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Ageha Sakura
ill. TCB



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Just Wants
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“Prepare yourself, Lam.
When you’ve recovered,
I plan to spoil you as
my heart desires.”

A mischievous smile
curled on Char’s lips,
and he dropped a
kiss on my forehead.

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Chapter One: The Cowardly Countess Awakens

In the southern part of the Tête Kingdom's royal capital lay the Earl of Mercure's estate, home to the few professional mages in the nation. The House of Mercure, led generation after generation by powerful mages, was shrouded in mystery. Since the establishment of the Tête Kingdom, they'd undertaken jobs requiring magical expertise at the behest of the king, other noble families, and the church. They had a peculiar reputation among their peers who found their magical abilities eerie and unsettling yet did not dare to provoke them for fear of being on the receiving end of their mysterious powers.

Mere seconds ago, the mansion of the esteemed Mercure family had developed a hole the size of a large rock, courtesy of none other than yours truly—Lam Mercure, Earl Mercure's wife.

"Phew. Guess I beat that insignificant insect unconscious." I brushed my hands on my skirt and took deep breaths to calm myself, slowly returning to my senses. "May've gone a little overboard. I truly forgot the sensation of mana circling through my body, huh?"

I glanced down at my feet, where the overweight gardener who had attempted to strike me a few moments prior was sprawled on the floor in a disgraceful manner.

Not too long ago, he'd yelled, "You're just His Lordship's wife! How dare you be so arrogant?!" before charging at me with his fist raised. All I did was defend myself.

The servants keep on attacking me, one after the other. They truly had no respect for the old Lam, did they? It's starting to irritate me.

By marrying Earl Mercure, I'd become part of a higher ranking family, but it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. Since then, everyone in the mansion, regardless of status, had trampled all over me. Though I was a countess, I couldn't perform any of the duties that came with the title because I'd never received the proper education to deal with them. I was just the daughter of a

baronial family of commoner origins, after all. On top of that, I didn't have any friends in the earldom to take me under their wing. My husband ignored me, the servants abhorred me, and I lacked the knowledge to manage an estate. In short, there wasn't a single soul in the mansion who wasn't hostile toward me.

Well, perhaps there's one. My husband simply seems to have no interest in me whatsoever.

I was not Earl Mercure's first wife: he'd been married before to a lady far more accomplished than I was. Furthermore, I'd always had a weak constitution and had never left my childhood home before, which had left me ignorant of the ways of the world. A terrible shyness slowly devoured me, to the point I feared everything and could never voice what was on my mind.

To make things worse, my lead handmaiden—the daughter of a prestigious viscount—was in love with Earl Mercure and loathed me with a burning passion. She couldn't accept that he'd chosen me, a lower noble, to become his second wife over her, a woman who'd devoted herself to the House of Mercure for her entire life. The other servants had gradually started copying the way she treated me. The thought of serving the measly daughter of a baron had irked them to no end. Despite my best efforts, there was no way I could run the estate with the servants refusing to obey my commands.

It hadn't even been my wish to marry the earl. Due to certain circumstances, I'd practically been sold to the Mercure family—not that the servants cared about that. They took advantage of the fact that the earl was almost never home due to his busy schedule to torment me without end.

It was on one of those miserable days, as my handmaidens abused me yet again, that my memories returned.



“Honestly, how useless can you be? When will you finally recommend me as a concubine to His Lordship?!”

The early summer sun was shining outside, a stark contrast to the cold emptiness of the room I presently occupied. A young woman tugged on my sloppily combed light-green hair and a pained groan escaped my lips.

I hate this! I'm so scared, but if I dare to speak up, the punishment will be even worse.

If I just endured it in silence, I wouldn't get in trouble.

"Hey! Are you listening to me?!"

The next instant, my body was drenched in liquid. She'd dumped a bucket of cold water over me. The echo of malicious giggles filled my ears. After marrying into the House of Mercure, *this* had become my daily routine.



“Not only are you utterly clueless, a simpleton in every sense, His Lordship does not even care for you,” the woman said haughtily, gazing down on me as I lay crumpled on the floor. “Yet, you dare call yourself the countess! Are you not *embarrassed*? At the minimum, you should follow my orders. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The woman speaking was my head handmaiden, the one who held authority over the other servants, and the ringleader of the most wicked and cruel servants in the earl’s household. She was beautiful, with shoulder-length black hair, icy blue eyes, and—perhaps due to her upbringing—an ego the size of the highest peak of the Ouragan Mountain range, which stood in the distance outside my window.

“Since you are so useless, the least you could do is introduce His Lordship to a woman who can bear him an heir,” she said.

How nice it would be, if that was all it took to resolve everything.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t fulfill her request even if I wanted to. There was one immutable requirement to become the Countess of Mercure: to have mana still flowing through one’s body.

The majority of people lost their mana when they were blessed as young children, but there were exceptionally rare cases where individuals retained their mana after the ceremony. For those who did, their magic might even manifest out of the blue at times. It was commonplace to find such individuals unsettling, but the Mercure family was different. As they made a living as professional mages, it was necessary for the earl’s wife—even his second wife like me—to possess mana as well.

That’s the only reason they chose me to be his bride. It’s only natural that my maids resent me.

However, I knew explaining myself to the head handmaiden would do nothing to appease her anger. I’d been watching her every day since I married into the family and understood what kind of person she was. I remained silent.

“You are such an eyesore. Girls, show our dear *madam* her place!” she said.

Like chuckling hyenas, the other maids started pushing and jostling me

around. While they might have been ordered to abuse me, I knew they hated me regardless.

“Ha ha, sorry about that! I *accidentally* nudged you with my elbow.”

“Oops, and *my* knee! I couldn’t help it, you know. It’s *your* fault for crouching in the way, *madam*. You are so dull-witted, I can hardly believe it!”

A satisfied smirk curled on my head handmaiden’s lips as she watched the others go after me. Not one person in this house would help me.

Please, no more...

What about my husband? He was a busy man and had no interest in me, the woman he’d married out of obligation. I could count on one hand the number of times we’d met. I didn’t know if he was aware of the way the servants treated me or if he was deliberately ignoring it.

I don’t mean a thing to him.

From what I’d been told, after his previous wife had passed away, the earl’s entourage had pestered him to remarry. In the end, he’d settled for me, a second-rate noble who wouldn’t talk back to anyone. The Mercure family had offered my father substantial financial support in exchange for me, so no one in my family had ever peeped the slightest complaint about the way I was treated by the earl’s household. Thus, dreary day after dreary day, I had endured abuse just like this.

“Serves you right, you worthless plebeian!” one of the maids snapped. The head handmaiden wasn’t the only one who liked to pick on me; the other servants bonded over mistreating me as well. “You’re so irritating! How was someone like you chosen to be His Lordship’s wife?! Sure, you have mana, but you can’t even *use* magic, can you?”

I hated myself for sitting there and just accepting their bullying, but I was terrified of what they would do if I tried to defy them. I didn’t want to feel even *worse* pain, to suffer more, to cry.

“No matter what you do, it is futile.” This idea had been hammered into my head, both physically and verbally, time and again when I still lived at home.

I just need to stay silent. It's my fault for being so incompetent in the first place.

I didn't have the willpower to resist them anymore. Even if I did, nothing would change.

"Say something! Just the sight of you irritates me beyond measure!" the head handmaiden exclaimed as she shoved me backward with great force.

I let out a yelp as she sent me flying, so hard that I knocked the back of my head against a shelf. In that instant, something changed inside my body. There was a strong throbbing, and I could feel the back of my head burning.

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts!

However, there was another sensation mixed in with the pain—a strange sensation, like a mysterious tide rising up within me.

What an...uneasy feeling. Whatever it was, it felt like it might overflow from my body. Alarmed beyond belief, I shrunk in on myself. *What's happening? I'm scared! Please, no!*

I buried my head in my hands, my body trembling like a leaf. Fear strangled my chest so tight I couldn't even scream.

My head...

Like a dam bursting, unfamiliar events began flooding my mind in droves. It felt as if someone were cramming too much information into my head, all at once. I saw visions of an unknown country and strange spells flying through the air with seemingly no end. *I* was the one who'd cast them, my three disciples by my side. I'd never seen any of these scenes before, yet they stirred my heart with their familiarity.

What's going on?

Overwhelmed by the waves of unknown memories crashing over me, I braced my hands against the wooden floor. Happiness, warmth, and a bittersweet sorrow welled up in my chest. Tears prickled at the corners of my eyes.

What is this?

Soon, the visions came to an end, the pain disappeared, and what remained

was me—and the memories I had regained. I remembered *everything*. These important, incredibly precious memories were all mine.

That's right. How could I have forgotten such warm and gentle moments?

After a few seconds, my mind cleared again, as if I'd awakened from a long dream.

I am... No, I am no cowardly countess. The real me is...

"Now that I've regained my memories, I won't let them treat me like this a second longer," I muttered.

The maids, sensing the change, eyed me with suspicion.

"Talking to yourself? That's a new level of pathetic. Did you go mad after hitting your head, perhaps?" the head handmaiden said.

From my position on the floor, I could see her shoes approaching. I stood up, brushed the dust off my skirt, and glared at her without a word.

"How dare you look at me like that? So impudent! I see you are still in need of correction," she shouted. She swung her right hand at me to strike me for my defiance.

I easily sidestepped the slap, and her eyes widened upon seeing me move with such uncharacteristic agility.

"I believe it is *you* who is in need of correction. Day after day, you've bullied me relentlessly, but that ends now!"

The countess who let everyone walk all over her was no more. From now on, I would repay every punch and insult thrown at me twofold!

The real me would never let such unreasonable behavior go unpunished. My glare intensified. The head handmaiden grew even more irate, seeing me rebel for the first time since joining the Mercure household.

"Wh-What did you just say?!" she shouted in anger. "You filthy little lowborn! I... Huh?! What are— Gaaah!"

I did not let her finish her sentence. Before she could spew more of her venom at me, the palm of my hand slammed into her cheek, hard enough to

send her flying across the room. The force of my strike caused her to twist in the air before she crashed violently into the wooden wall. A cloud of dust raised into the air as her unconscious body hit the floor.

See? If you had done your job properly and cleaned my room, you wouldn't have gotten covered in dust. You reap what you sow.

I'd only intended to slap her in the face, but I was so furious that I'd put way more strength than necessary into my strike.

I think I subconsciously used mana to reinforce my body—perhaps a side effect of not having used magic in a while?

Mana wasn't exclusively used to cast spells; one could also use it to reinforce their body and improve their physical abilities, allowing them to hit harder or run faster.

"Phew. Guess I knocked that insignificant insect unconscious," I muttered.

Brushing my hands on my skirt, I took a good look at the head handmaiden sprawled out on the floor. Day after day, she'd done as she pleased, thoroughly tormenting me.

How pathetic I used to be, but those days are over. From now on, I will live as I please.

Now that I had regained my memories, I had no intention of returning to my previous submissive and fearful self. I could live my life as I pleased without the need to rely on anyone. Why was I so sure of it? Well, that was simple: in my previous life, five hundred years ago, I wasn't Lam but Aurora Ibrusus, the strongest mage in the world.

To this day, there were legends of the witch Aurora. After studying under her elfin master—an ancient magical race now thought to be extinct—she'd traveled far and wide, formulating groundbreaking magical theories. Most people believed her to be a myth, but I had really existed.

It was said that I'd spent most of my time helping other mages deal with cumbersome cases that they couldn't manage on their own and teleporting to locations where vicious monsters had appeared to vanquish them, saving the locals. When unjust wars broke out, I'd supposedly stand at the front lines and

mercilessly annihilate the enemy. Rumors also said that countless nations had been destroyed after their leader tried to pick a fight with me. I also had a reputation for developing potions and magic items to improve people's lives and had raised three disciples whom I'd dispatch to various places around the world. Together, we'd left behind a strong legacy of achievements.

And all of these stories are true!

My personality as Aurora was the complete opposite of Lam's. I was strong-willed and brimming with curiosity, always looking for a new challenge. My disciples had said that I had a "bad case of people-pleasing," but I had never seen it that way.

Curious. I clearly remember my work and my disciples, but not the end of my life. How did I die? The memories of my death blurred and drifted as if they were shrouded in a fog. *Hmm, I can probably figure it out if I try.*

People still knew of the legendary Aurora, even now. I remembered seeing her—well, *my* name listed in the category of this world's eminent figures in a history book I had read as Lam. From that fact, I deduced that the world I'd been reincarnated in was the same world I used to live in, just further in the future.

From what I knew, there were very few magic users in this day and age, and none of them were nearly as powerful as the mages of yore. I didn't know all the details, but it seemed that after my death, the number of mages dropped and their social position declined.

Despite these circumstances, my name is still listed as one of this world's greatest figures. That's a bit of an enigma, isn't it?

The House of Mercure was the last standing mage house in the kingdom, and they were responsible for basically anything related to magic, from defending the kingdom against outside threats to defeating monsters. There were no other magic users in the nation, and while foreign countries had mages of their own, their numbers were also few and far between.

Well, then. Time to carry on.

I directed my glare to the other servants in the dusty room. I'd hoped that

they would run away on their own after seeing what I'd done to the head handmaiden, but they seemed to think it was just a stroke of luck on my part. To their minds, just because I'd managed to strike back one time didn't mean I'd be able to do it a second time. Their fighting spirit hadn't left them yet; they were preparing to retaliate.

"What did you do to the head handmaiden?! You're just His Lordship's wife. Don't start acting all high and mighty on us!"

"How impertinent!"

What they said made no sense: as a countess, my rank was far above that of a mere handmaiden. It seemed that, to the maids, my upbringing as the daughter of a baron diminished my current status. But I had no intention of staying the craven woman they thought I was. If I wanted this absurd place to change, I had no choice but to take matters into my own hands.

"Let's remind her of her place, everyone!" one of the maids said, and the others moved to surround me.

Oh, please! As if I'd lose to a bunch of young ladies who never learned how to fight.

In my past life, I'd taken down even the most ferocious of beasts with ease.

They noticed my attitude. "Don't get cocky, you good-for-nothing madam!" one of them cried.

"Cocky? That would be you," I retorted. "Every day, you kept ganging up on me, knowing that I couldn't defend myself. Cowards like you deserve a good smacking!"

I stood, ready to counterattack. Just like earlier, one of the maids thrust her elbow at me. This time, I sent her flying in the opposite direction as the head handmaiden.

I put too much force into my strike again. This is more difficult than I thought.

I easily avoided the knee the second maid aimed at me, causing her to crash to the floor, and dodged the third one's attempt at a tackle.

Oh dear, she rammed herself into the wall all on her own.

Once all of the maids had lost consciousness, I hoisted them up and threw them out of my room. I used a quick spell to clean my body and clothes of any dirt before heading down the corridor with determined steps. For now, I needed to get a better grasp of the situation I was in.

“What should I do next?” I wondered out loud.

Being the wife of the Earl of Mercure, I knew I should probably start by taking care of the duties that came with the position. I might have regained my memories, but I couldn’t just start introducing myself as the strongest witch in history and take on magic-related jobs like in my past life.

I’ll start with some good old intelligence gathering. Lam was a shut-in, so I don’t have the slightest idea of the House of Mercure’s current state, not to mention the kingdom’s broader affairs. I only know a few superficial things that I learned from the security of my room. Wow, this isn’t a good look for a countess.

I needed to do some serious self-reflection on my lost self, who had abandoned her duties in favor of cowering in fear. Lam Mercure had been too weak. That was why everyone tortured her—although, I’d have argued it wasn’t normal for servants to hurt their master, whatever the circumstances might be.

Ultimately, this is Lord Mercure’s fault. If he hadn’t neglected Lam, the servants wouldn’t have treated her this horribly.

After walking for a couple of minutes, I reached the entrance of the mansion. A young butler spotted me.

“Well, that’s a problem. We can’t have you wandering around all on your own, *madam*. We already have enough work as it is,” he sneered.

His words implied that me trying to do my duties would cause him and the other servants more trouble than good. He’d much rather I stayed shut away in my room and out of the way. Too bad for him. The current me had no intention of letting people order me around.

“Pray tell me why I, the countess, would need your permission to move about my own home?” I asked, tilting my head to the side exaggeratedly.

The butler’s eyes widened in shock at my obvious provocation, but he still had

no intention of heeding someone he deemed beneath him. “Listen, how about you just shut yourself away in your room like always? We’re busy here. If you keep being difficult, I’ll tell His Lordship.”

The servants had a tendency to bring up “His Lordship” whenever I did something they didn’t like. They knew that Lam’s family received substantial financial aid from the Mercure family and used that as leverage to make her obey their demands. However, I wasn’t the “good little countess” anymore. I had no plan on following that man’s orders and returning to my room.

“Suit yourself,” I said with a shrug. The young butler did not appreciate my response, and I could tell he was starting to get frustrated with me.

What an impatient man.

“Are you fine with His Lordship divorcing you? What if your family falls into poverty because of you?”

“That does not concern me,” I replied, airy.

After all, Lam had no happy memories of her childhood home. Just like in the earl’s household, she’d constantly endured pain and mockery at the hands of her parents and sisters. Her spineless nature had been ingrained in her long before she’d married into the Mercure family. Having been born sickly and frail, she’d been seen as a burden by everyone else. While her younger sisters were beautiful and elegant, Lam was plain and unremarkable. Her sisters had lovely blonde hair; Lam’s was a peculiar shade of green. Worst of all, she hadn’t lost her mana as a child. Because of these differences, her parents had always treated her unfairly, and finding a suitable match for her had been no easy feat.

As they grew up, Lam’s sisters had noticed the way their parents had treated Lam and started emulating their behavior. Every day, they berated the poor girl and forced her to do their chores. Not only had they treated her like their servant, but they’d also made a point to steal anything valuable she owned and beat her black and blue when she wouldn’t obey them. As a last-ditch effort, Lam had turned to her parents for help, but they’d simply joined the abuse, laughing as they mistreated her. Through it all, Lam had never tried to defend herself or retaliate, instead gritting her teeth and enduring in silence.

One day, rumors had reached Lam’s father that the Earl of Mercure was

looking to remarry. As luck would have it, the only requirement for marrying into the Mercure family was possessing mana, a rare trait in this day and age. The baron and his wife had jumped at the opportunity and basically sold their daughter to the earl. Although Lam couldn't use magic, that hadn't concerned the Mercure family. They'd accepted the baron's proposal and, in return, provided Lam's family with continuous financial support.

Being the spineless weakling that she was, Lam could only do as she was told.

For these reasons, I had no particular attachment to my—well, Lam's family. Sure, I was thankful that they'd fed and sheltered her as a child, but they'd also treated her horribly. She'd owned fewer personal belongings than a servant and hadn't even been allowed to take her meals with the rest of the family. Perhaps marrying into the Mercure family had been a blessing in disguise, as it allowed her to leave that awful house.

Not to mention, the Mercures are professional mages! Just like in my past life.

There were eight types of magic: Fire, Water, Wood, Lightning, Wind, Earth, Light, and Dark. Most individuals who possessed mana were adept at using one attribute in particular, although that didn't mean they couldn't use the others. However, as a rule of thumb, their power with those types would always be less than half of what they could do with their primary attribute. Well, at least that was how things had been five hundred years ago. If the fundamentals of magic hadn't changed, it would probably still be the same now.

Fire Magic allowed its users to manipulate fire, of course. They could use flames to burn things or couple it with Wind and Earth Magic to cause explosions. One could also use it to manipulate things like the temperature and brightness in an area. The only downside was that it was prone to accidents, as the fire could easily spread and cause an uncontrollable blaze. All in all, it was a dangerous attribute that required careful and deliberate use.

Water Magic was useful in everyday life, allowing users to create water, steam, and ice. The strongest Water Magic wielders could even manipulate the weather to their liking and trigger floods, making it a powerful attribute.

Wood Magic focused on controlling vegetation, enabling users to create and manipulate plants. Historically, it was especially valuable for agriculture.

Lightning Magic was considered the strongest offensive magical attribute. Its users could not only draw on electricity, but also enhance their movement speed, teleport in the blink of an eye, and create magnetic fields. It was also handy when it came to crafting and using magic items.

Wind Magic was the most user-friendly attribute, and could be used to manipulate gusts, adjust the composition of the air, and make people fly. It was often used in tandem with Fire and Water Magic to boost their effects.

Earth Magic allowed one to manipulate the ground itself, as well as all sorts of different minerals. Earth Magic masters could even produce rare precious stones and metals, making it pretty easy for its users to become rich.

Light Magic—*my* primary attribute—was similar to Fire Magic, as it could be used to control an area's temperature and brightness. It could manipulate space as well, which was quite convenient.

Lastly, you had Dark Magic. On top of allowing its users to manipulate darkness and shadows, it could also be used to influence people's minds and interfere with time. It was the rarest magic attribute, on top of being the hardest to use.

Mana was a double-edged sword: while it granted one the ability to use magic, it came with its own challenges. A single mistake could cause irreparable damage to a magic user's body. This was true for *all* magic types.

Lam was so frail because she didn't know how to circulate her mana through her body. I'll need to work on my stamina, but I should at least be able to handle daily tasks now that I've taken over.

Before I regained my memories, Lam was just a regular girl who'd happened to have mana but didn't know the slightest thing about magic. In contrast, Earl Mercure's first wife had been a powerful Fire Magic user, making Lam seem lackluster in comparison. However, I wasn't *her* anymore. I remembered plenty from my past life, where I'd been an outstanding wielder of Light Magic.

Thus, this renewed version of me wasn't scared of anything!

I stared down the butler blocking my path and said, "To reiterate, I do not care in the *slightest* about my family's financial situation. Please tell His

Lordship to feel free to divorce me, if he so wishes.”

Besides, it was her parents’ fault that they got themselves into their situation in the first place. They were so incompetent that they couldn’t manage a business without running it into the ground, yet kept on indulging in every luxury under the sun. They could’ve avoided this predicament without resorting to selling their daughter.

“You dare talk back to me when you’re just His Lordship’s wife? How brazen! Come, I’m taking you back to your room!” the butler said, grabbing my arm firmly.

No servant in a normal house would dare lay a hand on their master in this manner. His grip was so strong it hurt.

I can just shake him off, right? That should be fine.

I put all my strength into my arm and planted my feet firmly on the ground. “Stop harassing me. I told you I would go where I please!”

“Enough already! How dare you resist, you worthless— Aaah!”

“Huh?”

All I’d done was swing my arm to try and get him to let go, and the young butler had been tossed across the room. It seemed that I had, once again, used too much force.

I haven’t tried circulating mana in a while. My senses are so dull.

Just like the maids earlier, the butler crashed into the wall before hitting the ground. Splintered wood fell from the damaged wall and rained down on him.

“Phew! One more insignificant insect for the ground.”

I decided to leave the butler there and carry on my way, but I didn’t have time to take a single step forward before I heard the mansion’s door opening. The young butler’s face lit up when he saw who the newcomer was, as if his savior had arrived.

“Y-Your Lordship!” he exclaimed, still sprawled on the floor.

I also shifted my gaze to the door. A tall gentleman with cold, strikingly

handsome features stood in the foyer. His silver hair was tied in a low ponytail, hanging down all the way to the middle of his back, and his scarlet eyes gleamed like two precious stones. He handed his luxurious coat to the chamberlain. This man was none other than Char Mercure, Lam's—*my* husband. At twenty-five, he was five years older than me.

A cold and ruthless man, he was a Lightning Magic user and renowned as the strongest head in the history of the House of Mercure. As any magic-related matters in the kingdom fell under his responsibility, he spent most of his time working and only returned to his estate occasionally. Whenever he was home, he'd pay no attention to the old me, preferring to shut himself in his office instead.

Lam had been unilaterally terrified of him and had never dared approaching him. Needless to say, the two were as good as strangers. Lam's family couldn't care less as long as they received their money, and Char had never tried to fix the situation either. If anything, he must've been glad Lam had stayed out of his way.

At the end of the day, all he cares about is my mana, huh?

Char's icy gaze paused on me for a split second before he turned to leave, only to be stopped by the butler who started crying out that I had attacked him and whatnot.

Funny, I clearly remember him grabbing me by the arm first, I thought. Being tattled on while the other party didn't take accountability for his actions was a nuisance.

Char glanced at me. "Oh, you're there," he commented dismissively.

I smiled and dropped into a curtsy. "Welcome home," I said, playing the part of the perfect wife.

The original Lam had always averted her gaze when talking to Char and couldn't hold a conversation without her voice trembling, but *I* wasn't afraid of him. If you added how old I'd been in my previous life to my age in this one, I was the elder. Plus, Char might have been an incredibly powerful mage, but he had no interest in his wife; he'd never lay a finger on me. In a way, he was the safest person to be around in the entire Mercure estate. Although, that didn't

mean he'd take my side during a conflict. Just like now.

"Lam, I don't know how you broke the wall but... Please just try not to cause too much trouble," he warned me, his lack of concern in the situation quite glaring. Maybe he was tired from work.

The butler smirked, pleased to see me getting scolded, no matter how apathetic my husband had sounded.

How unpleasant.

I wasn't about to let this man win, so I looked Char straight in the eyes. "With all due respect, the butler came at me first. I merely shook his grip on my arm. If anything, I believe it is improper on his part to bother you with such trivial matters when you are so busy."

Char was the only one in the mansion who had authority over the personnel, but he was too busy to actually oversee their day-to-day actions, meaning they were allowed to do whatever they wanted. This was one of the reasons why their harassment of Lam had gone unpunished for so long.

"Isn't it your job as the countess to manage the estate and discipline the staff?" Char asked, trying to shift the responsibility onto me, so he wouldn't have to stay any longer.

What? No one ever told me that I have the right to manage the personnel.

If he had announced that in front of the entire staff when we'd first gotten married, the situation might not have become so dire.

No, that probably wouldn't have been enough to protect Lam.

Char was a bit of a jerk for dumping the responsibility of the situation on me, but, in the end, it was actually to my advantage.

This may be a blessing in disguise.

The corners of my lips curled up in a smile. "Will you really leave the estate in my hands?" I asked. "I shall do my utmost to manage it well."

Char was tired and probably hadn't thought those words through, but that was on him. I fully intended to use it to my advantage. Just like that, I'd been given the right to oversee the Mercure estate by the earl himself.





Char Mercure sat alone in his office, surrounded by dark, ornate furniture, rubbing his temples. He'd been burdened with one absurd mission after the other from one of his regular clients. Upon finally returning home, he'd been greeted by a mountain of paperwork on his desk. The House of Mercure was severely understaffed and had always been. While they had servants for everyday tasks, there were few they could trust with sensitive magic-related matters.

However, this wasn't what weighed on Char's mind at the moment.

My wife's been acting so strange lately. What in the world has gotten into her?

He had noticed something was off a few days ago. Lam, who was usually too shy to look him in the eyes, had talked back to him for the first time ever. Unfortunately, her timing couldn't have been any worse: Char had been working himself to the bone for days without a break and was so tired that he'd ended up responding with vague remarks just so that she'd leave him alone. She'd been quarreling with a butler over something, so Char had told her that managing the staff was her duty as the countess before locking himself up in his office. He didn't know exactly how Lam had interpreted his words, but ever since that day, she'd started showing *a lot* more initiative when it came to overseeing the estate.

Her first measure had been to fire an absurd number of servants, including all of her personal maids, without giving them a chance to explain themselves. In the end, she'd ended up replacing over eighty percent of their personnel.

"Should you disrespect me even once, you will be dismissed as well," she had threatened the few who had been spared.

Char couldn't fathom his timid and submissive wife uttering those words.

What is she scheming, and why did she change so suddenly?

He'd been glad that his new wife was so low-maintenance, but she must've been hiding her true nature all along. Although, Char had a hard time fathoming that Lam's cowardice had been merely a façade. On their wedding day, she'd

been so terrified that she hadn't managed to look him in the eyes a single time. The few times they'd dined together, Lam had trembled and kept her head down the entire time. Once, she'd accompanied him to a party, and not only had she not said a word during the carriage ride, but she'd refused to even stay by his side at the event. Char had no idea how to approach his fearful wife and had gotten fed up with trying, so he'd put off dealing with the issue, thinking it'd be better for the both of them. He genuinely believed that she'd prefer if he stayed out of her life, just like his previous wife—although probably for different reasons.

Ever since becoming the earl, Char had received marriage proposals left and right. However, due to the House of Mercure's particular circumstances, it was absolutely necessary for anyone marrying into the family to possess mana. As such, suitable candidates were few and far between.

He'd married a young noble lady as his first wife, but she'd proved to be absolutely dreadful. She'd taken advantage of Char's busy schedule to squander the estate's money on luxury goods for herself and even had an affair with one of the butlers. Char had chosen to overlook her misdeeds, feeling partly responsible for not giving her the attention she'd desired, but she'd taken that as permission to sleep with even more staff members. This had eventually led to a tragic end when one of her lovers killed her in a fit of passionate rage. It would've caused a huge scandal if word of it got out, so the Mercure family decided to announce that she'd died of an illness.

After his wife's passing, Char had decided that he wouldn't marry again. However, his household had pestered him endlessly to remarry, so he'd reluctantly agreed and searched for a new wife. He'd hoped that his new spouse wouldn't be as troublesome to deal with as the first one had been, though he'd been aware he couldn't be picky given how rare mana users were.

So it came to be that a few days after he announced his decision to remarry, Lam's father, the Baron Ivoire, had reached out to him. As it turned out, his eldest daughter possessed some mana, and he'd offered to betroth her to Char in exchange for financial support. He'd promised Char could do whatever he wanted to her and he wouldn't interfere as long as the money kept flowing. This had been a great deal for Char—up until now, that was.

What should I do? Should I scold her?

He didn't have any reason to admonish her, though. Sure, she may have swapped most of the mansion's staff for new servants, but this hadn't led to any issues, nor had it disrupted Char's life in the slightest. Besides, he had told her that the estate was in her hands in front of several witnesses. He couldn't possibly go back on his word now.

In the meantime, Lam was doing as she pleased with the estate.

It's not like someone taught her how to do these things, so how did she learn?

He didn't know *how* to stop her, but... If he didn't, he was afraid Lam would drive them headfirst into a scandal, just like his previous wife. Ever since he'd given Lam free rein over the estate, servants who'd worked for the Mercure family for years kept barging into his office, begging him not to fire them.

As Char was deep in thought about possible solutions, Fouet, his aide and one of his most trusted subordinates, entered the room.

"Is something the matter, Lord Char? Could it be that the servant who came into your office uninvited earlier did something to displease you?" Fouet inquired.

Char shook his head. "No. It's my wife."

"I assume it's about the fact that Her Ladyship replaced almost all of the staff at once. It is outside of my jurisdiction, so I do not know the details, but it hasn't caused any disruption to our daily lives. How about you let her carry on for now?" Fouet suggested.

"You have a point, but..."

"If you're so worried, perhaps you should go check on her yourself. It has been several months since she arrived at the mansion, but you've stopped paying attention to her recently."

"I make sure she has everything she needs," Char said. "Besides, my previous wife seemed to like it better when I left her alone."

"Her Ladyship seems quite different from your previous wife, though," Fouet pointed out. "Well, for now, I would suggest waiting and seeing how things play

out. If you don't have time to go talk to her, I can go in your place."

"Please."

Char knew he could trust Fouet with this matter. *If* anything were to go wrong, he'd handle it without any issues. For the time being, Char decided to leave the case of his wife to his subordinate.

Chapter Two: The Countess Uses Magic

Greeted by a crisp, refreshing morning, I leaped out of bed and padded toward the window. Pulling the curtains wide, I basked in the warm sunlight.

“Life is so much more enjoyable now that I don’t have to deal with those pesky handmaidens!” I exclaimed, letting out a relieved sigh. “Listening to their shrill voices first thing in the morning was most unpleasant.”

For the previous few months, the maids had violently roused me out of bed every morning, grumbling and complaining all the while. As if to spite me, they’d take an obnoxiously long time to help me get ready for the day, even though they only ever did the bare minimum. Then, they’d shove me into a corner of the room and bring me my breakfast: hard bread and vegetable scraps. Meanwhile, they’d hog the table and enjoy a nice tea party.

Naturally, I’d dismissed all of them as soon as the chance arose, but I couldn’t help but wonder how Lam had managed to endure their mistreatment without a word of complaint.

I don’t have any handmaidens left, but that’s all right. I can get ready by myself.

I’d never had any assistance getting dressed in my previous life, so this was nothing new. Sure, Lam’s dresses were a tad more intricate than my old outfits, but it was nothing I couldn’t handle with a bit of magic.

Dressed and ready, I left my room and entered a long corridor full of antiquated decor. Everything here seemed old and worn, casting its own gloomy spell over the mansion.

I’ve gotten quite familiar with the inside of this place, so I would like to see the outside soon.

With no more pesky servants to get in my way, I was able to reach the dining room without a hitch.

Freshly baked bread, fruits, and vegetable soup! Firing that chef who only ever

fed me scraps and kitchen waste was the best decision I ever made!

As I enjoyed my breakfast, someone sat in the chair opposite me. Looking up, I saw an unfamiliar young man who seemed to be surveying me, a smile on his face. He had brown hair with black streaks, a well-defined face, and an air of amiability that made any wariness I might feel melt away.

If I recall correctly, he's Char's aide.

Sitting at his master's wife's table as she took her meal was definitely outlandish behavior, but I sensed no hostility from him.

"Good morning, madam. I believe this is our second time meeting. I am Fouet, His Lordship's aide."

I had been so terrified that my memories of the first time she'd spoken to Fouet were hazy, but it must've been when Char introduced her to the household. I vaguely remembered him introducing himself in a similar fashion.

"Good morning, Fouet. As you can see, I am in the middle of my breakfast, but if you have something to discuss, please go ahead," I said, resuming my meal as I waited for him to speak.

Fouet treated me to a pleasant smile and asked, "Are you busy today, madam?"

Was that a jab? Right off the bat?

I swallowed my mouthful of bread. "Do I *look* busy? I'm so bored that I've spent the past few days rearranging the entire mansion. I actually plan on exploring outside today—though, rest assured, I will not leave the grounds."

"Then, allow me to accompany you," Fouet offered. "It might be helpful to have someone explain things to you along the way, don't you think?"

Just like before, I couldn't feel any ill intent from him, but I couldn't tell what he was thinking either.

"Did my husband order you to keep an eye on me or something?"

"Oh no, not at all, madam. I have merely noticed that you spend most of your days alone and thought I might be of assistance. That is all."

I eyed him with suspicion. “Is that so? After all these months?” I asked. Despite that, I nodded. “Very well. I’ll take your word for it.”

Having finished my well-earned breakfast dessert, I stood up from my seat and held my gaze on him.

I cannot bring myself to trust this man. But... Eh, whatever. I’m bored and have nothing better to do, so might as well take him up on his offer.

“Shall we go?” I asked.

“Certainly, madam. I’ll be happy to show you around. Perhaps we could start by visiting Lord Canon at the schoolhouse?” Fouet suggested.

I nodded slowly. “I’ve been meaning to go greet him eventually. I haven’t been granted permission to see him even once since our first meeting...even though I’m his mother.”

Canon was Char and Lam’s son—well, adopted son. There was no blood relation between them. The title of Earl of Mercure wasn’t inherited by blood but instead granted based on magical abilities. This system was said to have been put in place to ensure that the family’s magical strength didn’t wane with each new generation. Due to its particular position, the House of Mercure relied heavily on magic to fulfill its duties, so it was vital that its leader remained a powerful mage. To this end, the Mercure estate had a special facility on its grounds called the schoolhouse where they welcomed children with considerable mana and high magical potential to train and evaluate them. The most promising among them would eventually inherit the title of earl.

Currently, the most promising child out of all of them was Canon, age fifteen. Of course, he was way too old to *actually* be Char and Lam’s birth child, but, given the family’s circumstances, no one paid that any mind. Just like Canon, Char had undergone training at the schoolhouse before he was chosen as the Mercure heir.

As the position involved fighting and other dangerous duties, the House of Mercure always chose a successor early on to prepare for any eventualities. Moreover, if Char and I were to have a child in the future, they wouldn’t inherit the title unless their magical abilities surpassed those of Canon.

Why would Char's wife need to have mana if he already has an heir? I wondered. Are the Mercures scared they'll lose their prestige as a "family of mages" if they welcome a single non-mage into the fold? Do they want to maximize their chances of securing an heir with strong magical abilities? After all, the more mana the parents have, the more likely it is for a child to retain their mana after their blessing.

Lam was actually fond of children, and she'd been curious about Canon ever since their first meeting on the day she moved into the Mercure estate. However, every time she had asked to see him since then, the servants had brushed her off, claiming "His Lordship hasn't given his permission" for them to meet. Eventually, they'd told her that Canon didn't want to see her, and Lam had stopped asking after her son altogether.

I explained the whole thing to Fouet, who seemed surprised.

"They claimed that you weren't allowed to see him? I had no idea," he said, his brow knitting in an incredulous scowl.

"They did. They repeated that I couldn't meet with him until His Lordship authorized it, then changed that to saying that Canon didn't want to see my face." I had no way of knowing if it was true or if the servants had been lying to spite the old me.

The two of us exited the mansion and traversed the large courtyard. After following a little path on the outskirts of the estate, we reached our destination.

"So, this is the schoolhouse?" I peered at the unassuming three-story wooden building nestled amid the trees. This was where the children studying magic under the Mercures lived and studied. They were seldom allowed to leave the premises.

Poor kids, trapped in that austere place day after day.

It seemed that people's vision of magic had changed a lot in the five hundred years since I'd lived as Aurora. Back then, we'd play around with spells and learn at our own pace; we weren't stuck in a building, confined by strict schedules and lessons.

Fouet stepped into the schoolhouse as if he was familiar with the place. I

followed behind.

“Do you come here often?” I asked.

He nodded, another one of the unreadable smiles I was learning were his trademark curling onto his lips. “My duties often bring me here. I used to study at the schoolhouse, so they let me roam around freely.”

“Ah, I see.”

“As you may be aware, all the important posts within the Mercure estate are given to those who studied at the schoolhouse,” Fouet informed me. “This includes the main title, naturally, but other key positions such as His Lordship’s advisors as well. Anyone involved with the House of Mercure must possess mana.”

I nodded. “It was also the only immutable condition to become His Lordship’s wife.”

“The only magical abilities that matter are those of the head of the household, but the Mercures think that everyone else should have mana as well,” Fouet said. Then, he confirmed my suspicions, adding, “It increases the likelihood of children with mana being born into the family.”

The first floor of the schoolhouse was where the classrooms were located, while the second and third floors housed the students’ living quarters. There was a training area in the yard for practicing large-scale spells. According to Fouet, the oldest students even got to fight monsters on occasion.

“There are currently ten children enrolled at the school, with the youngest being six and the oldest fifteen—that would be Canon. When they turn sixteen, they leave the schoolhouse and start working for the family, either as aides to His Lordship or as mages in other regions. Ah, but no matter where they end up, they’re still considered employees of the House of Mercure,” Fouet explained to me as we walked down the hallway.

“I see. I wish I could adopt them all. Char already has an heir, but I don’t see why we can’t have other children,” I said.

A complicated look crossed Fouet’s face before it returned to his enigmatic smile. “Sadly, such things are often a lot knottier than we might think.”

“Is that truly the case?” I wondered out loud.

We soon arrived at a classroom where three teenagers were practicing their magic.

“These are the schoolhouse’s oldest students,” Fouet told me. “Canon is among them. Their teacher, Gourdin, is one of my former classmates, and he is a Fire Magic user.”

It seemed that this time of day was dedicated to classroom learning, as the three students were reading books while performing simple magic tricks of their preferred magic attribute. Canon had conjured a small lump of water in the palm of his hand while the other two were wrapped in auras of light and fire.

“Lord Canon is a Water Magic user,” Fouet continued. “The kids are working on their magic control.”

“Magic control?” I repeated.

“Yes. They’re training to concentrate as much power as possible into a spell, then condense and maintain it in that form for as long as they can.”

“You call conjuring a little ball of water in the palm of your hand ‘magic control,’ hmm?”

What was the point of that? Being able to condense and maintain a spell had no practical use. In battle, you might want to focus your mana into a condensed version of a spell, but that would only be for a brief period; sustaining it for extended durations didn’t make sense. Defensive spells, on the other hand, *did* require to be maintained for long periods of time, but condensing them was counterproductive. Mages who specialized in defense often had to shield large groups of civilians, which required spells that covered a wide area. There was no practical reason to condense them.

Has this become the norm for magical training?

It seemed that, over the years, people had forgotten the true charm of magic.

There was something else that I didn’t quite understand: Fouet had called Canon a “Water Magic user.” Did that mean that he couldn’t use other magic types? Did students of the schoolhouse only ever use the attribute they

specialized in? It *was* true that everyone had a magic type they were *better* at. In my case, I excelled at Light Magic and my proficiency with other attributes was much lower overall. However, that didn't mean I couldn't wield them *at all*.

I need to start learning about the current approach to magic as soon as possible.

I didn't like what I'd seen up until now, but perhaps there were some advantages I had yet to discover.

Still, I thought as I looked around the classroom, *this lesson seems dreadfully dull, and the kids look bored out of their minds*. On top of that, the teacher kept reprimanding them, so their magic was unstable.

"What attribute do you specialize in, Fouet?" I asked.

"Wind Magic. It's much easier to use than other attributes, so I really lucked out."

After a few minutes, Canon noticed us. Gourdin, the teacher, glanced at us and told the students to take a break from their drill. Then, he approached us, rubbing his hands together.

"Well, well, what a pleasant surprise. Welcome to the schoolhouse, madam. What brings you here today?" he asked me.

"I'm feeling much better, so I've decided to take a stroll around the estate. I'm here to visit Canon." I'd been using the excuse that I was "feeling better" to explain why I could suddenly leave my room and walk about the estate.

I shifted my gaze to Canon. He stared at me in silence, an inscrutable look in his blue eyes. He didn't seem particularly happy to see me.

Well, I suppose that was to be expected. He's probably wondering why I've suddenly come to see him after months of ignoring him. Either that, or the servants weren't lying and he doesn't want anything to do with me.

The other students and the teacher were also staring at me with cold expressions. I sensed malice emanating from them, reminiscent of what I'd felt from my previous servants.

I guess I'm not welcome here.

As I held my breath, waiting to see what would unfold, one of the children—a girl—spoke up. “I want to see your magic, madam.”

“Me too!” the second one chimed in.

Even Gourdin joined them. “Could you please give us a little demonstration, madam?”

I wasn’t sure if the children knew Lam couldn’t use magic, but Gourdin definitely did.

He intends for me to make a fool of myself in front of the kids.

There were a few things I understood after doing research on the House of Mercure, and one of them was that magical ability was a key determinant of one’s standing within the household. Her inability to use magic had relegated Lam to the lowest ranks, which had given her tormentors yet another reason to treat her with contempt.

I balled my fists and met Gourdin’s gaze. “Of course, I can show you some of my magic. Since you’ve been focusing on magic control and maintenance in your lesson, I’ll incorporate those aspects into my demonstration.”

I decided to go for an illusion spell using Light Magic as a base, then adding touches of other attributes. From what I’d seen during Gourdin’s lesson, modern magic education was exclusively focused on training students in their primary attribute, but I didn’t like that. Magic only revealed its full potential once you started combining magic types.

Let’s see... I’ll use Light, Water, Wood, Wind, and Fire.

The room was soon veiled in fog. Over that blank canvas, I started projecting all sorts of illusions. First, I turned it into a vibrant flower field, then a peaceful snowy landscape. I made a little show using dancing flames that weren’t hot to the touch before summoning a rainbow that arched across the room. By compressing the air, I could change the temperature and make each illusion even more immersive.

The kids and the teacher were completely dumbstruck by my demonstration.

In my previous life, this kind of illusion spell was used as an introduction to

magic, but it seems like their first time seeing anything of the sort, huh?

I really wanted the kids to understand that magic was supposed to be fun. Unfortunately, it didn't seem that they'd appreciated my demonstration. Everyone in the room, including Fouet, was as still as a statue, their eyes wide open in something like horror.



Too bad, I thought, my shoulders slumping in disappointment.

“Pardon me, madam, but what in the world was that?” Fouet asked once he’d regained the ability to speak.

“A simple illusion spell using Light Magic as a base and touches of other attributes,” I explained matter-of-factly.

The teacher and the kids were still petrified.

“It’s quite straightforward,” I continued. “You just create the illusionary space with Light Magic, then, whoosh, use your imagination to blend in other magic types and project them with a *bam!* Then...”

Despite my efforts, the other four stayed frozen in place. *Is this a new method of bullying me?* I wondered.

“Madam, may I speak with you privately in the courtyard?” Fouet said.

I followed him outside, confused by his strange behavior. I had come to see Canon, but I hadn’t exchanged a single word with him, which left me feeling disheartened.

“I clearly recall being informed that you couldn’t use magic when you married His Lordship,” he said as we walked through the garden. He seemed bewildered.

“Indeed, I was unable to because I was unwell,” I replied. I kept using my health as an excuse for everything, but it was so convenient that I didn’t see a reason to stop.

“Because you were unwell?” Fouet repeated.

“Yes. It’s not good for the body to exert itself too much,”

“Might I know which attribute you...” Fouet trailed off, seemingly unsure of how to finish his sentence.

“I specialize in Light Magic, but I can use all attributes. I mix and match them as needed.”

“All attributes?!” he exclaimed, looking even more surprised than before.

It seemed that there really was a big difference between the magical theory

of my previous life and the current one.

“Um, if I may ask, where did you receive your magical education, madam? Your father never mentioned any formal training.”

“Well, I’m mostly self-taught. Imagination plays a big part in magic learning.”

“You’re *self-taught*?!” Fouet couldn’t stop gawking.

“Magic is something that should be enjoyed,” I replied airily.

After our conversation, the two of us concluded our tour of the estate and returned to the mansion. I couldn’t help but notice that Fouet had been somewhat distracted as we walked.



As always, Char had come home to find a pile of work waiting on his desk. Night had fallen already, yet there seemed to be no end to the paperwork and reports that required his attention. He was in the middle of reading through a document when his aide Fouet barged into his office, looking unusually flustered.

“What’s wrong, Fouet? It’s not like you to be so unsettled.”

Fouet leaned over the desk and exclaimed, “Lord Char, your wife is truly something else!”

I’ve asked him to keep an eye on Lam, but what does he mean by “something else?” Char wondered.

To Char’s knowledge, Lam was merely the frail eldest daughter of a baron with terrible spending habits. Her only notable trait was her mana. What had gotten into Fouet?

“Her Ladyship can wield multiple attributes, and she appears to be quite proficient at magic.”

“Multiple attributes?” Char repeated. “And you’re saying she’s *good* at magic? Elaborate.”

“Earlier today, I accompanied Her Ladyship to the schoolhouse as she wanted to visit Lord Canon. She performed a large magic spell unlike anything I’d ever

seen before in front of all of us. We were speechless.”

“Are you sure you didn’t just imagine it?” Char asked. There was no way a cowardly girl like Lam with no magic abilities could pull off such a feat. Besides, Char had never heard of someone who could wield every magic type. The idea was foolish.

Yet, Fouet was adamant. “I am *positive*. Gourdin and the children at the schoolhouse also witnessed it. If you have any doubt, you should confirm it with them.”

Char was stunned by his subordinate’s unusual insistence.

“I also looked into the servants dismissed by Her Ladyship,” Fouet continued. “I was thinking there must’ve been a reason she let them go.”

“And? Did you discover anything interesting?”

Fouet nodded. “It seems that the servants used to collectively mistreat Her Ladyship. Some even went as far as to physically assault her while demanding she introduce them to you. That’s not all. Apparently, the previous chef would feed her nothing but leftovers and food scraps.”

“What? That’s impossible. No one would treat a countess like tha—” Char stopped abruptly as realization dawned on him.

Her handmaidens *had* been of lower social standing than his previous wife, but they were above Lam. Many noble ladies refused to serve someone of lower rank. Still, that didn’t give them a pass to treat Lam that way.

“You may have noticed that Her Ladyship always wore simple dresses,” Fouet continued. “Well, it turns out that her handmaidens sold the more extravagant gowns we’d ordered for her and used the money for their own indulgences. Additionally...”

“There’s *more*?” Char asked, dumbfounded.

“For the past several months, the servants have forced Her Ladyship to stay in her room and wouldn’t allow her to meet with Lord Canon. I believe this harsh treatment contributed to the drastic change in her demeanor. Even the most patient person has a breaking point, after all. You should have paid more

attention to your wife, my lord.”

That was easy for him to say, but it wasn't like Char could do anything now! Lam had already fired the worst offenders without writing letters of recommendation for them as was the custom when a noble family let go of an employee. Complicated emotions swirled within him, and Char turned his head away, unable to find the words to respond.

“So, the baron's daughter wasn't just some timid and cowardly girl. Really?” he muttered.

“I'm aware that you've developed a dislike of women because of your previous wife, my lord, but Her Ladyship is different,” Fouet said. “I believe it is not too late to attempt to mend your relationship.”

Char stayed silent. He felt guilty about the way his servants had treated Lam, but he couldn't help but feel a glimmer of hope upon learning these new things about his wife. He looked down at the documents on his desk and pondered his next course of action.

What a boring girl.

That'd been the first thought that'd crossed his mind upon meeting Lam. Yet, Fouet claimed that there was more to his wife than met the eye. At the time, she'd seemed like little more than an ornament; she was always wary of people's reactions and never spoke her mind. Char hadn't ever managed to have a real conversation with her, as she kept apologizing whenever he tried. Needless to say, Lam hadn't left a particularly positive impression on him, and he'd been careful to treat her with kid gloves ever since.

“Fouet, is Lam in her room?”

“She should be. I escorted her personally after our walk. Although, I cannot guarantee she's not roaming the mansion now.”

“I see.” With that, Char stood up from his chair and made for the door.

“Where are you going, my lord?” Fouet asked.

“To see my wife,” Char replied, his face sour. He was of the opinion that troublesome matters were best dealt with sooner rather than later.

“Take care, my lord. Please do your best to get along with Her Ladyship. I’ll be retiring to my quarters unless you require anything else,” Fouet said, a somewhat mischievous smile on his lips.

Char shot him a sidelong glance before exiting his office and heading for his wife’s room.

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Clad only in my nightgown, I stood in my room, confused. What happened, you might ask. Well, for some reason, my husband Char had decided this was the perfect time to pay me a visit.

What could he possibly want at this hour? I’m not pleased with him barging into my room unprompted. He’d never paid me any attention before, so what’d gotten into him all of a sudden? But, I won’t know unless I hear him out.

I had little knowledge of Char beyond the fact that Lam had found him “scary” and had avoided him whenever possible.

Well, it’s not like I can just stand there and do nothing. For now, I decided that greeting him would be the best course of action.

“Good evening,” I said, dropping in a curtsy. “What brings you to see me at this hour?”

I motioned for him to take a seat at the table, then sat down across from him.

“Lam, there’s something I’d like to discuss with you,” he said without preamble.

His demeanor was unlike anything I’d seen before. Usually, when we crossed paths in the corridors, he would walk by without acknowledging me. What in the world was going on?

Did he hear about the little magic trick I performed at the schoolhouse? Lam couldn’t use magic, so it’s no wonder he’d be curious about it. I was positive Fouet must’ve told him about the morning’s events. Char must’ve come to my room to question me about them. *That has to be it. He wouldn’t come without some sort of ulterior motive.*

Now that he was here, I studied my husband. He was sitting with one leg

crossed over the other and staring back at me with sharp eyes that would've made the old Lam run away—barefoot and screaming—in the middle of the night. I couldn't tell if it was intentional, but his gaze was quite unfriendly.

No wonder poor Lam was terrified of him.

I understood why the Earl of Mercure was rumored to be so difficult to approach. Not only did his magic unnerve others, but his overall impression was cold and intimidating despite his good looks.

"I thought that you only had mana, but I've learned that you can also use magic. Why have you kept it a secret from me?" Char asked, his piercing eyes locked on me.

The real reason was that I'd just regained my memories, but I felt that this explanation would make things uselessly complicated, so I decided to go with the same excuse I'd given Fouet.

"I couldn't before, but now that my health has improved, it seems I can," I said evasively.

"Your health?" Char repeated, clearly skeptical.

Lam might've been scared of Char, but I wasn't, nor did I have any qualms about lying to him. Besides, it *was* true that I hadn't been at my best physically due to the way the servants were treating me. On top of all that, I'd stopped expecting anything from my husband, so why be honest?

He'd only married Lam out of convenience and proceeded to completely forget about her, leaving her at the mercy of the servants. I understood that he had no interest in her, but, come on! Any other man in a similar situation would've at least made an effort to check on his wife once in a while. He couldn't even do that. Lam went through hell because of him, yet he sat there, pretending not to know what he'd done. Needless to say, my opinion of Char was far from favorable. Anyone in my position would feel the same.

"Show me the magic you performed at the schoolhouse. I want to see it with my own eyes," he said.

This man had no idea how I was feeling, yet he dared to demand things of me with his usual haughty demeanor? Too bad for him; I had no reason to obey his

commands.

“Why should I? It is none of your concern whether I can use magic or not. I do not appreciate being ordered around.”

“What did you just say?” Char’s jaw dropped, and he stared at me with wide, incredulous eyes. He clearly hadn’t anticipated his timid wife refusing his command.

However, he quickly pulled himself together and fixed me with a look that had turned cold and calculating. Any trace of his earlier agitation disappeared.

“You’re my wife. Of course, it concerns me.”

Well, color me surprised: he remembers that I’m his wife!

“Yes, indeed. I am your wife—the same one you cast away the second we were wed. Now that I’ve served my purpose, you don’t need me anymore, do you? Rest assured, I have no intention of using my magic to cause you harm, so can you return to leaving me in solitude as you have up until now?”

Char’s brows furrowed. “I’m providing financial support to your family. I don’t think you should be so dismissive of me,” he said, scrutinizing me with a hint of challenge, as if to test my resolve.

Well, his threats didn’t work on the current me!

“You can stop the financial support anytime you like. I couldn’t care less if they end up on the streets,” I said. I chuckled to emphasize my indifference.

Char seemed lost in his thoughts for a moment. Then, in the next instant, his lips curled into a sly smile.

“I see. Fouet was right,” he said.

I had anticipated anger or shock from him, but not a *smile*. It was my turn to be stunned into silence.

Why is he smiling? He should be furious! I eyed him with suspicion, waiting for his next move.

“Lam, you were deceiving me all this time, weren’t you?” he accused me.

“Playing the part of the frightened, submissive wife while hiding your true self.”

“I wasn’t.” I had no choice but to lie to him if I didn’t want to tell him that I’d remembered I was once someone else.

“We’ve never had a proper conversation, so I hadn’t noticed you were playing me.”

He was right about that first part: he and Lam had only talked face-to-face a handful of times, mostly because Char spent the majority of his time working and cloistered in his office whenever he was home.

“Indeed. You have no idea of what I’ve endured since coming here, do you?” I retorted.

Char was partly to blame for the way the servants had treated Lam. If he’d at least pretended to defend his wife, the bullying wouldn’t have gotten this severe. Well, I supposed I was a fool for expecting anything of him in the first place.

I observed him in silence, awaiting his next words.

His eyes focused on me once again. “Today, Fouet told me about the way the servants have been treating you.”

“Oh, really? Here I thought you already knew and were only turning a blind eye to it,” I replied coolly.

Again, I knew he had no interest in Lam, but this was just pathetic. There was no point in holding grudges and acting petty, but Char irked me to no end.

“I often have to travel for work, but it’s not like I’m never home. You could’ve told me about their behavior yourself,” he pointed out.

That would’ve been impossible for the old Lam. Not only was she a coward, but she had no trust in Char whatsoever—and she was right! The one time that I’d reported a servant’s wrongdoings to him, he’d shrugged it off and told me to deal with it myself. This man wasn’t reliable in the slightest.

“Well, all those days I was confined to my room, forced to take cold baths even though it was freezing outside, slapped around by my handmaidens, and kept awake at night out of spite, I assumed that you had no interest in me.”

Char froze upon hearing me lay out the harsh reality of my life for the past

few months. Surprisingly, I sensed he was a *tad* guilty about the way the old Lam had been treated. Not that it mattered much now.

“...ry.” Char tried to say something, but his voice was so quiet I didn’t hear it.

“Excuse me? I couldn’t hear you.”

“I said I’m sorry,” he said, louder this time. “I didn’t know the servants were treating you that way.”

“Huh?” I blinked in surprise. I hadn’t expected him to apologize.

He still looks as pompous as ever, but it sounds like he means it.

I thought he was a terrible husband, but after seeing him apologize, I couldn’t blame him for not knowing.

He turned his head away with a huff, then sighed. “I had no idea how to approach you. I was busy with work, so I had very few opportunities to get to know you. Whenever I tried, you ran away. In the end, I thought keeping my distance was better for the both of us.”

“Hold on a minute...”

I thought back on the ways Lam had interacted with Char. She’d been terrified of him, that was for sure. So much so that she couldn’t even look him in the eyes. Whenever Char had attempted to strike up a conversation, all she’d done was apologize. I actually couldn’t remember a single instance of her saying anything other than “sorry” to him.

Was it her fault they never had a proper conversation?

How was Char supposed to communicate with someone who refused to talk to him? Imagine trying to get to know your wife only for her to apologize repeatedly without even letting you finish a sentence. Was there anything more annoying than that? As I remembered it, Char *had* made a minimal effort to be courteous to Lam. It’d been the bare minimum, but still.

There was more: once, Char had taken her to a party, but she’d been so scared that she’d slapped away the hand he’d held out to her and run away. It was no wonder Char thought it was better to leave Lam alone after she’d refused him so vehemently.

Okay, I admit—the more I think about it, the more I realize that the me of the past wasn't blameless.

I still blamed him for the way the servants had tormented Lam, but I saw why he'd told himself it was better not to interact with her too much. After all, she'd refused his attempts at communication, running like a jackrabbit for the hills whenever he'd tried.

Actually, so much of it was her fault, right?! I'd thoroughly changed my mind by the time I was done reflecting on the past.

"From now on, I'll keep an eye on the servants so that the same situation doesn't repeat itself," Char said. "If I'm not home and something happens, you can always contact me using the magic communication item in my office." He paused. "Mm, but I suppose it's too late for that. It sounds like you took care of the problem yourself."

"I have, indeed. There's no need for you to concern yourself further." I couldn't keep holding him to account for Lam's past mistakes. I smiled at him, continuing, "You must hate having such a nagging wife, yes? That's why I believe we should get a divorce. There are many women who'd eagerly take my place as the Countess of Mercure, and I'm confident I'll manage just fine on my own."

Even though I'd cleaned house, I longed for more freedom than the life of a countess offered. Having lived as a commoner in my past life, I was confident I'd have no issue returning to a simpler lifestyle. I looked at Char with a smile as if to ask him, "It's a lovely idea, don't you think?"

To my surprise, he burst into a peal of laughter. It was my first time seeing such a radiant expression on his face.

Huh? Why is he laughing? He should be conflicted, shocked, or angry! Not laughing! I really don't understand this guy.

When he was done, he rested his eyes on me again. "You have a much better personality than I thought, Lam. How funny."

"Huh?" I asked him if we could get a divorce and his only response was to call me *funny*?

“Don’t worry. I never had any intention of divorcing you. Our conversation has only strengthened my decision,” he said.

“Why?! Anyone would want to kick their wife out after they’ve talked to them like I have!” Besides, Char was supposed to have no affection whatsoever for me!

“Sorry for disappointing you,” he said, a playful smile curling on his lips.

“Well, *I* don’t find *you* particularly funny,” I replied, accidentally letting my true feelings show. Somehow, this only seemed to please him further. No matter what I said, he seemed happier and happier, which I found baffling.

Char’s rumored to be a cold and cruel man—but to me, he just seems like a huge weirdo!

I thought he’d jump on the opportunity to divorce me, but life rarely went as one hoped. Was there really no way for me to convince him?

“You know, it’s not that easy for nobles to get a divorce,” Char said as if he could read my thoughts. “Especially for us. The Mercure family has such a unique position that, as the Earl, I need to get the king’s approval before marrying or divorcing anyone. Just give up the idea. Besides, even if I were to agree, poor Canon would miss his mother.”

A gasp escaped my lips and I returned to my senses. I had completely forgotten about Canon. *I find it hard to believe that Canon would “miss me” but, well...*

He wasn’t my real son, and I couldn’t say we had a good relationship, but I didn’t want to abandon him. I sighed and tried to calm my emotions.

“Fine, then. I shall give up for today,” I said. That was right—for today and *today only*. As soon as I figured out a solution for Canon, I was out.

I stood up and ushered Char to the door. “Just so you know, I have no intention of withdrawing my wish to divorce you,” I said. With that, I pushed him out of my room and locked the door behind him.

From the other side of the door, I heard him laugh, but I *didn’t* care. He was out of my room; that was good enough.

“Phew, I’m exhausted! I’ve dealt with that weirdo for the night, so I should just go to bed,” I muttered to myself. I slipped under the covers on my bed, and in less than three seconds, I was out like a light.

“Well, Canon isn’t the kind of kid who would miss his mother if she *were* to leave, but oh well,” Char muttered with a chuckle from the hallway, but I was already in dreamland.

Chapter Three: The Countess, Her Husband, and Her Son

The next morning, after dressing, I ventured outside once again. Picking up a broom that was lying on the ground in a corner of the yard, I began to swing it in the air with one hand, using it as a prop for some much-needed exercise.

“Ah, what a beautiful day!” The sky was a flawless expanse of blue, and a gentle breeze brushed against my cheek. It was perfect weather for a bit of activity. The only problem was...

“Ugh, this body is so weak.”

You see, Char’s late-night visit hadn’t been the only unforeseen event of these past few days.

I have no stamina whatsoever! I’d thought in horror when I woke up this morning. *I performed one little spell yesterday and I’m completely exhausted!*

Lam had a terrible constitution—an inevitable consequence of spending so much time cooped up indoors—and the smallest effort made me tired. Despite pushing through it, there was only so much I could do with willpower alone. So, I’d resolved to start exercising to build up my strength. The more endurance I could develop, the better; I didn’t want to be completely wiped out every time I used magic.

This is quite a challenge, I thought, having had to stop to take a break after only a couple of minutes. *Being a delicate noble lady is tougher than it looks.*

All of a sudden, I heard some rustling in the thickets nearby. Glancing over, I saw a familiar teenage boy emerging from the bushes. His blue hair and eyes resembled neither mine nor Char’s. He was pretty, with a sharp and intelligent face, and seemed fit and healthy, perhaps due to his training at the schoolhouse.

“You... Canon?” I asked.

I'd actually realized for some time that someone was watching me, but since I hadn't felt any ill intent from them, I'd chosen to ignore it.

"Mother?" Canon said hesitantly, casting a quick glance my way before darting his eyes away.

Mother, huh? It has a nice ring to it.

At twenty, I was obviously way too young to be Canon's *real* mother, and so was Char's former wife, who would've been twenty-five, like him, if she hadn't passed away.

There would've been a ten-year difference between her and Canon. The Mercure family has such weird traditions.

Still, it wasn't *his* fault. No matter the details, I *was* Canon's mother and needed to act as such.

"Is something the matter? Do you need anything?" I asked, trying to sound as gentle as possible, though my words ended up coming out a little stiff. At the end of the day, the two of us were basically strangers; it was hard to shake off the awkwardness.

"Um, I-I, uh," he stammered, just as nervous as I was.

I shot him as reassuring of a smile as I could, waiting for him to continue. For a short while, he stood there in silence, looking at the ground and fidgeting anxiously.

"Well," he finally said, "the magic you performed yesterday was incredible, mother. I'm sorry for how rude my classmates and the teacher were." He looked up at me tentatively, trying to gauge my reaction.

Moved by his apology, I smiled even wider and said, "It's all right, I'm not upset. Could you lift your head?"

He timidly met my gaze. Unlike his father, he seemed like a gentle boy. *I really hope the two of us will be closer one day.*

"Mother, if I may, wh-where did you learn that spell?" he asked me, his voice trembling slightly.

"I learned it on my own," I replied, still trying to sound as kind and motherly

as I could, but I didn't miss the way Canon's cheek twitched.

Technically, it's not a lie: I did learn and popularize that spell by myself in my past life, but magic theory has changed so much since then that Canon might find it hard to believe.

He started fidgeting again to hide his confusion, but it was painfully obvious he doubted me.

I need to convince him, I thought, quickly crafting a story to explain myself.

"See, I've always been so sickly that I used to study magic alone in my room. But I was so weak, I couldn't *actually* use it until recently. That's why my parents don't know about it! You know, since *I've always been so weak and sickly*. And, well, no one has ever asked me if I could use magic."

I rattled off my explanation decisively, not giving Canon the time to ask any questions. This time, I'd decided to blame everything on my weak constitution, adding it to my repertoire of Very Convenient Excuses alongside my ever-reliable "I was unwell." It *did* make me feel a bit pathetic, though.

"I see," Canon said, clearly overwhelmed by my rapid-fire speech. I could feel that he didn't quite believe me, but I'd at least managed to deflect his questions for now. That was good enough. "Can I use that spell too? Or is it impossible for me since I'm a Water Magic user?"

"It has nothing to do with your magic attribute," I said, though my words only seemed to confuse him more.

Five hundred years ago, we used to learn all sorts of magic, both those of our preferred magic type and others. Nowadays, children were told that they could *only* use spells of their designated attribute. To Canon, who had grown up with this modern approach, attributes were of great importance.

I really wonder how and when things came to this. Sure, you'll always be better at your preferred magic type, but that doesn't mean you can't use the other attributes altogether.

Even Char only ever used Lightning Magic. They'd really hammered that idea into the students, huh?

“Would you like me to teach you, Canon?” I offered.

A confused look appeared on his face and he started fidgeting again. I could tell he really wanted to learn that spell.

Perhaps magic will help us become closer.

Canon’s main element was Water Magic, so I had to make some adjustments to the spell I’d performed at the schoolhouse. I took a moment to organize my thoughts and began my impromptu lesson.

“Let’s put your Water Magic to good use, shall we? When I performed the spell, I used Light Magic as a base, but we’ll go with something slightly different for you. Don’t worry, the result will be similar enough. Water and Light make the best combination for illusion spells.”

“Huh? Mother, you know Water Magic too?”

“I know *all* magic types. So you can trust me, yes?”

With that, I dived into practical training. I guided Canon patiently and attentively, ensuring he enjoyed the process and made the most of his learning experience.

“First, we’ll start with some nonoffensive Water Magic. Try vaporizing the water like this,” I said, giving him a quick demonstration.

From what he told me, his go-to spell was to conjure orbs of water and throw them at enemies. When I told him that wasn’t the only way of using Water Magic, he seemed puzzled.

“Like this?” he asked, trying to vaporize the water as I showed him. “Is this the right temperature? The right range?”

“Don’t worry about the details,” I assured him. “You can adjust them later when you’ve mastered the basics. Now, let’s incorporate other attributes.”

“Urgh. My mana feels unstable when I try to add another attribute.”

“Oh, is that so? That’s actually a learning opportunity! It’ll make for a nice training drill. Come on, Canon, hang in there,” I encouraged him.

As you’d expect from the future earl, Canon had a natural talent for magic, on

top of being a quick learner. The only thing he lacked was flexibility.

“Your method is different from the one they teach us at the schoolhouse,” he said. “What made you decide to adopt this approach?”

“Hmm. Playing by ear, I suppose?”

“Could you tell me the name of the book where you read about it?” he pressed.

“I forget. All I know is that this magic is from five hundred years ago.”

“Five hundred years ago?!” he exclaimed. “So, it’s not really a new spell? Hm... But I’ve never seen anything of the sort in my history books.”

The boy was quite sharp.

“People must’ve forgotten about it.” I shrugged. “Back then, everyone used to do these sorts of—” I caught myself before saying too much and cleared my throat to cover the slip. “Never mind.”

“I would love to read the books you studied from, mother.”

I wasn’t surprised. In the past five hundred years, magic education had shifted to a strictly practical approach, making modern magic rather dull.

“Ah... Um...” Unfortunately for Canon, these books didn’t exist, but I couldn’t exactly tell him that. “I’m sorry, but my parents disposed of them. Don’t fret, though! I can teach you anything you’d like. I remember the content of the books by heart.”

“*Everything?*” he asked, his eyes widening.

“Yes. I’ve always been sickly, so I had nothing better to do to kill time.”

This whole “I had a weak constitution” excuse was turning out to be so handy. I made a mental note to use it more often.



It was pleasantly warm in the courtyard that day, and Canon was trying his hand at a spell he’d never attempted before under the enthusiastic guidance of his mother, Lam, his father’s second wife.

She’s much more approachable than I thought. Canon’s first impression of

Lam had been that she was a cowardly young lady who seemed overwhelmed by her own struggles. He'd assumed that she had little interest in children, but that was already an improvement from his father's despicable first wife. Canon never thought of going to visit his new mother; his training at the schoolhouse was already demanding enough without the extra effort of making up excuses to go see her. Everyone always called Canon a "heartless child," and he couldn't argue with them.

Still, if I'd known she was this kind of person, I would've approached her sooner.

Canon's impression of Lam had done a one-eighty after she'd visited the schoolhouse. His classmates and teacher had tried to play an ill-natured prank on her by asking her to demonstrate her magic, fully aware that she couldn't actually perform any. Canon hadn't said anything, watching with interest to see how the situation would unfold. To everyone's surprise, not only *could* Lam use magic, but the spell she'd performed had been unlike anything Canon had seen before. Even his teacher couldn't use such elaborate magic, yet Lam executed it with ease.

What was that? Just who is my mother, really?!

This had caused Canon's interest in Lam to grow tenfold, leading to him asking her to teach him magic.

"Canon, you can add more mana into the spell. Remember, the key is to maintain a clear image of what you want to achieve," Lam instructed him.

"Y-Yes, mother."

It had only taken Lam a few seconds to come up with a spell tailored exactly for Canon. She truly was something else.

The first step was for him to create a sort of water film and vaporize it. Then, he had to reflect some light on it and use Dark Magic to create a space for him to add other elements onto. After that, all he had to do was use other magic attributes to create scenery, but that was much easier said than done.

Not only is it my first time combining magic types, but I'm having a hard time coming up with ideas for the illusion.

Canon had never learned anything of the sort at the schoolhouse. His teacher only taught him offensive spells, defensive spells, and magic control. He'd never been taught something whimsical like how to perform illusion spells to create beautiful scenery. Most people would consider that a frivolous use of magic.

"You're very good at dividing your mana between the different attributes. As for the scenery you came up with, well—it could be better. What are those? Trees and rocks? You definitely have... Let's say a *unique* sense." Lam's comments were brutally honest.

"I..." Canon had to admit, his artistic sense was almost nonexistent. In the end, all he'd managed to come up with were projections of trees like the ones surrounding them and rocks like the boulder on which the students practiced their spells in the schoolhouse's training grounds.

"Do you never leave the schoolhouse?" Lam asked.

Canon shook his head. "No. We're not allowed to leave without permission."

"Is that so? I'll take you on an outing next time."

Canon was taken aback by Lam's response. "Did you hear what I just said? We can't leave the schoolhouse."

"Unless you have permission, right? Good thing I'm the countess, then."

Canon almost pointed out that even she wouldn't be able to convince the teacher to let him leave, but Lam's enthusiasm was so genuine he chose to remain silent.

What a peculiar woman. She's not at all like the other members of the House of Mercure.

They resumed Canon's training, and before he realized it, it was already past noon. The classes at the schoolhouse seemed endless, yet Lam's lesson had passed in the blink of an eye. She wasn't even a proper teacher, but her methods were precise and effective.

"You're truly amazing, Canon," Lam said. "It hasn't even been a day, but you've already mastered the spell."

"What? But my magic is still unstable, and I could only project simple things

onto the canvas,” he mumbled.

“I’d say it’s already quite impressive.”

Canon shook his head. “I’m still lacking the skills and experience needed to be the next heir of the House of Mercure. Father still hasn’t approved of me either. I have the best grades at the schoolhouse right now, but if someone better came along, they could easily replace me,” he said with a burst of honesty.

He heard her angrily huff in response. “I understand their perspective, but I simply cannot get behind the Mercure family’s inheritance method. I shall discuss it with Char. Perhaps he’ll agree to change it.”

“M-Mother?!” Canon stammered.

Complaining about a Mercure family tradition to Char was absolute madness!

I have to stop her, Canon thought, but Lam was either oblivious to or unconcerned by her son’s agitation.

“Everything will be all right, Canon,” she reassured him. “If you have any worries, you can come to me. And if your father has an issue with that, I shall use my magic to put him in his place!”

What in the world is wrong with this woman?! Canon’s jaw hit the ground. This was Char Mercure she was talking about—the strongest head of the House of Mercure in history! No one had *ever* dared claim they would “put him in his place,” and Canon’s father definitely wasn’t the type of man to go easy on anyone, regardless of gender.

What should I do? I need to stop her before she puts herself in danger, Canon fretted. Then, he saw someone headed their way from the other side of the courtyard. To his dismay, the newcomer was none other than the source of his agitation—Char Mercure himself!



I stood face-to-face with my husband in the courtyard. His scarlet eyes narrowed as he looked at me, and—completely ignoring his son who was standing to the side—he handed me a letter.

“What is this?” I asked, taking the envelope.

“We’re invited to a party at the castle. You’re coming too,” he said matter-of-factly.

I blinked in surprise. “Huh? A party? What for?”

“The king wants to honor me publicly for a monster I’ve killed. I told him I didn’t need any recognition, but he wouldn’t listen. What’s more, he wants us *both* to attend the event.”

“I see. How troublesome. The last party I attended was an absolute fiasco.”

Having been treated like a slave by her family since childhood, Lam had never been in the public eye until she’d married Char and, even after becoming countess, she had never managed to fit into high society. Her tendency to stay shut in her room and her lack of friends had only made her struggle to adjust even harder. Throwing a sheltered and timid lady into a gathering of high nobles without a single ally had been a recipe for disaster. Predictably, it’d ended poorly. After that, Lam had received no more invitations to parties.

I knew that, even if I were to attend the king’s party, I would most likely be isolated the entire time.

“My apologies, but as I am in poor health, I won’t be attending,” I said.

However, Char wasn’t about to let me run away that easily. “That’s unfortunate. I suppose I’ll have to carry you around the venue, then.”

“Huh?”

A mischievous smile curled on Char’s lips, his usual cold self nowhere to be found. “I told you, *both of us* have to attend. We’re husband and wife, after all. Sick or not, if you can ‘put me in my place with your magic,’ I’m sure you’ll be fine attending a little party.”

I gasped. “You were *listening in* on us? How outrageous! I want a divorce—now!”

“Are you sure you want to do this in front of the child?” Char said, shrugging his shoulders dramatically.

That’s grand coming from someone who didn’t even bother greeting him!

Canon had looked uncomfortable since Char’s arrival; it was clear he wasn’t

too fond of him. The boy had already been a bit awkward around me, but he'd now tensed up far more. We were supposed to be his parents, but it didn't feel like we were a family at all. I supposed it was only natural given the fact that we weren't *actually* related, but I thought it was a shame.

"You don't have to worry, Lam. This time, I'll stay by your side for the entire duration of the party. Although, I *do* understand your wish to avoid formal events after the disaster that was the last one."

"Th-That's... It was mostly your fault," I mumbled.

"Oh, was it, now? If I remember correctly, *you're* the one who slapped my hand away and ran off on your own."

I let out a frustrated groan. He seemed to have a comeback for every remark. Admittedly, he *did* have a point: the original Lam had charged into the party all on her own the first and last time she had been invited to an event. Char hadn't chased after her, but who could blame him? He must've been embarrassed by his wife's behavior. My past self had been firmly entrenched in a victim mentality, lamenting that Char was a heartless man who'd pretended not to see that his wife was completely isolated at the party, but, in hindsight, she might not have been as innocent as she'd thought.

In truth, he didn't know how to approach Lam after she ran away and decided it was best to give her space.

I let out a long sigh. Just how self-centered had Lam been that it led to such misunderstandings? I also realized with horror that my only excuse for not attending the party had crumbled into pieces.

"Fine," I said. "I just have to be present, right?"

"Will you run away from me again?" Char taunted me, and I threw him a glare.

"I won't!"

"I'm looking forward to it," he said, an amused smile playing on his lips.

Canon's innocent, bewildered gaze as he watched us was painful to bear.

As much as it stings to say he was right, we really shouldn't fight in front of

our son. I need to stop before things get out of hand. I turned around and gave Canon a gentle, reassuring smile. Then, I shot Char a sharp look, warning him not to scare the boy any further.

“Oh, right. How’s school going, Canon?” Char asked it as if the question had just popped into his head.

Canon flinched at the question, a look of panic rising on his face.

He must’ve skipped school to come train with me. I didn’t want to scold him, but Char might. The poor boy clearly didn’t like him; he didn’t reply to Char and instead stood as still as a statue. *I understand where Char’s coming from, but I can’t blame Canon for wanting to learn magic he’s interested in.*

Listen, if I had been a student at the schoolhouse, I would’ve done the same thing!

“Do you think you’re fit to be the next earl with such an attitude?” Just as I feared, Char started lecturing Canon.

“He’s fine. He’ll be a great leader,” I interjected, stepping between them.

Canon might not have been as assertive as Char, but he was thoughtful, cautious, and observant. I could tell that much from our time together this morning. Char was Canon’s father; I really wished he’d pay more attention to his son’s good qualities.

However, all he did was frown at my remark. “On what basis are you making that judgment? Lam, you don’t need to be so soft on him.”

“He spends all of his days studying. Surely, he can skip school *once* in a while. Besides, it isn’t as if he’s just twiddling his thumbs. He came to learn magic from me. I’ll return to the schoolhouse with him and explain the situation to his teacher myself,” I declared, grabbing Canon by the hand and heading toward the schoolhouse.

I had only taken a couple of steps before Char wrapped an arm around my waist.

“H-Huh? What are you doing?!” I squeaked.

Char paid my agitation no mind. “I don’t think so, Lam. You’re coming with

me,” he said calmly. “I’m still not done talking to you.”

“Well, I don’t have anything to say to *you*!”

“Please, I’ll be fine, mother,” Canon said before he rushed to return to the schoolhouse on his own.

Leaving to stop Char and me from fighting, huh?

A triumphant smile curled on Char’s lips. How immature could this man be?

“I suppose I don’t have a choice.” I graciously accepted defeat and began to follow Char through the garden.

After we walked a little, I asked, “So? What did you want to talk to me about?”

The Mercure estate’s gardens were large and not lacking in places to stroll through. There was no one around, meaning we could discuss things without anyone listening in on us.

“It’s been weighing on my mind: where did you learn those spells?” he asked.

I’d been anticipating that question, so my answer was ready. “I’m self-taught.”

A dumbfounded look appeared on Char’s face. “You’re telling me that a sickly girl like you, who was treated like a servant by her family, learned that magic all by herself? Even a member of the House of Mercure wouldn’t manage such a feat.”

I chuckled self-importantly. “Some books on magic ended up in our collection due to my father’s business dealings.”

“Baron Ivoire owns *magic grimoires*?” Char asked, clearly baffled.

I didn’t want him to press further, so I hurried to say, “I-I don’t remember the names of the books, though. It’s been many years, after all.”

Just as I’d anticipated, Char wasn’t as easy to deceive as Canon. Well, “deceive” probably wasn’t the right word; Char wasn’t going to pretend to believe me like Canon had. Not wanting him to ask for more details, I decided to change the topic.

“Anyway, I feel bad for Canon and the other children,” I said. “Their teachers keep putting all this pressure on them, and they’re forced to endure such dull lessons. It’s no wonder Canon never smiles. The poor boy is only fifteen!”

While I had mostly changed the topic to avoid Char asking more questions about my magic education, this was a subject I did want to discuss with him. Canon was clearly suffering, working himself to the bone in an attempt to meet everyone’s expectations.

I *knew* Char was aware of this, but his tone was cold as he replied, “Too bad for him. Training their magic is the duty of the children of the House of Mercure. I, too, went through it.”

Apparently, those dull, monotonous lessons were a tradition that had been passed down through generations in the House of Mercure.

“We can’t just change the method of teaching on a whim,” Char added. I pursed my lips in frustration at his unhelpful response, but then he continued, “I do admit, the magic you taught Canon was fantastic.”

“Huh?” I hadn’t expected Char to compliment me; he left me at a loss for words. Here I figured he would berate me for teaching his son useless spells.

“It’s a frivolous demonstration, but it does help one practice using multiple attributes at the same time. To be honest with you, until I received Fouet’s report, I had no idea anyone could use magic types other than their main attribute.”

“That’s what I’ve heard, yes. Well, I’m glad you understand. The spell I taught Canon tests your magic abilities, on top of being a lot more fun than those boring magic control classes he has to sit through. Canon seemed to like it as well.”

Hearing Char’s impressions on the spell made me think. Could it be that, until now, Char and I simply hadn’t understood each other? Perhaps I was wrong, and he was actually someone I could reason with, given a bit of patience and tenacity. I might even be able to convince him to get a divorce.

“Char? About the di—”

He immediately cut me off. “We’re *not* getting a divorce. No matter what you

do, the fact that you're my wife won't change, so give up on the idea. By the way, you seem to be feeling just fine today. Let us resume our walk."

"Ugh." I wanted to argue more, but I knew it was futile. It was clear he wouldn't change his mind, at least not today. I decided to drop the topic for now. "Fine, I'll give up—for now."

I needed to find a good reason to convince Char to divorce me, but what? As I racked my brain trying to come up with a new strategy, I took a step forward and noticed that something was wrong. Suddenly, everything tilted around me as my body lurched to the side.

"Hey!" Char called out in alarm.

Huh? My body feels so limp all of a sudden. Why? I haven't done anything to make me so exhausted! Then, I recalled Canon's magic training and let out a gasp. In the end, I'd performed the spell several times to show Canon how it was supposed to be done. *Did I use too much magic? Argh, for it to affect my body this much...*

Char lent me a hand to help me stabilize my staggering body, but instead of helping me stand, he used the momentum to hoist me up and drape me over his right shoulder.

"Wh-What are you doing?!" I exclaimed, slapping his back over and over again, but he remained completely unfazed. *We might be husband and wife on paper, but he's way too close! I'm not okay with this!*

"I'll carry you back to the mansion. Consider it an honor," he said, his voice perfectly steady.

"I-I can w-walk by myself, thank you very much!" I said. To my chagrin, I kept stumbling over my words. In reality, I was completely at Char's mercy. If only my strength hadn't decided to betray me now! I could've run away!

"You're much livelier than I thought you'd be," Char said. "No need to be so stubborn, just let me help you."

I almost managed to escape from his hold, but he easily captured me again, all under the warm but somewhat curious gaze of the new gardener who was in the process of watering the flowers.

I'm so embarrassed. What in the world is wrong with this man?!

Much to my frustration, I had to accept that my body had completely run out of stamina, and I couldn't do anything as Char carried me up the mansion's steps.

It's fine. Everything's fine. Char's just curious because of my sudden personality change, but he'll lose interest in me sooner or later, I told myself. For now, I needed to focus on finding a good excuse for us to get a divorce. Then, I'd watch for the moment when Char started to lose interest in me and *strike*.

Char's voice pulled me out of my fantasies. "You're lost in thought when I'm giving you the honor of carrying you in my arms?"

"What a despicable attitude to take with your sick wife. I want a divorce now!" I cried. Besides, he wasn't exactly "carrying me in his arms," since I was slung over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Yes, yes, you bring that up every two sentences. Look, we've arrived," he said, thrusting the chin in the direction of the door. Except that it wasn't my room we were standing in front of, but *his*. He dexterously opened the door with one hand and entered the room, still carrying me over his shoulder.

"Wuh?" I had assumed we were heading to *my* room, not *his*!

Char's room was quite simple and had little decor; I could tell it was meant for practical use rather than luxury. He carried me to the massive bed draped in a deep crimson duvet and lowered me onto the covers with an unexpected gentleness, something I'd never have expected from such an arrogant man.

"Th-Thank—" I was about to thank him out of reflex when, unexpectedly, Char pushed me down onto the bed and climbed over me, an amused smirk playing on his lips.

"Wh... Wh-Wh-Wh-What..." I stammered, too stunned to speak fluently as my mind went completely blank.

"Hm? Whatever happened to your bravado?" he murmured, close enough that I could feel his breath on my face. His tone was sultry, but I didn't miss the mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“Hmph! Y-You must be tired too, no? How about we just go to sleep?” I suggested.

“I’m not so composed that I could just fall asleep with my wife in my bed,” Char said. His hand which had been combing through my hair moved to rest on my cheek. I could see my flustered face reflected in his crimson eyes.

However, there was a slight issue. You see, while I used to be the strongest witch in history in my previous life, there was one thing that I’d never experienced: romance. I had *no* immunity to men’s attention, and the mere fact that my husband had carried me here like a piece of meat was enough to embarrass me beyond saving.

Aaah, this is too much!

So, just like that, I passed out on Char’s bed.



Char stared down at his wife’s unconscious body, puzzled. What he’d just done was so out of character, he’d surprised even himself. Up until now, he’d never felt any particular interest in individuals of the opposite sex, but Lam’s new personality had piqued his curiosity in ways he hadn’t anticipated. Ever since she’d stood up to him the previous night, he found himself irresistibly drawn to her, wanting to provoke and tease her more. The stronger Lam’s reactions were, the more he felt the urge to push her buttons. It was starting to become a problem.

Very few people dared defy him—especially in his household. In a way, Lam’s resistance was refreshing.

She wants us to get a divorce, but letting go of her is out of the question. For plenty of reasons.

He threw Lam another glance. He *was* interested in her, but not to the point of laying a hand on a woman who’d passed out on his bed out of shyness. That wouldn’t be any fun. Besides, Char had no intention of having any children of his own.

I don’t want a repeat of what happened when I became the earl.

Being the best student of the schoolhouse, both in terms of mana and magic abilities, Char had been chosen as the heir to the former Earl of Mercure quite early on. He'd actually hailed from a noble family himself, but as he hadn't been the eldest son, he'd been sent to the Mercure family while he was still very young. However, the earl of the time already had a son who was the same age as Char who'd attended magic lessons at the schoolhouse just like everyone else.

Naturally, the earl and his wife had wanted their son to be their heir, their love for their own offspring winning over their sense of duty. Unfortunately, their son had only been the second-best student in the schoolhouse—after Char.

Char had been nothing but an obstacle to the earl and his wife, and the two of them had tried every way under the sun to get rid of him. They'd harassed him and excluded him from certain lessons, specifically the ones on general etiquette and noble social skills. However, in the House of Mercure, prowess was everything, and Char had refused to slack off in his training. In the end, Char had ended up learning etiquette on his own years later, though he still lacked confidence in that area to this day.

Back then, the only people on his side had been Fouet and Fouet's brother. The two of them were the earl's bastard sons, born of the union between him and his mistress. For that reason, they'd also spent their lives being persecuted by the earl and his family. Fouet and his brother had the lowest grades in the entire schoolhouse; Char was the only one who knew they were hiding their true strength on purpose.

When Char had turned fifteen, he'd chosen the path of survival: he'd confronted all of the teachers and servants who'd opposed him, as well as the earl, his wife, and their son, and had defeated them all.

In the aftermath, Char had secured the title of Earl of Mercure through ability alone. However, having only ever known the schoolhouse and the Mercure estate, he'd been painfully ignorant of life outside those confines. He *had* to look after those who'd supported him, though, and with no one to offer him guidance, Char had decided that the simplest path would be to follow in the footsteps of the adults he'd known. Thus, Char had become the youngest earl in

the history of the House of Mercure and had gone on to be feared as a ruthless and cold man.

Why are such useless memories resurfacing now?

Char shook off the bitter past and gazed at his wife's peaceful, sleeping face. He was well aware that Lam didn't like him. Before, he'd also had no interest whatsoever in his timid wife, but now—he couldn't stop thinking about her. Not only was she not afraid of opposing him, but she'd even managed to fluster the ever-calm Fouet and bring a smile to Canon's face.

Perhaps with her around, the bloodstained House of Mercure could change for the better, he found himself thinking.

Chapter Four: The Countess Blows A Noble's Wig Off at a Party

The royal palace was bustling with people. The light spilling from the windows made the majestic building stand out against the night, giving it a strangely intimidating air.

Before the grand doors, I stood clad in a luxurious red ball gown with purple accents my new handmaidens had helped me get changed into earlier. Char had apparently prepared it for me beforehand, along with all the other party essentials I would need tonight. Lam's previous handmaidens always sold her more intricate dresses as soon as she received them, leaving her with only the simplest gowns in her wardrobe. When Char had asked why she never wore the dresses he ordered for her, Lam had apologized instead of explaining anything.

If she had told him the truth, perhaps things would've been different. I knew there was no point in dwelling on the past, but I once again found myself lamenting Lam's poor decision-making. *Now all the dresses get delivered to me directly without going through my handmaidens. That's much more reassuring.*

Char was beside me, decked out in a nice suit, his bangs brushed back. His personality was strange, to say the least, but there was no denying he had a handsome face.

"Come on, let's go," Char said, holding out a hand to me. I looked at it, remembering the past. It was only proper to accept a man's hand when he offered to lead you, but the old Lam had slapped Char's away at the last party, which was completely improper for a young lady.

Char must've gotten impatient seeing me lost in my thoughts, as he soon grabbed my hand, holding it firmly.

"I-I won't run away anymore!" I protested.

"I find it hard to believe considering how you dashed into the venue the last time I offered you my hand," he replied.

“Well, you have a point, but...”

I trailed off, struggling to come up with a rebuttal. The old Lam had a crippling fear of Char, and she’d spent the entirety of the first party they attended together running away from him. This resulted in the other nobles mocking Lam behind her back, labeling her as “that poor countess whose husband ignores her,” and “that failure of a noble lady.”

The more I think about it, the more I realize Lam brought much of this upon herself.

I had begrudgingly allowed Char to escort me tonight, but I still dreaded attending the party due to the complete disaster that was the last one. Not only had Lam spent the entire night getting mocked by the other nobles, both behind her back and to her face, but some of the guests had even resorted to physical violence, tripping her and causing her to spill her juice, as well as pushing her and kicking her. Unable to defend herself, Lam had ended up hiding in the back garden and spent the rest of the night crying alone.

What a spineless girl. If I could knock some sense into my past self, I absolutely would.

As we stepped into the venue, I saw a glimmer of malice appear in the eyes of the other wives and noble ladies attending the party. They were all delighted to see that their stress outlet for the night had arrived. Walking alongside Char, I could pick up their mocking comments.

“Look, the Countess of Mercure has arrived. And would you look at that? It seems that her husband is *actually* escorting her this time,” a noble lady sneered, her voice dripping with disdain.

“He’ll probably abandon her after a few minutes,” another chimed in. “They didn’t even speak to each other at the last party.”

“You’re absolutely right,” the first one replied, nodding in agreement.

They weren’t being particularly discreet, so Char noticed them as well. He glanced in their direction but didn’t break his stride, grabbing my hand even tighter and leading me toward the back of the venue, which was lit by huge chandeliers. The tables were covered with fresh flowers, mouthwatering dishes,

and sparkling silverware, though the music was a little too loud for my liking. Nobles mingled around the tables, fake smiles plastered on their faces as they assessed one another.

In what world are these events supposed to be enjoyable? I'd always disliked parties. The mingling scents of the guests' perfumes hung heavily in the air, making me feel queasy. I almost dashed for the exit right then and there.

The party hall was huge and packed with people. If I wasn't careful, I'd get lost in the crowd. As much as it pained me to admit it, Char had made a good decision by holding my hand.

"Ah! Lord Char, you—"

"Look, it's Lord Char! He's so handsome. Lord Char, please dance with—"

From time to time, a noble lady would approach Char to try and get his attention, but he brushed them all off without so much as a glance.

Someone's popular with the ladies, huh? Well, with a face like his, it's hardly surprising. I could only imagine the number of young noblewomen swooning over him, yet he seemed to not have the slightest interest in women whatsoever—and I was no exception. Sure, he had taken a liking to me recently, but I figured it was more out of curiosity than attraction.

After a few minutes, a flourish of trumpets echoed in the venue and a man with a long beard appeared from the stairs at the back of the room—the king. His subordinate urged Char forward and I watched from afar as he went to stand beside the king.

"Tonight, His Majesty wishes to honor the Earl of Mercure for defeating the terrible beast that was threatening the western territories of the kingdom," the prime minister announced to the audience.

Char's annoyance was obvious, as if it were written in bold letters all over his face. I couldn't help but think he should at least make an effort to appear less grumpy.

"Lord Char Mercure has defeated the gigantic, vicious Zombie Poison Kraken! Let us celebrate his service to our kingdom!" the prime minister declared.

Cheers rose from the crowd.

A kraken, huh? I've got to hand it to Char—that's quite the accomplishment. Krakens are as big as small castles, so it must've been no easy feat.

As I watched him turn to face the king, the crowd erupted in applause, with several young noblewomen shrieking his name. It seemed that in the five hundred years since my death, noble ladies had decided that shamelessly fawning over married men during formal ceremonies was an acceptable thing to do.

"How annoying," Char muttered grumpily as he returned to my side after receiving his medal from the king.

"You really don't bother hiding your feelings in front of others, do you?" I asked.

"Why would I need to do that?" he retorted. "My relationship with these people is purely transactional. They make fun of mages behind our backs, yet they try to cozy up to us for their own benefit. They disgust me."

As it turned out, Char really disliked the other nobles, including the king. After the prime minister's speech, several nobles approached him to talk, but he maintained his expressionless facade throughout. Still, the flow of nobles wishing to curry favors with Char didn't end, which I attributed to the House of Mercure's influence. Cher didn't only take on jobs from the crown, but also from the Church and other nobles. The other nobles mostly hired him to deal with the monsters in their territories, to handle bandits that were too much for them to manage, and for escort missions. Depending on the job, he might have to spend long stretches of time away from home. Nobles in this country scorned people who retained their mana, but they couldn't live without the Mercures' magic. As such, they tried every trick in the book to butter Char up.

I get why Char doesn't like them. They're trying way too hard, I thought as I watched several men crowd around Char, attempting to force a conversation. Not only were they annoying him, but they were also being incredibly rude to me.

"It's such a shame you had to marry this girl," a chubby man remarked, shooting me a disdainful glance. "Sure, she has mana, but I'm sure someone like

you could've done so much better than the daughter of a baron—and a parvenu at that! It truly is regrettable.”

Rummaging through Lam's memories, I recognized this man as one of the Mercures' neighbors, the Earl of something-or-other. The old Lam had been painfully shy and often struggled to remember other people's names, which made my life quite a bit harder, but if her memories were to be trusted, that man had a daughter around my age.

He's trying to set her up with Char, isn't he?

A tall and thin man with an unnatural hairdo cackled at the other noble's comment. I recognized him as a relative of the royal family, the marquis of...something. Once again, Lam hadn't remembered his name.

“I wholeheartedly agree with you. Isn't he right, Lady Mercure?” he said, turning toward me.

I wasn't expecting him to address me and the only sound that left my mouth was an incredulous “Huh?”

Why are you asking for my opinion?! This man was trying to make a fool of me! These sorts of comments didn't get to me anymore, but I was furious he dared to mock me in front of everyone.

“Well? What is the matter, Lady Mercure? Cat got your tongue, perhaps?” Marquis what's-his-face said, staring at me, a mean glint in his eyes. It was clear he was reveling in my discomfort.

Char, noticing the marquis's intention, opened his mouth, ready to come to my rescue, but I made my move before he could say anything.

If I let that nobleman mock me again, people will talk behind my back even more, so I'd better act before he can get another word in! I rolled up my sleeves and felt mana surge through my body. I wasn't about to stand there in silence as this idiot ridiculed me in front of everyone. I extended my hands, focusing my gaze on the top of the marquis's head.

How about a little compound Light and Wind Magic spell? Shining Whirlwind!

In an instant, a swirling gale materialized around the rude marquis, glowing

softly. The scene had an almost celestial beauty to it, leaving all the other nobles momentarily breathless. The next instant, *something* was lifted from the man's head and started floating in the air. The glowing wind gracefully carried the fluffy object out through the window, whisking it away into the night.

"Phew! I ended up blowing that insignificant thing out the window."

"Wh... Wha...? Magic?!" Earl something-or-other exclaimed as the now-bald Marquis what's-his-face collapsed to his knees, a flicker of fear crossing his face.

Looks like the people here aren't used to seeing magic, huh?

To think that people's reactions toward a little spell would change so drastically in a mere five hundred years. Part of me found the change refreshing, even intriguing, but another part couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness at how things had evolved.

Next to me, I heard a chuckle escape Char's throat, causing a commotion to run through the crowd. I doubted any of them had ever seen him smile before. He paid no mind to the perplexed murmurs, his attention fully on me.

"I'm very happy I got to witness another one of your spells, Lam. I didn't expect you to send his wig flying, though."

The nobles' eyes shot wide open at his words and they all looked at me.

"I-It was Lady Mercure who performed that spell just now?" Earl something-or-other asked.

Char nodded. "Yes. It wasn't me. Lam is a very talented mage, you see. But let's get back to our earlier conversation, shall we? I'm rather curious—who exactly is this woman you believe would make a better wife for me than her?" he asked, his tone calm yet laced with an edge.

"Ah, um, no, I just..."

The two men muttered some sort of excuse under their breath before making their exit, practically fleeing from the scene. Both of them were afraid of Char, which I was expecting, but, to my surprise, they now looked scared of me as well.

Oh, come on, all I did was blow his wig off!

People nowadays really weren't familiar with magic *at all*. Just what kind of place did I reincarnate into? Looking up at the colossal chandelier above, I let out a small sigh.

A short while later, one of the king's aides came to fetch Char.

"Lam, His Majesty is calling for me, so I must leave your side for a bit. I'll be right back, okay?" Char told me.

"Please, don't worry about me," I said, trying to brush off his concern. I wasn't a child anymore; I didn't need a guardian. Whatever had gotten into Char today, he was being way too overprotective.

"I don't want to go around looking for you, so stay put," he said before leaving.

"Yes, yes, I told you. You don't need to worry about me. Have fun."

Were I to get lost, I could use my magic to indicate my location to Char, so I wasn't *that* worried about losing sight of him.

With my husband out of the way, I decided this was the perfect chance to gather some information about the current state of magic and societal norms. After all, social events like this were ideal for such endeavors—especially since I couldn't really use anyone from the Mercure household as a reliable reference. They all seemed a touch disconnected from reality, and I didn't just mean Char and Canon; even Fouet, who seemed the most reasonable of the lot, harbored some rather peculiar and, frankly, *unsettling* views.

The new servants I had hired had kindly filled me in on the lives of commoners, but getting accurate information about the current political climate or the state of magic proved far more difficult. Anyway, what people were *saying* and what was actually *happening* could be miles apart. That's why I figured being here, closer to the center of power, might give me a better shot at learning about the world.

Unfortunately, my efforts had been rather unproductive so far. Eavesdropping on the nobles' conversations yielded little more than gossip about scandals and chatter about the latest trends.

I wish I could ask someone directly, but I don't have any friends here. Lam's

catastrophic society debut had caused her to be ostracized by pretty much all the other nobles. The two gentlemen from earlier had changed their opinion of me after witnessing my little magic trick, but I could still feel other people glaring at me, their animosity palpable. A group of young ladies in particular kept throwing glances at me and whispering among each other. I recognized them as some of the nobles who'd picked on Lam at the last party. Lam hadn't been able to stand up for herself and ended up running away from them (like always). I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I knew they were mocking me.

As if to prove my suspicions, two of them started making their way to me, weaving through the crowd with malicious smiles on their faces.

These girls aren't any threat to me, but I need to be careful not to burn them to ashes when trying to defend myself. After five hundred years without practice, I was a bit rusty, and controlling my powers remained a challenge.

Just then, moving in perfect unison, the two girls stopped right beside me.

"Oh, my! Lady Mercure! How lovely to see you tonight!" one of them exclaimed, her voice dripping with insincerity. She and her friend picked up glasses of juice from a nearby table and suddenly hurled the contents at me. What a delightful greeting.

Well, I figured they'd try something like this. I'll just use a little counter-spell to deflect it, I thought.

A wall of light materialized beside me, protecting me from the splash zone. I often used this wall to protect myself from monster attacks back when I was Aurora, so it was sturdy. The second the juice came in contact with the wall, it redirected its trajectory back to the very girls who had attempted to douse me, drenching them from head to toe.

"Ah! My new dress!" one of them shrieked, her face instantly turning as white as a sheet.

"No way! Why did it have to be durian juice of all things? I stink now!" her friend exclaimed, starting to panic.

I quietly observed them for a couple of seconds. "Oh my, your dresses are all

wet. Are you all right?" I asked with faux concern.

They glanced at me and immediately stiffened at the sight of my wall of light.

Just as I thought, noble ladies aren't used to seeing magic nowadays. The two girls quickly backed away as if trying to distance themselves from me and my "creepy" magic.

"I-It was your idea to throw juice at her! Now we smell awful, and it's all your fault!" one of them blurted, shifting the responsibility onto her friend. Under normal circumstances, she would've directed her anger at me, but the unexpected magic had clearly unnerved her.

However, her friend wasn't about to let her friend pin the blame on her.

"Excuse me?! You're the one who picked durian juice!" she shot back without a moment's delay.

In the end, the two of them didn't know who to direct their anger toward, and they started arguing with each other in the middle of the party hall.

"What did you just say?!" the first one exclaimed, her voice rising in indignation.

As I watched from the sidelines, their argument escalated, becoming more heated by the second.

"You know, I've always thought you lacked common sense!"

"Huh?! And what gives you the right to judge me?"

Still fighting, they stormed off back to where they came from.

Thank goodness they left so quickly. They'll likely pretend I don't exist from now on, but that's better than them pestering me.

For a brief moment, all eyes were on me, but I feigned ignorance and walked to a table on which glasses of juices were arranged. I'd decided I couldn't care less about what others thought of me. Instead of worrying, I picked up a glass and gave the liquid inside a sniff.

"So this is durian juice, hm? What an interesting taste. It seems that uncommon fruits have become more accessible over the past five hundred

years,” I mused, sipping on my drink.

Just then, another noble lady made her way toward me, a throng of followers in tow.

Can't they give me a break already? How obstinate. The woman in the middle must've been some sort of high-ranking noble, as she was wearing an especially showy gown and her hair was adorned with numerous roses. *I feel like I've seen her before. If I remember correctly, she was the one who first picked on Lam at the last party.*

That's right. Her name was Lilyrossa Rose, and she was the daughter of a marquis. She was a typical entitled, proud, highborn young lady, and her air of superiority made it clear she was used to getting her way.

“You there! How dare you spill juice all over my friends?! I won't let you get away with this!” she said, stopping in front of me. She didn't seem nearly as angry as she was making it sound; it looked to me more like she had been looking for an excuse to come pick on me, and the durian juice incident had given her the perfect opportunity.

“I'm not the one who dumped juice on them,” I replied. It wasn't a lie; all I did was defend myself. The girls had brought this upon themselves.

However, Lilyrossa wasn't having any of it. “Don't you dare talk back to me!” she said, a stern look on her face. “Now, come here! I'll make you regret crossing us!”

“Why would I go to you now that you've threatened me?”

“That's right! You just have to follow me like a good little— Wait, what?!” Lilyrossa stammered, her jaw dropping in disbelief. She clearly hadn't expected me to protest.

“I cannot believe you dared to disobey Lady Lilyrossa! Who do you think you are?!” one of her followers said, glaring daggers at me.

All I did was state something completely reasonable, though.

“You're disturbing the other guests with all this shouting. I believe it's time for you to leave. Come on, shoo, shoo,” I said, waving my hand dismissively.

In an instant, Lilyrossa grabbed my wrist with her left hand, and before I could pull away, she slapped me across the face with her right. Everyone had gone quiet when Lilyrossa and her minions had first approached me, and the sound of the slap echoed throughout the entire party hall.

“I’ll never let you dare to defy me in a *million years*, you useless little countess! You’re just a plain and uncultured plebeian who’s managed to scrape by thanks to your mana! Someone like you could never be worthy of Lord Char!”

I let out an unimpressed hum in response as I collected myself.

I never would’ve thought a highborn noble lady like her would stoop so low as to slap me across the face in such a conspicuous place all because she’s in love with my husband. At the last second, I had used my mana to block the slap, so I wasn’t in pain, but she definitely took me by surprise. Now, she was glaring at me and I could tell she was preparing to attack me again.

I don’t want to get hurt, so let me just make my skin harder preventively. Hmm. Bronze should be enough, but perhaps I should make it as hard as orichalcum, just to be sure.

Making one’s skin harder was quite easy with a bit of magic: all I had to do was create another barrier of light, but this time, I wrapped it around my body instead of making it into a wall. I could then change the hardness and the elasticity of the barrier, allowing me to replicate my skin texture. Additionally, I could buff it with other spells, such as one to deflect attacks right back at my opponent. Of course, Lilyrossa had no way of knowing the silent actions I’d taken. She raised her hand to strike me again, breathing erratically through her nose.

“You really don’t have much self-control, do you?” I said.

“Shut up!” Lilyrossa shot back. “Don’t get cocky just because you managed to make a wig float in the air!” Once again, her hand landed on my cheek with great force, only this time, there was no slapping noise. Instead, there was a dull thud as her hand met the magically reinforced barrier around my cheek. In the next instant, Lilyrossa’s face contorted in pain.

Oh dear. Well, that’s what you get for trying to hit me that hard.

It seemed that I might have made my skin *slightly* too tough. I really should've gone with the copper rather than the orichalcum. Lilyrossa's minions scrambled to her side, each of them trying to get to her first, most likely in an attempt to make themselves look good by pretending to be concerned about her well-being.

"Lady Lilyrossa!"

"Are you all right?!"

To any onlooker, it must've seemed like I'd just been attacked, yet no one asked *me* if I was all right.

What a cutthroat place this world has become.

"Phew! I successfully repelled that insignificant ladybug's attack," I said under my breath.

I expected her to retreat, but Lilyrossa wasn't done yet. She staggered a few steps back and, as haughty as ever, told her minions, "Girls, put that impudent countess in her place!"

Though her voice was choked with tears, she hadn't given up on taking her revenge on me. She was much more obstinate than I initially thought. At her word, her minions sprang into action all at once.

Are you sure you ladies want to make a scene here? We're kind of in the middle of a party. I don't particularly feel like getting into trouble because of some entitled noble lady, thank you very much. However, the wild-eyed girls, their hair disheveled, seemed to have no care for the other guests as they closed in on me. *Oh boy, their faces are scary—like lions chasing after their prey with their hair tousled like that.*

They all readied themselves to strike, but their hands never reached me.

"Stop," a familiar voice commanded. The next instant, I felt a tall figure step behind me.

The young ladies who'd been closing in on me first flushed a deep red then turned pale upon realizing who the newcomer was.

"Oh, um, dear," I said to the person behind me. "You really didn't need to

intervene.” Turning around, I was met with the sight of Char looking down at me, a sullen aura surrounding him.

“I returned to find quite the spectacle, so I felt the need to step in. Now...” Char paused, throwing Lilyrossa and her minions a glare that could freeze water. His expression was even scarier than before. His voice was icy, making the girls flinch involuntarily. “What business do you have with my wife?”

Char, I know we’re technically husband and wife, but could you please refrain from draping your arm around my shoulders so ostentatiously in public? I pleaded silently. Based on the way we were standing, it almost looked like we were in *love*.

After a few seconds, Lilyrossa seemed to return to her senses and immediately started playing the victim.

“Lord Char, Lady Mercure is a violent brute! Look at what she has done to my delicate hand!” she wailed. Her hand was, indeed, visibly red and swollen.

Surely it’s not that bad...right? A little ice and it should go down in no time. Probably.

“Lord Char, you ought to punish that impertinent girl!” Lilyrossa implored. “You must be just as tired of her as I am, aren’t you? After all, you didn’t utter a single word to her at the last party!”

“Why would I do that? It’s your fault for hitting her in the first place,” Char replied coldly.

Lilyrossa froze, a frightened expression appearing on her face. She clearly hadn’t been expecting Char to brush her aside like that. I didn’t really understand why, though; his demeanor was always like this.

I’ve been thinking this for a while now, but Char speaks the same way to everyone, doesn’t he? He was just naturally bossy and brash.

“Lam isn’t the kind of woman who’d just attack someone for no reason. Besides, I saw you strike her, but she didn’t retaliate, did she? Did anyone see my wife hit this lady?” he asked, his eyes scanning the crowd.

The nobles confirmed that, no, I hadn’t hit Lilyrossa back. They probably

thought that blowing wigs out of the window was the extent of my magic and had no idea I had used a spell to defend myself.

Just then, Lilyrossa's father rushed over, most likely having noticed the commotion. When I saw who it was, I sighed internally. It was none other than Marquis what's-his-face, the very man whose wig I'd sent flying earlier. In my humble opinion, he looked much better without that fluffy mop on his head.

"Lilyrossa, what's going on? Did something happen with Lady Mercure?" he asked.

Lilyrossa's face instantly brightened once she saw her father had come to her rescue.

"Father, you won't believe this! This woman *assaulted* me!" she exclaimed, dramatically pointing at me. "She refused to follow me and ignored my orders, so I tried to punish her but she blocked my strike with her hard head—no, her hard cheek!"

"Wh-What?!" Marquis what's-his-face exclaimed in anger. However, his ire wasn't directed at me. "You foolish girl! How dare you be so rude to Lady Mercure?!"

"Huh?! Why are you yelling at *me*?!" Lilyrossa protested. "You're always the first one to call Lady Mercure names—"

"Silence!" the marquis interrupted his daughter before launching into a stern lecture. My little Shining Whirlwind had clearly left a lasting impression on him. To most people, magic was something mysterious and unpredictable: convenient, yet incredibly scary. The marquis had already harbored a fear of Char, but after my earlier display of magic, it seemed I had earned a spot on the "people not to cross" list right alongside my husband.

"I'm deeply sorry for my daughter's actions, Lady Mercure. I shall call for a doctor immediately to examine the bruise on your cheek and—" Marquis what's-his-face offered as a way to repair his daughter's mistake. It was obvious he didn't want to get on the House of Mercure's bad side.

However, Char interrupted him before he could finish. "That won't be necessary. I'll take care of my wife myself," he said and started leaving the

room, gesturing for me to follow him.

But the marquis was hot on his heels. “Lord Mercure!”

Char shot him an ice-cold glare. “I won’t dispatch any more mages to your territory. Our resources are limited and I was already considering easing their workload.”

As Char mentioned, the House of Mercure didn’t have an endless supply of mages. There was Char himself, Fouet, a few other adults, and the students training at the schoolhouse. This meant that Char had to be strategic about where and how he allocated their services. Typically, he assigned the mages based on the urgency of the situation and the client’s social standing, but after today, the marquis would find himself at the bottom of the priority list, regardless of the circumstances. Considering Char was already busy to the point where he could only come home a few days a month, I wholeheartedly agreed with his decision to cut ties with the marquis.

Char may only be an earl, but his position is quite unique, huh? Even higher-ranking nobles tread carefully around him.

Upon hearing that Char wouldn’t dispatch additional mages, the marquis turned as white as a sheet. “Y-You can’t... What am I to do now? I need mages to act as security during festivals and to deal with monsters.”

“Yet, you and your daughter dared to disrespect my wife, a mage herself. In front of me, no less. If you wish for me to send mages to your territory again, I expect you to change your behavior.” He paused and looked at Lilyrossa’s minions. “And you ladies can tell the same thing to your families as well.”

The marquis and his daughter collapsed to their knees while the other young ladies burst into tears. At that point, I wasn’t sure anyone could bring order to the chaos. At that moment, I finally understood why Char commanded such respect and fear from everyone around him.

Char grabbed me by the hand and led me out of the palace, away from the crying noble girls. The cool evening breeze was a refreshing relief after being cooped up in that crowded hall for so long. The party was almost over and Char had already received his medal from the king, so we were free to leave.

We exited through the main gate and arrived in the moonlit garden at the entrance. The flower beds were meticulously arranged with white flowers that swayed gently in the evening breeze. Char brought me under a nearby lantern and examined my face.

“Your cheek looks fine,” he said.

“I used Light Magic to harden my skin,” I explained. “The marquis’s daughter took more damage than me, but she didn’t seem too badly hurt. The pain should subside by tomorrow.”

A frown appeared on Char’s face. “I couldn’t care less about her. Are you hurt anywhere?”

“No, I’m fine.” To think Char was the only person who asked if I was all right. “It’s unlike you to fuss over me like that. What’s gotten into you?”

“It’s only natural for a man to be concerned about his wife,” he replied without hesitation, his frown deepening. His expression conveyed just how bitter tonight’s events had left him, and his voice turned soft. “I understand now that my past actions have encouraged others to hurt you. I swore to myself I’d never let it happen again.”

“Huh.” Seriously, what was his deal today?

“I don’t know why you didn’t defend yourself with magic last time, but...oh well. At least the nobles who saw our exchange with the marquis shouldn’t bother you again.”

So, by telling the marquis he wouldn’t send mages to his domain again, he was setting an example for the other nobles, huh?

He was thinking that far ahead? When I lifted my gaze, I saw a hint of suspicion in his eyes alongside his concern for me. *He’s probably curious about the spells I’ve used today. But even if I told him the truth—that I had memories of my past life and that these were spells I used five hundred years ago—I doubt he’d believe me.*

Reincarnation was technically possible according to magical theory, but no one had ever succeeded in achieving it. Besides, manipulating dimensions and life had significant repercussions, so this type of magic was considered taboo.

One needed to be a master of Dark Magic and give up all sense of ethics to wield such powers.

These techniques have probably disappeared anyway. Even if I were to tell Char the truth, he'd just think I'd lost my mind.

Thus, in the end, I decided not to tell Char about my past.

Chapter Five: The Countess Puts an End to a Harmful Tradition

With the party now behind me, I settled back into my daily routine at the Mercure estate. Life was largely unchanged, except for one notable detail: Char spent significantly more time at home and, for reasons unknown, never left my side when he was there.

He did say he was going to cut down on work, but doesn't he have a little too much free time?

And it wasn't just Char: Canon also came to see me more often. Ever since I began teaching him magic, we had slowly started to grow closer.

This morning, both Char and Canon had come to find me in the garden at the same time. I was doing my daily muscle training, swinging my broom around, and the two of them were sitting on a bench nearby. It was unusual to see them sitting together, but there was only one bench, so it wasn't like they had any other option. Unfortunately, Canon still hadn't warmed up to Char and was visibly uncomfortable. To be fair, Char wasn't exactly helping the situation; he hadn't uttered a single word to his son the entire time they'd been there.

I can't force them to get along, but I wish they would develop a bit of a connection. They're father and son, even if not by blood. There were still many problems for me to tackle in the Mercure household. Since I can't get a divorce yet and have nothing better to do with my time, I might as well focus on improving the environment here.

There were almost no mages left in the current world, and even the types of magic were dwindling down. By some strange twist of fate, I had found myself reincarnated as the wife of the last family of mages in the kingdom. It might be fun to help them recover techniques that had disappeared over the past five hundred years.

"Canon? You've been sitting here for a while now. Are your studies going all

right? Shouldn't you be at school right now?" I asked, deciding to address the elephant in the room. It wasn't like the boy was slacking off when he was with me, but I had noticed he had been missing *a lot* of lessons recently.

It seemed that I was right and he should, in fact, be in class right now, as he averted his gaze. From what I'd gathered, Canon seemed to really dislike the lessons at the schoolhouse. I couldn't blame him, though; the one time I came to see him there, the atmosphere had been so tense that the students had been on edge the entire time.

Char glanced at his son and let out a sigh.

"All members of the House of Mercure must undergo lessons at the schoolhouse. You've managed it without complaint until now, so what's changed all of a sudden?" Char himself had spent his entire childhood at the schoolhouse, so, from his point of view, Canon's sudden dislike for it must've been perplexing.

Refusing to meet his father's eyes, Canon started explaining his feelings in a strained voice. "It's almost time for us, the oldest students, to graduate. I feel like our lessons have been going too far lately. I know it's to help us prepare for the future, but it seems like at least one of us gets badly hurt during extracurricular training every day, and the corporal punishments we get when we misstep during regular lessons have been getting harsher and harsher. It's not even like the classes are that useful. Mother's are much more interesting."

"Oh dear," I said.

Personally, I had no qualms with Canon continuing to take individual lessons with me, and I fully supported the idea of abolishing corporal punishments at the schoolhouse—not just for Canon, but for all the children. However, Char didn't seem to share that perspective.

"I fully trust Gourdin with the content of the lessons. He knows what he's doing. I'm disappointed in you, Canon," he said, casting a cold glance at his son. "The future heir of the House of Mercure shouldn't shy away from his responsibilities. It's pathetic."

"I..." Canon opened his mouth to defend himself, but he found himself at a loss for words.

So this is the mindset of the House of Mercure, huh? I had already noticed that the Mercures' common sense seemed skewed, but the more I reflected on it, the more I began to wonder if the family structure and educational approach weren't at the heart of the issue. Char himself had clearly been heavily influenced by the family's rigid ideals.

Do they expect all their descendants to adhere to this same mindset forever? That would be an unbearable weight for anyone to carry.

Char had to start moving things in the right direction. He couldn't remain complacent in the current environment. I understood that this was a lot to ask for someone who'd been immersed in this system since childhood, but things needed to change or the children of this house would continue to suffer like Canon did.

Didn't Char ever struggle with the same issues himself as a child? I wondered. Some might even argue that allowing his family to remain trapped in such wrongheaded traditions and neglecting their well-being was a dereliction of his responsibilities as the head of the household.

For some reason, I couldn't bring myself to ignore these problems. Perhaps my former disciples were right and I really was too softhearted.

It's just not fair...

It might seem nosy, but I couldn't sit by and do nothing after hearing Canon mention getting badly hurt and receiving corporal punishment.

"Husband—no, Char. I understand that you've had your own struggles. I can't even begin to imagine the hardships you had to go through to be at the top of your class and become the earl's heir," I started. Char had never really told me about his life at the schoolhouse, but it was likely that he'd gone through the same harsh training as Canon did, if not even worse.

"However, right now, you're responsible for everyone in the Mercure household," I continued. He couldn't let things remain unchanged just because they were "tradition." What was the point in forcing future generations to go through the same things as he did? "As the countess and Canon's mother, I hereby request that the Earl of Mercure revamp the schoolhouse and reform the curriculum!"

“What?!” Char exclaimed, staring at me in confusion.

“If you can afford to watch me do my morning exercise, I assume you have time to tackle that issue.”

I would’ve taken on the task myself, but—countess or not—people would undoubtedly protest if I tried to change long-established traditions. As such, I could only get involved as a last resort and encourage Char to take the initiative.

However, he didn’t seem too keen on the idea. “Lam, you may be my wife, but it’d be quite problematic if you started changing things at the schoolhouse on your own.”

“I know, that’s why I’m asking *you* to do it,” I retorted. “Until things have changed, I’ll be in charge of Canon’s education. Don’t worry. I’ll make sure to raise him into the strongest mage the Mercure family has ever had.”

I *knew* I could do it. In my past life, all three of my disciples had gone on to become powerful mages.

As Char and I stood there, glaring at each other, droplets of water began to fall on the ground. Looking up, I saw that the sky was now covered by gray clouds, and cold rain was hitting my cheeks.

“It’s raining,” I noted. “Let’s head back insi—” Before I could finish my sentence, Char removed his jacket and covered me with it.

“Don’t let yourself get wet; what if you get sick again? It’ll just cause me more trouble,” he said, exasperated.

“Th-Thank you.”

Despite his usual arrogance, he could be surprisingly kind in moments like this. When I thanked him, he turned his face away with a *humph*.

Aw, is he embarrassed? I thought, amused. *He’s an oddball, but he’s not completely irredeemable. That’s what makes his usual haughtiness all the more frustrating.*

I grabbed Canon’s hand and silently followed Char back inside. At any rate, it seemed that—for the time being—he was willing to let me take Canon’s

education into my own hands.

Chapter Six: The Countess and the Secret Room

I sat across from Char at the Mercures' ginormous dining table, eating my meal. The potato salad was good. The company? Not so much.

"Today's carrot soup is quite delectable," I said, trying to break the awkward silence.

"Is that so?" Char replied noncommittally.

Neither of us knew how to break the ice, making conversation stiff and tense. Realizing that we wouldn't make any progress unless I took the initiative, I decided to take a more direct approach.

"Char, didn't you have questions for me?" I sipped a spoonful of my soup and waited for him to speak up. I knew exactly what he wanted to ask.

He glanced at me, let out a sigh, and closed his eyes. "To be honest, I don't know where to begin. First there was that strange sigil you drew on the ground, then the spell you used to heal the children's wounds... You keep using magic I never even knew existed."

He wasn't blaming me for his confusion; he seemed more overwhelmed than accusatory.

"We simply have very different approaches to magic," I said.

Ever since I'd regained my memories, I'd been using spells that had long been forgotten in front of Char and the others. It was only natural that he would start to sense something was amiss.

"Who *are* you?" he asked. "You told me before that you learned magic by studying the books in your childhood home, but that's impossible. A young noble lady like you couldn't possibly learn how to use magic on her own. I collect magic books and grimoires myself, but I've never come across anything like the spells you've been using—and I'm the Earl of Mercure! Enough of this. Tell me the truth, Lam."

There was no point in lying any longer; he clearly didn't believe my excuses. I *knew* I should tell him the truth, but I couldn't bring myself to confess that I was the reincarnation of the strongest witch of all time.

It's so far-fetched, he'll never believe me! If anything, it might just make me look even more suspicious.

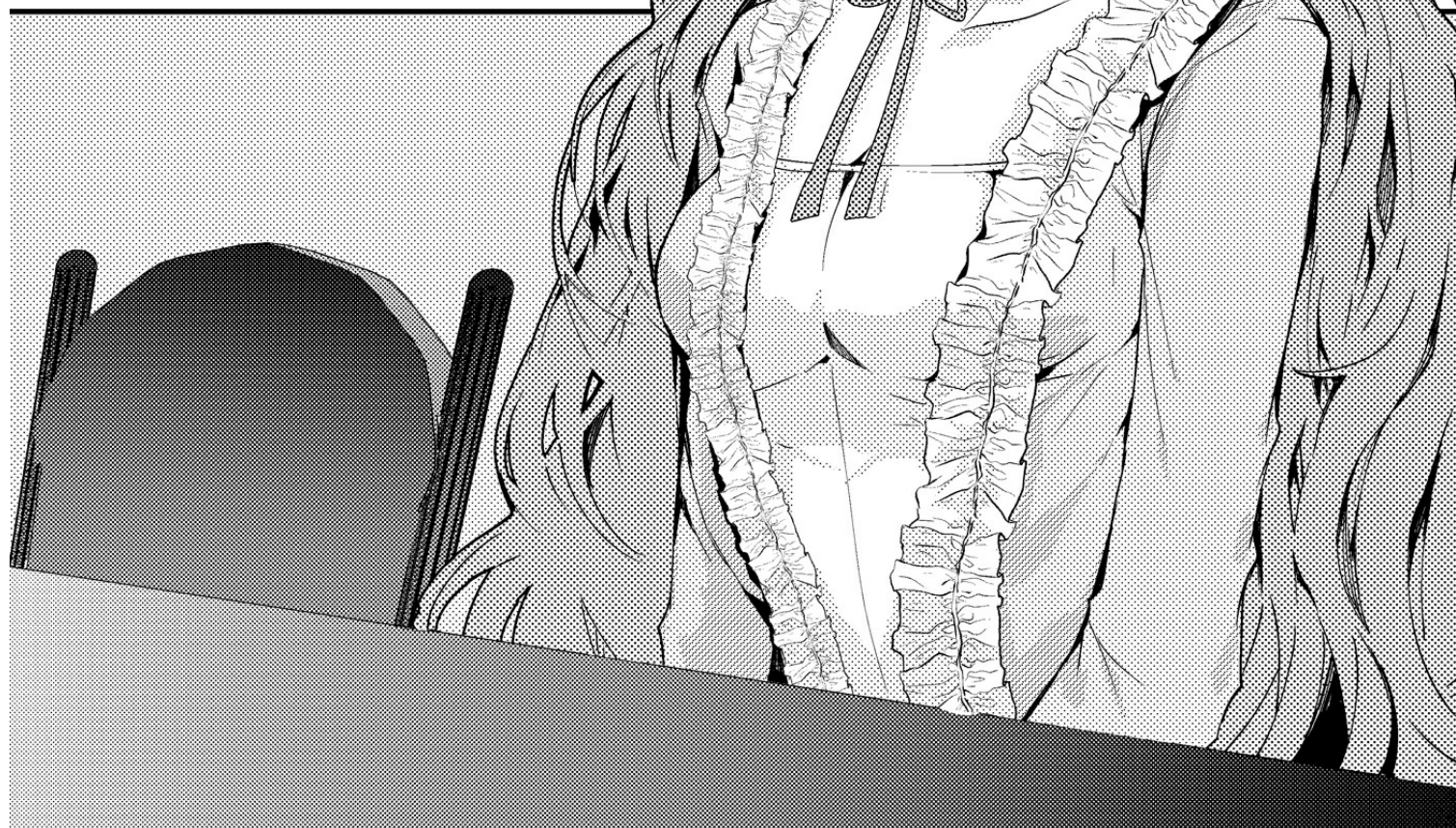
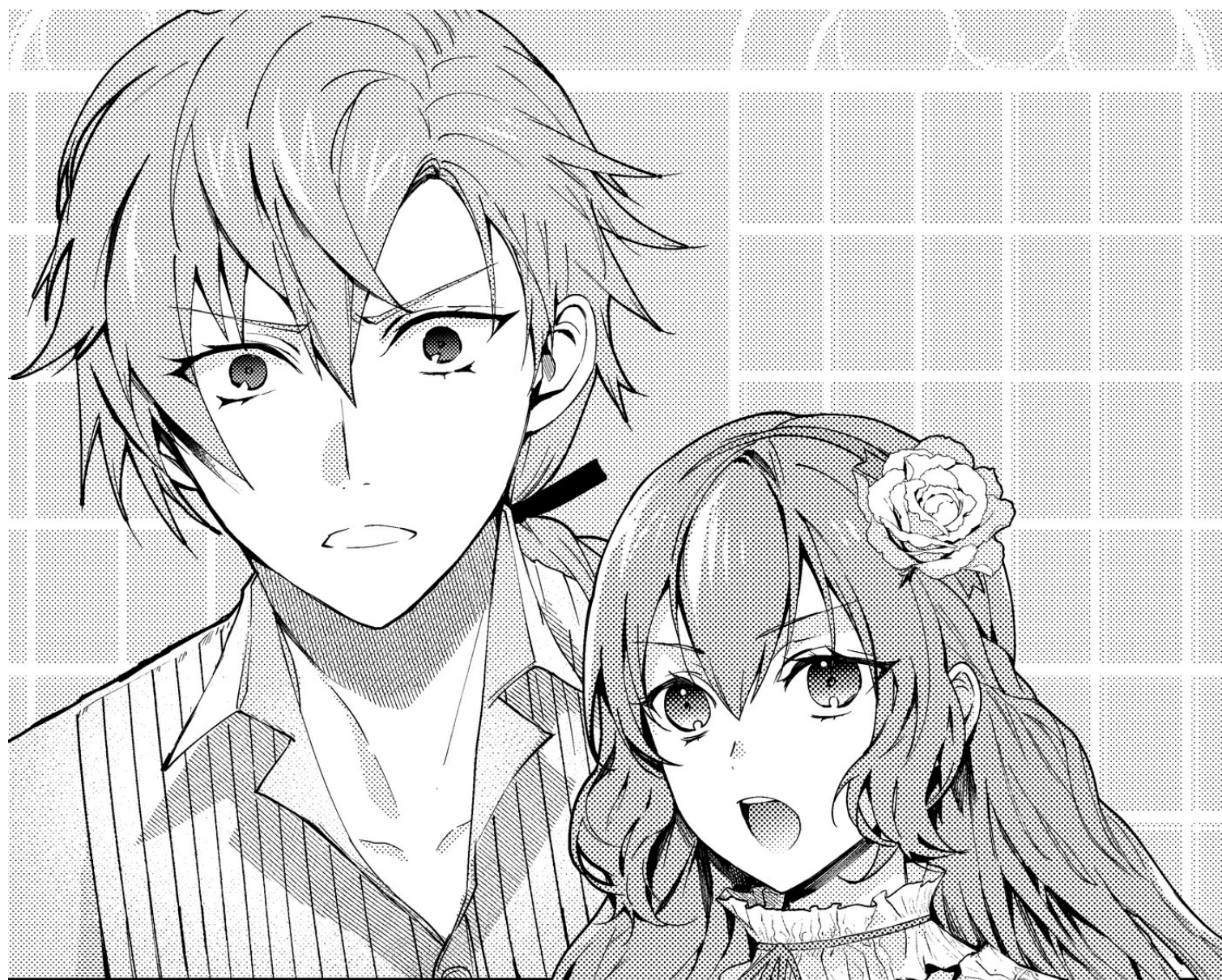
I supposed I could just tell him that I had my memories of my past life without mentioning Aurora. He might think I was crazy, but I didn't exactly have another choice, since he didn't believe my other excuses. Besides, it'd give me an idea of how he might react if I ever told him the full truth.

I met his gaze and said, "You're right. I'm sorry. Everything I've told you up until now was a lie."

Char nodded and urged me to continue, not looking surprised in the slightest by my confession.

"The truth is, I now have memories of my past life from five hundred years ago. Back then, I also had mana and worked as a mage."

"What?" Char said, his eyebrows shooting up. He clearly hadn't been expecting this part. "Explain yourself."



“You noticed my personality changed suddenly a few weeks ago, didn’t you? That’s because I regained my memories. Before that, I was the Lam you knew: timid and cowardly.” I sighed. “Well, I don’t expect you to believe me. I can’t even explain how I was reincarnated or why.”

“I’ve never heard of anyone being reincarnated before,” he said, a pensive look on his face. Just as I’d expected, he didn’t believe my story. “If such magic existed, the mages of our house could achieve immortality.”

I frowned. “Don’t say such disturbing things.”

Dying an honorable death fighting monsters only to be resurrected and forced to do it all again sounded like torture. Besides, reincarnation wasn’t something one could control so easily; you didn’t get to choose where you’d be reborn or retain your old memories. And, let’s be real: if they regained their memories like I had, there was no way they’d willingly return to the Mercure estate. This family was nothing but trouble.

“I also have a question for you, Char—well, it’s more of a request, I suppose. I’m completely out of touch with the current state of magic, so I’d like you to fill me in.”

“You’ve lived in this kingdom for twenty years. Shouldn’t you have a basic understanding of it by now?”

“Normally, yes, but the original Lam was a recluse. She was frail, had no friends whatsoever, and lacked any desire to learn. You’d be surprised by how little she knew—not just regarding magic, but about the world in general.”

“This is a headache,” Char replied, slouching with his arms draped over the sides of his chair. It still wasn’t clear whether he believed me. “I’ll take you to my study, how about that? There’s a vast collection of books there. You should be able to get a good idea about the current state of magic by reading them.”

“Am I really allowed in your study?” I asked. I’d never set foot in there before. The original Lam had never left her room, and even if she had, she would never have dared to enter her husband’s study. I didn’t have that problem, but I’d never had any reason to visit until now.

“You’re my wife, so you can come and go as you please. In exchange, I want

you to teach me the teleportation spell and healing magic you used earlier. It doesn't look like the kind of magic I can just try to imitate. It'd be too risky if I made a mistake."

"Sure. I was planning to teach the spells to the kids anyway."

With that, we finished our dinner, ate our dessert, and made our way to Char's study. It was a spacious room with a high ceiling, and an entire section of the wall was covered with well-stocked bookshelves.

"This is the collection the former Earls of Mercure have amassed over the years," Char told me. "I've also learned a great deal from these books since becoming the earl myself."

I surveyed the shelves. There were so many books crammed in there that it'd be quite the challenge to find what I wanted.

"Do you have anything from five hundred years ago?" I asked.

"There are no books left of that time period," Char replied after a pause. "At least, none related to magic."

"Then I suppose I'll just have to go through them one by one," I said, scanning the shelves for the oldest-looking books. A tome with a particularly worn spine caught my attention, but it was quite high up. "Hup!" I grunted, stretching to reach it. I could touch it, but it was just out of my grasp.

I toyed with the idea of using magic to get it when a shadow appeared behind me.

"This one?" Char asked, effortlessly pulling the book from its place. As he did, his fingers brushed lightly against mine.

"Th-Thanks," I said, feeling my cheeks flush.

He's so much taller than me. I'm jealous.

He handed me the book and I started flipping through it. From what I could tell, it seemed to be a book about the different types of magic, written two hundred years ago.

"Hmm... No teleportation or healing magic," I mused. "This means whatever caused all these spells to disappear must've happened even earlier—ah." I'd

just put a hand on the shelf for support when I heard a click. The next moment, there was a rumbling sound as the bookshelf started moving.

“Uh, I-I think I touched something!” I said to get Char’s attention.

He turned around, his eyes wide. I’d never seen him this flustered before. “Wha— Lam! Did you activate the bookshelf’s mechanism?!”

“I don’t know! It started moving on its own, and the wall too...”

As I spoke, the walls parted, revealing a path in between two bookshelves. It was quite an elaborate mechanism.

“A hidden passage?” I said. “It looks like there’s a room at the end of it.”

“Lam, d-don’t—” Char tried to stop me, but my curiosity got the better of me. I really wanted to know what was inside that room.

I’m just going to catch a teeny-tiny little glimpse, I decided, jogging down the passage. I opened the door at the end, but my breath caught in my throat as I stepped inside.

“What the heck?! What is this place?!” I repeatedly blinked in surprise as I looked around the small room. Its design was similar to Char’s study, with shelves lined with ancient, weathered books, and a desk cluttered with old magic tools.

They all seem broken, though, I noted. When I glanced up, I saw the last wall was covered with portraits—all of the same person.

Once I processed what I was seeing, I exclaimed, “What in the world is going on?!”

The woman in the paintings had short, light-green hair and a soft smile on her lips. She looked a bit like my current self, but I knew all too well that she wasn’t *Lam*.

“Aurora Ibrusus,” I whispered.

That’s right: that woman was me in my past life. Taking a good look at the books on the shelves, I noticed that there were copies of books I had published back then, and the artifacts on the desks were all tools I had developed myself.

They're not original models, though. Did someone study and improve them over the past five hundred years?

As I stood there, lost in my thoughts and feelings, Char poked his head into the room, an embarrassed look on his face.

"Char, why are there items that used to belong to Aurora Ibrusus in the mansion?" I asked.

A look of shock appeared on his face. "Y-You know Aurora Ibrusus? The legendary mage?!"

I blinked in surprise. He was usually so cold and flat; I'd never seen him this visibly astonished before. "Well, yeah. She's still considered to be the greatest mage of all time, isn't she?"

"That's not what I meant. How did you know who these books and tools belonged to just by looking at them?"

Oops.

At least Char didn't seem too suspicious of me. His face was a mixture of embarrassment at the fact that I'd discovered his secret and excitement to have found someone else who knew of Aurora. I didn't even know he could make a face like that.

I hesitated a little bit before saying, "I have my memories of five hundred years ago, so, of course...I know her."

By "I know her" what I really meant was "I was her," but Char didn't need to know that. He probably wouldn't believe me anyway.

His jaw practically hit the floor at my words. "What?! Y-You... You were alive at the same time as Aurora?!" he asked, closing the gap between us and leaning forward, his eyes locked onto mine.

"I-I've never met her, though," I quickly said.

If I wasn't careful, I'd risk exposing too much, so I decided to play it safe and act as if I only knew *of* Aurora but had no contact with her. Char didn't seem entirely convinced by my act, but I didn't think he was bothered much. He pointed at the shelves, a gleam of excitement in his eyes.

Looks like he's taken me for a fellow Aurora admirer!

"Everything in this room is related to Aurora in one way or another. I've spent over a decade building this collection," he explained (despite me not asking). He sounded awfully smug. "Though, I've never been able to decipher the books, and the tools don't seem to work no matter what I do."

"Still, it's impressive you managed to amass so many items," I said. I threw another glance at the bookshelves and the desk.

These tools are missing parts, I noted. As for the books, they're written in ancient Elfin. Perhaps the only reason they haven't been destroyed is that no one can read them.

However, there was something that caught my curiosity even more than the books and tools.

"Why do you have so many of those paintings?" I asked, pointing at the gallery of portraits. Every inch of the wall was covered in paintings of Aurora. I understood that Char admired her, but this was a little overkill, wasn't it? I'd find it creepy even if it weren't pictures of me.

"The portraits? Every time I stumble upon one I don't have, I buy it and add it to my collection," he said.

"But what's the point in having so many of them?" Surely one was enough, right? His obsession with Aurora was starting to creep me out a little.

"You wouldn't get it. Aurora was both the pinnacle and origin of all mages. She's the witch I admire the most in the entire world," he said, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "That's why I've dedicated myself to seeking out every item related to her and storing them all in this room."

So, basically, he's a big fan of hers. Still, I can't agree with his statement about Aurora—well, me—being the "origin" of all mages. I learned everything I knew from my teacher.

Needless to say, I felt incredibly awkward standing in this room. Also, now that we'd had this conversation, there was absolutely no way I could ever tell him I used to be Aurora. I glanced at the paintings again. Seeing so many portraits of my past self on display made my skin crawl. I wanted to take them

all down—and right away!

“Char? About the paintings...” I started. “Can I come here to look at them from time to time?”

His brow furrowed, and I could tell he didn’t like the idea of letting me come and go in and out of his secret room. He probably didn’t want me to touch his collection. Fair enough.

There’s something I’d like to do in here, but if I tell him, he’ll never let me in ever again.

I thought it over and decided to lean into his assumption I was a fellow Aurora fan, as he already seemed half convinced. “I really admire Aurora too, so I’d like to be able to look at her portraits. Besides, since I have my memories of five hundred years ago, I might be able to decipher those books for you.”

I fully intended on sneaking into the room even if he didn’t allow me to, but having his permission would make things much easier for me.

He turned his face away, looking sullen. He still didn’t want me to approach his collection, but my offer to translate Aurora’s books for him seemed to have struck a chord.

“Hmph, do as you want. Just don’t break anything.”

Yay! Not only would I get to remove all these embarrassing paintings, but I’d also be able to read my old manuscripts—killing two birds with one stone!

“Thanks, Char. I’ll come by from time to time, then,” I said, my chest swelling with anticipation.



It was late at night, and Bombe was lying in his bed in the boys’ dormitory on the second floor of the schoolhouse, completely lost in thought.

Just who in the world is the countess?

Bombe had heard countless stories about her from the mansion’s servants since she’d married into the Mercure family, all painting her as a dim-witted and cowardly petty noble who couldn’t use magic to save her life. Yet, when the countess had visited the schoolhouse, she’d performed an intricate spell unlike

anything Bombe had ever seen. Gourdin had scoffed and called it “pointless magic,” as it had no offensive power, but to Bombe, it was the coolest thing he’d ever seen! All his life, he’d been taught that the only point of magic was to hurl spells at his targets. He’d never thought it could be used for anything else, let alone to create such a beautiful display.

Since then, he and Mine had been desperately trying to recreate that spell, both in their free time and during training hours. Canon, being the countess’s son, got to learn it directly from her, which Bombe thought was *really* unfair.

When Gourdin had discovered what he and Mine had been up to, he’d punished them by sending them, along with Canon, to confront a monster far stronger than anything they’d previously faced in the forest. From what Bombe had been told, this monster had been terrorizing nearby villages and towns, and Fouet and Barre had to intervene before it could cause even more destruction than it already had. They’d captured it, and Gourdin had released it in the forest without the twins’ permission.

If they had to send Fouet and Barre to deal with that monster, there’s no way we’ll be able to kill it, Bombe had thought glumly on the way to the training. After all, they were only fifteen and had very little actual combat experience.

Most kids at the schoolhouse agreed that Gourdin’s trainings were way too harsh, but they had no choice but to endure them: the students of House Mercure *had* to go through such rigorous trials. It was tradition.

As expected, the three students hadn’t managed to defeat the armor bear. Bombe had broken his arm, Mine had passed out, and Canon had found himself backed into a corner when facing the beast alone. But then, the countess had leaped into the fray and punched the armor bear in the face. The sight of that noble lady sending an armor bear crashing into a tree and knocking it unconscious had been absolutely surreal. That wasn’t even the most astonishing thing she did that day: after she’d finished with the bear, she’d teleported them back to the mansion by scribbling some squiggles in the ground *and* had healed Bombe’s broken arm like nothing had happened. Even the Earl of Mercure himself couldn’t perform such a feat.

Seriously, what’s her deal? That woman can’t be an ordinary countess.

Mine's arrival pulled him out of his thoughts. The girls' dormitory was on the third floor, but they were allowed to visit the boys' dormitory whenever they wanted, and vice versa.

"How's your arm, Bombe?" she asked him.

"It's fine. The countess's magic healed it completely."

"This type of injury usually takes at least a month to heal," Mine said after a short pause. "Who in the world is she?"

"Dunno. We should ask Canon. He might have an idea."

Coincidentally, Canon stepped into the dorm in the middle of their conversation. He was probably about to turn in for the night.

"Hey, Canon, just who the hell is the countess?" Bombe asked the other boy.

"No clue," Canon answered with a yawn, pouring water from the pitcher into a glass.

He might have had the best grades of the entire schoolhouse, but communication definitely wasn't his forte. He put on a facade when they were out in public but was remarkably unfriendly when they were just among themselves.

"What do you mean, 'no clue'? You're her son, aren't you?" Bombe pressed.

"Well, yeah, but I'd only met her a handful of times up until a couple of weeks ago. She said she used to be sickly and couldn't really leave her room before."

"That's *definitely* a lie. She sent Gourdin flying!" There was no way she could've lifted a grown man like that if she was "sickly."

Canon shrugged. "I don't really know a lot about my mother either, so... Anyway, Mr. Gourdin will probably get fired, won't he?" he said, changing the topic.

Bombe nodded. "Given his personality, he's gonna hold a grudge against her."

"I wonder who the new teacher will be," Mine said.

They would be graduating soon, so they were probably fine, but what about the younger kids? They needed a teacher. The three of them tilted their heads,

pondering who could possibly take on the role.



At the present time, I, Lam Mercure, was fighting an uphill battle. You see, I'd been minding my own business, removing those embarrassing portraits from Char's secret room, when he caught me! He'd probably sensed that I was up to no good.

"Lam, I don't remember giving you permission to redecorate the room. Put those paintings back on the wall, *now*," he said.

No! They're too embarrassing!

I took a few steps back to put some distance between my husband and me, the portraits firmly clutched in my hands. "Th-These aren't meant to be displayed. They should be sealed away somewhere!"

"Are you insulting Aurora?" he asked, his tone low and threatening.

"I'm *not*."

Ugh, what a pain. It was so annoying to talk about Aurora while hiding the fact that I *was* her. Still, I just couldn't bring myself to live in a house with *an entire room* filled with portraits of my past self. This might've been Char's collection, but I didn't care: the paintings had to go, and the sooner, the better. I quickly came up with a random excuse to explain my actions.

"What if they get damaged?" I asked, dodging Char's attempts to grab the bundle of portraits from me. "Wouldn't it be safer to store them properly rather than risk them being ruined?"

Char froze in his tracks as he considered my argument.

"Hmm... I see your point. These pieces aren't meant to be exposed and admired, but rather preserved and kept safe," he mumbled, nodding to himself before shifting his attention back to the paintings.

Whew, thank goodness. I don't care what his reasoning is, as long as he stops trying to expose those damn portraits, I thought, relieved.

"Now that I think about it, Aurora looks a bit like you, Lam," Char said, pulling me out of my thoughts.

Uh-oh.

“O-Oh. D-Does she really?” I said, playing dumb.

I’d noticed it too: Lam looked *a lot* like Aurora. I’d always found it curious that Lam looked so different from the rest of her family. Not only was she the only one with green hair, but her features didn’t resemble those of her sisters at all. Her hair was longer than Aurora’s, and they didn’t have the same bearing, but their faces were eerily similar. Even though I’d been reincarnated, my appearance had remained how it was in my past life. Fortunately, the only things left of Aurora were painted portraits, so I could claim it was just a coincidence, but if physical projection spells had still existed, I would’ve been in a real pickle. This was part of the reason I wanted to seal the portraits away before anyone could connect the dots.

I’d never even considered the possibility that Char could be an Aurora fanboy. That was a huge miscalculation on my part. He’s managed to gather so many items from five hundred years ago... He sure is obsessed, huh? It’s a bit unsettling.

I hurriedly stashed the portraits away when Char came to find me, a book in his hand. “Lam, you can use such rare spells, so I was wondering, can you read this?”

“Probably, yeah...”

Of course, I could read it—I was the one who wrote it!

Char looked back and forth between the book and me. “Could you decipher this for me? I’ll make sure to repay you. I’ve been told that this book was written by Aurora herself. Judging by the state of it, it seems to be one of her first manuscripts.”

He handed me the book and I started flipping through the pages...before slamming it closed almost immediately. This wasn’t a spell book—it was my cringy childhood diary!

Who’s the idiot who left this for future generations to find?!

“I-I think the books on that shelf over there look more like they’re about magic,” I said, trying to steer Char’s interest away from my old journal. “Let’s

focus on those instead!”

“So you *can* read them. What language is that?”

“Ancient Elfin. It had already fallen out of use five hundred years ago, but mages still used it, as it’s particularly well suited for magic.” I’d learned it from my own teacher back in the day.

“Perhaps you weren’t lying when you claimed to have lived five hundred years ago,” Char said, bringing me a book from the other shelf.

Hooray! I successfully managed to protect my childhood secrets! I grabbed the book Char wanted me to translate and quickly left the room before he changed his mind. Following me, he paused to fiddle with the wall to put the bookshelf back in its place and seal the passage. *I can see why he wouldn’t want anyone stumbling upon his collection.*

Glancing at my husband, I saw that he was back to his usual cold, apathetic persona. Despite his attempts to maintain a stoic front, I now knew that, deep down, he was just an Aurora fanboy. I’d probably never be able to take him seriously ever again.

“This book is pretty thin. I should be done with it in no time,” I said.

“Don’t push yourself too hard. We’re not in any rush.” Char really had mellowed out recently. He’d even started being somewhat considerate of others.

“I’m fine, don’t worry. I’ll have it done before bed.”

Just then, a knock at the door interrupted our conversation.

“Lord *Chaaar*,” Fouet called from the other side. “Barre has come home. He wants to report to you and discuss what should be done with Gourdin. We’ve captured him in the forest.”

It looked like Gourdin had made it out of the forest safely, though I was curious about Fouet’s choice of words. He’d said they’d “captured” him, not “retrieved” him.

Char glanced at me briefly before replying to Fouet with a curt, “Come in.”

Before, he would’ve probably told me to “get out.” He’s truly changed, hasn’t

he?

Fouet entered the room, followed by another young man—the one he'd called "Barre," I presumed. It was my first time meeting him.

"I'm back, Lord Char!" Barre announced cheerfully. He bore an uncanny resemblance to Fouet, both in build and facial features. But they didn't have the same hair color—Barre's was red with brown streaks while Fouet's was brown with black streaks—and their overall demeanor differed as well: where Fouet was quiet and reserved, Barre seemed more approachable and had an air of charming innocence about him.

Are they brothers? I wondered.

"Good job," Char told Barre, reverting to his usual standoffish self as if nothing had happened. He then turned back to me. "Lam, this is Barre, Fouet's twin brother. His main duty is to coordinate external jobs."

Barre flashed me a broad grin. "Nice to meet you, madam. Well, *you* may not remember me, but *I* know you. After all, I was the one who came to survey your father's estate when you got engaged to Lord Char."

I let out a little quizzical noise. *I don't really like his tone.*

Was it just me, or did he sound slightly goading? At first, I'd thought that he seemed friendlier than Fouet. Now, upon closer inspection, his expression and mannerisms betrayed a hint of wariness. Why would he be on guard around someone as timid as Lam? Did Fouet say anything weird to him about me?

"Lord Char, we found Gourdin scheming in the forest, so we grabbed him," Barre said, turning to Char. "We've dumped him in the hallway for the time being. I used wind restraints on him, and he lost consciousness right away."

Judging by Barre's words, it seemed that he was stronger than Gourdin.

So, Gourdin didn't reflect on his actions at all? What a pity. I guess I have no choice but to fire him now. I was a tad disappointed, but there wasn't much I could do about it. *Your feelings don't always reach others, no matter how hard you try.*

"Hmph. How foolish," Char said. "He was that angry simply because Lam

lectured him?”

Barre twitched in surprise at Char’s words. “Lam? You’re saying that *the countess* gave Gourdin a sermon?” He started walking toward me, his eyes sparkling with curiosity, and I hurriedly took a few steps back to maintain the distance between us. There was a hint of challenge in his tone as he asked, “*You* stood up against Gourdin? *Really?*”

Judging by the confrontational glint in his eyes, he didn’t like me.

“Gourdin’s stupidly dangerous training would’ve killed the kids. Lam stepped in to put a stop to it,” Char explained.

I was speechless. What had gotten into Char? A few hours ago, he’d been arguing with me that Gourdin’s trainings were a House of Mercure tradition!

This feels...weird, I thought, looking up at my husband.

I didn’t know how Barre had interpreted Char’s words, but he didn’t stop approaching me. “Madam, could you show me the spell you used on Gourdin?” He extended his arm to me. His eyes—the same green color as Fouet’s—sparkled like distant emeralds.

He’s trying to provoke me, isn’t he? Well, I’m not falling for it. I’m way too tired for this today. I’d used a lot of magic and my body was nearing its limit. Judging by how things had gone up until now, I thought I could use one more spell before I was completely drained. I didn’t want to seem stuck-up, but I wanted to avoid passing out, thank you very much.

I let out a sigh and said, “I will take my leave now. You may resume whatever business you have with Char.”

As Fouet and Barre would be giving their report to Char here in the study, I decided to take the book back to my room to translate it. To my surprise, when I moved to go, Barre blocked my way, refusing to let me pass.



Barre was both intrigued by and suspicious of the sudden change in the countess’s demeanor. While he was away, Char had grown noticeably closer to his wife. Perhaps it was just an act, but Barre still found it incredibly suspicious:

Char—the Earl of Mercure, known for his coldheartedness—wasn’t one to show kindness to anyone, let alone women. Why *this* one in particular? She was a timid, unremarkable girl, and Barre doubted Char had anything to gain by being nice to her. The whole thing baffled him.

Back when Lam was still living with her family, Barre had conducted a thorough investigation into the woman who would eventually become the Countess of Mercure. From what he’d gathered, she was a weak, nervous young lady with no confidence in herself whatsoever who was ostracized by the rest of her family and spent all of her time in her room. Barre thought she was the perfect choice, as she wouldn’t get in the way of Char’s work, so he’d recommended it to the earl. It had never occurred to him things could end up like *this*.

Even his brother now fully supported the countess, even though he’d once been just as indifferent to her as Char had been. That woman was an anomaly—one that might bring the House of Mercure to its doom.

Those who studied together at the schoolhouse naturally formed strong bonds. It definitely wasn’t a *pleasant* thing, but the students needed to stick together if they wanted to survive the harsh environment. This had been especially true for Barre and his peers, given how messy the situation had been with the earl and his family. Barre and Fouet, being the earl’s bastard sons, had found themselves in a particularly difficult position as they’d been mistreated by the rest of the Mercures. Naturally, when it’d become time to choose a camp between the earl’s biological son and Char, who’d been selected as the next heir, the twins hadn’t hesitated a single second before siding with Char—unlike that opportunist Gourdin, who’d merely joined the stronger side once it’d been obvious who would win.

From what Fouet had told Barre, it seemed that the countess had fired all the servants and was actively trying to change the rules and customs they’d grown up with.

The audacity, when she’s just an outsider!

The countess tried to exit the room, but Barre caught her by the arm.

“Barre, I’ll listen to your report. Let go of Lam,” Char said. He was standing up

for that woman *again*. Frustration rose in Barre like a high tide.

“Her Ladyship is part of the family too. Shouldn’t she stay and hear my report as well?” Barre argued.

“Lam is busy. I’ve entrusted an important job to her,” Char said.

“And what job might that be?”

Barre doubted that it was a good idea to trust the countess with any jobs, given that she couldn’t handle basic social interactions. He’d never even seen her leave her room before today.

“The transla— *Ahem*. It doesn’t matter. She’s busy, so stop bothering her.”

Barre glanced at the countess. She was staring at her arm, still in his grasp.

“Um... Can you please let go of me?” she asked.

“I will. When you’ve shown me your magic,” Barre replied.

“We’re indoors. I can’t throw you in the air like I did to Gourdin.”

The countess looked like she *really* wanted him to let go. One more push should do. “Then do something else. Fouet told me that you could use all sorts of fascinating spells. How about you give me a little demonstration?” Barre said.

He refused to believe the stories Fouet had told him until he saw the countess’s magic for himself. He knew he was being pushy and selfish, but his goal was to protect the House of Mercure.

“Fine,” the countess eventually agreed. “I suppose I’ll use my magic to change the atmosphere of this room a little. I’ve been thinking it’s too dark and gloomy for my taste.”

Barre could see why people outside the family might feel that way: being a family of mages, the Mercures had amassed many sinister trinkets and pieces of furniture over the years. The dominant color in the estate was black, all the furniture was carved with ominous patterns, and the heavy curtains and eccentrically detailed rugs only added to the unsettling atmosphere. The previous earl had claimed this was a way of intimidating outsiders, but to anyone unfamiliar with the House of Mercure, it just looked weird.

“Lord Char, do you mind?” Barre asked.

“If Lam doesn’t, then I don’t,” Char replied.

“Perfect. Could you let go of me, then?” she asked Barre.

He shook his head. “Nope. What if you run away from me?”

The countess seemed like she was ready to bolt out of the room at the first opportunity. There was no way Barre was going to let that happen.

“You might get caught in the spell,” she warned him.

“You’re just going to change the room’s decor, right? I’ll be fine,” Barre replied. He wasn’t about to fall for her excuses. He wanted to see her magic, and the sooner she stopped grumbling, the faster they’d be done.

“Well, I suppose it’s not going to hurt you, but...” the countess trailed off. She seemed hesitant, but eventually raised her arm—the one not in Barre’s grasp—and prepared to cast the spell. She chanted, “Shining Cute Room!”

What did she just say? It wasn’t uncommon for mages to yell their spell names, as it allowed them to visualize their magic more clearly, but Barre had never heard *that* spell name.

To his surprise, something actually happened: a faint light spread across the room, enveloping the walls and furniture in its soft glow. It almost looked like it was the work of a god. Barre was utterly mesmerized. The light eventually disappeared, revealing an adorably decorated room with pastel pink and white dominating every surface.

“What in the world...?”

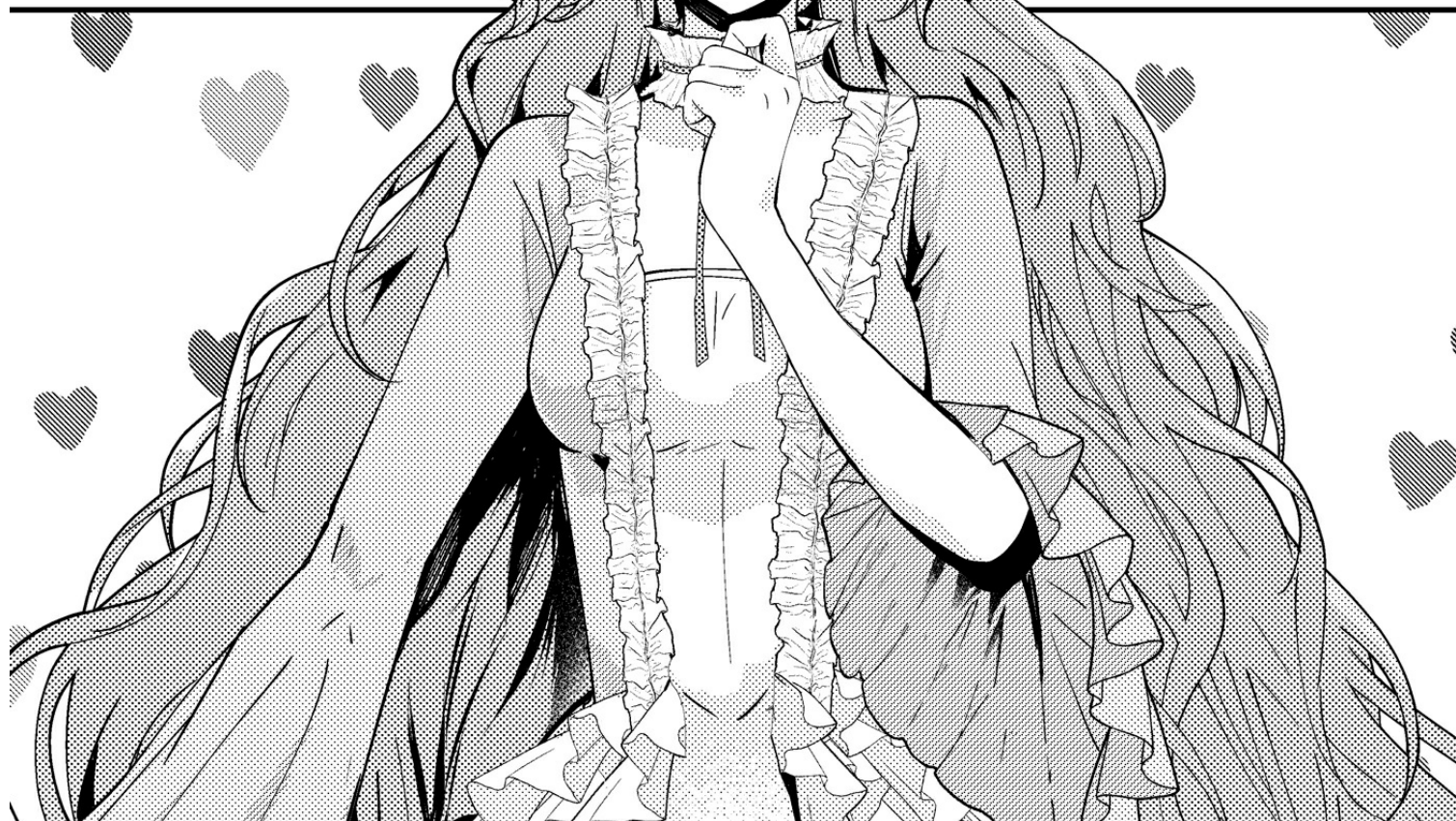
The creepy ornaments had been turned into stuffed toys like the type you’d find in a kid’s room. However, upon taking a good look at them, Barre noticed that they were all somewhat off, like they’d been poorly made. The curtains were now delicate flowery lace, and the rug had been replaced by one with a fluffy, cloudlike texture. As for the shelves, they were covered in red and white polka dots, and the formerly dim chandelier was now decorated with little suns, moons, and stars, and shone brightly.

This is atrocious—nothing matches, and it’s all horribly tacky, Barre thought in

horror.

Char was speechless, staring at the strawberry-patterned desk with his mouth hanging open. The countess, on the other hand, seemed quite pleased with herself.

“Phew! I’ve turned this boring study into an adorable little room. I’m glad it turned out so well. Now it’s lovely.”



No, it's not! It's anything but! Barre thought. It wasn't cute; it was just gaudy! *How is Lord Char supposed to receive guests here?*

"Oh my." The countess's voice pulled him out of his thoughts. She was staring at his arm. "You *did* get caught in the spell. I told you that would happen."

Barre glanced down...and let out a shriek. His entire forearm, up to his elbow, was pink and decorated with tiny, yellow ribbons, just like the cushion covers nearby.

"P-Please remove it, madam," he said, his voice tinged with desperation. "I'm sorry for cornering you and forcing you to use your magic."

The House of Mercure was part of the elite. He'd be the laughingstock of the entire nation if he went out with his arm looking like that.

However, the countess simply tilted her head to the side, a perplexed look on her face. "But it's so cute," she said as she peered at his arm.

It seemed that she didn't want to remove it. Barre gritted his teeth in frustration. He absolutely couldn't go out like this.

"Please, madam. This would only get in the way of my work."

"Fine, fine, I'll turn your arm back to normal. Ah, but I can't today... Is tomorrow all right with you?" she asked.

For some reason, she seemed reluctant to use her magic again. Her words seemed to snap Char out of his daze, and he rushed over to his wife's side, a grim expression on his face.

"Lam, are you unwell?" he asked, grabbing her by the arm.

"Looks like I used too much magic during the kids' extracurricular training. I'm fine, but I'm near my limit."

"You should've said so," he said, letting out a sigh. Without warning, he picked the countess up like she really *was* his bride. To Barre, he sternly said, "Don't make her use her magic again today. She'll fix your arm when she's feeling better."

"Wha— Hold on!" Barre tried to stop Char, but he dodged the attempt and

left the room with his wife in his arms. “No way...” A look of despair washed over his face as he was left behind.

Meanwhile, Fouet observed him with a calm gaze.

“See? I *told* you not to anger the countess,” he said. He was never one to pull his punches with his twin. “You don’t need to be so wary of her. During our last meeting, she told me that she wanted to adopt all the children from the schoolhouse—that’s the kind of person she is. She’s not just *talking* about high ideals. She has the power to make them a reality. I’m sure that she’ll be a great asset to our house.”

“You might be right,” Barre said after a short pause.

“And above all, she seems to have captured Lord Char’s interest. That’s quite a feat.”

Barre nodded, finally in agreement with his brother.



I was feeling a lot better after a good night’s sleep and decided to tackle the task of fixing Barre’s arm. I personally thought it was quite cute and almost wanted to leave it as is, but Barre had ambushed me as soon as I left my room and begged me to turn it back to normal, tears threatening to spill from his eyes.

Fine, I suppose. My body feels better, and he seems to genuinely feel bad about what he’s done.

The spell I’d used to remodel the study was the practical version of the one I’d shown to Canon and the others at the schoolhouse. It worked by creating an illusion with Light Magic and transferring it onto existing objects. As Barre had seen, it worked on living beings as well, but it was a lot harder to fine-tune for them, so it was rarely used that way. The spell itself wasn’t dangerous, so it wasn’t the end of the world if you accidentally got it on someone, but it *was* just as difficult to remove as it was to imprint the pattern on them properly. It also synergized poorly with time-rewinding magic; mistakes could erase the person’s original skin color or distort the pattern instead of making it disappear.

Unfortunately, this kind of tragedy, if it occurred, could not be fixed. If I’d still

been my old self, I would have trusted myself enough to use magic to fix Barre's arm, but I wasn't familiar enough with Lam's body yet to judge how to safely handle such things. Instead, I decided to make the pattern disappear gradually with a medicinal treatment instead. I explained this to Barre.

"There's a lab for medicine-making on the estate, complete with all sorts of ingredients. They're kept in the storage room inside the building," he informed me.

"No one told me such a handy facility existed here," I said.

I asked Char for permission to use his mixing room and, after receiving it, headed there with Barre. He trudged in front of me, his cute, pink hand peeking out from his sleeve. From what he'd told me, the art of medicine-making hadn't completely disappeared. The Mercures mostly used their mixing room to produce mana-recovery potions and the like.

I was a bit taken aback when he told me. After all, five hundred years ago, mana-recovery potions were basically the least helpful things to make. Of course, the Mercures had no way of knowing that and thought this was the extent of medicine-making.

There used to be so many useful medicines back then, so why are the only ones that still exist today the most useless ones? I lamented.

All the medicine my teacher and I had created in my past life seemed to have disappeared from the world. I knew there was no point in crying over spilled milk, but it did sadden me.

We crossed through the garden on the east side of the estate and stopped in front of a large, two-story building. This was the medicine-making facility. According to Barre, the mixing room was on the first floor and all the ingredients and books related to medicine were stored upstairs. A flicker of doubt crept in.

They must have the ingredients I need to fix Barre's arm...right? They're not particularly rare or anything.

"Welp, first step is getting the ingredients," I said. "Barre, you know this place better than I do. Mind helping me? I have no clue where anything is."

“Of course,” he said, though a little begrudgingly.

“First, I need twisty mushrooms, giant-tree butter, burstflower nectar, and sunstone fragments.”

Barre nodded. “We have all of those. We use them for throat medicine.”

“Perfect. After that, get me some bubblecoral fruit, horse saliva, and some of the sand over there. Oh, and water.”

Barre paused, his face suddenly paling. “This is getting weirder by the second.”

“Don’t worry! The saliva and sand will turn into other things through magic,” I said in an attempt to reassure him.

“So I either have to take that gross medicine or live with ribbons on my arm for the rest of my days... Ugh, this is the worst,” he grumbled but went to get the ingredients for me nonetheless.

Looks like he chose the medicine. What a shame. The ribbons are so cute!

Once he delivered them to me, I headed back to the first floor with my haul and got to work. Barre watched me prepare the medicine with interest. It seemed that, while he was reluctant to take the medicine, he was still interested in seeing how it was made.

Fortunately, it was a pretty simple recipe: all I needed to do was dump the ingredients in a pot and let it simmer until the mixture started boiling.

“The twisty mushrooms and great-tree butter will make the medicine both stronger and easier to drink,” I explained. “Thank goodness the pots and utensils are the same as the one I used back then.”

Barre threw me a dubious look. “Madam, you’ve never made medicine at your parents’ home. Have you?”

“Uh... I...”

Thankfully, a cloud of smoke emerged from the pot right there and then, saving me from having to reply to his question. This meant that the medicine was ready. Peering inside the pot, I saw a thick, reddish-purple liquid bubbling away.

“Looks good. All we need to do now is to use this and stir, stir, stir, stir,” I said in a sing-song voice as I stirred the liquid with a ladle until it turned syrupy and started to solidify. Before it hardened completely, I removed it from the heat, scooped a chunk out of the pot, and weighed it. Then, I rolled it into a ball, set it down on a dish, and handed it to Barre. As for the rest, I decided to store it for now.

“All done,” I said. “Do you have water to drink it with?”

“There,” he said, thrusting his chin in the direction of a cup of water. “The servants bring fresh water every day. Ugh, this is going to be a pain to swallow.”

“Be glad it’s not a liquid. Come on now, one quick gulp!”

Pinching his nose, Barre popped the sticky pill in his mouth and quickly washed it down with water.

“Blegh. There’s a gross taste in my throat now. It’s both weirdly sweet and bitter,” he whined. Then, his face turned green, and he collapsed onto the floor.

“Oh, come *on*, it’s one of the milder medicines that exist,” I said, rolling my eyes. “The ribbon pattern will gradually fade now. It should disappear within half a day, so you should be thanking me!”

Barre kept moaning in agony on the floor, so I couldn’t tell if he’d even heard me. With a sigh, I helped him lie down onto the couch in the mixing room and told him to rest until the medicine was done working its magic. After that, I left the mixing room and headed back to the study to finally translate the book for Char.

I’d fixed Barre’s arm, but the study was still just as cute as I’d left it the previous day.

I’ll be spending a lot of time here, so it’s a good thing I made it so nice! It had become such a soothing space; I was positive Char would love working here. He was so overwhelmed with joy yesterday that he’d practically turned to stone.

I should make other types of medicine when I have time, I thought. It sounded like the art of medicine-making was just as endangered as magic, so I was limited in the types of ingredients I could get, but I really wanted to bring back as many useful remedies as possible.

I've been making some good progress improving this place, despite the baffling state of magic in the current world. I still had a lot on my plate, though. First, I was worried about the kids; they didn't have anyone to teach them magic anymore. I needed to tackle that issue as soon as possible. *I must train them well. They're the only ones left who know how to use magic in this country, after all.*

The House of Mercure might be beyond saving, but not everyone here was a lost cause. A lot of them had started changing for the better, Char included. With that thought, I looked at the clear sky and smiled with renewed determination.

Chapter Seven: The Countess Becomes a Teacher and Receives a Surprise Visit from Her Sisters

The next day, I handed the translated book to Char and made my way to the schoolhouse. After the whole debacle with Gourdin, my husband had given me permission to temporarily take over as a substitute teacher. I was assigned to teach the oldest students, while Barre, who was currently staying at the mansion, handled the younger children. I couldn't help but feel a bit worried about those little ones in his care.

As for Gourdin, he was suspended from teaching and had been locked up somewhere on the estate. According to Fouet, there was very little hope of him agreeing to mend his ways, which saddened me deeply. Surely, there had to be a better way to get through to him—but I'd done what I could.

What a shame.

When I stepped into the schoolhouse, I found the older students sitting stiff as boards.

Why do they look so scared of me?! This came as a huge shock, because I thought we'd bonded during the extracurricular training!

"M-Mother—I mean, Professor, what will you be teaching us today?" Canon asked, acting as a spokesperson for all three of them.

The title "professor" sent a little thrill through me. "Good question, Canon! Today, I'll be assessing each of your individual aptitudes."

"Our individual aptitudes?" Canon repeated, visibly confused.

"Yes. I *could* teach you all the same thing, but all three of you have different personalities and preferred magic types, so it'd be rather pointless. Wouldn't it be better to work on something you're interested in?"

The kids exchanged puzzled glances.

"Mine, I'll start with you. As for the other two, you'll study the books I give

you in the meantime.”

“Wait, what?! *I’m* first?!” Mine exclaimed, unable to hide her surprise.

“Yes. You and I both have the same preferred magic attribute, so you’re the easiest to teach.”

I gave Canon and Bombe their assignments, which were two books to study. The first one was a manual I’d quickly put together last night, named *The Basics of Remedy Crafting*, which outlined how to make various salves and antidotes. The second was a transcript of the book I had translated for Char. Using Light Magic, it hadn’t taken long to create two additional copies.

With Mine, I headed to the training grounds behind the school. Admittedly, “training grounds” was a grand name for it—it was just an overgrown patch of land with a few big rocks scattered around.

“Well then,” I said, carefully observing Mine’s demeanor. “First, let me ask you a few questions. Do you have any idea of the type of spells you’d like to learn? Do you ever think, ‘I wish I could become this or that type of mage’?”

A sour look appeared on her face. “What would be the point in me telling you that? My main attribute is Light Magic, so it’s not like I have a ton of choices. I know I could never be as strong as the other two, but... As long as I can make it out of here alive, that’s fine by me. I don’t even like fighting in the first place. If I told Mr. Gourdin that, I’d probably get an earful, but you wouldn’t yell at me, would you, madam? You’re far too kind for that.” There was a hint of challenge in her tone.

I suppose it was a bit foolish of me to expect her to open up to me right away. It’s fine; she seems much more endearing than my former disciples were at first. I’m sure we’ll get closer eventually, even if it takes some time.

All three of my disciples as Aurora had been quite the problem children; between the one who’d shot offensive spells at me without warning on our first meeting, the one who froze on sight anyone he didn’t like, and the one who used passersby as test subjects for his magic experiments, I’d definitely had my hands full.

Now that I think about it, the Mercure children are quite well-behaved, aren’t

they? Comparing my former disciples to Canon and the rest, I realized just how problematic they'd been. Nevertheless, despite their many quirks, they'd still been my precious apprentices.

I shook my head to force myself out of my memories and focused back on Mine. "Light Magic isn't a weak attribute by any means. Watch this." I held a hand out toward the sky. Instantly, a torrent of light rained down, smashing the rocks in the training grounds into pieces, cutting chunks out of the earth, and erasing every weed down to the root.

"See?" I said, turning around, only to be met with the sight of Mine curled up into a ball, trembling with fear.

Oops. I'd forgotten just how much more sensitive the students of the schoolhouse were compared to my former apprentices. I quickly stopped the spell before I could traumatize the poor girl any further and used some Earth and Wind Magic to level the ground.

"Um... At least it made the terrain more practical, I suppose? Anyway, this was just a small example of what you can do with Light Magic. Of course, if you don't want to fight, there are other ways to use it."

My words seemed to spark something in Mine. She raised her head, a determined look on her face. "I've always thought Light Magic was a subpar attribute. No matter how hard I tried, I was always struggling with combat and couldn't figure out how to grow. Seeing that spell... Light Magic is way more complex than I thought, isn't it? I want to know more."

I nodded. "I can show you! Light Magic is often either too weak or too strong, so it's definitely a tricky attribute to work with. But if you mix it with other elements and strengthen your body with mana, you could be as strong as Canon and Barre—if that's what you want, of course."

Mine was now listening to me intently, her earlier lack of motivation a distant memory.

"Moreover, Light Magic is a useful and versatile attribute. You don't need to fight if you don't want to. If you like, I can teach you spells for everyday life as well," I offered.

“Yes, please!”

“All right, then. First, let’s have you try to replicate the spell I just performed, shall we?”

Mine’s eyes shot wide open. “Huh? R-Right off the bat?! I have to do *that*?!”

“The only challenging part is adjusting the strength of the spell. Other than that, it’s actually rather easy: all you have to do is use your imagination. Try remembering how it looked when I performed it.”

The land beyond the training grounds was just as overgrown as the training grounds themselves. It seemed that the Mercure didn’t bother maintaining the areas where they didn’t welcome guests.

“Try casting the spell over there,” I told Mine, pointing at the overgrown land. “Focus your attention on what you’re seeing, and imagine yourself gathering all the particles of light there into your magic.”

Mine nodded and did as she was told. She didn’t seem particularly gifted at magic, but I could tell she was a hard worker. After a few tries, she managed to produce a spell similar enough to the one I’d performed—though her control was all over the place.

“Taaake this! Boom!” she yelled, enthusiastically shattering rocks left and right with her magic. Once she’d gotten the basics of the spell down, her demeanor did a complete one-eighty; she was much more confident, to the point where she seemed like an entirely different person.

She told me that she doesn’t like fighting, but it looks to me like she has a talent for destruction.

Soon, Mine’s individual lesson came to an end and the two of us made our way back to the schoolhouse. We stepped into the classroom and were met with the sight of Canon diligently reading his book...and Bombe sprawled on his desk, snoring loudly.

Oh, dear. Looks like I’ll have to think of a different type of assignment for Bombe—one that doesn’t involve reading. Bombe simply wasn’t the kind of kid who could sit still with a book.

I gave Mine her books, grabbed the sleepy Bombe, and headed back to the training grounds.

When he eventually woke up more, he gave me a little bow. “Thank you very much for fixing my arm last time, madam.”

“Don’t mention it. It was nothing at all.”

“So, what’ll you be teaching me today?”

“Hmm, let’s see... Your preferred attribute is Fire, yes? First, I’d like to see you go all out and show me all the spells you can perform.”

“Yes, madam!” he nodded, his face lighting up. Just as I thought, he was the type of boy who’d much rather practice his magic and move his body than sit still. “The training grounds are much neater than before, aren’t they?” he said, looking around. “I feel like there used to be more rocks and grass and stuff...”

“Mine leveled the ground with her magic,” I said. “She shattered the rocks into tiny pieces and burned all the weeds to the root.”

“No way!” Bombe’s eyes shot wide open. “But Mine’s preferred attribute is Light! Don’t get me wrong, it’s helpful to have her blind the enemies with her magic, but I’ve never seen her pulverize rocks before.”

“I taught her a new spell,” I explained. “Although, she apparently doesn’t like fighting, so I suppose she’ll use it exclusively to get rid of weeds and rocks.”

Bombe took another look at the training grounds, his eyes still wide. “Mine’s amazing,” he marveled.

“You can do the same thing with Fire Magic. However—and this is the case for both Light and Fire Magic—remember to always pay attention to your surroundings and adjust the strength of your spells so as not to harm the environment.”

I was still in the middle of my explanation when Bombe started shooting spells left and right, as if to show me he could compete with Mine. Well, I supposed I *did* tell him to show me his magic.

“Fireball! Fireball!” he chanted, shooting little lumps of fire at the ground, causing small craters to form in the earth. I had asked him to show me

everything he could do, but he was just repeating the same spell over and over again.

It seems that this boy also only knows one spell. Mine had seemed to only know how to blind enemies, and, before he started taking lessons with me, Canon could only shoot orbs of water.

“Bombe, let’s learn a new spell, shall we?” I suggested.

“Hell yeah! I want a supercool one, like the one you taught Mine! Then, I’ll finally outshine Canon!” he said, getting even more fired up. I silently commended him for his competitive spirit.

“Before we do that, let’s head to the forest for some hands-on training,” I said.

“Huh? The forest? *Now?!?*”

“Don’t worry; since I’ve already been there, I can teleport us straight to it.”

Without hesitating, I sketched some patterns on the ground and teleported the two of us to the entrance of the forest, near the spot where Gourdin had passed out last time.

“Whoa! Your magic is so cool, madam!” Bombe said.

“First, try to kill that cutter rabbit hiding over there,” I instructed him, pointing at a spot in the long grass in front of us.

Cutter rabbits were monsters that often appeared in fields located near forests. They had sharp claws on both their front and hind legs and frequently caused trouble for field workers due to their aggressive nature. Five hundred years ago, they were classified as dangerous monsters because of the sheer number of farmers they wounded every year. From the way the one I’d spotted was hiding, its eyes fixed on us, waiting for the perfect opportunity to jump, I imagined they hadn’t changed their ways much since my death.

“Look at how strong I am, madam!” Bombe said before casting the only spell he knew. “Fireball! Fireball! Fireball!”

The cutter rabbit chose that moment to jump out at us, only to find itself on the receiving end of a barrage of fireballs. However, only one of them hit it; the

other two missed their target and hit the ground, setting the grass on fire. To make matters worse, the grass was dry and almost dead, causing the flames to spread rapidly.

“Did you see that, madam? I killed it!” Bombe told me excitedly.

“Yes, you did,” I nodded, eyeing the fire. It had reached the trees and was spreading even farther.

When is he going to notice? I wondered. This confirmed the suspicion I’d had when I accompanied the children on their extracurricular training: Bombe had no idea Canon was using his magic to extinguish his flames whenever he got a little too enthusiastic.

“What’s next?” he asked me, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

He sure is a good, genuine boy, at least. However, this was a double-edged sword, as it meant he didn’t always pay attention to the consequences of his actions.

“Um, Bombe? Before we move on to the next exercise, could you turn around for me?”

“Turn around? Why?” he asked, but obediently did as he was told. When he caught sight of the forest fire, he gaped. He’d finally realized what he had done. “Oh no... My flames, they...”

“Bombe, you need to be *very* careful about your environment when you use Fire Magic.” I launched into a little lecture while he panicked, trying to find a way to extinguish the flames. “That’s especially true when you’re in a forest, as the flames can spread rapidly. You probably haven’t noticed, but, up until now, Canon has been extinguishing your flames before they grew out of control.”

I used a quick time-rewinding spell to restore the tree and grass to their original state. I could’ve used Water Magic to put it out, but the steam would’ve risked attracting the other Mercures’ attention, and I didn’t want to deal with that headache right now. Judging by the expression of pure horror on Bombe’s face, I believed he’d put a little bit more thought into his magic practice from now on.

This is how children grow, I thought approvingly.

Bombe eventually pulled himself together, and I teleported us back to the training grounds to teach him his new spell.

“As I said, it’s not safe to use flames everywhere, but other than that limitation, Fire Magic is quite easy to use. You can even use it to manipulate the temperature, just like with Light Magic. For now, I’ll teach you another spell you can use in combat.”

With those words, I made a giant column of flames appear in the middle of the training grounds.

“It’s a spell to create pillars of fire, which you can then move to hit monsters or trap your prey inside. You can make it even stronger by adding more pillars or expanding their ranges,” I explained.

“Can I really do something like *that*?” Bombe asked.

“Hold out both hands in front of you,” I said as I moved beside him. I put my hands on his arms and guided the flow of his mana to teach him how to conjure the fire pillars.

“Let’s practice somewhere with no flammable things around,” I said. “You prefer this to books, don’t you?”

Bombe looked surprised. “How did you know?! I *really* don’t like sitting still and reading.”

Considering how loudly he’d been snoring when I returned with Mine, it would’ve been stranger if I *hadn’t* noticed his dislike for books, so I gave him another assignment: to stay in the training grounds and practice his new spell.

After that, I returned to the schoolhouse to pick up Canon for his own individual training session. I crossed paths with Barre on my way there. He was taking the little ones to the training grounds, so I asked him to keep an eye on Bombe for me while he was there. A quick head count told me there were five small children. There had been ten of them at first.

Curse you, Gourdin! What a terrible teacher!

I arrived at the schoolhouse, and Canon lifted his head when he heard me come in. “Mothe— Um, I mean, Professor, where’s Bombe?” he asked.

“Still at the training grounds. He doesn’t particularly enjoy self-study, so I thought it’d be better to let him do some kinesthetic learning instead,” I replied. “It’s your turn now, Canon. Is there something specific you’d like to do today?”

“I’d like to try making this,” he said, pointing at a potion in the book I’d given him. “It’s not exactly magic, though... Is that all right?”

“Of course. This probably won’t take us too long, so try to think of something you’d like to do with the remainder of your time,” I told him.

“Yes, Professor.” He nodded.

“Mine, don’t push yourself too hard, all right? Take a break whenever you feel like you need it,” I told the girl, who had her nose in her book, before we left.

“Yes, madam. But don’t worry, this is nothing compared to Mr. Gourdin’s lessons.”

Apparently, Gourdin sometimes made them study for the entire day without a single break.

Seriously, curse you, Gourdin!!!

The two of us made our way to the estate’s mixing lab. When we reached it, we first climbed up to the second floor to grab the ingredients we’d need for the potion before moving on to the actual mixing. Canon observed me as I lifted a pot and set it on the stove.

“Is it your first time making a potion, Canon?” I asked.

“Yes. The Mercure family doesn’t engage much in medicine-making. Besides, from what I’ve heard, most of that sort of work is left to the servants.”

“Is that so? You kids often get hurt while training, so you should always carry healing salves and potions with you. Unlike healing magic, you don’t need to know any spells to use them, and they don’t cost mana either,” I explained, tossing the ingredients in the pot one by one and letting them simmer.

“It seems rather similar to cooking,” Canon said.

“I suppose it is, yes.” At that moment, I found that the two of us looked very much like mother and son.

“Mother— I mean, Professor, the liquid inside the pot changed color as I mixed the ingredients,” Canon noted.

“Oh, you don’t have to call me ‘Professor.’ I understand you not wanting to call me ‘mother’ in front of your friends, but when it’s just the two of us, you don’t have to be so formal. We’re family,” I said with a smile.

His cheeks reddened when I uttered the word “family,” but, just a few seconds later, a troubled expression appeared on his face.

Did I say something weird?! Was something the matter? I started panicking.

“Your words make me very happy, mother,” Canon said as he kept stirring the pot. “I’ve never really had much of a family, so...” He flashed me a weak smile. “When I ran away from my parents’ home, I had nowhere to go but here. I had no choice but to do everything I could to survive.”

“What do you mean? I’ve heard that the Mercures invite all the children of the nation with mana to join the family.” I also couldn’t help but think he could’ve chosen a better place to run away to.

“My family are devout followers of the Motar Faith, so they dislike anyone with mana. Starting when I was little, they kept me locked up in the basement...”

“How awful,” I said in horror. “The Motar Faith is the kingdom’s official religion, yet they hold such prejudices against those with mana...”

It was all because of the Motar Faith that people started stigmatizing those with mana! Lam’s family were also followers of the faith, which explained (in part) why they’d treated Lam so horribly all those years.

“My birth parents called me a ‘child of evil,’” Canon said. “For most of my life at home, they only fed me scraps, until they eventually stopped giving me food altogether. I was genuinely afraid I might starve. When I overheard the servants talking about the Mercure family, I took the first opportunity I had to escape the basement and run here. My birth family lives nearby, so I didn’t have to travel too far.”

Judging by the fact that his parents had servants, Canon must’ve hailed from an affluent family. I’d heard Char himself had been the son of a noble. That

didn't matter—from the moment someone entered the schoolhouse, their social status was irrelevant.

I couldn't help but pull Canon into a tight hug.

"You went through so much," I whispered. He was such a sweet boy, yet he'd been mistreated his entire life, first by his family, and then by the Mercures, forcing him to do everything in his power just to survive. "Everything's all right, now. You have me."

We weren't related by blood, and I was way too young to be his mother, but I truly believed we could become a real family one day.

"Oh, look. The medicine is almost done," I said.

Canon pulled away from me, his face flushed red, as he removed the pot from the heat.

I looked inside and gave him a reassuring smile. "This looks pretty perfect. You can take it with you and use it whenever you need it. We still have some time. Is there anything else you'd like to study?"

"Yes. I want to learn that spell in the other book you gave us, the one that can freeze things!" he said, and I could feel his determination. "I only know how to shoot water and how to perform that illusion spell you've taught me, so I'd like to expand my abilities."

"Sure thing!"

The ice spells in the book were frequently used by one of my previous disciples. I'd included not only the spells I'd personally used but also those learned by my beloved disciples along the way. Coincidentally, one of them specialized in Water Magic, just like Canon.

"There *are* several ice spells in the book, though," I pointed out.

"I want to learn this one," he said, showing me the page. "The spell that 'freezes anything instantly.'"

"Oh, dear." My previous disciple mostly used this spell to freeze people he didn't like, and I was often the one who had to deal with the aftermath and thaw them out. Not that Canon needed to know that, of course. Anyway, I was

sure he'd find a much more constructive use for it.

Thinking back on it, my disciples as Aurora really were a bunch of troublemakers...

I bottled the potions we'd made while explaining to Canon how to use the spell. Before long, he got the gist of it. All he needed now was some actual practice, so we returned to the training grounds. When we arrived, we saw Bombe proudly showing off his new spell to the younger students. I noted that he was keeping a close watch on his flames to ensure they didn't spread out of control.

"Look at my Fire Tornado!" he said. Oh, he'd even named his spell already.

The children were squealing excitedly.

"Woow! You're sho cool, Bombe!"

"Sho stwong! Sho cool!"

"Sho handshome!"

"Aren't I?" Bombe said, gloating. Then, he spotted us. "Ah! Canon! I heard you were off making medicine, or whatever boring thing it was. Did you see my new spell?!"

"I did, I did," Canon said dismissively. "I need to use the training grounds too, so make some space for me, will you?"

"Oh yeah? How about we see whose spell can overpower the other?"

"No, thanks. Besides, the spell I want to practice isn't like that."

I noticed that Canon was much colder and more aloof with the other kids than he was with me. His attitude reminded me a little of Char. Then, he turned toward me and his expression brightened instantly.

"Please watch me, mother," he said, a smile curling on his lips as he headed to a corner of the training grounds and started practicing his new spell. The ground surrounding him started freezing in a circular pattern, though its scale was rather small. Still, he had successfully performed the spell.

"Oooh! It's shuper cold!" the little ones exclaimed, gathering around Canon to

marvel at the aftermath of his spell.

“Your magic truly knows no bounds, does it, madam?” Barre commented, approaching me. “Would you mind teaching me a few spells as well? As you must be aware by now, we who studied at the schoolhouse only know how to use one spell each. In Fouet’s and my case, we can only make restraints with our Wind Magic.”

“I suppose you have a point.” The Mercures were the kingdom’s only magic practitioners, yet their abilities were astonishingly lackluster. This only confirmed my fear that magic was almost extinct in the kingdom. “I’ll be dedicating my days to teaching the children, but I can fit in a few lessons for you during my free time.”

“Thank you, madam. I can’t let the little ones outshine me with their magic, after all. Oh, and while I have your attention—*please* don’t go redecorating the schoolhouse.”

“Why? It’s so dreary and dull. I was thinking of making it cuter.”

That’s right; I had been secretly planning to redecorate the schoolhouse. I hadn’t expected Barre to find me out so quickly, though.

“I knew it!” he said. “I had a bad feeling ever since I saw you examining the schoolhouse’s outside walls earlier. Thank goodness I warned you before you made any major changes.”

It seems that our aesthetic sensibilities differ quite a bit. Despite how cute I’d made Char’s study, Barre’s face still turned green every time he stepped into the room.

The younger students came back and Barre found himself surrounded by little children who were happily chattering away.

“Madam! I want cute walls for the school!” one of them exclaimed.

“No! I want somethin’ gwown-up!” another insisted.

“Quit it, kids. The madam’s aesthetic sense is dreadful anyway,” Barre said.

How rude! Whose sense of aesthetic is he calling dreadful?!

Arguing here would get us nowhere, so I’d better just make it a done deal

already. “Then I suppose I’ll go ahead and redecorate the entire schoolhouse to accommodate everyone’s preferences.”

“Madam, nooo!”

The children squealed happily while Barre let out a cry of despair.

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When I returned to the mansion after my lessons, Char summoned me to his study. The evening sun was shining through the window as I stepped into the room, and Char rose from his chair, a sullen look on his face.

“Lam, I’ve heard you’re going to be teaching magic to Barre,” he said, his gaze fixed on me.

“Yes, indeed. He came to me today and asked me to teach him spells in my spare time. Word sure travels fast here, doesn’t it?”

I didn’t understand why he was looking at me with such reproachful eyes, as if I’d wronged him somehow. I thought he’d be *pleased* to hear that the family’s overall magical abilities were improving.

“Wh-Why do you look so mad?” I asked.

Char remained silent for a moment before finally speaking. “You’re my wife. Don’t you think there’s something inappropriate about teaching magic to another man?”

A bewildered “What?” escaped my lips. I must’ve misheard him, right?

“What I’m trying to say is... You...” he faltered.

I could see his mouth moving, but his words were barely audible, and I couldn’t hear the end of his sentence.

What’s gotten into him?

Then it hit me: was he...*jealous*?

No. No way. It’s Char we’re talking about. He’d told me in the past that he was “interested” in me, and that he’d “taken a liking” to me, but that was simply because he thought I was a fellow Aurora fan, nothing more. I *knew* that, so why had my heart started racing in my chest all of a sudden? How weird.

Sometimes, it felt like I didn't understand my own body.

"Lam, do you have a minute? If you're not busy, I'd like you to come with me," he said.

"Sure."

He set a hand on the strawberry-patterned desk, a relieved look on his face.

Barre did force my hand a bit, but I'm glad I redecorated the study. What a lovely desk, I thought, pleased with myself.

"Let's go. This way," Char said as he reached out, his fingers gently clasping mine.

He led me out of the mansion and toward the dimly lit training grounds behind the schoolhouse. I couldn't help but stare at our intertwined hands. Before I knew it, Char had taken the habit of holding my hand whenever we walked together. This was definitely something new—he never used to hold hands with Lam before I'd regained my memories. It may seem like a trivial thing, considering he'd carried me in his arms several times already, but I couldn't help but feel a bit flustered.

I quickly pulled myself together and cast a spell to light up the training grounds. "Let there be light," I said, and several glowing orbs appeared in the air. It was a simple spell, but it did the job perfectly.

Meanwhile, Char had moved to the center of the training grounds. "I've learned the spells in Aurora's book. I'm going to perform them now, so tell me if I'm doing them right," he said. No "please," of course; it was Char we were talking about. I wasn't going to lecture him about politeness, though. His lack of manners was nothing new.

Besides, the first part of his sentence had caught my attention. "Hold on a minute; you learned all the spells from that book? In *one day*?!"

Thinking back on it, he'd once managed to copy a spell after seeing it a single time. Could it be that Char possessed an extraordinary innate talent for magic?

There were twenty spells in that book, with only three of them being Lightning-related. Neither I nor my former disciples had specialized in Lightning

Magic, so I hadn't bothered adding more. The spells that *had* been included were a paralyzing spell, a short-distance teleportation spell, and a power-up spell that circulated one's mana through one's body and amplified it. I used the last one all the time.

"You're not going to try out the paralyzing spell on me, are you?" I asked.

"Of course not. I've brought a test subject," he said, pointing toward the edge of the training grounds. Fouet was standing there. He waved at me, his trademark, unreadable smile plastered on his face.

When did he get here?

"Oh, you've called Fouet," I said before spotting the tied-up figure shouting and struggling at Fouet's feet. "Gourdin?! What is he doing here?!"

"He escaped from his cell and sneaked into the schoolhouse to try and harm the brats," Char told me. Fortunately, Fouet and Barre had caught him before he could hurt the children. "So I've decided to use him as a guinea pig for my new spells as punishment. It'd be a hassle if he tried to escape again."

"Let me go! Knock it off! Damn it!" Gourdin shouted, struggling futilely against his bindings.

Char ignored his protests and wielded his new paralysis spell on him. Gourdin let out a little cry when the spell hit him, then fell silent—a success. Then, Char used the teleportation spell to instantly reappear next to Gourdin. Another success. Lastly, he strengthened his body, grabbed the paralyzed Gourdin and...*threw him!*

Gourdin's body crashed into the only tree that had miraculously escaped Mine's rampage. He seemed to instantly lose consciousness on impact.

Char managed to use all three spells perfectly, I thought in utter shock. It's his first time performing them, isn't it?

However, Char wasn't done yet. "I want to try those of the other attributes as well. I told you, I learned them all," he said before proceeding to perform all twenty spells in the middle of the training grounds.

Fortunately for Gourdin, none of them required a human target, so he was

spared further use as a test subject. Char's control was a bit rough around the edges, but every single spell worked as intended. I couldn't believe my eyes. I'd never heard of anyone being able to learn *twenty spells* in a single day.

"You're amazing, Char," I said. "It's my first time seeing someone master so many spells in such a short amount of time."

"They're from Aurora's book, so, of course, I had to learn them. I can't believe I'm using the same spells as her... It's like a dream come true," he said, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

His usual aloof demeanor was completely absent. He made it sound like it was a given he'd learn Aurora's spells in a day, but the speed at which he had mastered them was nothing short of extraordinary. None of my former apprentices had been able to learn spells this rapidly. Char's admiration for Aurora truly was something else.

"Nothing is impossible to a willing heart," I suppose.

"I-I'll translate another book for you, yes?" I said, feeling like I had no choice. Char looked like he was still ready to learn more spells.

Barre had joined us halfway through Char's demonstration, and he handled carrying Gourdin back to his cell. Meanwhile, Fouet and I had to drag Char back to the mansion, as he refused to leave the training grounds.



The next morning, as I was doing my daily exercises before the day's lessons, I noticed a commotion near the mansion gates. The servants seemed visibly troubled.

"What's the matter?" I wondered aloud.

The Mercures rarely received visitors, and when they did, it was usually people seeking Char's services. They'd always meet with him covertly, making an effort not to draw attention, as they feared the Mercures just as much as they needed them.

Back in my day, mages weren't feared by ordinary people—well, except for a select few.

Fouet or Barre would surely arrive soon to see what the fuss was about, but I decided to go check out the situation for myself.

“Is something wrong?” I asked the nearby servants, who visibly relaxed upon seeing me.

Before the mansion gates stood a gaudy carriage that screamed “nouveau riche” from which two teenage girls with blonde hair stepped out. Their gowns were as tacky as the carriage, and their hairstyles and makeup were garish to match. Upon seeing me, their lips curled into condescending smirks.

“You sure took your sweet time coming to greet us, dear sister!” one of them said.

“You’re just as slow and unthoughtful as ever, aren’t you?” the other added.

I recognized them as Lam’s biological sisters, Lim and Lem Ivoire, who were seventeen and sixteen, respectively. We couldn’t be any more different—both in appearance and demeanor—but we were indeed related by blood. The two of them were unmarried and lived carefree lives at our parents’ estate, squandering the family’s money on frivolous luxuries.

To show up uninvited to someone’s house without notice... How troublesome. Perhaps if they had announced their visit in advance, I wouldn’t have taken “my sweet time” to open the door.

Lim lifted the hem of her orange skirts and strode toward me. Lem, clad in a yellow dress, followed closely behind. They stopped right in front of me and fixed me with confident gazes. The old Lam would’ve started trembling and cowering in fear, but I was different.

“What brings you all the way here?” I asked coolly. “I don’t have much time, so I’d appreciate it if you could make it quick.”

It was almost time for me to start my lessons, and I couldn’t afford to waste too much time on their unexpected visit. My sisters didn’t seem to appreciate this response, if the way their brows furrowed and their blue eyes narrowed was anything to go by.

“How impudent! You dare order me around?!” Lim exclaimed.

“We came all the way here for you, yet you don’t even invite us inside to have some tea and sweets?!” Lem added.

Seriously, what are they doing here? I couldn’t believe their audacity, showing up at someone’s house and demanding to be served tea and cookies. The servants did everything they could to keep their faces neutral, but some of them couldn’t hide their shock. Thankfully, Lim and Lem didn’t notice.

“We’ve heard rumors of your magical prowess at Lord Mercure’s recognition ceremony. It was the talk of all social circles, you see, so we came to see you for ourselves,” Lim said.

“Exactly. Everyone was talking about how ‘the cowardly Countess of Mercure blew away a noble’s wig at the party,’” Lem chimed in. “Well, it’s probably not true, though.”

“You’d never have the courage to do that,” Lim said. “Besides, you can’t use magic, can you, dear sister?”

I understood the motive for their visit now: they were bored and had time to kill, so they’d come to pester me. Being the daughters of a baron—who used to be a commoner, no less—my sisters were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and were largely ignored by most nobles. The only person they could try to lord it over was me, their coward of a sister, so they’d traveled here to vent their frustrations on me.

“That *is* a nice dress you’re wearing, dear sister,” Lim said, examining me from head to toe. “Oh, and what beautiful accessories! You look nothing like you did when you still lived at home.”

“You’re right, Lim! Lam, you must be leaving such a lavish life here. I’m so jealous!” Lem whined. “Can’t you share a little with your poor little sisters?”

My “poor little sisters”? What is she talking about? Char provided financial support to my parents. When I told him he didn’t have to, he said that they had an arrangement, and he would continue to uphold his end of the bargain.

“Lam, I’d *love* to have that necklace!” Lim said.

“And I want those earrings! And that bracelet too!”

This time, the servants' masks slipped. Unable to hide their disbelief, they stared at my sisters as if they were rare monsters. One of them hastily dashed into the mansion.

Is he going to call someone? I'd rather not escalate this any further. I just need to get these troublemakers to leave.

"Lim, Lem—Lord Mercure gave me this necklace and these earrings," I said slowly as if I were admonishing children. "I don't have any obligation to give them to you. If you don't have any other business here, could you two go home already?"

My sisters gasped. Lam had never refused them anything before.

"What did you just say?! You dare defy us?" Lim said.

"I can't believe it! What belongs to you belongs to us, too, doesn't it? You always gave us your things before," Lem pouted.

My jaw dropped at the inanity of her words. "What kind of reasoning is *that*? I really don't have time to indulge your whims, so how about you go home?"

I was doing everything I could to make them leave, but they refused to budge. They seemed quite irritated that I wouldn't give them what they wanted.

"Don't start acting all high and mighty just because you're a countess now!" Lim said.

"Exactly!" Lem shouted. "Don't forget that you're nothing more than a replacement for His Lordship's first wife! So stop arguing and give us whatever valuables you have on you!"

Oh dear, my sisters had turned into robbers.

"If your extravagant dresses and that new carriage are anything to go by, you're already receiving more than enough money from the Mercures. I've heard Father built a new mansion as well," I said.

"That's nowhere near enough!"

"Yeah! It's so unfair that only you get to live such a luxurious life while we're left with scraps!"

These two made absolutely no sense whatsoever. Any attempt at reasoning with them was a failure, and I was starting to lose hope.

The Mercure family works hard to make a living, while our father simply throws all his money into new businesses without doing any prior research, only for them to fail miserably. You can't compare the two. And, despite our father's repeated failures, he never seems to learn. The whole family still indulges in luxury without a care in the world!

Meanwhile, their employees were forced to work themselves to the bone with no breaks, only to be paid a pittance for their efforts. It wasn't hard to imagine how they must've been feeling. None of *them* ever received any of the money Char sent to my family. No, it was exclusively used to fund their lavish lifestyle and cover the losses from my father's failed ventures. As such, no man wanted to get involved with our family, and our parents were struggling to marry off their daughters. Lim and Lem used to mock me, claiming that I had "missed the boat" by not getting married until I was twenty, but they must've been struggling just as much to find someone willing to marry them.

"You own tons of dresses, right?" Lim piped up. "It wouldn't hurt to lend a few to your adorable little sisters."

"You don't have to lend us the one you're wearing right now, it can be any of the others," Lem added.

I knew from experience that, in my sisters' language, "lend" meant "give." They never returned what they borrowed. Back when she still lived at home, the old Lam had lost countless belongings by lending them to Lim and Lem.

"I told you, I am not going to give you anything," I repeated. "If you want something, learn how to get it yourselves instead of taking it from others!" I knew lecturing them would only make them angrier, but I *had* to say it.

"Seriously, what's your deal?!" Lim spat. "Who do you think you are, talking to us that way?! I'll tell mom and dad! They'll punish you, just like before!"

Back when she still lived at home, Lam had often been yelled at by her father. He'd throw things at her, or sometimes even hurl her against the wall. Her mother would pinch her in places her clothes would hide or smack her on the head with her folding fan. But that was in the past. Even they wouldn't go so far

as to come all the way to the Mercure estate to punish the daughter they'd married off—if they had any common sense, that was.

“Lim’s right,” Lem said. “I’m sure even the earl is getting tired of you. Oh, wait a minute, he already has, hasn’t he? He didn’t spend a single second with you at the first party you attended together, right? Mother was so fed up with you when she learned the news. You’re really pathetic, dear sister. It’s been so long, yet you haven’t given your husband a single child. If he had married me or Lim, he’d already have more than he can count!”

It had only been a little over six months since I’d married into the Mercure family, so even if Char and I *had* conceived a child, I wouldn’t have given birth yet! There was no world in which Lim or Lem could have given him “more children than he could count” in that time frame.

“I’m sure His Lordship would prefer us! We’re far cuter than you, with your plain face and your gross green hair. Right, Lem?”

“Definitely, Lim!”

The two of them puffed out their chests in pride. I was so fed up with them that I had no energy left to argue.

That was when a voice came from behind me, refuting their claims. “Absolutely not. I don’t like slow and loud girls like you.”

Shocked, I turned around to see Char standing there with a severe expression on his face. I had expected Fouet or Barre to come, not *Char himself*. Perhaps he was bored.

I was also surprised not to have noticed him until he spoke! “Did you use Aurora’s presence concealment spell just now?” I asked.

“Yeah. I wanted to try my hand at Dark Magic. I’m happy to see it worked on you too.”

I felt that, ever since he started being interested in my magic, Char and I had been growing closer and closer.

“It worked because I wasn’t doing anything special. Under other circumstances, I would’ve set up a barrier that would notify me of your

presence regardless.”

“I see. Is that spell written in any of the books?”

“I’m not sure. If you’re curious, I can teach it to you next time.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

About ninety percent of Char’s attention seemed to be consumed by Aurora’s magic, and he had completely forgotten my sisters. However, Lim and Lem didn’t hesitate to remind him of their presence.

“Oooh! Are you Lord Mercure? It’s such an honor to finally make your acquaintance,” Lim simpered in a nasal tone, sounding like an entirely different person. It was clear that my sisters found Char pleasing to the eye. “Lord Mercure, you should divorce my sister and marry me instead!”

“Ah, not fair, Lim!” Lem interjected. “Your Lordship, you should marry *me*! I’m *so much* younger and cuter than Lam.”

Much like the servants earlier, Char was staring at my sisters like they were strange monsters he’d never seen before. He leaned in and whispered in my ear, “Um, Lam? I don’t mean to be rude, but...are your sisters all right? Mentally, I mean.”

“You don’t need to say it. I’m of the same opinion,” I whispered back.

“Anyway, what are they doing here? Did something happen? It must be urgent for them to show up unannounced.”

“Oh, no, not at all. They just came to beg me to give them some of my belongings. It seems that your financial support alone isn’t enough for them.”

“Are you joking?”

Lim didn’t seem to appreciate Char and I whispering among ourselves, and she threw herself between us with great force.

“You know, I’d *love* to have a walk through the gardens with you, my lord,” she purred, leaning against Char. She placed both hands on his chest and gazed up at him with wide, innocent eyes. My sisters were quite pretty, and they knew it. However, their terrible personalities coupled with our family’s reputation completely canceled out their looks.

“Not fair, Lim! I wanna have tea with Lord Mercure!” Lem whined.

Char’s annoyance was starting to show on his face. “I think I’ve gotten the gist of the situation.” He sighed. “Lam, your sisters are— How can I put it?” He paused. “*Exactly* like your parents. When they want something, they don’t give up until they get it.”

I nodded. “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, yes.”

I was glad to finally have someone on my side here, but Char’s phrasing gave me pause.

Please don’t tell me my father has asked more of Char than the financial aid he’s giving them. It was my father we were talking about: he’d totally pull something like that. *I’m worried about what he made Char do. In any case, I’m so sorry, Char.*

Speaking of Char, he dexterously extricated himself from my sisters’ grasps, but Lim and Lem were relentless.

“Lam, I want to spend some time with Lord Mercure. Can I?” Lim asked.

“Me too!” Lem piped up. “Can you lend him to us?”

Ah, there goes their favorite word again.

“Char is a person, not a thing. I can’t lend him to you. Please stop being so inappropriate in someone else’s home,” I chided them.

“You cheapskate! Lord Mercure, have you seen how mean our sister is to us? We came all the way here to see her, and she won’t even let us come inside!” Lim complained. “She doesn’t want to lend us her dresses and accessories, and she won’t even let us spend time with you!”

“Lim’s right! We don’t have nearly enough money with your financial assistance, but Lam refuses to help us!”

Char walked over to me and cast a frosty glare at my sisters. “Go home.” He’d always been somewhat asocial, but his misanthropic tendencies were especially strong today.

Lim and Lem stared at him in disbelief, as if they couldn’t believe he had rejected their advances.

“If you keep making a fuss, I’ll stop offering financial support entirely. The only reason I’m sending Baron Ivoire money in the first place is that it was his condition for letting me marry Lam. It’s more than enough for all four of you to live comfortably. However, not only are you not satisfied with it, but you went as far as to force yourselves into our home and harass my wife. And don’t claim you didn’t understand the implications of your actions,” Char said, as relentless as ever.

“Th-That’s not true! We just...”

“You just *what*? Wanted to steal my wife’s belongings?” Char said coolly.

“No, we—”

Lim tried arguing, but he cut her off. “What kind of family marries off their daughter to someone, only to then order him to divorce her? Talk about self-centered.”

Seeing that Lim was cornered, Lem tried to shift the blame onto me. She glared at me. “Lam, you *meanie*! You fed lies to Lord Mercure, didn’t you?!”

“On what basis are you making *that* claim?” I asked.

“There’s no way Lord Mercure would take your side over ours if you hadn’t! Mother and father always favor Lim and me!”

A groan escaped me. “*Please* don’t lump Char in with our parents.”

What Lem said was the truth, though; our parents had always favored them over me, their eldest daughter, who didn’t look anything like the rest of the family. This was why my sisters had grown up to become such brats.

“You’re right, Lem. It’s all Lam’s fault!” Lim exclaimed, jumping on the bandwagon. “You really shouldn’t believe anything my sister says, my lord. She’s a pathological liar.”

A pathological liar? That’s you two, not me! I thought, but decided against speaking up. Instead, I looked at Char, waiting to see how he’d react. A cold, fiendish smile curled on his lips, truly befitting of the dreaded Earl of Mercure himself.

“Oh? Well, you two are quite gutsy, coming into my home and insulting my

wife in front of me. I trust you're prepared for the consequences?" he said.

"Huh? What consequences?" Lem asked, unintentionally dropping her nasal, high-pitched voice.

"I'll be sending a messenger to Baron Ivoire's estate later today. It's a hassle I'd rather not have to deal with, but I have reached my limit with you and your father's unreasonable demands. I've already sent you way more funds than our original agreement required, so I will officially be terminating your family's financial support."

"Huh? What?! Why?!" My sisters' eyes shot wide open in horror at Char's words.

"Y-You can't! If you stop sending us funds, our house will be ruined!" Lim stammered. "Don't be so cruel!"

"So, you came to pick a fight with me without being prepared to face the consequences of your actions?" Char asked, raising an eyebrow.

"We never had any intention to pick a fight with *you*! It was our sister we—"

"And you thought I'd just stand by and watch as you disrespect my beloved wife in front of my eyes?" Char's tone was icy.

"Huh? What are you saying? You don't like Lam, do you? Father and mother said so..."

"I may not look like it, but I am quite the devoted husband. I'm *very* fond of Lam."

Oh, really? That's news to me. He'd probably just said that to get my sisters to leave, but my heart still jumped in my chest. I decided to remain silent and observe while waiting for my pulse to settle.

"That's impossible!" Lim screeched. "There's no way you could actually like a *weirdo* like her! Her hair's a weird color, she's plain, cowardly, and, to make matters worse, she has *mana*!"

Oh, Lim, you shouldn't have said that, I thought, pressing the palm of my hand against my forehead. *Char has mana too. Did you forget?*

Judging by the triumphant look on my sister's face, she clearly hadn't realized

that she'd just insulted Char's whole family.

Char let out an unimpressed hum. "Let me make sure I understand: not only did you insult my wife and take my money, but now you're also decrying the nature of my house? Well, it seems that Baron Ivoire really wants to sever ties between our families. Very well. I shall grant his wish."

Lim and Lem still didn't grasp the full extent of their offense. They did, however, seem to understand that they'd angered Char. Both of their faces paled in unison when the fiendish smile on his lips widened. No matter how handsome they thought him, Char's smile was absolutely terrifying. There was a reason he was feared by so many people.

"Barre, Fouet," Char said to the twins, once they finally arrived, "see to it that the young ladies from the Ivoire family are sent back to their home with the utmost courtesy. I am terminating our financial agreement. From now on, we shall sever all ties with their family."

"The servants told us everything. These young ladies came to pick a fight with the madam? I also couldn't help but overhear them insult our house," Barre said.

Fouet chuckled. "How bold. It is quite good timing, though: I was *just* looking for daring souls to use as test subjects for my new spells."

"C'mon, Fouet, that's not fair. I also want to test the Wind spells I learned from the book the madam gave me. I'd like to see what it'd be like to unleash them to their fullest potential."

"Our target is a petty baron. It shouldn't be too difficult to blow his estate away, down to the last brick."

Both Fouet and Barre were beaming as they talked about destroying my parents' home. My sisters had brightened up when they saw two more handsome men joining us, but their expressions were swiftly replaced with ones of dread when the twins mentioned that they were looking for test subjects.

They're joking...right? I hope they are, at least.

Char turned around and asked, "Lam, are you all right with this?"

“If you’re talking about you cutting off my family’s financial aid, then—by all means, go ahead. I was in favor of it. I’m really sorry for the commotion my sisters caused, though.”

“There’s no need for you to apologize,” he said. “Just leave the cleanup to us. We have our own way of dealing with matters that risk affecting our reputation.”

That made sense, but I was slightly worried what that “way” was. “As long as it doesn’t end in a bloodshed.”

“We don’t intend to kill anyone. The aftermath would be a pain to deal with.”

“In that case, I trust your judgment on the matter.”

He nodded, a satisfied smile appearing on his lips. “It’s almost time for the kids’ lesson, isn’t it? You should go to the schoolhouse before you’re late.”

“But...”

“Don’t worry, I’ll give you a full report of everything we did when you’re done with your classes.” He turned to Barre. “Barre, take Lam to the schoolhouse. You have the little brats’ lessons as well, don’t you?”

“Yes, Lord Char,” Barre said, drawing out the “e.” “Make sure to leave a few test subjects for me, yes? Let’s go, madam.”

I was curious about what would happen to my family, but I couldn’t neglect my duties toward the children, so I followed Barre to the schoolhouse.



When I was done with teaching, I made a beeline for Char’s study. I found him in the middle of work. Once again, I couldn’t help but marvel at how lovely the room was. My favorite part *had* to be the strawberry-patterned desk.

If I do say so myself, I actually have such an eye for aesthetics.

“I’m very sorry about this morning, Char,” I said. “What happened after I left?”

Char raised his head from his desk work and met my gaze. “Well, Fouet and I *really* wanted to test that new spell...”

“Test that... Wait, which spell are you talking about?” I asked.

“The ‘approximative teleportation’ spell from Aurora’s book. So we tried to send your sisters and their carriage back home with magic.”

“What?!” I squawked.

The spell in question allowed one to teleport oneself or a target near a place that they didn’t know the precise coordinates of by roughly specifying its location. It was crude but very convenient...if you didn’t care about the safety of the target you wanted to teleport.

“Don’t worry, we didn’t kill them,” Char assured me. “The baron’s estate is in the royal capital as well, so we had a good idea of the target location. We headed there with our own magic just to be sure your sisters had arrived safely, and we found the two of them in the garden pond, covered in waterweed.”

He then muttered something about needing to be a tad more precise next time. As always, his mind was fully occupied by magic.

“I officially cut off the financial support as well,” he added. “The baron kept begging me to reconsider and wouldn’t shut up, so I got to test out my new spells as well. He stopped arguing eventually.”

“Uh, are you sure that was a good idea?” I asked, my face twitching uncontrollably.

This family’s character education is going to be the death of me! Due to how outrageous the schoolhouse’s living conditions were, the Mercures were severely disconnected from societal norms, the adults and children alike. As such, they had a tendency to go to extremes without a second thought. The fact that the House of Mercure had little to no contact with other houses (as the other nobles were terrified of them) didn’t help. None of the adults in this house had any idea of what common sense was!

“It’s all right. Fouet threatened him with magic, and he obediently agreed to sign the papers.”

“I-I see. I’m really sorry for the trouble,” I said, deciding against launching into a lecture to explain to him that what he did was *not*, in fact, all right. Besides, it was my fault Char and the others had been roped into this situation in the first

place. If I'd given up on trying to reason with my sisters and used force instead, things wouldn't have escalated so much.

This really is all my fault.

Char shook his head. "Why are you apologizing? You didn't do anything wrong."

"It's not just about my sisters. I can't believe I didn't know that my father was forcing you to increase their financial aid all these months, even though it's my fault that you had to pay it in the first place." I had been completely oblivious to the situation and ended up causing a lot of unnecessary trouble for Char.

"Well, of course, you didn't know; I didn't tell you about it," he retorted. "You don't need to worry."

"I do! I feel so guilty, I probably won't be able to sleep tonight. Char, you *have* to punish me for my negligence!"

"Absolutely not. I was the one who let them get away with their unreasonable requests in the first place. It's partly my fault that they grew so bold."

I was absolutely stumped. Why was he shifting the blame away from me? What was I supposed to say to that?

Suddenly, he rose from his chair and crossed the room to me. "If you're worried that they might try to get revenge, don't be. I made it very clear that any attempt to harm you would not be tolerated. They won't be able to interfere with our family, and I've banned them from ever setting foot here again."

"I can't believe you went to such lengths for me," I whispered, feeling moved. I really wasn't used to Char being so considerate and proactive.

"Well, I *am* a devoted husband, after all." He smiled and slipped an arm around my waist without warning. Although this kind of gesture might be typical for a regular husband, it was so uncharacteristic of Char that I found myself momentarily speechless.



“R-Right. That’s the pretense you went with,” I stammered once I regained my composure.

I didn’t want him to notice my agitation, so I tried to cover it up, but his piercing ruby red eyes seemed to see right through me. “It’s not a ‘pretense.’ It’s the truth. I told you I’m rather fond of you.”

How could he say such outrageous things with a straight face?! If I didn’t know him as well as I did, I might almost believe he was *actually* in love with me.

“Yes, yes, because I’m a fellow Aurora enthusiast, right?” I said. I didn’t know who I was trying to convince—him or myself.

“There’s that too, but it’s not the only reason. I like you as my wife as well.”

“Yes, yes, because you’re interested in my magic.”

“I am, but that’s not what I’m trying to say.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” I repeated, trying not to flinch.

Char had turned out to be much more decent than I initially thought, and he was genuinely trying to better himself and the Mercure family. Regardless, I knew that he didn’t *love* me. I, Lam Mercure, was his wife—but only on paper. Besides, having been raised in that dreadful house, he probably had no real understanding of what a normal marital relationship should be like. I was sure of it.

Chapter Eight: The Countess and the Unwelcome Guest

Several days had passed since my sisters' surprise visit.

I owe Char a big favor after what he did for me this time, I mused while doing my daily exercise. *I need to find a way to repay him—and the sooner, the better.*

Thinking back on the conversation I had with him that day, I felt my heart skip a beat. Yeah, I *really* wanted to settle this debt as fast as possible.

In the meantime, these past few days had been quite fulfilling; I'd translated more books for Char, and taught all sorts of new spells to the twins and the schoolhouse's children. My life at the Mercure estate had become quite enjoyable, a stark contrast from how things used to be.

I've made so much progress, it'd be a shame to stop here. I'm going to make even more changes to this place!

Though, to my dismay, Char had collected even *more* portraits of Aurora since my first visit to his secret chamber. Whenever I spotted a new one, I made sure to hide it behind the shelf with the others, but, every few days, Char would change his mind and decide that he wanted the portraits exposed. It was an endless game of cat and mouse.

Being the strongest mage of all time, Aurora's face—*my* face—was printed on all sorts of books and trinkets aimed at history enthusiasts. I'd seen ones where her face was almost identical to mine, the real deal, and others where I barely even recognized myself. Still, they all had one detail in common: in all the illustrations of Aurora I'd seen, she always had light-green, shoulder-length hair.

I used to have short hair, it's true. I wondered if someone who knew me in my past life had passed on this specific information about me to the future generations, and if that was why the portraits were *somewhat* recognizable. One of my disciples, perhaps? I still didn't remember my last moments as Aurora. I *knew* that I had died and had been reincarnated, but the exact

circumstances of my death remained a mystery.

As I stood there, swinging my broom and reminiscing on the past, a harried Fouet made his way to me. Now, that was unusual—Fouet, while excellent at his work, always took care of his duties as fast as possible so he could spend the rest of his time slacking off. He and Barre might have been twins, but he was much shrewder. Something serious must've happened for him to be this worked up.

“Madam, an unexpected visitor has arrived to see Lord Char,” he said, speaking much faster than usual. “He’s a rather difficult person and extremely challenging to deal with, so it’d put me at ease if you stayed in your room for the time being.”

“Oh? Now I’m curious. Who’s the mysterious guest?” I asked.

Fouet’s face soured as if thinking about that person brought back unpleasant memories. “The aide of the Cerveau Cathedral’s bishop. He’s here as an envoy from the bishop himself.”

“A messenger from the bishop? If I remember correctly, the Cerveau Cathedral is the base of operations of the Motar Faith, right? And the biggest one in the kingdom? I thought the Faith disliked mages. What business could they have with the Mercure family?”

“We haven’t mentioned it, but the Cerveau Cathedral is one of our regular clients. They hate magic and everything related to it, yet they keep hiring our services. It’s *infuriating*. With their influence, it’s not as if we can refuse them. It’s a harsh world we live in, isn’t it?”

I nodded sympathetically. “It seems like a tricky position to be in.”

“It is. We have no choice but to carry out their requests, no matter how absurd they are. Do you remember that period when Lord Char spent most of his days out without coming home once? That was because of the Faith’s demands.”

When Char and Lam had just gotten married, there had indeed been a time when he’d been so busy with work that he’d barely spent any time at the mansion at all.

Now that I had access to Char's study, I'd been reading through stacks of books to learn more about the current state of the world. From them, I'd learned that the Motar Faith had churches and cathedrals in many countries, including, of course, the Tête Kingdom. The Motar Faith hadn't existed back when I was Aurora, but it seemed that, in a mere five hundred years, it had spread all over the world—most likely thanks to its powerful patrons.

Speaking of the Tête Kingdom, this place hadn't always been known by that name. Many kingdoms had risen and fallen over the centuries, until the day the Tête Kingdom was eventually established. This region also happened to be where I had lived when I was Aurora, though the kingdom only encompassed half of what my homeland had once been. The once vibrant and diverse culture had faded, leaving behind a world where convenience was prioritized over exploration and frivolity, as people didn't have the means to make life easier that we used to have back then.

I'd read that the Motar Faith held even more power than the royal family. Its central governing body was located in another nation, where the Holy Father—the Faith's most influential figure—resided. The Motar Faith had branches all over the world, and held authority in many countries.

It also had its own hierarchy. At the very top stood the Holy Father, whose primary responsibility was to oversee the Faith's main headquarters. Beneath him were the cardinals and other clergymen who assisted him in his duties. The bishops were the head of the Faith in their respective nations, followed by the priests, who worked at the local churches, and, finally, the deacons—the priests' apprentices. There were other religions in the world, but none of them was as prominent as the Motar Faith. Some of them were even related to it, albeit under a different name.

When all was said and done, the bishop of the Cerveau Cathedral was an *incredibly* powerful man, more important than most noble houses in the kingdom. In other words, he was an absolute terror to deal with!

"What a troublesome client," I said.

"I couldn't agree more," Fouet replied. "We're not *too* scared of the Cerveau Cathedral and its bishop, but we really don't want to make an enemy of the

Faith, no matter how good we are at magic.”

“If I remember correctly, the Motar Faith has their own elite mages stationed at their central headquarters, right? I’ve read about them. Aren’t they incredibly powerful?”

Fouet nodded. “Yes. The Faith has the Holy Order of Chivalry. All of their members undergo special magic training. The ones they call the Ten Saints are reputed to be in a completely different league from the other mages in the world.”

“It’s quite hypocritical of them to hire mages despite their anti-magic stance,” I pointed out.

He shrugged. “According to them, they aren’t regular mages but *saints* and *holy knights*, so it’s not the same thing.”

“Well, that’s a sophism if I’ve ever heard one.”

I thought I understood what was going on. It was only speculation, but could it be that those saints and holy knights were taught the powerful spells from my past life? If that was the case, the Mercures stood no chance against them—for now. If I kept on teaching them stronger spells, one day, perhaps Char could start refusing the bishop’s unreasonable demands.

They’re all brilliant, so I’m sure they’ll become great mages.

I was already done with the children’s lessons for the day; I’d actually finished before lunchtime. After the whole debacle with Gourdin, I’d told the kids that they didn’t have to stay at the schoolhouse if they didn’t want to. I just felt so bad for them, being stuck on the estate. I wanted to give them some more freedom and make them realize that they didn’t *have* to become mages. They could do whatever they wanted! There were plenty of jobs for those who couldn’t use magic, after all. If they *couldn’t* find work anywhere else, we could always hire them to work at the mansion.

To my surprise, none of them had wished to leave. When I told them to look for a new purpose in life, they all looked lost and couldn’t come up with a single other thing they wanted to do, nor did they want to change the way they’d lived so far. Canon’s future had already been decided for him, so he didn’t have

a choice but to stay, but I was surprised none of the other children wanted to leave. After discussing the situation with Char, we decided to keep the schoolhouse running as is.

Still, I didn't want the kids to feel trapped here for the rest of their lives, so I'd started teaching them a huge variety of spells so that they could gain their independence if they ever wished to do so. I also began devising strategies to make magic-learning more fun for them.

I just want them to feel like they have a choice—that working for the Mercures is only one option among many, many others. I'd be delighted if they chose to stay, but it needs to be their decision, not something they feel forced into.

For now, their new lessons were going smoothly. It had been five hundred years since the last time I taught magic to someone, so I was also having a great time!

I suppose this isn't the time to think about the children. I'm quite curious about the bishop's messenger's visit.

"Fouet, can I stay while you and Char talk to the bishop's messenger?"

"It's not an issue, but you'll likely end up having a rather unpleasant experience. I'm sure Lord Char will be of the same mind."

"I'll be fine. I just want to see what kind of person he is."

Fouet didn't have any real reason to refuse my request, so it didn't take long to convince him. "You're quite curious, aren't you, madam? Lord Char is in the drawing room if you wish to speak to him."

"I will." I nodded. Then, a thought struck me. "Fouet? Since we're having a guest over, I was thinking that I could redecorate the room before—"

"Absolutely not," he interrupted. "Lord Char has given strict instructions that I am *not* to approve that request. I've heard that you recently redecorated the schoolhouse. Barre was crying about the pastel octopus pattern on the outside walls."

"Oh my, he liked it so much that it moved him to tears? I'm glad! The little ones were very happy about the new decor as well."

“Be that as it may, you absolutely *cannot* redecorate the drawing room.”

He wouldn't relent no matter how much I prodded, so I reluctantly made my way to the drawing room to join Char and wait for our guest.

Ugh... Urge to redecorate...rising...!

As I stared at the dull walls of the drawing room, lamenting the missed opportunity, a servant came to tell us the bishop's messenger had arrived. With that, Char and I went to greet him at the doors. Char wasn't usually one for politeness or formality, but this was an envoy of the Motar Faith we were dealing with—even he knew he had to make an effort.

Our visitor was a middle-aged monk dressed in a flowing tunic and trousers, with a scarf wrapped around his neck. His outfit was adorned with red and blue stripes, the symbol of the Motar Faith. His head was completely clean-shaven, a requirement for all clergy members below the rank of bishop within the Faith. When Char greeted the man, he cast a cold glance at Char, letting out a haughty sniff as he stroked his goatee. Judging by his attitude, he looked down on the Mercures.

“Hurry up and let me in, mana wielders,” he said. His tone was condescending right off the bat. He seemed beyond insufferable!

Should I remind you that Char is an earl?

Not that I should have been too surprised; it might seem like nobles and the royal family were at the top of the food chain in the kingdom, but in reality, the Motar Faith wielded even greater influence and authority. The Holy Father was the one holding the *real* power, but the bishops he'd dispatched all over the world exerted their own significant control over most nations' domestic affairs. Their influence was not to be underestimated. Still, that didn't give that man the right to disrespect Char, regardless of social status.

I really don't think anyone should talk to someone like that, especially if they want to hire their services—which must be the reason for his visit.

Char didn't react to the monk's snide tone and led him to the drawing room. Just as Fouet had said, he was in a difficult position here.

It was only the four of us in the room: Char, Fouet, our visitor, and me. I had

received Char's permission to stay.

"We have a request for you," the monk said without further preamble, not even touching the food and drink laid out before him.

I debated saying something, but I decided to just observe the situation for now.

"We want you to exterminate the monsters roaming the Ouragan Mountains. We received a report that a few thousand ferocious beasts had penetrated our territory from the neighboring nation," he said calmly, as if it were a mere inconvenience. But "a few thousand" monsters were a *lot*, and depending on how "ferocious" they were—as he put it—they could be incredibly dangerous.

We don't have the manpower to take on that task, do we? Besides, there was something that bothered me in his request. Monsters didn't appear out of the blue in such large numbers; they must've known there was a monster problem in the Ouragan Mountains for some time now.

He said that they came from the neighboring nation... The Tête Kingdom and its neighbor are joined by land, so incidents near the border are always complicated to deal with. I bet they observed the situation for a while, and once they saw that the other nation wouldn't do anything, they came to pass the issue onto us.

Char let out a sigh.

"As you're aware, we're perpetually understaffed," he said, a glum look on his face. "It would be nearly impossible for us to exterminate a horde of several thousand monsters. If the area we had to cover were smaller, it might be feasible, but the Ouragan Mountains are vast. We'd need to split up, which means we'd have a more difficult time fighting the monsters. Currently, there are only three of us who can fight dangerous creatures effectively—Barre, Fouet, and myself."

Um, you forgot me, Char!

I almost protested but managed to hold my tongue at the last second. Perhaps Char had his reasons for not mentioning me. Other than that, everything he said was true; Gourdin was locked up in a cell. Even if he weren't,

they still wouldn't have enough manpower to cover the entirety of the Ouragan Mountains.

I can use detection spells to locate the creatures, but the other Mercures don't even know those exist... Besides, even if they could use them, it'd still take them a lot of time and resources to deal with the monsters.

"Then send the children too," the messenger said haughtily. "They can use magic, can't they?"

Char shook his head. "They're not strong enough to deal with dangerous monsters yet."

I agreed! While I'd been teaching them new spells, they were nowhere near ready to take on so many monsters at once.

"The rumors made it sound like the education here was efficient, but it seems to be lukewarm at best. There's no point in keeping useless mages alive," the messenger said.

He sounds just like Gourdin and Char a few weeks ago. This made me pause. I'd thought that the Mercures' cruel education policies were exclusive to them, but could it be that they had also been shaped by external influences? *Were they forced to adopt such harsh methods due to the way others treated them?*

Either way, that issue clearly ran deep in the family, since things had already been this way when Char had been a student himself.

Seeing as we didn't reply, the messenger insisted. "It's your duty to produce soldiers that can be used in times of need. We don't have a use for deadweights! Just get rid of them already!"

"Just get rid of them"? Does he mean the children? A heavy silence fell over the room.

Fouet and Char were both radiating a chilly aura. It seemed that I wasn't the only one who'd taken offense at his words. Perhaps they'd become attached to the children after living around them for so long. Besides, both of them came from the schoolhouse. During their time as students, they had probably faced threats of being "gotten rid of" themselves. That might explain why Char had agreed to let me reform the schoolhouse after just a little thought. He must've

felt *some* empathy for the children.

I bet he can't help but see his younger self in the schoolhouse's children. Who wouldn't be displeased?

Char's lips curled into an enigmatic smile. "'Get rid of them,' huh? You said it so casually too."

All of a sudden, the air became electric with tension. Being on the receiving end of Char's piercing gaze, the messenger found himself at a loss for words. Despite his constant grumbling and clear disdain for the Mercures, he was still terrified of Char.

If only he'd acted like a decent human being, Char wouldn't be glaring at him.

Well, he wouldn't have been *friendly* either—it was Char we were talking about; he was as aloof as they came—but he would've acted professionally. I'd started to get a good sense of my husband's character since I began spending time with him.

"We can't undertake such a large-scale request, especially not on such short notice. I've made that clear numerous times before. Unless you wish for the demise of my house, I suggest you take your request to the Holy Order of Chivalry." He added that the Mercures could handle single targets and small groups of dangerous monsters, but they didn't have the manpower to tackle large-scale extermination missions.

Up until now, the House of Mercure's *modus operandi* had always been to train a select few elite individuals and discard the rest. This was a well-known fact, especially among the nation's most influential figures. None of them knew, as of yet, that I'd decided to revamp the education system altogether. There were few students at the schoolhouse, and I didn't want to force any of them to fight monsters if they didn't want to.

"Besides, why did you let the situation escalate to this point in the first place? If you had told us about the monster threat when it first appeared, we might've been able to handle it before things got out of hand," Char said.

I'd thought the exact same thing. It was obvious that they'd ignored the situation until it spiraled out of control.

The messenger's reaction only confirmed our suspicions, as his face turned crimson with anger. "Sh-Shut up! Don't ever tell me what I 'should do' again. All *you* have to do is obey our commands without asking questions!"

"Your *commands*, hm?" Char repeated, his presence growing more imposing by the second.

Once again, silence draped like a heavy fog over the drawing room. Char wasn't the only one who was angry—I was seething too. Judging by the unsettling expression on Fouet's face, he hadn't taken the man's words well either.

"In any case, you have no option but to accept, unless you wish to make an enemy of the Faith! The holy knights and the saints won't take your refusal lightly. If they make a move, you stand no chance! You should be grateful we keep on offering you work. That's all you mages are good for, anyway. If you can't handle the few jobs we give you, then what use are you, you *cowards*?!"

If you're going to call the saints and the holy knights anyway, wouldn't it be faster to ask them to deal with the monsters directly? If they're as strong as everyone claims, they wouldn't have any issue exterminating a few thousand monsters.

Fouet had told me that, up until now, Char had accepted every one of the bishop's requests, even the most absurd ones, as he didn't want to make an enemy of the Faith. After listening to his conversation with the messenger, I could see why he'd sometimes had to spend weeks away from the mansion to fulfill these unreasonable demands.

"Just sign the damn paperwork already, like you always do!" the messenger demanded, his assured tone a stark contrast to the frightened expression on his face. You could say whatever you wanted about this man, but he definitely had guts.

His attitude still makes my blood boil, though.

I could easily imagine what would happen if Char continued to accept the bishop's demands: he'd task the Mercures with harder and harder missions until they reached their breaking point and the house collapsed. I was starting to suspect that the reason all the previous Earls of Mercure had passed away so

young and why there were so few adults still alive lay in those unreasonable requests. In other words, the mages who worked for the Mercure family weren't safe even after leaving the schoolhouse.

Sending children into the fray is absolutely out of the question. On one hand, refusing the bishop's request might bring us trouble later down the line, but on the other, I didn't want Char to let him do as he pleased. *I suppose I don't have much choice. It'll consume a ton of mana, and I'm not sure that I have the stamina to pull it off, but I have to use my magic to do something.*

All right, I think I can do it.

After checking that no one was paying attention to me, I focused my mind and began to manipulate my mana. I guided it out of the room and fired a detection spell in the direction of the Ouragan Mountains. There was quite a bit of distance between the mansion and the mountains, but my mana could move at light speed.

The detection spell worked by tracing a person's or a monster's mana to locate them. However, it only worked accurately on creatures with mana; for humans who didn't have any, a different method of detection would be required. Fortunately for me, all monsters had mana, so it would be a piece of cake to locate the ones in the mountain. I could even determine the type of creatures they were based on their mana signatures—well, as long as they were monsters I'd encountered before.

I closed my eyes and spread my mana across the mountain range like a web to increase the area of my search. I couldn't tell if it was because I hadn't used a detection spell in a while, or because the surface I had to cover was too wide, but I struggled to manage this. Nevertheless, I pushed through and projected my consciousness to my target location.

A short moment later, the landscape of the Ouragan Mountains materialized in my mind. My detection spell had reached its destination. With my power, not only could I detect my target's location, but I could even project the surrounding landscape directly into my mind through magic manipulation.

I'll have to explain the location of the monsters I detect to Char and the others later, so it's better if I have an idea of the lay of the land.

I focused on my detection spell, only to sense *many* monsters in the area.

These must be the ones the messenger was talking about. I visualized the horde in my mind. There were *a lot* of them. *That's an infestation of highly reproductive monsters, all right! They've crossed the border and are spreading like wildfire. As for where they're coming from...*

Ah, found it. It seems to be that lake in the neighboring country.

I extended the area of my detection spell even farther. The monsters had already propagated throughout the mountain range. The place was absolutely *teeming* with monsters.

The Cerveau Cathedral probably didn't want to negotiate with another nation, so they decided to dump the matter on us. Good grief. That's the bare minimum of diplomatic interactions. Do your job a little!

Half of the Ouragan Mountains belonged to our kingdom's neighbor, but the other half belonged to the Tête Kingdom itself and the Cerveau Cathedral. The border between the two countries was delineated by the ridges of the hills. Regardless of what was happening in the other nation, the kingdom didn't want to leave dangerous beasts unchecked in its territory. However, given the sheer number of these creatures, they wouldn't be leaving anytime soon.

I quickly pulled my consciousness back to the drawing room. "If we want to eradicate these monsters, we'll need to kill all of them, including the ones in the other nation's territory. Naturally, we'll have to deal with the lake they're breeding in as well."

The messenger's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "H-How did you—"

"I just *know*. If we don't deal with the monsters in the other nation, there won't be an end to them."

"You cannot!" the messenger immediately protested. "The procedures to get into another nation are too much of a hassle! Deal with the problem, but you are not to leave the kingdom!"

His words left me momentarily speechless. "What...?"

He was asking us to exterminate these monsters, but refused to let us into the

neighboring nation to finish the job? How were we supposed to do that?! If we didn't strike the creatures' breeding ground, the Mercure family would end up in a never-ending cycle of using manpower and resources to kill the monsters. The monk *must* have been aware of that, yet he hadn't mentioned it at all and was pressing Char to take on the mission.

Does the Motar Faith want to see the House of Mercure fall? Did they find a way of handling issues without having to rely on our magic, and so they want us out of the way? Or could it be that they really have no idea about the situation? Either way, they've exploited the Mercure family all these years, but this request is beyond the pale.

Just what did they take us mages for? And they wanted us to send the *children* to deal with the threat too? Absolutely not. I refused to let them abuse us into taking on such a nonsensical mission.

I won't let Char and the others be stuck in an endless loop of killing monsters in the mountains over and over again.

But if I made a scene here, I'd only cause trouble for them. I was only the countess—my authority held little weight in this situation.

Well, then. I focused my consciousness and mana back onto the mountains. If I couldn't cross the border, then I'd deal with the monsters from here—though I wasn't sure how much I could do with this weak body of mine.

Hmm. Seems that we're dealing with zombie leapers.

Leapers were frog monsters with impressive reproductive capabilities that lived mostly in lakes. Had they been regular leapers, we wouldn't have needed to exterminate them to the very last, as the mountain's ecosystem regulated its population. Leapers served as prey for many creatures, and they rarely wandered into human towns. As long as they didn't get too close to farmlands, there was no need to worry about them.

However, these weren't regular leapers, but *zombie* leapers. Zombie monsters weren't just born naturally in the world; they were created using magic. Now, according to legend, monsters were the product of ancient mages' experiments. They'd tampered with all sorts of different creatures, who then started reproducing on their own, giving rise to what we now called

“monsters.” When a regular monster died, it could then, under certain conditions, be resurrected into a zombie.

Basically, zombification is the act of meddling with dead monsters through magic—and it’s a pain in the butt to deal with.

You see, zombie monsters possessed some really annoying characteristics. First of all, they could contaminate other monsters of the same type. By adding a single zombie to an army of leapers, the zombie condition would spread to the others. In no time, the entire army would be infected! Even their offspring would be born as zombies. Second, it caused the monsters to reproduce at an even faster rate, making their numbers grow explosively. Third, zombie monsters tasted horrible, so other monsters refused to eat them, which meant their numbers never dwindled naturally.

If we don’t do anything before they proliferate further, the situation will become unmanageable.

Soon, the leapers wouldn’t stay in the mountains anymore: they’d start spilling into the nearby village, invade fields, and wreak havoc on crops, just as regular leapers did when they found themselves near civilization. Even zombified, their overall behavior stayed the same. Considering the sheer quantity of them, it might even lead to a food shortage in the affected villages.

I sent my consciousness back to the mountains and studied the army of zombie leapers once again.

First thing first, I need to deal with that lake to prevent them from multiplying even more. I calculated how much mana I had left and unleashed a Light spell on the lake, the same one I had taught Mine.

Aaaand...boom! No more lake.

After that, I locked onto my targets and unleashed a torrent of spells. Once you mastered magic, you could learn how to strike targets from afar by combining offensive spells and detection spells. The only downside was, it cost a *boatload* of mana. With how weak my current body was, I knew I was in for an entire day of bed rest tomorrow.

But I have to exterminate those monsters—for the Mercures.

Having dealt with the lake, I moved on to the zombie leapers in the river nearby.

The riverbank... Boom! Underwater... Boom! One more for good measure... Boom!

I tore through them. Light Magic was especially efficient against zombie monsters, so the leapers had zero chance of survival.

I didn't know if the Cerveau Cathedral knew that the monsters in the mountains were zombies, but one thing was for sure: such creatures didn't come into being without human intervention.

With the current state of magic in this country, who could have the knowledge to turn monsters into zombies? More importantly, why did they do it? This situation is baffling.

When I was sure there were no more zombie leapers in the river, I tackled the ones in the mountains. I had to track them all one by one, which made the entire process quite tedious. It would've been faster to destroy the mountain range altogether, but that would've meant killing thousands of innocent creatures in the process, which I didn't want to do. Instead, I painstakingly tracked every single zombie leaper and killed them, one shot at a time.

It took me some time, but I managed to finish the job while the messenger was arguing with Char. I had almost no mana left, and my head was spinning—it seemed I'd reached my limits.

Phew, I've exterminated every single one of these insignificant hoppers. Just need to tell Char before I collapse. After that, the only thing left would be to deal with that infuriating messenger. What should I do with him? I really don't want to just let him leave unpunished... Aha! I have an idea.

That man worked at the Cerveau Cathedral. Perhaps I could use him to learn more about what went on in the five hundred years since my death.

I've wondered this since learning more about them—could the Motar Faith have an idea of what caused almost all magic to disappear?

The saints and holy knights were supposedly more powerful than anyone in the Mercure family, so it was likely that they knew stronger spells than Char and

the others. Maybe, just *maybe*, these spells were the very ones that had “disappeared” after my death. If a record of those spells existed, and the Faith had it in their possession, they could be hogging the most powerful ones for themselves to ensure that no one would ever dare to cross them—the Mercure family, for instance.

Perhaps the Motar Faith is the key to unraveling the mystery behind the sudden decline in magic.

Char was about to reach for a pen to sign the mission contract when I raised a hand to stop him.

“Wait.”

“What’s wrong, Lam?” he asked, shooting me a quizzical look.

I silently signaled to him that I had something to talk to him about later before turning back to the messenger. “There’s something I’d like to discuss regarding your request.”

The man sighed and slowly moved his head to look at me, as if I was bothering him. “What is it *now*?”

“This mission will force the House of Mercure to make many sacrifices. We’ve never asked for additional compensation in the past, but we simply cannot afford to take this request on without receiving something of equal value in return.”

“What, so you want more money? How greedy. Well, I suppose I shouldn’t have expected anything else from the daughter of a social climber like your father.” He was just as curt with me as he’d been with Char, perhaps due to the fact that I also had mana.

Well, he’s right that my father is greedy, but it’s not money I’m after.

I put on my most amiable smile. “We don’t need more money, no. In exchange for dealing with the monsters, we’d like to take a look at the cathedral’s book collection.”

The messenger gaped at me. He clearly hadn’t been expecting such a request. Char eyed me with surprise as well.

“I’ve always wondered what kind of books the Cerveau Cathedral kept in its collection, you see. I would love to read them.”

“Huh? B-Books?” the monk stammered.

I nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, books. There must be some rare tomes in the cathedral that aren’t available anywhere else. Are there not?”

The man stayed silent for a few seconds, a look of utter bewilderment on his face, before eventually snapping back to reality. “D-Don’t be ridiculous! Even if we happened to own such tomes, why would we let an outsider like you read them?!”

His argument was sound. But I really wanted to read these books, so I couldn’t care less about his objection! I *had* to see them to understand what was going on in the world, and I would stop at nothing to achieve my goal.

“I’m sure you’ll find a way to get me the permission. I have faith in you. If you ever find yourself in need of, ah, *assistance*, please feel free to come to me.” I punctuated my sentence with the sweetest smile I could muster.

You see, unbeknownst to him, I had cast a *teeny tiny* little spell on the monk—nothing harmful, of course, just quite unpleasant. Let’s just say he might soon discover that his body odor would gradually worsen over the next few days.

How’s that for payback! Despite how infuriating he was, I didn’t want to *harm* him. Besides, I had almost no mana left, so a bad smell it was.

He should consider himself lucky to escape with just that after crossing me, the witch of legends! I could have done much worse. Another fun effect of the spell was that it would spread to anyone who spent too much time around him. *You want us to deal with an outbreak of zombie leapers? Fine! Then you can deal with an outbreak of stinky monks in return! An eye for an eye, an outbreak for an outbreak! Bring it back to your lair and let all those people who seek to ruin the Mercure family suffer!!! Maybe then you’ll find yourself more inclined to get me the permission to see these books.*

I *could* break into the cathedral if I wanted to, but I’d rather get in with proper authorization. I still lacked information about the Motar Faith, so proceeding with caution seemed like the smarter choice.

Char signed the papers and escorted the monk back to the door. The man was acting as pompous as ever as he climbed into the carriage that would take him back to the cathedral.

Heh. He has no idea what's coming his way.

Fouet headed to his room for a well-deserved break, while Char came to join me in the drawing room again.

"You did something to him, didn't you?" he said, flashing me a knowing smile.

"My, you're quite sharp." Char had a natural talent for magic, but he had been getting even better at detecting it since he'd started studying Aurora's books. "I just made it so he would be more inclined to accept my request. You don't need to worry."

"I'm not worried. You seemed so pleased with yourself, I was just curious about why." The smile on his face morphed into a serious look. "Still, you should be careful of the Motar Faith. No one knows what their saints are capable of."

They must've been quite dangerous for Char to be so wary of them.

"Have you ever met one?" I asked.

"They don't appear in public often, but one came to the Tête Kingdom when I was a child. They were wearing a hooded cloak and looked somewhat...*eerie*."

"That was quite a long time ago."

That meant the saints didn't come to the kingdom often. I supposed that made sense: the Motar Faith was prevalent in many nations and there were only ten saints. The Tête Kingdom was a small country with little influence, so it was understandable that they wouldn't prioritize a visit here. That was probably for the better; the bishop was annoying enough, having holy knights and saints around would just make things worse. I really wanted to see one for myself, but if they never came to the kingdom, there was nothing I could do about it.

I snapped myself back to reality and looked up at my husband. "Char, there's something I need to tell you about the bishop's mission."

"What is it?"

I was glad he had started listening to me without complaining when I asked him to. It made my life a lot easier. “I’ve already killed all of them, so you don’t need to bother with it.”

Char stared at me like I’d grown a second head. “What?”

“Someone from the cathedral will probably contact you about it in the near future.”

He slowly sat down on the couch. “What in the world are you talking about?” he asked, blinking at me.

“I told you, I killed the zombie leapers, and...” I couldn’t finish my sentence as a wave of dizziness hit me. My legs felt like jelly and I felt my center of gravity tilt toward the ground.

That’s no good. I’m going to fall!

“Lam!” Char exclaimed, catching me before I could collide face-first against the floor.

Thank goodness. I knew those spells would take a toll on me. Wish my body could hurry up and become as resilient as a regular person’s, if not better.

“It seems that I may have overdone it. Remote magic consumes so much mana, my body couldn’t keep up,” I said to explain my sudden bout of dizziness.

Char didn’t reply to me, just called for Fouet. “Fouet, head immediately to the Ouragan Mountains and see what’s going on with the monsters. I need to take care of Lam.”

“Aw, man. Fine.” He pouted at the sudden increase in his workload. Teasingly, he added, “Can you even take care of someone, Lord Char?”

“Lam is not merely ‘someone.’ She’s my wife,” Char said unabashedly.

Fouet has a point. I’m a bit worried...

Fouet called Barre, refusing to work alone on his break, and the two of them headed to the mountains. They had both learned the rough teleportation spell from Aurora’s book, so it shouldn’t take them too long to reach and survey the entire area.

As I once again found myself getting bridal carried by Char to my room, I reflected on my earlier actions.

I got really angry when that man started disrespecting the Mercure family—my family.

Back when I'd first regained my memory, I'd wanted nothing more than to divorce Char and get out of this wretched place. Now, I felt uneasy at the idea of leaving them alone for a minute. I wanted to free everyone in this family from the absurd rules their predecessors had dreamed up and protect them from those who wished to harm them.

I've gotten that attached to the Mercures, huh? Humans' desires sure are fickle things. I never would've thought things could turn out this way back then. I just couldn't help it. After learning about everything the Mercures had been through, I found myself coming to like them.

Char brought me to my room and lowered me onto the bed. "I know you're an incredible mage, but no one can cast spells from such a long distance," he said, still not believing me.

"I can," I managed to reply, despite how fuzzy my head felt. "It uses a ton of mana, though."

He was visibly skeptical about my explanation. Despite that, he diligently cared for me as we talked.

I didn't expect him to be so good at looking after others. I'm surprised.

I'd had to nurse my former disciples back to health many times in the past, but it'd been a really long time since anyone took care of me like this.

When Char was done buzzing about my room, arranging things for me, he returned to my side. "Go to sleep. You've been way too active lately, so your body must have reached its limits. I'm giving the kids a week off from tomorrow onward. Take this opportunity to rest."

"Hey—" I was about to protest and tell him not to make decisions for me, but he started stroking my hair and the words died in my throat. My body tensed at the unfamiliar gesture.

“It’s an order from the head of the family. Fouet and Barre are surveying the Ouragan Mountains. If you really managed to kill all these monsters from afar, then I want you to teach me how you did it, but only once you feel better. So, get some rest.”

“F-Fine,” I reluctantly agreed. “I’d end up causing you more trouble if I pushed myself anyway.”

“Also...” Char stopped petting my hair and studied me intently with his crimson eyes. In that moment, he felt incredibly close—both physically and emotionally. “I know you have your memories from five hundred years ago, but you won’t convince me *everyone* could use these types of spells back then. Just who in the world are you, Lam?”

I stayed silent.

It’s fine—he still hasn’t figured out that I’m Aurora.

He was such a huge fan of hers that it’d be all sorts of awkward if he ever learned about my true identity. Well, he probably wouldn’t believe me even if I told him the truth anyway.

“I’ve relied on you a lot recently,” he said.

“I’m just doing what I want. Since I wound up reincarnated here, I might as well have a good time.”

“Even so, to me, you’ve become irreplaceable.”

He must be talking about my magic. From that perspective, it was true that I’d contributed a lot to the House of Mercure as a whole.

“Prepare yourself, Lam. When you’ve recovered, I plan to spoil you as my heart desires.” A mischievous smile curled on Char’s lips, and he dropped a kiss on my forehead. It was so brief that I didn’t have time to react.

Did he... Did he just kiss me?! And what does he mean by “spoil me”?! I really couldn’t understand this man. Ugh...

I was so embarrassed that my mind went blank, and I passed out in front of Char for the second time.

“What?! The monsters have been exterminated to the last?!” Avare, the bishop of the Cerveau Cathedral exclaimed.

It had only been a few days since he’d sent a messenger to the Mercure estate to dump the task on them, yet his subordinate had just reported to him that the monsters had been dealt with. The upper half of his corpulent body had leaned forward when he’d shouted, while the rest of him remained comfortably nestled in the plush chair. The rings adorning each of his plump fingers glimmered in the light.

The monk who had come to bring the news shrank back under Avare’s intense gaze. “Yes. The lake in the next nation over, in which the monsters had been breeding, has been destroyed as well. The traces indicate that the monsters have been killed using magic, but no one knows who did it.”

“Such a large-scale extermination *must* have had witnesses. Did no one see anything? What’s going on?!”

“We’re at a complete loss. From what we were told, countless rays of light rained upon the mountain. In the next instant, all the monsters were dead.”

Avare brought a hand to his flabby jaw, deep in thought.

I don’t know who did it or why, but they’ve truly saved our hides. The cardinal asked me to deal with their escaped test subjects, but I had no idea how to, and the neighboring nation refused to help. To whoever you are, good job!

He hadn’t been informed that any holy knight or saint had been sent to deal with the issue, meaning that it must’ve been handled by an unrelated third party.

It definitely wasn’t the Mercures—they couldn’t pull off anything like this.

At any rate, the job was dealt with and Avare could finally rest easy. Why *had* he been the one tasked with dealing with the zombie leapers in the first place, when it was some higher-up who had accidentally let them slip away? What a hassle. The neighboring country’s mages refused to lift a finger to help, so he had ended up dumping the matter on the Mercures, though he had been aware they didn’t have the manpower to deal with so many monsters.

“What should we do, Your Excellency?”

Avare hummed to himself, then declared, “This must be a blessing from our god, Motar, himself! He has taken pity on us and dealt with these monsters in our stead or sent someone to handle the situation!”

He didn’t want to give the problem any more thought, so he decided to claim it was Motar’s doing and call it a day.

The monk’s face lit up. “Ooh! How blessed we are!” he exclaimed, bringing both hands in front of his chest to offer a prayer of gratitude to their god.

Avare only believed in money and nothing else, but most of the clergymen in the cathedral truly believed in Motar, so his haphazard declaration had worked. That settled that. There was, however, one other problem weighing on Avare’s mind.

Why is it that my subordinates all smell so foul recently?

He felt that, these days, no matter where he walked in the cathedral, he could never escape the smell of body odor. This didn’t use to be the case, so what had happened?

The monks bathe every night, yet they smell worse and worse with each passing day...

Avare was at his wit’s end. The sour scent of sweat lingered in every corner of the cathedral, and there was no way to get rid of it. People had even stopped coming to pray! If rumor started spreading among the nobility and they stopped sending donations, it would spell disaster for the cathedral’s finances. He had to find a solution, and *fast*.

The most baffling thing was that *no one* except for the cathedral staff had this problem. The visitors all smelled normal. Avare tentatively smelled his own armpit. *Why do I stink too?!*

He didn’t notice the face of his aide suddenly turning pale as he observed Avare’s behavior.



In the royal palace of the Lèvres Kingdom, a man gazed pensively out at the Ouragan Mountains. The servants lining the walls of the opulent room couldn’t

help but sigh, utterly enthralled by the scene before them. With golden hair and eyes as deep and blue as the ocean, the first prince of the Lèvres Kingdom was a sight to behold. His beauty was famed not only within the kingdom but throughout the neighboring nations as well.

“His Highness is as radiant as ever on this fine day.”

“Not only is he a feast for the eyes, but he is the most competent out of all his siblings, *and* kind to boot. His Highness truly is perfect.”

“He would be...if only his fashion sense weren’t so abysmal.”

The servants scanned the prince from head to toe.

“Tell me about it. Why is his entire suit covered in *pumpkins*?! What is the royal stylist *doing*?”

“His Highness allegedly told him to let him wear whatever he wants during his free time, but those colors are an absolute eyesore. Red and green with pumpkins? *Really*?”

“We cannot let anyone else see him like this! His Highness is the most suitable candidate for the throne. We ought to ensure he becomes king after His Majesty, whether he likes it or not!”

“Exactly. His Highness is the only person to have ever shown kindness to us mana wielders, after all.”

The servants were getting louder and louder, but the prince paid them no mind, his attention still fixed on the distant mountains.

“Remote magic is supposed to have vanished long ago, so who in the world did this?” he muttered, his eyes lowering wistfully.



The day after the bishop’s messenger’s visit, the twins returned from the mountains. I was still bedridden, so I couldn’t listen to Barre’s report with Char, but he kindly summarized it for me when I asked. I was still somewhat flustered by what he’d done the other day, but I tried my hardest not to let it show—not when Char himself seemed so unaffected.

It probably didn’t mean much to him. I felt like I was getting toyed with, and it

left me feeling frustrated.

“After searching the entire mountain range, we didn’t find a single one of the monsters the bishop’s messenger mentioned. It seems that they’ve really been wiped out. Several people told us that they saw light raining from the sky upon the mountain on the day of the messenger’s visit,” Barre had reported to Char.

Before, it would’ve taken the twins much longer to gather the information and return to the mansion, but now that they could use Aurora’s rough teleportation spell, they were able to drastically reduce their travel time.

“I can’t believe you *actually* wiped out all those monsters,” Char said. I decided not to complain about his lack of trust in me; remote magic was such a foreign concept to him that I could understand his skepticism.

“You wouldn’t have wanted to deal with a never-ending swarm of monsters, would you?” I asked. “I destroyed their nest too—a lake in the Lèvres Kingdom.”

Char’s handsome features contorted into a bitter expression. “Those bastards from the cathedral. They couldn’t be bothered to do their job, so they dumped their mess on us,” he muttered. “This should’ve been a job for the mages of the Lèvres Kingdom, not us.”

“Oh, they have mages too?” I asked. “I’ve never heard of them before. Are they nobles like the Mercures?”

Char shook his head. “No, it’s a bit different over there. There’s no noble house specialized in magic like ours, so their mages are mostly independent. Though, apparently, a member of the current royal family is a mana wielder.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, the first prince, or so I’ve heard. But he doesn’t take on jobs like we do. I’m assuming the cathedral didn’t know who to commission over there. Asking the prince would be too risky. What if he died on the job? But finding an independent mage to take on the mission would’ve been a huge hassle as well. Not everyone who has mana can use magic, after all.”

He was right. Most people with mana were probably like the old Lam; their magic might trigger by accident now and then, but without proper training, they wouldn’t be able to do anything with it. The cathedral would’ve needed

someone skilled in offensive magic, not just any mana wielder.

“We’d never have managed without you. Thank you, Lam,” Char said.

“Don’t mention it. That messenger just got on my nerves—I had to do *something*. Speaking of, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask. I saw the Lightning Magic book I translated for you not too long ago back on the shelf. Have you finished learning the spells already?”

“Yeah.”

“That was a pretty hefty book, though, wasn’t it?” I already knew Char could learn a spell after seeing it once, but it seemed he didn’t even need to *actually* see it; just reading about it in a book was enough. I once again found more than a few reasons to be impressed by him.



It took another ten days for the messenger of the Cerveau Cathedral to pay us another visit. The moment the carriage door opened, a foul stench wafted out, and I couldn’t help but wrinkle my nose in disgust. Char threw me a reproachful look, as if to say, “*Really?* You couldn’t have chosen another spell?”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, feeling compelled to apologize.

To be fair, I hadn’t thought things would get to this point. I’d expected the messenger to be back within three days at most, not *ten*.

I can’t believe he put up with the stench for that long. Clergymen are nothing if not persistent. Unfortunately, I couldn’t remove the spell just yet—not until the messenger gave me what I’d requested.

“Lady Mercure, do you know what has happened to me? My body odor has gotten worse and worse since my last visit. No matter how many times I’ve bathed, the stench won’t go away. You did something to me, didn’t you?” he said, throwing me an accusatory gaze. He must’ve remembered my words from last time and connected the dots.

“Well, I don’t know what’s causing your issue, but I can certainly remove the stench. I promised you I’d help if you needed ‘assistance,’ after all,” I replied with a sweet smile.

“So it *was* you! Fix it, right now!”

“I’ll consider it once you bring me the books I asked for. Ah, I’m mostly after history books, so look for those in priority. If you find anything that documents what happened in the past five hundred years, that’d be particularly helpful.”

“You heretic! I’ll have you arrested!” he bellowed.

“I mean, you *could* do that, but you’ll have to live with that stench for the rest of your life. How about you go tell your superiors that the Countess of Mercure is the one who put that spell on you? I’d *love* to see their reaction,” I said airily.

The monk clenched his teeth in frustration. It wasn’t that he didn’t *want* to tell on me; it was simply that he *couldn’t*. As things stood, other than the Mercures, no one knew I could use magic. If he told his superiors that I was the cause of the stench plaguing the cathedral, they’d never believe him. Besides, the Mercures specialized in offensive spells; why would they use a *body odor* spell of all things? His superiors probably wouldn’t even believe that the Mercures knew that kind of magic. In the end, he’d only make a fool of himself.

The man clicked his tongue and produced a few books from the breast pocket of his tunic, which he handed to me under Char’s and Fouet’s watchful eyes. I accepted the books and immediately started leafing through the pages.

“It wasn’t easy to sneak them out of the cathedral,” the monk said. “These are the only three ancient history books we have. The important tomes are all stored at the Faith’s mother church.”

“You seem to be telling the truth,” I said, having made sure these were actually history books. “All right, then. I shall come to the cathedral within the next few days to return them to you.”

“No, I’ll come get them. I don’t want you anywhere near the cathedral.”

“Why? I’m just a harmless countess,” I said innocently.

“You seem anything but,” he replied, narrowing his eyes at me. However, he didn’t have any proof of what I had done, so he couldn’t outright accuse me of anything. Most people still believed that I was just a frail, scaredy-cat countess. Even my little stunt at the last party I’d attended with Char had been deemed a fluke! Although, to be perfectly honest, this worked in my favor. Considering

the dreadful state of magic in the current world, I'd never have been able to explain myself if anyone had asked. For now, I was fine pretending to be a helpless little lady.

"As promised, I've removed the body odor spell," I said. "When you get back to the cathedral, go take a little walk around the place. Those who were contaminated with the spell should be cured within a few days once they get in your vicinity."

It basically worked just like the bad odor spell, but in reverse.

"Huh? O-Oh! It's true! I don't smell anymore... I think?" It seemed that the monk's nose had become numb to the stench, but I wasn't too worried about it; his sense of smell should recover soon enough.

After he'd left, I took the books to the study to read them. Char must've been curious about their contents, as he picked one up and started reading alongside me. But we quickly ran into an issue.

"Who're they kidding? The important parts have been blacked out," I said.

"They have." Char frowned. "Can you make it readable with your magic?"

"Probably. It doesn't look like there's any magic or anything at play here. They've just been painted over with ink."

Sure enough, one quick spell to remove the ink blotches later, and the hidden text was revealed. "It says here that the Motar Faith was founded five hundred years ago. Pretty much just after I died, huh?"

"Lam, I've been meaning to ask you about that. What did you die of in your past life?"

I wished I could reply to his question, but even I had no idea! "I don't know," I told him. "I remember my job as a mage and my disciples, but I can't seem to recall my last moments."

The two of us went back to reading in silence until Char stumbled upon something intriguing. "Apparently, the Motar Faith was born *here*. The book says this region used to be home to a country named the Ventre Kingdom. I would've thought the Faith originated from the nation where their mother

church is located, but apparently not.”

“I’m actually from the Ventre Kingdom,” I said. “It was much bigger than the current Tête Kingdom. The capital was called Front; it was a canal town with waterways everywhere.”

Char stared at me in silence before saying, “Your description matches the one in the book. This kind of knowledge isn’t taught in schools... You really *do* have your memories from five hundred years ago, don’t you?”

“That’s what I keep telling you!”

Perhaps Char would *finally* believe me now. He looked like he wanted to add something, but ended up deciding against it and dropped his gaze back to his book. When he reached a certain page, his brow contorted into a frown. “There was a large-scale mage hunt four hundred years ago?!”

“What?! Let me see!” I said, peering at the text.

According to this book, during that time period, mages had started being labeled as “heretics,” which led to a widespread hunt in the Ventre Kingdom. In the ensuing violence, most of them had lost their lives—and the instigator had been the Motar Faith. They’d sent their saints and the newly created Holy Order of Chivalry to track down and eliminate the mages.

“How did things get to that point in just a hundred years?” I muttered in horror. My disciples had most likely passed away already by that point, so they hopefully hadn’t had to live through the persecution that followed. Still, I couldn’t help but feel a whirlwind of rage well up within me.

Was the Motar Faith really responsible for the decline in magic?

Char and I finished reading the books. Other than the few aforementioned passages, they were mostly propaganda for the Motar Faith, with overblown epic tales of the saints peppered throughout. There was no other mention of mages or magic in general.

I want to know more! At least there was some information about the Holy Father as well. *One of the censored sections says that the Holy Father has been alive since the Faith was born, but that’s most likely a lie. Still, I wonder why they chose to black it out. It doesn’t strike me as something they need to hide.*

Did the person who blacked it out do it by accident?

This made me even more curious about the Holy Father. From what I'd read, it seemed that he never appeared in public. Some people wondered if he even existed...

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Cépieux, the bishop's messenger, was pacing furiously throughout the cathedral.

"Those cursed mages," he muttered through clenched teeth. "How dare they give *me* orders. I'm the bishop's aide!"

Cépieux hailed from a noble family and held a high rank within the Motar Faith in the kingdom. Over the years, he had steadily risen through the ranks to become the bishop's trusted assistant. It was precisely because of his rank that he had been able to sneak the history books out of the cathedral without raising suspicion. However, he was a very arrogant man, and his pride had been deeply wounded by the Countess of Mercure's manipulations. He couldn't stand the thought of being bested by her.

I can't report her to the higher-ups, though. They'd never believe me, and I'll end up looking like a fool. While he did hold some level of power within the cathedral, he knew that making baseless accusations would undoubtedly backfire, and he'd end up tarnishing his own reputation. That was a situation to avoid at all costs. *It's so infuriating!*

He finished his round in the cathedral (which, thankfully, no longer smelled of sweat) and headed outside for some fresh air. The cathedral looked out onto the capital's central square, which was always bustling with activity. This was where the city hosted its special events and markets. Other large buildings bordered the plaza, including the merchants' guild and the bank. Being located right in between the noble district and the commoners' quarter, the city square was a unique place where nobles in disguise could mingle incognito with commoners. Although, only the wealthiest of commoners could afford to live this close to the plaza.

Hmm? Those nobles over there didn't even bother disguising themselves. Cépieux's gaze landed on a group of noble ladies who had made no effort to

conceal their identities. They were surrounded by guards and servants and had claimed an entire corner of the city square for themselves. They were so strikingly out of place that no passersby dared to go anywhere near them. The girls didn't seem to mind, though, too engrossed in their conversation to notice the curious glances directed their way.

"That girl is getting on my nerves!" he heard one of the young ladies exclaim.

"Indeed! We invited her to our tea parties out of the goodness of our hearts, and she had the audacity to refuse us! Unbelievable!" another said.

"I cannot believe it!" a third chimed in. "Not attending my party is one thing, but Lady Lilyrossa's father is a *marquis*! Rejecting her invitation is simply unacceptable! She's only the Countess of Mercure. Who does she think she is?!"

"I would understand her acting all high and mighty if she was as powerful as Lord Char, but all she can do is make wigs fly and harden her skin! What a waste of air she is!"

Cépieux's ear twitched. *Are they... Are they talking about the Countess of Mercure?!*

He sneaked closer to the plaza to hear their conversation better.

"We ought to remind her of her place before she lets it get to her head. To think that Lord Char has to put up with having that woman as his wife. The poor thing! I wish I could free him from her clutches. Wouldn't you agree, Lady Lilyrossa?"

The girl at the center of the group nodded and parted her vividly red-painted lips to say, "That's *right*. I swear, I will make that girl pay!"

From what he'd picked up from the conversation, Cépieux assumed she was who the other girls had addressed as Lilyrossa, the daughter of some marquis.

"All we need now is to find a way to drag her out of that stupid mansion. But the Mercures almost never appear in society, and she's refused all our invitations..."

"One of my friends used to work as a handmaiden for her. According to her,

the countess never leaves her room. She was putting up a front at the party, but the rumors of her being a sniveling coward seem to be true!”

“Does anyone have an idea on how we can lure her out?”

The young women’s conversation had given Cépieux an idea of his own. He made their way toward them, unable to stand still any longer.

Chapter Nine: The Countess and the Noisy Hair Balls

A letter from the bishop's messenger had arrived at the mansion that morning. Apparently, something had come up, and he couldn't retrieve the books himself anymore, so he asked me to meet him at the "Black Lizard"—wherever *that* was.

"Where even is this place? Wouldn't it be faster for me to bring the books back to the cathedral?" I muttered as I felt inside the envelope, hoping for some more indicators of the location. Sure enough, the messenger had included a map with his letter. "An inn, hmm? That shouldn't be too much trouble. I can get there in no time with my magic. But why an inn? Is it some new form of bullying I'm unaware of?" It was certainly odd, calling a noble to an inn, of all places.

Oh well. He even went through the trouble of drawing a map, I suppose I'll go.

As I was studying the map, a hand suddenly appeared from behind and snatched the letter out of my grip. "What's this? A secret rendezvous invitation? From a man, perhaps?"

"How is *that* where your mind immediately goes?" I reached out to take the letter back, but Char, being taller than me, held it just out of reach. How frustrating! "It's a letter from the cathedral's messenger. He can't come collect the books anymore, so he's asked me to bring them to the address in the letter."

"An inn in the middle of the city?" Char said after glancing at the map. "I'll go with you."

"No need. I'll be just fine on my own."

A pensive look crossed his face and he said slowly, "Lam. You *do* realize that a married lady going to meet with another man at an inn is bound to raise some unsavory rumors, right? Even if your intentions are entirely innocent."

I gaped at him. "Really?!"

“You really know nothing of the world, do you?”

“Well, no. I never married in my past life, and was a shut-in for most of this one. But I don’t think someone raised in that dreadful schoolhouse has any right to talk about *my* lack of common sense,” I said. Char sighed and handed the letter back to me. “Do you think the bishop’s messenger is as clueless as us? That’s why he invited me to an inn?”

“I doubt it. Either way, I’m coming with you.”

“Fine.”

I was still rather unfamiliar with this era’s social practices, so I’d started making an effort to study them, mostly by reading the books in Char’s collection and asking him questions. I felt like I understood the basics, but I kept putting off studying how to interact with the opposite gender, so I was still painfully unaware of how to behave around men.

With that settled, Char and I grabbed the books and headed out. I drew some patterns on the ground of the courtyard and used my magic to teleport us to the spot. The symbols would stay on the ground, meaning that anyone from the Mercure family could use them as a catalyst to teleport wherever they wished.

I expect the kids won’t dare to use them, though. Back when I was studying under my teacher, I would sneakily use her teleportation circles for fun, but the Mercure kids have received such a strict education that the idea probably wouldn’t even cross their minds.

True to its name, everything in the Black Lizard inn was black: from the roof to the walls and even the flooring. It wasn’t even noon yet, but for some reason, there were already several carriages parked before the building. I spotted the church’s carriage, but couldn’t help feeling curious about the others.

They’re very fancy. These must belong to nobles, right? Is this inn popular among high society? I wondered.

Char stopped to study the crests painted on the carriages, and I had to grab him by the hand to pull him along. We stepped into the building and the innkeeper took us to the room where the bishop’s messenger was awaiting us. I noted that the walls of the inn were covered with black roses, the emblem of

the Motar Faith. It seemed that the people running this inn were quite devout believers. In the language of flowers, black roses symbolized eternal, undying love.

If they're so passionate about "love," they could make an effort and be nicer to us mages, I thought glumly. The Motar Faith sure was full of contradictions.

We stepped into the large room the innkeeper had led us to, but, to my surprise, there was no one inside. There was, however, a large tapestry with an enormous rose embroidered on it that caught my eye.

"The bishop's aide hasn't left the building, so he should be with you shortly," the innkeeper told us.

His carriage was parked in front of the inn, so I suppose we just have to wait. However, even after several minutes had passed, there was no sign of the bishop's messenger.

"He sure is dallying. Is he making us waste our time on purpose? Let's just leave the books here and head home," I suggested.

"I'd love to take you up on that offer, but that monk seems like the kind of person who'd claim he hasn't received the books unless you hand them to him directly," Char said.

"True... I'll make sure to put a couple of spells on the books when he arrives; one that'll confirm he's received them, and another one that'll make his body hair grow every time he tells a lie. This should give us some insurance without bothering anyone else."

I had received complaints from *everyone* in the Mercure household because of the body odor spell I'd used on the messenger last time, and I'd learned my lesson. This time, I wouldn't be using such an unpleasant curse.

"I suppose it's fine, as long as you don't stink up the place again... Still, you're downright terrifying," Char said. I didn't miss the way he shuddered.

"It'll be fine. Monks of the Motar Faith are well-known for their honesty and integrity. I'm sure he won't end up covered in hair."

"I suppose, yes," Char said hesitantly.

“You’re really walking on eggshells around the Faith. It’s unusual coming from you.”

Judging by the expression that crawled over his face, my words had hit the mark. “We could easily deal with the Cerveau Cathedral, but it’d be a hassle if the saints got involved. As things stand, I’m not sure that we’re strong enough to win against them. I just don’t want our house to fall.”

That explained why Char was so meek around people of the Faith. His reasoning made sense; we still had no idea whatsoever what the saints were capable of.

“You’re doing it all for your family, huh? Ensuring that none of them fall victim to the Faith... It’s very commendable of you, Char.”

I meant it as a praise, but he turned his face away from me sullenly.

Aw, is he feeling shy? He’s not used to receiving compliments, after all. I’d noticed he had a tendency to hide his own feelings.

“Still, the messenger is taking really, really long to get here. I’m going to take a peek in the hallway,” I said before leaving the room.

The inn was a two-story building, with the first floor housing the reception area and dining hall, while the second floor was reserved for guest rooms. The dining hall was rather small, as most guests tended to order their meals directly to their room.

After checking the hallway of the second floor, I made my way down the stairs, the heels of my shoes clicking against the wooden steps.

“Lady Mercure?”

I had almost reached the bottom when I heard someone call my name. A surprised sound escaped my lips. Looking around, I spotted a group of young noble ladies with their guards and servants standing near the foot of the stairs.

I’ve seen these girls before... I think it must’ve been at the last party I attended with Char! Unlike the old Lam, I could more or less remember people’s faces, and these girls’ over-the-top dresses definitely made them hard to forget. What is a group of noble ladies doing here, though? Do the carriages parked in front

of the inn belong to them?

First the bishop's messenger, now noble ladies—what was the deal with this inn, seriously? What was even stranger was that these girls seemed to have been waiting for me.

“You're all alone? How bold,” one of them giggled. “We've been waiting for an occasion to catch you away from Lord Char.”

Apparently, they wanted to talk to me or something?

I scanned the first floor, but found no trace of the bishop's messenger.

Where in the world has he disappeared to? I peered out the window, and saw that his carriage was gone. That was strange; I was positive I saw it parked in front of the inn when we'd arrived. I went over to the window and opened it to take a better look, but it really was gone.

Did he head back without meeting with us? But he's the one who suggested this establishment! I really don't understand... For now, I'll just head back to Char and let him know. If he's returned to the cathedral, there's no point in us waiting here any longer.

I turned around and was about to head up the stairs when one of the noble girls grabbed me by the arm.

“Hey! How dare you ignore Lady Lilyrossa?!” Her grip tightened around my arm.

“How rude!” one of her friends added with a nod.

I looked in the direction of the one they had called “Lady Lilyrossa.” She stood out in her excessively flamboyant dress, her expression dripping with arrogance as she glared at me, her guards flanking her on either side.

Oh! I recognize her now. It's the girl who tried to slap me at the party. Anyway.

“I was looking for someone,” I said calmly. “But since they're not here, I'll be heading home now.”

There. Now they can't say I've ignored them. Nevertheless, the girl still refused to let go of my arm. *I could easily shake her off, but should I really make*

a scene here?

As I hesitated, one of the girls standing next to Lilyrossa piped up, “If it’s the bishop’s aide you’re looking for, he had to leave due to an emergency.”

How did she know? Sure, his carriage had been there earlier, but I hadn’t mentioned a word about him. The situation was getting stranger and stranger.

“Did he seriously leave without saying a word to us?! And no one thought of letting us know?” I muttered to myself. I threw a reproachful glare at a nearby male staff member, who immediately averted his gaze. It seemed that he knew what was going on.

Something is really off with this inn.

Well, now that the messenger was gone, there was no point in Char and I staying here any longer. Right as I was about to leave, Lilyrossa stopped me *again*.

“Oh, Lady Mercure, are you looking for the bishop’s aide? Come with me, I’ll take you to him,” she said.

So she knows where he is? Yup, this is definitely some sort of scheme.

“Come on, let’s go!” she repeated.

“Hurry along now! Lady Lilyrossa has even arranged a carriage for you.”

“You don’t want to make the bishop’s aide wait, do you?”

The noble ladies and their servants crowded over me and practically pushed me out of the door. They couldn’t have been more suspicious if they had tried.

Why are they so insistent? I have no idea what the bishop’s messenger and these girls are scheming, but I might as well follow them and expose their intentions. It might give us some leverage against the Faith and make things easier for Char from now on.

It wasn’t like these girls could hurt me anyway, so I obediently climbed in the carriage they had arranged. Just to be safe, I cast the spell I had planned on putting on the bishop’s messenger on them. Now, their body hair would grow with every lie they told, which would make it easier for me to uncover whatever scheme they were plotting. That spell barely consumed any mana, and wouldn’t

leave any lasting signs on their bodies. I'd briefly considered using the same body odor spell I'd used on the monk, but I couldn't bring myself to do that to a group of noble girls—it'd be too cruel. Besides, I didn't want to get scolded by Char and the others again.

Speaking of Char, I sent him a message through magic to inform him of my plan.

Well then, let's see what these girls are up to. I noticed that some hair had already started growing on the arm of the one who was holding my arm. Not that I had any intention of letting her know or anything.

The carriage rattled and clattered on the road, and I noticed that we'd left the royal capital and were headed to the outskirts of town.

"Where exactly did the bishop's messenger go? Aren't we going too far?" I asked, my body swaying to the rhythm of the carriage.

It would've taken me less than a second with teleportation magic. I sighed inwardly. Carriages were so inefficient! I didn't voice my complaints out loud, though, and just went with the flow.

"His Excellency's aide is a very busy person, Lady Mercure. We are taking you to see him out of the kindness of our heart, so don't complain and show a little gratitude."

"That's right! We're using what little free time we have to help you. Be thankful!"

As they spoke, I noticed the hair on their fingers getting slightly thicker and longer. And the more they lied, the worse it'd get. They could shave it off, but it'd grow back again the second they let out another lie. I'd used that spell to have an easier time seeing through the girls' lies, but I hadn't expected their hair to grow quite this fast.

After a few minutes in the carriage, they seemed to have gotten bored of me and started chatting among each other. "Lady Lilyrossa, your earrings are absolutely stunning! And your dress suits you perfectly!"

"It truly does!"

“You and Lord Char would make the most *perfect* couple!”

Lilyrossa’s minions started showering her with compliments. For some reason, though, their eyebrows were getting thicker and thicker with every word they uttered.

Could it be that they don’t actually like her? There is more to noble girls than meets the eye, huh?

Before long, the carriage entered the forest lining the roadside. There was a path there, but it soon got quite narrow, to the point where the carriage wouldn’t be able to proceed farther—definitely not the kind of place a bishop’s messenger and a group of noble ladies would frequent on the regular.

Seriously, what’s that messenger’s deal? You won’t make me believe the “emergency” he had to deal with was in the forest, of all places. This reeks of a trap. I can feel the presence of monsters in the forest too.

Once we exited the carriage, the girls led me to a relatively large cabin in the woods.

“Reverend, we have brought Lady Mercure,” Lilyrossa said, standing outside the door.

“Everything’s ready on our end,” came the answer from inside the cabin.

Soon after, the door creaked open. The bishop’s messenger was standing in the hut alongside several other shady men.

A clergyman and a group of thugs... Now that’s an odd combination. I also noticed that one of them was holding a rope. I don’t know who these people are, but they’re all staring at me for some reason.

A sleazy grin curled on the lips of one of the thugs as he sauntered toward me. “Well, well, she’s a real looker. A pretty little thing like you is bound to fetch a nice sum. Plus, nobles are always easy cash.”

“Her personality is less than desirable, but she’s not bad on the eyes. I’m sure she’ll catch the attention of some foreign man,” the bishop’s messenger said, a sinister expression on his face.

Was it just my imagination, or did he say something really rude just now?

Either way, I decided to stay put and let the thugs bind my arms with their ropes. Making a scene here would only make this whole thing drag on.

“C’mon, guys. We’re taking the lady to our base.” One of the thugs signaled to his companions. Judging by their words from earlier, it seemed that they planned to sell me off somewhere.

To think their middleman was the bishop’s aide... A clergyman involved in human trafficking? What has this world come to?

For a moment, I considered using remote magic to track down their base and destroy it, like I’d done with the zombie leapers’ nest. However, tracking humans was trickier than monsters, and it drained a lot more mana. If I pushed myself too hard, I’d be left dizzy and exhausted, the same as the last time. While I considered what to do, the thugs shoved me outside and forced me into a carriage much shabbier than the one belonging to Lilyrossa and her minions.

I suppose my best option is to let them take me to their base and destroy it from the inside. Mana-wise, it’s much more cost-effective than remote magic, and, if they have other captives, I’ll be able to free them while I’m at it. Plus, if I found something incriminating on the bishop’s messenger, that’d be a bonus.

Lilyrossa and her minions stood off to the side, laughing smugly as I was forced into the shabby carriage. They seemed quite pleased with themselves, no doubt convinced that they were done with me.

“I can’t believe she fell for it! How idiotic is she?”

“Such a stupid girl isn’t worthy of Lord Char.”

“She’s hard to look at too. Hurry up and sell her! I don’t want to see her face ever again.”

One of the thugs climbed onto the coachman’s seat, while the others crammed into the carriage to keep an eye on me. The bishop’s messenger was watching the scene unfold from the sidelines, a pleased smirk on his face.

That louse. You want to play this game? Fine! I’ll put that body odor spell right back on you, I thought, and did just that. This time, though, I went with the version of the spell that didn’t transfer to others.

The thugs closed the curtains and the horse leading the carriage set off, taking us deeper into the forest. After several hours, we emerged from the woods and arrived in a dilapidated town. My kidnappers lifted the curtains up and the brightness of the sun flooded in—it was still light outside. This clearly wasn't the capital anymore, but we couldn't have traveled too far.

They parked the carriage in front of an old, run-down building before forcefully dragging me out of the carriage by the ropes binding my wrists. Then, they opened the doors of the building and shoved me inside.

"Get in! You better stay put, you hear me?"

I let out a little yelp as I stumbled to the ground. The door slammed shut behind me, followed by the sound of the men cackling as they locked it from the outside.

I can easily unlock it with my magic, you know.

I glanced around the dusty room. Thankfully, the windows allowed plenty of light to flood in, so I didn't have to strain my eyes to see. Several girls, all restrained with ropes, were lying on the ground like me, while others had managed to stand up or to drag themselves to sit against the walls.

Just as I thought, they have other victims. Judging by the quality of their dresses, it was highly likely that these girls were either nobles or hailed from wealthy merchant houses. It also didn't seem that they had been here for long.

"Where are you all from?" I asked. The girls, frozen in fear, eventually thawed enough to tell me who they were and what had happened. Just as I thought, they were all young noble ladies who had been abducted by these criminals. And speaking of them, it seemed that they were contractors who specialized in illicit activities.

"Don't worry, I'll get you all out of here," I said, offering the girls a reassuring smile. However, judging by the vacant stares they directed at the empty air, it looked like they didn't believe me.

I guess my delivery wasn't convincing enough. Oh, well. I stood up and used my magic to cut my ropes and the girls'.

"You're a *mage*?" one whispered. A few had gasped in shock at the sight of

my magic. It seemed that most people really weren't used to seeing mages anymore in this day and age.

"I'm Lam Mercure. Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you."

"Huh? You're the Countess of Mercure?! How did someone like you end up here?!" one exclaimed. It seemed that some of these girls knew of the Mercures.

I didn't reply. Instead, I headed toward the door and, with a quick spell, shattered the lock.

"Come on, now. How long are you going to keep cowering in there? We're escaping," I said, looking over my shoulder.

For a moment, the girls didn't move, staring at me with a mix of shock and fear. But once they realized they were free, they scrambled to their feet.

I could go straight home, but I'd like to catch these thugs if possible. If I let them escape, they would most definitely continue their nefarious activities, and that wouldn't do. I needed to put an end to it. *They can't have gone too far.*

I decided to head out alone first, in case some of them had stayed behind. Sure enough, a few were standing guard outside the building. They immediately spotted me and rushed over.

"How the hell did you get out?! And what happened to your bindings?!"

"I severed them all with magic," I replied airily. "Oh, and I broke the door lock while I was at it."

"What?! You little... You're just a piece of merchandise, so go back inside and stay put!" one of the men bellowed before pouncing at me.

Hot-tempered much? Well, don't mind if I counterattack then.

I waited for him to get close before thrusting both hands forward, sending him flying with a burst of magic.



“Phew, that’s one of these insignificant insects taken care of. More importantly, what is this place?” I muttered, scanning my surroundings. There was no road, just a path worn in the bare, reddish-brown earth. A small, unfamiliar village lay at one end, while the forest I’d just come from loomed at the other.

“Shut up and get back insi— Aaah!”

“How dare yo— Aaah!”

The two remaining criminals lurched at me, and I dealt with them in the same way I had with their colleague. They went crashing into a stone wall, and I winced when I saw it crumble under the impact.

I may have gone a bit overboard... Thankfully, it was just a random wall and not part of a house, so breaking it probably wasn’t that big of a deal.

With no more of those jerks to get in my way, I resumed my inspection of the area, but it proved fruitless; I had no clue where I was. As I stood there, wracking my brain to make sense of my surroundings, a timid voice came from behind me.

“Um, considering we did not travel very far, I believe we might be in the town of Crimine,” one of the girls told me. “It’s a makeshift settlement tucked away by the edge of the forest where crooks with ties to nobles and the royal family tend to hide.”

“I see. So these ruffians aren’t just working with the Motar Faith, but they’ve got connections to the royal family too. Good grief, the ruling class of this era is rotten to the core.”

“Do you think we can leave now?” the girl asked, glancing around nervously.

“Yes. I’ll handle the rest of them when they return, don’t worry,” I assured her. “What’s your name? How did you end up here?”

“I’m Jaune, the daughter of Viscount Lucie. I angered some higher-ranking noble lady, and she hired these ruffians to abduct me.”

“Same thing here, though I had the pleasure of angering the bishop’s aide myself.”

As we spoke, the sky began to darken unnaturally in the direction of the forest. I squinted and noticed what seemed like countless tiny black specks moving about.

“Lady Mercure, what is that?” Jaune asked, looking up at the sky nervously. “It looks like it’s getting closer to us...”

“That’s...a pack of flying monsters!” I realized with horror. What horrible timing! I needed to hurry and teleport the other girls back to the royal capital before the monsters found us.

I looked around for a spot with enough space for me to draw a teleportation circle. It would be safer and more mana-efficient than if I tried to teleport them with my magic alone.

The path should do; it’s mostly dirt. As for the coordinates, I’ll just send them to the Mercure estate for the time being.

The earth of the path was a bit firm, but, since it wasn’t paved, I didn’t struggle *too* much to draw the symbols. But before I could finish, the rest of the kidnappers returned. I’d made quick work of the ones on watch, but, this time, there were a lot more of them.

“What the hell are you doing here?! How did you break free from your restraints?!” one of the outlaws exclaimed.

“Look!” another said, pointing at his unconscious comrades and the wall I had destroyed. “They knocked the others out!”

“Trying to make a run for it, huh? You think we’re just gonna let you waltz away after messing with our friends?!”

The other girls started trembling in fear upon being shouted at by the kidnappers, who had yet to notice the pack of monsters approaching.

Argh, I don’t have time to deal with you right now!

“We’re facing a bit of an emergency right here, so could you stop bothering us?!” I yelled at the kidnappers. “Can’t you hear that noise?”

“Huh? What noi— *Aaah!*” The kidnapper’s face turned white as a sheet, and he pointed out at the sky. “Crap, monsters! Get inside the building, quick!”

At least they were quick to take action after having spotted the monsters. I supposed they must've been used to this sort of attack, living so close to the forest.

Unfortunately, it was too late: the monsters were already upon us. A large black cloud formed overhead, composed of hundreds of bat-type monsters, which I instantly recognized as caniba bats. They were fiercely carnivorous monsters and extremely dangerous despite their relatively small size. Once they latched onto their prey, it was almost impossible to get them to let go.

Once again, just like with the zombie leapers, there are way too many of them! That's not normal.

The kidnappers grabbed their unconscious partners in crime and made a beeline to the building where they had locked us up earlier. The girls tried to follow them in, but they shoved them away and closed the door to our faces. One of them must've been blocking the door, as it wouldn't budge, and the girls started crying, begging them to let us in.

Hah. Look at them acting all tough against defenseless young ladies, yet the moment monsters show up, they scamper inside and barricade themselves in. Cowards.

"Don't worry, everyone. I'll protect you," I said, materializing a barrier of light around us. "There. The monsters can't get near us now."

Jaune and I hurried to gather the girls who had started to panic and run about. We pulled the last of them into the barrier just as the caniba bats swooped down, colliding violently with the invisible wall in a chaotic symphony of *thuds*.

Whew, that was close.

The monsters didn't relent, continuing their frenzied assaults against our barrier, but it held firm. However, some of them had changed targets, trying to enter the dilapidated building where the kidnappers were holed up instead. Unfortunately for those thugs, the roof was nowhere near as sturdy as my barrier, and part of it collapsed under the caniba bats' assault. Seconds later, screams started pouring out of the building. It seemed that the bats had broken through.

“Eeek! H-Help us! Anyone!”

“Help us, please! Aaah! Don’t come near me!”

Panic ensued among the kidnappers as they tried to avoid the bats.

I let out a sigh. I didn’t particularly want to help them, but, at the same time, I didn’t feel like watching them getting eaten by monsters either. Besides, I had questions for them, so I needed them alive.

It can’t be helped, I suppose.

I extended my right hand in the direction of the building and used a spell that froze all creatures except humans. I didn’t know if they had gotten injured by the bats or if they were just cowering in fear, but they didn’t exit the building. I made sure to cover the hole in the roof with some thick ice, which should prevent more monsters from getting in. Then, I could shift my attention to the rest of the caniba bats. To my dismay, there were even more of them than there were earlier.

I have to kill them. If left alone, these pesky creatures would fly from village to village, attacking every human in sight. *Caniba bats don’t typically act in groups, though. Did some moron make modifications to them? Either way, if I don’t wipe them out here, the nearby towns are as good as gone.*

One caniba bat was manageable, but there was no way any town could deal with such a large group at once.

I’ll go with a big compound Lightning and Wind Magic spell. It’s going to cost me a ton of mana—especially if I keep the Light shield up at the same time—but I don’t have many options here.

I held up both hands above my head while maintaining the barrier. The air began to ripple, and a vortex of wind started to form around me. I added some Lightning Magic to the mix, and small thunderbolts started crackling and dancing within the tempest. One after the other, the caniba bats were drawn toward the swirling storm and, once they were in, the lightning made quick work of them.

Sorry, little bats, but my life is on the line here. I can’t go easy on you.

It only took an instant for the ground to be littered with the bats' remains.



Lilyrossa felt like she was about to lose her mind. Something was terribly wrong with her body. No, scratch that—it wasn't just her. The other girls and the bishop's aide were in a similar state.

Why are my arms so hairy? I've told my maids to keep me clean-shaven!

Glancing at the other girls, it was painfully obvious that their eyebrow hairs and the peach fuzz on their face were much longer and thicker than before. The same went for the bishop's aide—his goatee was definitely longer than when they arrived, and so was his nose hair. For some reason, he also smelled very bad.

Just what in the world is going on?! Was it even possible for one's body hair to grow so fast all of a sudden? Lilyrossa shook her head and, to distract herself from her worries, turned to one of the girls.

"Aren't you being a little too neglectful with your personal hygiene? You cannot be part of my entourage while looking like this!"

"My apologies, Lady Lilyrossa. Your skin is so smooth and beautiful, I will make sure to follow your example from now on," the girl said. Right as the words left her mouth, her eyebrow hair grew *even* longer, to the point where it started dangling in front of her face. She must've felt that something was wrong, as she brought a hand to her brow and gasped when she felt how thick the hair had become.

The other girls looked in turn at Lilyrossa and the girl with the long eyebrows, stiff smiles plastered across their faces. They hadn't seen their own faces, but they could tell they must've been in a similar state.

"I suppose I shall be more diligent with shaving as well in the future," Lilyrossa muttered.

"Not at all! Lady Lilyrossa, you are perfect just the way you are!"

"Indeed! The paragon of nobility!"

"Your attention to detail is truly admirable! Just as expected of a marquis's

daughter!”

The girls immediately started complimenting her, but, as they did, the hair on their body grew even longer and thicker. None of them dared to say anything about it, but they were all thinking the same thing.

What is going on? I can't go home like this! I refuse to have such thick hair growing all over my body! No way!!!

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Back at the inn, Char was massaging his temples, a glum frown on his face. He'd just received Lam's message. Mere seconds ago, a strange bird had appeared inside the room, and when Char went to investigate it, it turned into a letter.

There's only one person I know who can use this type of magic. So this was why Lam was taking so long to return.

The letter read, “The bishop's messenger has left the inn. I'm going after him, but it might be a trap.”

“Lam, you moron...” Char muttered, seething. His wife had apparently gone along with a group of ladies who were, per her own words, acting suspicious. “If you know they're suspicious, why did you go with them?!”

Char had memorized all the crests painted on the carriages parked in front of the inn. He wouldn't let any of these people get away scot-free—neither the bishop's aide, nor the ladies.

A few minutes later, another bird flew in. This time, it turned into a map. *I'm assuming Lam's current location is where the large mark is, but what's that other, smaller one? There's no explanation.*

There was no doubt something was going on at the locations Lam had marked, but Char wished she had written some sort of explanation along with the map. Char knew his wife was trying not to worry him, but her actions had the complete opposite effect.

If she didn't want me to worry, she shouldn't have left the inn alone in the first place!

But what was done was done. Lam had mentioned in her first letter that she would “be back soon,” and that Char “shouldn’t worry about her,” but he refused to stay still and do nothing.

He stood up from his seat and used the quick teleportation spell he had learned recently. It wasn’t as precise as if he had drawn a teleportation circle, but it was much more convenient.

First, I need to head back to the mansion and get the others. The more people we have to rescue Lam and catch that messenger, the better. Unfortunately, he didn’t know how to send messages using magic like his wife, so he couldn’t just tell Fouet and Barre to join him at the location Lam had indicated on the map.

He arrived in the garden and went straight to his study, where he explained the situation to Fouet and Barre, all of this in only a few minutes.

“That’s the gist of it. I can’t believe Lam let herself get abducted. Come, let’s go fetch my troublemaker wife.”

“They kidnapped the madam? How impudent!” Fouet said.

Barre shrugged beside him. “I think ‘suicidal’ is a better adjective.”

Just then, Canon happened to pass by the study, and he caught the tail end of their conversation. He had started spending more and more time inside the mansion recently, thanks to Lam’s influence.

“Father, I just heard you mention that mother was abducted. What’s going on?” he asked, sounding uncharacteristically harried, a far cry from his usual cold and misanthropic behavior.

I suppose I ought to tell him the truth, Char thought, then did just that.

“I’m coming too!” Canon declared as soon as he heard the full story. Once again, such self-determination was very unusual from him. Not only did he volunteer himself, but he even went to the schoolhouse to fetch his two classmates for backup.

“I won’t let these ruffians get away with kidnapping my mother! I’ll show them what for!” Canon said.

“I’ll use the spell the madam has taught me to level the ground...with their

corpses!” Mine chimed in.

“Perfect timing; I was itching to try my new spells,” Bombe said. “You guys don’t mind if I burn them to a crisp, do you?”

The twins’ eyes closed as they cast proud smiles at the three teenagers, as if celebrating their growth.

“Those who want to join can come. We already know who we’re dealing with. They probably won’t pose much of a challenge, though, so you might not get to test all your spells,” Char said.

They already knew that the masterminds were the bishop’s aide and the young noble ladies who had abducted Lam. As for the perpetrators, they were most likely the ladies’ guards and perhaps some ruffians they had hastily hired to carry out their scheme. Canon and the other two were used to practicing their magic against monsters, so they would have no problem handling a group of humans who couldn’t use magic.

Up until now, Char had never defied the Faith, but things were different this time: they had abducted his wife. Needless to say, he had no intention of making any compromises.

“Go see what’s going on here,” Char said, pointing at the smaller mark on the map. “I don’t know what’s there, but Lam wouldn’t have marked it without a reason. I’ll head to the big mark after I’ve teleported you there. Make sure to secure as much proof as possible.”

The children nodded solemnly, and even the usually carefree twins wore serious expressions.

“I’m sending you there now,” Char said. With these words, he used Aurora’s rough teleportation spell to send the kids and the twins to the location Lam had marked on the map.



Canon landed in the forest alongside the twins and his two classmates. The spell Char had used to teleport them was apparently called the “rough teleportation spell,” and it definitely lived up to its name; while Canon and the twins had landed smoothly on their feet, Mine and Bombe had been

unceremoniously thrown to the ground. Teleportation spells were tricky, and it seemed that even his father had trouble setting precise coordinates.

Canon watched over Mine and Bombe to make sure they were able to get back to their feet by themselves. Once they were steady, he scanned their surroundings and noticed they had landed directly in front of a mountain hut. He could sense the presence of several people inside.

Suspicious.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Fouet said.

“Agreed. What a hassle,” Barre grumbled.

The twins marched up to the hut and flung open the door. However, they froze almost instantly.

Huh? What’s wrong? Canon wondered. He cautiously peeked inside, only to be met with the sight of some strange creatures covered in hair. Worse, one of the creatures in particular smelled really bad. *They look...fluffy? No, that’s not the right word. Scraggly is more like it. Just what in the world are these things?*

Taking a closer look, Canon noticed colorful cloth peeking through the hair of the creatures, which he recognized as the fabric used to make dresses.

Does that mean these used to be people? He tilted his head to the side in confusion.

“This is definitely the madam’s work,” Barre said. Canon didn’t know how he could be so certain.

“Yeah, there’s no doubt about it,” Fouet agreed. “I *begged* her to never use that body odor spell again, but she obviously didn’t listen.” He took a few steps back to distance themselves from the source of the foul smell.

“How are these hair balls related to mother?” Canon asked.

Before the twins could respond, one of the hairy creatures spoke up, “Are you people from the House of Mercure? You’re saying the *countess* did this to us?! That loathsome woman! Forget selling her, we should’ve had her killed!”

“Lady Lilyrossa, these people are mana wielders. They might be able to lift the curse—”

“Will you all *shut up*?!”

The first two hair balls who had spoken sounded like young women, while the third had a deeper, masculine voice.

“I recognize that voice,” Fouet said. “Are you the Cerveau Cathedral bishop’s aide?”

The hair ball began to tremble. “D-Dear me, no! You have the wrong person! More importantly, can you undo this magic trick?!” it said. As it spoke, the hair ball started to get visibly angry, and for *some* reason, its hair also grew even longer.

“Yes, restore us to our original appearances!” the first hair ball demanded. “We have no ties to the Countess of Mercure whatsoever!” Just like the other creature, this one’s hair grew as well.

Does it get longer when they speak? No, that doesn’t make sense; there were no changes when it first talked to us. Could it be that it grows when they’re lying, perhaps? Calmly, Canon tried to analyze the spell while observing the situation.

Mine and Bombe, on the other hand, weren’t nearly as composed.

“You hairy monsters! How dare you abduct Her Ladyship?! I’ll level the ground with you!” Mine shouted.

“Yeah, we won’t let this slide! I’ll burn you all to a crisp!” Bombe added.

Barre intervened immediately. “Hold it, you two. *No* killing. We have to question them. Lord Char told us to gather as much evidence as possible, remember?”

Fouet nodded. “Barre’s right. We need them alive. In fact, why don’t you kids handle this? It’ll make for great extracurricular training, don’t you think? You’ll even get to practice your interrogation skills!”

Canon had a *slight* feeling that Fouet had just made up that excuse to avoid doing extra work. He’d always been a master at slacking off. However, Mine and Bombe, their eyes sparkling with excitement, seemed thrilled at the prospect of torturing the hair balls. They charged toward the pack of hairy creatures

without hesitation.



Silence returned to the little village opposite the forest, clouds of dust dancing above the rough path where the now-dead caniba bats lay in heaps.

“Phew. I made quick work of these insignificant mosquitoes,” I said, dusting my hands off as I scanned my surroundings to ensure all the monsters were dead.

Behind me, the frightened young ladies slowly raised their heads. “D-Did you kill *all* of them?” Jaune—the only one who wasn’t too terrified to talk to me—asked in a shaky voice.

“I did. You can rest easy now.”

I cast a detection spell in the direction of the forest just to be sure but didn’t spot any more caniba bats. With that threat dealt with, I returned to the young ladies and started inquiring about their identities. However, I quickly realized that was fruitless; the previous Lam had been so much of a recluse that learning their names and houses didn’t offer much insight. I’d need to ask someone at the Mercure estate to help me figure things out once I teleported us all back.

But as I moved around the little group, asking for their names, an overwhelming wave of dizziness hit me, and my legs turned to jelly.

I’ve used too much magic.

Despite that, I planted my feet firmly into the ground and forced myself not to lose consciousness. My initial plan had been simple: wait for the outlaws to reappear, subdue them, and teleport everyone back to the estate. But the caniba bat attack had thrown everything off, and I’d used way more mana than I’d anticipated.

This isn’t good. But I can’t collapse now, or the other girls... I didn’t dare finish that thought. Those criminals were still inside the building. If I lost consciousness now, they could easily recapture us. *I have to stay awake, at least until we’re safely away from here.*

If I used a teleportation circle, I’d probably have *just* enough mana to teleport

us to the Mercure estate. I picked up a branch from the ground and resumed drawing the symbols I'd started earlier on the path.

Unfortunately, halfway through, the thugs emerged from the building. Some were nursing injuries from the bats' attack, but none seemed life-threatening.

"Damn! Look at all these monster corpses! What the hell happened here?" one of them exclaimed.

"Look, the girls survived! I don't know how they made it, but, hey, I ain't about to complain about our merchandise not gettin' eaten by monsters."

They had no idea I was the one who had killed the caniba bats. Judging by their blithe attitudes, they didn't seem too concerned that we had escaped. They must have thought it would be easy to round us up again—a group of young women couldn't pose much of a challenge, after all.

What should I do? I have almost no mana left. If I use another spell, I'll collapse for sure. Even if I managed to defeat them with magic, I wouldn't be able to teleport the girls back to safety or protect them if we got attacked again.

The thugs began to approach, their steps slow and deliberate, while the girls huddled behind me, trembling.

"What are you so scared of? If you listen to us, we won't hurt ya. Promise," one of them said.

I threw him a sharp glare. "Right back at you. Surrender now, or you'll regret it."

We were locked in a silent standoff when, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a group of men on horseback riding in from the village.

"Perfect timing! The rest of the guys are back," one of the thugs said, and all his friends turned excitedly to greet the newcomers. The current group hadn't even been all of them?!

This organization is larger than I thought!

The newcomers dismounted their horses and started crowding around us, menacing smirks on their lips. One of them, a particularly tall and burly man, stepped forward.

“We saw those monsters flock over here, so we rushed over, but it looks like you and the merchandise are all fine,” he said to the others. “What are they doing out of the building, though? Well, it doesn’t matter. Catch them and tie them back up. The client’s coming tomorrow.”

“Yes, boss!”

So, that man is their leader? I thought. To my dismay, my vision flickered, and my legs nearly gave out under me. To make matters worse, a wave of dizziness hit me and I felt like I was about to throw up. I hated how weak this body was.

This is not the time to falter! I can only use one more spell before my body gives out, so I have to choose my timing carefully.

At the burly man’s command, the gang rushed toward us.

“Come here! Stop moving!” one of them barked.

“Aaah! Nooo!” the girls screamed.

I had to act *now*.

If I let them capture us again, I won’t have enough energy to free the others, escape, and fight back. I need something that can take them all at once without endangering the girls.

I gave it some thought and decided to use a Wood Magic spell. That way, I could target my enemies individually without risking the girls getting caught in the cross fire.

“Enough with all of you!” I exclaimed, using the last of my mana to unleash a midsize Wood spell. Thick vines burst from the ground, coiling around the ruffians and lifting them into the air.

“A-Aaah!”

“What are these things?! Some kind of plant monsters?! *Damn it*, let go of me!”

Phew. This should be enough to... I couldn’t even finish my thought before another, much stronger wave of dizziness hit me. The world spun violently, and I collapsed to my knees on the spot.

“Lady Mercure?!” Jaune cried out, rushing to my side.

I can't pass out now. If I do, the vines will disappear. But no matter how hard I tried to stay awake, my body wouldn't listen, and I felt my consciousness gradually slipping away. *I can't do it...*

Just as I was about to succumb to the overwhelming exhaustion, I heard a voice calling my name from far off. I thought it was my imagination, but, the next instant, something fell from the sky right behind me. A small cry of surprise escaped my lips when a pair of hands grabbed me from the sides, helping me back to my feet. I slowly turned around and a wave of relief hit me when I saw who the newcomer was. Char was standing there, holding the map I had drawn for him as he stared at me.

“Char, you scared me. Did you teleport here?” I asked, my voice weak.

“You don't have to speak if you're too tired. I'm assuming the dead caniba bats on the ground are your doing, and these men are the ones who abducted you,” Char said, having assessed the situation with a single glance.

I nodded weakly. “Yeah.”

“I'll take it from here,” he said. Supporting me with one arm, he let Lightning Magic course through his other hand. Soon, thin lightning bolts rained on the gathering of miscreants, taking them down one at a time. I marveled at how he was able to adjust his magic at such a precise scale. When did he become capable of that?

Before long, they were all unconscious, and I was able to lift my spell, which relieved some of my fatigue.

“You came for me,” I said to Char. “Thank you.”

“Of course I did. Did you really expect me to stand back and do nothing after receiving your message?” He treated me to a reproachful look. “Lam, why in the *world* did you rush into their trap alone?! Just look at the state you're in.”

He gently set me down in the shade of a nearby building and went to tie up the unconscious criminals. It was a good thing they had brought so much rope to restrain me and the other girls. Speaking of them, some—including Jaune—went to help Char with the bindings.

Once every member of the gang was secured, Char returned to my side. “You overexerted yourself again, didn’t you?” he asked, his tone accusatory.

“Something unexpected came up,” I said, bracing myself to explain the situation to him. I had charged headfirst into the bishop’s aide’s trap, thinking I could find something to hold against the Faith so that they’d leave Char alone. Instead, I’d walked straight into a disaster. Embarrassment washed over me, and I felt the urge to crawl into a hole and hide.

“A large group of monsters came from the forest, and I ended up burning all my mana on them,” I explained.

Just like the zombie leapers incident, this caniba bats attack felt unnatural. With such an odd swarm, I *had* to use most of my mana to protect the girls, the thugs, and the people of the town of Crimine from the monsters.

Char glanced at the monster bodies strewn over the ground and nodded, a look of awe on his face. “So you killed all these by yourself while protecting the others? Your magic never ceases to amaze me, Lam.”

“But this body is so weak that I can only use a few spells before it gives out—just like now.”

If only I still had my old body... I needed to find another way to use more magic with my current body, something more efficient than simply building stamina. But what?

“I didn’t expect things to take such a turn. It’s a good thing that I sent you that map,” I said.

Char nodded. “Speaking of which, I came here alone and sent the twins and the kids to the other location you marked on the map. They should contact us soon.”

“That other place is the hut where Lilyrossa and the others were when I left. I marked the location just in case. Are you sure it was a good idea to send the children?” I asked with a hint of concern.

“You taught the brats plenty of new spells, didn’t you? You’re underestimating them, Lam. Besides, they’re the ones who volunteered to go,” Char said, as blunt as ever, before holding out a hand to me. “You really don’t

look well. Let's go home."

I hesitated for a moment before nodding. "O-Okay," I said, placing my hand in his. "Ah, but I still have to send the other girls back to their own houses."

"The twins will take care of it. For now, I'm just going to teleport us all to the mansion, along with the kidnappers."

"That works. I already started drawing a teleportation circle over there," I said, gesturing to my half-finished work on the path.

"I'll finish it. I've gotten the hang of teleportation circles," Char said. True to his word, he swiftly completed the drawing.

Before teleporting us to the Mercure estate, he hoisted me into his arms. His spell was a bit rough around the edges, but it was still impressive considering he'd only picked up teleportation magic a couple of weeks ago.

We landed in the garden, with me still in Char's arms. I wasn't exactly happy about having to be carried around *again*, but I couldn't move, so it wasn't like I had a choice.

"Ah! Mother!" Canon exclaimed, rushing over as soon as he spotted us. It seemed that they had returned home before us. I wasn't too surprised, since the twins had learned how to use teleportation spells as well.

What are those strange, frozen lumps of hair behind Canon? I also noticed that there were small craters scattered around, and that some of the shaggy creatures' hair was singed. Mine and Bombe stood next to the hair balls, both looking quite pleased.

A realization hit me.

"W-Wait. Could this be..." There was no doubt about it—this was the children's doing. The holes in the ground, the scorched hair, and the way the creatures were *frozen* indicated that the kids had used the new spells I'd taught them.

"Mother, we captured these evil noble ladies! We even interrogated them, just the three of us!" Canon announced, his eyes sparkling. He was looking at me expectantly, as if waiting for me to compliment him. He was always so stoic

that it was surprising to see him quite proud of himself. For once, he looked like a boy his age, although I was concerned about what he meant when he said he and the others had “interrogated” the noble ladies.

I didn’t have to wait long to find out.

“We all worked together and came up with lots of different ways to force them into telling us the truth. Fouet and Barre gave us a passing mark!” Canon said.

Yeah...*exactly* what I’d feared.

What in the world were Fouet and Barre thinking, making children interrogate suspects?! I wasn’t happy about the twins’ actions, but Canon seemed so proud of himself that I decided to smile and commend him for a job well-done.

“G-Good job, Canon. You did great.” Mine and Bombe approached me expectantly, and I made sure to give them their share of praise as well.

I noticed that the bishop’s aide wasn’t here, and the kids told me that they weren’t done interrogating him yet. Seeing as Fouet and Barre weren’t in the garden either, I assumed they were taking care of that matter as we spoke. My gaze then returned to the frozen hairy creatures.

So, these are Lilyrossa and her minions? Goodness gracious, how in the world did their hair get so long? I knew their hair would grow *some*, but I hadn’t expected them to turn into literal balls of hair! *Just how many lies did they manage to spout in such a short amount of time for it to get this bad?*

I shuddered at the thought.

“Canon,” Char said. “Take the other victims to the guest rooms and tell the twins to send them home when they’re done with the bishop’s aide. You can handle that, right?”

Canon nodded solemnly. “Yes, father. You can count on me.”

“I’ll take Lam back to her room,” Char said before glancing at Mine and Bombe. “You two, help Canon.”

“Yes, Lord Char!” they replied in unison.

With those words, my husband carried me inside. “Um, Char? You can put me

down. I don't feel that bad right now," I said.

"Absolutely not. Your face is even paler than before," he replied, his tone leaving no room for argument.

His judgment turned out to be spot on, as a wave of dizziness hit me right as he stepped into my room.

"See?" he said. He gently lowered me onto the bed and began tending to me, making sure I was comfortable.

It's only been a few days since the last time he took care of me like this, I thought bitterly. I felt like I always ended up looking pathetic in front of him.

"I'm fine, Char, I just need to get some rest. This body is really starting to get on my nerves, though. I can't believe I'm having such bad backlash from using a couple of spells," I grumbled.

"From now on, you won't be making such reckless moves without consulting with me first," he said, his expression unwavering. "With the two of us, we'd have double the mana and firepower. You don't need to overexert yourself anymore."

"But..." I hesitated. The truth was, I had never even considered asking anyone from the Mercure family to fight alongside me.

Char interrupted me before I could argue. "You're not sure that I'd be of any help to you." It sounded as if he'd read my thoughts. "I understand, given the difference in our magic abilities. But I've learned many spells from Aurora's books. I should be able to contribute more than before."

He had a point; just a few weeks ago, he'd only known a single offensive Lightning spell, but he'd made tremendous progress since then. His ability to remember spells after seeing them just once made his learning speed frighteningly fast. Still, I couldn't help but feel a little surprised seeing him act so uncharacteristically humble.

"Thank you, Char," I said. "You've really changed a lot since our first meeting, haven't you?"

He looked taken aback by my comment. "I have no idea what you mean."

“I’m saying you’re much nicer than before.”

For a moment, he stared at me in astonishment, before quickly averting his gaze.

Aw, what a shame. It was such an unusual expression on him, I wished I could’ve seen it a bit longer. Having grown up at the schoolhouse, Char had never learned what it meant to be loved or to love others. Yet, he was making genuine efforts, in his own way, to become a respectable head of the household. I would *never* deny the progress he’d made.

“Anyway, how are you feeling?” he asked, changing the subject as he hesitantly placed a hand on my forehead. The coolness of his palm sent a shiver through me, and a frown formed on his face. Meanwhile, my heart did that strange thing it sometimes did when Char touched me, where it fluttered for no apparent reason. “Your fever is getting worse. I was wondering, but can’t you fix your condition with magic?”

“Sadly, no. I can mend wounds by rewinding time exclusively in the affected area, but curing illnesses is much finickier. Even if I somehow managed to make my body more resistant, I’d risk messing something else up in the process.”

Living beings’ bodies were annoyingly complex, which made them rather incompatible with magic. Back when I was Aurora, there used to be mages specialized in healing techniques, but even they couldn’t forcibly cure illnesses, focusing instead on alleviating symptoms and helping people improve their overall constitutions. Most of their remedies were made with medicinal herbs, which they then tweaked with magic to make more potent.

As a side note, while *I* could mend injuries with my magic, that wasn’t the case of *most* mages. It was a tricky process, so, unless a wound was life-threatening, it was usually better to let the body heal naturally.

“That’s a shame,” Char said.

“It is. Magic is very convenient, but it’s not a miracle solution for everything. My body’s frailty is something I was born with, so the best approach is for me to slowly but surely build up my stamina and strength.”

Char took a seat at the edge of my bed, a cryptic expression on his face.

“Unless someone’s life is in immediate danger, using magic to cure them isn’t a good idea. The chances of restoring them to near-perfect health are incredibly slim, and you might end up doing more harm than good. You should keep that in mind, Char,” I said.

“If a mage as incredible as you says so, then it must be true,” he nodded. “I also have a piece of advice for you, Lam: before trying to resolve an issue all by yourself, remember that you have a husband you can use.”

“Use?”

“Luckily for you, your husband has quite a lot of mana, and he can even use magic to some extent. If you delegate even half of the work to me, you won’t need to overexert yourself to the point of passing out again,” Char said insistently.

His worry was evident in his demeanor. Perhaps he was right, and I *should* lean on him more. After all, he had come all the way to Crimine to rescue me from the kidnappers, even though I was the one who had gotten myself into the predicament in the first place.

Char is actually much more dependable than I initially thought.

It wasn’t just him; today, the twins and the children had also done everything they could to help me. I suddenly realized just how blessed I was to have such wonderful people around me. At first, I’d thought I would never fit in among the Mercures, but, now, I could say with certainty that I did. Despite all my grumbling and complaining that I wanted to divorce Char, perhaps I didn’t *need* to rush into that decision just yet. I couldn’t just abandon Canon, and it wasn’t like being a countess was particularly arduous. Most importantly, I found myself thinking that I *wanted* to stay here. I’d become close with Fouet and Barre, and the children were all dear to me—I didn’t want to leave them.

Moreover, this was the only house in the Tête Kingdom where magic was still practiced. With how widespread the Motar Faith seemed to be, it was likely that magic had mostly disappeared in other nations as well. It had been a few weeks since I’d regained my memories, but it finally dawned on me that I was almost the last of my kind. Sadness poured down on me like rain as I thought about this.

Still, it truly was a stroke of luck that I had reincarnated into one of the few mage houses still standing in the world. As things stood, staying in the Mercure estate for a tad longer might not be such a bad idea after all.



Meanwhile, in the Lèvres Kingdom, the first prince, Flèche Laîné Lèvres was gazing at the cloudless blue sky above the Tête Kingdom beyond the Ouragan Mountain range.

“I sense someone using powerful magic again. Is it the same person as last time?” he murmured.

People sensitive to magic could sense when another mage used a large spell, and Flèche just so happened to be particularly gifted at detecting magic.

A knock at the door drew him from his thoughts.

“Prince Flèche, we have received a report from our spy in the Tête Kingdom!” one of his subordinates said from the other side.

Flèche opened the door, and the man handed him a blank piece of paper. Raising one eyebrow, Flèche held a hand over the page. Instantly, a message appeared on the surface. This inconspicuous piece of paper was actually a nifty magic tool Flèche himself had created that allowed him to receive reports from his informants around the world.

He ran his eyes over the page. His secret agent had described the magic spell Flèche had sensed coming from the Tête Kingdom. They hadn’t been able to figure out who had been at the origin of the spell cast over the mountains a couple of weeks ago, but, this time, one of his spies had actually managed to gather some information.

“Apparently, it happened in Crimine, a little town near the capital. It says that a member of the House of Mercure was responsible for the spell.”

Flèche had heard of the Mercures before. From what he knew, they were a noble house of mages that the royal family of the Tête Kingdom kept on the payroll without really utilizing their abilities. Not that they were particularly good mages—well, at least that was what Flèche had heard.

That magic signature was very similar to hers. I can't just ignore it. He wondered if there was a way for him to establish contact with the Mercures. Perhaps he could use diplomacy as a pretext. His heart had just started racing in his chest with excitement when his chamberlain appeared and put a damper on his good mood.

“Your Highness! What in the world is that seaweed-patterned costume you’re wearing? I keep telling you to be mindful of your appearance when appearing in public!”

“But seaweed is so *cute*,” Flèche said dejectedly. “What about one of these?”

“No! Not the grilled chicken or the stink bug suit either!”

Flèche closed the door and begrudgingly let his chamberlain dress him in another outfit.

Oh, well. Might as well take advantage of my social status for once.

Clad in a suit more befitting of a prince, Flèche picked up a pen and started writing a letter addressed to the neighboring kingdom. His mind was focused on a single goal: to find the person he cared about more than anything in the world.



Several days later, the Mercures made Cépieux’s crimes public before releasing him. He could finally return to the Cerveau Cathedral, though his joy was short-lived, as he was immediately put in solitary confinement upon arrival. The noble ladies who had acted as his accomplices were also facing similar fates within their households.

Cépieux had lost all credibility after the Mercures revealed his involvement with human traffickers to the public. The intense interrogations the Mercure children had subjected him to had forced him to spill every detail of his involvement.

Those damn brats! What kind of education did the Mercures give them for them to become so vicious?!

With the evidence the Mercures had gathered and the scale of the incident, it

wasn't long before everyone learned of his wrongdoings, from the bishop to the inhabitants of the capital and even the king himself. The king and the bishop eventually managed to bring the situation under control, but it hadn't been easy. To make matters worse, they had received a sudden letter from the first prince of the neighboring nation, announcing he would be arriving in the Tête Kingdom in a few days' time to discuss the events.

If he's coming to visit, he could just stay in the royal palace! Why does he want to come to the cathedral too? And, for some reason, he seems to know about what happened in Crimine... How?! Did he just so happen to be there? No, that's impossible. Only a handful of people know about the existence of that town!

Human trafficking was a serious crime, so, no matter how many excuses Cépieux had made, none of them held up. Neither the king nor the cathedral had succeeded in fully papering over the truth.

What is that damn Lèvres Kingdom planning? Cépieux had no idea what that prince was thinking. Even if he knew, there was nothing he could do about it, locked in his room as he was. His only company was when the bishop came to visit—just as he had today.

"Cépieux. You still smell terrible," the bishop, Avare, said. His nose wrinkled in disgust.

Cépieux hurriedly prostrated himself on the floor, not daring to look up. "My apologies, Your Excellency!"

"I cannot defend you this time, nor can His Majesty."

"B-But... I did nothing wrong. It's all the Mercures' fault!" Cépieux argued. As soon as the words left his mouth, his body hair started growing. *I just shaved it all a few days ago! Why does it keep growing? And what triggers it?!*

"You will be returning to the headquarters as a way to atone for your crimes," Avare continued, his tone cold and uncaring. "It is best that you stay away from this commotion for some time. Perhaps the saints will understand the spell that is causing your current condition."

Cépieux's face paled instantly, and he started trembling. "No! Not the headquarters! Please, reconsider your decision, Your Excellency, I beg of you! If

you send me back like this, the saints will use me as a human guinea pig to perform their experiments on!”

While the saints were reliable figures, respected by the members of the Motar Faith, they were *also* terrifying mages with no sense of ethics whatsoever.

“I have already contacted the headquarters, so there is no point in arguing. Besides, I don’t want the smell to linger in the cathedral,” Avare said, ignoring Cépieux’s complaints.

“It’s all the Countess of Mercure’s fault! You shouldn’t leave that heinous woman at large! She will bring the Faith to its doom, I am *sure* of it!”

“I have met the countess before, and she didn’t seem like an impressive mage—more like a frightened little rabbit.”

“It’s a facade! That woman is the greatest villain of the century!”

Avare looked at his subordinate with pity. “You truly need a break, Cépieux. Do as you are told and get some rest at the headquarters.”

“N-No! Please! Not the headquarters!” Cépieux sobbed.

The bishop ignored his pleas and left, locking the door behind him. Cépieux’s cries echoed throughout the cathedral’s corridor for what felt like hours.

As he walked away, Avare muttered to himself, “No one from the House of Mercure can use such magic. But then, who was it?”

Side Story 1: Char's Past

It was a quiet night, but Char suddenly awoke in his bed with a start. The darkness outside his window indicated that only a few hours had passed since he'd drifted off to sleep. His sheets were tangled around him, damp with sweat.

Another nightmare... Occasionally, memories from his childhood would resurface in his dreams—bitter recollections he thought he'd long buried.

His birth father had been a duke, and his birth mother was the king's elder sister. At three years old, he'd visited the Cerveau Cathedral to receive the Motar Faith's blessing, as it was a requirement for noble children. Most nobles were fervent believers of the Motar Faith, and Char's birth family had been no exception. It was said that children lost their mana after the ceremony, but, two years after Char's blessing, inexplicable phenomena had begun to occur around him: all of a sudden, everything he'd touched had been imbued with the power of lightning.

When they'd realized what this meant, his once-loving parents had done a complete one-eighty. They'd called him a "cursed mana wielder" and cast him out of their estate. Char—only five then and too young to truly understand what was happening—had been forcefully sent to the Mercure family and enrolled at the schoolhouse, terrified and alone. He had still been at an age where he craved parental affection, but the Mercures didn't care about how their students felt, and the boy had been forced to undergo difficult, life-threatening training from the start. It hadn't been long before he'd begun becoming numb to the world around him.

He'd managed to survive life at the schoolhouse thanks to his abundant mana and natural talent for magic, had gained allies in Fouet and Barre, and had used his power to defeat the former Earl of Mercure and claim his position. There was nothing left for him to fear in this house. Yet, nightmares of his past still haunted him—reminders of the time when he had felt weak and powerless.

Well, I'm wide-awake now.

He headed to the courtyard to get some fresh air, but as he walked into it, he noticed that there was already someone there. Clad in only her nightgown and a coat, the frail young woman was silently looking at the night sky.

“Lam?” Char said.

She turned around. “Oh, it’s you, Char. You can’t sleep either?”

Char didn’t know how long Lam had been there, but he had a feeling it was probably longer than she should have. He promptly closed the distance between them and grabbed her hand, a gnawing anxiety twisting in his stomach. Sure enough, her skin was ice-cold.

“How long have you been out here? Even with a coat on, you might catch a cold.”

His wife had a weak constitution. Up until recently, she hadn’t been able to circulate her mana, and the excess energy had eaten away at her body for years. As a result, she had to spend most of her life confined to her room. Now that she had regained her memories, she was able to get her mana under control and had even started building up some strength, but she was still very delicate.

“My, my, are you worried about me?” she said with a teasing smile. “I’m fine. You’re overreacti—
Achoo!”

“In what world are you ‘fine’?” he grumbled.

She avoided his gaze. “If I say I’m fine, then I’m fine.”

Char picked her up, ignoring her protests, and carried her back to her room. Her usual struggles left him unfazed.

I’ve been doing this a lot recently, haven’t I? he mused as he set Lam down on the bed and forcibly put the covers on her. At that, she seemed to resign herself to her fate and let him fuss over her.

“If you can’t sleep, I’ll keep you company,” he said, the warm light of the lantern on the side table shining on their faces.

Char wasn’t the type of person to worry about others; Lam was the only

person for whom he'd go through all this trouble. Yet, it seemed that his wife did not get the message whatsoever. He sighed internally, reflecting on how different Lam was from the other noble ladies he'd encountered.

Oh, well. We're already married. I don't need to rush into things.

"Why can't *you* sleep, Char?" Lam asked him.

"I had a dream of the past. A sickening, twisted one," he replied, not feeling the need to hide the truth from her. Lam was technically five years younger than him, but he felt like he could talk to her about everything—perhaps because she had the memories of her past life.

"Oh, what a coincidence. Me too. Well, in my case, it was a dream of my life five hundred years ago, and it wasn't a *bad* dream," she said. Despite her words, a faint shadow crossed her features. Char studied her face in silence, waiting for her to continue.

"I dreamed of the people from my past," she continued eventually. "But, when I woke up, I realized that they're not here anymore. It weighed on me. That's why I went to the courtyard—I thought some fresh air might clear my mind."

"I see," Char said. He resumed looking at Lam in silence. She was staring vacantly at the air, reminiscing about people who were no longer with her. All of a sudden, anxiety crashed inside Char like a clap of thunder. What if Lam, too, ended up disappearing? That thought ignited an irrational anger within him, and he impulsively put both hands on her shoulders.

"Um... Char?" she said, staring at him in surprise.

He *knew* his gesture was pointless, but he couldn't suppress the torrent of emotions welling up inside him.

"You have me," he said, the words leaving his mouth before he could even process them. Lam blinked at him in confusion. "I'm your husband—your family. You have the twins and the children too. So, what are you feeling forlorn for?"

He wanted her to focus on the present, not the past.

A few seconds passed, and Lam nodded meekly. “Y-You’re right. I do have you and the others.”

He could see her regrets on her face as clearly as before, but she was still trying to convince herself otherwise. Somehow, this annoyed Char even more.

“Fine! If you’re so lonely, I’ll do you the honor of sleeping alongside you tonight,” he declared.

“Huh? Wait... What?!” Lam squeaked, bolting upright, her face as red as a tomato.

“That way, you won’t be on your own,” Char said, softly pushing her back down. “Actually, from now on, let’s sleep together every night. That way, you won’t have those stupid dreams anymore.”

Even if his wife got lost in the past again, as long as he was by her side, Char could pull her back into the present.

“Wh-What has gotten into you all of a sudden?!” Lam asked.

“If anything, it’s strange that we *haven’t* been sleeping in the same bed until now. Now that we’ve cleared away the misunderstandings and mended our relationship, there is no reason for us to have separate rooms anymore.” The more he spoke, the more convinced Char grew that this was a great idea.

“B-But, Char—”

“Married people sleep in the same bed. Even I know that much. I’ll get the servants to do the necessary arrangements tomorrow,” he said, ignoring his wife’s protests. “You’d better warm up to the idea, because you don’t have a choice.”

With those words, he slipped under the covers beside her. Worried she might try to run away, he wrapped both arms around her, which led her to let out a startled yelp. When he placed a soft kiss on her forehead, her eyes rolled back in her skull. She had, once again, fainted out of embarrassment.

“Hey, wake up. Stop passing out every single time.” Just when it felt like they were *finally* acting like a proper couple, she’d managed to pull something like this.

That's Lam for you, I guess.

Char tried to shake her awake, but to no avail—she groaned but didn't wake up.

"You're hopeless," Char muttered before settling down beside her and immediately drifting off to sleep. Perhaps having a warm presence next to him that helped; he had no more nightmares that night.

Side Story 2: Lord and Lady Mercure's Day Out

On a day with just a little rain in the air, I sat in the study, poring over the map of the city Fouet had given me that morning. I wanted to take Canon on an outing through town and was trying to decide where to go.

We've started getting closer, so I'd like for us to do more mother-and-son bonding activities. Unfortunately, I'd pretty much never been out and knew next to nothing about the royal capital, so I had asked Fouet to make me a list of the town's notable sightseeing spots. He was resourceful, so, even though he rarely left the estate, he was actually quite knowledgeable about the city.

"This library looks nice, and it's right across the street from a café. Oh, and this bakery always has a line..."

As I happily marked the places I wanted to go and the ones I thought Canon would like, the door opened and Char entered the study.

"O-Oh, Char. Didn't you take the day off? What are you doing here?" I asked. He shouldn't have any business in the study today. Char was the kind of person who would spend every waking hour working if left to his own devices, so the twins and I—worried about his well-being—had begun forcing him to take days off. Fortunately, the Cerveau Cathedral had stopped sending him unreasonable requests, so he could afford to take some time to rest.

"Do you plan on going out?" he asked when he spotted my map.

"Yes. Canon told me he's never visited the capital, so I was thinking of taking him on an outing. I'm currently in the process of marking the places that seem fun—hey! What are you doing?!"

Char grabbed the map, holding it out of my reach, and began to study it. "These are the types of places you like?"

"The ones I think Canon *and* I could enjoy."

"These aren't the kind of choices a noble lady would typically make," he pointed out.

“Who cares about that? My father was once a commoner, remember?”

Lam had never received a proper noble lady’s education, even after her father became a baron. The only reason I was somehow managing as a countess was thanks to the knowledge I had accumulated five hundred years ago. Back then, I’d regularly visited the palace and had often interacted with the royalty and nobility. Well, for work, mostly, as I’d been a commoner at the time. I *had* received a noble title at some point down the line, but it hadn’t been a regular peerage—more like an official designation tied to my job as a mage.

To be completely honest, I was extremely uncomfortable in formal settings. Char, on the other hand, seemed like a nobleman through and through. I remembered being told his birth parents had been nobles and could definitely tell.

“It’s just a stroll around town. I didn’t think I needed to be *that* formal about it,” I added.

“You’ve never walked around a city in this life, though, have you? Are you sure you’ll be all right, taking Canon out when you’ve never gone for a long walk yourself?”

“I mean... You have a point. But, I’ll manage in some way or another.”

Char’s face lit up with a grin, as if he’d struck upon a brilliant idea. “Let’s go take a look at the city together *before* you take Canon. I’ve spent a fair bit of time there, and I know where those libraries and cafés you want to visit are.”

That was actually a decent idea. It would be better if I knew what I was doing before taking Canon out. “Have you ever strolled around the city incognito before, Char?”

“Many times. I often have to for work, and I used to sneak out of the schoolhouse a lot as a kid.”

“My, I didn’t expect you to be such a rascal.” Or perhaps it was Canon and the other children who were too serious.

Char looked out of the window and I followed his gaze. The rain had stopped, and the wet leaves of the trees in the garden glimmered in the sunlight.

“Should we go tomorrow?” he asked.

“Sure. I still have the cheap, tattered dresses my former maids used to force me to wear. They’ll be perfect for passing through town unrecognized.”

As I spoke, a strange look appeared on Char’s face. “I’ll find some outfits for us. You can throw away or sell those dresses.”

“Are you sure? Well, thank you.”

Char was skilled at his job and, per his words, was used to walking around the city in disguise. I trusted he’d find me a good outfit. Frankly, he’d changed into someone I could rely on as of late, to the point where I now felt comfortable entrusting most matters to him. While he took care of that, I made a list of the places I wanted to see, buzzing with excitement for our upcoming excursion.

The next day, I let Char guide me by the arm as we strolled through the streets of the royal capital. I was wearing the adorable floral-patterned dress he had ordered for me, and was very glad about it—it felt much more comfortable than the rags I’d planned on wearing.

The Mercure estate was located on the outskirts of the royal capital, so the city center was quite a distance away. We could have used the family carriage to get there, but it would have taken some time, so Char had teleported us to our destination instead, which I had no qualms about. His magic was getting more and more precise with each passing day.

He definitely has a natural gift for it. It’s not normal for anyone to improve this fast.

Besides, it felt rewarding to see him use the magic that I had taught him.

“So, this large building is the library? Can anyone go in?” I asked when we reached our first destination.

“Yes, and you can even borrow books if you go through the proper procedures. They have books about all sorts of topics as well as novels and the like, but no magic books,” Char explained to me.

“What about history? Actually, never mind. They probably don’t have anything about five hundred years ago,” I said dejectedly. On the bright side, I

could probably find books about general knowledge and social etiquette there. I'd already read through Char's collection, so it might be a good idea for me to visit the library from time to time.

Char and I took a quick look at the inside of the building before heading to the café on the other side of the street. It was still morning, so it wasn't too crowded. I was a bit unsure of how to place my order, but, fortunately, that part hadn't really changed from five hundred years ago. You simply had to call over a waitress.

"What are you getting, Lam?" Char asked me.

"Durian juice."

"They definitely don't have that here," he said, handing me a menu. Coffee, black tea, herbal tea, citrus and berry juices... He was right! No durian juice.

What a shame. I thought it was quite nice when I had it at the party.

In the end, I settled for some mint tea and a slice of spice cake. I was about to add an extra-large berry parfait to my order when Char stepped in. "That's enough. You're going to upset your stomach. Wasn't there a bakery you wanted to check out too?"

Overprotective as always! Sometimes, I felt like he treated me a bit like a parent or teacher would a child.

"You're right," I conceded. "What are you going to order?"

"Coffee."

"I should've expected that. I suppose you're not the type to add sugar or anything either?"

We placed our order and, a few minutes later, the waitress came back with our drinks and my cake. My mint tea was refreshing, and the cake wasn't too sweet; they paired very well together.

"Is it good?" Char asked me, eyeing my cake with curiosity. At that moment, he looked so much younger than his age that I couldn't stop a smile from curling on my lips.

"Very much so. I understand why this café is so popular. Do you want to try

some?" I offered. I was about to cut the cake in half when Char leaned forward and ate the piece on my fork.

"You're right. It's really nice and mild," he said, flashing me a mischievous smirk, and I found myself at a loss for words. Why was I so flustered all of a sudden?

"I-Isn't it just?" I stammered, confused as to why he'd eaten the piece on my fork when there was still plenty of cake on the plate. I shot him a glare for good measure, but his grin only widened. He was toying with me again!

Looking at us like this, we really do look like a newlywed couple—and a happy one at that. Wait, what am I even thinking?! Just why in the world did my thoughts go in that direction?!

"You're not having any more?" Char asked, pulling me out of my thoughts. "I thought you liked it." Before I could react, he grabbed my fork from my hand, cut a piece of cake, and brought it to my mouth.

"Huh? Wait. Surely, you're not—"

"Open your mouth," he interrupted me, his tone leaving no room for argument.

The cake brushed softly against my lip. *Eek! He's totally trying to feed me the cake, isn't he?!*

"I-I can eat by myself, thank you very much!" I said, panicking from embarrassment.

"No need to be shy."

"I'm not being *shy*, I'm an adult, I can eat by my— Mmph!" Char took advantage of my protesting to shove the piece of cake into my mouth.

Mmmh, delicious. I felt my entire body relax from how good it tasted, before snapping back to reality with a gasp. "Wait, Char, you can't just shove cake into people's mou— Mmf!"

Char chuckled as he forcefully fed me yet another bit of cake. He looked so innocent and unguarded, I couldn't help but widen my eyes in surprise.



I've never seen him smile in such a carefree manner before. He always looked so unapproachable, I had genuinely started to wonder if he ever really smiled. I supposed it must've been due to the pressure that came with the title of Earl of Mercure.

Well, smiling or not, he's still a huge weirdo.

With Char's "help," I was done with my cake in no time, and, seeing as the café was starting to get busier, we left for our next destination.

"This isn't bad," I commented. "We should take more strolls around the city now and then."

"Sure."

Despite Char's antics, I was having a good time. Then, on our way to the next shop, Char suddenly stopped beside me. Curious about what had caught his attention, I followed his gaze...and immediately let out a strangled "Oh no."

"Lam, we're making a detour," he said, making a beeline for a shady-looking market stall selling antiques—and not just *any* antiques.

A-Aurora merch!

Every inch of the stall was covered in items depicting a young woman with short, light-green hair. You see, Char collected relics of Aurora, much to my embarrassment. She was considered an eminent historical figure, so it wasn't rare to stumble across portraits and other trinkets of her.

I ran after my husband in a panic. "Char, you're not going to buy *more* Aurora portraits, right? Your secret room is already filled to the brim with them!"

"Of course I am. I don't have those," he said before turning to the stall owner. "Shopkeeper, I'll take everything from here to here. Send them directly to the mansion."

"Wait, Char!" I argued, but he wasn't listening to me.

"These used to belong to Aurora? There's a hand mirror, a cup, a nightgown..."

No! They're all fake! I cried out inwardly. Not only had I never owned any of

those items, but their condition was far too good for something from five hundred years ago, especially that nightgown! *They look brand-new! Secondhand items from so long ago could never be in such pristine condition!*

Char was usually a clever and levelheaded man, but he lost every last shred of common sense when it came to Aurora. Frustrated, I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him away from the stall.

This must be how he gathered such a large collection in the first place, I thought, casting a look at the stall as we advanced away from it.

After a few minutes, we reached our next destination: the famous bakery I wanted to try. To my dismay, we hit a major snag.

“E-Everything’s sold out?!”

Apparently, it was impossible to get a single pastry unless you queued up while they were baking them. It said on a sign that the next time slot would be after noon.

We can’t exactly stay that long, though...

“I’ll send someone later and have them deliver the pastries straight to the mansion,” Char said as if he’d read my thoughts. “It looks like it’s about to rain.”

I hadn’t noticed before he’d pointed it out, but, at some point during our jaunt, the sky had filled with dark clouds.

“It is. We should go home soon.” My body’s weak constitution wasn’t anything to be trifled with. I knew for a fact that, if I spent even a few minutes in the rain, I’d come down with a fever.

The words had barely left my mouth when I felt droplets of water hit my cheeks. The rain was *here*.

“Put that on,” Char said, draping his outerwear over my head. Then, before I could react, he lifted me off the ground.

“I can walk back on my own,” I protested.

“No way. It’s faster if I carry you,” he said, sliding an arm under my knees, eliciting a little cry from me.

I once again found myself cradled in his arms. Looking up, I saw the rain begin pouring down, the raindrops like silk threads falling from the sky.

Thanks to Char, our first outing as husband and wife had been a pleasant experience, though I *did* feel a bit pathetic that he had to carry me at the end.

“Um, thank you, Char,” I said. “I had a good time today.”

I couldn't see his whole face from my position in his arms, but I didn't miss the way his lips curved into a soft arc.

Side Story 3: The Heir of Mercure's Facade

Recently, there was something that Bombe simply couldn't wrap his head around: Canon's behavior around the countess.

Is that Canon? He looks like a completely different person!

Bombe gaped in shock at the sight that he and Mine had just stumbled across in the garden. The boy standing alongside the countess wasn't the unsociable and too-mature-for-his-age future Earl of Mercure, but a regular fifteen-year-old boy. Canon was always cold and curt with his classmates, never showing his true feelings. Somehow, in front of the countess, he was successfully playing the part of an innocent youth.

Canon was giving it his all, though Bombe could tell it was forced. He was acting like a spoiled child, pulling at the countess's sleeve with a bright grin on his face. Barre had *never* seen him smile like that before.

"Mother, can you teach me another spell?" he pleaded.

"My, you *are* a hardworking boy, Canon, aren't you?" the countess said, completely unaware that it was an act. To Bombe, it was painfully obvious.

Canon often took advantage of his position as Char and Lam's son to get her to teach him new spells ahead of his classmates. While Bombe thought it was unfair, he'd never tried putting a stop to it. He knew the kind of life Canon had lived before coming to the schoolhouse, after all.

Unlike me, he doesn't have happy memories with his parents. It's only natural he'd want to spend time with his new mother.

Bombe remembered the day Canon had arrived at the schoolhouse, emaciated and wearing rags. When Bombe had asked, he'd been told that Canon was the son of some viscount who had abused him for having mana.

Nobles are scary, he'd thought to himself.

Mine hadn't had a great childhood either, having been sold to the Mercures

by her family, and most of the other students came from similar backgrounds. As for Bombe, while he'd been persecuted by the people of the village where he was born, he'd at least had loving parents. They'd eventually been forced by the other villagers to send him to the Mercures, but it hadn't been their fault.

Bombe had had several younger siblings by the time he'd been chased out of his home, and since he'd been one of the first students of their generation to arrive at the schoolhouse, he'd naturally started looking after the other kids like an older brother. That'd included Canon and Mine.

Canon used to be so cute and lovable when he arrived. How did he turn out like this? he bemoaned to himself. The once-frail Canon had grown up to be strong—and somewhat brazen. While it was a good thing for a member of the Mercure household, Bombe still thought it was a shame.

When Canon returned to the schoolhouse that evening, he instantly dropped his cheerful facade and returned to his cold, unsociable self. He didn't greet the others, heading straight to a corner of the boys' dormitory and curling up with a book. Despite being Lam and Char's child, he didn't have his own room at the mansion; just like the other students, he had to stay in the dormitories until he was done with his studies.

"Hey, Canon," Bombe called out as he approached him.

The boy glanced up, a flicker of irritation crossing his face. "*What?* I'm busy. If you want dinner, make it yourself."

"I've already eaten. That's not why I'm here. I saw you with the madam today. You were acting way different than you do with the rest of us! If you can manage to be like that with her, can't you be a little nicer to me too?!"

Canon threw Bombe another glance and sighed, his brow furrowing in disdain. "You're annoying" was all he said before turning back to his book.

The little brat! I hope the madam finds him out one day!

Still, Bombe couldn't bring himself to be *really* mad at him. Not only had they lived together for years, but Canon had a lot on his plate. Being the heir of the House of Mercure came with intense pressure, especially when his father was renowned as the strongest earl in history. No matter what Canon did, he would

end up being compared to Char.

Deciding not to let Canon's foul attitude bother him, Bombe vowed to keep looking after him just as he always had. After all, the students of the schoolhouse were his family now—for better or for worse.

Afterword

Hello everyone, it's Ageha Sakura. Thank you so much for purchasing the first volume of *The Countess Is a Coward No More! This Reincarnated Witch Just Wants a Break*. I'm truly grateful to all of you for making it possible for me to publish this series as a book.

I've written many stories about young noble ladies before, but this is my first time writing about a character who is married from the start. I really wanted to make the switch from Lam to Aurora distinct, so I decided to write the original Lam as an extremely timid character, to the point where the reader would feel uneasy reading about all the horrors she's going through. Not only is she a coward, but she's also withdrawn and disheartened, has no allies, no prince charming coming to rescue her, and her husband, who is incredibly busy with work, doesn't engage with her at all. It's quite the "hard mode" beginning! Since I'd feel too bad writing about her being bullied unilaterally for too long, I ended up introducing *that development* right at the beginning of the book. The new Lam won't let anyone else dictate her life, so you don't need to worry about her!

TCB-sensei is responsible for the book's gorgeous illustrations. When I first saw the sketch of the cover, I was so captivated by Char's aura that I immediately pushed my cat out of the way and stared at my screen, completely mesmerized. The building behind them looks like a church, so I assume it must be the Cerveau Cathedral. It's such a beautiful building, I feel terrible for what Lam does to it... I'm so sorry! Despite their busy schedule, TCB-sensei has taken time to design all the characters—from the lively and energetic Lam, to the stunning male cast (my personal favorite is Bombe; I love how wild he looks). Thank you so, so much!

In exciting news, this series will get a manga adaptation in Comic Gardo. I've seen the characters in the manga version, and they're all gorgeous! There are so many things I want to say, but I'll save the details for when the information is officially released. The manga version is incredibly fun, so be sure to check it out

when it comes out!

Lastly, I'd like to thank my editor, who saved me from myself when I nearly spiraled into a philosophical reflection about the meaning of life, as well as everyone involved in the production of this book. And, of course, thank you to you, the reader, for sticking with me until this point.

— Ageha Sakura









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The Countess Is a Coward No More! This Reincarnated Witch Just Wants a Break Volume 1

by Ageha Sakura

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Original Japanese edition published in 2022 by OVERLAP, Inc.

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Ebook edition 1.0: December 2024