acceptable to grant a foreigner like myself permission to do that, especially so casually? I mean, someone could easily get out of hand if they were allowed to do whatever they wanted.

"Well, it would be a problem if you played at banditry or something like that, but it would actually be quite convenient if you did some trailblazing. I suppose it's a bit embarrassing for me to say this, being the governor of these lands, but the cost of opening up the wilderness for development is quite heavy indeed, both in terms of money and manpower. It would be to our benefit if someone else managed all that. And if a new village was founded, the taxation would improve our cash flow, and that would in turn improve our citizens' lives. It's a win-win situation—assuming such a project is successful, of course."

Now that he'd explained it, I could see the logic. If the citizens themselves could reclaim the land and develop it further, then it would reduce manpower and financial costs for the government. Even if the attempt were a failure, there would be no onus on the governor to take responsibility or financial losses either—though I guess it sounded bad, putting it that way. Conversely, if it was successful, their purse would only grow fatter. There would be a need to expand administrative duties, but I doubted that was difficult to do for a small village.

"So, I do hope you'll accept this gift of permanent residency. But don't worry, I'm not intending to force you to help with land reclamation or anything. It's not as though having permanent residency means you must obey my every order. I simply think it'd be wonderful if you could help, and I'm certain that having the right to reside here will eventually help you in turn. Even if it doesn't, it's probably still worth having."

"Lord Lycoris... Thank you so much. I'll accept this courtesy you've given me." I bowed to him, honestly expressing my gratitude. It was exactly as he said—having permanent residency would one day be of use to me. After I reunited with Azalea in the royal capital, it wouldn't be a bad idea to take advantage of my status as a citizen here in Lycoris and start my new, slow life.

"Then I'll have the documentation prepared for your residency issued within a few days. Until then... Right, yes. You may feel free to stay at my residence."

"Here, in your manor?!" I was startled.

"Oh my, oh my! Father, that's a wonderful suggestion!" Rose gave Claus's offer an enthusiastic round of applause. Unfortunately for me, however, my eyes were wide-open in surprise as sweat began to drip down my face.

It was true that I could keep expenses down for a lot of things by staying at the manor, and I wouldn't want for anything while I was here. The manor was in the center of town, so it'd be easy to get to the adventurer's guild no matter where it was located. But still, wasn't he being just a little *too* trusting with someone he'd met only hours earlier? It was a little nerve-racking for me to be staying in a manor full of unfamiliar faces too.

"Oh, please do say you'll stay, Lord Hisui! We'll have everything prepared for you—your meals, your baths, and even your room."

"Uh... I don't know. I don't think I could impose quite that much..."

"Come, it's no trouble at all. I know I've said this quite a few times already, but you're our savior. You needn't be so reserved. In fact, what if we have your sisters come here to stay for a while as well? We've plenty of spare rooms," Claus insisted.

"Wha?!" Was he really saying he'd have rooms prepared not only for me, but for Armeria and Cosmos as well?! That cinched it, then. Whether Claus really wanted to pay me back that badly or just thought I was useful to keep around, the offer was simply too good to pass up.

Besides, I'd kinda been intending to take advantage of him from the start anyway... Though now, it was a little less of me taking advantage and more of him practically begging me to take advantage. And since he wanted me to, I wouldn't have to feel guilty about it. I wanted to get Armeria and Cosmos out of that house right away too. Mngh...

I turned the offer over in my mind for a while. Claus and Rose simply waited quietly for me to finish my deliberations and give them

my answer. It probably took a solid five minutes. I'd tried to decide as quickly as I could, and the answer I arrived at was...

"Thank you, Lord Lycoris. Please let me take you up on your offer."

I ended up succumbing to the temptation.

Chapter 3: Leaving Home

"Feel free to use this room starting today. If you have need of anything, please don't hesitate to ask." With that, the young maid of some twenty-odd years standing in front of the bedroom door bowed to me, then disappeared down the hall. After watching her go, I turned the doorknob, opened the door, and stepped into the room.

"Wow... It's huge!" That was the very first thought that hit me when I entered. It was so big that my bedroom back at the Clematis manor was basically the size of a bathroom in comparison—I was pretty sure this was at least three times bigger than my own room. And on top of that, it was fully furnished. The bed felt like it was too big for just one person, and the blanket looked really nice and thick...

Yep, confirmed: It was super fluffy.

I sat down on the bed, and I sank so deeply into the mattress that it was almost funny. For a world that didn't have modern technology, the craftsmanship was incredible. I'm sure the price tag on it was eye-popping. And considering House Lycoris could afford to set out a bed like this for guests... The upper crust of nobility who were rich enough to own an incredibly far-reaching swath of land really did have fat wallets, huh.

Dandelion hopped down from atop my head. "*Chirp!*" And with that, he began to roll around on the bed.

"Isn't this just wonderful, Huey? You were given such a fancy room!" Lying down on the bed with Dandelion, I saw the three goddesses appear above me, floating down through the ceiling. Right in the middle of the group was Fouré, with a broad smile across her face—she must've been just as happy for me as I was for myself.

"They didn't really give me the room, Fouré. I'm just borrowing it

for a little while," I corrected her.

"Oh, really? We didn't want to disturb you while you were talking to the other people, so we kinda kept our distance. I don't really have any idea what's going on!"

"Thanks for the consideration. You too, Aruna, Cult."

"No need to thank us. But my, aren't things looking sunny for you? You saved some nobles and were rewarded with money," Aruna remarked.

Cult giggled. "I was worried for you when the dragon appeared, but you defeated it without a hitch. How much of it did you manage to keep?"

"Um..." At Cult's urging, I tugged on the drawstring of the storage bag I'd borrowed from her, opening it. I peered into it, and the three goddesses took that as a cue to lean in for a look as well.

"Wow! It's in perfect condition!"

"You really did get most of it in there. I imagine you could sell it for far more than the basilisk."

"Hee hee. Now, dear one, with this much material... You could do it, don't you think?" Cult's bloodred eyes settled on me. She didn't exactly say what she meant, but her gaze told me all I needed to know. I'd already been thinking the same thing anyway.

"Yeah. I have a lot of money now, even if the windfall was purely by coincidence. I still have the basilisk and dragon parts to sell, I'll be getting permanent residency in Lycoris, and Claus said I could live however I want on his lands. So basically... I can bring Armeria and Cosmos here."

I hadn't even been in Lycoris for a day. I'd kinda felt like dealing with the dragon was a pain in the ass while I was fighting it, but I didn't realize it'd bring me such a stroke of good fortune. Honestly, if I *could* thank the dragon, I would, from the bottom of my heart.

"The marquis said he'd arrange rooms for them too. Armeria might be married off within the next two or three weeks, so let's get back to the manor right away—I need to get the both of them out of there." I'd already decided on this course of action from the moment Claus said that my sisters could stay at the Lycoris estate as well.

"Lord Hisui? Is the room to your liking?"

Just as I was clenching my fist in determination, a knock sounded from the bedroom door. I could hear Rose's voice from the hall.

"Lady Rose! Thank you so much for letting me borrow such a wonderful room." I stood up from the bed and strode over to the door, and then turned the knob to open it. There, I found Rose standing in the doorway wearing a different ensemble from earlier. She must've gotten a change of clothes.

Now, she was wearing a blue dress that looked a little like a nightgown, though it was also something you could wear out on the town without anyone batting an eye. White stripes ran down the left and right sides of her dress, giving it a breezy and sleek look.

"Oh, no, it was my father who arranged for the room. He did say he would let you borrow one, after all."

"I'm thanking you for agreeing to let me stay."

"I'm not so base a person that I would bar our savior from staying in my home. Anyway, I'll have the maid bring you a change of clothes later."

"I'll handle my own clothes. Don't worry."

"You needn't be so shy about accepting help. As long as you're staying here, I promise we'll do what we can to accommodate you!"

Her enthusiasm made me feel a little embarrassed, and I laughed. "Thanks... That does help." The excessive hospitality made me a little uncomfortable, but insisting on refusing would be rude. Besides, I had things I needed to do, so I had to prioritize those.

"By the way, could I ask you to pass a message on to Lord Lycoris for me? I'm going to return to the Clematis estate now."

"What?! You're leaving already?" Rose was so shocked, she took a few wobbly steps backward. Panicking, I shook my head to allay her fears.

"It's not what you think! I'm just going to go fetch my sisters, like we discussed earlier. I have to do it as soon as possible, or one of them might be married off to a nobleman more than three times her age."

"Your sister's getting married off?!"

"That's right. It was my family's decision; I think they must want to strengthen our family's relationship with that viscount."

"I suppose that's a rather common situation among the nobility," Rose acquiesced. "All right, I'll pass your message on to my father. Please, be careful on your way."

"Thank you! I'll be off now, Lady Rose."

"Stay safe, and I hope you'll return soon."

Leaving the room, I walked toward the foyer. Behind me, Rose waved, so I waved back and exited the manor.

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I greeted the two knights stationed at the entrance, and then I sped off, full to bursting with energy. First, I needed to get to the south exit of the town. From there, if I headed east, it was a straight shot back to the Clematis manor.

Right now, dusk had just barely begun to fall, so they shouldn't have sealed off the south gate for the night just yet. After I left town, they'd shut the gates when it got dark, and then it would be completely closed off so no one could enter or exit. It wouldn't be possible to get back inside, but that didn't matter—however I split the situation, it'd take at least a full day to return with my sisters in tow.

If I could at least have hired a carriage to take me from Lycoris to Clematis, that would've been great, but hilariously not a single carriage route between the two lands existed. Clematis was so remote, even the merchant Viscount Geremeigh only sent someone over once a month. So much for easy travel.

Since that wasn't an option, I figured walking home would be the fastest way in the end. The real issue was how I was going to get Armeria and Cosmos to Lycoris. Neither of them could use magecraft, so the journey would be pretty dangerous.

Then I thought maybe the easiest way would be something like a rickshaw. It'd be nothing to cart them to Lycoris with my magecraft powering me. But, man... That was such a muscle-headed idea, even for me. Thoroughly embarrassed for myself, I dodged the gatekeeper's warning about the dangers of leaving the city so late and hurried away from the town. In the distance, the sky had gotten

quite dark.

"What will you do now, Huey? Are you planning on heading straight home from here?" asked Fouré.

"Yeah. I'm going to get home before morning! This time, I won't be taking so many breaks." I dashed at top speed toward the manor. Since I'd have Armeria and Cosmos with me, I could take it easy on the way back. After all, if I did end up pulling them there in a cart or a rickshaw or something, then going through the forest might make things difficult due to the terrain—and if I went too quickly, they might go flying from their seats.

"This should be good magecraft practice, then. I'll keep watch for you, so channel a good, efficient amount of energy into your legs. Aside from that, you should make sure to fortify everything else with only a minimal amount of energy." Aruna, who was floating above me and to my left, directly opposite Fouré, was giving me some training tips despite the situation. But Cult put a stop to that before she got too invested.

"Hold on, Aruna. It's night now, which means it's my turn. I think it'd be better for Hisui to practice spellcraft."

"What are you talking about, Cult? Hisui's sprinting as fast as he can through the forest. It would be inefficient for him to try to get home with both powers at the same time. He'll be using magecraft either way, so he ought to train it up."

"That's just what *you* think, Aruna. Hisui can use multiple powers at once, and he's plenty capable of using just two while running. You know that as well, don't you? So stop acting so high and mighty."

"Oh, now you've said it!"

"I won't simply put up with anything and everything you say all the time either!"

Sparks began to fly between Cult, who was trailing behind me, and Aruna. Personally, I thought both of them sounded reasonable, but Cult did have a point about following the rules we'd set before, and I was going to support those rules.

"Sorry, Aruna, but Cult's in the right this time. I'm going to practice spellcraft while I run, since it's a great opportunity to turn up the training difficulty. But we have to follow the rules we set—I

train in the morning with Aruna, then Fouré in the afternoon, and Cult at night."

"Mngh... All right. Practice as you like, then. Do your best to control your magecraft while you do so, though."

"I will. Thanks for understanding, Aruna." She was the most mature of the three goddesses and was thus relatively reasonable. If Fouré were in her shoes, she definitely would have thrown a tantrum. I guess that was part of Fouré's charm, but right now I was just glad for Aruna's levelheadedness. She was a little sullen, but she'd cheer up later...probably.

I smiled awkwardly, seeing how she'd turned away in a huff. Then, just like she'd asked me to do, I focused on maintaining control of my magecraft while I started practicing spellcraft.

I knew the world was a big place, but I was probably the only person in existence who could practice magecraft and spellcraft at the same time—and while running, at that. I wondered how people might react if they saw this—I was sure they'd probably be left completely speechless.

Cult giggled. "Oh, that made me feel just wonderful. Thank you for taking my side, dear one." She drifted up to me from behind and placed her hand on my shoulder. When she did, her two bounteous mounds pressed up against my back.

"Cult?! I don't think hugging me while I'm in the middle of running will work out very well!"

"Worry not. It's not as though I am putting my weight on you. You don't feel any heavier, right?"

"That's not the issue here..."

She was right—I didn't feel her weight at all. But the sensation of her breasts pressing against me was flooding my brain with information overload. The spellcraft energies in my right hand began to waver; my control was weakening. Cult might not have been heavy at all, but my feelings on this situation were definitely starting to slow me down.

"Hey! Cult's sexually harassing Huey! That's not fair—not fair at all!" Cult's hug instantly drew Fouré's ire, prompting her to speak up. She even whipped her finger out, waving it in Cult's face and yelling

at her. But though she complained at Cult, it didn't have much of an effect—Cult simply turned away and ignored her.

"Huh?! Cult's giving me the silent treatment..." Fouré whined, then immediately changed tactics. "Let Huey go right now!" After being treated so coldly by a friend, Fouré began to tear up...but her crocodile tears dried up almost instantly.

I didn't expect anything else from the Light Goddess, honestly. Her healing factor was through the roof—including, apparently, for psychic damage. Invigorated by her recovery, she grabbed Cult by the shoulders and attempted to pry her off me. However, Cult resisted her efforts and refused to let me go.

"Let go of me! I won't have you disturbing my little tryst with Hisui!"

"What do you mean, 'tryst'?! The only person who's allowed to flirt with Huey is *me*!"

"You're always being all touchy-feely with him, aren't you? I'd like to hug him sometimes too..."

"Quit messing around, you two." The air had turned downright frosty. Aruna had called out Fouré and Cult, stopping them in their tracks. "You can't be giving Hisui trouble. He's busy right now, you know? The whole point was that he'd be practicing spellcraft and magecraft at the same time. So knock it off, got it?"

Fouré pursed her lips before responding with a plaintive "Okaaay."

"I understand," sighed Cult.

Both Fouré and Cult sighed dejectedly, then they released me and backed off to their original distance.

"Thanks, Aruna. You're a lifesaver."

"Think nothing of it. They always lose their minds when it comes to you. Honestly... I wish they'd at least leave that sort of behavior for once we've returned to town."

I laughed awkwardly. Did that mean she thought it'd be okay for them to flirt all they wanted when we got back? I hoped they'd at least hold back until we got to an inn or something, away from people's prying eyes.

But there was a snowball's chance in hell of that happening. The three of them, holding back? They didn't know the meaning of the

term.

And with that minor apprehension hanging over me, I redoubled my efforts to sprint through the woods. The night forest wasn't the easiest place for a run, after all.

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After traveling the vast distance between Lycoris and Clematis, I finally made it back to the manor. "Whew... I ran a lot more than I did yesterday, so I'm actually kinda pooped."

"Good work, Hisui. You should go to your sisters."

"Yeah."

With a shove on the back from Aruna, I opened the entrance doors while checking to see if Glenn or Mikhail were around. Thankfully, the foyer was empty.

"Let me know if you pick up on anything, okay, Dandelion?"

"*Chirp!*" Dandelion called out from his place on top of my head, his adorable little chirp serving as an acknowledgment. If there was anything he was better at than me, it was his ability to detect other creatures, so I was relying on him to help with that.

Furtively, as if I were a thief in my own home, I decided to start by looking for Armeria. First, I climbed the stairs and headed directly to Armeria's bedroom.

Just as I approached her door, I could hear her voice from within.

"Hisui... Where has he gone? I haven't seen him since yesterday... He's never just disappeared like this before..." I'd headed to Lycoris without a word to her, so of course she'd be worried. I had assumed only Cosmos would be worried about me, but evidently I was totally wrong. My chest tightened. Wanting to rid myself of the pain as soon as possible, I knocked on Armeria's door.

"Huh? Who is it?" came her voice.

"It's me, Armeria," I replied.

"Hisui! Where'd you go! How could you leave home for a whole day?!"

"Let me just come in first."

She was terribly angry. Armeria was usually very mild mannered,

so it was rare for her to get truly upset—so rare, in fact, that a sense of dread came over me. But running wasn't an option, so I turned the doorknob and entered her room.

"Sorry for barging in. And I'm sorry for making you worry too, Armeria."

When I opened the door, I could see her sitting on her bed. A single book had been abandoned on top of her blanket. She must've been reading the book up until I'd come in; I practically couldn't imagine her doing anything else. She was still the same old Armeria, whether she was bedridden with illness or perfectly healthy.

"Hisui!"

"Oh!" When I stepped into her room, Armeria leaped off her bed and came speeding toward me like a bullet. I managed to catch her, and she wrapped both arms around me in a tight embrace.

"Thank goodness... I was so sure something had happened to you..." She was crying—which, again, was a response I completely failed to predict—anger would've been the more obvious response, I thought. But she was crying...so I had no idea what to do or say.

"I'm really sorry, Armeria. I just went on a little excursion."

"An excursion? But where to?"

"Lycoris, the neighboring marquisate. A lot happened over there."

"Lycoris?! But why..." Armeria's shock wasn't unwarranted. I'd been gone since early evening yesterday, and I hadn't come home all through the night. It'd be hard for anyone to imagine an eight-year-old child making it through monster-infested woods in the dark—and on top of that, the fact that I'd made it all the way to the neighboring territory and back in that time was difficult to believe.

"I went to go sell some parts from a monster I'd defeated earlier. I mean, you know how we can't support an adventurer's guild in Clematis? That means there's no place here to buy or sell monster materials."

"You risked danger just to do *that*?!"

"It wasn't dangerous at all. You remember what I told you before, right? About how I can use magecraft? None of the monsters around here are a match for me."

"Even if you can use magecraft, you're still a child! You're being

too reckless!" Armeria was telling me off like a dog who'd broken a vase. Making her angry was really sapping the life out of me, especially considering how gentle she was ordinarily.

"Is it still reckless if I can defeat a dragon?"

She was silent for a moment, clearly taken aback. "A dragon?" she finally repeated. Her puzzled expression clearly showed she didn't believe me.

"Yeah, like I said, a dragon. I can kill a green dragon by myself."

"D-Dra—"

Whoa, now *that* was an uncommon reaction. She was usually so calm and composed that seeing her really lose her composure was actually kind of funny. But I was sure she'd start lecturing me if I laughed too much, so I decided to push the conversation along.

"Yeah. I coincidentally ran into Marquis Lycoris as his carriage was being attacked by a dragon. Since his retinue was injured, I gave them a hand. After I defeated the dragon, I healed the wounded knights...and then escorted the marquis to town. We're pretty good friends now."

"Wait. Hold on, Hisui, let me get things straight—you're going so fast and skipping so many details that I just can't follow your story. But let me just make sure we're clear: You *are* telling the truth, right?"

"I would never lie to you. You know that, right?"

She eyed me thoughtfully, then sighed. "Yes, I do. I can't imagine you'd ever try to tell me such a ridiculous lie. So that means it must all be true." Armeria didn't doubt me for a moment. She grinned at me and, reaching her right hand out, she gently stroked my head. "I won't forgive you for leaving and going somewhere so far away without so much as a word, but I think it's wonderful that you helped someone. You're such a kind boy. As your sister, I'm proud of you."

"This was all really just a coincidence, though." I'd just gotten lucky. Had I left home just a little later, I never would have met Claus or encountered the dragon. I wouldn't have been able to come back to the manor until much later—and on top of it all, I wouldn't have been able to save anyone's life.

Thank goodness we'd both had a stroke of luck when we needed it most.

"Anyway, I have something important to talk to you about. You'll listen, right?"

"Sure. If you need to tell me something, I'll never ignore you."

"Then, I'll get straight to the point. Armeria... I'm planning on leaving this place for good, and I want you to come with me."

"Huh?"

Armeria froze in place, shocked. She couldn't have predicted I'd say this. Even her hand, which had still been stroking my head, stopped where it was as her eyes widened.

"It's nothing all that complicated. I can't let them marry you off, so I actually went to Lycoris to make money in order to take you away from here."

"You did all that...for me?"

"I'll bring Cosmos with us too, of course. I got a lot of money from Lord Lycoris for saving him, and I still have the basilisk and green dragon parts to sell. Once I do, we'll have even more money. After that, I was thinking of becoming an adventurer."

"Cosmos too? Money? The basilisk and...green dragon? An adventurer! W-Wait a second, Hisui! Give me time to process all of this!"

She retracted her hand from my head with a *whoosh* and flailed her arms in panic. I guess I'd given her way too much information all at once, overloading her mental capacity in an instant. I could almost see the steam coming off the top of her head as she overclocked her brain to catch up with all the stuff I was saying.

"Sorry, sorry! You can have some time to think about it. Just know that I can take both you and Cosmos away from here whenever you like. I'll go look for Cosmos for now, so I hope you can give me an answer by the time I come back."

"Of course. But let me just say one last thing."

"Hm?"

"I've always trusted and believed in you, so I'm not afraid to leave here with you either. Please...promise me you'll take me away no matter what, okay?"

“Armeria... Yeah! Just leave everything to me,” I cheerfully replied, then left her room.

Treading down the quiet hallway, the emotion that welled up in my heart perplexed me. Was this...joy? My heart was beating so rapidly, I felt like it might burst. Armeria trusted me with everything she had, and knowing that made me so happy I was tingling from the excitement. But more than anything else, it meant my decisions hadn’t been wrong. I really was going to bring happiness to the two of them. That was my main priority now.

Determination curling my hand into a fist, I went to find Cosmos.

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By the time my sisters had finished getting ready for the move, dawn had broken.

“Is this everything you wanted to bring, you two?”

At the rear of the manor so as to avoid any unwanted attention, Armeria, Cosmos, and I were making a final check of our belongings before we left. But honestly, all I needed to do was to put their belongings into my storage bag.

“I’m fine. Thanks to you, Hisui, I’m able to take a lot of books.”

“I feel a little bad for doing this to father,” I admitted.

A short while earlier, once I had found Cosmos, I told her what I had told Armeria while keeping an eye out for Glenn and Mikhail. Cosmos had been just as startled to hear everything, but she didn’t hesitate for a second before agreeing to leave the manor with me.

So we returned to Armeria’s room, and I told them to pack up their things...but in the course of doing that, we ended up relieving half of our father’s books from his study.

It wasn’t like father was going to read them, right? Armeria loved books, and I was sure they’d be happier in the hands of someone who would actually read them.

“It’s fine—don’t worry about it. No one besides you two ever touched those books anyway,” said Cosmos, offering her opinion—which was the same as mine. It looked like we were all on the same page, so to speak. Both me and Armeria laughed sheepishly.

"Anyway, Hisui, when did you manage to get a magical artifact? That one's for storage, right?"

"Yup, that's right. I got it...when I went to Lycoris, as a reward," I lied.

"Oh, I see. The marquis must have awfully deep pockets to give away an artifact like that. Amazing! And on top of that, we're heading to stay at his estate now, aren't we?"

"Yup. He gave me his permission, so I'll protect you two on the way there. Don't worry about anything."

"*Chirp! Ch-Chirp!*"

"I'll protect you too!" Dandelion seemed to be saying, given the tone of his chirps, and he raised his right...hand? Wing tip? From his seat in Cosmos's hands. As soon as he did, Cosmos raised her voice in a delighted squeal.

"Ohmigosh! How cute! I can really tell how much he wants to help!"

"*Chiiirp...*" Dandelion sounded like he was being crushed in Cosmos's embrace, but a little hug wouldn't kill him. He just wasn't used to the feeling of being squished a little, but he'd get used to it in time.

Sorry, Dandelion. Put up with it just for a little longer... I begged his forgiveness in my heart and looked away. It seemed that Cosmos loved small animals more than anything. Azalea liked them too, so maybe all girls adored cute animals. To be fair, I also liked them, even though I was a boy—maybe cute things were just universally appealing.

"Be careful not to hurt Dandelion, Cosmos."

"I know, I know. Your family is our family too."

"All right. Well, we have everything all packed up now, so let's go before Glenn catches us." I grabbed the handle of the cart-like carriage I'd created with spellcraft with large, simple wheels affixed to its underside. In my previous life, this was called a rickshaw. I was going to see Armeria and Cosmos safely to Lycoris with it.

"What is this, Hisui?" Armeria stared at it, openly curious. She'd never seen one before.

"It's called a rickshaw. You two will ride on the cart part, and I'll

pull it. It'll be a lot faster than walking, and we can travel super easily." Like a horse-drawn carriage, just without the horse. Or rather, I was the horse.

If I'd asked Fouré to help, she would have just created a horse, but I didn't want to deal with any questions about that, so getting her assistance was no-go. I could already handle the situation just by doing my best with my own abilities.

"A...rickshaw? I don't want to work you like a horse, Hisui!" As I expected, Armeria expressed her discomfort. A strange expression came over Cosmos's face as well.

"It's fine. I can use magecraft, and this'll be good practice too. Besides, you two can't move through the forest underbrush very well, right? I'm used to traveling around in the woods, so you can trust me to get us through."

"Hisui..." Reluctantly, the two of them did as I bade and climbed into the seat. They must've felt that complaining any further would just make things harder on me.

"Okay! Hold on tight so you don't fall out!" I said, just in case. If I pulled the rickshaw fast enough that they were in danger of falling out, though, that would basically guarantee some kind of accident. I'd already decided to go at a nice, gentle pace.

Wreathing the entire rickshaw with magecraft, I began to move. As soon as I did, though, I heard a shout from behind.

"Hisui?! Where are you going? And Armeria! Cosmos! What do you think you're all doing?!"

It was Glenn's all-too-familiar voice.

"Ugh... Not this." I didn't want us to get caught, but of course we had been—and at the absolute worst moment too. Still, there was no turning back, and I doubted Glenn could stop us even if he wanted. *Come on then, Glenn; go ahead and chase us through the forest if you've got the guts*, I snarled in my head.

I began to sprint, ignoring his cries for me to stop. The rickshaw was practically light as a feather.

"Are you sure about this, Hisui? Glenn looked really mad..." Cosmos asked from behind me, sounding worried. I answered her with a bark of laughter.

"It's fine, really. It's not like we were planning on ever coming back here."

After a short pause, she finally replied. "All right. That's true." Cosmos understood. Armeria didn't seem that bothered either, as she simply opened a book to read without so much as a word.

After a moment of running, Glenn disappeared from sight. We couldn't hear his shouting anymore either. It seemed like he really didn't have the guts to follow us into the woods after all. Silence filled our surroundings. In the peaceful quietude, I began chatting with Cosmos. We were careful to keep our voices low, however, to avoid disturbing Armeria from her book.



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And so, I made my departure from Clematis once again, this time with Armeria and Cosmos. No matter how much magecraft power I used to pull the rickshaw, we were still traveling through the woods—I had to be considerate of the other two as well, so the journey took a rather long time. In the end, after leaving that morning, a full two days passed before we arrived at the town of Canna in Lycoris. But it had been well worth taking our time to get there—we'd arrived at the town's south gates with nary a scratch.

"Wow! Look, Armeria! They have such a huge gate! And the wall is so biiig!" Clambering out of the rickshaw, Cosmos shouted with excitement, eyes aglow. Armeria climbed down to look up at the gate alongside Cosmos, leaving her book in her seat.

"It really is amazing!" Armeria exclaimed in reply to Cosmos. "I knew Clematis was considered quite rustic... But goodness, other lands *are* really much more developed, aren't they?"

"Lycoris has a large population, and I've heard there are lots of towns and villages," I offered as an explanation.

"That must be due to the marquis's good governance," Armeria agreed.

"Are there lots of shops too?" asked Cosmos.

"Of course! There are so many, they'll make your head spin!"

"I want to go sightseeing..." she sighed.

"Let's make some time soon to do just that. We'll go sightseeing together, just the three of us."

"Dandelion's coming too!" Cosmos exclaimed. Over the past couple days, Dandelion had been following Cosmos around the entire time, and now he was nestled atop her head.

"*Chirp!*" Raising his right wing, he seemed to be in agreement. Maybe it was because they'd practically been glued together for the ride here, but Dandelion had gotten rather friendly with Cosmos; how wonderful.

"Then the four of us will go sightseeing. You'll come too, right, Armeria?"

"Yes, of course. I am curious about the town myself."

"We'll stop at a bookstore for sure. I'm pretty sure I saw one earlier."

"Really?!" This time, it was Armeria's turn to shout with excitement. Nothing caught her attention like books.

"It'll be my treat—I can spare a little pocket change." Once I sold the basilisk and dragon parts, I figured I'd have enough money for the lifestyle of a lesser noble. Even aristocrats at the bottom of the social ladder rarely wanted for anything in their daily lives. House Clematis's poverty was actually kind of unusual.

"I'm so sorry that you have to take care of everything, Hisui... Cosmos and I will work too! I have experience, personally!"

"Experience? Er, do you mean when you helped out back home?" The only "work" we'd done was, at most, helping with the fields or preparing meals—and it wasn't as though we knew how to do those things professionally or anything. I really couldn't see my sisters working.

But it was my job to help them feel less like they owed me, so I figured we might as well look for work—at least as a way to pass the time. If we did manage to find something, I'd be free to spend the money I earned as I liked without the stress of saving it for the future.

"I don't really want you two to push yourselves too much...but I suppose it's fine if you take some time to look for work."

"Okay!" Armeria and Cosmos were both pumped to go job hunting. I was planning on working as an adventurer too. The list of things we wanted to do was growing by leaps and bounds. Thinking about how we could finally spend time doing things together as a happy family, my heart thrummed with joy. A grin crossed my lips, and the three of us passed through the massive gate.

Since I hadn't yet gotten my permanent residency paperwork, I had to pay the toll. But it hardly put a dent in my money, given that they only asked for a few silver coins. After we finished passing through the south gate, buildings upon buildings and crowds of people filled our view.

Armeria and Cosmos's excitement boiled over once more, but

sightseeing would have to wait till later. Right now, I wanted them to meet Claus as soon as possible, and they agreed once I explained my thoughts to them. We merely glanced at the sights as we headed to the town center. After walking for some time, the town's grandest residence came into view.

"Is that...Marquis Lycoris's manor?" Gasping at the overwhelmingly large building that sat in front of us, Armeria and Cosmos stared at it in wonder.

"Yeah. It's got two floors, just like our manor, but the sheer area it covers is kinda crazy, isn't it?"

"A-And...we're allowed to live here?! We're not going to be put in the stables to sleep, are we?!"

"Of course not, Cosmos!" Why would anyone let the family of someone who saved their life sleep in the stables? If Claus did that, his standing among the people would drop like a rock. Terrible rumors would circulate all throughout the region.

"They'll have proper rooms made ready for you. I already have a room myself, and it's pretty huge. I bet it's at least three times the size of the room I had back home."

"Three?! I-I can't believe we'll get to stay in such a nice place..." Armeria squeaked in surprise and began trembling in bewilderment. Cosmos, on the other hand, simply stared wide-eyed in astonishment.

They probably couldn't even imagine exactly how large a bedroom thrice the size of our old rooms would be. I understood the feeling, I really did. If our positions had been reversed, I was sure my jaw would've dropped from sheer shock. But I was glad that things had worked out how they did—I got to give the two of them a rich, happy life. That made me happier than anything.

"Oh? Are you, perhaps...the marquis's guest?" When we reached the front entrance of the marquis's estate, the same knight who'd been stationed there two days earlier was once again at his post. I nodded to him in greeting.

"Thanks for remembering me. Is it okay for us to go in? I've brought my family with me."

"Of course. The marquis left orders to let you through once you

returned."

"Thank you." While I'd been away for the past two days, Claus must've heard the situation from Rose. That really made things easier.

Thanking the knight, I pulled the rickshaw through the yard to the manor proper, with Armeria and Cosmos riding atop. It wasn't really needed anymore, but I figured I might as well use it to finish our victory lap.

Leaving the rickshaw in front of the foyer's main entrance, Armeria and Cosmos climbed out of the cart carriage. Shoving the entire thing into my storage bag, I moved to push open the luxurious beige-colored entrance doors, but before I could, they opened from the inside. Light filtered into the building.

"Welcome back, Lord Hisui." Standing just past the doors was the elderly butler who had delivered my reward two days earlier, dressed in an elegant black tailcoat. Offering me a single, graceful bow, he stepped aside as he spoke. "Please, step this way to the study. Lord Lycoris and Lady Rose await you there."

"All right."

Beckoning Armeria and Cosmos inside—the two of them watching over me from behind despite their amazement—I headed to the study. It was on the first floor, directly ahead on the far left. Making our way through the vast space, we finally arrived at a stately wooden door. I knocked.

"Who is it?" When I knocked, Claus's genteel voice sounded from within the room.

"It's me, Hisui. I've returned with my two sisters."

"Oh, Hisui! You've returned much earlier than I expected. Do come in."

"Excuse me." With his permission, I opened the door and stepped into the study. Armeria and Cosmos suddenly fell very quiet, and they trailed in close behind me as if they were my retainers.

"Good to see you back, Hisui. That was quite the distance you traveled, and you're already back! With your two sisters, no less." At the far end of the study, Claus sat situated behind a desk, holding a teacup. A small smile graced his countenance.

"I hurried as quickly as I could. My sisters aren't used to staying in the forest."

The marquis chuckled at that. "I don't blame them! There are countless people in town who've made the same choice as you. Well, your return was rather fast, but I suppose your journey there must've gone even more quickly."

"It took about a day, I think."

"One day?! I imagined it might take a week by carriage, considering the distance, but you managed it in a single day..."

"I expected no less of you, Lord Hisui! Your might must be on par with that of the royal guards in the capital!" gushed Rose.

"Hardly... I think you're a little mistaken, Rose," Claus said, as he set his teacup down on his desk.

"Hisui was able to defeat a green dragon alone, and quite easily at that. So you're right—his abilities are much closer to those of the captain of the royal knights."

"The captain?" I looked at Claus curiously. This was the first I'd ever heard of such a person. But I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. The capital was far larger than even the Lycoris marquisate, so of course they'd have an order of knights there. And those knights would need a leader, so *somebody* would have had to play the role of captain. Hearing that filled me with a strange sense of novelty. Right, of course—knights always need a captain!

"Oh my, oh my! You mean to say he's a match for the sword master, Duke Pendragon? Lord Hisui is most certainly a child prodigy, then." Unlike me, Rose apparently knew of the aforementioned knight captain. She'd been to the capital before though, so of course she'd know.

Still... Both captain of the knights and a sword master, *and* he was called "Pendragon"? How much of a stereotype *was* this guy?

"Indeed. Hisui is a new light of hope for our kingdom. I'd like to send a missive to the king immediately regarding Hisui, but before I do that"—and here, Claus paused to look at me directly— "would you be so kind as to introduce your sisters?"

Claus's gaze shifted to the two girls behind me, who had kept their silence. Noticing they had his attention, Armeria's and Cosmos's

shoulders shook in surprise. Their nervousness was evident. Claus spoke once more, probably to ease them into the conversation.

"Let's introduce ourselves first, then; it's only proper that we should. My name is Claus—Claus Mil Lycoris. I am the governor of this town."

"And I'm Rose, Rose Mil Lycoris. I was saved by Lord Hisui. I do hope we'll get along." After the two of them finished their greetings, Armeria began to introduce herself, voice slightly wavering.

"I... I'm Armeria," she paused, finding her words. "Armeria Belcoure Clematis. I see you've been taking care of my brother..." She trailed off, and Cosmos took that as her cue.

"I'm Cosmos Belcoure Clematis. I-I'd like to be friends too!"

Both Armeria, who was prim and proper and the very image of a noble lady, and Cosmos, who was strong of spirit and vigorous, were completely unused to this situation. They were terribly nervous and had no idea what to do in the face of such high-ranking nobility.

I hadn't been nervous when meeting Claus and Rose, circumstances being what they were at the time, but I guessed being nervous was the usual way things went.

"Miss Armeria and Miss Cosmos, then. Glad to make your acquaintance. You may stay at this residence awhile—please, do rest easy here with Hisui."

"Thank you very much."

"Th-Thank you!" Armeria and Cosmos bowed their heads in turn.

"Well, personally," Claus suggested, "I wouldn't mind if you all made yourselves comfortable here while Hisui plans for his stay in town."

"I-I couldn't... I really couldn't trouble you for so long, Lord Lycoris," I said.

"It's no trouble at all; you needn't hold back. You're a very special person, and it's best to keep special people in special environments. It's important that you cultivate your abilities more, being a chosen one and all."

"Special, huh..." Claus was absolutely right. I was embarrassed to put it in such clear-cut words, but I was most certainly special.

I knew that, because I had the three goddesses by my side, and I

was the only person in the whole wide world who could see them. No one else could even hold a conversation with them, much less express their thoughts and feelings to them. On top of that, I received my powers directly from them—the power to use all three kinds of magic to their maximum potential. Adding the fact that I was a reincarnated soul into the mix, it'd be harder to find something about me that *wasn't* special.

Still, there were a lot of drawbacks to being special. It meant you would always be different from the people around you—and in the end, that meant living with terrible loneliness.

"I'm glad for your offer to let us stay here long-term, Lord Lycoris. But we'd like to enjoy an easy life. I think that's a lot more important than special treatment."

"Hisui..." From behind me, Armeria murmured my name quietly. I didn't have to look at her to know she was touched.

Claus chuckled. "Excellent answer, Hisui. I'm deeply impressed you'd choose that. A free, unfettered life is the privilege of mankind, after all."

"Thank you, my lord."

"Father! You've soured the mood with all this ominous talk!"

"R-Rose... That's quite harsh."

"If anyone here is harsh, it's you, father! Lord Hisui does have a wonderful talent, but he's still a person just like you and me! You ought to treat him just the same as anyone else!"

"That's my intention. My apologies, Hisui."

"Oh no, I understand your thoughts completely. I also understand the value in making use of my capabilities." When I thought about everything I'd learned so far, I could tell that I was extraordinarily gifted in this world.

A person who could use two powers seemed to be entirely unheard-of, so I was probably the only person ever who could use all three. I'd also taken down a dragon at the unripe age of eight. If someone managed to exploit my powers, their profits would be immeasurable.

That was another reason I didn't want to become head of House Clematis, even if the desire to avoid being used by others was

maybe a bit childish.

"Sometimes, Hisui, you seem to be a mature adult just about my age. You're quite the sagacious one."

"I-I'm nothing that wise. Ha ha ha..." Sorry, Claus. I was sure that if I added my actual age and my age as Hisui together, I *would* get a number pretty close to his age. But right now, I was eight years old—so please, have mercy.

Claus's intuition was just so keen, I couldn't do or say anything but laugh dryly. Thankfully, neither Claus nor Rose—nor Armeria or Cosmos, for that matter—thought anything of it, and the conversation proceeded apace.

"Now then... This has been quite a long conversation, but we're happy to have you here, Miss Armeria, Miss Cosmos." They were officially permitted to stay here. The three of us were thrilled.

And with that, our impoverished living came to an end.

Once we'd finished speaking with Claus, I returned to my room. Armeria and Cosmos found themselves dragged off to the baths before they could go to their own rooms. "You and your clothes are terribly grimy from the road! We must be nice and clean—a lady must always present herself as such!" Rose had told them.

But in truth, neither of them had ever had the opportunity to bathe themselves in a decent bath before, and their clothes were indeed old and fraying. Considering we'd just spent two days in the wilderness, it wasn't surprising that dirt and grime would stand out all the more on them.

I wanted to take a dip as well, but it was only right to let my sisters have a bath first. I was younger, after all, so I needed to show them respect.

"Good work, Huey! It must've been sooo hard to cart your sisters here over two whole days!" Now that I was alone, the three goddesses appeared. Fading into the room through the wall, Fouré first threw her arms around me.

"Whoa! It wasn't all that bad, Fouré. It really wasn't too much work to get here, I promise," I commented.

"Well, *I'm* training you, after all," Aruna remarked proudly, which prompted a giggle from Cult.

"That being said, you mustn't become a monster like Aruna, dear one."

"Who's the monster here? Say that again, I dare you," snarked the War Goddess.

Following Fouré's lead, the other two goddesses approached me and stood before me in a line.

"Aruna's really strong, but she's not a monster. She's an adorable young lady," I chided.

"I wouldn't say *that*! B-But... I suppose I'm happy to hear that..." Aruna abruptly turned away, embarrassed. She always tried to keep me from seeing her face whenever she was blushing.

"Oh, no, no, no! Aruna's a horrible, terrible fiend! She's so scary, even a dragon's got nothing on her. It would basically be a gnat in comparison!"

"How dare you! Do you really think it's okay to insult someone right in front of them? Not that it's okay behind their back either, of course!"

"Ow ow ow ow ow! You're gonna split my head in two!" With a wap, Aruna grabbed Fouré's head from behind, locking her in a claw grip—an iron claw, even, just like that one wrestling move. The grip was so strong that her skull creaked a bit, but unsurprisingly, Fouré was a-okay.

"You've cut off your sense of pain, so this can't possibly hurt. Honestly, now." In the end, I didn't have to worry about how much force it'd take for Aruna to pop Fouré's skull and splatter her brains either—Aruna suddenly released Fouré from her grip before too long. Apparently she didn't want to get blood all over the room. Even though they were invisible to others, any blood they shed would remain for a while, as it wasn't incorporeal and could still stain anything it touched.

"By the way, Hisui..." began Aruna.

"Hm?"

"What happened to Dandelion? Is he still with your sister?" Aruna, perceptive as ever, noticed the little yellow chick was not by my side. I nodded, lips twisted into a wry smile.

"Yup. Looks like he's totally smitten with Cosmos. He'll protect my

sisters while he's away with them, so I don't mind if he's not with me all the time."

"That's exactly how I made him! Praise me!" The mother of Dandelion's creation, Fouré, smirked confidently—and was subsequently thrown out of the way by Aruna.

"I see. If it's fine with you, then I won't say anything."

"Did you *want* to say something?"

"Not really. I just wanted to make sure it didn't bother you."

"Huh?" Aruna was being considerate toward me? Maybe she'd started wondering if I was lonely, now that I was down a family member and all.

"All right, that's enough of that. Let's talk about something more constructive," Aruna shrugged.

"Constructive? Like what?" I asked.

"Like what you'll be doing tomorrow."

"Oh, my schedule. Right."

Now that she mentioned it, I realized I *had* achieved a massive milestone. Next, I needed to reunite with Azalea in the royal capital, but since we'd already come all this way to Lycoris, I wanted to let my sisters enjoy themselves a bit more before heading out there. Azalea would most likely be busy with her studies anyway.

But we'd need money if we were going to live in this town long-term, and for our future prospects, it would be best if we landed a massive amount of cash. So, basically...

"I do have an idea. Or... Well, it's something I've been thinking about for a long time, actually."

"Are you referring to...adventuring?" Aruna ventured.

I nodded. "You got it."

I'd been thinking about what job I wanted to do even before coming to this town. Well, I called it a "job," but adventuring was a little more than that—it would let me travel all throughout the world. I'd heard the adventurer's guild had a presence in the capital, but for starters, I figured I should register with the guild in town.

"First, I'll become an adventurer, then I'll save up money while I see the sights the world has to offer. But no matter what, I'm heading to the capital as soon as a good opportunity strikes. I'm

going to meet up with Azalea there."

"I figured that's what you were thinking."

"That sounds lovely! Adventuring with Huey, huh?" Fouré hummed.

"Hee hee. You still have the basilisk and dragon parts, though. You needn't go out of your way to find work, do you?" Cult cut in with just the right question regarding my plans.

"I'll sell them—don't worry. I'm sure that will earn me a lot, but money's not something that sticks around for long. You need a constant source of it. So while we're staying in town, I want to get into the habit of taking jobs. Get used to the work, you know?"

"That makes sense. It's a good idea, I think—anyone at all can make mistakes when they start a brand-new endeavor. I suppose you're thinking of getting the troublesome parts out of the way as soon as you can?"

"Yeah. I don't want to have to deal with all that after going to the capital." I wanted to head there only once I was fully prepared. Ideally, I could just settle down into a perfectly routine life there right away too.

"Then our next goal is job hunting!" Fouré exclaimed.

"Don't be silly. He's already decided on becoming an adventurer, so it'd be more accurate to say he'll be looking for job requests."

"Ugh, don't be pedantic," she whined. Fouré pursed her lips, then began booing at Aruna's quip. As I watched them, I began daydreaming about what things would be like once I'd become an adventurer.

I was downright starry-eyed at the prospect, even though it was the most basic fantasy "job" out there—maybe that was my memories from my past life influencing me.

What sort of exciting ventures awaited me? The sun was sinking below the horizon, signaling bedtime, but my excitement continued unabated. I was so absorbed in my daydreaming that I even ended up forgetting to take a bath.

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“Please, do accept my honest apologies.” Before me, a pretty woman in her twenties bowed deeply. “Arisa” was written on her name tag.

Her response had been completely unexpected. Flustered, I managed to squeak out my own reply. “Huh? Um... Why? Why not?!”

But maybe I should explain how I got to this situation.

It was the day after I’d brought Armeria and Cosmos here from our terrible old home, the Clematis barony. I zipped out of the Lycoris estate in high spirits with the three goddesses by my side and went straight to the adventurer’s guild in the middle of town. There, I spoke with the receptionist and asked to be registered as an adventurer...

“You’re still eight years old, Hisui?” Arisa asked.

“Yes.”

“I’m very sorry, but we only allow persons aged twelve and up to join the guild.” I was shocked into silence.

Th-There was an age restriction?! I’d never imagined my plans would get hung up on my age of all things. When I thought about it, though, I realized it was pretty reasonable. In my past life back on earth, kids couldn’t get part-time jobs until they were in high school —so, at least fifteen years old. I guess this world had labor regulations too!

For the first time since being reborn, I cursed my youthfulness. The plans I’d dreamed up yesterday had just gone up in smoke. I morosely trudged away from the reception and headed outside.

“Age restrictions... What am I supposed to do about that?”

“We were completely blindsided. We don’t really have much of a concept of age, but I suppose it is true that adventuring would be a rather difficult job for a child.”

“Huey is very mature, so I still don’t get why he can’t be an adventurer!”

“He’s reincarnated, so he’s already grown up mentally. Maybe we can explain that to the guild?”

“That’s a great idea!”

I sighed and shook my head. Fouré had gotten on board way too quickly with this random idea Cult had blurted out. “I can’t tell them

about my past life... I haven't even told my family that, you know?"

Besides, if I couldn't even trust my family to believe me, there was no way a complete stranger—and an adult at the adventurer's guild at that—would ever buy such a far-fetched story. I would've been laughed out of there.

"Considering the treatment I just got, other jobs are probably out of the question too... What a headache."

And on top of all that, I couldn't sell monster parts without registering with the guild either! Apparently that rule was in place to prevent a criminal black market from springing up, but it was a terribly obstructive hurdle for me.

Maybe Armeria could register and sell the parts for me? She was twelve. But selling through a proxy was against the rules as well—and if we were caught, we'd both be punished. I couldn't afford to take a risk like that.

Cult seemed amused by my plight, however. "Hee hee. Why don't you try consulting with the marquis, then? He seems to feel indebted to you, so perhaps he'll think of something."

"I don't want to bother Claus any more than I have already. I'd feel bad."

"Since he wants to get on your good side, I think he'd actually be quite pleased to help," remarked Aruna.

"You really think so?"

"Yes, I'm certain," she asserted. I suppose Claus had said himself, in no uncertain terms, that he wanted to have me close at hand. Maybe it was worth consulting him, even if I didn't intend to just outright ask for his help right now.

"Hm... I guess I could see if he has any thoughts."

At this rate, I was going to have issues just trying to survive. It looked like I was gonna have to break some eggs to make this omelet after all. I had no choice but to swallow my pride.

Leaving the guild behind, I hurried back to the Lycoris manor.

I informed a maid that I wanted to speak with Claus, and within minutes I was called to his study. I would have been happy to see him whenever he had some spare time... At least, that's what I'd *meant* to imply.

Still, it was actually more convenient for me to get this solved earlier rather than later. Following the maid to the same room I'd visited yesterday, I entered Claus's study and saw that he was seated behind his desk. He was scrawling on a piece of paper at an impressive speed.

"Hello there, Hisui. You had something you wanted to discuss with me?"

"Yes, but it can wait until after you're done with work."

"I don't mind chatting right now. You went out of your way to call on me, after all—I can always make time for you."

"Thank you, Lord Lycoris."

"Anyway, we can't have you standing in the doorway. Please, take a seat and tell me what's on your mind." A plush sofa for guests was situated just in front of Claus's desk. I plopped down on it and quietly studied Claus's face for a moment.

Though he was willing to chat with me, his eyes remained fixed on the documents he was writing. I decided to get straight to the heart of my problem so I wouldn't take up any more of his time.

"I wanted to discuss being an adventurer."

"What do you mean?"

"Just now, I stopped by the guild—to register as an adventurer, of course. But they have a lot of rules, and I don't think I can register without being at least twelve years old."

"Ah, yes. It's the same for every kind of job. If we allow children to work, some adults will take advantage of that, so we have laws in place to prevent that from happening."

"I understand. It's just..."

"If you can't work, then you'll run into financial difficulties before long, I imagine."

I stifled a sigh before replying. "Yes, that's right."

I didn't know anyone as astute as Claus. Not only did he understand my predicament, he instantly knew *why* I was trying to become an adventurer. Plus, he'd figured it out while he was working, so that meant he was thinking it over even as he handled his paperwork. Was he some kind of multitasking genius?

"It'd be difficult even for me to adjust our laws and regulations. If

I did, people would be sure to complain."

"I agree. I know very well that it's pretty much impossible to change."

"So what would you ask of me? What is it that you want me to do, exactly?"

"I don't mean to give you any trouble—I was just hoping to borrow your knowledge; I came thinking you might have a nugget of wisdom to share."

"Wisdom, you say..." He hummed as he considered my words, and for the first time since I'd set foot in his office, he stopped writing as he placed a hand on his chin in thought. "I'm very sorry, but I can't allow you to work, as you're still a child. As governor, I also cannot suggest any loopholes that you might use to bypass the law."

"Right... I see." This was exactly what I had expected—my problem wasn't an easy issue to get around.

I figured the conversation was over, so I moved to rise from my seat when Claus spoke once more, stopping me in my tracks.

"However, all of that is only true if I do nothing to help you."

"I'm sorry?" I didn't follow.

"You said so yourself: You do not wish to trouble me. So I did my due diligence and I thought about ways to solve your issue if I did *not* do anything to help. Of course, pursuing that train of thought failed to produce an adequate solution. However, if I step in to assist you, that would be another matter entirely—in fact, we could solve your problem immediately."

"Are you...offering to help?"

"Don't worry; it won't take much effort. You came knowing I'd be interested in currying favor from you from the start, didn't you? If not, knowing you, I'm sure you would have looked for a way to solve this on your own."

"It was that obvious, huh?" Wow, he really was a fast thinker—he might as well have been a mind reader with how easily he could figure me out. He could even tell how I was feeling before I made the decision to talk to him. It looked like hiding things or trying to pull one over on him wasn't ever going to be an option.

"You're a man of honesty and integrity, Hisui, and you wear your heart on your sleeve." Claus smiled and began writing again. "Since we're on the same page now, let me formally declare that House Lycoris would like to deepen our relationship with you—I'd like it very much if you were pleased with us, in other words. So please, take advantage of my generosity as you will. I will also be imposing on you."

"You're really just laying it all out there, huh?"

"That's how you prefer things, isn't it?"

"You already know me so well." His tenacity in trying to win me over by understanding what made me tick was impressive, and I could feel it growing on me. I could never dislike him. Claus was a man of honesty and integrity as well. I could trust him.

"So... Supposing you decided to help me, what would you do?"

"I would send a missive to the king, suggesting that one Hisui Belcoure Clematis receive special permission to be registered with the adventurer's guild."

"Special permission?! Is that even possible?"

"Yes, in all likelihood. The adventurer's guild is an organization under national administration. The king has authority over the grand master residing in the capital, and its talented members are beloved by His Majesty. Were he to be apprised of your predicament in full knowledge of the incredible power you possess, he'd be like as not to issue an exception to the legal ruling that prevents you from registering at the guild. So, in this situation, there's no need to change the law itself."

"You'd ask the king on my behalf?"

Was it really so easy to get special permission, even if it was Claus making the recommendation? I felt like other people wouldn't be so easily convinced...

But, as though sensing my apprehension, Claus chuckled. "Your thoughts are written plainly on your face. You're worried someone might take offense to the very suggestion, no?"

"Ah!"

"Bull's-eye, it seems. Your concern is entirely understandable, but I assure you that you needn't worry."

"I don't?"

"Oh, there are certain to be some naysayers. At least one or two people will speak up, out of self-interest in preserving their own pride."

"Then this won't work out—"

"I propose this regardless of the opposition." Claus flatly interrupted me. "I believe the truly gifted among us should be treated well, few as they are. Their value should not be appraised based on the assumption that they are equivalent to the average citizen—it is the purview of the talented to upend common sense and change the world. Not making use of that singular ability would be tantamount to sacrilege against all mankind... At least, that's my opinion on the matter."

Though he was beaming, I could sense an extraordinary passion behind his visage. Had something happened in the past involving people who were blessed with great talent?

"So, that being said, you needn't worry about anything, Hisui; I'll take care of things. It may take a few days for a response to come from the king, so until then, feel free to take things easy."

"Lord Lycoris... Thank you so much." I bowed my head. I'd never forget how much he'd already done for me.

"You're very welcome. If you'd like to return the favor... Please, take care of Rose. It looks like she's taken quite the shine to you."

"Y-You'd like me to take care of Lady Rose?" What had he meant by this? He wasn't actually implying I should *marry* Rose, right? I was just the son of a lowly baron, so he couldn't possibly be suggesting something so outrageous.

Claus must've realized his wording might be open to misconception, as he immediately explained himself to dispel my misunderstanding.

"I'd like you to teach her godcraft. While we have a tutor already, Rose would love it if you could share your knowledge as well. Of course, we are still in your debt, so you needn't give me an answer now. I simply wished to lay the prospect out"

"Oh, no, I'd be happy to help with that. I'll teach her what I can of godcraft whenever our schedules happen to align."

"Oh, that's wonderful! Thank you, Hisui. You really are such a good lad." Claus cried in jubilation and laughed, overjoyed that I had agreed to tutor his daughter. The serious mood that had previously claimed the room was dispelled in an instant. "I'll let you know once we receive an answer from the king. If anything else comes up, just come to my study. You needn't ask for permission from the servants."

"All right. Thank you for your kind offer of help." I bowed once more, then took my leave. I'd initially gone to Claus thinking it'd be nice if he could come up with even one good idea, but my problem was cleared up instantly thanks to him. Feeling mentally and emotionally refreshed, I left the manor once more—this time, with a skip in my step. I had free time for days, so there was only one thing to do.

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I left town.

While I had to pay the toll every time I entered and exited town, there was no way I could practice swordplay and train my magecraft up in the middle of an established settlement full of people. Not just the buildings, but the very streets and foundations would get ruined.

"I don't even have a job yet, so I can't be picking up repair bills." After running for a while in the woods, I finally stopped when I came to a spot where I figured no one was around to see me, and I pulled my sword from my bottomless bag.

"That's just how it is, Huey. You can't talk to us if people are watching either," sighed Fouré.

"And you can't have a proper training session if you're unable to respond when we talk to you. Communication is important."

"Hee hee. We train at night, when you'll be in your room, so this doesn't affect me either way."

"Oh, now that you mention it, same here! The only craft that ends up damaging things around you is Aruna's magecraft, huh?" Fouré grinned triumphantly while she verbally trashed Aruna, as if she were trying to provoke the other. A vein began to bulge on

Aruna's forehead.

"Well, you two don't even try to be considerate about what's going on around Hisui. You just talk on and on! And you know Hisui can't have his powers discovered by other mortals! If you're just going to keep jabbering without a care in the world, I'll knock the stuffing out of you!"

"Yiiikes, Aruna's scaring me. Huey, won't you save me?"

"Look at how I'm trembling as well. Please save me, little one."

"You guys..." I groaned.

Fouré and Cult both latched on to me, throwing their arms around me in an embrace. They obviously weren't even trying to look like they were really in distress, given how stiffly they'd delivered their lines.

"Could you guys give me a little space? I can't even swing my sword. Besides, if you mess around too much, Aruna'll get mad for real."

"Okaaay," Fouré whined, then let go of me.

"Very well, then." Cult likewise let go. They'd both done it without much of a fuss—probably because they must've already known I wasn't going to put up with them from the start.

Finally, I began my training.

I single-mindedly focused on swinging my sword in the silent forest. I was using my actual sword to practice this time rather than my wooden training sword, and the weight difference was noticeable. This way I could get used to the feeling of swinging a real sword—I didn't want to falter in actual combat when push came to shove just because I was unfamiliar with how the sword felt in my hands. I needed to get used to it as soon as possible.

"Come to think of it... Hisui's going to have a hard time doing his training from now on."

"Why's that?"

The words Aruna mumbled weren't meant for anyone but herself, but Fouré, who had been standing beside her, replied anyway. I was curious as well, and my attention drifted from my training to their conversation.

"Why wouldn't he? Before, he only needed to run a short way

into the forest to find a good place for practice, but now he has to come all the way out here from town every time he wants to train. It's a waste of time."

"Ohhh, right. The marquis's manor is right in the center of town too... Even if Huey hurries, it still takes time to get out here."

"Hee hee... And if he releases his magecraft energies at full strength in a settlement, he'll most certainly destroy things."

"Exactly. It would be easier if he just lived outside the town."

"Outside..." The word inadvertently slipped from my mouth as I continued my swings. I hadn't thought too deeply about it before, but the amount of time wasted getting out here was actually a real problem. Not only did I have to consider the goddesses, but I also had to keep my powers under wraps. I could do my swings on the marquis's estate, but I'd only be able to practice the basics. Worst of all, I wouldn't be able to talk to the goddesses. Aruna was right—it'd be much more convenient for me to base myself outside of the town.

But if I wanted to move out, I'd have to ask Claus about it. Though he said it was fine to build outside of town now that I'd be receiving permanent residency in Lycoris from him, I had yet to actually obtain the papers. I figured I should at least try asking him if I could live out here even without the proper documentation.

"That's a great idea, Aruna."

"Hisui? What is?"

"Living away from town. I agree that it'd be a pain to have to come all the way out here every day. Even if I get my residency papers, I still need to pay the toll every time I go in and out of town as long as I'm not registered with the adventurer's guild. I feel kind of bad for bugging Claus so much, but given the situation, I think I'll ask him about it. I'm still waiting on my papers too, so I doubt he'd give me any grief."

"Are you sure? You've only just brought your sisters there."

"Well, about them..." If I moved out of town, then I'd end up being separated from Armeria and Cosmos—but I didn't want to bring them out here with me, even if they wanted to come. It wasn't likely to be that far away, though, so I was sure I could convince

them to stay at Claus's estate.

"I'll just have to persuade them to stay in town. It's not a big deal anyway; we can meet up any time we want, so I'm sure they'll understand."

"Do you think it'll really go that well?" Each of the three goddesses looked perplexed. Apparently I was the only one who thought this was going to be easy.

They'd had the opportunity to observe my sisters and their behavior for a little while now, and from what they knew they didn't seem to think my sisters would just nod and accept my proposal. But I trusted my sisters, and I was sure they trusted me too.

Anticipation welling up in my chest, I focused on my sword practice. I worked at improving my swordplay and magecraft skills, putting everything I had into training until the sun had reached its midday height. Then, I started on my godcraft practice, which I worked on until the evening. When the dark of night began to creep in, I headed back to civilization. Going straight through town, I returned to the Lycoris manor.

Almost as soon as I'd gotten back inside the manor, Armeria's sharp tone rang throughout the dining room. "Absolutely not!"

It was now night. Having heard that dinner was ready, I immediately headed to the dining room, where I found Armeria, Cosmos, Rose, and Claus all seated together. Thinking this the perfect opportunity, I figured I would get the discussion out of the way at once. I told them about my plans to move out of town, but the words were scarcely out of my mouth when Armeria flatly vetoed my plans.

"It doesn't matter how strong you are. You're still eight years old! This is the first time you've even breathed a word of adventuring to me—and on top of that, you're planning on living outside town..."

"I'm surprised as well, Hisui. I admit I don't have the right to comment on where you plan to make your home after you receive your papers...but I do think this decision is a bit hasty." Evidently, Claus also disliked the idea of me moving outside the town walls. Rose and Cosmos had yet to give their opinions, but their doubts were plain on their faces.

Hmm. Looked like there wasn't anyone in my corner but me. I hadn't thought it would go entirely smoothly, but I hadn't expected *this* much opposition. How was I going to convince all four of them to change their minds?

"You've got the picture all wrong, Lord Lycoris. I've always intended to live a nice, peaceful, slow life. I'd like to develop farmland, actually," I explained.

"Well, if that's why you wish to live outside the walls, then... I suppose I have no objections. I'll have fields prepared for you—and, of course, a house to go with them."

"Sounds perfect! I have no complaints about that. You see, there's another reason I want to live outside of town: I need to keep my powers concealed."

"Ah, your powers... That *is* quite the delicate topic, now that you mention it. It's true—talent as rare as yours would draw the wrong sort of attention should people discover it. Letting anyone see it would be most unwise."

"Right? The best place around here to support my training without people noticing would be outside of town entirely. I hope you understand, Armeria, Cosmos. I'm capable of handling myself. I've defeated a green dragon, after all." The odds of monsters stronger than a green dragon roaming around near town was incredibly minuscule. If weak monsters tried to gang up on me in a pack, I'd just wipe the floor with all of them. It was a waste of energy to worry about me.

"But you'd be defenseless during the night, while you're asleep. What would you do if you got attacked after wearing yourself out with training?"

"I'll make magic artifacts to handle that. To tell the truth, I can also use spellcraft."

Now that the conversation had come to this, I'd decided I wouldn't hide anything more from them. My original reason for keeping my secrets from Armeria and Cosmos was because I didn't think it was necessary to tell them any more than they needed to know. But now, I figured it was better that I tell them about my spellcraft than to keep hiding it.

“Y-You can use spellcraft as well, Hisui?! So, you’re versed in all three powers?” The most surprised among the four of them was Claus. Rose, on the other hand, was smiling sweetly, as if to say she’d expected this all along.

Armeria had apparently already had an inkling that this might be the case, as she didn’t seem particularly shocked. But Cosmos reacted nearly identically to Claus—she voiced her surprise with a loud “No way!”

The dining room grew abuzz with noise. Then, after a moment of digesting this new, astonishing news, Claus spoke. “This just makes me less inclined to leave you on your own.”

Huh? This situation hadn’t gone at all how I’d expected. I’d honestly thought Claus would’ve been like, “Well, in that case, you’re clearly superstrong, so there’s nothing to worry about! Ha ha ha!” Instead, he started acting all concerned... I couldn’t believe it.

“Aside from you, Hisui, not a single person is known to have had all three powers awaken in them. If the king is apprised of the situation, you will almost certainly be recognized as an apostle of the goddesses.”

“An apostle?!”

“Yes, and the one most beloved by the goddesses across all of history. That would most certainly be you.”

Yeah, he was right.

“He’s right.”

“He got it!”

“My, he knows quite a lot.”

After I’d mentally agreed, Aruna, Fouré, and Cult all reacted the same way in turn.

Even though Claus had no way of knowing the goddesses on a personal level, he’d seen right through them with impressive clarity. I was indeed beloved by the goddesses.

“The wrong sort of attention I’d mentioned earlier will come flocking to you without a doubt. You’re someone to be revered, and you ought to be protected by bodyguards. If you asked for it, I’m sure the king would even grant you the title of count.”

“Does that mean...I could earn a court rank?”

"Indeed. The nation would be loath to let go of someone with your extraordinary abilities. Giving you a court rank would be an easy way to keep you bound to the country. Even the rank of duke wouldn't be out of your reach, I'd expect."

"Whoa..." Our conversation was moving at a breakneck speed, but Claus had looked dead serious as he explained. Judging from his tone, I couldn't imagine he was lying or pulling my leg. It finally hit me exactly how incredible my powers really were. All of this was well beyond what I had imagined.

"That being said, I do think it'd be going too far to keep you bound to this town. You are your own person, after all—regardless of how blessed you are with talent, it would be inhumane to infringe on your basic freedoms. Especially considering that you clearly have the power to take care of yourself."

"Right. I'm sure that if I erect a barrier around my house with a magic artifact, I won't be attacked by monsters very easily."

"A barrier, you say?" Claus's eyebrow twitched. Was he interested in them?

"I was planning on installing something around my house that can emit a permanent, physical barrier. If I tried making something that detects magecraft or electrostatic energy or heat, people and even regular animals would end up getting caught in it, so that won't do." Though, strictly speaking, "regular" animals pretty much didn't exist in this world, or at least not in the same way. If livestock were kept outside, they'd be literally snapped up by monsters. In this world, cattle and pigs and chickens were all kept within the safe confines of the town streets.

So I was most concerned about monsters. If I could just keep those out, then I wouldn't have been too bothered if I'd had to use a heat detector or electrostatic device. But there were still birds that could get caught in something like that, and it'd be terrible if other adventurers approached the barrier and were mistaken for monsters. So instead of using a detection method, I'd settled on just having a physical barrier that was up all the time and would prevent anyone from entering. It wouldn't be too hard to do either.

"A permanent barrier, is it? Would the maintenance not be too

difficult?”

“Right, there’s maintenance to consider too, I guess. Basically, the dark monstrite needed to power artifacts is only found in dungeons. It wouldn’t be cost-effective to keep the barrier running around the clock too.” Artifacts and I were naturally at odds, since they cost so much money while I wanted to save. “Still, there’s a way to manage it, and it’s a simple method at that.”

“How so?”

“I just have to make it so it’ll run on spellcraft energy. While other artifacts naturally run on monstrite, I just need to design the artifacts I create to use whichever of the three energies I’d like them to. Simple solution, right?”

Claus didn’t seem entirely convinced. “Perhaps. The world would certainly be a different place if craftsmen around the world could do as you suggest. But just as there’s a reason for everything that exists, there is also a reason for things that don’t.”

“Right. I’ve heard it’d be terribly difficult to create an artifact of that specific design. But I’ll do it, I promise. I haven’t missed a single day of spellcraft training, after all.”

“There are other considerations to make as well. Supposing that even if you could use any of the three powers as a source of energy for an artifact, where would the energy to sustain it long-term come from? Even those who have deep reserves of power can only sustain use for a few hours.”

It was exactly as he said. Running an artifact twenty-four seven for 365 days a year would require a staggering amount of energy—enough to make a person faint. It only made sense to use artifacts that ran on monstrite instead. But that calculation ran on one false assumption—that my energy output was that of an ordinary person.

“You said so yourself, didn’t you, Lord Lycoris?”

“Hm?”

“That I was the most beloved of the goddesses in history.”

“Ah, yes... I suppose I did. What of it?”

“That’s a very important point. The amount of energy I can use is actually several times *greater* than that of the average person. I can naturally regenerate more energy than it would take to power an

artifact.”

This was the honest truth.

The goddesses furnished me with energy during training, since it’d be a waste of time to wait for my energy to naturally replenish itself. But even if they didn’t, it only took a few hours for it to recover. The energy needed for artifacts was just below my natural regeneration rate. I could recover an hour’s worth of energy in a mere five minutes, so I could supply energy in perpetuity.

At least, I could in theory.

“I see... Ha ha! How silly of me to have forgotten my very own words. You are a special case, and I really can’t gauge you based on my own presumptions.” Claus laughed awkwardly. He must’ve judged my claims to be accurate. “Now that I’ve heard your ideas, I actually don’t think I could *stop* you from leaving. There’s no issue at all, I suppose. But what about you two, Miss Armeria, Miss Cosmos? You are his sisters, after all.”

Claus’s gaze moved to my two sisters, who were sitting beside me. They hadn’t said anything so far, but they clearly looked like they wanted to. They must’ve been seriously debating whether to try to stop me or to just let me go. Finally, they decided on their answers. “I’m still worried,” Armeria said. “Hisui saved us, that much is true. He even cured my illness and took us away from our terrible old home, so I have nothing but appreciation for him. If it were possible, I’d love to help make his wish come true. But as much as I want that for him, I still don’t want to see him go...”

“What about you, Miss Cosmos?”

“I agree with Armeria. I don’t want Hisui getting up to anything dangerous. No matter how strong he is, if he ended up dying... I don’t think either of us would ever recover from that.”

“There you go, Hisui. You of course have the right to do as you wish, as your own individual—and legally speaking, no one would be able to stop you. You already have residency here in Lycoris, after all. But what do you think of your sisters’ feelings?”

Claus’s question pierced directly into my heart, earnestly and gravely. I had the choice to stay my course, but I also had the choice to give up out of consideration for their feelings. That was

basically what he was saying.

"I won't change my mind. I'm happy that my sisters are so concerned for me, but I have reasons I need to live out of town. It'll be fine—I can visit often. It's not as though I'll be leaving the country."

"Hisui... All right." Armeria nodded her assent at my answer to a difficult decision, though her expression told me that she still didn't completely accept it. Regardless, I smiled at her.

"Thanks, Armeria. What about you, Cosmos?"

"Well, Armeria's already given you permission. I'm not such a horrible person that I'd try to force you to stay here. I don't have a choice but to accept your decision, as your sister." Cosmos sighed deeply in disappointment.

Including Claus, I now had permission from all three of them. I could officially live outside of town.

"Wonderful outcome, don't you think?"

"My thanks to you as well, Lord Lycoris, for giving me permission."

"Think nothing of it. Though I might be the governor, I have no right to restrict the lives and actions of my citizens. You may live as you please, just the way you like. I know you can. But I admit I do have one thing I'd like to ask of you."

"What is it?" What could he possibly want from me? Was he going to take this opportunity to ask me to do something? He'd already asked me to tutor Rose, though...

I looked curiously at him as I waited for his request. Noticing this, Claus finally spoke, his voice humble. "It's about the barrier artifact we discussed just now. I'd like you to create a second one that I might use for my own estate."

"You'd like one too? Would a barrier be that useful to you?"

"It would. You see, as much as it pains me to admit, I don't have any sort of defense for my estate. It's not something particularly easy to obtain."

"What, really?!" Now this was surprising. I couldn't believe someone of the marquis's social standing and power wouldn't have *something* to protect himself and his assets. In a place like this,

most people would try to obtain a means of protection before basically anything else.

My doubt must've been obvious, as Claus immediately began to explain. "Perhaps magic artifacts are simple for you to make, but they're actually quite difficult to manufacture. The creation of artifacts is a secret closely guarded by experienced mages, and even among all the artifacts out there, ones that can create barriers are exceptionally rare. Even setting aside the issue of supply, most barrier-type artifacts are purchased by the king. Even though I'm a marquis, this is an issue I cannot overcome with money."

"I see... It's important for royalty to be protected, so I see why that would be the case." It was easy enough to comprehend—royalty and the palace they lived in were two things that required maximum protection. This was a fact that the nobility and vassals of the crown could hardly disagree with.

If something actually happened to the royal family, it'd be a disaster not only for them, but for the nobles, the ordinary citizens, and the country itself as well. Claus was a kind man, and conscientious too, so asking for a barrier artifact in his own defense must not have been something he was willing to do. It was a sticky situation if I ever saw one.

"Thank you for understanding. That makes it easier for me as well. So, do you think you could do it? If it's too difficult, feel free to decline. But if you can, I'll of course give you suitable compensation."

"Just leave it to me, Lord Lycoris." I still hadn't actually created a single magical artifact, but recently, when I'd asked Cult about making one, she'd mentioned that I should be able to now, after all that training. I had no clue why artisans traditionally struggled with making even a single artifact, but I was pretty sure I could figure out the trick if I tried doing it now.

"Ah, thank you ever so much, Hisui. If I had something of a permanent barrier here, then I could ensure not only my own safety, but Rose's as well. I'm quite delighted."

"I wanted to ask this earlier, but if you had a barrier that was meant to run permanently, what would you use as the source of

energy? Would you supply one of the three energies, like me? Or would you use monstrite as the energy source?"

"The latter. We don't have the means or wherewithal to sustain a magic artifact that must run permanently. So I would need to use monstrite, even if it costs a large sum of money. That, at least, is something I have plenty of."

"All right. I'll make it so it uses monstrite, then." If I only needed to be concerned about making it compatible with monstrite, it'd be easy as pie. I could simply make it according to Cult's instructions, problem solved.

"If that's all, then I'll get started with the artifact in my room right away. Armeria, Cosmos, go ahead and enjoy the rest of the evening."

"We will. But be sure to tell us before you move out, okay? If you disappear without a word again, we might just go out there and drag you back ourselves."

"That, uh... Well, I could do without that happening, honestly." I chuckled awkwardly. I doubted they'd be able to find me outside of town, but I'd be the one worrying about *them*—they'd no doubt be hunted down by some monster. Armeria was showing her tactical genius here—there was no battle plan proven to break my focus faster than this, and she knew it.

Armeria laughed. "Glad you understand. Good luck with making that artifact."

"Thanks. Anyway, I'll be going now." I bowed to Claus and Rose, then left the dining room, returning directly to my assigned bedroom.

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When I looked up from where I was sitting on my bed, Cult's quiet giggle greeted me.

"It's my turn with you now, isn't it?" The three goddesses drifted down through the ceiling, drawing closer to me. Looking to my right, I saw Cult gently floating in the air with a coy smile on her lips.

"Yeah. Thanks for agreeing to teach, Cult. Were you listening to

our conversation in the dining room?”

“Yes. You want to create an artifact that makes a permanent barrier, correct? One that will use your energy to function, and can be changed to use any of the three types of magic.”

“I can’t say I understand spellcraft that well, but can Hisui even make something like that with his current level of experience?” asked Aruna, who stood a little to Cult’s left in front of me. Cult nodded in reply to Aruna’s simple but sincere question.

“Very easily, in fact. An artifact of those specifications would be difficult for others, but simple for me or Hisui. The most difficult application of spellcraft is cursing other people, not creating objects. That’s why mortals tend to use special items to curse their targets rather than using spellcraft itself.”

“Special items?”

This seemed different from the kinds of magical items we’d been talking about, but I found my curiosity piqued—Cult hadn’t mentioned this topic before. She continued, prompted by my mystified question.

“Yes. You can easily find items that do such things if you doubt my word. Most are obtained from dungeons—not from just any dungeon, mind, but enough that some of these items have found their way into mortal hands. And then, of course, there are curse-imbued artifacts deliberately created by mortals as well.”

“So if someone used one of those cursed artifacts, they could easily cast a spell on someone?”

“Indeed. Those who have a low resistance to curses would be especially susceptible—it would be simple to kill them outright.”

“Wow... That’s so dangerous.” With just one of these artifacts, a person could commit a murder out of the blue. I bet those things were a criminal’s best friends.

“That being said, these artifacts are very few in number, so they are not things you need to concern yourself with. Since you’re under my protective blessing, curses will not work on you in any case.”

“I’m not worried for myself so much as I am for Armeria and Cosmos,” I explained.

Cult nodded. “Those two wouldn’t be able to defend against even

the weakest of such magic. That's how it goes for people who have no affinity with spellcraft."

"Is there no way to protect against it?"

"There is. You can use godcraft to defend yourself, or carry a protective item with similar properties to godcraft."

"Godcraft..." Oh yeah, I thought Fouré or Cult had mentioned something about that earlier. Godcraft and spellcraft were basically oil and water. The power of change and the power to revert something to its original state—godcraft was truly the one weakness of spellcraft.

If godcraft awakened in Armeria or Cosmos, then the problem was basically solved, but we couldn't count on something so lucky to fall into our laps. So the only real choice was to go with Cult's other suggestion: a protective charm.

"So, could I make an artifact with a function similar to godcraft?"

"Let me think... Well, I guess you could at least *try*."

"That doesn't fill me with much confidence. Is it really that difficult?"

"I'm guessing so. This might be obvious to you, but to make something that has the same protections as godcraft, you'd have to mix that magic with spellcraft. As far as I know, not a single such artifact exists in this world."

"What? Not even one?" I couldn't disguise my shock.

"Well, to be more precise, no mortal has succeeded in creating one—it goes without saying that they'd need to have both godcraft and spellcraft powers at their fingertips to create an artifact like that, and you are the only one with those capabilities."

"Ah, I get it now." I was really surprised to hear that there weren't even any items like that in dungeons either, though. On that note, how did dungeons even manage to manufacture monsters and magical artifacts anyway? Like, I couldn't even see why a dungeon would make those kinds of things at all, much less *how*. Did they have some kind of inherent supernatural power? That was how it worked in books at least.

No matter how hard I thought about it, though, I couldn't come up with an answer. I shook my head to clear the distraction and

returned my attention to Cult's lessons.

"If that's the case, then I'm sure I can make them too," I said. "The real issue would be whether I have the skill yet."

"Right. You train so diligently every day, so I doubt you'd completely fail. I'm more concerned with—"

"The quality of the finished product, right?" I interrupted.

"Exactly." She nodded. "The only way to find out is to simply make it. You could accomplish this purely through spellcraft, as I do, but I think that would be too much strain for you at your current level of expertise."

"So basically, you're saying I need to control and manipulate spellcraft on the same level as you do?"

"Yes."

"Yup, not happening," I readily agreed.

Cult was the blessed embodiment of spellcraft and had spent several millennia perfecting her craft. Her powers had fashioned the basic form of the goddesses—fairies—and I needed to have the ability to manipulate spellcraft on *her* level? That was literally impossible. Becoming that skilled would take centuries of practice, if not even more. The amount of time required was staggering.

"Well, there isn't much point in thinking about it now. I'll work on the barrier artifact that Claus asked for. I gotta take it step-by-step and start with something I know I can do."

"A wise choice. I knew you'd make the right decision." Cult made a huge show out of patting my head, as though to tell me what a smart boy I was being.

Of course, now that Cult was getting touchy-feely, the other goddesses immediately joined in, hugging and patting me as much as they could. My head got special attention this time around, and I swore I could still feel them ruffling my hair hours later.

After a while, our cozy cuddle huddle drew to a close, and I finally began practicing spellcraft.

This time, I'd be making a magical artifact that had never been created before. I needed to visualize something completely different from the stuff I'd been making, like weapons and clothes and food.

"First, think about the shape you want this barrier artifact to

manifest," guided Cult.

To help me focus, I shut both my eyes as I extended my right hand forward. Energy flowed through my body and into my fingertips, and I began to form a picture in the back of my mind.

The shape itself didn't matter much; anything would be fine. Ideally, it'd be something I was familiar with, since that would make it easier to craft.

The very first thing that came to mind was a disk-shaped device, kind of like the smoke alarms they attached to the ceilings of houses in my previous life. Nice and flat—that was a pretty safe choice for something that warned people about danger, right? It would be compact enough to hang up somewhere or leave on the ground.

Once I'd decided the basic shape, I could fine-tune its appearance using my spellcraft. In addition, now I had to visualize the effect I wanted to give the artifact. I figured that my fire-alarm-like device would generate a translucent wall that would serve as a physical barrier.

Spellcraft energies would do just fine as its power source, and I thought fifty meters sounded like a good range of effect. Of course, the wider the area it covered, the more energy it would consume. I estimated that fifty meters was just about its maximum limit. Any wider than that, and it would exceed the rate of my natural energy regeneration.

"I've constructed its design and visualized its effect. Now... I just need to materialize it all."

I opened my eyes and looked at my hand. In my right hand danced the red of spellcraft power, flickering and wavering like a flame. The flicker began to slowly, but gradually, manifest my vision.

Although I'd visualized its appearance pretty thoroughly, Cult had warned me that if I didn't maintain the requisite focus to transform the properties of my spellcraft energy, the shape of the artifact might warp, or it might even lose its functionality entirely.

So, with that knowledge, I put everything I had into solidifying the energy until the bitter end. Less than an hour later, I finally completed my first prototype.

"I did it! This is the barrier artifact I wanted!"

I held the softball-sized object that now rested in my hands aloft. Around me, the goddesses began to clap.



"Congratulations, dear one. That was an excellent display of spellcraft. And even though it was only your first attempt, I see not a single flaw... Yes, this is a perfect specimen."

"Good job, Hisui. I was wondering what form you envisioned this artifact taking... The result is rather unusual."

"Congrats! You're really getting better by leaps and bounds. Even though spellcraft isn't my specialty, I can still tell just how amazing you've gotten!"

The three goddesses congratulated me in turn, with Cult first praising me, then Aruna expressing her curiosity, and Fouré finally gushing with compliments. The whole situation made me feel incredibly awkward, but I did feel pretty good about making a magic artifact.

Scratching the back of my head sheepishly, I thanked them all. "Anyway, that was just the prototype," I went on. "I'm going to make a lot more so I can improve on it."

"*Chirp?*"

"Huh? When did Dandelion get here?" I wondered to myself when I heard his familiar chirps. Looking around from atop my bed, I spotted him nestled beside me. Had he escaped Cosmos and fled here? Though... I guess I probably shouldn't describe it as "escaping," really.

"He came in while you were making your barrier artifact. He likely slipped from your sister's grasp." Aruna explained in response to my confusion.

"Oh, okay. Thanks for watching over Cosmos, Dandelion. And I know this is coming pretty late, but thanks for warning me about the dragon back then too."

I gently stroked Dandelion's tiny head. Although we hadn't been together for long, Dandelion had really helped me out. He'd saved Cosmos's life once, and he'd also known exactly where to find Claus and his retinue when they were being attacked by the dragon.

It was enough to make me wonder just how useful godcraft could be—although, I didn't have to ponder the question too hard. It was obviously really useful no matter its exact limits.

"*Chirp! Chirp!*"

Dandelion squinted his eyes shut in pleasure at being petted. He was so adorable that the goddesses began to crowd around to pet him as well.

"Huey? I know it's important to give Dandelion attention, but are you sure you want to skip out on your spellcraft training?"

"Ah! I guess petting him was just so soothing," I sighed. "Honestly, it's your fault for being so cute, Dandelion."

With that half-hearted complaint, I gave Dandelion a final pat on his cheek. That was that for now—time was a-wasting, and I could always play with him later. He looked pleadingly at me as if he were reluctant to part.

I coughed once to clear my throat, then tried activating the artifact I'd created. A translucent shimmer began to spread from the object in a circle, and continued permeating through the floor and walls until it brightened in color ever so slightly and stopped moving. I estimated it had stopped about fifty-ish meters away.

"Wow! So that's the barrier artifact... Or, rather, the actual barrier itself? So it worked?" Fouré pointed at the barely visible wall outside the window, shooting off rapid-fire questions in her excitement.

"Hey, Hisui. I have a question," Aruna abruptly asked.

"What is it?"

Much like Fouré, she was gazing at the barrier as well. "The activation was indeed successful, but I'm wondering about its durability... It's a barrier that physically wards off intruders, after all, so how was it able to pass through you and Dandelion—and indeed, the entire room?"

"Oh, that? Well, when I was making the artifact, it suddenly hit me that if it functioned like a physical barrier right off the bat, then it'd just break things or knock stuff over in the area as it expanded. So I adjusted it a little."

"How so?"

"I made it so it wouldn't actually function as a barrier until it finished expanding about fifty meters. That way we can set it up safely and we won't break anything."

"I see. But that does introduce a flaw."

"I knew you'd notice. Because the barrier takes time to fully

activate, it can't keep out anything that's already within its activation range, right?" This was an issue I realized just as I was finishing the artifact.

If I made it so the barrier would only form once it had reached a specified range, then anything close by when I switched the barrier on would still be able to get to us. If I tried activating this outside, for example, and there turned out to be monsters less than fifty meters away, then that'd be a big problem.

Since the design was fairly simple, the barrier itself would only block things outside from entering. It would still be possible to exit it from the inside...but there'd be some risks to doing that.

"So, what will you do? Disregarding the manor itself, if you mean to keep your powers secret, you'll need to expand the barrier to its full range and make sure there aren't any people around, won't you?"

"More or less. I know this is kind of a brute-force solution to the problem, but I was just planning on defeating any monsters within its range once it's deployed. As long as I make sure to take out everything beforehand, no one can enter the ward unless it's destroyed or I remove it."

"I figured you'd say that." She didn't say anything more—probably because she'd reached the same conclusion as I had.

After a moment, Fouré finally tugged at my clothes. "Hey, if you're done answering Aruna's questions, we should go test how strong the barrier is next!"

"I know, Fouré. Aruna, can you do the honors?" I decided to have Aruna do the all-important durability test, given that she was the strongest warrior among the goddesses. From a pure power level perspective, Cult probably had more capabilities, but Aruna's power was far more intimidating on the offense. That's why I figured she'd be perfect for stress testing a protective wall.

"Leave it to me. I'll be sure to adjust my strength as needed when I give it a good whack."

"Oh, you're just going to hit, then..." That was definitely something I expected her to do, but the way she said it was reminiscent of something an elementary or junior high schooler

would say—even though she was hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of years older than me.

"Hisui? You're not thinking anything weird, are you?"

"Huh?! N-Not at all! I would never!" For a moment, I startled myself, thinking I might've accidentally spoken my thoughts aloud. Aruna scowled at me as I hurriedly covered my mouth with my hand, but her gaze drifted away from me before long.

"Fine. Anyway, I'll measure the durability of the barrier for you." She gently floated upward and then headed outside, passing through the wall as she did so.

The moment I had the thought that I wanted to see Aruna do her test from up close, Fouré and Cult got on either side of me and lifted me up. Once again I felt like a hapless alien snatched up by curious humans, much like when I'd previously been caught by Azalea and Cosmos. Sandwiched between the two, I was carried outside through the window.

"Um, surely there's a better way to carry me, right? Fouré, Cult?"

"What? Nope, no way—this is the only way I get to carry you in my arms. So there."

"Hee hee. Please, do accept our cuddling, little one. I too would like to hold fast to you like this sometimes."

"I feel like you 'hold fast' to me like...every day, though."

"*Chirp!*" Disregarding my discomfort, Dandelion chirped joyfully from atop my head and waved his right wing toward Aruna. He was perched upon his throne again, and he was now getting a free ride.

"Hisui! I'm starting the test now!" shouted Aruna. Some distance away, Aruna had arrived at the edge of the barrier. I managed to wave at her in reply even though Fouré and Cult had my arms held aloft.

"Please do, Aruna!" Upon hearing my response, Aruna returned her gaze to her target and tightened her hand into a fist. Drawing her elbow back just a little, she rapidly threw out some simple forward jabs.

Her fist came into contact with the barrier. Then...

"Whoa!"

A violent gale rushed past us.

Though we were still quite far away from Aruna, the wind pressure nearly blew us away. Had Fouré and Cult not been holding me as tightly as they were, I was sure both me and Dandelion would have plummeted to the ground. Or, maybe just me—Dandelion could fly so he'd probably have been fine.

I grimaced. The wind was so strong, it felt like I was being hit in the face. Finally, I heard a shrill crash ring out, announcing the shattering of the barrier. It was a tinkling sort of crack, much like the sound of shattering glass.

"Down in one impressive go. I wonder if she actually held back like she said she would."

Fouré laughed awkwardly. "Aruna was holding back quite a bit, I think. If she really meant to do damage, the shock waves would have obliterated the ground too."

"Right... I can see that."

Evidently, I still wasn't able to accurately estimate Aruna's extraordinary might. Of course I couldn't—I'd never actually seen Aruna fight at full strength before. Had she done so at any point, I'm sure Clematis would have been reduced to a barren wasteland immediately.

Her inspection finished, Aruna turned back toward us with an unreadable expression. Slowly, she drifted over.

"Nice work, Aruna. So how was my barrier?"

"Not too bad. If it took about twenty percent of my strength to break, then even something as strong as a green dragon shouldn't be able to penetrate it. You should be proud."

"T-Twenty percent..." Considering that was twenty percent from the world's strongest being, I knew I should be happy about the assessment, but I just couldn't help feeling a little disappointed at the low number.

But since the barrier could withstand an attack from a green dragon, it had plenty of practical use, especially for Claus. Since he lived in town, he'd be able to keep strangers from slipping into his residence with this. Besides, nothing stronger than a green dragon should be appearing in town anyway.

"Thanks, Aruna. The barrier's perfect for our needs, then. I can

hand this off to Claus without a problem."

"Is the range good enough?" she asked.

"It's probably fine," I mused. "At its current activated range, it'll just barely cover up to the walls surrounding the estate." If the barrier ended up extending to the streets, then I'd have to modify its effective range, so it was more convenient if it stayed confined to Claus's property.

"I see. Then let's return—the night is still young," remarked Aruna.

"Yeah," I agreed. "Can I ask you two to bring me back inside, Fouré, Cult?"

"Okey dokey!" chirped Fouré.

"At once," nodded Cult.

And so, I was carried back into the manor, still sandwiched between the two goddesses.

▼△▼

Daybreak came and went the following morning, and I hurried to give Claus the prototype I'd made the day prior.

"Lord Lycoris, this is the barrier-generating artifact I made yesterday, after our discussion."

"Oh! You've already made it? You're quite clever with your hands, I see." Well, that was an odd way of putting it. *Please, Claus, you're making me sound like a real ladies' man here*.

"The artifact you requested doesn't require any sort of fine-tuning or anything, so I could produce it pretty quickly. Its effective range extends beyond the manor and just barely reaches the walls surrounding your estate. To be more precise, its range is approximately fifty meters. I've made it so only people who know a secret password are able to pass through."

"I'm impressed you've given it so much thought! Thank you so much. Will you accept your payment for it now?"

"Oh, no. I was planning to leave town today and get moving on preparations for building a house. Do you mind if I pick up that payment once I come back?"

"Not at all. That's actually more convenient for me." Claus paused, thinking. "Now that you mention it, have you decided to build your house immediately?"

I nodded. "Yes. I should strike while the iron's hot, as they say. Besides, I don't have anything else that needs doing right now."

"I see. In that case, you should leave town via the south gate and head west. You'll find a large lake there—should you choose to establish your residence beside it, I'm sure the sight will be spectacular. You'll also have a clear view of the surrounding area, so you'll know immediately if someone is approaching."

"The western lake, huh? Thank you, Lord Lycoris. See you soon!"

"You as well. Take care." We waved at each other, then I departed.

That had been pretty good advice. Life at the lakeside, just chilling in my very own home... It did sound like the slow life I'd always wanted! If I could just find some land to set aside for farming, it would all be perfect. It'd be so easy to irrigate it too. Claus must've recommended the location to me with that in mind—living by the lake would leave me wanting for nothing.

Positively aglow with happiness, I broke into a sprint and wove my way through the streets, making my way outside of town. Today, the toll at the gate hadn't stung as much as it usually did—at least, that's how I was feeling, anyway.

My goal was the lakefront to the west that Claus had so kindly informed me about. He hadn't told me exactly how far it was, but as I dashed along, it suddenly struck me that it might be *too* far away from town, which could be a problem. But then, all of a sudden, it came into view.

"Oh... Wow!"

After I spent thirty minutes threading through the trees and trampling grass underfoot, the sight that met my eyes brought me to a stop, despite my legs having been augmented with magic. The gorgeous blue directly in front of me captured my gaze and refused to let go.

I see... So this was the lake Claus mentioned.

There were very few trees directly around the lake; perhaps

they'd long since been cut down and hauled off. With nothing to obstruct the sun, its rays shone down on the lake and made it glitter. As I gazed at it from the underbrush, I could tell it was nothing less than a work of art.

"Wooow, what a pretty place! It soothes my very soul!" Standing next to me, Fouré couldn't help but gush in wonder as she stared at the lake.

The other two goddesses seemed to be similarly speechless as they looked out at the glistening water. Of the three of them, however, Cult's gaze remained hollow and disinterested. Nothing could shake her, I guess—she was only interested in me.

"The lake's surprisingly close to town, but it's far enough that random adventurers probably won't be stumbling in too often. Once I put up my barrier, it'll be totally safe."

I'd run here using magecraft, so I'd been moving about as fast as a car—or maybe even faster. I'd probably been going at about seventy to eighty kilometers an hour. Considering I'd mostly been traveling in a straight line, as long as nothing in particular happened to draw them here, I doubted other adventurers would be showing up anytime soon. Even if someone came looking for the lake itself, intruders weren't going to be an issue once I activated the barrier.

"So, what's the plan, Hisui? Are you going to turn on the barrier first?"

"No," I said, shaking my head. "I think I'd best build a house first. I'll need a lot of lumber to start." If I put the barrier up now, then it'd only get in the way of any logging activity I needed to do. Every time I brought in some new wood, I'd be forced to deactivate and reactivate it.

"In that case, shall I prepare construction-ready lumber for you? It'd be a simple matter with spellcraft," offered Cult.

"No, Cult. That'd take the joy out of building the house. Constructing it log by log, with my own hands, is exactly what I've been wanting to do. It'll give me satisfaction like nothing else," I explained.

"Is that how this works?" Cult asked doubtfully. She didn't sympathize with me even remotely, since the joys of convenience

and ease were more her speed. I understood her point of view too, but I didn't want to ruin my first step toward my slow life of dreams. This was going to be an important experience that set the tone for my easygoing life.

"Honestly, why not? I think building a house together will be a good bonding experience," shrugged Aruna.

"Right, Aruna! So, do you guys think you can help?"

"Just leave it to li'l ol' me! I'll keep an eye on our surroundings and take care of the lumber!" volunteered Fouré.

"What exactly are you going to do with the lumber?"

"If you use lumber from a newly cut tree, any building you make with it will creak and warp because the wood is still full of water. So, to stop that from happening, I can draw the water out of the wood with a wave of my hand!"

"Wow, I had no idea you could do something like that, Fouré." I knew she was really second to none when it came to affecting living beings, but I never would have guessed that she had such thorough control over the environment, as well. I supposed a tree was no different from any other living thing to her—or to godcraft itself. Maybe everything had some kind of life force she could affect.

"Then Hisui and I will take care of cutting the trees down. We'll carry them as well," said Aruna.

"As for me, I suppose my job could be to improve the shape of the dried lumber," Cult decided, thoughtfully.

"Then we all have our jobs, Hisui. Let's all get that house built up!" Following Aruna's directions, we each got to work with the roles we were given. To my surprise, Aruna dished out orders one after another, as if she'd been doing this all her life.

Holding her strength back as much as possible, she cut trees down with me, which Fouré would then dry out. Lastly, once Cult had processed the logs, we brought the lumber to the spot I wanted the house to be. We repeated this process all day.

Honestly, we *needed* to spend all day doing this—as Fouré had mentioned, we would need an incredible amount of wood if we wanted to build a decently sized home. The goddesses really were a lifesaver, though. Since they were helping me, the preparations were

completed several times faster than I thought it'd take.

"Is this about enough wood for the house?" asked Aruna, who stood in front of a veritable mountain of lumber, arms crossed.

"Right, hm... I think this is enough for the size of the manor that Fouré wanted to build," I said, likewise eyeing the stack of boards we'd accumulated.

"Honestly... It's utterly ridiculous that she arbitrarily decided we were going to build a *manor*." Thinking back on Fouré's demand a short while earlier, Aruna's face darkened. It was true that our work had increased exponentially because of her, so I couldn't help but laugh dryly.

"What's the problem?" Fouré objected. "We're building Huey's very first house! Besides, since no one will be coming around here to notice anything, we could live here too if we wanted! We *have* to make it big!"

"You sound like a mortal. We don't need to eat or sleep, remember?"

Cult giggled at Aruna's assertion. "But you're rather too attached to behaving like a fairy, Aruna—you're so inflexible. Why can't we try living as the mortals do? I agree with Fouré. I too would like to give mortal life a try with Hisui in his new house."

"Wha—!" Now that Cult had taken Fouré's side, Aruna was really in a predicament. Her cheeks flushed a mild red, then she huffily replied in embarrassment, "I-It's not like I *don't* want to live with Hisui, of course. Fine, do whatever you want!"

"Eeek!" Fouré squealed. "Why are you blushing? Are you thinking about something naughty? You can get as lovey-dovey with Huey as you want, but might I remind you he's still only ei— *Bwargh?!*" She never got to finish her teasing. The loud crack of a punch echoed through the area, and she vanished from sight. Aruna too had gone.

"Fouré stepped on one of Aruna's land mines again, so to speak," I sighed.

"Indeed, and she did it so cleanly." Cult, who still remained in the vicinity, hugged me from behind as she responded to my comment.

She really had a habit of sticking close to me whenever the other two weren't around. Her ability to exploit a lapse in attention from

the other two, rather than trying to strong-arm her way past them, was really something. But most of all, it was honestly incredible how she regularly did this without giving any hint or inkling that she was going to. She truly lived following her own tune.

"Let's head back to town, Cult. Night will fall before those two come back, so we can't really wait around for them."

"That sounds like the best plan of action."

Having agreed on a course, we returned along the way we came. Far in the distance, I could hear the slightest whisper of an explosion. I just barely heard it even with my hearing enhanced with magecraft, so they must've been duking it out pretty far away.

But as I rushed back toward town, all that remained on my mind was...that I hoped I could make it before they closed the gate.

Chapter 4: Mixed Bathing?!

"Hisui, some things have arrived for you."

It was early in the morning, and I was still a little fatigued from the workout I'd gotten the day before, so it took some effort to drag myself into the dining room. Claus, already seated, was there to greet me, and he lost no time jumping into conversation.

"Things? What things?" I asked, as I slid into an empty seat.

"Your permanent residency papers and a missive from the crown. The letter regarding your registration with the adventurer's guild came quite a bit faster than I expected as well—the king must be deeply interested in you."

"You really think so?" I'd thought Claus was just a really nice, upright guy, but I saw a different side to him now that we had received an official response from the king. He grinned broadly at me, his shoulders drawing back ever so slightly.

"I do indeed. You were granted special permission so readily, you might think the crown was trying to curry favor with you. But I have seen your strength, and... Well, although knowledge of your power has not spread far beyond us yet, it *has* been publicly declared and demonstrated. Owing to that, the letter states you shall be given permission to register at the adventurer's guild. Take the missive to them, and I daresay you should be settled in immediately. Congratulations."

When Claus finished speaking, the elderly butler—who had been quietly standing behind me all the while—extended his hand. In it was the aforementioned letter, which he placed on the table in front of me.

"If the guildmaster, any of the guild members, or other adventurers demand that you give a demonstration of your powers, return here instead. I apologize for the inconvenience, but I would like to avoid any potential fuss," Claus cautioned.

His concern was reasonable to me. “Thank you so much for all the help, Lord Lycoris.”

“Please, you needn’t thank me! We both benefit from this arrangement.”

Claus brought his cup to his lips and took a sip of the steaming contents—probably tea, all things considered—before setting it back down with an audible *clink*.

“That aside, I will admit that I am terribly curious just how useful you’ll be for our country, both on a personal level as well as in my role as governor. But, I do hope you’ll take care of your own health first and foremost. While you may not think much of any injuries you might sustain, your sisters will surely be distressed by it.”

“Right. I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.”

Since I could just use godcraft to patch myself up, I doubted I’d land myself in any situation that would cause them to get upset. I guess Armeria might pick up on something if she noticed my clothes were torn... But I could just use spellcraft to mend those anyway. Everything would be just fine, and I wasn’t going to make either of them sad... Or that was what I *wished* I could say, but knowing that I couldn’t guarantee it—especially since I’d already made them upset before—really sucked.

“Ah, it appears our food has arrived. Let’s put the conversation aside for now and tuck in,” Claus remarked as mouthwatering dishes were brought from the kitchen one after another.

While my life at the Clematis residence had been an extremely frugal one, the Lycoris residence enjoyed an entirely opposite lifestyle. So many different dishes were served that I couldn’t help but wonder how anyone could eat this much first thing in the morning. I was still growing, so it wasn’t any trouble for me to finish my plate, but I had the feeling Armeria and Cosmos would end up leaving a lot uneaten.

I picked up the knife and fork resting on the table just as Claus did the same, and I began my morning repast.

After I finished eating, it was time to start on my daily routine. For now, I wanted to prioritize completing the construction of my house over training, but I didn’t want to skip out on practice either.

Leaving the Lycoris estate, I planned to head straight to the south gate...but I ended up making a detour to the adventurer's guild before leaving town.

"Are you going to the guild, Huey?" Bobbing in midair next to me, Fouré questioned me curiously, picking up on the fact that I'd chosen to take a different route than usual.

Taking care not to attract any attention, I whispered back to her. "Yeah. I don't know if they'll let me take jobs from them yet, but I need to at least get registered."

"That would be for the best. Nothing's better than getting chores out of the way first." Aruna voiced her agreement with me, although I personally didn't consider registering at the guild to be a chore. If I could become an adventurer, then I'd never hurt for work in the future, so it was a very important step to take.

Going for a casual jaunt through the cobbled streets, I arrived at the adventurer's guild after about ten minutes of running. Because the town was so large, the streets were packed with people, and I couldn't weave through the crowd very easily. Even short trips often took a long time.

Breathing a deep sigh, I placed my hands on the guild's wooden double doors. Just as before, I could hear boisterous, joyful voices from inside the building as I pushed the doors open, the creaking of their hinges revealing their age as they moved. The view spreading before me was exactly what I expected from a fantasy guild.

While I'd come here blissfully unaware of the rules and procedures before and had been summarily refused, this time I had an ace that would guarantee my registration. My heart began to inadvertently race as I glanced around the room on my way to the reception that sat at the very front of the building. Luckily for me, no one was lining up there, so I was served immediately.

"Welcome to the adventurer's guild—wait, hold on. Aren't you the boy who came here earlier?"

"Huh? You remember me?"

Of the three receptionists lined up behind the desk, I spoke to the lady right in the middle. I'd spoken to her on my first attempt to register with the guild. I recalled her name was Arisa or something

like that. She seemed to remember me as well, and she looked at me rather kindly.

"Children hardly ever come to the guild. Adventurers come off as rather rough and rugged, right? Since most of their jobs involve exterminating monsters, most people find them intimidating. But you, on the other hand, are adorable! Besides, the color of your hair really stands out."

"Oh, I guess that makes sense." Now that she mentioned it, the people milling about who looked like adventurers were all doing something that made them feel really hard to approach—some of them were built like tanks, some of them were glaring around the room while armed to the teeth, and some of them were wearing hardly anything at all.

Not that I stood out from the crowd any less than they did—since the moment I'd set foot in the guild, people had been unabashedly staring at me.

"So, what business do you have with the guild today? Come to register again, you silly duck?" She said, teasingly.

"Actually, yes. I found a way to get around the age restriction," I replied, not missing a beat.

"What?! There's really just no way we can let a child your age be an adventurer..."

"Please have a look at this." What faster way to validate myself was there than showing proof? I pulled out the letter I'd received from Claus earlier and handed it to Arisa. She slowly read through it, and then a moment later...

"F-From the king?! What?!" Arisa practically shrieked, voice shaking. Looked like my letter from the king had shot straight through her comprehension with ease. She turned pale, face blanching within seconds.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

Taking a long moment to compose herself, she finally managed to respond. "Um... I-I'll...get this checked out right away! On the double!" Her shout tore its way out of her throat, the high pitch ringing in my ears. With my letter in hand, Arisa dashed up to the second floor in a panic and was gone in a flash.

“I-Is she just leaving me here?” As she abandoned me at the reception, the responsibility for dealing with the situation she’d left behind was dumped entirely on my shoulders. The guild staff and adventurers were all completely focused on me, their uncomfortable stares clearly showing that they were all wondering what I’d done to the poor woman.

Well, it’s not like I’d asked to be left with an awkward, mood-killing atmosphere like this. Praying that Arisa would return sooner rather than later, I sat down in the closest chair I saw.

What was up on the second floor of the adventurer’s guild, anyway? Maybe the guildmaster was up there? At least, I hadn’t ever seen anyone on the first floor who looked like they might be in charge here.

To kill my growing boredom, I idly speculated in this vein. After about twenty whole minutes of me wondering what was upstairs, Arisa finally returned. Behind her trailed a woman with gorgeous light-blue hair that was tied back into a ponytail—one that was long and flowing enough to reach to her waist.

The woman fixed her gaze on me. “A child with green hair who isn’t even ten years of age... Ah, you must be Hisui.”

“Um, yes. That’s me. Who are you?” I asked. She looked to be in her twenties and wore a monocle over her left eye, giving her a distinctly intellectual look. She quietly studied me with eyes the same aqua color as her hair. Even her voice had a refreshingly cool tone.

“I’m Nelpha, guildmaster of the Lycoris branch of the adventurer’s guild. Might I have a moment to speak with you?”

“Guildmaster?” I asked, thinking. “What might someone so important need from me?” This clearly had something to do with the letter from the king that I’d handed off to Arisa a moment ago. Otherwise, there was no way someone as busy as the guildmaster would make the time to speak with a mere child.

Seeing how tense and guarded I was, Nelpha smiled at me gently before she spoke. “Don’t worry—I won’t bite. I only want to ask you a few questions regarding the letter you gave Arisa. Do you mind giving me some of your time? It would help make the registration

process go smoothly."

I hesitantly acquiesced. "All right, if it's only for a little while."

"Thank you. Let's go up to the second floor, then. All these eyes on us down here are annoying."

The guildmaster Nelpha turned on her heel, hair fluttering as she went, and leisurely strode back the way she came. I followed right behind her. Considering that I already stood out a great deal, this exchange gave me the sense that the other adventurers were paying even *more* attention to me—in a bad way, of course.

I just hoped they weren't going to start a brawl or anything...

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Nelpha, Arisa, and I all climbed up the stairs to the second floor of the adventurer's guild. Contrasting with the open design of the first floor, there were several rooms on the second. It seemed almost as though it were constructed like an inn, but other than that they didn't seem particularly special. Maybe the second floor was just for staff?

As I looked around, I followed Nelpha, who spearheaded our little group. After a moment, we reached the room situated the farthest from the stairs.

"This is my room—in other words, the guildmaster's office. Come in, and feel free to make yourself at home. I don't mind," said Nelpha, her tone welcoming and friendly as she opened the door. But despite her invitation, it wasn't as though I could *really* make myself at home—no using her sofa as a trampoline or asking her to serve me snacks or anything like that. So instead, I meekly let myself go with the flow and stiffly sat on her sofa, freezing in place like a little statue. I'd never really had much experience dealing with people, least of all people held such high office, so I was beyond nervous.

Conversing with Claus was relatively easy since I'd gotten to know him through far less conventional means; saving him and his retinue from the green dragon had opened that door. But I didn't have any convenient means of breaking the ice with Nelpha. This

was both my first time meeting her and our first real conversation. We had nothing between us, so the mood was unsurprisingly austere.

"I'm sorry for making you come all the way up here, but I didn't think we could continue our conversation downstairs, especially not considering your circumstances," Nelpha said before positioning herself in a seat at the farthest end of the room from the door. She rested her elbows on her desk with her chin in her hands as she leaned forward to speak to me.

"Thanks for being so considerate of me," I replied.

"No worries. You don't have to thank me. By the way, are you a noble child? I do notice you have awfully good manners."

"I suppose so. I'm the youngest son of a baron in the area."

"Hmm, I see. The nearest barony would be...Clematis, I think."

"Oh! Yes, that's right. You're well-informed."

House Clematis was of little to no importance and probably completely unknown even among their fellow noble houses. And yet, Nelpha managed to guess right in one shot. She must have been rather knowledgeable, given her role as the guildmaster.

Buuut on the other hand...anybody with a reasonable awareness of the region could've figured that out pretty easily. Still, this made me even more wary of her.

"It's not much of a stretch. Clematis is right next door to Lycoris, although I can't imagine a noble child—and an eight-year-old one at that—would be allowed to leave for an excursion so far from their lands," Nelpha replied, as if she had read my mind. "I suppose you might be here with your parents, but considering you went out of your way to register at an adventurer's guild in Lycoris, I'm led to believe you actually live *here*, not over in Clematis. If you lived there, you could simply register at the guild in Clematis, after all."

"Clematis doesn't support an adventurer's guild. It's got nothing but farms and forest," I protested.

"Right. But the moment I saw you, before I knew you were a son of House Clematis, I immediately thought there was something strange about you. Why would you come all the way to Lycoris just to register at its adventurer's guild if it wasn't even your own

hometown?" said Nelpha amusedly, a quiet chuckle escaping her. This inquiry was rapidly getting unpleasant.

"But it was all clear the second you said you were a child of House Clematis. You decided to become an adventurer precisely *because* you're the youngest. Rest assured that it happens quite often. I think it's wonderful you have the temerity to do so at such a young age." I wasn't entirely sure she was actually praising me. The cynical side of me read her words as *you're awfully reckless for a child.*

"Still... One mystery remains," said Nelpha.

"A mystery?" I repeated.

"This letter." With a smooth wave of the hand, she showed me the letter I'd received from the king, which I had given to Arisa earlier. "I read it. The contents were quite amusing; I never would've guessed the king would request special permission for a child to register here. Just who are you, exactly? The letter didn't explain that in much detail."

I hesitated to answer. "Supposing that you didn't like my answer to that... What would you do?"

"What would I do? Nothing. I have no reason to take any drastic measures."

"Huh?" Her response was kind of a letdown. My shoulders drooped even before I'd had any time to mull over her words.

"I told you when we met on the first floor, didn't I? That you could register, I mean. I'm only asking these questions purely to satisfy my own curiosity. I couldn't contradict an order from the king even if I wanted to... Not unless I had as high a standing as the grandmaster at the adventurer's guild in the capital."

"Oh, huh... So you've got no ulterior motive at all? You're really just asking questions for the sake of it?"

"That's what I said, isn't it? Just what do you take me for?" she huffed, puffing up her cheeks childishly. Was she angry? I'd gotten the impression she was an odd one from the moment we'd met, but was she actually more immature than she looked?

"I think anyone would be a little wary after being dragged off to the guildmaster's office out of the blue and grilled about their

lineage," remarked Arisa, wou'd been patiently listening to our conversation.

"What?! W-Was I really being that imposing?" Nelpha turned toward Arisa so fast I could almost hear her neck creaking like a doll. Arisa didn't hesitate to nod.

"Even ignoring the pressure... Honestly, anyone would get nervous being called out by the guildmaster of all people. Plus, you kept laughing even when there was nothing funny to laugh about, and you were firing off questions like this was an interrogation... He's still only eight years old, you know."

"Ngh!" A critical hit! Nelpha's chin slipped from its resting place on her hands, and her head smashed into her desk. Was she okay? It had made such a loud noise that I was a little concerned.

"I-I just thought, maybe he'd feel more welcome if we got to have a casual chat. I really was doing my best to be open and approachable..." Nelpha sighed...but then her deflated tone suddenly flipped to irate. "But I'm an ex-adventurer! It's pretty crazy to have someone like me as the guildmaster in the first place! Am I gonna have to deal with this stuff until I retire?! Find someone who can actually be a proper guildmaster!"

Nelpha's shock only took a moment to transform into anger. Complaints kept spilling from her mouth one after another—she must have been keeping a lot bottled up inside.

"But you were the one who was like, 'Oh, I'm so lucky that Lord Lycoris asked me to be the guildmaster! Now I can make money without lifting a finger!'" exclaimed Arisa.

"Yeah, that was before I knew being a guildmaster was so much work! I wanna slack off with the best of them, okay? That snake tricked me!" Nelpha fumed.

"You weren't tricked. And Lord Lycoris only said he *hoped* you'd take the job. You're twisting the story way out of proportion."

"Hey! Just whose side are you on, anyway?!"

"If you're making me pick sides, then I'm on Lord Lycoris's."

"What?!" Her head slipped and smashed into the desk again... Didn't that hurt?

While listening to their comedy act, I started wondering if I could

just leave. But I wasn't done registering, which was the whole reason I'd come here in the first place, and I didn't have the audacity to leave the room while those two were bickering. So I decided to watch them quietly instead.

"Urgh," Nelpha groaned, stifling a sob. "You're so cold, even though we've been best buddies since our adventuring days! If you were really my friend, you'd totally be down for plotting to assassinate the marquis in revenge, wouldn't you?"

"I'm not even going to *pretend* to do that. Let's end our friendship and keep things strictly professional," responded Arisa, voice clipped.

"Nooooo!!!"

"That's such a crazy proposal, they could hang you twice and it still wouldn't be enough punishment! The marquis's blood is bluer than most blue bloods, you know! And you always use your powers without considering whether it's a good idea or not, so that joke's even *more* tasteless coming from you!" Arisa admonished. "Anyway, don't you think you should let Hisui go already? He's been awkwardly sitting there waiting for us to finish talking."

Nelpha gasped in realization. "I forgot!"

Hey now... She was the one who'd brought me up here to chat in the first place, so forgetting about her guest was awfully cruel. But if anything good had come out of this, it was that I'd warmed up to the guildmaster a little. She was actually kinda funny.

"I'm sorry, Hisui. I called you up here and everything, only to ignore you."

"Oh, no, it's okay. You two really are good friends, huh?"

"Have been for years—long enough that a good ribbing's part of the fun," laughed Arisa.

"Are you both ex-adventurers, then?"

"Yes, that's right. We were an unbeatable duo, I'll have you know," said Nelpha.

"Though we're not nearly as impressive as you, Hisui, considering you're already registering here at your age." Arisa giggled before her gaze fell back on the letter in Nelpha's hands. "Oh, right. I wanted to ask you about your letter. Just how strong are you, exactly? For the

king and Lord Lycoris to recognize your power, you must be pretty skilled, right? Has your magic awakened already?"

"Yes, I can use magecraft." I could tell them this much, at least—they'd find out eventually anyway, if I was going to be doing jobs for the guild from now on. But they didn't need to know that I could use the other two powers. Sharing the bare minimum with them would be enough.

"Really, now!" exclaimed Nelpha. "That's truly remarkable. I've heard the marquis's own daughter also awoke in godcraft at the age of eight. Kids are really incredible these days."

"I can't imagine the king giving you special permission to be an adventurer just because you can use magecraft, though. Is there something else that might've convinced the crown?" Arisa cut in, bluntly. She was right on the money.

"Very perceptive of you. I can't really discuss the exact circumstances in detail, but shortly before I arrived in Canna, I took down a green dragon on my own."

They stared at me in silence for a moment before Arisa finally replied. "Excuse me—a green dragon? Like, an actual green dragon? Not just a green-skinned lizard or something?"

"Right, a green dragon." They both stared at me once more, stupefied.

Nelpha's and Arisa's reactions to hearing I could use magecraft at my age was clearly nothing compared to this bombshell. Their mouths flapped open and closed wordlessly as their eyes widened, gazes glued to my face. After a long moment, their shock burst from them in an explosion of bewilderment.

"Th-That can't be true! Even I'd be hard-pressed to fight one off on my own, and you're telling me *you* managed to do it?!" Arisa asked.

"This is entirely unprecedented! Even the legendary swordmaster was just a nose-picking kid running around outside at your age!"

"That's pretty rude to the swordmaster, don't you think?" I remarked. As unlikely as it was that someone of such unparalleled repute would be doing that even as a kid, clearly neither Nelpha nor Arisa were thinking straight at the moment.

"Well, that's just how unbelievable your claim is!" Nelpha exclaimed.

"I'm not following... How does my claim have anything to do with the swordmaster's nose-picking?" I couldn't grasp exactly what they were getting at.

"You'll be the youngest ever to gain the title of Dragonslayer," said Nelpha, once more appraising my value.

"Can you get a title like that just from defeating a green dragon?" I asked. While green dragons were called dragons, they were little more than flightless dinosaurs. They really weren't anything to write home about, and definitely not something that would earn a title as impressive as "Dragonslayer," if you asked me.

"Some people actually do agree with you, Hisui. They don't believe green dragons should be counted as dragons at all. But whether they're 'real' dragons or not doesn't matter as much as the fact that they're just as *powerful* as dragons. If a green dragon tried to break its way into this town, we'd have to mobilize the army to fight it off—or I'd have to personally go out there myself. The former option would result in a terrible number of casualties, though, so naturally, we'd be better off if I just took care of it from the start," Nelpha explained.

"I don't think the one I defeated was nearly that strong though..." While I'd won against the dragon because I'd been able to channel more power than the dragon could handle, I was pretty sure that if a whole army had been mobilized against it, they would've been able to take it out without any casualties at all—if the battle plan were good enough to make that happen, anyway.

Nelpha's eyes narrowed at my thoughtless comment. "I see now. You've made things perfectly clear: You have no common sense whatsoever."

"What?" How rude! That was the first time anyone had ever said that to me. I mean, I was just just from a tiny barony out in the middle of the sticks, but I'd been interacting with my sisters and the goddesses for all of my short life! I was sure I had at least a *little* common sense...

But as those thoughts were running through my head, I

discovered that I couldn't get the words out of my mouth. The more I considered it, the more I realized that my sisters were actually country bumpkins just like me. Even Armeria's knowledge was restricted to the books she read.

And the goddesses couldn't be said to have any mortal understanding at all. The "common sense" Nelpha mentioned, in this case regarding monsters and raw combat strength, was something I'd measured through the perspective passed down to me from Aruna, Fouré, and Cult. To them, pretty much everything was weak and insignificant.

I hadn't really reflected on this before, but compared to other mortals, I actually *was* pretty strong, huh? I practically dominated the charts.

"A green dragon is a powerful and deadly opponent. The average adventurer might try to put up a fight, but they wouldn't win. Only the strongest of the strong can defeat one—someone powerful enough, for example, to take on the role of guildmaster." With a *fwip*, Nelpha swung her pointer finger right at me. "Hisui, you defy all common sense. You're far too strong. I've trained for months on end for over ten years—but in a fraction of the time, you've surpassed the strength and ability I've spent my life cultivating. You are, in other words, a monster."

"A monster," I repeated, startled.

I never imagined she'd go as far as to label me that. I could tell she wasn't being contemptuous or anything; in fact, her tone suggested quite the opposite, hovering somewhere between awe and reverence. She called me a monster, but I could tell it was meant as a compliment.

But that also meant that Nelpha, of all people, saw me as a terrifying beast. This turned out to be another great opportunity for me to reconsider how I looked at myself.

"Guildmaster! How could you say that?! Just look at how cute he is!" Arisa exclaimed.

"Ngh?!" My vision was suddenly obscured, a weight pressing down on my face. I belatedly realized Arisa had gathered me up in her arms, hugging me tightly. Her breasts were on the large side,

and my face was buried between her puffy pillows. My cheeks heated up from sheer embarrassment.

"And you're way too touchy-feely. He's practically suffocating," snapped Nelpha.

"Ah!" Noticing my mortification all too late, Arisa finally let go of me. "You're so cute, though, Hisui... Strong, but cute!"

It seemed like I appealed to the female staff here for some reason—at least that's how it felt with all the stares I kept getting. It was really awkward, though.

"You need to keep your harassment in line too," Nelpha sighed.

"I'm not harassing him. It's just a little hug. Right, Hisui?" Arisa looked at me expectantly.

"Um... I guess so."

"Dodging the issue like that is what's ruining society these days. You're setting a terrible example, you know." Nelpha shook her head in disdain.

"Oh, hush. Forget about that—since you're done chatting with him, you should let him go."

"Why do you have to say that like I'm keeping him locked up here?"

"I mean, you basically are, aren't you?"

"Ngh... Fine," Nelpha muttered, then turned to me. "Thanks for chatting with me today, Hisui. Tell me even more about yourself next time—you're a pretty interesting kid." She grinned devilishly as she spoke, her expression making her look much like a hawk hunting its prey. I shivered under her gaze, thinking I might have attracted the attention of someone dangerous.

"Uh... Sure. If we get another chance to speak." Bowing lightly, I took my leave and returned to the first floor with Arisa. It had taken a while, but I could finally register as an adventurer. Thank goodness.

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"Here you go, Hisui. This is your Adventurer Card."

After I handed over the personal information form that was

needed to complete my registration, Arisa went into a backroom for a moment, then returned with a single card in hand.

Receiving it from her, I noticed the card was about the same size as business cards had been in my previous life. How did they even make these ID cards? It was sturdy and well-made, considering how thin it was. My name and gender had been written on its front side.

"Thank you."

"You can use that as identification. You won't be taxed upon entering or leaving the town with that. But you need to keep up with taking jobs—your registration will lapse if you don't accept any for a certain amount of time. If that happens, you'll need to reregister or you'll lose any rights associated with your card."

"What happens if I try to use my card after my rights have been revoked?"

"If you get caught, you'll be in a lot of hot water. There's a huge penalty fee, and in the worst case, you'll be arrested on the spot."

"That...sounds scary." Yikes... In this world, they arrest people for something as minor as forgetting to reregister their papers, huh? I figured it was because there were some crimes people might commit using an invalid card, so keeping them tightly controlled was a way to preserve peace and law. That was probably it.

"Right, so keep all that in mind, okay?"

"I will." I nodded in understanding, and Arisa patted me on the head.

"Good, good. Honestly, I don't want such a little kid like you to be doing a hard job like adventuring. If it weren't for the order from the crown, I never would have allowed it."

"I'm pretty strong, though." I mean, I had beat a dragon. And if I could beat a dragon, then I could put up a pretty good fight against just about any monster. She really didn't need to worry about me so much.

But when I voiced my objection, Arisa only patted my head again and smiled gently at me. "That doesn't have anything to do with it. No matter how strong someone is, it only takes one mistake to get them killed. So the most important thing is your safety—don't forget that. If you need advice, come ask me anytime, okay?"

I sighed. She had a point. “All right. I promise I won’t make you worry too much.”

I knew what she was trying to say. To her, I was a kid—a kid who could beat dragons, but still a kid nonetheless. I could understand that outlook. In my previous life, society overall wanted children to be happy and healthy as a basic rule. But I had different ambitions now. As long as I was dedicated to making my sisters happy, I knew I’d have to accept a certain amount of personal risk. Besides, I adored the idea of being an adventurer. A job with the freedom to do what I wanted, when I wanted—how perfect!

But right now, I had things to do. “Anyway, I’ll be going now,” I said.

“I know I just ran my mouth about your safety, but don’t you want to take a job today?” asked Arisa.

“I only wanted to register.”

“I see. Well, I’ll see you later, then. Come visit whenever I’m on shift, okay?” She winked at me. I could feel my cheeks heating up.

“I-I’ll think about it!” I couldn’t think of a clever response on the spot, so I just waved goodbye and left the guild flustered.

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I tucked my new Adventurer Card into the safe confines of my storage bag, then left town.

Just as Arisa had told me, I was let through the south gate without having to pay a fee when I showed my card to the guards. This card really *was* handy. The guild hadn’t charged me anything when I registered with them, so how were they making a profit?

At any rate, I flooded my legs with magecraft energies and sprinted through the forest as I mulled over my experience at the adventurer’s guild. I should’ve at least checked what sort of jobs there were before leaving instead of getting all embarrassed, or stuck around inside the guild hall to see if I could catch more rumors about that illness I’d heard about. There were a lot of things that piqued my curiosity there.

Especially the rumors. Claus had mentioned that a lot of people

were falling ill lately, and it'd been especially bad in a residential quarter on the east side of town. The cause was currently unknown, but he'd wryly joked that the church's healers must have been making a killing.

"Please don't tell me it's a plague or something," I muttered to myself.

"Hm? What was that about a plague, Huey?" Fouré, sharp-eared as ever, had picked up on my mumbling. Right, I could just ask her!

"I heard that a lot of people were getting sick just before I arrived in town. I was just wondering if there was some sort of bug going around or something."

"Hmmm... Considering the symptoms of the afflicted, it's not exactly a simple cold."

"Do you know something about it, Fouré?"

"Of course I do! I'm the fairy who birthed godcraft into this world, after all. Judging by what's on the wind and in the air, I can tell something's happening."

"Do you mind telling me what's causing it?"

"Sure, I could tell you...but I think you're still too inexperienced to deal with it." She shook her head.

"What do you mean?"

"The problem you're asking about is caused by a curse."

"A curse..." I mused. While training me in spellcraft, Cult had told me that curses were spellcraft at their core—they directly affected another person's physical body, basically afflicting them with debuffs.

But why was a curse running rampant in the middle of town? Did someone own some kind of corrupted artifact or something? Or was there a bad actor jinxing the town on purpose?

"You're dying to look into it, huh, Huey?"

"Well, yeah. I can't just ignore hearing that there's a curse hanging over my home."

"I thought you'd say that. Let me think..." hummed Fouré. "How about learning the Cursebreaker ability? You've got enough godcraft energy built up by now, so you'd be perfectly capable of learning it, I'd say. But personally, I think you shouldn't have to rush things. That's why I said what I said."

"I'll do it. I want to know in case Armeria or Cosmos get cursed, anyway."

"Okay. I'll help you find the source. Until we locate that, someone else can deal with it. There are plenty of healers in town who can use godcraft, after all," Aruna remarked, joining the conversation.

"Yeah. I'll just do what I can and try not to rush things too much."

"Excellent response, Hisui. I was concerned you might want to drop everything to go hunt down the cause of the curse." Arms crossed over her chest, Aruna laughed quietly, looking rather pleased.

"I couldn't do that. I still need to finish building the house, and I need to take jobs from the guild. If the illness isn't something that I need to handle personally, I'm better off just keeping an eye on the situation—assuming that someone else can take care of it."

"Hee hee. You're so very rational, dear one." Cult joined in on our conversation, which had now turned to the topic of the house. Still... Deep down, the curse still weighed on my mind. I was getting a real bad feeling about it.

After we finished chatting, the four of us immediately got back to working together on the house.

"Cult, could you attach it to that wall there?" I asked.

Aruna and Fouré handled the raw lumber and, with me pitching in as a third pair of hands, we transferred the wood to the location of our future house and began fitting it all together. Cult used her spellcraft to bind the wood together—or, more precisely, she was fusing the separate logs into one. The reason for this was simply because fusing them made it significantly more durable than joining together individual parts. The house itself was starting to become a single mass of shaped wood.

"Hey, I just need to put the wood together like this over here, right?" Fouré asked.

I looked at her, appraising the lumber she was carrying. "Oh, the piece you're holding? Put it over on the other side. If we put them all together in one spot, it won't look very nice."

She didn't seem to like that. "Aw, why not? It's all going to end

up in the wall anyway, so what's the difference?"

"We need to keep the walls uniform in case we end up making a mistake somewhere. Besides, the piece you have there isn't meant for the walls, but the ceiling. Look, it's larger than the others."

"What?!"

"Let's try not to make any obvious mistakes like that," I gently chided her.

Fouré laughed awkwardly to disguise her embarrassment. "I've never built a house before! I'm basically clueless."

"You haven't ever made a house for yourselves?" I asked. Aruna and Fouré jumped on my innocuous question as we watched Cult put the lumber together.

Aruna shook her head. "Never. Being fairies, we have no need of a dwelling, remember?"

"If we built something somewhere, people would be so confused the moment they found it. They can't see us, after all," Fouré followed.

"Oh, right." That fact had slipped my mind.

"You can chat with us and think nothing of it, but the average person doesn't have that ability."

"Then, does that mean...you guys are just doing this for me? I'm sorry for making you go through the trouble." Now that I thought about it, I was the one who'd originally suggested building a house. When Fouré had said she wanted to live together, maybe she'd just been just going along with the idea to support me.

As I scratched the back of my head in embarrassment, the three goddesses all jumped to deny my conjecture. They each shook their heads as they explained.

"Of course we aren't just doing it for you. We want to live with you—that's why we're helping."

"Well, I guess I didn't care about living in a house or whatever, but I do want to try it if you're going to be there too, Huey!"

Cult giggled. "Please don't diminish yourself so, dear one. You needn't think so poorly about the situation. We deeply treasure your thoughts and feelings, so there was no question whether we'd help or not if it meant making your dream come true. We don't do

anything we don't want to—and rest assured that if we *don't*, you will hear of it."

"So the fact that you didn't object means..."

"That we're having fun building the house with you," Fouré chirped.

"Ah ha ha... Guess I made you guys worry about me for nothing. Sorry."

"Not at all. Your modesty and kindness is a virtue, dear one. But now that you know exactly how we feel about this, there's only one thing to do." With that, Cult reached out to my face without skipping a beat and softly stroked my cheek. While the others looked on in exasperation, there was an undercurrent of gentle kindness in their gazes.

From my point of view, the three goddesses were always kinder toward me than they were even to one another. They truly were *my* goddesses. As I offered them my prayers deep in my heart, I got back to working on the house.

"Thank you, Aruna, Fouré, Cult. I...am going to go put this lumber over there, okay?"

"Please do. Thank you," replied Aruna.

Though only a few hours had passed since we began work today, the house we were pouring our hopes and desires into was slowly but surely nearing completion. At this rate, we'd be done by dusk.

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After a few hours of steady work as I chatted with the goddesses, I noticed the sky was already painted with the pinks and oranges of dusk. While I didn't know the exact time of day, I was certain it was nearly nightfall. Still, it was well worth the effort.

"All dooone!" I whooped, looking up at the large, single-floor building that rose up before us. "Man, we sure finished that way faster than I expected."

Aruna, Fouré, and Cult had all been amazing at construction. Their immense strength let them transport tons of lumber all at once, and since they were fairies, they could fly anywhere they

wanted while working. Height wasn't an issue for them.

On top of that, Cult was also processing the wood into perfect lumber, so we were able to build the house faster and better than if we'd used ordinary wood. She truly was a goddess—mere mortals wouldn't be able to pull that off.

"Good job, Hisui. We made a pretty good house, didn't we?" Aruna said triumphantly.

"Nice work, Huey! It's as fancy as I imagined!" chirped Fouré.

"Wonderful!" Cult clapped her hands together. "It's sturdy enough to withstand a punch from Aruna, as long as she holds back."

I smiled. "Thanks for working so hard on it, everyone. It wouldn't have been possible to make a house this nice without all of you pitching in." I then thanked each of the goddesses in turn. "Thanks, Fouré, for drawing up the design plans with me, and thanks to Cult too—you helped make sure it looked as good as it does." Each of them smiled pleasantly in satisfaction.

"Let's work on furniture and decorations tomorrow," I continued. "I'd like to set up a large bath too. We could make it outside while we're at it—an open-air bath might be fun. It'd be awesome if a hot spring welled up here too..."

That being said, there was a lake literally right in front of me. I doubted there'd be anything as convenient as a hot spring source around here. But using regular old hot water to warm up would be plenty comfy anyway. As long as I could clean myself, I'd have nothing to complain about.

"A hot spring? I've heard of those. It's a pool of hot water mortals sit in, isn't it?"

My ears pricked up at Cult's mumbling. Her words hadn't been meant for me, but given her comment, it sounded like the goddesses knew of them. That must mean that, even in a sword-and-sorcery fantasy world, even hot springs were a common sight. The Lycoris estate didn't have one, but maybe there were other towns that were famed for their hot springs.

"Is it different from just putting hot water into a bath?" Fouré wondered aloud.

"It is a little different, Fouré. Water's ordinarily heated to make a

bath, but a hot spring is filled with warm water that wells up naturally from deep underground. People can't really *make* hot springs, per se."

Personally, as far as bathing went, I didn't think there *was* much difference between hot springs and filling a super huge tub with hot water. The real difference was how relaxing they were—the comfort provided by a bath and a hot spring were ostensibly on different levels. But as I'd only gone to a hot spring a handful of times in my previous life, I wasn't entirely certain of the details.

"Hmm... So natural baths and created ones are different, huh? Is there something special about hot water from a spring?" asked Fouré, looking at me.

"Apparently it can do things like melt your fatigue away or clear up your skin... At least, that's what I've heard. I don't really know for sure," I clarified.

"That's amazing! Then all we need to do is have Aruna dig some holes in the ground! Let's try to find a hot spring!"

"Don't be ridiculous," Aruna sighed. "If you could find them just anywhere, then Hisui wouldn't have bothered bringing it up. He's obviously being wistful about having one because we can't just *find* one here."

"Since we're directly next to a lake, we can't just start digging holes wherever we want," I agreed. "Even if we searched only in safe places that wouldn't affect the landscape much, it'd take a lot of time."

I was pretty sure the odds of discovering a hot spring here were just about zero—it would just be too convenient a coincidence. And the farther we got from the house we'd literally just built, the harder it'd be to maintain a hot spring even if we did find one.

"I'll do my best to dig one up anyway! I wanna try a hot spring bath sooo bad!"

"If Hisui makes a barrier artifact, its upkeep shouldn't be too hard to take care of... But no. Denied."

"Awww..."

Aruna shot Fouré's excitement down instantly. The latter's expression darkened, and she glared at Aruna. But Aruna hadn't

meant to just shoot down Fouré's idea because it was irrational—she immediately followed up with a suggestion of her own.

"If you want a hot spring so badly, we should simply have Cult create one."

"You want me to make one?" Cult blinked.

"Oh! That's a fantastic idea! Cult could make the perfect hot spring, and it'd be sooo easy to take care of if we made it here, right next to the house, Huey!"

"Can we really just go ahead and make a hot spring like that? We haven't even asked Cult if she'd do it."

"Hee hee. I don't mind making one in the least. This house belongs to the four of us, after all—a hot spring of my own making wouldn't be out of the ordinary here."

I felt a little bad that the hard work was being shoved onto Cult's plate, but I honestly wanted a hot spring too. Given that Cult didn't refuse the job of making one, though, I decided to take her up on her offer.

"That'd be great, Cult. Thank you."

"Think nothing of it. Anyway, let's discuss what sort of hot spring we want to make."

Fouré's hand shot into the air. "Ooh, me first, me first! We have to make it so the water freshens up our skin and makes it pretty!" she exclaimed, passionately pushing for her idea.

"Skin care is a pretty common benefit of hot springs," I said, nodding.

"I'd like the hot spring to take care of physical exhaustion well—the stronger the effect, the better. The aches and pains from training are best cured with a natural remedy," remarked Aruna.

"But if Cult's making it, can it really be called natural?"

"Of course."

It technically wouldn't be *man*-made, I supposed. But I figured having a way to wash away fatigue would be great, so I approved Aruna's request as well.

"Dear one, do you know of any other effects I ought to incorporate?"

"Let me think... I guess some hot springs are said to be good for

your health?”

“Is that different from the physical rejuvenation Aruna asked for?”

“I guess they are pretty much the same. Hmm, what else,” I mused, trying to think. “Maybe they improve your metabolism or repair frayed nerves?”

“I don’t get it,” groaned Fouré.

Urgh. Guess that was a clear-cut rejection of my idea. I shouldn’t be surprised—those were kind of abstract concepts people might not be able to wrap their minds around just from hearing...and to be honest, I didn’t really know exactly what I meant either.

“Well, for now, I’ll create a hot spring with Fouré’s and Aruna’s two requests in mind. With my power, it’ll be done in a jiffy.”

“As for the location,” I said pensively, “how about we put it behind the house?”

“Very well.”

With my guidance, Cult created a large hot spring. There was enough space in it to fit at least ten people with room to spare, which we managed to pull off through her ability to manipulate the properties of objects.

The spring was crafted so it was already filled with hot water. Steam wafted off its surface in billowing puffs, spreading a mysterious fragrance through the air.

“The water...smells like flowers?”

“The hot springs I’ve seen before have a rather caustic smell that I don’t enjoy, so I decided to change that as well. The effects of the water are still as requested. I only took the liberty of adjusting the scent.”

“Thanks Cult, I should’ve known you’d pick up on something like that. I’m pretty sure anyone else would be shocked to know how much you put yourself out there for me.”

Cult had made the hot spring such that the bath was fed directly from underground. I touched the water briefly and noticed she’d also already adjusted the temperature—it was probably around forty to forty-three degrees Celsius. Perfect.

“All right! Let’s jump in!” chirped Fouré.

“Huh? But I was just about to head back to town,” I replied,

confused.

Evening had already fallen. Although the residual heat of summer still remained, it was autumn now, and so the skies darkened into dusk a little earlier than usual. The town gates would be closed in a scant two hours. I'd be forced to camp out in the wilderness if I missed the gate closure. It wouldn't be a problem to just fashion a bed, but then I'd have to come up with an excuse to give Armeria and Cosmos for why I hadn't returned, and that was significantly more difficult. And pointless, to be honest—no matter what I told them, they'd be angry regardless, and I didn't want that.

"Let's try it out tomorrow. If I make Armeria and Cosmos angry, they might not let me leave the Lycoris estate ever again."

"Then I will simply bring you back to town myself once we're done."

"Aruna?!" What are you saying, Aruna!

"That's a lovely idea. That shouldn't take any time at all," Cult chimed in.

"You too, Cult?" I doubted I could wriggle out of this situation, especially considering the deadly serious look on each of their faces.

"Just give up already, Huey! Let's all try out the hot springs together!"

"T-Together?! We can't do that, Fouré!" I squeaked.

"Why not? I don't know what's so bad about it. We're fairies, you're mentally an adult, and this is just some nice, wholesome bathing."

"No, no, no! Mixed gender bathing isn't wholesome to begin with!"

"What do you mean? This is the house we all worked together to build. I think to celebrate, we should all take a bath together too." Fouré sadly hung her head, gaze turned downcast. She looked like she was about to cry, as though I'd hurt her terribly. As for me... My heart always melted when I saw someone in distress.

Turning everything over in my mind, I likewise hung my head in defeat. I wasn't getting out of this.

I sighed. "All right, fine. I just have to take a bath with you all, right?" As long as we wore towels, at least it'd be a little better than

nothing. With that thought in mind, I acquiesced to their demands.

"Yay! Me first, then!" Fouré whooped.

Without a shred of hesitation, Fouré magicked away her clothing, and stood before the rest of us fully nude. Her glorious twins jiggled and bounced with abandon...straight into my line of sight. The heat rose to my cheeks instantly as they burned red.

"I shall undress as well," declared Cult.

Following Fouré's lead, Cult did away with her clothing as well. It was a disaster—when I turned away from Fouré, my eyes fell directly on Cult. She was just as nude as Fouré, and her massive pillows—which dwarfed Fouré's by several degrees—filled my vision.

"Ahhhhh!" I couldn't hold in my shriek, and I instantly squeezed my eyes shut and turned around. But just my luck—Aruna was standing there. She stopped me from bolting away.

"What are you doing, Hisui? Come on, get your clothes off and let's have our bath," she said matter-of-factly and stripped my layers of clothing from me. Her dexterity and speed had me shaking like a leaf, although that might've been from the chill; I'd been left completely exposed. This was a sure demonstration of the War Goddess's skill, if anything!

I couldn't even begin to protest, much less actually object. She'd pulled my clothes off so smoothly it was as though I'd shown up here already naked. Clothes left in a heap on the ground, I instinctively tried to run like a spooked deer, but Aruna—who was also nude—caught me before I could get far and held me close.

Th-This sensation! Aruna was naked as well, after all... I knew exactly what I was feeling, even with my eyes closed.

"I'll go rinse myself off first!" I yelped, but Aruna wasn't about to be tricked.

"And where would you do that? We only have the bath here, so don't even try that crap with me," she said tersely, then lightly plunked me into the hot spring.

Hey, I could've at least poured some water over myself first! But the cries of my heart went unheard. Still, this was a good reminder of how humans were creatures of extreme adaptability—though my mind was consumed by difficult feelings of embarrassment and

shame, the pleasure of the hot spring made all those thoughts fly out of my head once I entered the water.

"This...feels so good..." The consternation I'd felt just a moment ago had disappeared. I sighed happily, absorbing the relaxing heat of the water.

"Taking a bath like this once in a while is pretty nice, isn't it, Hisui?" said Aruna.

"Yeah..." I nodded. "When I was still living back home in Clematis, I didn't get to take a hot bath like this even once. Even when I took a bath with Azalea and my other sisters, there was only so much water we could use, and given how poor my family was, we didn't even have enough for one person to sit and stretch out in. So a big bath like this really takes me back to my old life."

"Hee hee. But you can use the bath at the Lycoris manor however you like, can't you? Is this bath really that much different from that one?"

"It's *completely* different! Really, honestly different. This hot spring you've made has to be the best in the world."

"Oh! If you're that pleased with it, then it was well worth making."

I hadn't thought particularly hard about my answer, but Cult sighed happily in response and glided over to me. The steam somewhat obscured things near me, but once she got close enough, it didn't stop me from seeing the contours of her body with perfect clarity. Her breasts especially stood out, highlighted by the steam and water. Startled, I turned to avert my eyes. Then, just when I'd drummed up the nerve to give her a sidelong glance, I felt a soft sensation pressing into my back and arms.

"Hey! Cult's getting all cuddly with Huey! That's not fair, not fair at all!" Fouré was right—Cult had wrapped her arms around me in an embrace, and the softness that had pushed up against me was undoubtedly her breasts. I tried to convince myself that I was just imagining things, but thanks to Fouré's open declaration, I was forced to face the facts. As awkward as it was, this was honestly getting me kinda worked up.

To make things worse, Fouré also rushed over to us, splashing

water as she went. She grabbed my right arm, which was conveniently free, and clung to it, trying to pry me away from Cult.

"H-Hey... Come on, you two, could you at least keep things quiet and relaxed while we're in the bath?" I complained.

"I'm only doing this because Cult's trying to seduce you! I think you're better off away from her."

Cult giggled at this accusation. "But I am the very person who made this hot spring. I don't mean to discount Hisui's help either. But I think you ought to be the one to back off, Fouré, since you weren't much help at all."

"What?! I'll admit I couldn't help much aside from removing water from the wood, but still! You can't just pooh-pooh me like this!"

I tried to soothe Fouré as she shouted complaints about Cult's choice of words. I knew Fouré had tried to help as best she could—at the very least, she'd done more for the house than I had.

"Stop making a fuss, you two. Your opinions are both subjective and pointless—Hisui's here to relax, not listen to you two argue. Leave the yelling for later." As the only one among the three with any sort of conscience, Aruna sighed deeply as she told the others off. Problematically, however, she'd also entered my field of view. I couldn't budge, seeing as both my right and left arms were firmly stuck in Cult's and Fouré's grips.

"Hmph. You only did the bare minimum, Aruna! So stop talking down at us and get off your high horse!" shouted Fouré.

"I agree. You may take the high moral ground, but I know you'll make your own moves while we aren't watching. That's just playing dirty," accused Cult.

"Just who are you calling dirty?! I don't want to hear that from either of you!" huffed Aruna.

Even though we were in a hot spring, the goddesses were being as loud and noisy as always with their usual arguing. It was impossible to actually relax, especially since...they were all fighting nude. Every time one of them huffed in anger, my mind was ejected into the stratosphere by the swaying and heaving of their plump bosoms. Even Aruna's were lethal weapons despite their petite size,

now that they weren't concealed by her usual ensemble.

A short distance away, Dandelion was swimming around, taking to the water like a duck. I couldn't help but be jealous of his freedom to enjoy his bath.

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Our time in the bath ended up being lively and fun (and more than just a little embarrassing) but as with all good things, it finally came to a close. After I got out of the hot spring and dressed myself, Aruna picked me up in a bridal carry, making good on her offer to bring me back to town.

Aruna had trained herself both physically and magically to her absolute limits, which allowed her to move in complete silence. We swept through the forest with nary a rustle. I knew she was augmenting the strength of her legs, but I wondered what skill allowed her to move without a sound.

While I was marveling at her transcendent technique—though I couldn't make heads or tails of how it worked—we reached the vicinity of the town's south gates within a scant few minutes. I had Aruna set me down at the edge of the woods where no one was likely to be watching, and walked the rest of the way back. As I was walking, however, it suddenly struck me as odd that she had brought me here in a bridal carry. Did she really *have* to do that? Surely there was some other way.

At any rate, I barely made it through the gates before they closed. The bath had done wonders for my fatigue, so I didn't feel it necessary to rest just yet, but I headed urgently toward the Lycoris estate regardless.

En route, however, I was stopped by loud cries.

"You people need to know the glory and wonder of Erebos!"

"What's going on?" I muttered to myself, distracted from my goal of getting home.

At the plaza in the center of town, near the Lycoris estate, a group of men in familiar garb were declaiming with their arms dramatically raised in the air.

These men were worshippers of Erebos. I'd seen them here and there around town since I'd arrived—they were hard to miss, given their dark robes and habit of drawing their hoods low to conceal their faces. The acolytes were insistent on spreading the word of Erebos, but very few people in Lycoris seemed to be interested. Shunned everywhere they went, the number of people willing to lend them an ear was close to zero.

"They believe in such a strange god, don't they? I can't believe they're still at it even at this hour... I suppose they're enthusiastic, at least," Fouré observed.

"You shouldn't call their god strange. We may not understand their beliefs, but everyone needs something to put their faith in. As long as it doesn't cause problems for others, I think people should have freedom of religion," I gently admonished.

"Huey, you're so nice! That was a pretty kind thing to say!"

"But they've noticed you were looking at them, and they're coming this way. Be on guard, Hisui. There's something odd about them," warned Aruna.

"Huh?"

Distracted by my whispered conversation with Fouré, I hadn't noticed them coming. My reaction came far too late—they were already standing right in front of me.

"Hello, boy. You were watching us, yes? Are you interested in Erebos?" one of them asked.

"Oh, um... Not really..." I stuttered.

"That's a shame! Erebos is a wonderful god, filled with boundless love and mercy for all living creatures. All the happiness and fortune in the world is a blessing from the great Erebos!"

"R-Right..."

I had told Fouré just a moment ago that I thought people were free to choose their religion so long as they didn't disturb other people, but as it turned out, their proselytizing was already cranking up the pressure. If they weren't handled with finesse, I felt like this might spark a conflict between them and worshippers of the three goddesses. The Trinity faithful were far from radical as a rule, but given that the followers of Erebos were essentially denying the

power of the goddesses in their preaching, I doubted they would stay quiet forever.

"Interested in Erebos now? If you are, then I can tell you much, much more..." The man trailed off, expectantly.

I decided to decline. "Sorry, but I follow the Trinity, so I'm not all that interested in other religions."

"You're one of their believers too?!"

"Ah!" I squeaked.

One of the nearby preachers suddenly shouted, startling me. He was also trembling, but out of passion rather than shock, and his voice was filled with raw emotion as he continued.

"People have extolled the glory of the three founding goddesses since antiquity! How do you people not understand the greatness of our beloved Erebos?! Each and every one of you keep going on and on about the Trinity...but what exactly have those three done for you—or any of us?!"

His shrill cries rang through the plaza. The area had been filled with its usual hustle and bustle, but everything suddenly fell silent at this. All eyes were now focused on the man.

"You should keep that to yourself. If the Trinity orthodoxy hears you, they'll be angry for sure," I lectured him, not wanting to just stay quiet.

"Shut up, boy!" The acolyte's voice was laden with irritation, but I'm sure I sounded the same—I couldn't stand by and listen to someone insult Aruna and the others. "Damned whelp, wagging your tail for the goddesses," he sneered. "Divine punishment be upon you—"

"Stop! Not in a place like this!"

The man had moved to pull something from his robes, but the other black-garbed men immediately dogpiled him. In the end, he didn't do anything, but it was clear he'd been about to start a fight.

I hurried away from the group of Erebos faithful who had ganged up on me and fled toward the manor. "Maybe freedom of religion shouldn't extend to *that*," I muttered to myself.

I had no idea what those acolytes were trying to do, but whatever it was, they were being far too extreme about it. They

should've been more understanding of others—godliness was in the eye of the beholder, after all, and it ought to stay that way.

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"Damn that smart-mouthed brat!"

Once Hisui had disappeared into the crowd, the man who'd been about to start a riot hissed spitefully, his voice overwhelmed with a savage anger.

One of the other acolytes cut into his snarling. "Cool it, moron. If you use that here, people would know we're to blame for all this. Just why do you think His Grace deigned to give us that artifact in the first place?"

"Oh, shut up! It's just so frustrating... Every single one of those sheep milling around follow the Trinity. No one will stop to listen, and they all turn away from us, like we're nothing more than troublemakers. Aren't you angry about that too?!"

"Yeah, but if we give in to anger, then we can't achieve our goal. We've wanted to change this town for so long—it *must* change. They'll all realize soon enough that Erebos's guidance is needed to achieve true happiness."

Another acolyte, the one who had originally restrained the resentful man, spoke up, his voice full of rapture. His voice dispelled his comrade's anger instantly.

"Hmph. Now that you mention it, I suppose it is about time to put our plan into action."

"Yes. We've already captured the target. Once imbued with the curse and released, we'll see this town thrown into mayhem. His Grace grieves for the current state of affairs in this town, so we will begin the mission in the next few days."

"Good. If that brat gets cursed, let's just abandon him. It'll be beyond our ability to cure, y'know what I'm saying?"

"You're ridiculous, you know that? But, I get it—we gotta triage the afflicted and all... It's not like we can get to everyone in time. Do whatever you want."

"I will! Ha ha!"

Taking care to keep their voices low enough that others around them couldn't hear their conversation, the men continued their reprehensible discussion. Slowly but surely, their evil aspirations began to close around this sleepy town...but its inhabitants had yet to realize.

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After returning home, I managed to avoid a dressing down from Armeria and Cosmos, and went to bed. Soon enough, the sun had risen on the next day.

As we sat down for breakfast, I decided to inform Claus of my decision to move out of the estate as soon as possible—barring any issues, I'd be out today. Unsurprisingly, my sisters looked terribly displeased with my decision, but aside from a little bit of grumbling about how I was being too hasty, no one attempted to stop me.

Since I could craft furniture at Claus's manor, I went out into the courtyard to practice spellcraft and made item after item for my new home. As I toiled away, though, I heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Hm?"

Since whoever it was hadn't greeted me, I could safely assume it wasn't a servant. Turning back to look, I noticed Rose had come out into the courtyard and was heading straight toward me.

"Lady Rose?" I called out to her.

She greeted me warmly. "Hello, Lord Hisui. I'm not distracting you, am I?"

"Not at all. I'm just making furniture, I'm happy to chat if you like."

"Thank you. I actually have a favor to ask..."

"What do you need?"

"You'll be leaving the estate today and living outside of town from now on, right?"

"That's the plan, yes," I said as I put the finishing touches on a bed I was making. I had a wardrobe done as well, plus a table and some chairs, so I was now fully prepared for the bare minimum of

decent living in my new abode.

"Then, before you go... Could you come observe my godcraft lesson?" Rose asked.

"Your lesson? Oh right, you hired a private tutor," I recalled.

"Yes. Today's lesson will be starting soon. I won't ask you to go out of your way to help my tutor teach me, but...I'd be happy if you only came to watch."

"Observation, huh?"

From what I'd heard, Rose understood godcraft at a fundamental level, but she had little knowledge of how to apply it, and even less experience actually using it. Essentially, she would still be learning the practical basics. Since I'd long mastered the fundamentals, her lessons were sure to be so dull that I doubted I could keep from yawning.

On the other hand, I still owed Claus quite a bit, and I had promised to help her learn. Watching the lesson might not have been a half-bad idea. After all, I wasn't going to get many opportunities to teach her once I'd moved out.

Quickly coming to a decision, I nodded. "All right. If you're happy to have me there, I can try giving you some advice too. I'm not sure if you'll need it, though."

"Oh goodness, thank you so much! I'm so happy to hear that, Lord Hisui."

Throwing both hands into the air cheerfully, she did a pirouette on the spot. She was awfully excited for something as unremarkable as someone agreeing to observe her lesson... Not that that was a bad thing.

Rose then asked if she could watch me make furniture, so together we chatted away the morning as I kept crafting. When noon came, we had our lunch—delicious as always—in the dining room, and when we finished, we headed to a guest room. Rose's godcraft lessons were apparently going to take place there.

Together, Rose and I climbed the stairs to the second floor. We entered an unused room directly across the hall from my own, and there we waited for about ten minutes.

Finally, the door opened.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Lady Rose. Today we'll begin your lessons in godcraft," a tenor voice began, but faltered when its owner took stock of me. "Oh? Who's this little boy?"

The person who entered the room was a young man who appeared to be somewhere in his twenties. His hair fell to about his shoulders, with combed-back bangs and a single lock styled into a curious zigzag falling across his face. I kinda wondered how he'd achieved that zigzag thing, actually, but...

Overall, I thought he looked like a sleazeball, so he didn't exactly present a good first impression.

For starters, this was the residence of the marquis, a man who was situated quite high on the social ladder, and his daughter—and yet the tutor had opened the door without knocking, which was a terrible faux pas among nobility.

Furthermore, he'd been kind of dismissive in referring to me, despite the fact that we were strangers. Nor did he hide his thoughts very well: His raised eyebrow told me that he disapproved of this uninvited guest. Seeing as I was seated next to Rose, the obvious assumption would've been that I was also a noble of high rank... Never mind that I was actually just the youngest son of a baron, therefore occupying the lowest spot on the social ladder for nobles.

"This is Lord Hisui. He came to Lycoris from the neighboring barony of Clematis—and he saved my life," Rose said, introducing me.

"Clematis? I don't remember hearing that name before," the man said with a shrug.

What a jerk. I knew my home was a poverty-stricken barony in the middle of nowhere, but he still should've been *polite* about it. I didn't like Clematis, but I still had a certain amount of hometown pride about it.

"Well, never mind. It's fine. I am Graeger, the second son of House Clerkin."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," I said, nodding.

I honestly didn't want to bow down to a slimeball like him, but given that he was Rose's tutor, I couldn't pick a fight with him—

especially not in front of Rose herself. I decided to play the part of a well-mannered child.

Graeger turned his attention from me to Rose. "At any rate, why is he here, Lady Rose?"

"Hisui can also use godcraft, and he's so skilled that even my father acknowledges his proficiency. I thought he might be able to give me some advice," she explained.

"Is that so? Even though *I'm* here?" Graeger said, clearly offended.

"I don't mean to discount your skill, Lord Graeger. This is perhaps not the most delicate way of describing the situation, but I meant for Lord Hisui's advice to be accessory to your tutelage. The more people there are, the more things we might notice, don't you agree?"

"I suppose, but even so..." Graeger muttered, clicking his tongue disdainfully before addressing me. "Whatever. Very well. I'll allow your participation, given the lady is so insistent."

Graeger turned around, his green robes whipping through the air with a noticeable flap, and he took several paces back. His lips then stretched into a bold grin. "Let's start our godcraft training at once, then. Are you ready, Lady Rose?"

"I am," she nodded. "Go right ahead, Lord Graeger."

Graeger didn't forget to snap at me before beginning the lesson, though. "And *you*—remain seated and watch. Don't speak unless you're spoken to, got it?"

I bit back my irritation before responding. "All right."

Ugh, this guy was obnoxious as hell! He obviously saw me as an enemy. I figured he hadn't gotten a good impression of me, since I was basically here as a plus-one to dish out pointers, but he wasn't even trying to disguise his open contempt.

Most people would have been polite enough to at least make an effort to keep all that tucked away. Did he look down on me because I was from a house of lower standing than his? If he knew I'd killed a basilisk and a green dragon before coming to this town, maybe he'd change his tune... Wait. Crap.

Very belatedly, I realized something that was bound to give me a

headache.

Just now, Rose had introduced me to him by explaining that I could use godcraft, but he'd easily be able to guess that I could use magecraft too if he ever found out I'd fought those monsters. If that happened, the fact that I could use multiple kinds of magic would surely spread to other people than just Claus and Rose.

The only other people who knew about the dragon were the guildmaster of the adventurer's guild, and Arisa, who'd taken care of my registration. I doubted either of those two would leak the story, but at the same time, I didn't want to deal with any more trouble than necessary. Maybe I should've asked Rose not to say anything beforehand so I could've been sure...

"Come, let's begin by reviewing what we practiced last time," said Graeger.

"Hmm... Oh yes, I should focus on channeling godcraft energies into my right hand to manifest healing powers, right?" asked Rose.

"That's correct. Now watch closely! I shall demonstrate."

"Huh?" Upon hearing the content of Rose's lesson, my confusion fell from my mouth before I could stop it. Luckily, neither of them noticed... Or at least, they didn't acknowledge it if they did. Graeger continued with the training session, balling his right hand into a fist, which began to emanate a soft, golden light.

He'd begun to channel godcraft energy. From what I could tell, his skill with control and manipulation was rather limited—the light was barely visible, and he'd only generated enough energy to barely cover his fist.

"Wooow, blegh. Is he even trying? His output is complete garbage," Fouré groaned from somewhere behind me. She evidently thought little of Graeger's effort, but that wasn't a surprise considering she measured everything against both her ability and mine.

While her comment had been rather harsh, I could also tell that his skill with godcraft wasn't nearly good enough to heal much of anything. At best, he might be able to fix a skinned knee.

This couldn't be the extent of his real ability, right? I mean, he'd been flashing around that arrogant, shit-eating grin all this time...

"I'll...try it too!"

After watching Graeger's demonstration, Rose balled up her own fist and attempted to channel her energy, copying what she'd observed. But she was still a complete beginner, as Claus had previously mentioned, and she couldn't really gather the power into her hand. From what I could tell, she could actually release some amount of godcraft energy, but her output was too low and her control too poor. Not even a single mote of light appeared.

"That's no good, Lady Rose. You must concentrate harder! Focus your energy into your hand!" Graeger scolded.

"A-All right!" she responded, voice cracking.

Sweat dripped from her brow as she braced herself after the scolding, body tensing as she attempted to force the energy to coalesce. Activating godcraft power didn't require force, but I could understand the thought process behind her actions—surely, her powers would be easier to use if she exerted herself. But the more she developed her powers, the less she'd have to do that, so it was a bad habit to develop—and anyway, she had much more pressing issues than her output.

"Um... I don't think this exercise is appropriate for a beginner of your level, Lady Rose," I cautiously put forth.

"Huh? R-Really?" Rose asked, glancing at me.

"Didn't I tell you not to disturb the lesson? Be quiet," Graeger snapped, evidently displeased. The look on his face made it clear that he thought I was being a nuisance. Rose, on the other hand, was fairly pleading for help with her eyes.

Before the lesson had started, I'd figured this would be a simple job—all I had to do was watch and be done with it. But I just couldn't keep my mouth shut after seeing the tutor's terrible attempt at teaching.

"I won't interfere," I finally retorted. "I only thought to give Lady Rose some advice so she might learn to use her power faster."

"And I'm telling you that *is* interfering. Are you taking issue with my approach?"

"I am."

"What?!" A vein bulged on his temple at my immediate response

to his bait.

He looked furious. Maybe he was the short-tempered type? At any rate, I could guess what had made him this annoyed, but I didn't want him to snuff out Rose's talent before it even began to blossom. Given that her powers had awakened at eight years of age, she could very well become an incredibly gifted healer one day... Though maybe that was jumping the gun a little bit.

"Hmph! If you're so certain my approach is wrong, then very well. I will grant you leave to speak, even though whatever you say will be mere childish nonsense," acquiesced Graeger, voice dripping with disdain.

I didn't want to hear that from the likes of him...but since he was letting me talk, I decided to give Rose my full advice.

"All right. First of all, I'll teach you how to visualize a concrete image of releasing your godcraft power. It's really hard to successfully channel energy without an explanation of how to actually do it, so for starters, try to sense the godcraft energy circulating through your body. When you do, try to construct an image, little by little, of it flowing through your veins like blood. But first and foremost, you should focus on just sensing its presence."

"So I have to be able to feel the magic before I can control it," Rose hummed thoughtfully.

Figures. I doubted she'd actually been told how to channel energy in detail by that trashy tutor, and now it was painfully clear I was right. Her eyelashes fluttered as she blinked, but eventually she closed her eyes at my instruction and began to focus.

"You should've felt the godcraft energies in you when you first awakened to your powers. Keep that feeling in mind and try moving the energy around a little. Don't worry about channeling it anywhere specific yet; learning to manipulate it is the first step," I said, trying to guide her in the basics.

"Sense the godcraft in me...and manipulate it," she repeated to herself as she concentrated.

These fundamentals went for any of the three powers—the first step was always to sense the magic, then to manipulate it. Only after learning to do that could a person begin to make use of their

power. Trying to release energy before learning to manipulate it was awfully foolish.

According to Claus, this tutor had graduated from the academy in the royal capital, right? But this was the most basic of basics, practically Magic 101! It was possible that he was teaching her wrong deliberately, or maybe he hadn't ever learned it the right way himself...or he could just be incredibly stupid. No matter what the reason, I found myself doubting that he really was a graduate of any upstanding institution whatsoever.

"You don't have to rush yourself. Take your time. This isn't something that can be done in a day."

"All right," she nodded demurely.

Graeger clicked his tongue again. "If you waste your time listening to him, your peers will leave you in the dust!"

"Excuse me?" I snapped, exasperated. "Lady Rose awakened to her powers at *eight*. She's more likely to be the one leaving everyone else in the dust."

It was common knowledge that magic only awoke in people when they were at least ten years of age. Despite that, Rose's powers had come to her a full two years before the prescribed time, so she had at least two years' worth of head start compared to others her age. What she really should be doing was taking the time to learn at her own pace, without rushing things.

"Shut up! I am a veteran healer and graduate of a prestigious school, far more learned in the ways of godcraft than a child like you!" Graeger snapped.

"Yeah? Well, that's neat," I replied dismissively. If his earlier demonstration turned out not to be representative of his actual ability, then I'd be more inclined to believe his grand claims. But if that truly had been all he was capable of, then he wasn't anywhere near my skill level. Fouré must've also been thinking the same as me, as she couldn't help but snarl at Graeger.

"What? Huey's a million, billion times more awesome than this awful little stink bug! It's like comparing a dragon to a turtle!" she angrily huffed from behind me. I was pretty sure that bit about dragons and turtles was an exaggeration, though.

"Then how about we have a contest?" I ventured, deciding I wanted to measure Graeger's actual skill. "Let's see who can generate more godcraft energy."

He barked out a derisive laugh. "Hah! Ridiculous. Don't get ahead of yourself, child. There's no way you could beat me."

"I wouldn't have challenged you if I thought I didn't have a chance."

He sneered again. "Very well, I suppose I shall have to put you in your place. The world is bigger than you know, and there will always be someone better than you!" Graeger declared as he thrust out his right hand.

He channeled his energy, but despite his showboating, the light that wreathed his hand was no brighter than before. His control was so poor that it was hardly visible. Blind to his own dismal performance, he laughed. "See for yourself! This is what true godcraft is like!"

I shook my head. "No, it really isn't. You'd have to be able to release *this* much energy before you can go around calling it 'true' godcraft." I smiled as I raised my right hand, focusing energy into my fist. A blinding light far more intense than the one Graeger had conjured radiated from me and illuminated everything in the room.

"Whaaat?! H-How could a mere child like you...release so much power?!" Graeger shrieked.

"Because I focused on training the basics for a long time," I replied. "This light is the result of all my practice. You see what happens when you skip the fundamentals now, right?"

"I knew you'd win, Lord Hisui. Your light is so radiant," breathed Rose. Forgetting her practice entirely, Rose stared at me, completely enraptured. *C'mon, Rose, you should get back to practicing*, I thought.

"Th-This is ridiculous! A child a fraction of my age can't possibly be better at using godcraft! You must be doing a trick of some sort... Yes! You must be using an artifact, aren't you?! You horrible little fraud!" Graeger whipped his finger at me as he howled in outrage.

"Stop insulting Lord Hisui at once!" Rose's patience had finally reached its breaking point. "Your behavior has been completely out

of line. Lord Hisui may be the son of a baron, but he is still a guest of my house. Watch your words!”

“L-Lady Rose, I... I do apologize,” Graeger stuttered.

“There’s no point apologizing to me. You should be apologizing to Lord Hisui.”

Graeger ground his teeth audibly before hanging his head. “I...am sorry.” His apology sounded like it had been wrung out of him, causing him physical pain. But since he’d been served his humble pie, I had little more to say to him. I let the light of my godcraft fizzle out and likewise gave him a small nod.

“No, I wasn’t acting very mature either. I also caused trouble for Lady Rose.” I apologized as well, though I couldn’t keep my sarcasm contained. Graeger trembled as if he were about to lash out violently, but he stopped himself and raised his head. He couldn’t afford to worsen Rose’s opinion of him.

“My apologies, Lady Rose, but I just remembered I had something very important to attend to. Might I leave the remainder of today’s lesson to young Hisui?”

“Huh? What do you mean—” Rose began, but Graeger cut her off. He wasn’t accepting any objections.

“Now then, see you another day. Pardon me!” He dashed from the room like a frightened rabbit. His behavior was utterly inexcusable—how could he abandon a job so selfishly? I was almost impressed by the extent of his idiocy...but I was sure I could guess what excuse he’d come up with later.

The room was now entirely quiet, and Rose turned to me.

“He’s gone,” she said plainly.

“He sure is. What do you want to do now? I can teach you if you’d like to continue with your godcraft training,” I said in return.

“Are you sure?”

“I was the one who interrupted your lesson anyway. I’ll take responsibility for you and your lessons—and be your tutor if you’d like.”

“Y-You’ll take responsibility...for me?!” she squeaked, face turning bright red.

“Lady Rose? Are you okay?” I asked, concerned. I felt a little

awkward, thinking I might've accidentally said something she'd misinterpreted, but I really couldn't tell from what little she'd said.

She jumped in surprise at my question and took a huge step back. "I-It's nothing! Anyway, right, training! Let's get back to my training! I'll fire that awful tutor!"

And so, Graeger was all set to be relieved from his position as Rose's home tutor. Considering his lack of professionalism and abandonment of duties, his dismissal was basically inevitable.

"Well, all right... Anyway, let's focus on manipulating godcraft energy like I taught you earlier."

"O-Okay... Okay!" Face still glowing red, Rose went back to her godcraft practice. But something seemed to be on her mind the entire time, so she couldn't focus very well. In the end, she decided to finish the day's lesson early.

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"What? Rose's tutor left?"

Later that day, we were all gathered around the dining table for dinner when I explained the little quarrel to Claus.

"That's right. While it's true that I felt Lord Graeger's lesson was unsuitable for Rose, I admit I also went too far. I'm very sorry, Lord Lycoris." Before we tucked in, I bowed deeply to Claus. When I did, Rose, who was sitting across from me, hurriedly interjected.

"Lord Hisui did nothing wrong! That man was a simple fool through and through!"

"And that's that, Hisui," said Claus. "Given your story, I also doubt the lesson was appropriate. In fact, I should be happy about the way things worked out, seeing as you've offered to teach Rose, and I know you're a great deal more talented than that tutor. At any rate, your offer aside, Lord Graeger's behavior is unconscionable. I'll send Viscount Clerkin a letter at a later date to inform him of his son's actions. The lad could have damaged Rose's potential, after all."

Whoa—a raging inferno had flared to life in Claus's eyes. If I hadn't attended the lesson, Rose might never have learned to use her gift properly, and she might've even lagged behind at school

with how terribly she'd been taught. Claus's anger was entirely justified, and his restraint was honestly admirable.

"At any rate, to make this official: Could I ask that you be Rose's tutor? I know you're busy with your own plans, so feel free to decline," said Claus.

I nodded. "Please, leave it to me. I'll do everything I can to help her learn."

"Good, good. I'll of course reward you handsomely for this job; do look forward to your remuneration."

"Oh no, I don't need money for this. I've already received quite a large sum from you."

"That was for saving our lives—all I've been able to do in return has been paltry in comparison. Besides, you'll always need money, won't you? Please, just accept it."

"Lord Lycoris... Thank you."

I could never disagree with Claus for long, especially not when he was being so considerate. It'd be rude of me to continue refusing his good graces, so I simply lowered my head and bowed once again.

"Oh yes. I have something to discuss with you, Hisui, before I forget."

"What is it?"

"Recently, reports of people falling ill have been increasing. I suppose it may not be all that relevant to you, seeing as you've chosen to live outside of town, but do be careful of a potential plague outbreak when you pass through town."

"I see... All right, I will. I can use godcraft so I should be fine even if I get sick."

Claus chuckled. "Right, that's quite true. Even if you couldn't cure it, all you need to do is call upon the church in town. The healers there will see to you...as will the Erebos acolytes, I suppose."

"The Erebos acolytes?" I repeated, startled. What a coincidence that I'd heard that name again in such a short span of time, and this time from Claus of all people.

"You're well-informed! I should have known you'd have crossed paths with them."

"I saw them in town. They even called out to me yesterday," I

explained.

"My, that...must've been quite the ordeal." Claus looked directly at me, gaze filled with sympathy. Had he also been harassed or something? He must've, since I can't imagine he'd look at me with such concern otherwise.

"Do you know much about them, Lord Lycoris?"

"Not particularly. At least, hardly more than you, I presume. It's just that some of our citizens have experienced trouble with them. I've been receiving letters of protest, you see."

"So people have been complaining," I followed, feeling perturbed. After the episode I had yesterday with some of the followers of Erebos, I completely understood why some people would go as far as to lodge formal complaints. Since the marquis now had to deal with those complaints, the acolytes were clearly also inconveniencing him, though indirectly.

"I did have the opportunity to speak with them once. It's clear that they are fully devoted to Erebos, but they can hardly be said to be a *moderate* group. In fact, they seem to be extremists—their goal is to eradicate faith in the Trinity, so it's been quite the headache dealing with them. Many of the healers serving at the church have been calling for the Erebos acolytes to be driven from town."

"That does sound difficult," I sympathized.

"Indeed. Unfortunately, I cannot simply make them leave. They're proficient in their healing arts, and given that there's a possibility there may be a plague spreading through my demesne, I would prefer to have more healers available to help deal with the illness. Quite the predicament." Claus heaved a deep sigh as he finished speaking. His fatigue was really beginning to show on his face as well.

"If I notice anything, I'll help to the best of my ability," I reassured him.

"Thank you. That's certain to take a load off my shoulders," he said, smiling warmly.

Then, food was finally brought to the dining table from the kitchen, signaling a timely end to our conversation. As I tucked into my piping hot dinner, I went over what I knew.

Right now, Erebos acolytes were actively trying to gather converts in town, and their faith didn't permit acknowledgment of the three goddesses. There were also a lot of people in town who had fallen ill, likely due to a curse, and the Erebos acolytes had the power to heal that illness.

Claus wanted the Erebos acolytes to leave, but the situation being what it was, he couldn't afford to have them removed from town. Which...made for an excellent opportunity for the acolytes to stick around and spread their word. It was the perfect coincidence. But what was this nagging feeling in the back of my mind? Did I just think they were creepy?

I wanted to think about it more deeply first; it wasn't fair for me to be suspicious of them without reason. They might just be really fervent followers of their faith, and I didn't have any proof they were spreading a curse.

First of all, would they even stand to profit from doing that? Well... Yeah, actually. They were here to spread the word of Erebos. If they cured people, then they'd come to see the acolytes as saviors.

These Erebos guys were definitely suspicious.

As I sipped on the remainder of my soup, I decided to remain vigilant.

Chapter 5: Cursebreaker

I slept soundly through the night and woke to the birdsong in the air.

Pulling myself up to a sitting position, I noticed the three goddesses were also gathered around me, each wrapping an arm around me as they dozed. It was a common sight by now.

"So that's what that strangely heavy feeling was..." I muttered to myself.

When I'd still lived at the Clematis manor, my bed was so small that it was hard for them to sleep with me, but they had no such issue with my new bed. It was so large that all of us had enough space to roll around.

Thinking back, the size of the bed might've been why the three goddesses had gotten more touchy-feely once we'd started staying at this manor, though they mostly kept it contained to the simple act of sleeping next to me. Even if I went to bed alone, I'd always wake in the morning with them by my side.

Cult especially liked to rest her head on my thighs, regardless of the disastrous picture that painted. I'd told her several times over that it was indecent and that she ought to stop, but she'd always counter that she had nowhere but my legs to sleep, as there wasn't enough space otherwise. Of course, she always punctuated that with a teary, forlorn gaze.

I couldn't say no when she looked like she was about to cry, so I would simply leave the conversation at that—and this was the result.

"Well, the added warmth isn't so bad now that we're heading into winter, but it is still a little much sometimes... And that aside, you do realize I'm a boy, right?" I reminded her. Men had regular physiological responses in a certain part of their body that made it, uh...raring to go, right? I didn't want to say it outright, but I was embarrassed at the thought of a woman seeing that.

Cult laughed charmingly, clearly amused by my reticence. "I know that much, dear one. None of us mind it at all. You needn't be ashamed of it; in fact, it'd be much better if you simply considered it normal."

She finally sat up, releasing my legs from their role as her pillow. Her voice lacked the usual morning rasp people had after sleep, so it was plain to see that she hadn't slept at all.

"Normal?" I repeated, finding her comment a little absurd. "If it were that easy, humans would have lost their sense of shame a long time ago."

"You humans are so difficult," Cult sighed. But then, an idea struck her. "If that's the case, then you can practice getting used to it with us around! Or even just with me alone."

"Just you?" I repeated, unsure of what exactly she was getting at.

"Yes. I do take pride in knowing my body stokes the flame of desire in all men," she winked. "Of course, the only person of male sex I would permit to touch me is you and only you, dear one. So, how about it? I would be perfect for practice, don't you think?"

Clambering in front of me, Cult rested her head at the base of my throat as she pressed her breasts into my chest, squeezing them into soft, malleable shapes. Then I noticed her rather enticing scent and her voice's gentle notes whispered tenderly into my ear, stealing away all rational sense. Looking down even the slightest bit gave me an eyeful of Cult's breasts wedged against my chest.

"H-Hey, Cult," I protested weakly. "I'm only eight..." But Cult was a truly bewitching woman. Of the three goddesses, she was definitely the most feminine.

However, now that we considered each other our family, it'd be wrong to make a move on her, right? On the other hand, if she brought it up, then I couldn't exactly claim *not* to be interested.

The real issue was that my body was still that of an eight-year-old —the same age as an elementary school student would be in my past life—and this was way beyond any youthful experimentation.

"Age is but a trifling matter. There are plenty of nobles who indulge in such things at your age, you know," Cult purred.

"What, really?" I guess I shouldn't have been surprised, given this

was another world and all. A lot of the rules I remembered from my past life no longer applied.

"Yes, really. It is well within your right to toy with me as you will. None can rightly criticize us, especially when they have no awareness of my existence."

"But if someone *did* find out, they'd think I was a total nutjob," I protested. Since she was invisible to everyone else, all they would see is me going at it alone. They were sure to think I was crazy, and I didn't want that either!

"We are the only people here. Let's enjoy ourselves to our heart's content." With that, Cult brought her face close to mine once more, her lips quivering as she—

"This isn't okay, obviously," a third voice murmured.

Before Cult could lock lips with mine, Aruna, who had been sleeping soundly to the left of us just a moment ago, slapped the former. Cult's body went flying at a ridiculous speed, sailing through the wall to disappear somewhere outside.

"Th-Thanks, Aruna. You're a lifesaver." Glancing at her, I saw that she was rubbing her eyes and still rousing herself from sleep. Displeasure was written all over her face.

Biting back a small yawn, Aruna spoke. "That *snake*. We agreed not to make any moves on you ahead of one another, but she gets aggressive every chance she gets! Perhaps she needs to learn a painful lesson."

Determination settled in Aruna's gaze. Whenever she got like this, her threats were less like "threats" and more like "promises."

"L-Let's not get hasty, all right? I doubt Cult meant any harm," I said in an attempt to soothe her.

"You know she tries to take advantage of you precisely because you're so nice and forgiving, right? Honestly, do you *want* her to keep doing this?" Aruna snapped.

"No... I'd just feel bad for Cult if you got any more violent with her than you would in a friendly argument."

Even their "friendly arguments" resulted in a terrible time for those involved. Still, Aruna's emphasis on the word "painful" gave me pause, tugging on my heartstrings. It might not make a

difference to them, but my human morality still wouldn't abide torture.

Aruna sighed, exasperated. I guess she acknowledged my point.

"I have to teach her these lessons all the time, so what does it matter if I do it again? You're awfully sensitive about the oddest things, Hisui."

"Sorry. It's just that I think of everyone as family."

After a moment of silence, Aruna nodded, her anger dissipated. "I see. Well, I suppose there's nothing wrong with that."

Back to her usual self, Aruna gently combed her fingers through her orchid hair, the slightly wavy locks swaying to and fro as she went. It was gorgeous.

I had a healthy appreciation for Cult's dark hair, which closely resembled that of a Japanese woman's, but I also liked Aruna's unique hair color. Fouré's youthful, maidenly peach locks were also lovely, of course.

"Oh, right, Fouré's..." I glanced at her, who was lying to my right. "Still sleeping."

"She certainly is," Aruna agreed.

Unlike Aruna and Cult, Fouré seriously loved her sleep.

"I thought you guys said fairies don't need sleep," I remarked.

"We don't. But we *can* sleep, which is especially simple for Fouré—she can generate feelings of drowsiness," shrugged Aruna.

"Oh, okay." So that basically meant that Fouré was deliberately making herself sleep in order to align her schedule with mine. Aruna slept lightly, while Cult chose not to sleep at all. They each had their own reasons to sleep—or whether to sleep at all—and their personalities really came out in their choices.

While Aruna and I chatted, Cult came back. Her timing was perfect, as that was when Fouré happened to wake as well.

"That was such an ordeal," Cult complained as she entered the room.

"Mngh... Mmm," Fouré sleepily mumbled as she looked at Cult. "Huh? What happened to you? You're a mess."

"Nothing in particular. I was merely subjected to Aruna's usual temper tantrum."

"Oh, gotcha," Fouré yawned.

"I'm going to punch the both of you," Aruna growled, then lowered her voice, her tone carrying an undercurrent of venom. "Tell me, *who's* throwing a tantrum again?"

At that moment, Fouré, who had been blinking blearily awake, suddenly shot up straight and hung her head in an apologetic bow alongside Cult.

"No one! Don't you worry!" said Cult.

"No one is! Never mind!" exclaimed Fouré.

The War Goddess Aruna, the strongest of all living beings...was the single entity Fouré and Cult both feared, despite being equally powerful in their own rights.

The spellcraft Cult wielded had enough firepower to go toe-to-toe with Aruna's master magecraft, and Fouré's regenerative abilities meant she could always rise again, no matter how badly she'd been beaten.

But while Fouré and Cult were powerhouses in their own specialty, Aruna maintained a balance between might and durability—which made her the undisputed strongest of the three in combat. From what I'd heard before, Fouré and Cult couldn't beat Aruna even when they fought two-on-one.

"Honestly... You two need to think more about your behavior before you open your mouths or do something stupid. As fairies, at least try to maintain a modicum of dignity. You're going to be a bad influence on Hisui."

"Dignity, huh?" Fouré mused.

"Do we even need that?" Cult asked, grinning devilishly.

"Give your scheming a rest; it's showing on your face," Aruna frowned.

"Fiiine." Cult folded to Aruna's intense pressure once again. While I wanted to keep watching the three of them, my sleepiness had completely disappeared, and I had things I wanted to do today.

Now that I'd finished building my house and the furniture to go with it, obtained my papers for permanent residency in Lycoris, and registered with the adventurer's guild, it was time I tried the obvious next step: taking on a job request from the guild.

I knew I didn't have to rush into taking a job, but I couldn't keep my curiosity and excitement at bay. I had permission from Aruna, Cult, and Fouré anyway, so my enthusiasm reached a high as I daydreamed about the requests I might get.

I got dressed as Aruna continued lecturing the other two, then headed out to the dining room without them. After finishing my breakfast, I left for the adventurer's guild.

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I left the Lycoris manor and sprinted through the town's western quarter with the three goddesses alongside me. Before long, I arrived at the adventurer's guild, which was lively and bustling.

As I pushed the wooden double doors open, the smell of alcohol wafted from within. It wasn't as pungent as it had been the last time I visited, but I was still surprised at how many people were already drinking even though the sun was still high in the sky.

All eyes locked onto me. That made sense—I was the youngest person here by far, and the color of my hair stood out quite a bit. Aside from me, the youngest people in the crowd were in their twenties, and there weren't too many of them anyway—at this time of the morning, most of the adventurers I could see were grizzled veterans.

Ignoring their stares, I scooted between the people milling about as I headed to the reception. A friendly smile greeted me when I got there.

"Oh, if it isn't Hisui! You're here awfully early today." Arisa waved.

I greeted her in return. "Good morning, Arisa. I wanted to take a job request so badly that I headed here as soon as I could."

"Of course." She laughed airily. "But you know... Even though you're strong, you've still got a childish side to you. It's cute."

"C-Cute..." I trailed off. Her teasing had wounded my masculine pride. But while I've heard being considered "cute" by girls can mean a lot of different things, it's almost always positive. That's what my friends had always said in my past life, anyway. In my case, it was complicated—I appeared to be a child on the outside, but on

the inside, I was very much a grown man.

"By the way, where do I go to check job postings?" I said. "I forgot to ask the last time I was here."

"That bulletin board over there." Arisa pointed to my right. Following the direction she indicated—which would've been to the reception's left—I saw a large board. Its entire surface was covered with postings.

"This town's thriving, so there are a ton of requests. But before you go looking through them, I have to remind you that even though you've received special permission to be here, you're still a beginner like anyone else. Adventurer ranks start at E," Arisa cautioned.

"Adventurer ranks? What are those?" Now that she mentioned it, I'm pretty sure I saw a letter inscribed on my Adventurer Card.

"It's a rank that indicates an adventurer's ability and the success they've had doing jobs. It goes from E up through A, and then the very highest rank is S. So right now, you're on the lowest rung. Permission to take certain jobs is determined by rank—some of them require a rating of C or higher to undertake."

I nodded. "Okay, gotcha. I guess that rule's in place so that people don't take jobs they're not suited for—like to prevent a hotheaded newbie from jumping into something they can't handle, for example."

"That's right. You're so clever, Hisui! And to think, some people complain about that rule." *Pat, pat, pat.* Arisa leaned forward over the reception desk and gently patted me on the head. I wished she'd stop looking at me so tenderly; people around us were really staring. This was *so* embarrassing.

"Rules are made to protect everyone, after all," I remarked in an effort to change the subject. "I say it's best to put safety first, so it's important to be responsible and follow the rules."

It worked. "Wow, Hisui! Our work here would be so much easier if all the adventurers thought the same way you do," she said, following it with a deep sigh. I could tell exactly how much she'd suffered from the way she'd said that. "Oh, we kinda got off track. Anyway, Hisui, just to be clear, you can only take simple jobs right

now. You might be a tough little dragon-slaying cookie, but that doesn't mean you can bypass rank requirements."

"That's fine. I was planning on taking things one step at a time anyway."

"Good, good! That's the best way to do things, no matter what. But still, make sure you're careful, okay? It doesn't matter how strong you are—one mistake could cost you your life in this line of work," she said emphatically, then calmed down a little. "Well, you won't be hunting monsters for a while, though, so that's kind of irrelevant."

I chuckled, smoothing out the awkward air. "It's okay—I understand." I couldn't tell her that I'd already fought so many monsters I was almost sick of it.

Nodding to Arisa, I waved farewell and left the reception to head toward the job posting board. Near it, I noticed there were quite a few adventurers peering at the board as well. A brawny muscle-bound man, a gorgeous woman dressed like an elegant witch, a man with a ragged black cowl pulled over his face who almost looked like a bandit... All sorts of unique people were assembled there. Were all of them trying to decide which requests they wanted to take? I sidled up beside them to look at the jobs.

"Let's see here... A request to find a lost cat? Walking dogs? Cleaning the town's drain ditches?!"

Wow, what was with these jobs? All of them were regular stuff that could've been easily completed in town. Wasn't there anything that involved stuff like leaving town to collect medicinal herbs or battling goblins or something?!

The difference between reality and fantasy hit me like a ton of bricks. But when I looked more closely, I noticed that there were a lot of requests like that posted to the board—I just wasn't able to undertake any of them. The request for gathering herbs I saw did allow even the lowest rank to take the job, but written in fine print was an important condition: The adventurer had to be familiar with botany.

That made perfect sense. It'd be impossible to pick the correct herbs without some knowledge of plants to begin with. And since

the plants were going to be used for medicine—someone was probably selling them, in other words—quality was of the utmost importance. Looks like I had some homework to do. As for the goblin extermination request, it required a rank that was one higher than mine, which basically meant that the lowest adventurer rank probably didn't permit monster hunting at all. Did that mean I couldn't call myself a real adventurer without doing simple, boring tasks to raise my rank first?

"You've got to be kidding me," I groaned. "I can't believe they're a stickler for rules all the way down to odd jobs." The adventurer's guild I imagined was all about meritocracy and the rule of skill—something with the vibe of "Go out and show us what you're made of by conquering some tough challenges!" But now that I'd thought about it, in my previous life, all the decent companies were always about safety first. The rules were in place to avoid any unnecessary sacrifices.

"Aw, would you look at that... Even though you can kill monsters super easily, there aren't many jobs you're actually allowed to do," sighed Fouré.

"None of these will even take you outside the town!" exclaimed Aruna.

Cult snorted in amusement. "It'd be more efficient to go out and kill some monsters without taking a job at all. Then you could just sell any materials you manage to get."

"Right?" Fouré followed.

"Indeed," Aruna affirmed.

The goddesses were chatting behind me. They sounded like they were having a lot of fun, but I just couldn't agree with them. Before me stood the adventurer life I'd wanted so badly. Following their suggestions wouldn't make me any more of an adventurer—I'd just be someone who kinda *acted* like an adventurer.

And seeing as I'd literally just told Arisa that I thought rules should be strictly followed, I couldn't just go back on my word. Ignoring my disgruntlement, I decided to start with little jobs and take this step-by-step, just like I'd said I would. Resigning myself to complete some random tasks, I chose a job request that seemed

reasonable enough for me. The leaflet I grabbed asked me to find a lost cat.

"This looks like something I could easily accomplish." I could imbue my legs with magecraft and speed around town, and I could sense animals as long as they were within a certain distance—after all, I had Dandelion.

"*Chirp!*" Dandelion's voice was full of playful confidence. He was clearly on board with my plan.

Holding the leaflet, I turned to head back to Arisa. But before I could reach the reception desk, a large shadow blocked my path. "Hey, kid," said a gruff voice from above.

"Huh? What is it?" I looked up. A rough, massive, muscle-bound man who stood at least two meters tall blocked my way. His bald scalp was smooth and shiny, the skin sparkling ever so slightly in the light. A battle-axe larger than me was strapped to his back. Given his ragged, sleeveless clothing, he seemed less like a warrior—or even an adventurer—and more like the leader of a band of criminals.

"What's a kid like you doing as an adventurer? Heard you chatted with the guildmaster. Got yer card now and everything, that right?" he asked, sounding a bit like growling.

"I guess so, yeah." *I-Is this the isekai fantasy cliché of a newbie adventurer getting into a fight with guild veterans*?! I wondered. If so, it was turning out to be kind of cookie-cutter and boring. I hadn't thought my new life was going to hit all the classic tropes like that.

Honestly, when I was getting registered, I was half expecting to get jumped right then, but nothing happened at all—what a letdown! But now, I had an older adventurer trying to start a fight. I was trembling with excitement. Mistaking my shaking shoulders for fright, the big bald-headed man leaned his ugly mug near my face and began to shout.

"Hah! If you're scared of a big ol' lug like me, you ain't cut out to be an adventurer!"

He was incredibly loud. I'm sure the other adventurers in the hall had heard. Soon, a staff member would come and stop him, lecturing us about how it was against the rules to fight among ourselves. All I had to do was wait. If I played the OP protagonist

and beat up the first guy who tried to pick a fight with me, it would only make things worse. It was best to work things out without the use of force.

At least, I'd figured that'd be the case. But for some reason, no one came to talk to us. The staff clearly had no intention of interfering either. Wait... Were they expecting us to solve our own little squabble because we were adventurers? And was Arisa just going to stand by and watch after her long spiel about the importance of staying safe?

Was only one of us supposed to walk away from this?!

I despaired at the fact that no one was going to come save me, and my shoulders drooped as I looked up at the man. "So, what are you trying to tell me?"

"Isn't it obvious? Don't go doing anything dangerous! Make sure you stick to what you know you can do!"

Uh... Huh?

"Don't leave the town, and be careful with how you spend your money. Yer always welcome to ask us vets for help, so don't be shy. What else..." the man mused. "Ah! The guild has a library, so you can go read up on monsters and herbs and stuff. Knowledge'll always be useful."

"Oh, um... Are you trying to give me advice?" Whoa, this was some whiplash! He had a face like a mountain bandit, but he was actually a pretty upstanding guy.

"Of course I am! I ain't got a clue why a li'l kiddo like you's decided to be an adventurer, but I'm sure there's something real special about you. That's why, as yer elder, I decided I had to help take a load off yer shoulders! Better be thankful!"

I couldn't think of anything to say. He was a super-duper incredibly nice guy! I knew it was wrong to judge a book by its cover—even school kids knew that—but the difference between his looks and his personality was just astounding. If someone told me humans evolved from gorillas, I'd believe it after seeing this guy. He had the vibe of a feral beast, but he was incredibly considerate in thinking about me and my situation. Oh man—this guy was *really* winning me over, actually. My heart leaped at his kindness for a moment.

"Th-Thank you. I'll be careful." Oh, I got it—people knew he was a nice guy, and that's why no one had stopped him. There was no need for it.

"By the way, about the li'l guy on your head..." The man trailed off, looking at me earnestly.

"Huh? Oh yeah... You mean Dandelion?"

"Dandi, huh? That's a real cute name."

Dandi... Even the nickname he'd given to Dandelion was cute. Was he an animal lover or something? Like a pompadour-sporting thug who goes out of their way to rescue puppies abandoned on the roadside in the rain?!

"If it's all right with you, could I pet 'im? Call it thanks for the advice I gave you."

"A-Are you sure that's all you want?! If so, go right ahead."

Gingerly, he reached out to the top of my head. I felt like he was about to crush my head like a ripe melon with his bare hands, and Dandelion chirped loudly in alarm at the man.

"*Ch-Chirp?!*" He swung his right wing at the man's hand, striking it with a *thwap*!

"D-Dandelion?! He's a nice man, so you can't be hitting him!" I reprimanded Dandelion on the spot, but to my surprise, the man spoke up.

"Ha ha, it's fine. I think it was actually cute of 'im. Most animals run when they see me, so I'm actually real envious you got yerself one that won't, and he's still a real firecracker!" The man smiled and rubbed his nose, breaking out into a satisfied laugh. He was such a saint, I couldn't take it! The gap between the first impression I'd gotten and who he really was... It was just so charismatic! With people like him bolstering their ranks, the adventurer's guild was clearly a force to be reckoned with.

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I spent some time chatting with the not-quite-bandit afterward, then formally accepted the cat-finding job. His name turned out to be Douglas, and... Man, he was so nice and friendly. I was happy

that I'd made a new adventurer friend—no matter the time or place, being alone really wore on the soul.

"Hmm..." Fouré hummed, sizing me up. "I don't think I'd like it very much if you decided to take after that strange man and get all big and brawny."

"If that happened, you could simply change him back, Fouré. With my magecraft at his fingertips, any bulk would just be an accessory for our Hisui."

Cult giggled. "I can always adjust his appearance so his muscles aren't obvious too. Everything will be just fine."

"Good idea," agreed Fouré and Aruna in unison.

"Uh, could you three not discuss something so creepy in my vicinity?" I sighed. Once we left the guild, the three goddesses began chatting among themselves at their usual loud volume, uninterested in even pretending to be secretive. The topic of their lively discussion was, of course, how to prevent me from becoming as big and brawny as my new friend.

I didn't mind that they disagreed with me potentially bulking up, but they were crossing a line when they started discussing renovating my body with godcraft and spellcraft. Goddesses they might be, but wow, were they ever reckless.

"I mean, did you see the way Huey looked at that man? He was totally full of respect! That's so concerning!"

"That's not proof of anything, Fouré. I'm not planning on becoming a bodybuilder or anything." I preferred to stay the same way I was now—slim and toned. Inwardly grimacing at the visual imagery of getting bulked up, I silently apologized to no one in particular. Muscles *really* didn't suit me.

"As long as you understand we don't want you all muscled up, we're fine with anything! All that stuff we said was just a little joke anyway. Right, Cult?" Fouré nudged the other goddess.

"Of course. We deeply respect your wishes, dear one. We shall not alter your body without permission..." Cult trailed off, laughing quietly.

I shook my head in exasperation. "I can tell you actually *wanted* to, though."

"You're just imagining things." Aruna refused my opinion, and she wasn't likely to change her mind. But if she was that serious, maybe I really *was* imagining it.

Banishing the hazy suspicions from my mind, I changed gears. "All right. I'm going to focus on this job request."

"It was to find a missing cat, correct?" Cult asked.

"Yeah. I can't fly like you guys, so I'll just have to run around on foot."

"I think you actually could just fly around to look for it, though." Fouré suddenly blurted out an odd suggestion. Blinking in confusion for a moment, I repeated after her to reaffirm what she meant.

"Huh? You mean, like...in the sky?"

"You have our powers after all, Huey! For example, to fly...you'd need wind."

"Wind?" I stared at her for a second before realizing what she meant. "Ah, you mean I can alter the properties of the air however I like."

"Ding, ding, ding! You got it!" She clapped her hands enthusiastically.

"True, I would be able to fly doing that. But—"

"You would most assuredly stand out," Aruna interrupted.

"Yeah..."

Aruna was right. Looking up, I saw the sky was completely bereft of anyone in flight. There were no witches astride their brooms, and there definitely weren't any dragon-riding knights. People just didn't fly in this world. If I tried to do it when the prevailing common sense said it wasn't possible, I'd become a local legend overnight. If people asked me how I managed to fly, I'd be hard-pressed to answer. Flight just wasn't an option for me.

"If you don't want to fly because it attracts attention, then you could try bending light so people can't see you," Cult suggested.

"Wow, you can do anything with spellcraft, huh?"

Cult smiled. "As long as you leave the area around your eyes untouched, it shouldn't interfere with your vision."

"That's not a bad idea, but I don't really want to become invisible anyway, so I'll pass," I said, discarding the idea.

"Very wise. You should take the easy road only when you must—it's best not to get in the habit of neglecting good discipline. I'm pleased that you understand, Hisui." Aruna proudly complimented me.

"You've knocked it into me pretty well, after all."

Compared to the other two goddesses, Aruna was really strict. If I tried to skip training with a really irresponsible excuse, I was sure there'd be hell. Thankfully, I've never once tried doing that, so I've never had to witness that firsthand.

"So what are you going to do? Do you even have an idea where the missing kitty might be?" said Fouré.

"Unfortunately, no." I smiled bitterly at her question, shoulders sagging. I'd been running around town as we chatted, but I didn't see any cats resembling the one described in the request.

"There wasn't even a single cat back in Clematis," remarked Fouré.

"That's because it was all woodlands. I bet most cats would die trying to get through the forest, so they'd never even make it to the village."

Their lack of freedom was kind of sad to think about. Even stray cats in Canna never left the town. They must've been aware of the danger the wilderness presented, and as a result, there were a lot of cats around.

"I don't mind finding the cat for you, but I guess you wouldn't like that. Right, Huey?"

"Yeah. I have to complete this request on my own. I don't think I should rely on other people for something like this."

"You're so wonderful! So manly and cool!" Fouré cheered, when Dandelion suddenly stood at attention.

"*Chirp!*"

"Huh? What's wrong, Dandelion?"

"*Chiiirp!*" He flapped his wings against my head as if to get my attention and pointed in the opposite direction.

"Is the missing cat over there?"

Dandelion paused before chirping and nodded somewhat hesitantly. How did he manage to figure out where the cat was so

quickly, even though there was no way he was anywhere near as skilled as Fouré with godcraft? Even Fouré seemed a little surprised.

"Wow, Dandelion's so fast at finding things, it blows my mind! He might even be as good as me." Fouré was praising someone other than herself, something she rarely did. Because the goddesses had a ridiculously high skill level, the bar for impressing them was really high. Dandelion must've gotten hack-level skills because he'd been created by Fouré herself.

But this felt like cheating, so I had to decline his help. "This feels a little too easy. I'm sorry, Dandelion, but I'm going to try to find the cat on my own now. I would appreciate it if you could give me a rough estimate of the area, though."

"*Chirp...*" Dandelion became sullen. But if I didn't impose limits, then I'd end up finding the cat within seconds, and this job wouldn't give me any experience at all.

I apologized to Dandelion again and stroked his head, then began to run up and down the town's eastern quarter, searching through every street. Given that I was searching for a cat, I made sure to enter even the smallest and tightest places. Taking care not to miss any tiny alleys or side streets, I sprinted at top speed—at times, I even ran along the roofs of buildings like a ninja.

Then, after a while of running, I caught sight of something strange—but it wasn't the cat. I'd found a man collapsed on the side of the street.

"Is he okay?" After checking to make sure no one was around to see me, I jumped down from the roof and hurried over to the man's side.

"Wha?!" When I touched his shoulder, I felt an inexplicable malaise.

"Hisui, did you feel that?" Cult asked from behind.

"Just now, you mean?" Since her question had come precisely when I touched the man, she must've been referring to that terrible feeling.

"Yes. This man is cursed." *That* was what it was...a curse. As part of my training, I'd asked Cult to show me curses dozens of times, although I've never actually used one myself. It was clear that

somehow, even though curses wouldn't work against me, they were still able to affect me on some level—when I'd touched the man, it felt as though I were immersed in a mud that threatened to engulf me.

"What's a cursed man doing here? Is he important enough for someone to try to assassinate him?" But as I considered these questions, it didn't make sense. To my eye, he was nothing more than a man dressed in worn rags.

Curses couldn't be created easily, nor were they exactly commonplace. Either someone had a serious grudge against him, or he had come in contact with a cursed object.

"I don't know what happened to this man, but curses have certain patterns. He might have been exposed to a curse and gotten infected, like a contagion," Cult explained.

"Curses can spread between people?"

"Yes. They really are that powerful."

"Yikes..." This meant there was a possibility he'd simply come into contact with someone *else* who was cursed. In that case, that meant there were others.

"Anyway, I'll bring him to the church for now. I'm afraid I might make things worse if I try curing him on my own."

"I believe you're skilled enough to cure this curse with ease, dear one."

"Maybe, but I'm still scared. His life would be in my hands, so I don't want to risk it." Overestimating my own ability would be too dangerous. This case should be left to experienced professionals. I could just take my time training my skills.

Gathering the man into my arms, I headed for the church in the western quarter. To no one's surprise, all the people I passed stared at us—the sight of me carrying a fully grown adult in my arms must've been a surprise. I was a little embarrassed from all the attention, but I couldn't just leave him. Doing my best to ignore people's gazes, I sprinted through the streets toward the church without stopping once.

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When I arrived, I could hear the bustle of people's voices from within. Or, well, that wasn't quite accurate—rather than "bustling," it was simply noisy. It was the groans of the sick that created the cacophony.

"Claus mentioned there were a lot of people falling ill lately...but I never would have guessed there were so many," I said to myself grimly. Upon opening the doors, I saw people lying on the floor everywhere. Healers were attending to them, rushing frantically about the hall. In the midst of the hubbub, one of the healers noticed me standing in the doorway and hurriedly rushed over to me.

"And this man is...?"

"I found him collapsed in the eastern quarter. He appears to be cursed."

"Another curse! Why are there so many?!" The healer clicked his tongue in frustration, extended his arms to take the cursed man from me, and hurried away.

"There are a lot of cursed people?" I wondered aloud. "I guess that means all the patients here must be suffering with the same curse, then..."

"That's right; there's no doubt about it. The curse is faint on all of them, but noticeable," Cult remarked.

I nodded in understanding. "It was so faint that I didn't immediately notice."

"That's not a surprise. Curses are rarely transmitted this way."

"Really?"

"Yes. Ordinarily, curses simply kill their target, so they're designed to affect a single specific person," Cult explained. That was my impression of curses as well—I always imagined an elderly woman shoving needles or iron nails into a straw doll.

She continued. "The curse we're dealing with seems to be quite weak; its potency seems to have been diluted as it has the ability to affect multiple people instead of just one. It won't be able to kill anyone. I imagine the healers will be able to cure those afflicted on their own, given enough time."

"Looks like it. There are people who've already been healed,

though it looks like the healers are super busy...” I trailed off, my attention caught by figures in black. As I conversed with Cult, I looked around the church and happened to notice a group of people who were clearly disciples of Erebos. Since the other healers wore blindingly white clothing, the difference was starkly noticeable.

“I knew it. Those weird acolytes are here,” said Aruna. She noticed their presence immediately as I did. Like the healers, the Erebos practitioners were running about in an effort to help the afflicted—and unsurprisingly, there were a lot of people expressing their thanks.

Honestly, the scene practically *stank* of foul play.

Aruna glanced at me. “You think they’re suspicious as well, Hisui?”

“Maybe. From what we’ve seen, I think it’s likely,” I replied. The timing of their arrival and the curse was oddly perfect. I couldn’t help but suspect they’d intentionally spread the curse—deliberately made weaker so it wouldn’t kill anyone outright—in order to help them spread the word of Erebos.

“I suppose it’s entirely possible that one of their people cast a curse, or they have a cursed item. But...” I trailed off.

“We don’t have proof yet,” Aruna finished. Even if I told everyone that the Erebos acolytes were behind the curse, they’d dismiss my words as a child’s imagination running wild. If I made an especially bad misstep, I’d end up being run out of town instead. As long as I was Claus’s guest, I couldn’t afford to take a risk like that; it’d be a smear on his good name. I didn’t want to cause any trouble for my sisters either.

“Supposing they’re the ones behind the curse,” Cult said thoughtfully, “if you try to interfere with their plans, you might be able to catch them red-handed.”

“How would I go about doing that?” I asked, interest piqued.

“If we assume they’re the ones behind this, then we can guess that their goal is to improve the standing of their god’s name among the people,” Cult explained. “In other words, they want to save as many people as they can, and in turn drive feelings of gratitude into the people they save. If that’s the case, then all you have to do is

become their savior instead—you have to cure the cursed."

The genius of her plan stunned me to silence for a moment. "That's a great idea! It'll only help the people here, and if it does actually interrupt their plans, then they'll definitely try to stop me. That's when we'll see their true colors."

"Exactly," she nodded.

"Isn't this a bit dangerous? Must you really go that far?" Aruna cut into our conversation to disagree with Cult's proposal. But while I saw where she was coming from, I had to disagree with her in turn.

"I do. This is the town where Claus and Rose live, and now my sisters live there as well. I've finally gotten permission to stay here for as long as I like, and I'd hate to see people do terrible things to my new home."

"I see. Then all that's left is the willpower to see it through," she acquiesced.

"You can do it, Huey!" Fouré cheered. "There are lots of sick people here, so it's going to be hard work breaking the curse on all of them!"

"That's fine by me. This'll be like doing volunteer work to help my future plans along."

Putting on my best cheerful front, I rolled up my sleeves and called to one of the healers. "Um, excuse me!"

"Yes? What is it?"

"I can actually use godcraft. I'm pretty sure I can break these curses too. May I help?" I asked, trying my best to sound the part of a helpful child.

The healer gave me a withering look. "What? No, no... Don't be silly. You'd only get in the way, so please leave."

Well, I'd be more surprised if they actually believed a random eight-year-old child who said they could break curses. Seeing that I had no choice, I channeled godcraft energies into my right hand to release a blinding flash of light. The church was flooded with a golden glow.

"I-I can't see! Was that godcraft just now? You were telling the truth?!"

"Yes, as you can see. Are you still going to refuse my help?

Should I leave after all?"

"Oh, please help! We're so strapped for hands that we could really use another pair!" Yep, they sure did—nearly every single healer was running to and fro about the church, fully absorbed in their work. I got the sense they didn't even have the time to take any breaks.

Besides, Fouré had said that breaking curses was difficult and required a vast amount of energy—meaning, they needed as many people as they could get. They didn't have the wherewithal to refuse help.

The healer grasped my hand in joy and bowed, begging me to help once more. I immediately began healing the people in the church.

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There's a strange child here. That was the thought that ran through the mind of one of the Erebos acolytes when he saw a boy with extraordinarily unusual green hair in the church.

"Who's that?" he said aloud, not directing the question to anyone in particular.

His companion replied anyway. "Who knows. That's not a hair color you see around these parts. He was carrying a man just now, so he must've just brought in someone who happened to get cursed."

"What? A little kid like that, carrying an adult?"

"It's true. I was shocked too."

"Really, now? Well, whatever. Whoever that kid is, we still need to do our jobs—we gotta hurry up and get to breaking more curses. Has your energy recovered yet?"

"Not yet. But it's not like we need to hurry, y'know? Even the guys up top told us to take our time healing people."

"Yeah, I guess. But we've been sitting around for a while already. If we don't start helping soon, it won't be just the sick begging for our attention—the priests'll be yelling at us too." His conversation partner only shrugged in response, making him shake his head in

exasperation. “Guess we’re both still out of energy. It’s hard as hell to break curses, even with one as weak as this.”

“Everything’s all thanks to these magic artifacts we got from the boss. Without them, casters of our caliber would never be able to break these.”

“You idiot!” The other acolyte hissed. “We were told not to mention that! We’ll all be killed if anyone finds out!”

“Oh, whoops. My bad. But don’t worry, there’s no one here but a bunch of unconscious invalids. There ain’t a single person who can eavesdrop on us.”

“Hmph. You oughtta keep that ego of yours in check— Huh?!” The man flew into a panic midway through his comment, while the other jumped in shock—the sudden emission of blindingly bright godcraft light had startled them both. Golden rays lit up the entirety of the church for a brief moment, and the light had been so bright, both men instinctively screwed their eyes shut.

“Ghk! Wh-What was that?!”

“That light must’ve been godcraft, I’m sure. But was it really? It was so powerful!”

The light slowly died down, and the two men opened their eyes and began to search for its source. Their eyes were drawn to the green-haired boy they’d been observing earlier. His hand was still faintly glowing. With the direction the light had come from in mind, there was no doubt that the boy had been responsible for the flash of light.

“Cripes, no way... What the hell was that just now? Did that kid use *godcraft*?”

“There’s just no way! That kid doesn’t look anywhere near ten years old! He’s gotta be some kinda monster!”

“He must be using a super powerful artifact. There’s no other explanation.”

“That might explain the light, but don’t forget—he’s just a kid.”

“So what?”

“He’s still using magic! Don’t you remember? The marquis’s daughter awakened to godcraft at about that age.”

“Yeah, *daughter*,” the acolyte said, dismissively. “That kid’s a boy

no matter how you slice it. He's got a pinchable face, but so does every other kid that age."

Not a single person in Lycoris was unaware of the marquis's daughter and her budding talent, but the green-haired boy obviously wasn't her. From his winsome features, it was easy to imagine that he might one day grow to be a charming young man who would steal the hearts of women far and wide, but it was plain as day that he was no daughter of the marquis. Most telling was the simple fact that he looked nothing like the marquis nor his wife—neither of them had that distinctive green hair.

"Maybe he's a friend of the marquis or something. He's wearing real fancy clothes, after all—he's definitely someone to watch out for."

"Pfft! Are you scared of a kid?"

"No, dummy! The bigwigs said they wanted talent. You heard too, right? They won't shut up about procuring the marquis's daughter, Lady Rose."

"Ah, so that's what you're getting at..." the acolyte muttered, before raising his voice in surprise. "Hey! That kid's breaking curses left and right over there!" At first distracted by the conversation, the man who had been watching the little boy couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The boy—Hisui—extended a hand to a person lying on the floor nearby, then released an incredible amount of energy as he began working on healing the patient. While his control over his power was impressive, what shocked the man the most was the sheer amount of energy Hisui was spending. Using an amount like that would've caused the average person to collapse from exhaustion, but he showed no sign of needing to rest.

"That's impossible. Expending that much energy could kill a person if they're not careful! How can he do that like it's nothing?!"

"He's even more talented than we thought! Maybe that flash of light earlier wasn't from an artifact after all."

"No kidding? What do you mean?"

"Artifacts that can increase the amount of energy available are extremely rare. It's practically impossible for a kid to have one, and

on the off chance that he does, that'd still mean he was carting around something valuable enough to be a national treasure."

"So basically... The kid's royalty?"

"Of course not, you moron. Have you ever heard of a royal with green hair?"

"No... You're right, I haven't."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they had some illegitimate kids here and there, but I'd say it's more realistic to assume the kid's just using his own power. Besides, the royals here are all blond."

"Still, there ain't no way..." The man's voice was strained, as if he was struggling with the very idea that the boy could be so powerful. "We've been alive for twenty years, and we can still barely use godcraft! And you're telling me that little kid outclasses us?"

"Listen, I don't want to believe it either. But there *are* stupidly talented children out there, so we've just gotta suck it up. You know as well as I do that the higher-ups are collecting monsters like this kid. If you want to get on the up-and-coming, you gotta think outside the box."

"Yeah, whatever. So what're we gonna do about the kid? If we leave him, he's gonna take all the credit for healing these people in a snap."

"Yeah... But our hands are tied too. Let's just do our best to cure people—make sure everyone still approves of Erebos and all."

"All right. What about the kid's family and friends?"

The man considered the question for a moment, then settled on a plan. "After we finish up here, we'll tail him." Giving a concise order, the man got to his feet. With their companion in tow, the two acolytes laid their hands on the nearest victim of the curse and began healing.

Looking askance at Hisui, they continued whispering between themselves. "He'd better not get in the way of our plans..."

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A spark of light glimmered to life in front of me. I released godcraft energy, careful to maintain absolute control as I

manipulated it, and used it to banish the darkness consuming the man lying before me. Once the darkness fled, the man's expression eased from one of pain to peace. The curse was broken.

"Oooh, you're amazing, Huey! You really did figure out how to reverse it, huh?" Fouré dramatically clapped her hands behind me, shouting her support as she gazed at the prone form of the man I just cured.

I really hadn't managed anything impressive. All I'd done was spend a reckless amount of godcraft energy to more or less force the curse out of my target's body. Ordinarily, more precise control of godcraft would've been required, but my methodology of simply throwing energy at it couldn't accommodate such fine-tuning. I felt like I'd be doing the stricken people a bad turn if I used them as an excuse to practice, so I took a simpler and faster method of curing them, which required amplifying the amount of energy I was burning.

I was essentially relying on the sheer volume of energy to break the curses. The advantage of this method was obvious—even an inexperienced person like myself could heal those afflicted.

The only issue was exactly *how* crazy an amount of energy was needed to break the curse even once. Even though I'd started building my reserves little by little as I began training my godcraft powers a solid two years ago, within dozens of minutes I was about to run my energy dry.

At least I managed to grasp the tactile sensations of breaking a curse after a couple tries. Knowing I was able to lift curses at my current ability level brought me no small amount of relief—if it really came down to it, I could protect my family.

But now I had a new problem.

"Oh... It's as if the Light Goddess walks among us once more..."

"Thank you, boy, thank you..."

Because I used my powers of godcraft, all the healers in the church, as well as the cured townspeople, came to offer me their prayers. Did they think I was Fouré's apostle—or maybe even Fouré herself, reborn? The situation was incredibly awkward.

"Um... I've run out of godcraft energy, so I'm going to go home

now. Everyone, please take care."

"W-Wait, please! There's something we must ask you!"

"Sorry, but I don't want to entertain any questions right now. I prefer my privacy!"

Then, I cut down the swarming masses of people—in my head, anyway. Actually, I just made use of the natural strength in my legs, honed from all the training I'd done with Aruna, and deftly wove through the throng until I finally escaped the church. Several of the faithful came chasing after me, but I didn't stop running for a single second. When I was far enough away, I imbued my legs with a trace amount of magecraft and I finally lost them.

Slipping through the Lycoris estate's main gates, I entered the manor grounds. "I-I made it!" I said triumphantly. Looking over my shoulder just in case, I didn't see a single silhouette. Sighing with relief, I reached up to where Dandelion was perched on his throne, and I pulled him down from atop my head.

"Hm? Dandelion? You seem kind of stressed—is something the matter?"

"*Chirp, chirp...chirp!*"

"It's nothing," he seemed to be saying, then turned to look straight ahead. Something felt off; he'd been looking back down the way I came the entire time. I was confused, but decided not to press the issue any further, and we entered the manor proper. As soon as I did, I ran into Armeria.

"Oh," she mumbled, seemingly distracted. "Welcome back, Hisui. You're back earlier than usual today. Did something happen?"

"Thanks, Armeria. And I guess I got caught up in a little mess. I have to talk to Claus."

"The marquis? May I hear what you have to say too?"

"I don't mind, but are you sure you really want to? It won't be a particularly happy topic." I'd have to tell Armeria and Cosmos later anyway, so it didn't matter if they heard it now. In fact, it'd be more efficient to tell everyone all together.

Having been granted my permission, Armeria smiled. "I can tell by the look on your face that it's really quite serious. I'll go get Cosmos. Will you be in Claus's study?"

"Yeah. Oh, and if you see Rose, it'd be great if you could bring her along too."

"Okay, got it." We waved to each other and split up. She was going to go get Cosmos, while I headed directly to Claus's study, where I expected him to be.

Arriving in front of the door to his study, I knocked twice.

"Who is it?" I heard Claus's voice from within the room.

Dropping my voice low, I responded. "It's me. I have something I need to discuss."

"Hisui? Do come in."

"Excuse me." Feeling like I'd been bothering Claus a lot lately, I entered the room. No one was present there but him.

"Sorry for the sudden visit," I apologized.

Claus smiled warmly at me in return. "Not at all. Didn't I tell you? You're always welcome."

"Thank you."

"So, what did you need to talk about?" He placed his pen on the table, signaling I had his full attention. He must've realized I'd come to discuss something grave.

"You're aware that the church has taken in many people who've fallen ill, right?" I asked.

"Of course. I believe I also mentioned it to you."

"I coincidentally had the opportunity to visit the church a little earlier. When I went, I noticed the vestiges of spellcraft on the bodies of the ill. To be more precise, I found traces of a curse on them," I explained.

Despite the gravity of my comment, Claus's demeanor was as calm and placid as ever. Maybe he'd suspected this was the case from the beginning—I wouldn't put it past him, considering he was the governor.

"I see... So you ended up witnessing something terrible in that church."

"Why would there be a curse spreading through the town?"

"I don't know. I've had people look into it, but it seems the curse thankfully hasn't spread very far yet—if you can be thankful for anything about this situation, that is."

"But wouldn't the curse spread further if it's left unchecked?"

"I wouldn't worry about that. Reports of the curse have been slowly dwindling—thanks to the Erebos acolytes, whom you've already heard about."

I took a moment to consider Claus's assessment of the situation. "So you're sure the curse will eventually end?"

He nodded. "That's what I believe. Of course, if there's someone deliberately spreading the curse throughout town, then I acknowledge that it's possible there could be a resurgence."

"That possibility is exactly what I suspect," I said firmly. Claus's eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

"And your proof?"

"The curse's effect," I replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Ordinarily, curses are meant to kill their targets, so it only makes sense that the caster would want to hit someone with the most potent spellcraft they can muster."

"That was also my understanding of curses, yes."

"With that in mind, it's awfully strange that the effect of the curse spreading through town is relatively mild—and instead of targeting only one person, it's contagious. I haven't looked into the exact method it's using to spread, but its presence here is clearly the result of malice. Instead of being engineered to kill a particular person, it's been deliberately created to cause widespread suffering."

"Malice, you say," Claus murmured. "I see."

He closed his eyes, then leaned back in his chair. "Your concern is certainly justifiable. After hearing what you've said, I find myself thinking the whole situation is quite suspicious as well. However..." Claus trailed off. It was easy enough to guess what he was thinking.

"Without proof, we can't even begin to do anything about it," I finished.

"Indeed. There are criminals behind this, but flushing them out won't be easy. Especially not in a town as busy and developed as Canna."

"I have a hunch on some people, at least. Though I admit it's not much more than that."

"The Erebos acolytes, I take it?"

"Oh," I gasped, surprised he guessed so readily. He was right on the mark too. "How did you know?"

Claus grinned, his smile radiating confidence. "It's simple, really. Supposing that your estimations were correct, then someone must be benefiting from the spread of the curse. And who else but the Erebos acolytes could claim such profit when their healing is likewise spreading their name?"

"I should've known you'd figure it out, Lord Lycoris."

His guess was the same as mine had been. Apparently the followers of Erebos were plainly shady to everyone.

"I'm glad you think so highly of me," Claus said with amusement in his eyes before dropping his voice to a low tone. "But even should we look at them under a lens of suspicion, we cannot inquire any further without proof. They keep themselves well guarded."

"If they really are the criminals, then I doubt they'd leave any obvious tracks. But I think I have a plan."

"Do tell," he prompted.

"They're trying to make their name a household one with their healing, which is done through godcraft. I can stop them from attaining their goal by diverting people's attention to me instead. To tell the truth, I've already healed around ten people at the church." I sighed, recalling their reaction, before I continued. "The priests and townspeople who saw me using godcraft started pestering me so much..."

"What?!" Claus exclaimed. "Weren't you trying to keep a low profile? Are you certain you're okay with this?"

I nodded. "If we can catch the people spreading this illness around, then I don't mind sacrificing some of my privacy. If we don't handle this well, then my sisters and Lady Rose might get caught in the cross fire." A knock at the door came the very moment I mentioned them. "Lord Lycoris, is Hisui in there with you?"

"Ah, Miss Armeria. Yes, he's here. Do come in."

"Pardon us, then." Opening the door, the three girls filed in. After Armeria entered, next to join us was Rose—whose presence caught Claus by surprise. His eyes widened.

"Rose?"

"Hello, father. I've heard Hisui has something important he wanted to share with all of us, so I'll be joining the conversation."

Claus turned to me. "You've asked Rose to come too?"

"Yes. I believe the curse is relevant to Lady Rose as well."

"What curse?" Rose looked at me quizzically. Armeria and Cosmos likewise looked so confused, I could practically see the question marks hanging over their heads.

I gave them the rundown of what I had just discussed with Claus, wrapping it up with a warning that there might be someone dangerous lurking in town who was almost certainly going to be difficult to deal with. After I finished, they each offered their opinions, having come to very similar conclusions.

"A curse..." said Rose thoughtfully. "For the past few days, I've gone out a few times, but I haven't seen a single sick person."

"They seem to be mostly in the eastern quarter," I explained. "I'm guessing that's where we'll find patient zero."

Cosmos gave me a pat down, checking for injuries. "Are you okay, Hisui? You're not in pain anywhere, are you?"

"I'm okay," I replied. "I can resist curses. Besides, I could use godcraft to heal myself anyway."

"That's true... Well, don't push yourself too much, okay? I'll get angry if you do." Her last comment came out in a low threat. Upon hearing it, I struck a quick salute as I replied.

"I-I won't!" I'd never been able to defy my sisters. By now, I'd developed a habit of agreeing to whatever they said basically by reflex.

"Very good. Still... This news is such a shame."

"Is something wrong?"

Cosmos's face clouded over with disappointment at my question. "Actually, we had plans to all go shopping tomorrow. Lady Rose invited us."

"But considering the curse, we'd best be careful and stay home." Similarly disappointed, Rose hung her head in defeat. Still just eight years old, she must've wanted to go out and play like any other child —but she still strove to keep her feelings at bay to keep Claus from

worrying.

Upon seeing her distraught face, however, Claus must've felt it a waste to force her to stay indoors. "I suppose a little shopping will be fine."

"Huh?" Rose looked up.

"The curse is currently on the wane. Furthermore, it isn't extremely contagious—if it were, then the entire town would be cursed by now. I see no issue with some shopping so long as I and the guards accompany you," he explained, smiling gently.

"Oh, father! Thank you so much!" Rose shouted.

Cosmos likewise squealed with excitement, her eyes shining. "Thank you, Lord Lycoris!" Following Rose's lead, she bowed her head. Claus couldn't retain his usual professional demeanor either, heart warmed by two adorable girls thanking him. Armeria was also overjoyed with the prospect of going shopping, seeing as it presented an opportunity to buy some books. I'd give her some money later.

"What about you, Hisui? Will you also be accompanying us?" asked Claus.

"I still have a task I need to take care of for the adventurer's guild, so maybe next time." I'd only remembered on the way home, but I still hadn't found the missing cat. I'd make use of Dandelion's power tomorrow to find it as soon as possible. The situation in the town being what it was, I didn't have the luxury of trying to complete the job on my own.

Wait, hold on a sec. Now that I thought about it, why hadn't Dandelion told me about that man who collapsed on the street? Considering how powerful his detection ability was, he should have noticed the man when he'd located the cat.

Maybe he was just distracted? Or he couldn't sense that poor man for whatever reason? Or did he direct me to that general area from the very start because he wanted me to find him?

The question stuck in my mind, I couldn't help but continue thinking it over. I decided I'd ask Dandelion directly once my chat with Claus ended.

"Aw, you're not coming, Hisui?" Cosmos sighed dejectedly.

"Sorry, Cosmos. I have leftover work I need to take care of, but if I finish early, I'll come meet up with you guys."

She immediately brightened up. "Really?! That's a promise, then!"

"Yeah," I nodded.

That was a hard *if*, though. I still had to deal with the Erebos acolytes, which didn't leave much time for fun and relaxation.

After chatting a bit more with Cosmos, who was aglow with happiness, and mentioning a few more things to Claus that I thought he should be apprised of, I led our little procession out from the study.

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"Hey, Dandelion... Can I ask you a question?" Having returned to my bedroom, I sat on my bed and cradled Dandelion in my hands.

"*Chirp*?" Dandelion tilted his head at me curiously. I decided to make my question brief.

"You helped me this morning, right? With finding the cat."

"*Chirp.*"

"But we ended up helping that man instead. Were you..." I trailed off, trying to think of the right words. "Were you trying to get me to help him from the start?"

"*Chirp... Ch-Chirp.*" He bobbed his head a little, sounding hesitant. So he *had* led me to the man. I knew it.

"I see. I'm not mad or anything. Don't worry. I'm actually glad you did, since we saved someone's life. Thank you, Dandelion." Then, I gently stroked his head. Judging by the way he crooned, it must've felt good.

"*Chirrrp!*"

"Still, I'm amazed you knew that man was there. It feels a little like the time we saved Cosmos."

Back then, a monster had been attacking Cosmos. There hadn't been anything dramatic going on this time, but Dandelion, sensing an emergency, pushed me in the right direction anyway. As a result, I'd ended up finding the man before the situation had gotten any worse. Had he been left alone, the curse might've continued

spreading without anyone being the wiser.

"*Chirp, chirp, chirrup...*" Dandelion shook his head. Seems like I'd been off the mark somewhere.

"Huh? You mean you weren't using your powers of detection?" I was a little shocked by this. "I honestly thought you'd been using a detection power like Fouré's this whole time."

Then how had Dandelion been able to locate Cosmos and that man? Maybe instead of finding them, he'd just known they were there already? Dandelion's ability was incredibly exact—he was always able to locate a target without making even the slightest mistake. And in the case of Cosmos, he'd even managed to track her down in the middle of a forest, where visibility was minimal.

If his ability wasn't detection, then he must have just known they were there ahead of time. That was the only explanation I could think of.

"Then... Do you have the power of premonition?"

Fouré must've arrived at the same conclusion—though I hadn't noticed that she'd seated herself beside me until I heard her whisper into my ear. "His behavior up till now would make sense if he could see possible futures."

Fouré raised her hand, then whipped out her fingers as she spoke—her pointer finger, then her middle finger, then finally, her ring finger.

"First, the time he found your sister. He must've seen a future where the monster killed her. Second, when he guided you through the dungeon. Having seen what would've happened if you chose the wrong path, he knew which paths were safest. And lastly, that man. Maybe he saw a disastrous future, or maybe he saw a vision of you saving the man's life while out searching for the cat. If he saw a future like that, he'd want to help it come to pass, I'm guessing."

"You're amazing, Dandelion! I'm so jealous that you can see the future." And it wasn't that he saw a future that couldn't be changed—his ability allowed him to see *possible* futures. Since his visions weren't set in stone, the future could be affected by our actions. It was a power with limitless potential.

"Even *I* can't see the future!" Fouré said proudly, puffing out her

chest for some reason. Dandelion followed her lead, puffing up as well.

"You're such a good boy, Dandelion."

On the surface, he didn't look like anything more than a slightly chubby little chick. But he'd been hiding an incredible power, made possible because the Light Goddess had personally created him. He was truly the perfect companion.

"If you see any more trouble on the horizon in the future, be sure to let me know, okay?"

"*Chirp!*" *Understood!* he seemed to say as he raised his right wing.

I'd had a sudden realization with this new revelation, though. "Oh, but if that's how your power works, I guess I'll have to really put in the work to find that cat, huh?"

I'd been planning on using Dandelion to track down the missing pet. But since his power wasn't detection, but premonition, that changed everything. I couldn't just tell him to see a future where I found the cat, after all—that might be difficult for him.

I'd have to search the streets on my own in the end, I supposed...

Flopping down on my bed, I closed my eyes. It would all work out anyway, I was sure. Sleep came to me immediately, exhausted as I was by all the godcraft energy I'd expended earlier in the day.

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In the small hours of the morning, before the sun had risen, a group of people wearing dark cloaks assembled in an unassuming location in the eastern quarter. All eyes were fixed on an unconscious man lying on the ground in the center of their circle.

"So this is the sacrifice for our glorious Erebos?"

"That's right. He's been living in the streets for a while and he doesn't have any friends or family. No one's gonna miss him," whispered one of the men.

One of the other robed men replied. "Good. Then let's implant the artifact into his body now. It'll trigger a powerful curse, so ensure

you all stay away from him once we're done here."

With that, the man pulled a square box from within his robe. Veins pulsed on its black surface as if the artifact itself was alive.

"Understood. But," another hesitantly began, "isn't this much earlier than planned? We were supposed to use that artifact a lot later."

"The lord of these lands is far more astute than we anticipated, and is now quite wary of us. Besides, your men have told you about that boy with the godcraft, haven't they? Before long, he'll cause all the fear and panic over this curse to die down, and we cannot allow that. We have no choice but to use the artifact—we must spread the word of Erebos further, and this will allow us to sow the seeds of our faith in the people."

The robed man took a step forward from the ring of acolytes, towering over the unconscious man. Fixing his gaze on the sacrifice, the acolyte knelt low to press the box against the man's chest. As soon as the object touched him, it began to warp, becoming soft and malleable before it attached itself to the prone body. Slowly, it sank into the man's flesh until it finally disappeared.

Confused, one member spoke. "Nothing's happening."

"It will take time for the artifact to fully fuse with him," came the reply. "I believe it will take some hours for him to awaken—but when he does, he will be nothing but a mindless beast, controlled by the curse." A deep chuckle rumbled in the man's throat.

"And how do we stop his rampage, then?"

"We kill him. The curse will make him far stronger than the average person, but with our powers combined, we will see him dead within moments. He will be little more than a marionette, after all, and unable to resist the curse's impulses. After he spreads the contagion all throughout this sorry town, we will swoop in and end him. The people will sing our praises."

With that, the man turned on his heels and strode away, his retreating back clearly indicating to the others that he no longer had any business with their victim. The rest quickly followed suit, leaving the scene of the crime one after another.

"Still... How appalling that a mere boy has come out of nowhere

to disrupt our plans so badly. Who is that child?”

“According to a recent report, he appears to be staying at the marquis’s residence.”

“Marquis Lycoris has no legitimate sons, and I’ve never heard of any bastard children either. I suppose the boy must simply be a guest, then... But the fact that his lineage is unknown poses a problem.”

“Indeed. However, the boy does have quite a rare hair color, so I’m certain it will not be difficult to find out where he came from. At least we know there are no nobles in the royal capital with such an appearance.”

“Rare or not, there must be *someone* with green hair.”

“Even if there were, we can’t investigate much further. His parents are not residents of the capital, whether noble or commoner.”

“Hmm. Get your lackeys to look into it for us, then. Or perhaps we should simply see him killed during the chaos.” The man’s lips curled into a cruel, knowing smile.

The other man stopped him, voicing his objection. “No. I think we ought to take advantage of the boy’s skill and bring him into the fold.”

“Turn him into one of us, eh? But he seems to be an ardent follower of the Trinity.”

“We need only brainwash him. That’s our specialty, yes?”

“You’re entirely correct. That’s how we’ve bolstered our numbers so far.” The man nodded in agreement, the smile never leaving his face. “We’ll make him one of us, then. The boy will know of Erebos’s splendor before long.”

Chapter 6: Otherworldly Demon

The next day came after a night of restful slumber. Using magecraft to augment my speed, I zipped around town starting in the early hours of the morning. Because of all the people watching me—Erebos acolytes, priests from the church, and ordinary people I'd healed—I wasn't entirely sure this was the best idea, but I did my best regardless.

It didn't take long for my search to bear fruit—I found the lost kitten far earlier than I'd expected. It had black fur and green eyes, just as the job request had described. Gathering it up into my arms, I had the distinct impression that even regular cats looked a little fantastical in this new world. I hurried back to the adventurer's guild as quickly as I could.

The guild took the cat from me, saying they'd handle contacting the owner to have them pick up their pet. The job request was now officially completed; as soon as I'd brought her in, they said I'd accomplished my mission. I accepted the reward for my work, though it wasn't much, before starting to head home.

"Kind of a measly reward," the Light Goddess said as she looked at the coins I had tightly grasped in my hands. Fouré was floating gently beside me.

"Because it was a simple job. The pay was never going to be more than a drop in the bucket," I replied.

"If that's how much you get from working, then training would be way more worth your while."

"Don't you remember what Hisui said before? There's a point to him taking all these adventuring jobs," Aruna interjected.

"You're not wrong, Aruna, but still..." Fouré sighed.

"I feel the same way you do, but it's not as though Hisui is neglecting his training. He used magecraft and godcraft powers to complete the job. Let's just continue watching over him for the long

term.”

Cult giggled, as she usually did. “I agree with Aruna.”

“Hmph,” Fouré interjected, puffing up her cheeks. “Well, aren’t you two patient—”

Fouré’s grousing was cut off by a sudden scream toward the east.

“Huh,” she said. “Must be something going on over there.”

Several townspeople came running from the eastern district, faces contorted in fear. Amid the shouting, the answer to Fouré’s confusion became clear. “Th-There’s a man who’s gone berserk over there! Someone stop him!”

“What’s going on?! Anyone he hit got knocked out cold!”

“Run, everyone! The man’s absolutely insane!”

“Someone’s attacking people?” Whatever was happening was clearly a far cry from peaceful, and with so many people panicking, it had to be something big. Concerned and with nothing pressing on my agenda, I headed into the eastern quarter.

“*Chirp! Chirp, chirp!*”

Dandelion flapped his wings frantically against my head as he pointed. Whatever was happening, it must have been over there. Channeling power into my legs, I dashed with strides so long, I was practically leaping. Weaving through the throng, I headed toward the heart of the commotion.

The cause of the ruckus wasn’t difficult to find—a man was thrashing about in the middle of the street.

“Ghrk... Graaagh!” He must’ve been in his thirties, and he looked dirty and unkempt. His shoulder-length hair whipped about as he flailed, indiscriminately attacking anyone within reach. Bloodied victims lay in a heap at his feet.

“Isn’t that...” I trailed off, sensing something strange about the man. Seeing the man rampaging in the street, I immediately noticed he was blanketed in a shroud of spellcraft.

“Is he cursed?” I asked.

“I’ve no doubt that he is. But unlike the curse from yesterday, this one is terribly strong. Spellcraft energies are pouring out from his very heart,” Cult answered. She carefully studied the man, eyes narrowed into slits.

"Looks like we can't just ignore this," I said. "Now we've got an even stronger curse on our hands. There's definitely someone behind the scenes trying to spread these deliberately."

I looked around just to be sure, but I didn't see anyone who looked suspicious. Ordinarily, if someone put a plan into action, they'd want to see how it unfolded. The culprit always came back to the scene of the crime—or that's what I'd heard, anyway—so to avoid being caught off guard, I kept a careful eye on my surroundings as I channeled magic through my body.

"Are you going to stop him?" asked Aruna.

"Of course. From what I can tell, all of the victims have also been cursed—and that curse is the same as the one I treated before. If I don't stop him now, there'll only be more victims."

"All right. Be careful not to kill him, then. You'll have to put him out of commission before you can break the curse."

"I know." I balled my hand into a fist, readying myself for combat. My opponent was an unarmed human. Even though the spellcraft power emanating from his body gave him enough strength to destroy everything around him, I had to keep my own powers in check. If I drew my sword, he wasn't going to leave this fight alive—but I wanted to *save* him, not kill him.

I kicked off against the ground, dashing toward the man gone berserk. "Hraaagh!"

As I approached, he reflexively swung his arm at me like a whip. Dropping down low, I dodged it with ease. The blow was so powerful I could hear it whistle as it cut through the air.

"You're fast! But you're throwing your punches way too wide!" I shouted. Now that his guard was wide open, I drew my right arm back and threw a punch of my own straight toward his torso. My fist disappeared into his abdomen, sinking into it as if his belly were trying to draw it in.

I had held back the amount of force in my swing, but it was still an attack that would have instantly incapacitated the average person. At least, that's what I'd thought—until I saw the man strike back at me. My eyes widened.

"What?! How are you still moving?!" I jumped back, narrowly

dodging his counterattack. He glared at me, eyes bloodshot as he foamed at the mouth.

"His body has been fortified by the curse, it seems," remarked Cult.

"Curses can do that?"

"Yes, it's much like medicine—it can give incredible power as well as great suffering, just as an herb can be made into both a restorative and a poison."

"That makes sense. This might be a little tricky, then..." Well, there went my plan. I could've broken the curse already if my punch had sent him down for the count. Now it looked like I wouldn't be able to knock him out if I held back too much; I'd just have to hit him harder. But if I wasn't careful and misjudged the amount of force, I could inadvertently kill him.

Accident or not, murder was a serious crime. Plenty of witnesses could vouch for it being self-defense, so I doubt I'd be convicted, but... Legality aside, could I really bear the guilt of knowing I killed a man?

When I'd first fought a monster, I'd still hesitated to kill it despite the fact that it had been, by all appearances, a completely inhuman beast. Now, I was fighting a person who looked just the same as me. How could I bring myself to take his life?

I hesitated for a moment, which did not go unnoticed.

"Graaagh!" He bent his knees and leaned into a grappling stance, then charged at me like a beast intent on taking down its prey.

"Ah!" I attempted to dodge to the side and parry as he struck, but he pushed past. Did the curse boost his stamina as well? He'd been running wild this whole time, but he showed no signs of exhaustion.

"Sorry," I said as I raised my right hand with my fingers extended straight up. I was apologizing for what I was about to do. Whipping around behind the man, I swung my hand at the base of his neck—a knife hand strike, in other words—and hit him *hard*.

The man gasped loudly, breath leaving his lungs. His low stance meant his weight was now distributed toward the front, and as a result he pitched forward and rolled across the ground, skidding along its surface.

Still with my knife hand strike at the ready, I watched him closely. He showed absolutely no signs of getting back to his feet, though. It looked like I'd successfully knocked him out. Breathing a deep sigh of relief, I gingerly approached him and rolled him onto his back. His chest was rising and falling faintly, but noticeably.

"He's still breathing. Whew, I didn't kill him..."

I'd planned on increasing the force of my attacks little by little, but thankfully, I'd only had to do that once—the second attack had been enough to take him down.

"Dear one, you'd best break the curse right away. This one is far stronger than what we saw yesterday. He will surely perish if he's left untreated for long," said Cult.

"All right. I'm still a little shaky on my control when it comes to curse breaking...so I'll have to brute-force it." I placed my right hand on the man's chest, right over his heart.

Cult had mentioned earlier that his heart had become a wellspring for a powerful curse or something like that. In other words, I only needed to destroy that wellspring. It sounded simple in theory, and I had full confidence in the amount of godcraft energy I could draw on to overwhelm the curse.

Single-mindedly focusing on the task at hand, I released my power at full blast. In a flash, my surroundings were bathed in a radiant, golden glow. Even I couldn't keep my eyes open—I'd never used godcraft at such intensity before.

But it sounded like it worked.

"Gaaahhh!" The man writhed on the ground and screamed in pain as I removed the curse by force. According to Cult, this reaction was a sign of the curse itself resisting. The affliction sent pain signals to the body and dug its metaphorical claws into the flesh to avoid being removed.

In other words, though the curse's victim would be in immense pain, you had to keep trying to break the spell. Stopping would be doing exactly what the curse wanted.

Still, the man's cries couldn't help but move my heart. I felt terribly sorry for him, but I continued releasing godcraft power into

him without letting up even once. The healing continued for a minute, then three minutes, then five...

Eventually, his cries of pain died down; after the fifth minute, they had completely stopped. Taking that to be a sign the curse was gone, I stopped releasing power.

I sighed after a long moment, satisfied. “He looks peaceful. I’ve successfully broken the curse.” After the last glimmer of light disappeared, the man’s pallid face returned to a normal, ruddy color. I didn’t know whether he’d been in good health before the curse, but at least he looked relatively normal now. There were no issues with his breathing either.

“Good work, Huey! It took some real force, but you broke the curse perfectly!” Fouré flipped me a thumbs-up, but I just couldn’t feel the same way.

“I wish it didn’t have to be like this, though. If only I could control godcraft as well as you could, Fouré...” I sighed.

She laughed, though it was more soothing than in humor. “You’ve only just begun to learn to break curses, so it’s understandable. It requires the extremely delicate manipulation of godcraft, and your perception also needs to be at a level where it can even detect the location of a curse in a person’s body. Just being able to break the curse, even a little brutally, is still an amazing feat in itself.”

“Okay,” I said, unsure if I was convinced. “At any rate, I’m not done here yet.”

I glanced up from the man, looking forward. There, several people lay on the ground, injured during the man’s rampage. The curse seemed to have passed to them, though it was weaker than it had been in its source. Regardless, leaving them without providing aid would surely put their lives in danger.

“I think I have just barely enough energy left to cure them too.” I got to my feet and, smiling in resignation, headed toward the people collapsed on the ground. Turns out today was another busy day full of havoc.

I shrugged to no one in particular, releasing all the tension the situation had built up in my body. Little did I realize that the true

chaos was soon to come.

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Several hours had passed since the disaster with the cursed man. Once I'd brought everyone affected by the incident, now curse-free, to the church and left them in the healers' care, I headed out of town, discussing the situation with the goddesses all the while. I returned to my home, which I'd left protected by a barrier, and there I practiced my spellcraft, making sure to take intermittent breaks.

The most efficient way to understand curses was to actually create them myself, Cult had informed me, so I spent the entire afternoon practicing them. But nearing the end of my practice session, I could hear panicked cries from outside the barrier.

The voices sounded like men, and they seemed to be calling for me. While the barrier physically blocked intruders from entering, it allowed free passage of sound. Even if I could, I had no intention of making the barrier soundproof—it'd be a problem if someone came looking for me and I couldn't hear them.

Setting aside my training for the moment, I hurried toward the voices. I threaded through the trees until I reached the edge of the barrier, where I saw several knights. They shouted when they saw me.

"Master Hisui! Please, help us! His lord the marquis and Lady Rose are both in terrible danger!" They were awfully panicked—something very serious must've happened.

"Calm down, everyone! What happened?"

"A curse! The marquis and his daughter have been cursed!"

"What?!"

Come to think of it, Rose had mentioned she would be going shopping with Armeria and Cosmos today, with Claus and the guards as her retinue. They must've gotten cursed when they went out.

As far as I could tell, they hadn't been anywhere near the eastern quarter, where I'd been. That area of town was a residential district anyway; they would have gone to the west or south quarters to go shopping. That meant a carrier of the curse, or someone who had

barely escaped the rampaging man in the east quarter, had come into contact with Rose and the others.

Rose was kind, so if she encountered someone injured, she wouldn't have abandoned them to their fate. I could actually see both Rose and Claus ending up cursed that way.

"How are they doing?" I asked.

"They seem to be groaning in pain, but their lives don't seem to be in any danger. Still... While Lord Lycoris may be able to endure the pain, Lady Rose is only a child..." The knight trailed off, his concern clear in his voice.

"Things might take a turn for the worse, then, if we don't do something about it."

"That's right. The marquis ordered us to find you immediately, then fell unconscious directly afterward. Please, return to the manor with us!"

"All right. I'm not entirely certain I can cure both at the same time with the amount of energy I have remaining, but I'll give it a shot."

"Thank you so much!" The knights all deeply bowed at once. Seeing them bend low in earnest supplication made Claus's natural nobility and charisma hit home—his men were all desperately trying to seek help for him.

Leaving the barrier, I ran at the forefront of the knights. As we traveled back to town, I took the opportunity to ask about Armeria and Cosmos. "By the way, are my sisters okay?"

"If you mean Miss Armeria and Miss Cosmos, then they're unharmed thanks to Lord Lycoris's timely intervention. He let us know the curse was transmissible beforehand."

"That's good..." I sighed. That was a silver lining in all this mess. I was relieved that neither of my sisters were suffering. It was reassuring to think that no one else would get cursed now—

Wait a minute.

"Um, how did Claus and Rose manage to get back to the estate?" As the knights had been telling me what happened, I did think that detail was strange. If Claus and Rose had collapsed from the curse, then someone had to have carried them back to the manor. Wouldn't

the curse have spread to anyone who helped them?

There's always some truth behind a bad premonition, and my suspicions were validated when a knight answered, frowning in displeasure. "Several knights were cursed as well, but they managed to bring Lord Lycoris and Lady Rose back to the manor despite their ailment."

"They're a shining example of knighthood," I said.

"Indeed. I'm quite proud of my men." Judging by that comment, I realized I must have been speaking to the captain of the knights. Now that I looked more closely, I was pretty sure I'd seen him during the dragon-slaying incident. He looked pretty strong, so it was easy to remember him.

"I'll help the knights who worked so hard to save Lord Lycoris too. I can't abandon them either."

"Really?! But I thought you said you were lacking godcraft energy..."

"I have an idea. Don't worry," I said, glancing to my side. There, about twenty meters away, was Fouré watching over me. Seeing my look, she must've realized my intention, because she flipped me a thumbs-up. *Leave it to me*, she seemed to be saying.

"Thank you so much, Master Hisui! Thank you!"

The knight I presumed to be the commander was holding back tears as he ran. His palpable relief was entirely understandable. I decided not to talk to him, since that would be terribly tactless, and instead I just smiled quietly as we ran onward.

We ran through the streets all the way to the Lycoris estate without resting even once. Though the city gates should have been long closed by now, they were reopened on the knights' authority to allow us passage—they must have done the same thing when they'd headed out to find me in the first place. We passed into town through the south gates with far less trouble than I expected, then hurried through the crowd.

Shouting for people to make way, the knights easily parted the onlookers, and we arrived at the mansion in record time. I dashed to Claus's room on the first floor and entered in such a rush that I forgot to knock.

"Lord Lycoris!" I shouted. Stepping into the room, I saw Claus lying on his bed, his eyes closed.

"That black mist coming from his body...it must be the curse."

Just as the knights had informed me, Claus had indeed been cursed. The spellcraft energy coalescing on him wasn't as concentrated as it had been on the rampaging man from earlier—in fact, it was closer to the density I'd observed on the man's victims. The curse should weaken just from contact with godcraft energies, which would make breaking it a simple affair.

"I'm going to begin breaking the curse now. Don't touch Lord Lycoris under any circumstances."

"As you say!" acknowledged the knight captain, who then turned to his men. "You knights there! Keep watch outside the room."

"Understood, sir!"

Following my instructions, the knights scrambled to follow their orders without disturbing Claus. Now, only the captain and two of his knights remained in the room—everyone else besides the guards posted outside Claus's chambers had been directed to Rose's room. With the three knights watching, I approached Claus and touched his arm.

"Fouré, I'm counting on you," I whispered. As I spoke, I released all of the remaining godcraft energy that'd been flowing through my body. A bright golden light illuminated the room like a flash.

"Ngh! Aaagh!" Struck by my power, the curse sent pain coursing through Claus, its host, to warn of danger. Though Claus remained unconscious, he began to thrash about on his bed. The knights behind us began to panic.

"M-Master Hisui! Is his lordship all right?"

"Don't worry. When curses are being broken, they cause pain to the host's body. Once the curse is gone, the pain should stop."

"Are you absolutely certain?"

"Yes. While it's painful now, there shouldn't be any residual effects..." I trailed off, before muttering a quiet "I think."

"Master Hisui!" None of the people for whom I'd broken the curse had suffered any apparent side effects afterward, so things would *probably* be fine. But even though I was pretty certain, I couldn't

bring myself to say it was one hundred percent a fact. Unfortunately, that only seemed to fan the flames of the knights' anxiety.

Since no further discussion was necessary, I decided to focus on the task at hand and silently continued channeling godcraft energy into Claus. After five minutes of this, Claus's complexion finally returned to normal; his face was no longer the ashen gray of a dying man.

The light's intensity slowly faded until it had finally disappeared entirely. The knights opened their eyes to see Claus's peaceful face, and one of them spoke, voice trembling.

"Oh! Lord Lycoris looks much better!"

"The curse has been lifted. Lord Lycoris should awaken soon, so until then, please guard him. The barrier is still active outside, but we don't know what the criminal who cast the curse in the first place might do."

"We'll do as you say! Thank you, Master Hisui!" All three knights bowed to me in turn. They were so thankful, I wouldn't have been surprised if they got to their knees and grovelled. Their loyalty to Claus was incredible.

"Not at all. Anyway, I'm going to help Rose now. Should anyone other than me come here, to Lord Lycoris's chambers, be sure to turn them away."

"We'll do so."

Bidding farewell to the knights who were carrying out my orders, I left and headed to Rose's room.

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I pelted down the manor's hallways at full speed—without using magecraft, of course. I arrived at Rose's room in no time flat. Standing in front of it, for some reason, were Armeria and Cosmos.

"Armeria? And you too Cosmos? Why are you both here?"

"Hisui! Thank goodness you're safe!" exclaimed Cosmos. The moment they saw me, they both wrapped their arms around me in a great hug, their combined weight pressing down on my body.

"While we were shopping today, Lady Rose..." Armeria trailed off.

"We were worried, so we came to check on her," said Cosmos.

"Yes," Armeria agreed.

"We couldn't do anything to help, after all..." Cosmos sighed and bit her lip. Cosmos was ordinarily cheerful and vibrant, but now she was staring at the ground dejectedly.

"I know how you feel. If I were in your shoes, I'm sure I'd be upset too. But Lady Rose is really nice; I'm sure she won't blame you guys for what happened. You didn't do anything wrong." Hugging back, I spoke gently to soothe them. "In fact, you should give her a big smile and chat with her once she's better. I'm sure that'll make her happier than seeing you all depressed like this."

"Hisui..." murmured Cosmos.

"C'mon, don't cry. A smile better suits you, Cosmos."

Cosmos wiped the tears from her eyes with her sleeve. She continued trembling as she desperately tried to keep from sobbing.

"Just leave this to me. I'll break the curse on Lady Rose in a snap." With that, I pulled away from my sisters. I exchanged a glance with the knight standing guard in front of Rose's room, then entered alone.

Just as Claus had been in his own chambers, Rose lay prone atop her bed. Her complexion was far worse than Claus's had been, however—while the curse had the same effects on them both, the differences in their ages and bodies had caused it to weigh heavier on Rose.

"Hang on a little longer, Lady Rose. The pain will be gone soon." I approached Rose's bedside. When I did, she opened her eyes at the precise moment I drew near. Had she sensed my presence?

"Lord...Hisui?" she weakly mumbled.

"Good evening, Lady Rose. I've come to save you."

"I'm so sorry," she began. Her speech was halting as she pushed the words out despite the pain she was suffering "I'm causing you...so much trouble..."

"Please, Lady Rose, it's no trouble at all. The person who cursed you is the one in the wrong here, after all—you're a victim. So please don't think you're troubling me." I placed a hand over Rose's own, then gently channeled godcraft energy into her.

"Ah! It hurts!"

"Try to bear with it. You'll be fine soon, I promise. I'll break the curse now."

"All right. I...believe you..."

"I'll save you. Don't worry about anything."

After I reassured her, she fell unconscious once more. Whether it was from relief or pain, I couldn't tell. Regardless, there was only one thing for me to do. I gradually increased the amount of godcraft energy I was channeling into her, putting all my power into blasting away the curse that was eating through her body.

Rose's agonized screams echoed through the room.

Armeria and Cosmos, who had been waiting in the hallway, tried to push their way into the room upon hearing Rose's screams, but were barred from entry by the knights. Five minutes passed without anyone interrupting...and then the curse was gone from Rose's body as well.

"I'm so tired," I panted. I'd used a massive amount of energy in a short amount of time, and I had hardly any left now. Once I completely run out, I'd be overcome by a terrible feeling of heaviness, as if my body had turned to lead. Whether that could be called exhaustion or lethargy, I wasn't sure.

I collapsed down to sit on the floor, and the three goddesses descended down from above me.

"You've used so much energy, Huey! I know we were the ones who okayed it, but don't you think you went a little overboard?" asked Fouré, concerned.

I laughed tiredly in response. "This is nowhere near as overboard as the training I do with you guys."

"Oh, so our training goes 'overboard,' does it? Is there something you wanted to share with us, Hisui?" In the blink of an eye, Aruna had leaned in close to me. Her amethyst eyes narrowed as if she were trying to read my mind. I was honestly a little scared.

"I-I was just kidding! Of course I don't think your training is bad!"

"Hee hee," snickered Cult. "I think Aruna does go a bit too far sometimes, though."

"Whose side are you even on?" Aruna snapped.

"Dear Hisui's, of course."

"Sure, whatever you say." Aruna shrugged. "Anyway, you'd best get up, Hisui. Your sisters are waiting to hear the results outside."

"Yeah. I'd better tell them right away. If I don't hurry, I can definitely see them bowling the knights over to charge in here." Of course, neither of them really had the strength to do that—but they did have the guts and determination to try. I decided to report to the group waiting in the hall immediately, especially since the knights were also sick with worry.

Taking a deep breath, I roused my heavy body and stood. Plodding toward the exit, I turned the doorknob and pushed the door open. The moment I did, my two sisters peppered me with a series of questions.

"Hisui! Did something happen to Lady Rose?!" cried Armeria.

"We heard a loud scream coming from the room! Is she okay?!" asked Cosmos.

"Calm down, both of you. Lady Rose's curse is no more. Right now, she's fast asleep."

Relief washed over Armeria and Cosmos, but they weren't the only ones reassured by my words. The two knights who had been guarding the door also smiled and rejoiced.

Though I felt a little bad doing so, I shushed the group before their celebration got out of hand. "We should keep quiet until Lady Rose wakes on her own. It'd be bad for her health if we interrupted her sleep."

"Okay. Let us return to our room, Cosmos," said Armeria.

Cosmos hesitated for a moment before replying. "All right, fine. What about you, Hisui? Are you going home?"

"No. There's something I still need to take care of."

"Like what?" Armeria and Cosmos looked at me curiously. I turned my gaze away from them, though, looking at the knights.

"Where are the knights who were also afflicted?"

"They're in the detached quarters next to the manor," they explained.

I thanked them before turning to address my sisters once more. "I need to take care of that—there are people who still need my

help. Wait for me here okay? And whatever you do, don't go out."

"All right." Armeria nodded.

"We'll stay here!"

Good girls. I doubted they'd rush into Claus's or Rose's room after this. I was especially worried Cosmos still might have, but I was sure Armeria would stop her. Waving to the two of them, I headed down to the barracks where the knights were staying.

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Late at night, when all were asleep and silence reigned, a man garbed in a black cloak was muttering angrily in a quiet corner of town.

"What the hell is going on?! We used that priceless artifact, but nothing came of it!" He was referring to the events of that morning: Intent on spreading a powerful curse throughout the town, the acolytes had implanted a magical item into their chosen sacrifice. But their luck had proven poor, as Hisui had found the man and neutralized him without issue.

As if that weren't enough, Hisui had also completely erased the curse created by the artifact—which left the Erebos acolytes flummoxed.

"How could that boy be so powerful?"

"The sacrifice might have been an untrained, ordinary person with no powers, but his physical abilities still should've been enhanced dramatically! And the boy knocked him out simply by *hitting* him? Who the hell is that brat?!"

"His name is Hisui Belcoure Clematis, and he is eight years old. He seems to have come to Lycoris from the neighboring barony of Clematis."

"Clematis? Oh, right. That rural barony..."

"Correct. Judging by the boy's age, he must be the third son of the baron. The baron's other two sons are older and quite different from him."

"Then what is that power that Hisui boy uses? His physical abilities far outstripped that of any normal child."

“He’s confirmed to be a user of godcraft, and he can’t exactly have two powers, so...”

The man clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Then we really know nothing about him except his name and family.”

One of the gathered acolytes sighed in frustration. All of their plans had disappeared in a puff of smoke because of Hisui. Many of the acolytes could understand why the man could hardly contain his fury—they all felt the same to some degree, after all.

Now that their schemes were in tatters, the Erebos acolytes would find it difficult to achieve their ultimate goal of converting more to their faith. Hisui was the only topic on everyone’s lips in town now—the Erebos acolytes, who had also been curing the afflicted, were no more than a shadow in the back of people’s minds.

“What will we do about that Hisui Belcoure Clematis boy? If we leave him be, he’ll only throw a wrench in our plans.”

“He’s been doing that his whole time! But we can’t put anything in motion without permission. We’ll have to contact our leaders and ask them for their decision.”

“Ah, speaking of the leaders, a letter arrived earlier.”

“What letter?”

“It arrived just before our meeting here. I thought it best to check after we’ve finished here.”

“Let me see it.”

“Here.” Pulling a letter from within his robes, he passed it to the other man, who was the representative of acolytes in attendance. Taking the letter, the acolyte leader broke the seal and flipped it open.

As he read through it, he laughed. “I see. They certainly always have their ears to the ground—it seems they’ve heard of the boy already. Someone else must also be keeping them apprised of the situation.”

Having finished reading the letter, he leveled a harsh glare at the man who had delivered it, but only for a brief second—the more sources of information their leaders had, the better. Remonstrating himself for a moment under the knowledge that he was not being dismissed, he returned the letter.

"What did it say?"

"We have permission to proceed with the plan. However, the effects of the curse are soon ending, the marquis is on high alert, and now we have that Hisui boy to contend with—recovering from our setbacks will be far too difficult. I propose we kill the boy immediately. We still have one more ace up our sleeve."

The man pulled an artifact from his robes and showed it to the other acolytes. It appeared to be a small heart that was still beating, and no one present knew whom the heart could have possibly belonged to. Many of the Erebos faithful, overcome with a wave of nausea just from looking at it, averted their eyes.

"What manner of artifact is that?"

"It's quite the curiosity—it can temporarily summon quite the interesting monster."

"A monster?"

"Don't worry; it should disappear on its own once it completes its objective—that is, killing the boy. As I shall be the summoner, it will obey my commands."

"You're quite wary of that boy, aren't you?"

"Of course. Who wouldn't be? How can a child break curses? He may even be able to sense spellcraft, or at least possess an artifact that allows him to do so. On top of that, he was able to defeat a grown man who'd been magically enhanced in direct combat. Should we end up in a fight with this boy ourselves, we will be defeated. But this artifact is precisely for such an emergency."

Holding the eerie heart, he laughed in delight. His voice was low and guttural, and his eyes were filled with a clear malice that was, in other words, a sort of blind fanaticism—the type of self-confidence that made a person believe in their own righteousness. But none were foolish enough to question his madness. All in attendance had long since decided to give themselves to their faith in Erebos.

"When will we begin the operation?"

"Tomorrow. The sooner, the better. We will shatter the peace in this town—we must kill that boy. If not, then we take him to brainwash, provided he's weakened."

"As you wish." The Erebos acolytes all nodded in unison, save for

the man holding the heart.

The streets were still roiling in turmoil from the curse. The people must be plunged into greater chaos. The Erebos acolytes were driven only by these sentiments of pure malice.

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I slept like a log.

After breaking the curse for Claus, Rose, and the knights in their employ, I slept as soundly as I had after the mass curing at the church.

Noon had long since passed by the time I realized the amount of time I'd spent in bed. The moment I woke, the brightness of the day outside startled me.

What time did I fall asleep, anyway?

After checking the time, my eyes snapped wide open in shock—so wide that my eyeballs might've flown out of their sockets—and I made my way to Claus's chambers as quickly as I could.

Two knights were standing guard outside his door, clearly indicating that he was still inside. I quickly got permission to enter, and no sooner had I stepped into the room than Claus sat up on his bed, bright and full of energy.

"Is it okay for you to be sitting up, Lord Lycoris?" I asked Claus, who was perusing some documents on his bed.

Smiling gently, he replied, "I'm the perfect picture of health—thanks to you, Hisui. But what of you? Did you wake up just now? How are you feeling?"

"I slept a ton, so I'm feeling pretty good too. Sorry for borrowing one of your rooms without permission. I can't believe I slept in so late either."

"Why are you apologizing? You didn't just save me—I heard you broke the curse on my dear Rose as well, and furthermore even helped my knights. I ought to be the one apologizing for putting you through such trouble."

Claus looked up from his papers and gazed at me for a few moments before bowing.

I hurriedly shook my head and waved my hands at him.

"Y-You don't need to apologize! You were the victim in this mess, after all."

"That is a bit reassuring to hear, since you do keep saving me and mine. First, you delivered us from the dragon attack, then you helped solve the outbreak of the curse in town, and now you've saved my life yet again. I really haven't the foggiest clue how I might repay you for the favors you've done for our town."

"Please, think nothing of it. I didn't help because I wanted a reward or anything—I helped because I wanted to."

"Come now. You must be properly compensated, Lord Hisui."

The door behind me suddenly opened, and someone entered the room. The words that accompanied the footsteps froze me in place, my mouth agape.

"Rose?" Claus said. "Did I not tell you just this morning to stay in your room and rest?"

The new visitor to Claus's room was, in fact, his very own daughter. Casually flipping back her long, red hair with her hand, she spoke with an impish grin.

"I think it's quite unfair to exclude me from this conversation now that Lord Hisui's awake."

"That wasn't my intention at all. Besides, I imagine Hisui would have gone straight to your room after our conversation was concluded in any case."

"If I must return to my room, then why don't we go together? We can discuss your reward," Rose said, turning to me.

"Huh? But like I said, I don't need—"

"You *do*." Rose sharply cut me off and raised a finger.

"Come on!"

"You're far too humble. Considering you saved a lot of people's lives, you really ought to demand much more compensation! Think about it from our point of view—being the overseers of this land, we have to repay favors, or else it'll reflect terribly on our reputation."

"Couldn't I just accept your gratitude and be done with it?"

"Absolutely not. This is a matter of pride for our house."

"I see... All right. In that case, I suppose it would be impolite of

me to refuse."

Continuing to deny them seemed more rude than just accepting, especially after Rose's explanation. I had to admit that it would never hurt to have more money, so accepting it from people who could afford to pay me was probably a good idea. Besides, that way, I could help ease the burden on Azalea once we met up with her.

I raised both hands in surrender and smiled disarmingly. Rose smiled back.

"I'm glad things have worked out," said Claus. "As for the precise terms of your compensation, feel free to discuss it with Rose. Provided your request is not too outlandish, you can rest easy knowing we're happy to grant you whatever you desire."

"Thank you, father," said Rose. She bowed her head modestly, then grabbed my arm tightly. "Let's go. We mustn't disturb my father all afternoon. Let's have a nice, leisurely talk in my room."

"Um, okay," I said, sighing. "Don't go too hard on me."

I didn't know exactly what to say, so in the end, all I could manage was an awkward, confused reply.

Rose led me out of Claus's room and into the hallway. I never would have guessed she had such a strong grip.

Then, at that moment, I sensed something terrible far in the distance.

"Huh? I just felt something just now..."

"What's the matter?" Rose, who had been dragging me along by the arm, suddenly stopped and gave me a puzzled look.

"Well, it's just...I sensed the presence of something terrible just outside of town," I admitted.

As I explained what was going on, my expression grew increasingly grim. With each passing moment, the unpleasant feeling I'd first sensed intensified. We seemed to be far away from the epicenter of the sensation, so why did it still manage to instill so much anxiety and repulsion in me?

A single comment from the Chaos Goddess, who appeared floating in midair just above me, immediately answered my question.

"How quaint. Someone's performing a ritual to summon a demon

from another world."

An otherworldly ritual to summon a demon? Now *that* sounded ominous.

"I can't just ignore this... Sorry, Lady Rose, but we'll have to discuss my compensation later."

"Huh?"

"There's somewhere I need to be!"

With that, I shook Rose's grip from my arm and raced down the hallway in a blur. Dashing out of the manor with a great burst of speed, I bounded over the entrance gate without even pausing to greet the knights on guard.

Despite the height of the gate, I hit the ground running and sprinted through the town streets, pushing myself to the limit for as much of the distance as possible.

As I ran, I asked Cult about the ritual she'd mentioned earlier.

"What did you mean about the summoning?"

"It's exactly as it sounds. Some artifacts possess the power to draw in creatures from across dimensions and space. They function similarly to my spellcraft powers, but they use an entirely different kind of magic." She giggled in amusement. "How exciting."

"Summoning artifacts? Who would have something like that?"

"You'll be able to tell when you get there. The ritual isn't being held too far from town."

"They must be worried about getting caught, since they're going out of their way to avoid being seen by others."

If they were summoning monsters so close to town, did that mean they were planning an attack? If that was the case, then it'd make more sense to summon the monsters directly inside the town instead. The main reason for performing the ritual in such a remote location was probably to avoid being seen. In other words, the criminals were people who couldn't afford to be recognized.

The image of the Erebos acolytes drifted into my thoughts. They were the only ones who fit the bill at this point in time.

"An excellent challenge. I have the feeling this will be enjoyable," said Aruna, who had been floating next to Cult with her arms crossed. The goddesses each gave off the impression that they were

pretty dang optimistic.

"This'll be a real trial for Huey! The enemy's pretty creepy, but I think you'll be okay."

"And if it comes down to a fight and turns out to be too tough for him to handle, then I'll take care of things. Everything'll be fine," Aruna said.

"Are you implying you're not going to step in until I get killed?"

When I asked, Aruna looked away. And without a single word!

I wanted to protest and complain that they were asking for too much again, but I was well aware of how important it was to solve problems with my own power. If I avoided every threat and relied on the goddesses to do everything, I would never grow as a person.

Despite this, however, the goddesses did usually end up taking care of most things. Ordinarily, that wasn't an issue, but there was always the chance something might go wrong, and refusing to help when I'd been gifted such powers would've been nothing but laziness. I wanted to be the kind of person my sisters could be proud of, which meant that I had to be careful not to rely on the goddesses *too* much—especially for situations that could involve combat like the one I was currently facing.

"The attempt will be well worth the effort, Hisui. Uncommon opponents are very precious—it will be an enlightening experience."

"A-All right, fine. Sorry if I die, I guess."

"If you do, Fouré will revive you for a second round!"

"You're a monster!"

What, were they just going to keep reviving me until I finally defeated the enemy?! Were they never going to take care of the enemy no matter how many times I died?

I got the distinct feeling that Aruna's hardcore training regime was getting tougher by the day, so I couldn't help but be taken aback. The only reason I didn't just up and pass out on the spot was that I suddenly felt a mysterious, burgeoning swell of energy, as if something were about to come into the world.

Boosting my speed even further, I sprinted to make every second

count.

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Showing my Adventurer Card to the knights guarding the southern gate, I left town.

The culprits attempting to summon a monster were easily found by following the terrible aura that emanated from their ritual.

Deep in the forest, I came upon a group of people in dark robes. They sat in a circle, and in the center lay a small heart.

"Ugh, what the heck is *that*? It's still beating even though it doesn't have a body!"

The throbbing of the heart echoed in my ears, its beat pulsing loudly even though I was hidden a short distance away.

"From what I can tell, those people are channeling godcraft and spellcraft energies into the heart. The heart itself doesn't have any energy of its own, so they must need an ample amount to perform the summoning," Cult observed.

"So I'd best stop them before that happens."

"I'd honestly prefer it if they completed the summoning and the monster appeared," said Aruna.

I figured she'd say that—all she could talk about was training until we'd finally left town. But now that we knew the demon had yet to arrive, that changed the trajectory of my plans.

"I was going to clear out any nearby monsters until they finished summoning, but I can't really take a risk like that. If the thing they're summoning ends up ignoring me and heads to town, then it'll be the townspeople who suffer."

"You're right. It's a shame, but we should stop their ritual."

"Okay, here I go."

Drawing my sword from its sheath and weaving magecraft around me to boost my physical performance, I leaped from the bushes and used that momentum to strike at the person nearest me. Of course, I struck them with the flat of my sword.

"Gwagh!"

My surprise attack had been a success. The man who'd been

channeling energy into the heart gasped loudly, then fell over. One hit had been enough to knock him unconscious.

"You're—!"

Alerted to my presence, the other acolytes who'd been sitting on the ground rose to their feet. They drew their weapons, fixing their steely gazes on me.

"I didn't think you'd actually come, but here you are...Hisui Belcoure Clematis."

"How do you know my name?!" I gasped.

The man farthest away from me guffawed, then answered my question in a low voice. He explained that the acolytes had already investigated me, which I'd suspected they would do, but I was surprised at how quickly they'd figured things out. I wondered if there had been an information leak from the adventurer's guild.

"You really enjoy messing with our plans, don't you? Who are you, really? No ordinary boy would be able to sense the energy emanating from this artifact—the fact that it has spellcraft energies aside."

"I thought you'd looked into me."

"Yeah, and we didn't find a speck of dirt. Only that you're the youngest of a backwater noble family."

"That's everything there is to know."

I leveled my sword into a battle-ready stance. Though I'd temporarily interrupted their ritual, the heart seemed to be absorbing energy on its own—its beating in my ears hadn't stopped, and the presence of a powerful entity had not faded. I decided I was going to destroy the heart right then and there.

Everything happened in a flash. I dashed forward at a speed impossible to track with the naked eye, closing in on the heart lying on the ground.

"I don't think so, boy!"

The man rolled up his sleeves and thrust his right hand forward, revealing a purple bracelet. The bangle flashed a strange, sickly light for a single moment before it sent a burst of black mist hurtling toward me.

"Spellcraft, huh? Bad choice," I said.

His attack had been a curse formed from spellcraft. The bracelet was probably a magical artifact that could quickly generate simple curses. However, when the black mist reached me, it disappeared into nothing. It hadn't even caused me any pain or discomfort before dissipating.

"What?! That didn't land?!"

"Curses don't work on me. My body's pretty resilient," I joked.

In a single bound, I reached the heart. Raising my sword, I brought the weapon down as hard as I could, without mercy.

The artifact shone with a gray light as I split it in two—or it would have, if not for the arm that burst out from it a mere moment before my blade reached it. The bloodred arm caught my sword in its hand.

"Wha—?!" I gasped in surprise.

No way! I grumbled in my head. But even as I silently cursed, I hopped backward, keeping myself ahead of the game.

"My, my, that was close. Had you been just a little faster, you really would have ruined our plan."

The man, who'd been shocked at his failed curse just moments ago, was now clapping. As he did, the arm thrust itself into the ground—and with a horrendous creaking sound, the rest of its body began to form.

First came a second arm to match the original, then the torso. Flesh grew over the heart lying on the ground, then stretched outward to form the shoulders, chest, and belly. As those developed, its neck also stretched upward, twisting into a head. Its face was a deep red, the same color as the rest of its body. Purple eyes emerged from the surface of its face, followed by black horns. Its visage was twisted into a fierce snarl of anger—and I recognized the creature's appearance now.

"A demon?" I blurted out.

I'd been correct—the red monster looked shockingly similar to the demons of legend I'd heard of in Japan. As its arms, legs, and body neared complete manifestation, the terrible feeling that had been plaguing me drove my heart to race even faster.

"This is our ultimate ace—a beast summoned from a different world! How long will you fare against it?!"

“Groooaaar!”

The red demon, now with both feet planted firmly on the ground to hold it up, released a bellowing roar so loud I wanted to cover my ears. Birds bolted from the surrounding trees and underbrush, and I even caught sight of a few monsters fleeing some distance away.

“Now go! Destroy that interloper, then destroy the town!”

The man in the very back issued orders to the demon. The creature glowered at me, then charged with an upraised fist.

I gasped. “It’s fast!”

It closed the distance of five meters in an instant. Its hulking body, more than twice my size, was directly in front of me in the blink of an eye. I swung my sword reflexively, but it merely struck the demon with a loud clang. Not even a scratch!

“No way!” I yelped in surprise. Just how hard was its skin?!

As I grumbled in frustration, the demon swung its arm at me. I didn’t have time to dodge, so I brought my sword up to block the blow. The shock of the impact reverberated through me, knocking me out of my stance before it sent me flying backward.

I crashed into a large tree, and excruciating pain shot through my back.

“Damn, it’s strong,” I swore. “I didn’t attack with my full power, but I did use magecraft, and that wasn’t even enough to break through its skin.”

I was now certain that even if I poured all of my magecraft into an attack now, I still wouldn’t defeat it—in fact, I probably wouldn’t even manage to wound it significantly.

“What now, Hisui?” Aruna asked, looking down at me. “It’s far stronger than you. Are you going to try attacking it the same way you did with the basilisk, destroying your body to kill it?”

Fouré and Cult were floating above me as well, the former looking down at me anxiously while the latter stared at the demon in fascination.

“I don’t really want to make my sisters worry too much,” I replied.

Enhancing my body to that point was my last resort. I’d rather not do that if it was possible to avoid it—that was the kind of move

that ought to be reserved for when the situation was truly dire.

Besides, it wasn't as though I didn't have other options for breaking this stalemate. I could still boost my firepower through magecraft and attack again.

And with that, I had a plan.

Coughing up blood as I rose to my feet, I used godcraft as emergency first aid.

"Grrr!"

The demon stopped in its tracks to stare at me. *Surprised that I'm a lot tougher than you expected, huh? Well, that makes the two of us. You're stupidly tough, and stupidly strong—I can see why the acolytes went through all the trouble of summoning you,* I thought.

And that was why I couldn't let this demon escape.

Just now, the man had told the demon to attack the town once it was done with me. In other words, he meant to unleash the demon on the unsuspecting townsfolk, which meant there was a very real risk that Armeria and the others would be hurt. I couldn't allow that to happen no matter what.

"Come at me, then! I won't let you lay a single finger on my family!"

Spitting blood, I tossed away my sword.

My tempestuous emotions came boiling up and manifested in my right hand as pure power. Red energy converged in my palm. Purple energy appeared in my left hand.

Spellcraft combined with magecraft.



If unleashing my magecraft at full power wouldn't be enough to defeat it, then all I had to do was use that magecraft to augment my spellcraft instead. I was going to show this demon the full force of my ultimate attack. No matter how tough it was or how resilient it was to sword slashes, even an otherworldly demon still wouldn't stand a chance if I struck it with overwhelming force. I had to defeat it!

I brought the two powers together. Enveloped in a mantle of purple magecraft energies, the spellcraft power burned like the blazing sun.

I was planning on striking it with an energy beam—the easiest type of attack to manifest, control, and kill with. I further amplified the destructive power of the swirling energies in my hand several times over.

A chill clearly running down his spine, the man standing behind the demon began to shout, voice shaky.

"Wh-What is that power?! How can you use both magecraft and spellcraft?! And we've seen you use godcraft as well... Just who *are* you—"

Before he finished his sentence, the demon, judging me to be a threat, kicked off against the ground and made a mad dash toward me. It must have planned to crush me before I could unleash my attack.

It swiftly closed in, raking with its claws that were keen enough to pierce straight through my body.

But its strike never reached me. The demon's attack was clouded by panic, which made it simple to dodge—I merely had to turn my body to the side to avoid it. I continued charging my beam, focus not wavering for even a second.

How convenient that the demon had come near me of its own accord. At this distance, there was no way I'd miss. I was definitely going to kill it.

A shout tore its way out of my lungs, scorching my throat with its intensity.

"You're dead!"

The burgeoning spellcraft energies fully merged with magecraft,

transforming into a brilliant gold. Light flashed from the tiny sun floating in my palm, illuminating its path forward.

Heat, light, spellcraft, and magecraft... All of it savagely sliced through the air.

The beam's circumference had been round in shape, so a column of light blasted through the forest ahead of me. The ground was gouged open, trees vanished, and the path of pure destruction stretched far into the distance.

Everything in the light's path was obliterated. All that remained to witness the destruction were me and the Erebos acolytes who hadn't been caught by it. The demon, struck squarely by the beam, had brilliantly evaporated into nothing.

"This is impossible... How is this happening? No human...should be capable of such power..." the man whispered before fading away. The Erebos acolyte who'd been standing behind the demon had also been caught in the path of the beam and obliterated. The remaining acolytes garbed head to toe in black, whom I figured were the man's underlings, all fell to their knees in unison. They didn't have the willpower to even run, much less put up a fight.

"Maybe I overdid it a little..."

I had poured every ounce of magecraft and spellcraft energy I had into that attack. While the demon had been impervious to my other attacks, this attack had scattered it to dust in an instant. All that might not have been necessary after all.

"No way, Huey! That was a great attack! You were so cool!" cheered Fouré.

"Not bad," hummed Aruna. "I would not expect anything less from my magecraft."

"Come now," interjected Cult. "That attack was only made possible through spellcraft. Your magecraft was just a bonus."

"What? The beam would never have been that powerful without my magecraft to augment it. Just admit that it was all thanks to my power," snapped Aruna.

"No. I will not. Absolutely not!"

"Come on, you guys," I laughed awkwardly. "Don't fight here."

Though enemies still remained in the vicinity, the goddesses

followed their own tune as always. But I doubted the remaining Erebos faithful had any fight left in them. There were just a few things left to do. Forcing my exhausted body to move, I tied up the defeated acolytes one after another. They didn't put up much resistance, so it looked like I'd successfully captured them all alive.

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Dragging the Erebos acolytes along, I returned to town.

The demon's roars had echoed all the way to town, so the knights guarding the south gate were on the verge of panic, raising the alarm about nearby monsters.

The merchants and adventurers who were lining up to enter the city were also shaking in fear, afraid they might be attacked at any moment. To put them at ease, I lied, saying there had been nothing out in the forest. After all, I *had* defeated the demon, so it wasn't totally untrue.

Considering that a kid like me had returned from the forest entirely cool and composed, peace was eventually restored. But, of course, they had to question me about the Erebos acolytes I'd dragged back to town. I made up a story I hoped was reasonably believable, stating that they'd attacked me, so I just returned fire. Then, promising to bring the acolytes before Claus, I entered town proper.

They knew Claus trusted me, so they didn't question my story, nor did they detain me. I was allowed through the gates without a hitch and headed back toward Claus's manor with the acolytes in tow, ignoring all the stares I got from the townspeople.

"The Erebos acolytes were planning on attacking the town?"

Upon arriving at the manor, I brought the tied-up acolytes before Claus. Briefly explaining the unrest caused by the curse, I also told Claus about the summoned demon and the acolytes' plans. After I finished, Claus fixed an ice-cold gaze on the Erebos acolytes.

"You dared to harm my people! And you even cursed Rose..."

The air was downright frosty. I thought he might even draw his

sword. Well, even if he brought his sword down on them, I could heal their wounds, so I chose not to interfere and simply watched. But contrary to my expectations, Claus calmed himself, releasing his welling anger in a deep sigh.

"I can heal them if they're wounded," I said, with a metaphorical wink and a nudge. I understood very well how it felt to see one's family hurt. But Claus shook his head.

"No. As the governor of these lands, I mustn't give in to anger. You saved Rose, after all, so all's well that ends well."

"All right."

He was a much better person than I was, considering I'd let my anger get the better of me and unleashed untold amounts of destruction through my augmented spellcraft. Guess I wasn't cut out to be a lord—not that it was a big surprise or anything.

"I simply calculated that it was more important to extract information from them than it was to get revenge. Neither of these options are respectable ones."

Claus stood from his chair and drew his sword. Stepping toward the Erebos acolytes, he pressed the tip of his blade against an acolyte's neck.

"Now, that being said, I'll give you lot a choice. You can choose to suffer, or you can give me the information I want. Which is it?"

"Kill us! We'll never sell our people out!"

Claus sighed. "Well, I expected as much."

He lowered his sword.

I figured it wouldn't be that easy, but at least their devotion was commendable.

"I'll send you to rot in prison, then, and I'll personally question each and every one of you. We'll see how you withstand pain."

One of the acolytes gasped, but though Claus's threat had clearly shaken them, they still refused to speak.

Clenching their jaws tight, they stubbornly glared at Claus, murderous anger in their eyes.

Then, something strange and entirely unexpected happened.

"Gah!"

One of the acolytes began to cough up blood.

Soon, the others followed suit one after another, writhing in agony as blood poured from their mouths.

"Wh-What's going on?!"

"A curse!"

First to notice the spellcraft energy, I hurriedly cast a blanket of godcraft healing over them, but I was too late. Before I could break the curses, the Erebos acolytes had breathed their last.

Lying lifeless on the ground, their faces were twisted in sorrow—but somehow, a glimmer of joy shone through.

"Damn it! After you'd gone through so much trouble to capture them," cried Claus.

"A curse must've been cast on them in advance, or maybe one of them had an artifact to do it."

If it was an artifact, it had clearly been undetectable until activated. They'd been meticulous in their plans.

"Apologies, Hisui. I've gone and wasted all your effort."

"No, I couldn't stop the curses in time either. This was unfortunately inevitable."

No one was at fault here—except for the person who'd cast the curse in the first place.

"I'll have the bodies taken care of. You must be tired, are you not? Go and get some rest."

"Thank you, Lord Lycoris."

Taking him up on his suggestion, I headed back to my room as Claus dealt with the aftermath.

If I'd borrowed Fouré's power, I could probably have brought the dead acolytes back to life, but I didn't want to do that just to have them suffer lashings in prison. It'd break my heart to use Fouré's power for something like that, and they weren't likely to spill their secrets anyway.

As I trod down the long hallway, relief flooded through my body.

The case of the curse was finally closed.

Chapter 7: Payback for Everything

Erebos acolytes had summoned a demon from another world, intending on attacking the town Claus governed.

Having sensed the presence of the beast before they launched their attack, I'd put an end to their barbaric plans. Unfortunately, the ringleader had been killed in the process. Given that I'd been the one responsible, I awoke the next morning with a sense of dissatisfaction.

"Oh, Lord Hisui... Your face is so darling even while you're asleep."

In the midst of darkness, I heard a familiar voice.

My consciousness gradually roused itself, and I slowly opened my eyes...to see Rose right in front of me. She was lying in my bed next to me.

"Lady Rose?!"

My foggy thoughts cleared up instantly. Mind catching up with reality, I pulled away from her in a flash and got out of bed so fast I practically jumped.

"Good morning, Lord Hisui," Rose said sweetly. "Did you sleep well?"

"G-Good morning," I stuttered. "I'm not tired anymore, thank you... But may I ask why you're in my room?"

"Since this was the second night in a row that you've stayed here, I couldn't help but want to see you sleeping."

Rose smiled radiantly without a shred of shame.

Still, this was odd. I had taken Claus up on his offer to stay at his manor and I'd intended on staying a few more days to make sure my sisters didn't worry. I was pretty sure I'd locked the door before going to sleep. House Lycoris typically valued privacy.

But now Rose was in my bed, right in front of me. She'd probably

unlocked the door with a master key. That aside, for a boy and a girl of the same age to be sleeping in the same bed together... It was just a little bit indecent!

I had no idea what I was stammering at her at this point, but I was ready to dash out of the room in embarrassment.

"L-Lady Rose, this is improper! You shouldn't be getting this close to a member of the opposite sex."

"As long as it's you, I think it's fine. You're our hero, after all."

"You sound a lot like your father..."

"Yes, well... That is something father would say, after all."

"I see."

Wait, wait, wait. Girls couldn't go around behaving so vulnerably around men, heroes or not! Men were all animals. They were liable to lose control of their desires way too easily. They fell to temptation, lost all reason, and tried to do unthinkable things—justifying it to themselves with thoughts like "it's fine as long as nobody finds out."

I prided myself on my willpower, but despite that, I still didn't know where my instincts would take me. There were no absolutes in the world, after all.

I fanned my flushed face with my right hand, and my heart throbbed so hard that it hurt. But Rose seemed completely unaffected, as if she had never even entertained the idea that I could be dangerous. Looking at her face, I felt a strange sense of calm settle over me.

"So, why did you come to my room?"

"As I said, I simply wanted to see you as you slept."

"Is that really all?"

"Yes!"

Thank you for replying so enthusiastically. How did Claus raise you, anyway?! I thought.

"Now that you have, please return to your room. If your father saw this, my life would be—"

Just as I was about to say "over," there was a knock on the door.

"Hisui? Are you awake?"

Oh. It really *was* over.

Speak of the devil. The voice from the other side of the door belonged to none other than Claus.

Rose was still on my bed. If he saw this, I'd be executed—or at least, if I were a father, that's what I'd do.

But when I tried to tell Rose to stay quiet while I responded to Claus through the door, she beat me to the punch.

"Hisui's already awake, father."

Nooo! Rooose?!

Rose had answered so matter-of-factly, I thought my veins would burst from how loud I was screaming internally. My eyes opened wide, and I began to sweat profusely.

"Rose? You came to see Hisui too, did you? Well, excuse me."

Opening the door with a clack, Claus entered the room.

It was his home, after all—I couldn't exactly tell him *not* to come in. Instead, I simply stood trembling in the corner of the room.

Contrary to my consternation, however, Claus didn't bat an eye seeing Rose sitting on my bed.

"Good morning, Hisui. What are you doing in the corner over there?"

"Huh? Oh, um... Nothing."

His reaction was almost a letdown. I thought he'd be so angry he would fly into a demonic rage, but he behaved the same way as always.

"By the way, father, what brings you here? You don't often come asking after Hisui," remarked Rose.

"Ah, it's just... I have some troubling news to share," replied Claus.

"Whatever could that be?" I wondered.

Claus turned his attention to me. "You have visitors, Hisui."

"Huh? Visitors?"

Who would be here to see me? I'd only been living here for a short while, and I didn't really know anyone in town yet. At least, I couldn't recall meeting anyone who might come all the way to the Lycoris residence.

"Yes. They claim to be your father and brothers."

For a moment, my breath caught in my throat. Time seemed to

stand still as I fell silent, lost for words.

My father and brothers...were in town...and they came to this manor?

There was no way. This was impossible. Canna was a ways out from the Clematis estate, so had they hitched a ride on a traveling merchant's carriage or something? That was the only explanation I could think of.

"Lord Hisui's family?" asked Rose. She turned to me. "If I recall correctly, you said you weren't very close to them."

"Th-That's right. Neither my father nor my brother cared for me, so why would they come here?"

"I imagine they heard rumors about you somewhere," remarked Claus.

"Rumors?"

"Are you not aware? Your name's on everyone's lips these days."

"What?!"

I looked at Claus in shock, my expression telling him exactly what I wanted to ask.

"You're the curse-breaking hero. Do you realize just how many people you saved at that church? Ever since that day, the people who witnessed your healing have been spreading stories of your miracles. They say Fouré's apostle walks among us now, with strikingly green hair."

"Oh no..."

When had this happened?! I'd been branded Fouré's apostle before I knew it. Now that I thought about it, though, I had caused quite a scene at the church, so I guess it was no surprise that people would start talking.

"Yay! Huey's my apostle!"

In the corner of the room opposite my own, Fouré had thrown her arms into the air joyfully. Her dazzling smile was the last thing I wanted to see at the moment.

"What do you mean, *your* apostle? He's mine, obviously," complained Aruna.

"It's rather unfair that Fouré is the only one who gets recognition. I won't take this lying down," Cult chimed in.

"Too bad! Huey's only used godcraft in public, after all! So of course people would think he's my apostle. Anyone would. Because he is!"

"No!"

"You're mistaken."

The three of them were arguing over whose apostle I was. But wasn't one, and even if I were, I'd be an apostle of all three of them.

"What would you like to do, Hisui? Now that you're famous and known to possess power, your family may very well have come to take you home. Would you like for us to send them away?"

I ruminated on the idea for a moment. "No, I don't want to cause any more trouble for you. I'll figure something out."

My guess was that my father and brothers had come to take Armeria and Cosmos back, and had tracked me down after hearing all those rumors. Perhaps, as Claus suggested, they might even have come to take me home as well, but I would never let that happen. I wouldn't let them take my sisters either.

Claus chuckled. "Come now, you needn't refuse my help like that. You're certain to have need of it."

"Huh?"

Claus was brimming with confidence. I had no idea where it came from. But instead of waiting for him to explain, I simply got changed and headed to the drawing room.

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Rose and Claus both accompanied me there. When I opened the door to the parlor, I saw my father, Glenn, and Mikhail lounging on the luxurious sofa.

"Oh, you're finally here. What took you so long?" my father abruptly exclaimed as he placed a teacup on the table.

Sweets had been served for the guests, of course, but they'd already consumed them all. I mean, they were there to be eaten, I guess, but it was still embarrassing that they had so few reservations about scarfing everything down in someone else's

home.

Quietly exasperated, I took a seat on the opposite side of the table. Claus and Rose seated themselves next to me.

"I wasn't expecting to see you here, father. What did you need?" I asked.

"It's about Armeria and Cosmos. Glenn told me you'd taken them away from home," he responded gruffly.

Of course this was about my sisters. I'd surmised as much.

"I'm taking care of them. I can do what I want with my own money," I objected.

"Don't be ridiculous. Now that Armeria's recovered from her illness, we must marry her to Viscount Geremeigh as soon as possible."

"The viscount's in his forties! Don't you feel bad for Armeria at all?!"

"This is just how marriages between nobles work. Everyone has their role to play."

"Ngh..."

I managed to stop myself from cursing at him.

Right now, it would be a simple matter to send my father and brothers away, but it was a fact of law that children belonged to their parents. In this kingdom, the parents had the right to choose marriage partners for their children. This was law, and I couldn't overturn that no matter how much magical power I had.

"Now, now, do calm down, Lord Clematis. Your daughters are getting along with my own dear Rose. It would be a pity to separate them so soon."

Claus, who'd been listening to our conversation, had thrown me a lifeline.

"My apologies, your lordship. You see, we're not terribly well-off. We must maintain good relationships with our neighbors simply to survive."

"You're being disrespectful to Lord Lycoris, father!" I interrupted.

"Shut up, you! Armeria and Cosmos are coming home whether you like it or not. And I've heard you've awakened in power as well—a shame it's not magecraft, but you'll serve your use."

"No! I'm not going back and neither are Armeria or Cosmos! We'll mind our own business, so you back off and mind your own as well!"

"Ridiculous. You belong to me. You have no right to disobey!"

My father was using the law as a shield in order to force us to return home. Even if he dragged us back kicking and screaming, no one would find fault with him. This was just how things worked, after all.

But I could use magecraft to make a break for it, if necessary. I even entertained the thought of taking Armeria and Cosmos with me on a wild escape.

I stood from the sofa and moved for the door—but before I could sprint out of the room, Claus stepped between us.

"This is most troublesome, Lord Clematis. Hisui, Armeria, and Cosmos are all guests of my house. It would be difficult for me to send them away against their will."

"If it's so difficult, then I suppose you'll just have to ask the king to repeal the law right away."

"Mmm, I do agree that following the rules is important. Then I've a suggestion—perhaps you wouldn't mind letting them do as they please a little while longer?"

With a snap of his fingers, a butler who had been waiting in the hallway entered the room bearing a large bag. He placed it on the table.

"You'll find three hundred gold coins in the bag. That's one hundred each for Hisui, Armeria, and Cosmos."

"Three hundred?!"

I couldn't believe it either. Three hundred gold coins would probably have been worth around three million yen, but seeing as things in this world were significantly cheaper than they'd been in my past life, the purchasing power of those three hundred coins was probably closer to ten million yen. That was enough for years, even decades, of comfortable living. From the perspective of a poor-as-dirt baron, it was an unprecedented amount.

My father's and brothers' eyes lit up upon seeing the bag.

"Just to be clear, this is compensation for all the dedicated work Hisui's done for us. The fact that Hisui is staying here, on my lands,

has been a great boon. As Hisui's father, you have the right to receive this money in his stead."

"Are you suggesting I *sell* Hisui, then?"

"Hardly. As I said, this is compensation for his labor. As long as he continues staying here at my estate, I shall pay you for his further service commensurate to his performance. He is your son, after all."

"An excellent proposal."

Upon finding that this arrangement wouldn't be a one-off payment, my father's mood immediately improved. Glenn and Mikhail also seemed pleased that my value had risen. They didn't seem to think I would threaten their own positions in the family. That was the power of money, I supposed—though Mikhail was usually calm, his brain must've turned to mush in the face of so much money.

"Well, now that that's settled, let's end our meeting here. Take the money and go; I'm quite busy with work."

"Understood, your lordship," my father said, then turned to address me. "Hisui, don't cause any trouble for the marquis, you hear? And you'd best understand that I will be back to fetch Armeria and Cosmos."

"Even after all the money you've been offered?" I objected.

"According to the marquis, this is money that you earned. The two girls haven't done anything useful yet."

"Yeah," Glenn chimed in, riding on father's coattails. "You should still be grateful I managed to find Armeria a husband!"

"Uh-huh..." I was annoyed.

Even in front of the marquis, the lot of them were the same as always. Receiving all that money hadn't changed their behavior in the slightest. They truly were despicable.

Standing from the sofa, I walked toward Glenn and Mikhail, who'd been clutching the bag of money.

"What? Whaddya want, Hisui? Changed your mind? Think you'll come back with us? Guess we could put you to work," Glenn began, but he never had the chance to finish.

I punched him in the face as hard as I could.



He was thrown wide by the impact and crashed into the wall, which immediately knocked him out.

"Wh-What?!" shrieked Mikhail. "What do you think you're doing?!"

"Exactly what you think. He pissed me off, so I punched him—and no, I'm not sorry."

I couldn't take any more of their bullshit. Now that Claus had paid them and everyone knew I could use magic, there was no need for me to bow down to them as I had in the past. I had the marquis on my side, and my father was a greedy man. Now that I was his golden goose, there was no way he'd let go of an easy source of cash.

And I was correct in this assumption—he glanced at Glenn where he lay and silently narrowed his eyes. He picked up the bag of money and held it tight.

"Do you really think you can get away with this?!" Mikhail shrieked.

"What are you going to do about it? Drag me home?"

"Well, now that you mention it..."

"Stop, Mikhail. Stand down."

My father shook his head and clapped a hand on Mikhail's shoulder.

"But why, father?!"

"Hisui has his own work to do. He has time to finish all of that before we take him home."

"Ngh... All right, I get it."

Mikhail clenched his fist in frustration. He looked almost as if he'd been a victim, but I wanted him to know that he and Glenn were getting their just deserts.

Personally, I felt surprisingly refreshed after punching Glenn square in the nose. All the resentment I'd bottled up over the years disappeared as if it hadn't existed at all. I kind of wanted to give him one more punch before they left, but I knew Claus would stop me from going any further.

"I'll never let you off the hook for this, Hisui! Don't you ever forget!" snarled Mikhail, who was struggling to carry Glenn outside with my father—Glenn must've been heavy. He was still unconscious,

eyes rolled up and nose bleeding. Served them all right.

I watched them leave out the front door from a window on the second floor until they were gone from sight. Once they were gone, I breathed a sigh of relief.

I turned from the window and bowed to Claus.

"I'm sorry, Lord Lycoris. I've caused you more trouble."

"You needn't worry. I helped because I wanted to. Besides, I do owe you quite a bit."

"You really saved me. Now I have time to figure out what to do before they come back for us. I think I'll disappear again."

Should I head to the royal capital next? Even though I'd been granted permanent residency in Lycoris, I was best off heading to the capital now that my father and brothers knew my whereabouts. I had plenty of money anyway; it was definitely enough to get by in the capital despite the high costs of living there.

"Calm down—you needn't rush. Just leave everything to me. I have a proposal."

"A proposal?"

Claus replied, voice full of cheer even as I stared at him in confusion. "It's a brilliant plan that will resolve your current situation instantly."

He didn't explain what the plan was, simply assuring me that I'd know soon enough.

If all my problems really could be solved with his plan, then that would be a lifesaver. But, just in case they couldn't, I decided to prepare for a journey to the capital. I'd have to tell Armeria and Cosmos of our imminent move too.

After a brief chat, Claus and I parted ways.

But despite what had happened with my family, our prospects didn't seem too bad. I just wanted my sisters to live out their lives in happiness, and I'd use my own power and connections to see that happen.

As for myself, I still haven't given up on having the ultimate slow life. In fact, after everything, I wanted an even quieter life.

"Huey, Huey! That punch was amazing!"

"Why didn't you use any magecraft? Well, I suppose you did

knock him out in one hit...” Aruna trailed off.

Cult laughed. “Hisui would’ve killed the boy if he had. We must instead make him suffer terribly for all the pain he’s caused.”

“Man, you three have so much violence on the brain,” I sighed.

Everything was okay. I was sure to make my dream come true one day.

After all, I had the three goddesses watching over me, as well as my sisters. As long as they were all with me, I knew I could keep going no matter where we were headed.

As I looked at the sunlight that filtered in through the window, the fog hanging over my mind dissipated, leaving me feeling clear and refreshed. Today would be another good day of training.

Afterword

Thank you very much for purchasing the second volume of *Three Cheats from Three Goddesses: The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a Relaxing Life*.

I was able to release volume 2 because of all your support.

The first volume of *Three Cheats from Three Goddesses* released in August this year (2024), so it's been about four months since then. By the time readers pick up this volume, they may already be feeling the chilly bite of fall, but I'm still suffering the heat waves of summer as I write this book.

My air conditioner broke down, I got harassed by stupidly huge bugs, and the sunlight was blinding. Man, this summer was really rough.

Despite all the things that happened, I managed to struggle through to the completion of this volume. Armeria, who hardly appeared in volume 1, was finally illustrated in volume 2.

The way kiltukaiki drew Armeria is exactly how I imagined her to look as a noble lady. I have an especially soft spot for her.

Rose, a new character, has also made her debut.

The story of volume 2 began with our protagonist Hisui saving her, the daughter of a marquis. She hails from a land relatively close to Hisui's family home.

Using godcraft to cure Armeria, he takes his sisters out of their home and into the bigger world. He discovers Dandelion's powers, uses spellcraft to build things, and also ends up breaking curses...

Volume 2 had so many different scenes and plot points, didn't it? I'll be glad if everyone enjoyed reading the story, even if only in small ways. Hisui's grown up a lot too, so maybe his relationships with his family members will change going forward.

What'll happen with these characters in the future?! Even though

I’m the author, I don’t even know! (LOL)

Please be sure to check out the third volume once it’s released!

Finally, I’d like to thank DRE Novels for publishing volume 2, my editor who very patiently helped with the creation of this novel despite their busy schedule, kiltukaiki, who was flexible in adapting to my requests and created wonderful illustrations, and most of all, to all the readers who purchased this book!

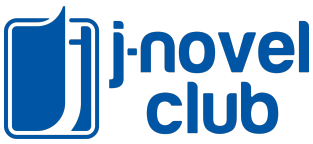
Thank you so much. I’m excited to meet you all again in volume 3!











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Three Cheats from Three Goddesses: The Broke Baron's Youngest Wants a Relaxing Life Volume 2
by Hanmenkyoushi

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