





Kakkaku Akashi  
Illustration by Kayahara

1

# Miss SAVAGE FANG

★ The Strongest Mercenary in History Is Reincarnated

as an Unstoppable Noblewoman ★





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## Mylene

A miraculous girl imbued with ultimate magic power. Possesses the Hair of Sulberia, which signifies she is beloved by God. However...inside her lurks the strongest mercenary in history, Savage Fang.

**THE BERSERK  
PRINCESS AWAKENS**





“The stories about you were true... No, the stories don’t do you justice! I am impressed, Miss Mylene!”

“I could say the same of you, Princess Colette. What sublime technique you have.”

### Colette

Imperial princess of Colorne, a military superpower. Combative at heart, she requested a duel with Mylene when she heard tales of her unusual powers. Wants to make Mylene her personal subordinate.

CLASH OF THE PRINCESSES



*You never cease  
to amaze me,  
Lady Mylene.*

### Albert

At first glance, he looks like a beautiful girl, but he's actually the prince of Eltania and Mylene's betrothed. After seeing his vision of an ideal "man" in Mylene, he became her devoted worshipper.

"A little late to be telling ya now, but just so ya know, this is an enhanced interrogation."

"Unless ya talk, I'm gonna do the same thing to your left hand. And once that's done, I'll break your arms. After that, I'll do your *bottom half*. I'll start with your toes and finish with your eyes and ears. There won't be a piece of you that makes it out unscathed."





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YEN  
ON  
New York





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# Miss SAVAGE FANG 1

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Kakkaku Akashi      Illustration by Kayahara

Translation by Sarah Moon

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SAVAGE FANG OJOSAMA Vol. 1 SHIJOSAIKYO NO YOHEI HA SHIJOSAIKYO NO BOGYAKU  
REIJO

TONATTE NIDOME NO SEKAI WO MUSOSURU

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## PROLOGUE

# My First Life, the First Timeline

In a half daze, I had a thought: *If I were actually what people called gifted, maybe my life would've turned out differently.*

I know, it's a frivolous thing to contemplate while I'm on the job, but that's what happens when you get too comfortable at your workplace. You get cocky and apathetic. Even if your "workplace" is a battlefield where Fire, Ice, and every type of spell under the sun is hurling at you left and right—the principle still applies.

An orb of fire was coming right at me. I ducked away in the nick of time only to become the target of some icy thorns. Then I tumbled out of their path and landed right beneath the trajectory of a lightning arrow. I staggered to my feet and took off running. There was a soldier clad in fancy armor up ahead. When he saw me headed his way, his face twisted with terror.

I thought nothing of the sight—I saw it every day—as I slashed my sword at the soldier's neck. Barely a second later, his neck ripped. Fresh blood spurted from the wound—I jumped away to avoid getting bloody and turned my attention to my next opponent.

"H-he's coming right at us!" a soldier screamed in distress.

"Stop him! Somebody stop him!" A stout, well-dressed man barked an order. He pressed his palms together, and a bunch of different types of elemental



magic swirled inside: Fire, Ice, Thunder, Rock. Then he shot them from his hands.

*Sorry, buddy. That was a bad move.*

I crouched down low, digging my feet into the earth and putting as much distance between us as I could while I deflected the spell.

“Impossible... He *blocked* it?!”

“Th-the spell! It’s coming right at us! Aaaggghhh!”

The spell meant for me shot back up at an angle toward the soldiers. It only managed to hit about half of them, but at least it made a dent. Their ranks descended into chaos.

“Agh!”

“Guh?!”

I wove my way through the troops, slaughtering them as I passed. The air filled with death rattles and fountains of blood. This bred further chaos—and all hell broke loose.

“D-disgraceful! To think Eltania’s honorable Order of Holy Knights would be defeated—”

“By a filthy mercenary...who can’t even use magi—ack! Augh!”

I thrust my blade into the whining soldier and wiped his blood off my cheek.

Just another day on the job. I kill whichever monsters or humans I’m paid to. That’s it. And it’s a fucking drag.

The only company I ever have is my enemies. And the pay is shit, considering I put my life on the line day in and day out. People don’t tend to last long in this career.

But that’s what it means to be a mercenary. I’ve got no education, no connections, no friends. And most of all—

“Come on! He’s just one sellsword, and *he can’t use magic*! Just kill him, you good-for-nothing shits!”

That’s right, I don’t have an ounce of magic—that thing everyone needs to



survive in this world. So *this* was the one choice that was left for me.

“B-but, sir—”

“No buts! How dare you force me to stoop so low as to cross swords with a lowly *plebeian*!” The commanding officer nipped his underling’s protest in the bud.

*Dang... I’ve always thought being a hired soldier is a shitty line of work, but in a kingdom at war, maybe good workplaces don’t exist.*

Some cocky guy strutted out and pointed his sword at me. “You! Plebeian! Prostrate yourself in fear! I, the great Gordon Raquet of the esteemed Sixth Order of the Holy Knights of Eltania shall do you the honor of fighting you personally!”

“Huh?”

*...The fuck is this swine babbling about?*

As I glared coldly at Gordon or whoever, a group of my mercenary buddies ambled in behind me.

“Phew, terrifying as ever today, aren’t we, Envil? I mean *who* kills sixteen guys all by himself...?”

“What’s left, a common soldier and a fat pig? Piece of cake. They don’t call ya Savage Fang for nothin’.”

The commander took one look at the row of rough men in front of him, and the blood just drained from his fat face. And I don’t blame him. No soldier stood a chance against a platoon, even one composed of lowly mercenaries.

I burst into a swarm of enemies to stir up chaos. It’s just easier to do that job solo—in the end, all I do is cut a chink in their defenses and get the ball rolling.

The *Gordon* guy was sputtering for breath. His face went from blue to red in a millisecond.

“C-come on! Hold your swords, mercenaries! I am doing you the favor of dueling this pleb in one-on-one combat! You should be honored!”

*Aha... So that’s his game.*



Seeing that he couldn't win against a small army, he was trying to pass the whole thing off as a one-on-one duel. Snickers erupted among my mercenary buddies, and the commander turned bright red at the sound of it. I guess even he had the brains to be embarrassed by his lame excuse.

Still, I had no obligation to go along with his batshit suggestion. I just wanted to kill him and hit the hay.

"C'mon, Envil, give the guy what he wants."

"Pig like him ain't even a challenge, right?"

"Yeah, I second it. C'mon, don't be a little bitch now. I'll give ya a bigger cut *and* all the best food at the party tonight if you take him on. Whaddaya say?"

"Hehhh? Shit... Why ya gotta make me do all the hard work?"

But my mercenary buddies kept egging me on. I couldn't imagine a task lamer than this... But the prospect of paying my respects to a guy who'd made a fool out of me *was* a bit tempting.

I took a couple steps away from my mercenary buddies and drew my sword.

A twisted smile came to the pig's face as he declared, "I am Scorched Earth Gordon! Commander of the honorable Sixth Order of the Holy Knights of Eltania! Prepare to die, peasant scum!"

And after his grand little speech, the man raised his sword. Magic swirled in his blade. It was probably...a Fire spell.

I couldn't use magic. Not in the slightest. But my deficiency only made me all the *more* sensitive to the presence of the stuff.

I took a quiet breath and focused. And just before the man swung his sword at me...I kicked off the dirt.

When the man swung his blade, his wave of fire crashed down on the spot where I was standing only a second earlier.

"What?! You dodged my attack?!" The commander could not hide his astonishment.

Still, he was definitely a platoon leader. That explained why he could cast his

spell so quickly and at such a wide range. Not too shabby in the power department, either. If it hit a magicless guy like me, I'd be toast.

But none of that mattered if I could evade it. Wide-range attacks were nice and all, but the bigger the spell, the longer they took to cast. It had also been obvious where he was aiming. As long as I knew where the spell would land, all I had to do was step aside before the wave hit me.

Plus, powerful incantations like that needed time to charge, so he wouldn't be launching a second one right away. And while there were *some* crazy bastards out there who made names for themselves on the battlefield with their impossible casting speed...

"Urk...! That I should be forced to resort to drawing my *sword* for the likes of a stray dog!"

...Yeah, there was no way could a guy of this caliber pull it off. In a flash, I broke through his defenses, carrying my momentum from my crouched position to spring up with my sword. The commander moved his blade sideways to block my attack—but that wasn't good enough.

With a shrill *clang*, I knocked his weapon into the air. Everything went quiet and dark. It was like time had stopped, and I was watching it all from underwater. I saw my opponent's face—the face of the man whose sword I had just slashed away—instantly fill with fear and dread. This was the moment he realized that the guy he'd written off as insignificant was going to kill him. I saw that expression often. Thinking nothing of the pitiful look in his eyes, I introduced the man's fat gut to my boot.

"Oof!" He twisted his bearded mug with a gravelly grunt and fell on his ample rump.

I looked down at him without skipping a beat.

"Ah...ahhh! Why must I...to the likes of a barbarian for hire like *you*...?!" Anger mingled with the terror in the stout man's eyes as he glared up at me.

That was another look I saw every day. Furious eyes, tense with fear. But it's not a face I saw only in my career as a mercenary. It was an emotion that filled my entire life.



But the moment he saw the glint in my eye, anger got the better of his fear. “Y-you bastard! How dare you look down upon me...you *plebeian*!”

Plebeian. It was one of the insults people often hurled at me. Shorthand for people who had no magic and couldn’t cast spells. They were plebeians... And apparently, I was one of them. I know it’s pointless to wonder about, but if I had been born with the gift of magic, I probably wouldn’t be making a living on a battlefield like this.

“Huh... Well, now I’m curious: Just how does it *feel* to look up at a plebeian like me?” Being called that didn’t faze me; I was used to it. But I asked the question calmly just the same. Lord Top Shit was looking up at me, a baseborn man he had mocked. It was quite the pathetic turn of events, so I kinda wanted to know how he felt.

“Sh...shut up! You...you must have *cheated*! Filthy plebeian, boasting a victory you won by mere chance!”

*Oh well. Looks like I’m not getting the answer I wanted.*

Cheater. That was another insult I’d heard all too many times. With a sigh, I grabbed the nobleman by his lapel and stuck the point of my sword against his throat. The man’s anger once again gave way to fear as the redness in his face vanished in the blink of an eye.

“Eep! Y-you bastard...! What are you doing?! Unhand me!”

“Just for future reference, what exactly did I do to *cheat*? I’m sure that information could help me a lot going forward.”

“Y-you’re...you’re actually going to kill me? A filthy mercenary...is going to kill me...?”

*This guy just isn’t gonna give me any answers, is he...?*

I happened to notice a wet patch between his legs. I scrunched my nose at the foul stench.

*What a waste of time. I guess that’s partially on me for messing around.*

“Pathetic piece of shit,” I spat.

But the nobleman only trembled in response. I guess he’d lost his will to sass

me.

“Oh well. When you’ve got an answer, give it to me on the other side. We’re both goin’ to Hell, after all.”

“W-wait! Please! No...!”

I yanked my sword away...and blood gushed from his neck with tremendous gusto. I must’ve cut through his windpipe—words failed him. The only thing that passed his lips was a wet, gurgling noise. I released his collar, and the man’s ample body sank into the bloodstained earth with a squelch.

Meanwhile, a triumphant roar boomed behind me. “Exquisitely done! That’s our Savage Fang!”

“What a massive upset! Ooh, we’re gonna get fucking *hammered* tonight!”

My mercenary buddies sang my praises, one after another. In our line of work, brawns and body counts were everything. It was lame but simple. And I kind of liked it for that.

I turned back to my adoring fans with a cool, emotionless smile.

“You’re coming to the party tonight, right? C’mon, my guy, you’re the man of the hour!”

“Eh... I’ll think about it.”

“This guy’s cool as ice, eh? Lighten up, ya just slaughtered a commander in the royal army. At least crack a smile, Envil.”

One of my mercenary buddies—whose scraggly stubble was completely unlike the epic beard the slain commander sported—walked over and clapped me on the shoulder. His name was Adan. He and I went way back. And he was one of the few people I could call a friend.

“Heh. Don’t get too excited and let loose tonight. Your baby’s due any day now, isn’t it?”

“Ouch. I thought we were friends.” Adan snorted and awkwardly scratched his cheek. When he acted like that...it was really hard to hate the guy.

When you’re a mercenary, your soul goes feral sooner or later. But Adan



hadn't changed a bit. He was still a normal man who loved his wife. But even regular guys like him had to work as mercenaries for money—and for their country. The only thing we couldn't change was that the enemy we were hired to fight was Eltania.

Eltania was in the middle of a civil war that had been sparked by their evil queen's tyranny. The steep taxes she levied and the bloody purges she enacted had incited her people to revolt in anger. They'd raised an army of rebels and were attempting to overthrow the monarchy.

So that was how things were in Eltania right now. Most of us mercenaries had been hired to fight alongside the citizens in the rebel army.

And technically, I was a *former* citizen myself...

"Hmph... Guess I'll spare ya the lecture for today," I told Adan.

"Ooh! So you are coming to the party, then! I'll save ya a seat—you'd better be there!"

When Adan noticed our mercenary buddies were leaving the battlefield, he scurried away with them, looking back over his shoulder many times. I slowly followed behind my restless friend, watching him run.



"*Well*, would you talk about *exciting*! Did ya see that pompous nobleman's undignified end?"

"You little shit... You're completely wasted. Now there's no point in me sayin' anything."

"But it was a major upset! And we got a raise! And my wife's happy! A man's gotta celebrate, y'know?"

"Shit, keep it down. You'd be better off goin' to bed."

For all my scoffing at Adan's drunk antics, I still found myself holding a glass of liquor in a tavern later that night. My drink was crude and strong. Just one sip burned your throat, coating it with a chemical bitterness that only guys like us can handle. The food was also shit. Dried meat covered in dirt and dust. It was

rough to the touch, too. One lick of it was enough to make you feel like there was a fistful of sand in your mouth.

Then again, Eltania was in such a sorry state these days that even shit like this counted as top-shelf cuisine. Things were so bad in the kingdom that meat alone was considered a luxury.

We were sitting at a table with bad food and bad drinks. But Adan was in a good mood.

“People are sayin’ we’re real close to slitting that shitty queen’s throat. Doesn’t it get ya pumped?! Eh?!”

That was a sign that this rebellion was nearing its end... And that witch had no one but herself to blame for it. Her name was Mylene Eltania. The reigning king, Albert, had married her because she possessed the Hair of Sulberia—silvery-white locks streaked with vermillion that were a sign of being blessed by God.

Once she became queen, Mylene got up to all sorts of wickedness. She taxed her people to hell while living a life of luxury, and she would severely punish anyone who voiced even the slightest complaint. The king was her puppet—he couldn’t defy her since she was “God’s Gift.”

When civil unrest had reached its apex, Duchess Melissa Tullio du Lulutrois, who had always sided with the common people, was executed. That was what kicked off the war. The peasants revolted and hired mercenaries. And just like that, a campaign to kill the evil queen got underway. Most of the mercs weren’t even in it for the money—they just wanted a regime change. Went to show just how much that bitch Mylene had pissed everyone off.

And now victory was in sight. The noblemen who were corrupted soon after Mylene’s coronation had atrophied over the many years of peace that had preceded her. With our triumph all but assured, rebels, citizens, and mercenaries alike were in a festive mood.

However...

“O, Dia Milus, almighty god! Hear your pious follower’s solemn vow: I will bury that cursed child of Eltania. I will rip out her entrails, and I will smash her head with a cobblestone!”



“Mylene’s head!”

“Let the head of *God’s Bitch* be an offering to thee!”

...No matter how you sliced it, this kingdom was on the outs. I ignored Adan’s drunken babbling and indulged in a little thinking as I sipped my booze.

Mylene’s coronation had corrupted Eltania at an alarming rate. And the rot didn’t end with the nobility—the peasants who relied on their protection had gone bad, too. Heathenistic flags were springing up randomly in the streets, and everyone and their mother muttered the name of some bogus god as they spat out violent, profane curses.

The deity that these psychos ranted about was Dia Milus. If I recalled correctly, that was the name of one of the Gods of the Moon, which were worshipped by a cult. Its members would gather around a statue of a serpent with horns, like they were putting on a Witches’ Sabbath. If you asked me, a god like that had no business being invoked at a celebratory feast.

I gave less than a shit about religion, but all the cultists in town sure looked proud of themselves. When they yelled the same psychobabble at you every day, ya couldn’t help but retain what they said.

And that wasn’t the only thing that was rotten these days.

“Ah... Here it comes. The *rush*. Yeah, it definitely hits ya faster with booze... Hee-hee...”

“Wh-whoa, there... Isn’t that ludus? Gimme some... I just ran out of the stuff —”

“Fuck off! This powder’s *mine*! I ain’t partin’ with a single hit!”

A narcotic, whose use and distribution by citizens was banned by the government, had become widespread. It was called ludus for the pleasure it brought, and it was created from a crimson flower. People claimed it caused no long-term damage to the body, but as a healthy person watching other poor saps use it, it was obvious that it made people slowly lose their minds.

And while there were some guys like Adan who hadn’t been affected, this country was putrid. From inside out. Like a plague was running rampant.

But then again...from where I was sitting, I didn't really care about any of that. I just kept watching, feeling everything at a distance as I quietly sipped my liquor.

Noticing I was by myself, Adan came stumbling over from his drinking buddies. "Ha-ha... What a mess, eh?"

"You're telling me." I smirked. Adan was an optimistic guy, but he must've had some anxieties over the situation we were all in.

"If only the Duchess Melissa were still alive. Then maybe none of this would have happened... Curse that *motherfucking* queen!"

Adan claimed he was in the fight for the money, but it was really avenging the duchess that lit the fire in his belly. I, on the other hand, had no such noble motives. Then again, I wasn't really after the coin, either.

"You wanna make her pay, too. Right, Envil?"

"Yeah... Guess so. Though I'm not as gung ho about it as you," I answered agreeably, chuckling over Adan's drunken antics.

But I wasn't participating out of apathy, either. The reason I came back to this country to battle as a mercenary was...in a word, principle.

I had no parents. I mean, of course *someone* had brought me into this world, but I'd been an orphan as long as I could remember. To be honest, I don't think I had a bad life at the orphanage. I hadn't known it at the time, but all the grown-ups at the orphanage were equally kind to all of us. Even to plebeians like me who were ridiculed for being magicless.

And I could say the same of the kids I'd grown up with at the orphanage. Though I don't remember being close friends with any of them, none of them were ever mean to me. It had been years now since I'd left the orphanage to be on my own, but I was so grateful to the people who raised me there that I still sent them letters from time to time. Only after striking out by myself did I realize the orphanage was a nice, cozy place to grow up. I liked it enough to describe it that way.

"Oh, right... I heard that bitch queen burned down the orphanage you called home..."



“Yeah. Something about them *paying for the sin of hiding the fact that plebeians had turned to worshipping a cult to bring comfort to their pathetic lives.*”

Yes, Mylene Eltania had burned that orphanage to the ground. It happened six years after I left. She’d justified it by claiming the place was worshipping the cult that was spreading like weeds through the cities. Once someone pins something on you, it’s difficult to clear your name. The orphanage was run by a church with a longstanding history of supporting the national religion. It was a very fine establishment, but those bastards didn’t give a damn. They’d gotten it in their heads that the orphanage was evil. Nothing you could say would change their minds.

Mylene, with droves of the king’s men behind her, used Fire magic to douse the big church in flames. She declared it an act of mercy from Lord Eltania to the fanatics. Legend has it that everyone born with the Hair of Sulberia possesses the mightiest of magic powers. And whenever the mood struck her, Mylene never hesitated to flaunt and abuse her powers in the name of her status as a chosen one.

She wished to distract herself from her dull life of extreme comfort and luxury. That was why she’d chosen the orphanage—a refuge of magicless plebeian children abandoned by their parents—as her target. She probably figured nobody would complain if a bunch of lowborn kids and the weirdos who cared for them bit the dust. And judging by what else I’d heard about her evil deeds, that checked out.

Anyway, because one angry bitch needed somebody to blame, everyone in the church and all the kids at the orphanage were burned to death... The orphanage staff lost their lives, too.

I’d been fighting in another country as a mercenary when it happened. I came back because I started hearing rumors about the events. Revenge...wasn’t really my plan. What Mylene had done to the orphanage did piss me off, but at the end of the day, the people there weren’t really my family. But I did have an obligation to avenge them, and it didn’t feel right to sit back and let somebody else handle it.

...So anyway, that was the gist of it.

As the mercenaries and civilians celebrated their imminent victory, I felt like I was worlds apart from the clamor of it all. This kingdom was done. It didn't matter which side won the civil war. Even if all the people in charge of Eltania had been slaughtered at the start, before all the rot set in, the pillars holding up this country would have collapsed, taking everyone down with it.

Even if the purest, most moral person in the world came to power after this, everybody had an idea of how that would work out. The next ruler wouldn't have the capacity to do everything that needed to be done. And no such person existed in this shithole country anyway.

*That* was why I'd come back here. To take care of unfinished business and leave this country behind me when all was said and done. I wasn't keen on staying behind and watching it burn.

"Hmph..." I frowned at the party scene before me, which had devolved into a sort of cult meeting.

*Seriously... This booze is shit.*



The civil war had been raging for many years now. Each passing year saw new mercenaries replace the old, until I was the only original member of our crew. And now here I was, taking in a sight that the fallen rebels had always dreamed of.

"Hey, Adan...are ya watching me?" I asked my absent friend as I stood beneath a sky of thick black clouds that seemed to determine the fate of this kingdom. The question I'd muttered went unanswered. A tsunami of cheering voices washed it into thin air. I know it's in poor taste, but I wish I could have shown him the scene before me.

We were at an execution site near Eltania's border. Even though it was in a remote area, it was teeming with people—more accurately, throngs of onlookers were spilling out all the way beyond the fortress walls.

This was the epic event everyone had been waiting for. People had journeyed

from all over the kingdom to catch a glimpse of this moment. At a glance, all eyes in the crowd were glued to a hooded woman tied to a pillar.

This woman, her vermilion-streaked Hair of Sulberia flowing in the breeze, was named Mylene Eltania. She was dressed in the thin, shabby rags of the condemned. She was bound to the pillar with thick black leather straps that hugged and emphasized her ample curves. The sight was titillating in a way, but nobody here was looking upon her with lust. Her bindings were actually expensive magic inhibitors. If she were untied, powerful magic would burst out of her.

It was a fitting accessory for a woman who'd hoarded everyone's money until the very end. I snorted, enjoying the irony.

As the throng of people beheld the condemned woman at the gallows, the cloth around her mouth was removed, and her face was laid bare. Impartially speaking, Mylene was a true beauty. She was blessed in status, looks, and in magic. When everyone around you sings your praises as a gift loved by god, it's hard not to be aware of it.

"Bloody...*hell*! Impudent cretins! Do you have *any* idea who I am?! I am beloved by the Lord Eltania, I am God's Gift, Queen Mylene Eltania! How dare you defile me like this!"

But her character had been corrupted. When she opened her mouth, Queen Mylene Eltania let her curses fly at will.

The sight of the evil queen, shamelessly spitting at her people even in her final moments, was not a joy to watch. Her soldiers, who granted her a showy veneer of protection, had been stripped of their armor. And her magic, the one thing she could truly rely upon, was sealed behind her leather bindings. She'd lost everything, and her cries of resentment were unbearable to listen to.

Yet to the mob who had been spurred here by their hatred of Mylene, the curses they heard from the gallows were but an appetizer to the main course.

But you know, the queen looked proud... Well, not proud, exactly... She looked like somebody who didn't think she was about to die. Her sneering face, devoid of imagination, appeared no different from those of all the nobles I'd killed.



“The Lord Eltania’s divine judgment is nigh! If you do not wish to taste it, then end this farce of a rebellion at once!”

From the way Mylene spoke, it was clear she had lost the plot. The anger of the crowd was almost palpable. And as I stood among them, I sensed a stark contrast in enthusiasm between myself and the feverish mob. Would Adan have been raising his fist just like everyone else if he were here?

“Kill her!” someone yelled, lighting the fuse. And even though they were swallowed in the noise of the crowd, those words—the words everyone was surely thinking—melted into everyone’s ears in a hushed whisper.

“Kill her...kill her...”



“Kill her! Snap that witch’s neck!”

“Eep?!”

Once the fire was sparked, the minds of the people in the crowd fused together as one with rapid intensity. But maybe that was the wrong idiom to use here... Those flames had already been burning for quite some time. The spark had just turned the fire into an inferno.

This was the moment when everything would come to pass. The united mob was like a single gigantic organism. Everyone was raising their fists, calling for her death. It was as though a humongous monster had loosed an angry roar.

“W...wait! Stop this! D-don’t you fear the wrath of God?!” Panic and fear finally started to settle in on the witch’s face. Even she could no longer deny her situation. But it was already too late. The inferno was upon her.

Besides... Nobody believed in God anymore. At the very least, nobody believed in a god so stupid as to favor a witch like her.

“Shut up! If you really want to live, then *do something* about your country!”

“Nobody loves a witch like you!”

There was nothing she could say that wouldn’t fuel their anger further. The situation was irreversible. Her execution was set in stone.

The “kill her” chant picked up again. At this, a look of pure terror formed on Mylene’s face. Then tears spilled from her eyes.

“No... I refuse! I don’t want to die! I—I am certain that God would still forgive you if you stopped now! So please, have mercy...! I don’t want to die!” Her bitching transformed into begging for her life. It wasn’t out of nerve but out of desperation. The anguished cries of a common idiot who couldn’t grasp what was happening.

“Too little, too late! Where were you when the Duchess Melissa begged for mercy?!”

“Just who ripped up our petition and laughed in the faces of the people who begged you to spare Duchess Melissa’s life?!”



“If you can truly make miracles, then bring Duchess Melissa back from the dead!”

What’s lost will never return. And we’d lost so many things before this point. Spilled blood meant lost life. The final bell had tolled, extinguishing everything from this evil queen...and everything in her kingdom.

The anger of her people had reached its apex. Not a single one of them was on her side. Mylene’s face went pale with the grim truth.

“N-nooo!!! Wait... Don’t! Please, don’t do this! Somebody help me! Anybody! Oh God...oh God!”

*Still, what a horrible way to go out.*

I always thought anything was fair game when it came to winning a fight. Because as a magicless plebeian, I had very few choices. But...I at least wanted to have a say in how I died.

The way Mylene said *anybody* was proof that she had nobody to rely on. Not even her god would come to save a Gift like her. She was alone in the universe. I would not pity her, though. She’d brought it all on herself. It’s just... I wouldn’t want to go like that. I spat.

Ending her swiftly would be the merciful thing to do. Not that a witch like her deserved mercy. I wanted to vomit when I thought about how Adan and my other good comrades had died in the pursuit of seeing this hideous sight.

Maybe I *was* one of the people who wished for her death. Cued by the abrupt mood shift in the crowd, the executioner holding Mylene’s rope placed a foot on the steps of the gallows.

But that’s when it happened.

“Huh...?”

Out of nowhere, an arrow struck the side of the executioner’s head. Soon after, a terrifying number of arrows covered the air like a blanket. I used an already-expired onlooker as a shield as the shots fell.

What the hell was happening? I tried to make sense of the chaos, but no answers came. My best guess was that it wasn’t Eltania’s soldiers who were

firing. To them, magic was something to be flaunted and exploited, an excuse to halt progress in other areas. But these arrows were the handiwork of a nation who didn't over-rely on magic. An army who used whatever tool was best for the job.

It was an onslaught from a shrewder breed of warrior.

But when the rain of arrows finally let up, one of the rebel soldiers who had miraculously escaped cried out, "C-Colorne! It's Colorne! Their soldiers are here!"

Barely a second later, soldiers in jet-black armor flooded the execution site, banners depicting an ebony lion flying high.



"Ah... Motherfucker...", I cursed, gasping for air as I stabbed the Colornian soldiers spilling into the plaza. With the sheer number of enemy troops that were flooding the area, only a few of us were left standing. Everyone else here was a corpse or a Colornian soldier.

The messenger had cried out at the moment of Mylene's execution to inform us of Colorne's invasion. Whether they had planned it that way or they just happened to be at the right place at the right time, that much was unknown. But if nothing else, the moment was poignant enough to make the people who were there believe in the existence of God.

The invasion was timed so miraculously it seemed as if it was a rescue operation for the evil Queen Mylene. It was enough to strike despair into the broken hearts of the people who had fought for so long against their own monarch.

A few mercenaries still remained in the rebel army... But they were so scant in number that you could count them. And I was one of them. My employer was gone. Without my money, I had no reason to protect this kingdom. And yet, for some reason, I hadn't chosen to run away.

The Colornian soldiers closed in on us, locking in the area. Soon, I wouldn't have time to think anymore.

“Graaaaah!!!” I just let my muscle memory take over, swinging my sword at the wave of enemies crashing into me.

“The fool, he’s fighting us without magic?!” one of the enemy soldiers sneered as I charged at him head-on.

I ignored him and kept charging. A blade pointed at me, red light gathering at its tip...and shot fire seconds later.

“A double suicide, Envil? Fucking brilliant,” I muttered under my breath as I ducked and kept running through.

The giant flames hid me from my opponent. I didn’t even flinch under its scorching heat as I slipped into my opening and jabbed my sword up through his jaw.

“Gah...” Rendered incapable of giving any last words on account of the blade in his head, the man died on the spot.

I sensed a mixture of confusion and fear rippled through the soldiers. So I wielded all the strength I had. I kept ducking, tricking the enemy soldiers into killing each other as much as possible and using their spells as a smoke screen.

I couldn’t use magic myself, but it was *because* I was unable to wield it that I had an extra-keen sense for it. Just like gauging the trajectory of physical weapons, be they swords or fists, as long as you could grasp the arc of magic spells, they weren’t all that difficult to dodge.

“Oof!”

“Yargh!”

As long as I stayed in a place that was difficult to reach with weapons, be it one against a hundred or one against two hundred, nothing changed much. If anything, the enemy’s large numbers put them at a liability. It just gave me more easy targets to hit.

“In-inconceivable! How could *one* magicless soldier do so much...?”

As my enemies unceremoniously fell about me, astonished voices mixed in with the pandemonium.

*That’s right. I’m just a plebeian who can’t use magic. Sneer at me more. Stay*



*confused. That'll give me the openings I need.*

White breath pulsed from my scorched body. I was reaching my end, but I was going to take down as many men as I could with me.

Waves of enemies crashed against me. I killed...and killed again. Their frightened eyes no longer beheld a man—but a monster. Savage Fang. That was the name I had been given. Every magic user I'd fought against came to call me that. Savage and cunning, like a beast. Now that everyone was looking at me with the same terrified eyes, I finally understood how people came to be known by titles like that.

*That's right. I'm fine with being a beast. Like a starving, feral dog nobody would ever approach. Except strays have balls, too.*

I kept slashing at the endless wave of foes crashing down on me... But eventually, like the sudden calm after a storm, my opponents froze.

The surreal part was that mountains of soldiers were still piling around me. But they were stacked in an orderly manner, as if they were making way for something...

Gasping for air, I asked, "What...the hell just came through?"

Before I could grasp my abnormal situation, I fell to my knees in exhaustion. It was like a bunch of gears were grinding to a halt. The adrenaline that had been keeping my already-dying body going had run dry. My pounding heart was now so loud it made my ears bleed. I felt like every molecule of my body was burning.

"Ah...! He fell to his knees!"

Seeing that as a golden opportunity, one of the enemy soldiers smirked and ran toward me. Still on my knees, I thrust out my sword, piercing his neck. Calming my quivering lungs, I lifted my head. And straight ahead of me I saw... her face.

The icy eyes of the woman on the black horse. Atop her steed, she was a league taller than the other soldiers. It was a literal representation of her high status.

*If I could just kill her...!* Strength surged into my sword arm. I was out of fuel to burn, so I burned my own life force, willing my muscles to move.

“Gggrrraaahhh!!!”

Power restored to my legs, I ran toward her.

“You will *not*!”

“She’s evil!!!”

The head of the soldier blocking my way flew. I deflected the handles of the spears coming for my side as I jumped and dodged boulders jutting out to obstruct my path. As my already-lifeless body wobbled on the landing, a lance plunged into my shoulder.

I cut it off by the hilt, roughly yanked the pikeman to me before I thrust my blade through his head. Weapons were annoying to deal with—unlike magic, they didn’t have an obvious trajectory. And unlike Eltania’s army, Colorne’s forces hadn’t abandoned normal armaments completely in favor of magic. Their pragmatic fighting style was quite literally whittling down my body and life.

I had fought alongside Colorne’s army many times as a mercenary. But this platoon was a whole new animal. Until a few years ago, Colorne’s army had relied solely on magic, just like Eltania. And the one who had changed this was probably—no, definitely—*that* woman. Their brains: the empress of Colorne.

I’d heard she was quite the berserker, but I didn’t understand what the head of an empire was doing in a place like this. Had she been lying in wait to strike and take this kingdom in one fell swoop?

Regardless, I was lucky that she bothered to show her face. Now I could pay her back for this brazen invasion.

*If I could just kill her!* I let the thought sharpen my fangs and give my body the fuel to run along the dirt. A herd of soldiers swarmed to stop me. I slashed them, kicked them, made them fall on each other’s spears. I was so close...so close to slitting the empress’s throat with my sword.

*If I could just kill her... If I could just kill her!*

“Mmf—you motherfucker!”

*If I kill her...then what?*

Nothing would change. This kingdom was already doomed. I was just moving the limbs of its corpse. Then my already-empty energy stores ran out completely. My feet tangled around each other. The ground rose up to smash my body. Then the Colornian soldiers swarmed me, and—

“Wait.”

A cool, sharp voice like the plucking of a harp string brought calm to the chaos of the battlefield once again. I lifted my exhausted face to find that the soldiers were standing at attention. The empress of Colorne dismounted her horse and approached me. She was tall and lean, with icy eyes to accompany her distinctive long black hair. She was called the Black Lioness. And she was looking down at me.

“Colette, the Black Lioness...”

“Oh, you know of me? I’m flattered.”

The empress of Colorne was named Colette von Colorne. The ruler of Eltania’s sworn enemy was standing right in front of me.

“I came here to ask you just one question: Who the hell are you? I find it difficult to believe you could make it this far against my soldiers without choosing to use magic.”

“I’m just a common mercenary...and I didn’t *choose* to not use magic—I *can’t* use the stuff.”

“What?” Colette’s face colored faintly with surprise. “I see. So you don’t possess magic.” Then she stared at me.

“Heh! Did ya underestimate me...’cause I’m a plebeian?”

“No. If anything, it’s the opposite. You sculpted your magicless body and sharpened your combat strategy so exquisitely that you sent hundreds of my troops to their graves. I regard your abilities with the utmost respect.”

Now it was my turn to be surprised.

“Seeing you in action reconfirms that my theory was not wrong. Magic is supreme in this world, but bows, spears, and swords can easily snuff out a



man's life. It is my belief that a fighter should make use of *everything* in his arsenal."

That was...surprising to hear. I had just assumed the nobility in every country believed magic was inherently superior—and that a sword's only purpose was to serve as a conduit for magic spells.

"All the more so with someone like you, who has sharply honed his blade. I'd love to show the old farts of the nobility how a warrior of your caliber fights."

"Heh... Paying a little too much lip service to a stray dog like me, aren't ya?" Just breathing hurt like hell, but I managed to throw in a sarcastic smirk with my sassy retort. If I let it show that I was exhausted—setting aside the fact that I couldn't possibly hide it—I would be admitting defeat.

Then again, this lady probably rejected the premise that this was even a fight. A smirk formed on Colette's lips as she said, "I doubt any stray dogs are remotely like you. They'd better not be—I would hate to have my militarily trained soldiers slaughtered so easily by mutts."

As Colette laughed and played along with the sass of a dying mercenary, I realized that she indeed possessed the qualities worthy of being an empress.

But then she extinguished her smile and posed a question. "So you called yourself a stray dog? If you're a mercenary, you have no reason to martyr yourself for Eltania. How would you like to wag your tail for me? If I had a man as powerful as you on my side, my kingdom could surely attain even mightier power."

She'd extinguished her smile to show that she meant every word. I was being scouted by the enemy. A reverberation of whispers surged through the soldiers around me. I picked out one of the bewildered voices saying "But he's magicless..."

"Then could you defeat him in one-on-one combat?" Colette asked her troops. "If the answer is yes, then I'll gladly appoint you to my imperial guard."

The empress's words quickly silenced the army of over a thousand soldiers. It seemed she really did mean business. After all, she had come here in the flesh to scout me—a common mercenary.

It was a bold move. If I'd known about this invasion ahead of time, the idea of working for her might have appealed to me.

However...

"Can I ask you just one thing?"

"Ask away," she said.

"What's this invasion all about?"

"See that woman on the gallows? Well, she was incredibly insulting to me. She said, '*I am God's Gift. Give me your kingdom's sacred sword.*' That insolent wench meant to use Colorne as a vassal state. So I came here to pay her back personally."

I followed the gaze of the empress and saw Mylene's silvery hair hanging over her shaking shoulders.

"I came here because I received word that she would be out here by the border today... I never dreamed this is the state she would be in. I had no idea her kingdom had deteriorated to the point where she was about to be killed in an uprising. Eltania was already destroyed—it didn't need my help."

What a joke. So I was right. Eltania had already been doomed for quite some time. I didn't think her demise was *this* final... But the empress's answer was more than enough to satisfy my curiosity.

"Keh-heh-heh..."

The atrophied, God-obsessed kingdom had picked a fight with a known military empire. What a fucking riot.

"So you're sayin' you didn't come here to save that witch?"

"A repulsive suggestion. It's quite the opposite. Was that all you wanted to ask me?"

"Yeah...and thanks for the satisfying answer. Your timing was just so good that, for a minute there, I almost believed in God." A chuckle escaped my parched throat. I glanced to the side and saw that the volley of arrows had missed Mylene on the gallows.

No, I take it back... God might actually exist. The very fact that she was still alive was a miracle. It was possible that Colette had ordered her soldiers to miss Mylene, but it would have made perfect sense that someone in the doomed rebel forces would have taken her out with him.

I already knew full well that if God existed, He never did anything worthwhile. But it was truly a shock to see that the witch still drew breath amid all the chaos.

Then again, somebody *had* shown up to pull the curtain on all this.

It was a pathetic way to go... But I'd reached my goal without lifting a finger. Even though I'd never called my motive revenge, I still couldn't stand the thought of being there when Mylene died, yet not having a hand in it. I'd joined in this war so I could put an end to everything on my terms. My very last moments were anticlimactic, but at least I didn't have any regrets.

"Ha-ha-ha...*haah*... Okay, Empress, here's your answer: I ain't gonna surrender to you. Even though my homeland was doomed to fall all along, I'm not a cute puppy who'll wag my tail for someone who destroyed it. I'll just snuff it in a ditch. I'll die with honor, like the stray dog I am."

"That is deeply regrettable... But I'll respect your honor. However, let me ask you one last question—what is your name?"

"It's Envil... Just Envil. But I'm known among the mercenaries as Savage Fang."

After a moment's hesitation, the beautiful Black Lioness raised a hand. She knew for a fact that I was almost dead. Earning the respect of a badass woman wasn't a bad way to go.

"I'll remember your name always. I shall tell everyone your story in the pursuit of achieving my goals. I will tell everyone about the magicless mercenary of legend, who fought like a beast—the strongest *warrior* there ever was."

Colette really did seem to regret losing me. With a bittersweet smile on her lips, she glanced at Mylene on the gallows.

"This might be a silver lining for my kingdom. If someone like you were born with immense magic power instead of that wretch of a woman, then the power

dynamics of this great continent would have surely been different.”

Legend had it that those with Hair of Sulberia—a sign of God’s love—were blessed with great magic. If I’d possessed magic like that, maybe my life would have played out differently. And even though I’d made quite a name for myself, as I looked at Mylene, I realized that whether God’s Gift really existed or not, in the end, it was up to you how you lived your life.

“Farewell, honorable wolf!”

With a loud, gallant shout, Colette lowered her right hand. An instant later, the soldiers sprang back to life and charged toward me—and plunged their swords into my body, one after another.

My consciousness was jolted far away. So this was what death felt like.

I choked on my own blood rising from my throat. I couldn’t breathe anymore.

“Drop the gallows floor! Offer Mylene Eltania as a last supper to the dying wolf!”

Just as my consciousness completely sank into the dark, I heard the empress’s shrill command. A queen’s head for a stray dog’s supper—what a luxury. Then again, I’d rather not have to share my trip to Hell with a rotten witch like her...

Nonetheless, I’d finally gotten closure. It was over.

*My life no longer has purpose. I’m fine with meeting my end here...*

As the corners of my mouth twisted upward into a smile, the final vestiges of strength left my body, which turned into an empty lump of flesh.



———?

As I floated at the bottom of the heavy black pool of consciousness, a question mark popped into being on a spurt of tiny bubbles.

I had fallen asleep without realizing it. Wait, I was *asleep*? I started to doubt my own thoughts.

But I’d died. I was sure of that—yet for some reason, I was able to think and



feel.

There was a soft sensation at my back. When I twisted around, I heard the rustling of cloth. And with that, the water lilies beneath the depths released my consciousness from their tangled grasp...and my face rose to the surface.

As my mind returned to me, the next emotion I felt was bewilderment as I sensed light on the other side of my closed eyes. It was a strong, warm glow. The light of the sun.

*How...is this even possible?*

*Don't tell me Heaven actually exists?*

I clearly recalled the sensation of the swords being thrust into me at the empress's command.

And from the pained gasps for air I'd made as I drowned in my own blood, I knew I had died.

But for some reason I couldn't explain, I felt no pain—the fact that I *felt* anything was strange to begin with.

I curiously opened my eyes, slowly pulling myself up to sitting—

“Eep! Y-you’ve awakened...!”

Then I heard a girl's voice beside me. I sluggishly turned my head toward the voice. And there was a girl—well, of course there was. She looked like a servant—a maid. She was staring at me with fear in her eyes.

She looked awfully meek for the master of Hell. And even if she was one of the Devil's minions, I'd expect her to at least be a little less nervous.

*Wait a minute... Am I still alive? I've never heard of anyone coming back from what I went through.*

Nothing came to mind. Even if you assembled one hundred of the greatest doctors and sorcerers in the land, nobody would know how to bring someone back from the dead.

But if I *had* somehow survived, then this would be a hospital, and this girl would be a...nurse?

*And if that's true, this has to be Colorne. I doubt that empress would go back on her word, but did she really feel it was so much of a shame to lose me that she brought me back from the dead?*

"So hey—"

I bet this girl could at least answer part of the question swirling in my mind. Just as I was about to ask her where I was, I felt a strange sensation in my throat. I scrunched my face in confusion.

"Ee-eep! Please...please, have mercy...!"

But the maid was panicking even harder. She was terrified of me. Then again, I guess I couldn't blame her for being terrified of a mercenary who'd killed hundreds of soldiers from her country.

"Shit, calm down. I ain't gonna hurt...you...?"

*Yeah, something's wrong with my throat. No, not my throat...my voice? It sounds strangely...high-pitched.*

I would ask the maid about it, but she'd be too freaked out to answer.

*Nothing's making sense, and it's starting to piss me off. Where am I? Why am I still alive? What happened to all my wounds?*

Just an answer to one of those questions would be nice.

I looked around for clues. Upon closer inspection, the room I was in was actually quite lavish. I'd been to a millionaire's mansion once to negotiate a gig, but this room was leagues above that in opulence. The curtains looked like they were made of a fabric more expensive than clothes. And the bed was nightmarishly decorated. In fact, the entire place was lavishly furnished with exhausting extravagance. Definitely not the sort of quarters you'd give to a captured mercenary.

But. Barely after I absorbed that, all my movements froze to an icy stop. It was because I'd *seen* something. The sort of thing you'd expect to see in a bedroom. Naturally, it was also excessively extravagant, but let's set that aside.

It was an item you'd find in anyone's room: a mirror.

But the person reflected in it was not a mercenary scarred with old sword

wounds...

...It was a girl.

“What...the hell...?”

I touched my cheek, doubting my eyes... And the girl in the mirror did the same.

Judging by her face, she was around...ten? Though there were traces of childhood in her round face, her features were handsomely set. You could call her beautiful or adorable—neither would be wrong.

But the hair growing from that head was disgusting. It was long and silvery-white, streaked with vermilion—the same colors of the sulberia, a flower beloved by God. That was where the name for this hair came from: Hair of Sulberia.

It marked that you were God’s Gift, born once every several hundred years.

*Yeah, right. Like that would ever happen.*

The worst-case scenario popped into my head. Even though I thought it was impossible, somehow my instincts naggingly pushed a name into my brain.



“I—I apologize for disturbing your slumber...! If I have angered you, I am prepared to suffer any punishment! Just please...please spare my life... Please, Lady Mylene!”

As I sat there shaking, unable to accept the truth, the maid called me by *that name*. It was just the two of us in here. Someone who was *not* me was talking to me. She wasn’t talking to anyone else.

The world wouldn’t accommodate *two* people with the same revolting locks.

Between the name Lady Mylene and the hair color, my fears were confirmed. I had braced myself for the worst, and the worst had transpired. I had been reborn as that pathetic, vomit-inducing witch, whose selfishness had turned her kingdom into a rotten corpse.

And judging by my youthful appearance, I was in the past. My mind was eerily calm as I sorted out my situation.

*Guess I was right... God doesn’t exist in this world. If He does exist, He’s the evilest, slimiest—*

“Agh. Motherfucker...”

*God’s a worthless prick.*

The girl in the mirror grimaced. Like she’d just bit into something sour.



# Miss SAVAGE FANG

★ The Strongest Mercenary in History Is Reincarnated

as an Unstoppable Noblewoman ★

Kakkaku Akashi  
Illustration by Kayahara



## CHAPTER ONE

# Dignity

It had been one year since I started my life as the guy—I mean, as the *girl* Mylene. I fell into deep thought, trying to sort out everything I had learned over the course of my new life.

First, the name of this body was Mylene Petule de Lilie. The name Mylene brings to mind that witch Mylene Eltania, but apparently, she only started going by that after marrying into the Eltanian royal family.

Her real name was Mylene Petule de Lilie, to signify that she was Mylene of House Petule in the Lilie dominion. At first, I'd thought that I might be a different person who happened to have the same name as the witch. In the end, however, I discovered that the Eltanian monarch was alive and well, the girl whose body I inhabited was hailed as God's Gift and had the Hair of Sulberia, and there were plans to marry her off to the prince.

This had to mean that I was in the past, and the body I occupied was the younger version of the evil queen. I was appalled at the idea of two of her existing, but that thought was trivial compared with the humiliation of having to live as her.

Second, I discovered that Mylene had been a good-for-nothing piece of shit even in childhood. A year back—right when I took up residency in this body—Mylene would explode like a bomb at the servants at the Petule mansion if they crossed her.

From what I'd heard, she always got her way since she had been regarded as God's Gift from birth. That was why that maid had been so terrified of me the day I first woke up in this body. She had roused the little tyrant from her slumber. Afterward, she told me that she thought she was going to die then and there. And well, I guess she was being a little melodramatic, but still...

Third, Mylene's parents were also rotten little shits. They didn't abuse her, though. It was actually the opposite. Poor bastards were at the beck and call of the girl with Hair of Sulberia. When their daughter wanted something, she wouldn't take anything but yes for an answer. Neither would she listen to any pleas for humanity. All she had was a dependence on power, predicated on her ego and her Hair of Sulberia.

Not only did her parents not push back against her abuse, they also praised her for it. They told her that was exactly how a ruler should behave and gave her everything she wanted. That was the firsthand impression I got of Mylene's parents. They probably saw their daughter as nothing more than a bronze idol who would bless them with riches if sufficiently worshipped. The pair would present her with sacred offerings and then worry about their parenting style. What a joke.

*But then again, I mostly get to do what I want because they're like that...*

"Hmph!"

I swung my sword to clear my mind—though, at my height, it was more like a longsword. After finding myself in Mylene's body, I'd begun a full-body strengthening regimen. And boy, was it a struggle. I remember my little muscles were so weak that I had to start off by helping the servants carry things around. Thanks to my efforts, I could now lift a barrel and other large household items with ease. I'd started swinging a sword as soon as I had enough strength to lift it.

Despite all this, my outward appearance hadn't changed a bit since I started my training regimen. Probably because my body had *magic* inside.

It was obvious, in hindsight. The former Mylene flaunted her Hair of Sulberia and the power it gave her every chance she got, such as when she'd burned down the church. Just thinking about it left a bad taste in my mouth. Still,

honing my magic was a novel and fascinating experience.

Part of it was that I had nothing else to do, but no matter your origins, everything in this world was determined by power. Having been made acutely aware of this in my past life, I knew that I needed to get stronger.

I had to get used to having magic, something I'd lacked in my past life. But I also needed to become stronger because my parents wanted me to marry into the royal family... And I had no intentions of walking the path they'd laid out for me.

That meant I would have to run away and elope or something... But if I had any hope of managing that on my own, I would need the strength to pull it off. That was why I was training hard.

I eagerly swung my sword, testing out the magic filling my body as I went. I had been devastated when I first found myself in this body and couldn't even lift an empty barrel. But I had managed to put quite a bit of power into my muscles.

Still, these muscles of mine couldn't seem to get any bigger. Probably in part because I was using magic or whatever, but I guess it was also just one of those things that made male and female bodies different. I don't mean to complain.

And I'm ashamed to admit it...but in a way, I had already become stronger than I was in my past life.

"Shit, *nobody* should be *this* goddamn powerful. I've got so much magic *and* Hair of Sulberia..."

The term Hair of Sulberia came from the white-and-red sulberia flower. Lord Eltania, the god this country was named after, was believed to have loved it most of all. That was why people born with hair of this color were called God's Gift.

Considering how Mylene met her end in her past life, the concept of God seemed like the stupidest thing ever. But for whatever reason, people born with Hair of Sulberia were always blessed with tremendous magic power.

And Mylene had flaunted her abilities every chance she got. Between burning churches or setting mountains alight, she was like a little brat with a pyro fetish.

When you think about all the pointless things she did, it really was a case of wasted talent. I couldn't help but recall the words Empress Colette had left me in my past life:

*"If someone like you were born with immense magic power instead of that scum of a woman, then the power dynamics of this great continent surely would have been different."*

At the time, I'd thought she was giving me way too much credit. But now that I had magic, I could make history with one hand tied behind my back. The sky was the limit.

When I felt sweat trickling down my cheek, I set down my sword in the garden and looked at the sky. I turned my gaze back down and saw the tiny hands of a girl.

In my past life, I had been without a drop of magic. And I was mocked for it. Called a magicless plebeian. But in exchange, I'd trained my body well in techniques for killing my enemies on the battlefield. They'd toppled at my feet, unable to grasp the source of my power. Whenever a magicless plebeian like me defeated them, they'd call me a cheater or a savage. That was how I'd gotten my name: Savage Fang. It was a title that exposed the sore losers for the ignorant bastards they were... And it served me well, too.

And that was how I'd outwitted my enemies all those years. But in the end, I'd gotten caught up in a much bigger power...and met my end. My life was extinguished for good, and now I was being forced to live in the body of the wickedest witch in the world, the person I hated the most.

I clenched my fists firmly in anger. "I swear... I swear I won't lose this time. This time around, nobody, not even God can stand in my way..."

In might, in public opinion, and in history. Never again would I live a life where I let the current of fate carry me along the sea of great power.

I had no intentions of becoming a queen. Nor did I want revenge. Since I was Mylene now, I didn't exactly have anyone to unleash my vengeance on anymore.

*That's why I'm never losing again. That is the one rule I live my life by now.*



*I'll topple every obstacle in my path and live the way I want.*

And in order to make that happen... I needed to want it for now. Hunger for it. I needed to obsessively pound as much strength into my body as I could.

Expelling all hesitation from my mind, I picked up my sword and swung it again.

"Rrraaah!" With a bold cry, I imbued my blade with magic, sending a rift through the garden.

*...I hate to admit it, but magic is powerful shit.*

*Magic is the source of all energy from the soul.* When I read that in a book, it didn't make sense to me, but now that I could actually use it, I could see that calling it *the source of all energy* wasn't that far-fetched.

Drawing upon the caster's soul, magic transformed all energy into various physical forms. Fire and Water, Thunder and Earth. It even transformed the most basic energy from the human body. You could create all kinds of energy and power with magic—it was up to your imagination.

Apparently, each caster had an element they specialized in. In my case, it was *Light*. Which was ironic, really. I wouldn't peg Envil or Mylene for the Light elemental type.

But if Light was the hand I was dealt, then I clearly had to learn how to use it well. There weren't many Light casters out there, so no one understood its applications. That meant I'd have to take my time to fumble around in the dark, looking for a way to make it work.

And I had to start with the basics. That was why I was focusing on deepening my knowledge of magic itself and learning to move my newly magical body for now.

When you thought of magic, it was usually *spells*, like blasting fire or ice beams, that came to mind first. But that wasn't the only way to use it. Magic could also amplify its caster's strength and durability. The effects were usually insignificant, but the more magic power you had, the more physical effects it could have on your body.

And I was living proof of that. By simply harnessing the power of magic, I was able to imbue these tiny muscles of mine with an endless supply of strength. Even though I was puny as hell, I could still swing an iron longsword as if it were a stick.

*I fuckin' hate this power*, I spat. Take it from a guy who used to not have a drop of the stuff—magic makes things way too easy. It's unfair. Only somebody like me, who acquired magic later in life, would really understand that.

Apparently, the more you use magic, the more of it you get. If your magic stores run extremely low, your body realizes you need more and increases its storage capacity... I guess that's the logic behind it.

It was kinda how muscle building works. Except unlike muscles, which everybody has, people could be born without any magic whatsoever on rare occasions. Like the former me: Envil the mercenary.

So the more magic you use, the more magic you get... In other words, somebody born with no magic at all lacks the ability to acquire it.

Still, it was pointless to woulda-coulda-shoulda everything. As soon as I got this magic, the words of Empress Colette kept haunting my mind despite myself. I was still an amateur when it came to magic, but if I'd had the athletic abilities that I had now back then, my blade might have reached her throat. I didn't exactly resent her—I just couldn't help but wonder how that world might have been different.

I cursed under my breath and sheathed my sword. "Guess I'll call it a day." I was dripping with sweat. It felt a bit lighter on my skin—probably because *her* skin was smoother than mine in my past life—but damp clothes still felt gross to me.

But just when I was about to put the day's training behind me—

"Here you go, Lady Mylene!"

—My maid, the first face I had seen in this new body, smiled and handed me a towel.

"Ah... Thanks, Leah."

Her name was Leah. She beamed radiantly when I thanked her.

“Oh, think nothing of it. I am your *exclusive* maid, Lady Mylene! Come! I have a change of clothes waiting for you.”

My first impression of her had been a face so horrified you’d think the end of the world was coming. But over the past year, she’d gotten over her fear of me...or Mylene, rather. Interestingly, she came to pride herself on being my exclusive maid. Even now, she never hesitated to emphasize the fact that she was my *exclusive* maid in an effort to hold back other people in my circle.

And as for who was in that circle...

“Oh, Lady Mylene, you are beautiful as ever today!”

“You swing that sword with such freedom and grace in your fragile arms!”

“Your flying sweat shines as bright as the sun!”

...That would be the other maids.

Though when I’d first woken up as Mylene, every single one of them was terrified of me. And because that groundwork was in place, their emotional shift was drastic—I guess you could say there was a chasm between us. It was just too hard to get things done with my maids and servants cowering in fear every time I spoke to them, so I’d made it a point to be kind to them... And that’s how we’d ended up here.

Now my maids flocked to me every time I practiced, squealing and swooning over my exploits. It was annoying as hell, actually. But it sure beat the way things had been when I first got in this body, when people would act like I was a monster every time I passed them in the hallway.

I could’ve just told my parents to make my servants shut up, but there was no need to put myself in a more awkward position. Whenever I raised an arm in acknowledgment to my maids, just like I used to do to my mercenary buddies, their swooning only got louder.

*Dang... Past or present, Mylene is a menace.*



“Oh, Mylene! Your tresses are flowing beautifully as ever, I see. Have you finished your daily training?”

I had changed clothes and was walking down the halls of the mansion. It was a rare occurrence since I’d taken over this body—I could count on one hand the number of times it happened outside the mansion—but I’d just been called by name without any honorifics.

I clicked my tongue and answered, “Yeah... Guess so.”

“Ohh, listen to the way you talk. I’ve been receiving word from the maids that not only has your manner of speech changed recently, but the way you behave as well. Did some strange novel influence you? Your shift in behavior has been regarded highly, but we’ll have to do something about that foul mouth you’ve developed. We can’t have you speaking like that when you marry into the Eltania royal family, now, can we?”

This again. I knew he meant well, but there wasn’t anything more annoying than this. You could probably tell from the way he spoke, but that was Mylene’s father talking. His name was Balzac Petule de Lilie. He only cared about money and influence—from the peasant perspective, he was what you’d call a basic nobleman. And even if he weren’t that way, it was only natural for him to want to do something about his daughter’s potty mouth since she was going to be married off to a monarch, but...

“Yeah, I fucking get it. I’ll talk the way I’m supposed to when I’m outside the house. If that’ll help ya, then that’s what I’ll do.”

“Your disdain pains me. But if that’s the way you wish to do things, then I won’t complain.”

See, this is what I’m talking about. He always blows everything way out of proportion. “*I won’t complain,*” he says—more like, he *can’t* complain. These poor saps have observed their daughter’s behavior all these years, so they know they can’t say anything that would put her in a bad mood.

The way they treated her... It almost made me understand why Mylene went astray. Still, it wasn’t enough to get me to pity the witch who twiddled her thumbs and let the country burn.

I didn't know what most noble parents were like, but I got the feeling most of them would try to stop their daughter from speaking like a battle-hardened mercenary in high society—even if it meant beating it out of her. Then again, I didn't plan on staying in this house for long.

Having said that, the way my parents griped about me was a good representation of who they were.

“Now, I don't mean to be harsh, but make sure you mind your manners when we visit Prince Albert next month to discuss your betrothment.”

Basically, I could do whatever I wanted as long as my father could save face was and wasn't at a disadvantage. It was painfully easy to understand. It wasn't exactly an MO that I would reject entirely as a mercenary...but that just wasn't the way a normal guy treated his daughter.

“*Shit, Dad...* Why yes, Father, I understand and shall comply. I shall behave with impeccable manners when the day arrives... Is *that* how ya want me to talk, old man?” I gripped the hem of my skirt and bowed like a porcelain doll. To be honest, speaking like that sent chills down my spine, but this shit was like currency in the world of the aristocracy.

“Mm! Quite good. Well, I shall see you later, Mylene.”

“Kay.”

Satisfied by my reply, Balzac skipped off in high spirits. Being a nobleman, he did keep rather busy earning money. And thanks to him, I had just about everything I needed at the Petule estate. Sometimes I thought that I ought to at least be grateful for that.

But next month, I'd have to go meet the prince I was supposed to marry soon... And as you can imagine, that weighed heavily on my mind. I may have had a female body, but I was a man inside. Just the thought of flirting and making nice with another guy was off-putting.

Lots of Eltania's people had blind faith in religion. I highly doubted anybody would force themselves upon a girl believed to be God's Gift. But still.

Eltanians devoutly worshipped the Lord Eltania, the deity their country was named after. Now, if God actually did exist, and if He loved the former Mylene,



she wouldn't have exposed the ugliness in her soul to the extent she did. And for that matter, God would've chosen someone much more worthy to have the Hair of Sulberia.

But nobody in this country knew anything about that now. Almost everybody wasted away their days praising Eltania, their Lord and savior. The irony was that the woman chosen by God or whatever destroyed this country... Though, I was the only one who knew that.

In a way, I understood better than anyone what this God guy was all about, since I had the Hair of Sulberia. However...

"Shit... Next month, eh?"

My shoulders slumped under the weight of the reality that the dreaded day was already here. Once I moved to the castle, I wouldn't be able to talk like a man anymore. I could pray for a breakup, but that would only happen if I was banished from the family anyway.

Surviving in my current state wouldn't be tough—I could do it with an arm tied behind my back. But I had a full belly and a bed to sleep in without having to work for it. I had a place to train my body to my heart's content. It would be a shame to give it all up.

I needed to stay in this free environment as long as I could. That way, I could get stronger and solidify my foothold. There was no bigger annoyance than my damn eye-catching hair. And people didn't take me seriously because I looked like a kid. And if they didn't take me seriously, then no sweet propositions would ever come my way. That was one aspect where mercenaries and little ladies were the same: Our image was our livelihood. In conclusion, I needed to be the kind of girl they wanted me to be.

"Shit. Guess even being a little lady ain't that easy..."

The bitter curses I muttered under my breath vanished into the long, empty hallway.



## CHAPTER TWO

# A Divine Betrothal

I was sitting in a rattling carriage. My long-dreaded doomsday had arrived, and dark clouds hung over my soul. I propped my chin on my hands and looked at the weather out the window. It was spitefully clear and sunny. Daddy Balzac was pleased. Said it was a sign that God was blessing this union.

“Why so glum, Mylene? You used to be so excited about marrying the prince.”

Guess I was wearing my heart on my sleeve. Resisting the urge to curse, I kept my gaze out the window and answered, “Well, you know what they say, Father. The feminine heart is most fickle indeed.”

Since we were out of the house, I had to talk like *that* today. To be honest, speaking formally was the biggest pain in my ass. But it wasn’t my only problem. The gaudy, over-accessorized outfit my parents had picked out for me for the big day was impossible to move in, and I kept catching the dangling parts of my headdress in my peripheral vision. It was so annoying.

But most irritating of all was the fact that I needed to go whore myself to the male counterpart of Eltania’s destroyer, the biggest fool in history. While it was technically Mylene who’d destroyed Eltania by drying up the country’s wealth, readily executing anyone who disagreed with her, and picking fights left and right, she had not actually been its ruler—she had been its ruler’s bride.

And even though she’d basically been given free rein, the major decisions and absolute authority came from someone else. In the former timeline, that

person was Prince Albert, the boy I was about to meet now.

According to rumor, he was smart and kind. But in reality, he was the biggest idiot in history. An evil princess's doormat. Mylene's bitch.

Only one of the rumors about him was true: He was a pretty boy. But even that only further amplified his feebleness. In a way, the fact that he was even more pathetic than Mylene was what led to my assessment of him being a fool.

And I had to make nice with *that* guy. Could ya really blame me for being in a bad mood? I don't mean to pull the man card here, but as a man, it did kinda make me feel sick having a puny femboy ruling my country. A man with people following him needs to be a certain way, ya know?

"Ooh, look, Mylene! It's in sight. Behold, the nucleus of our kingdom! The majestic and dignified Castle Eltania!"

With a huge sigh, Balzac leaned out the window looking terribly excited. And indeed, a grand castle did loom just ahead of us. Well... I had entered it once before in my past life. To literally drag that pansy Albert out of it. And in the end, I'd barely managed to bring him out of the castle before Eltania's peasants, mad with rage—well, I'll let you fill in the rest.

"What a fucking drag..."

But the curse I murmured reached nobody's ears and was carried away on a smooth gust of wind.



"A warm welcome to Mylene Petule de Lilie of the Hair of Sulberia, and her father, Balzac Petule de Lilie. You must be tired from your trip."

Upon our arrival at the castle, we were escorted into the showy throne room. We knelt before the king, and he looked down on us—which was a slightly antagonistic way of putting it, I guess. Graciously gazing at us with plenty of dignity, from his higher place on the platform, was Yosef Eltania, the current monarch of the royal kingdom of Eltania.

With a long beard, long golden hair, sharp eyes, and a crown atop his head, he was the spitting image of an elderly king.

...But don't let my praise fool you. This guy's also a major idiot.

To be fair, a lot of the reason Eltania had enjoyed peace all this time was because of him. He'd formed a nonaggression pact with the neighboring imperialistic kingdom of Colorne. And you had to admit it was admirable that he was able to keep the peace in Eltania as long as he had.

Domestically, he kept taxes low, and there was very little discontent from his subjects. If you lined up all his achievements, there were too many to mention. If you judged him only by that, he would have gone down in history as a great king.

You'd just have to omit his epic mistake of bringing that witch Mylene into the royal family.

See, this Yosef guy was a devout worshipper of the Lord Eltania. Either he'd been blind to Mylene's true character, or he'd been willing to set that truth aside to bring God's Gift into his family. Ultimately, his choice sounded the death knell for this nation.

If only he'd brought up his son right, then perhaps the worst-case scenario might have been avoided...

"Come now, Albert. You can't hide all day," he scolded tiredly. "Your betrothed is here. Come say hello to her."

"Y-yes, Father!"

A tiny figure popped his head out from behind the throne. The rest of his body was still hidden, so he looked like a small animal.

*Aha... So this is the young version of the biggest fool in all of history.*

Now I could see how he'd gotten like *that*. If people weren't watching, I would have scratched my head in disgust. In a word, the little figure peeking out from behind the throne looked just like a girl. His short, golden hair was silky smooth and spotless. His face was quite thin and girlish, even by the standards of a pubescent boy. And his eyes were big and round, like a doll's.

Actually, if he had long hair, and if I hadn't seen a grown-up version of him, I'd definitely have thought the prince was a girl. While his facial features were

better proportioned than most, they didn't have a hint of masculinity. That is how this version of Prince Albert looked.

It would have been a different story if he at least had a bolder personality. But the little dude was hiding behind a chair when he was supposed to meet his fiancée. He was a lost cause.

"Wow... What a beautiful young lady! So this is the one who the Lord God Eltania Himself hath chosen!"

When Albert saw me, his eyes widened in surprise. I mean, I didn't exactly mind having my looks praised, but still...

"Oh, you are a charmer, Prince Albert. A pleasure to meet you," I said, giving him my best pick-me smile.

But Albert only scurried back behind the throne. Yeah. He was way too limp-wristed for a boy. I mean, I didn't wanna fool around with a roided-out guy, either, but this was its own kind of yuck.

"Ha-ha-ha, look who's being shy. So...do you think you and Mylene can get along?"

"W-well, I... Yes...! However, I worry that I am unworthy of someone who was chosen by God Himself..."

Just spitballing here... But maybe this country's biggest fuckup was the day Yosef decided to give this guy a pass as prince. Even if Albert *was* smart, when you're leading a country—when you're going to stand above other people—you're gonna eventually need more than just brains.

God Himself could have chosen Albert to be prince for all I cared—I sure as hell wouldn't have picked him to marry either way. Which was why I'd already started planning my way out of his marriage. However, now the idea of just leaving this country was starting to concern me.

I thought I'd severed ties with any lingering attachment I had with Eltania... But it was still my homeland. The thought of witnessing its destruction again left a bad taste in my mouth. As long as I existed as Mylene, history wouldn't repeat itself exactly. But that didn't make me any less wary of the direction Eltania was headed in since I knew Albert would be prince.





“You both are practically strangers. Might I suggest we get to know each other a little better over some tea? I’ll prepare a room for you two.”

Just when I was thinking it wouldn’t hurt the prince to give him a little pep talk (to further solidify my foothold) King Yosef suggested a tea party to help out his hopeless son.

“A-alone, Father? B-but I, um...,” Albert stuttered and cast a sideways glance at me, flustered by the suddenness of the suggestion.

*Aha... This just might be a golden opportunity.*

This all came second to my personal goals, but I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if I let this kingdom destroy itself again on my watch.

*I think I’ll take the opportunity to give this poor kid some balls.*

“What an excellent idea, Your Majesty.” I smiled and bowed, shoving my disgust back into my gut.



“This way, please.”

Some guards escorted us out of the royal audience chamber to a lounge. At a glance, each and every furnishing looked expensive. It was a gaudy place—not at all conducive to a leisurely chat—its company rooms had to be the epitome of extravagance for the royal family to keep up appearances.

Once in the lounge, all but one of the guards exited, leaving only the prince and me with him.

*Damn... Talk about complacency. I may be a fellow compatriot who seems trustworthy, but I’ve got tremendous magic powers and Hair of Sulberia. Don’t they think it’s kind of dangerous to leave just one guy to protect Eltania’s sole heir to the throne?*

Eltania’s citizens were foolish to place so much blind faith in the Hair of Sulberia as a sign of divinity. No wonder their kingdom had fallen.

“My goodness. How inconsolable... Hup!” I flopped into a big chair. Its ample, airy cushion softly cradled my bottom. *Damn, the king sure knows seating.*

I let out a snort of contentment. The prince flinched, and his guard made a face.

“Oh dear, *pardon* me. I didn’t mean to sit before you, Your *Highness*. Please forgive my deplorable manners.” I spoke with a twinge of sarcasm, hoping to provoke him.

“Oh! Um! No! I-I’m just a little slow. I humbly apologize for making you uncomfortable...!” But the prince didn’t take the bait. Showing no signs of irritation, he hunched over apologetically and hurriedly plopped into a chair.

*Prince...my guy...are ya just gonna take my abuse like it’s nothing? Now I’m seriously worried about you.*

The guard was blatantly displeased, but with the empty-headed way his master was behaving, he couldn’t exactly voice his anger.

“Please, don’t speak ill of yourself, Prince Albert. You are the prince of Eltania, are you not? You must be firm and not tolerate any disrespect.”

“Oh, oh...yes... You’re quite right...”

*Shit... This guy’s hopeless.*

I could just picture how this conversation had gone down on this same day in the previous timeline. This kingdom had been doomed to fall from the moment its prince was hounded by the girl with the Hair of Sulberia—or anyone, for that matter.

*Agh... What’re we gonna do about this guy? Where do I even start?*

“So, Prince Albert, there’s something I’ve always wished to ask you. May I?”

“Y-yes! Please! Ask anything.”

Even I thought this was a bold move, but at the end of the day, Eltania *was* my homeland. As things stood now, it was fated to fall, with or without Mylene’s interference. If the world was a peaceful place, that’d be one thing, but with their hawkish neighbor Colorne in the picture, Eltania was totally done for. That empress seemed like the sort of person who would be just as pissed off by a guy like this as Mylene.

I had to do what I could to help. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to sleep well at

night.

“Forgive me if this sounds vague, but what sort of king do you fancy yourself becoming, Prince Albert?”

“Huh?!”

I started by asking Albert what kind of king he wanted to be, as a man. In the former timeline, I’d heard that this guy was a softy. But as far as his accomplishments went, all I could list was *being Mylene’s doormat*, which made it all the harder to know what he was like as a person. The only thing I knew about him so far was that the submissive expression on his face just screamed *“Please step on me with spiked boots.”*

“I want...I want to become a king like my father.” As Albert gave the obvious answer, I noticed a look in his eye that I’d seen a lot.

“And what do you mean by that?”

“I want to keep the peace, be considerate of my people’s needs, and bring us toward a prosperous future—that’s the kind of ruler I want to be. I am still in the process of learning how to do so, but I want to be a king who is loved by his subjects above all else.”

*So the guy’s got admirable goals. He hasn’t left the cradle yet, but he’s working hard to do so. That actually wasn’t a bad answer.*

And the guard looked somewhat pleased... If his subordinates liked him, I guess I ought to reconsider my opinion of the guy. But there was one thing he lacked—an awareness he absolutely needed.

“An admirable aspiration, indeed. Now... I don’t mean to be rude, but may I offer you a piece of advice?”

“Advice...from you, Miss Mylene? Y-yes! Please.”

“All right, then. Please, Albert...stop believing in God.”

He needed the awareness that religion was bullshit. He needed to renounce God and make it on his own.

“Wha—?!” The prince gasped in astonishment. And I didn’t blame him. Somebody who was basically a messenger from God had just told him to

renounce the state religion.

“What...do you mean by that?! How could you say that, Miss Mylene? You have the Hair of Sulberia—you’re God’s Gift!”

“I mean exactly what I said. God will never save you when you really need it. I know that firsthand.” I pressed my hand to my chest and smiled... But my eyes were cold as steel.

With anger—no, despair—in his eyes, Albert rose to his feet. But when he saw the malice of a battle-hardened mercenary in my gaze, he meekly sank back into his chair with a little gasp.

*That’s right. I know the truth: Even if you are God’s Gift, He will never save you.*

I don’t actually know if the original Mylene ever believed in God. Maybe she’d considered Him an accessory for her own glory. Regardless, God didn’t even save the people of Eltania who believed in Him.

But those events hadn’t transpired yet. And with Mylene out of the picture, Eltania probably wouldn’t fall the same way it had in the former timeline. But if this wimpy prince became its ruler, the kingdom’s days were numbered. A weak country was like a prey animal. Relations with Colorne were peaceful now, but with that empress in the next kingdom over, there was no telling what would happen tomorrow.

“And *that* is why you must become stronger, Your Highness. In your present state, you are far too weak to lead this kingdom.”

“Oh dear... But I...”

Tears welled in his eyes. And fear wasn’t the only emotion I’d instilled in him with my murderous gaze. There was also bewilderment. Confusion over the beloved child chosen by his God forsaking His name. But the truth in my words—the words of a man who’d seen it all happen—and the hell reflected deep in my eyes seemed to faintly spark something in him.

Y’know... He took it rather well. Crying was much better than letting his stupid pride get in the way and denying everything I said.

“Might I suggest you stop believing in God and focus on strengthening your mind and body instead? Could you not reevaluate your belief in Him once you’ve grown up and have a better perspective on things?”

“Oh, oh... Er, um...”

I was barely managing to retain my facade as a refined little lady, but when I hit him with the harsh words of a battle-hardened mercenary, Albert floundered like a fish flopping on land desperate to find water.

However, it looked like he was more than just scared. The gears in his brain were clogged. In other words, there was still hope for him.

Well, it’s not like I thought I could fix the guy overnight. Unfortunately, I’d be seeing a lot more of him from now on. And he *was* thinking about the well-being of his kingdom; he wasn’t just sitting around picking his ass all day. Perhaps he would turn out to be of some use to me if I kept pounding some moxie into him.

Neither of us had made a very good impression on the other, but that would have always been the case. And I had no intentions of aggressively associating myself with the guy, so I didn’t really care if he liked me or not.

*Okay... What should my next move be? This is a prince I’m dealing with, after all. It would be awkward if I dropped the conversation here and just left.*

“I hope that you will give what I said some consideration, Your Highness. Though seeing as how you’ve done nothing but moan and whimper in reply to the advice of a girl, I’m not certain you’re capable of that—”

Albert’s indecisive attitude must have pissed me off more than I realized. Just as I was about to hurl another insult at him for good measure, the nearby guard angrily butted in to the conversation.

“Lady Mylene, that was rude! This whole conversation has been painful to listen to!” His forehead was lined with blue veins, and I could tell that his muscles were twitching beneath his uniform. His master had been mocked, and he could contain his anger no longer.

“Oh dear, do forgive me.”



“I don’t give a damn that you’re God’s Gift; I cannot overlook your disgraceful behavior toward the prince!”

The dignified face of the royal guard puffed red with anger was truly a sight to behold. But what piqued my interest even more than that was his physique. As an imperial guard, he surely also used magic, but he hadn’t neglected his physical training. It was proof he could pack a punch in a fight.

So it surprised me to see that a pathetic prince like this could still inspire such devout adoration in his skilled subordinates. It would seem that the tales of the prince’s good character that I’d heard in the former timeline weren’t entirely baseless.

“You cannot overlook it... Interesting. So what are you going to do about it? Will you punish me, perhaps?” I narrowed my eyes at him, daring him to say yes.

“Paul! *You* are the rude one! This young lady is my—!”

“But, Prince Albert...!”

A punishment—if I were a common peasant, he could have easily settled the matter like that. But he couldn’t. After all, I was God’s Gift. Cussing me out may have felt good in the moment, but he could only come out the other side looking pathetic.

And yet, I kinda liked this guy.

There was no good reason to believe in a god ya can’t see. And all he’d done was rebuke the daughter of a duke for sassing his master, the prince—I didn’t see what was so rude about that. In exaggerated terms, this guard had just prioritized the prince over God. *This* was the sort of person Eltania needed more of. People who weren’t bound by blind faith.

“No, Prince Albert, your guard is in the right. All this gentleman did was rebuke the daughter of a duke for being rude to a prince.”

“Miss...Mylene?”

I masked my emotions and trained the cold glare of a mercenary on the guard. The look in his eyes changed abruptly—he must have caught the

glimmer of bloodlust in my stare. His change of expression was so subtle that he probably wasn't aware of it himself, but I clearly saw the shift. It was fear.

In my current life and in my former, being underestimated sure came in handy. That whole wolf in sheep's clothing trope. That's how I managed to slaughter all my enemies.

*And yet, this guard was able to peek under my mask just a little. I guess this kingdom does have some capable bastards after all. That cheers me up a bit.*

"There is no need to win the favor of an enigmatic God who won't even show His face. It is we who live our lives on this Earth. This gentleman is the sort of person Eltania will need moving forward. Take note, Your Highness."

When I flipped the situation on its head and praised the guard, both of their jaws dropped. I bet they were shocked that I of all people had eased the tension in the room. And though the guard clearly resented me for it, he was uncomfortably silent. He had no idea what else he could possibly say.

"I don't deserve such praise, Miss. However, that does not count as an apology to the prince you wronged—"

"No, I don't suppose it does count. Though, it was never my intention to *apologize* anyway."

I interrupted the guard with yet another provocation when he tried to punish me by forcing me to apologize to his master. This was a perfect opportunity to beat into them just how useless God was.

"Miss Mylene... You speak abusively because you know I cannot lay a finger on a little lady like you. But you do know that is undignified, yes?"

"Oh my, you needn't worry about me, sir. I've been training hard. And I am confident I can hold my own in a fight against *any* puny man out there." I flashed him a secretive smile from behind my hand.

Frustration returned to the guard's face. He had to have realized that "any puny man out there" was referring to Prince Albert and him.

"Ha, ha-ha... Is that so? But you know what they say—pride comes before a fall. Don't you know it's dangerous to have too much self-confidence?" Though

the guard wore a smile and his voice was calm, his anger was palpable.

*Translation: "Shut up, you snot-nosed little shit." Okay, let's give him another push.*

"Yes, indeed... Well then, might I suggest you teach me a lesson? It would be an honor to spar with Prince Albert's personal bodyguard."

*Translation: "If you want a fight, I'll give ya one."*

It was a shocking suggestion. The two of them froze like statues made of ice when they heard it. But I think they got the message.

Prince Albert stood up and shouted, "B-but it's too dangerous! You're a lady...! B-besides, Paul is one of the finest swordsmen in Eltania!"

*Aha, so I guess he's not as slow-witted as I thought. However, what this little prince doesn't seem to understand is that most men wouldn't sit back and let a girl patronize them like this—especially in matters of brute strength.*

"No, Prince Albert... I think it's a fine suggestion. Besides, it's what Miss Mylene wants. And I wouldn't mind complying, either." Paul the guard's tone was icy, but a ferocious smirk lingered behind the superficially peaceful grin on his lips. My challenge was a godsend to him. I knew the sucker would take the bait.

*Ah, good. Now things are finally getting interesting. I've trained hard, and I've gotten myself up to speed on all the tricks I used in my past life. It's high time I give this new body a test run.*

"Well then, may we borrow the courtyard for a while?"

"Sure... W-wait, why is this happening?!" But the bumbling prince was already left out in the cold.

I looked into Paul's eyes and smirked again.



"Oh dear, I wasn't expecting to attract such a large audience."

We'd come out to the courtyard to find a place to spar. By the time Paul and I had both warmed up and chosen our wooden practice swords, word had gotten

out about our duel. Everyone in the castle with a moment to spare gathered out in the courtyard, surrounding us eagerly like spectators in a battle arena.

Most of their gazes were filled with interest, but a fair amount of the onlookers were directing death glares at me. That wasn't surprising. I'd talked shit about their prince. It would be a problem if *none* of them were offended. But not everyone was there to be entertained. Some of them were probably there to make sure that Paul didn't get carried away.

Our biggest obstacle to the fight would have been the king, but he was absent. Either he wasn't interested, or he was being held up somewhere in a meeting. Either way, it was a win for us. This made everything easier.

As I got a feel for my wooden sword, Paul addressed me cheerfully. "Now, let me offer you a little guidance: Are you certain you don't need armor? You might get hurt... Is this all right with you?"

"Oh, it's quite all right. None of the armor here would fit my tiny body anyway...and besides, *I'm not going to need it.*"

He was encouraging us to wear armor to maintain the idea that this was technically a training session. It made sense—even wooden swords could kill someone if swung hard enough. And even though he was defending the honor of a prince by dueling the person who'd offended him, he would be in pretty big trouble if he seriously wounded the girl with the Hair of Sulberia.

But his warning about the possibility of me getting injured meant hurting me was on the table. He was definitely serious about this fight.

"Paul, p-please don't! If anything was to happen to Miss Mylene, you would never be able to atone for it!" The whole thing was too much for the prince, who stammered wildly in an attempt to stop us.

"Don't be silly, Your Highness. Miss Mylene asked for this. Granting her wish to the best of my abilities is my way of showing respect to the Hair of Sulberia. Lady Mylene is God's Gift. I am not so small-minded that I would argue semantics with her when she asked me for a practice fight of her own free will."

*Well, he is the prince's personal guard. I don't blame him for being cocky.* Maybe that explained some of Albert's wishy-washiness—he had Paul to rely

on. If he'd grown a pair and said "*I'm the prince, dammit!*" then I could've apologized for my opportunistic posturing, and this whole thing could have been nipped in the bud.

But that's the problem with this country... Well, it ain't unique to this country, but the problem is this: The top dogs are pigheadedly overconfident. And that makes them way too vulnerable.

"All right, then, brace yourself. As we established earlier, this is a sword training session. Are you still all right with prohibiting magic attacks?"

"Yes. That was what I had in mind."

"Very well... Somebody give us the signal to start!"

At Paul's command, I brusquely readied my blade. My stance was a far cry from the swordplay seen in any of the kingdoms. It was *Envil's Mercenary Style*...and it garnered a lot of snickering from the crowd.

Apparently, word had spread among the nobility and royalty alike that the free-spirited girl with the Hair of Sulberia had taken up the blade. That's where their laughter was coming from. "*There are rumors that she's proud of her skill, but surely, she spread them herself. That's just one of her quirks.*" I knew that's what the crowd was thinking. I could see it in their eyes.

"Well, well, well... Is *that* the extent of the magic the girl with the Hair of Sulberia has?"

"So much for God's Gift, eh? I doubt she could even hold her own against a common rookie soldier."

But my stance wasn't the only issue. They were also mocking my feeble magic energy. The more confident someone was, the more they judged a person's abilities by their magic energy.

At the moment, I was restraining my magic energy to my utmost limits. That alone was enough to trick the gullible knights and soldiers alike. It even fooled Paul, the guard who'd been able to catch a glimpse of my true nature beneath my noble mask.

"Begin!" The soldier tasked with refereeing swiftly lowered his raised hand.

Just then, Paul beat his chest as if to say, “*Come at me, brat!*”

*Sigh... That’s the flaw all elites seem to have.*

“A gentleman, I see. So you wouldn’t mind if I went all out?”

“Be my guest—don’t hold back. I’ve trained to protect Prince Albert—these muscles aren’t just for show.”

Even in my past life, a guy like him would’ve been no sweat for me. But I guess in this case, he couldn’t help it. He was up against God’s Gift, after all. He was probably hoping to embarrass me and send me home in tears. But as I’ve said over and over, and let me repeat this piece of advice:

*Don’t judge a book by its cover.*

I crouched down, lunged forward, and held my sword upright. Then I crawled smoothly along the ground, but on two legs only. And in a sprint.

A look of shock struck Paul’s face. I’m sure he wasn’t expecting to see such speed from me. I hadn’t really given this move a name, but in my former life, it was called *beast stance*. It was a footwork technique. You ducked as low as you could so you could glide along the ground like ice. The inhuman movements of the stance, combined with its low, foot-tangling posture evoked the image of beasts fighting each other.

See, humans are vulnerable to leg attacks. If an animal came at your legs, you could just kick it away, and all’s well. But I was no animal. I was a human being with a sword for fangs and a cunning mind.

Though technically, I was just using a *wooden* sword in this fight...

“Urghhh?!” Paul slammed his blade down at me as I approached his legs. It was a pathetic, aimless swing. Fencing was designed to train people to fight against other humans...not against wild animals, running close to the ground.

At the end of the day, I was just mimicking a beast, but it was an immensely effective tactic. It also helped that I was in the puny body of fourteen-year-old girl. Just a tiny target moving at that speed was disturbing enough on its own.

I hoisted my sword over my shoulder to cleanly swipe away the blows raining down at my head. I could easily deflect them by blocking at an angle like this. It



was the most effective defense maneuver in beast stance.

“Augh!”

If we had been using real swords, that would’ve dismembered his left leg and rendered him incapable of fighting. But as Paul fell to his knees, I swooped behind him and thrust my sword into his back.

“Nice match. Did that satisfy you, *Mister Knight*?” I asked, throwing in a good dose of snark.

Reacting to my tone of voice, Paul finally turned to look at me. His eyes were blank. Stupefied with shock.

...Well, I didn’t blame him. I’d faced off against Paul without magic to lower his guard and had come out on top. Just like that. Without using a single spell.

Truth be told, if Paul had taken me seriously, we might have had more of a duel. But that wasn’t what happened.

“I caught you off guard, didn’t I? If I had challenged you to a duel with the prince’s life on the line, I’m curious to see how that might have affected your fighting...”

Hubris. That was his fatal mistake, and it had cost him dearly. He’d lost. To a kid with average magic and a little sword training. The implications of this were significant.

“I suppose the prince would have died in such a scenario. A word of advice: *Won’t you please avoid judging your opponent by outward appearances going forward?*”

My words froze Paul to the spot. I was right—if this had been a real fight, his loss would have spelled destruction for Eltania. That was what it meant for the prince’s personal bodyguard to lose in combat.

“*He can’t use magic.*” “*He’s just a peasant with a poor upbringing.*” —The hubris of the poor bastards I’d fought had gotten them all killed.

People really banked on magic in this world, but conventional weapons were still brutally efficient. If you could shoot fire or arrows of light, you did pose a threat. But all the spells in the world couldn’t save you from taking a blade to

the gut.

These people were unable to shake off their idealized image of magic. And in the end, *that's* what made Eltania weak.

The strongest were those who survived the longest. In that regard, that empress in the next country over was a bonified powerhouse. She'd have to be to lead an army to sack a country on borrowed time.

"C...Captain Paul...lost?"

"To a little girl...with no magic...?!"

A murmur rose from the soldiers who had come to watch. Despite his performance just now, Paul was apparently quite the skilled fighter. If only he'd actually used his real talents; then we could've at least had a proper duel.

I turned away from the still-stupefied guard and walked over to Albert. After giving an elegant bow, I spoke to him firmly in a low voice only he could hear: "There. Ya saw it. If you're weak, ya can't protect shit. If you're weak, ya can't even survive. And good luck committing to your noble cause if you're fucking dead. When all's said and done, you've gotta get strong if you want to protect what's important to you."

"Er?! Uh...well... What?!" The prince widened his eyes in shock, as though he'd been struck by lightning, either because of what I'd said or the words I'd used to say it.

"Might we have a little chat, Your Highness? If possible, I'd like it to be *just the two of us* this time..."

With my mask back on, my smile probably looked like that of a prim and proper little lady.

...Or it would have, if he hadn't seen my true nature seconds earlier.



Since we wanted to move from the courtyard to a place where the two of us could talk in private, we made our way to Albert's private quarters. I'd deemed it the best place, since not just anybody could enter, and it was difficult to

eavesdrop on us there.

Now that there weren't any prying eyes, I dropped the act and sat cross-legged. This made Albert cower even more in my presence. Pretending to be a lady was just too much of a drag. And though I had no intentions whatsoever of marrying the guy, we were technically engaged. We couldn't make any progress if we hid our true selves from each other.

I shot Albert a curt glance, and he squeezed his thighs together, shrinking in fear.

"So." I leaned forward. "I got a question for ya right off the bat."

"Y-yes?!" Albert's brittle spine shot up even stiffer than before. I'll admit, I was throwing a little too much at the guy at once, but the shock was good for him.

"Hey, kid. Your dad says you've gotta hook up with some crass bitch ya just met today. Are ya satisfied with that? 'Cause I wouldn't stand for that shit."

After spending the day with him, my biggest concern with this prince was unquestionably how *weak* he was. Let's say, hypothetically, that Albert and I got married just like this. Without a doubt, the future waiting for us would be the same blueprint in the last timeline—I'd have my way, and he'd be my bitch. And it would be the same trajectory for him with any other girl.

I didn't think every single girl vying for the throne was a witch like Mylene, but in my biased estimation, most daughters of the nobility were cut from the same cloth. In short, at the rate things were going, this country's future was bleak, no matter who this guy married.

In normal households, a woman holding the reins is—at least, when I think about my friend in my past life—a good thing. But if a psycho holds the reins of power to a country, it's all over.

"W-well, Miss Mylene...if you don't mind my saying so, um, I wouldn't mind if *you* were my, um..."

And yet. *This* was the dumbass who had the vital task of choosing her.

What the hell made him think a girl like *me* was good for him?

“Even after all the abuse? What a fucking joke. If ya really wanna be like your daddy, then don’t let a bitch like me give you lip.”

*Maybe this guy is more than just weak... He might be a masochist. Argh. I’m getting a headache.*

I mean, I wasn’t one to yuck somebody else’s yum, but I was sick of this country getting fucked over by pain enthusiasts.

“Well, I do indeed dream of becoming a king like my father, but I have an even bigger aspiration—”

As I was busy averting my eyes and smirking, I noticed that Albert was doing something out of character: voicing his opinion. So I turned my gaze, snark and all, back toward him.

He was easily mistaken for a girl, but the way he nervously shivered was strangely attractive—which, conversely, made me feel sick.

After a long, hesitant pause, Albert finally looked up and said, “W-well... My dream is...to become a powerhouse just like you, Miss Mylene!”

“Huh...?” What he said was outside the scope of my imagination.

“You’re small, dainty, and beautiful, yet you use such unbelievably powerful sword techniques—I want to learn those! And I love how you behave with such nobility and grace, just like my big brother would if I had one! Miss Mylene—no, *Lady* Mylene, the way you carry yourself... It’s exactly as I dream myself to be!”

His gaze was threatening and fierce, and the sparkle in his eyes told me he was sincere in every word.

“Stunning...strong...sublime...! You are a warrior maiden made flesh, serving the Lord Eltania Himself!”

“O...kaay... Is that really the right way to describe me...?”

“Yes! Please, I wish to become just like you!”

He was so insanely eager I just had to falter. I’d always thought he looked like a girl, but his preferences might be even more girlish. I had heard of people with proclivities like his existing...but coming from a face like that, I had to wonder if this “guy” was actually a girl.

In a word, he was into boyish girls. I couldn't deny that was pretty forward-thinking of him. Of course, an era where that preference was standard never came until I breathed my last breath.

That said, liking strong girls so much that you wanted to *become* one wasn't a bad way of thinking. Of all the things I'd heard today, I think that made the biggest impact on me.

"Ohh... So what you're saying is that ya wanna become manlier?"

"He-yeep! Um, yes... I do! If you w-wouldn't mind, I would l-love to...talk it over...yes..." Now that he'd gotten what he wanted to say off his chest, Albert shrank back into his shell a little, but he stuck to his guns.

"Keh-heh, I'm technically a girl, and you're asking *me* to teach ya how to be a man?" I inquired with a bit of snark.

No longer visibly upset, Albert began to eagerly flap his wings like a bird.

"Pfft! Ha-ha...ha-ha-ha! I like ya, Princey-boy. You're a real hoot." He was so silly I just couldn't help but laugh at him. But I didn't mind it one bit. "Sure, man. If ya wanna be manlier, I'll whip ya into shape."

"Really and truly?!"

The hungry way Albert eagerly latched on to me was undeniably hilarious to watch. It reminded me of the many men who'd asked me to mentor them in my mercenary days. Then again, this was the first time a guy had specifically come to me to make a *man* out of him. It was a refreshing change.

But I needed to make some provisions first. I put my knees up on my chair and propped my arms on them. Then I held up my index finger.

"I do have one condition, though. And if ya can't agree to it, the deal's off."

Albert gave an exaggerated gasp. I could see the fear on his face. But I wasn't going to say anything extreme.

"Stop believing in God. In my life philosophy, ya use *all* the tools ya can to crush the obstacles standing in your way. God Himself is no more than a *tool* you can *use*."

Quit believing in God. That was my one rule. It wasn't bad to have something

to cling on to. In fact, it was good to have a walking stick to stop you from falling. But only a fool put so much faith in his walking stick that he forgot his own two feet.

“But I...” Albert’s face clouded over.

“Ya can’t do it?” I sneered.

But after a moment’s hesitation, Albert looked up. There was a resoluteness in his eyes. “To be honest, I think that will be difficult. As Eltania’s prince, I was taught to have faith in the Lord Eltania from birth.”

*So he’s hopeless after all*, I almost thought.

However, the prince continued, “But witnessing your fight earlier opened my eyes. You have immense magic powers on loan from God Himself, so you could have easily defeated Paul with a single spell. Yet with just a little magic energy and a trained body, you defeated not only one of the royal knights but Paul, a particularly skilled one. Whether you intended to or not, in doing so, you showed me that God doesn’t need to exist. That I can carve out a place for myself in the world by my own power.”

In actual fact, Albert was absolutely right. I didn’t have anything particular in mind when I suppressed my magic. I’d only done that because it was the easiest way for me to fight. But apparently, he had interpreted it differently.

“To me, that fight you just had was a refutation of God’s existence. You have the Hair of Sulberia—there must have been some meaning or some horrific experience that led to you doing what you did. Therefore, if you tell me not to believe in God, then I shall do so. In exchange...” Albert cut himself off and closed his eyes in meditation.

“In exchange for what?”

His eyelids and his mouth were shut, so he must have been pondering a few things. But when the prince next opened his eyes, his gaze was resolute. In a loud voice, he proclaimed, “...I shall put my faith in *you*, Lady Mylene!”

A refutation of God’s existence. I had no intention whatsoever of endorsing such a grand conclusion from that lame-ass fight. But as reality would have it, I’d gotten firsthand proof that God wouldn’t even save His Gift during the final



moments of my first life.

*Ya know...now that I take another look at him, Albert's got a pretty good fire in his eyes. What he's saying is batshit crazy, but he does seem to have grasped something.*

"Dang, those are some profound words, kid. All right, I'll be happy to whip ya into shape."

"Y-yes! Oh, thank you so much, Lady Mylene!"

Albert's tightly pursed lips relaxed into a big, girlish smile. I guess the cliché *stars in his eyes* would describe him perfectly. It was a sight I never saw as a mercenary, but just being smiled at with such angelic eyes gave me a refreshing feeling.

But yeah, things had just gotten real weird.

In my past life, I'd never taken on a protégé. Thought it was a hassle. And even though Albert wasn't exactly my pupil, I never dreamed the first person I'd teach anything to would be the *prince*.

*Life's full of surprises, ain't it? Wait, I got reborn as that motherfucker Mylene. That's the bigger surprise.*

However.

I stared head-on into Albert's gaze. In a few words, his eyes were colored with dreaminess. As though he were a dirty little kid staring at a shiny new instrument—like when you fantasized about touching something out of reach.

*No, wait, it's not quite that, either. Could it be that...the object of his faith simply transferred to me? Nah... Please tell me I'm wrong.*

If he'd turned a girl he just met today into his new deity, then something told me we hadn't gotten to the heart of the issue.

"Hee-hee, I am so happy to have you in my life, Lady Mylene, my goddess!"

As Prince Albert smiled at me, I really couldn't see anything but girlish beauty in his face.

*No need to rush things... I'll just take my time and whip his pathetic*

*personality into shape. Does this mean I'll have to visit the castle regularly? It's a fucking hassle, but Daddy'll probably be overjoyed.*

I sighed crudely and glared at Albert. The blissful smile he sent back at me instilled me with an unplaceable sense of dread over where this was headed.



## CHAPTER THREE

# Karma

Some time had passed since my first trip to the castle. I was once again engrossed in my daily training regimen. My muscle bulk could still only be called healthy at best, but magic-wise, I was making great progress.

I was getting a little burned-out from the monotony of my daily routine, but change had come to the Petule estate recently.

The usual gaggle of idle maids who came to watch me practice in the garden were not here today because I'd gone through the trouble of shoos them away. As for the reason why...

"The fuck kind of posture is that?! Put some spirit in your backbone, dumbass!"

"Ah! Yes, my lady-eee...!"

...The prince was visiting the Petule garden today. That's right. This guy, this girlie boy replying meekly but eagerly to my scolding, was Eltania's sole heir to the throne: Prince Albert.

At first, I'd thought I would be going to the castle for our training sessions, but one day (and I'm not sure what he was even thinking), the prince showed up at the Petule manor. There were a lot of issues with a member of the royal family—and a prince, no less—going to visit someone beneath his station rather than the other way around, but he'd apparently put his princely foot down and

talked his circle into being allowed to do it.

Using his special privileges to visit a girl of all things was a bit silly, but I guess I should be pleased that he'd grown the balls to do it.

The reason I had to send my audience away was because I couldn't exactly kick the prince's ass while commoners were watching.

"Hah...! Hah...!"

Still, since this guy had actually grown a spine recently, I'd been getting fewer chances to do it. Albert corrected his stance as instructed and swung his wooden sword. From the way he was huffing, it looked like he was hurting keeping upright, but he knew that I would scold him again if he broke his posture, so he gritted his teeth and held his back straight.

"Good... You can stop now. Take a rest."

"Yes, my lady-eee...!" At my signal to take a break, he fell onto his back, letting the grassy carpet cradle him. He looked pretty exhausted for a guy who was only swinging a wooden sword. He wasn't half dead, more like two-thirds dead. But compared with how he'd been on the first day he came to me, he'd come quite a long way.

"W-well, Lady Mylene? How was that...?"

To be honest, he hadn't even reached a place where he could be properly critiqued yet. He wasn't fit to stand on a battlefield for one thing. Any snott-nosed kid who'd learned to fence was better than him.

But the prince never ceased to surprise me. And the desperate way he latched on to every lesson I gave him wasn't too shabby.

"It was so-so. Your sword technique is still garbage, but your posture's gotten better."

"Hee-hee... Thank you so much..."

*Then again, his physique hasn't really changed at all. I don't suppose there'll be a plot twist where it turns out he was a girl all along?* The Albert I'd seen in my past life was a body double—or at least that was the impression I'd gotten now when I saw how girlish the Albert in front of me was.

*Well, it's not like he has to survive as a mercenary. All he needs is technique and toning...and a proper backbone... Then he won't have any problems.*

That aside... I was the one with problems. I knew I would get stronger as I got more and more magic in my body. But my physical appearance wasn't changing much at all. My arms had built up a bit of muscle tone, but they were so skinny that they weren't even worth comparing to the guns I'd had in my former life. At first, I considered becoming a mercenary this time around, too, but maybe it was best I gave up on trying to add a prestigious luster to my appearance.

I swished my sword at attention to get the tangled web of thought out of my mind, swinging as I pleased. Believe it or not, I had gained quite a lot of knowledge from my little duel with Paul earlier.

Sword techniques from the crouching beast stance I favored as a mercenary worked perfectly with my tiny body. I could become even lower, even tinier. In beast stance, a melee-focused fighting style that concentrated on evasion, being a small target for attacks gave me the advantage of weighing my options when it came to my sword's range.

"You never cease to amaze me, Lady Mylene. Your swordplay—nay, your combat sense is truly outstanding... I've never seen anything like the way you maneuver your sword from such a low stance."

"Like I told ya before, *use all the tools at your disposal*. Just think about what's the best way to fight against someone who uses magic, and you'll naturally arrive at my fighting style."

When Albert caught a glimpse of me practicing the forms I'd developed in my former life, he stopped practicing his own standard sword forms and leaned forward eagerly to watch. I'd developed my sword technique as an anti-magic art first and foremost, so its movements were all centered on taking out spellcasters.

On a fundamental level, magic attacks went either in direct lines or radially, across a circular area. By making myself low and compact, I gave myself an advantage against such long-range attacks.

In contrast, the nobility also put themselves at a disadvantage by focusing on anti-sword techniques. The fencing they taught couldn't handle beasts crawling

across the ground, so as long as you optimized your reaction to the *type* of movements your opponents used, beast stance was hard to deal with, especially if they hadn't been taught to do the same.

And *that* is why I'd been called Savage Fang in my former life. The nobility believed I was cheating by fighting against them with moves they'd never been taught. Those sore losers had christened me out of spite.

"Well, if ya just learn a bunch of tricks and apply them, you'll be able to master some techniques unique from mine. It's the same in every field."

"Oh... Now I see!" Albert's eyes sparkled. "So by mastering the secrets of your art, I can discover new ones for myself!"

"It ain't *that* grand, kid," I spat curtly, leaning in toward Albert.

*Why does this guy always have to be so awkwardly poetic? Can't he think in simpler terms? That'd be nice.*

I snorted and gripped my sword again. I was just thinking about working on my magic next, when—

"Mylene! Oh, Mylene, there's big news!"

My dad came stumbling out of the house. As the huffing, bumbling man barely managed to make it over to me, I started to think that maybe this guy was the one who needed to be whipped into shape. But there seemed to be a reason he was flustered.

"What's wrong, Pops? Somethin' happen?"

But my question only made Balzac's face turn bluer by the second. "M-Mylene...! You are in the presence of Prince Albert!"

"Oh, don't mind me, sir. Besides, I think she's much more valiant that way, don't you?"

"Heh...? Y-yes... If you say so, Prince Albert, then I suppose it's all right..."

For all my dad's griping about the crass way I talked, Albert was already used to it. He passionately defended it, even. This made a different shade of bewilderment color my dad's face.



“Ahem! N-never mind that. Mylene, something exciting has happened.”

Balzac loudly cleared his throat—either to chase away his exhaustion or to reset his mood—and ceremoniously presented something to me. It was a letter. A man of his status would normally let his vassal handle his mail. I dubiously flipped over the envelope.

And then I saw it... The seal of the black lion.

“Is this from Colorne?” I asked.

At my mention of the empire, Albert stood on tiptoe to sneak a peek. I tore open the envelope... And just as the seal had indicated, it was indeed a letter from Colorne, addressed to me.

“It’s...an invitation to attend an exhibition of Colorne’s knights? Why the hell did *Colorne* send this to *me*?”

The missive was an invitation for Mylene Petule de Lilie of the Hair of Sulberia to attend an exhibition performance of the Order of the Knights of Colorne. Compared with Eltania, where I was worshipped as God’s Gift, Colorne, which had no state religion, regarded the Hair of Sulberia as nothing more than a sign that its owner had powerful magic.

It was Albert who answered the question that slipped out of my mouth. “Are you not aware, Lady Mylene? Ever since that little incident at the castle, your name has become widely known not only throughout Eltania but also in the neighboring empire of Colorne as well.”

“Huh? Shit, what a pain in the ass,” I cursed, spitting my feelings out in the open. My eventual plan was to disappear, cover my tracks, and maybe become a mercenary. Being famous was a liability. Back when I’d worked as a hired sword, I longed to be a lone wolf with miliary fame. But as a daughter of the nobility who wanted to run away from home...notoriety would only shackle me.

And the person who spread this cumbersome news about me was...

“Hmm...? Is something the matter, Lady Mylene?!”

...the little princey-boy, gazing at me with stars in his eyes.

I gave Albert’s hair a violent tussling.

“Wh-whoa! L-Lady Mylene, please stop!”

Despite his protests, he was clearly enjoying the attention. When I did as he said and stopped, he whimpered like a neglected puppy.

“The knights’ exhibition, eh... And they want me, some random daughter of the nobility from another country to come... That’s some crazy shit right there.”

Regaining my composure, I turned my attention back to the letter. Inviting me to a party or something would have made more sense, but this was a knights’ exhibition performance. Going off the former timeline, maybe they wanted to show off their military might or something?

“Is that so? Well, Colorne’s princess is famous for being a fierce fighter and a tomboy. Don’t you suppose she took an interest in you since your dominion is near hers?”

“Could be.”

*Yeah... I guess it would make sense for them to invite someone over from an atrophied kingdom like Eltania.*

And just as Albert said, the letter was signed by the woman I’d seen at the end of my former life: the empress of Colorne. This was probably before her coronation, though, since she had only signed it *Colette*.

Colette von Colorne. In the previous timeline, she’d destroyed my home and taken my life. There was no way I would ever forget that name. Mind you, I didn’t hold much of a grudge over what she had done to me... But I *was* curious to see what she was like in this timeline.

“Y’know, this sounds like it could be fun... Hey, Pops, tell the bitch I’m comin’ over,” I said, casually tossing the letter at my dad. It was funny how visibly flustered that made him.

“S-sure... Very well. But, Mylene, *please* watch your language!”

“I ask the same, Lady Mylene. While I do find you more charming this way, you don’t want to be profane around the princess of Colorne.”

Prince Albert was surprisingly calm in contrast. He’d seen me put on my charm plenty of times, so he probably trusted I could behave myself. *Use all the*

*tools at your disposal.* I was the one who had taught him that lesson. And I wasn't about to contradict myself.

"Yeah, fine. I get it, dammit... Though I do have my reservations, I shall do just as you say." *Dang, I've gotten really good at noble girl-speak.* I almost cursed under my breath, but I forced it back with my best dignified, feminine smile.

Balzac heaved an exaggerated sigh, while Albert smiled with stars in his eyes—they were like night and day.



A few days later, I was jostling in a carriage. I was headed toward the capital of Colorne, an empire not far from my family's territory. As a matter of fact, it wasn't my first time coming here. I'd gone there many times for work during my days as a solo mercenary.

Perhaps because of its fine military, Colorne was excellent at keeping order. This had spurred an industrial revolution, which had invigorated the empire as a whole—what I was saying was: I really liked this town.

Most importantly, it had great food. My first time eating sausage there had been a profoundly emotional experience. I'd accepted the invitation to come here knowing I could look forward to some good eats...

Just when I was starting to forget about the whole military exhibition, *it* came into view, an awkwardly large palace that signified the military might of the Colornian Empire. The gate opened loudly with aplomb to welcome our carriage. I felt like we were marching into the mouth of a giant monster... Though, that was probably my past-life memory's influence.

We passed through rows of soldiers lined up to greet the carriage—to greet me, rather—and we came to a stop at the palace entrance. Atop the arc of steps near the palace entrance was a girl with long black hair. Her eyes were sparkling, her arms were crossed, and she stood proudly.

This girl was...maybe a little too old to be called that, but she held vestiges of girlish innocence beneath the sharp gleam of her eyes. The moment I saw her, bells went off.

“Welcome, noble lady of beautiful hair. I am deeply grateful that you accepted my personal invitation!”

Personal invitation... When you thought about it, there was nothing wrong about the way she phrased it. This girl was indeed *Colette*. She was *just* Colette at present, since neither she nor any of her siblings had been chosen to ascend the throne. But I knew the truth.

This was the future empress who would take the surname Von Colorne—and she was my nemesis.

Colorne’s rulers chose their successors from the brightest and best of their children. This girl had made a place for herself in such a world from a young age. And while her eyes held a girlish twinkle to them, they were also sharp like a hawk’s—no, like a lion’s. According to rumor, she had a younger sister and an elder brother. I wonder if they had the same eyes?

I was impressed, but not surprised... This was Colorne’s future empress, after all. But I wasn’t the man I used to be. Vassal on my hand, I grandly climbed the steps.

“A pleasure to meet you. I am Mylene Petule de Lilie. I was honored to receive your invitation, and I do hope we see more of each other in the coming days...” I lifted the hem of my skirt and gave a reverent curtsy.

*Use all the tools at your disposal.* When I gave her my name, I let my fighting spirit burn violently in my eyes, putting my life’s philosophy on display.

“So *that’s* the Hair of Sulberia...”

“From the rumors, I was expecting a brusque woman, but how lovely you are...,” the nobleman standing beside her said dreamily. Well, I did have a pretty face. I wouldn’t blame him for having that impression without knowing who I was on the inside.

The present-me and the former-me didn’t exactly have personalities worth praising. Not even insincerely. Still, if I’d duped this guy that easily, I guess the nobility of Colorne wasn’t all that great either—

“Mmmrrrggg!”

Things would sure be easier if that were true.

But when I saw Colette, shaking slightly and smiling eagerly at the glimpse of warrior spirit hidden deep within my eyes, I realized she would be a tough nut to crack. According to rumor, Princess Colette was infamous for her pride in her fighting prowess. And now I knew firsthand that those tales were true.





“Ha-ha—I like you! I hope we become good friends. I have a feeling you and I are going to be seeing a lot of each other for a very long time.”

“Yes, Princess, the feeling is mutual. If I may be so bold, I do hope that you and I will become the best of friends, as we are around the same age.”

I gave her outstretched hand a gentle squeeze. The explosion of sighs around us proved that we really did paint quite a beautiful picture together.

Though Colette was still young, her pristine facial features evoked the feeling that she would be quite a beauty once she grew up. My white hair and Colette’s black hair. If I saw two contrastingly beautiful young ladies holding hands without any further context, it would definitely be a feast for the eyes.

But the truth was that we were two beasts facing off against each other. Now, I wonder how many people saw *that*.

“We have some time before the exhibition begins. In the meantime, you should rest from your long journey.”



A while later...

We had relocated to a meadow near Colorne’s capital of Wussberg. In the vast field, overflowing with people, I watched the knights practice from my seat of honor above them.

The men were separated into two groups of red and white, the colors of Colorne’s flag. Their sparring was quite impressive to watch. I was told that two generals led each group of soldiers. This military exhibition was both a festival and a friendly competition.

But if I was gonna be honest...it was kinda boring.

Sure, their skills were the real deal, but as someone who knew just how powerful Colorne’s military would become in the future, it was frankly a bit of a letdown to watch.

In the wars that transpired after the development of magic, it was not uncommon for a single hero to determine the outcome of a fight. That was why



it was common to have a group of soldiers shooting spells to support one brave general on the battlefield.

In the future, Colorne would introduce new advanced weapons like crossbows to its armed forces... But as things stood now, they weren't much different from Eltania in military might.

Then again, there was a huge difference in the potential of their generals.

"Well, what do you think, Miss Mylene?"

Colette hurled the question from the seat beside me as I stifled a yawn. Even though I'd assumed I wasn't letting my true colors show, I made sure my public face was on and said, "It is terribly impressive—those two generals in particular. I sense a tremendous spirit from them both."

"Ha-ha-ha. Oh, do you?" Colette asked with a cheerful laugh. But behind her smile, I didn't sense she was that amused. "It is pretty nice, as a spectacle. But you know... Doesn't it feel like we're just at a theater watching a play?"

A spectacle. That was the word Colette deemed apt for what was going on below us, a clash of soldier bodies without a trace of actual warfare. And she was absolutely right. Without changing my expression, I took another look at the "skirmish" beneath us. The rows of soldiers were firing magic spells. The battlefield was a tangled kaleidoscope of colors from magic of various elements. Since it was an exhibition, the chances of death or injury were significantly lowered, but it was nevertheless a reflection of what "war" was in this era.

And yet Colette had compared it to theater. Nothing more than a spectacle.

*"Magic is glory, dignity in victory always—I think it's all a bunch of drivel. Fights like these belong in books or on the stage, don't you agree?"*

Dang, she certainly had some nerve asking me questions that were difficult for me to answer honestly, since I was her guest and all. But I agreed with everything she said 100 percent. Fighting in this era—well, also in future eras—was inflexible. Since everyone was so fixated on clashes of sword and spell, they were blind to any other tactics.

In extreme terms, arrows were still perfectly capable of killing people. Magic spells gave you an advantage since you didn't have to carry anything—you

couldn't discount that—but there were an infinite number of ways you could win a fight. And I was cognizant of that.

“If I was in charge, I would shake things up. I'd make Colorne much, much stronger. Glory is something you only attain by *killing*. And only if you *live* to tell the tale. Don't you agree?!”

Colette's words were only stoking the fire in my belly. Though in truth, it was hard to say that Colette had achieved all her ideals after becoming the empress of Colorne. The influence of magic didn't decline during her reign. Though Colorne had introduced new weapons, this merely ended up widening the variety of armaments used in combat to include those with anti-magic properties.

I was still startled to see a fourteen-year-old like her even considering things of this nature. I'd heard that the Black Lioness was a war maniac to her core, and apparently that wasn't idle gossip. Most intriguing of all was the strangely compelling lure of her words—she sure had charisma. If I had worked under her, my dreams would have undoubtedly been fiery.

I'd just have to pray that the Black Lioness wouldn't turn her fangs on my home this time.

“I'm afraid I don't know much about warfare, but you sound terribly passionate about it,” I finally answered.

“I know. Well, I do acknowledge that destroying old stereotypes is a rather difficult thing to do.”

But if she did manage to pull that off, my task would get much more difficult. Compared with my former incarnation as a magicless plebeian, it was a lot harder to operate as the chosen one with the Hair of Sulberia. However, as long as I masked my magic energy and made my enemies underestimate me with my innocent looks, I could have accomplished my goals all the same.

Yet the more the world stopped relying on magic, the harder it would be for me to operate the way I was used to... In a way, I'd prefer if that world never came to pass.

As I smiled and nodded in reply and watched the exhibition, my mind racing

with such worries all the while, the competition finally came to an end. The red general was victorious. The young leader raised his sword and let out a triumphant cry.

“That was excellent, Princess.”

“Yes, let’s just say it was.”

Neither of us were saying what we were really thinking... And I think Colette knew that, too.

Amid the roaring cheers of the crowd around us, we were icy cold in our VIP seats. Silence settled between us in the sea of clamor.

“Say, Miss Mylene?” It was Colette who broke the quiet.

“What might it be, Princess Colette?”

“I’ve heard that you’ve taken an interest in training your body recently. You are hailed as the Beautiful Valkyrie—a name that has traveled to your neighbors here in Colorne.”

“Oh, but that is only a rumor gone wild, Princess. Though yes, I have been training, as a matter of self-discipline...”

“Ha-ha, come on, don’t be so modest. Actually, I like you that way. You say you’re merely training for yourself, but I was considering what sort of army general you might become in the future. Hypothetically, Miss Mylene...if you were in command of the White Team, how would you have led them to victory? Any ideas?”

*Is this just a casual quiz?* Colette’s eyes were sparkling with interest as she looked at me. Like she was daring me to think of a way to turn the White Team’s fortunes around. If her scenario was in the confines of the current rules, getting them to win would be a bit of a hassle. But if this were a real battle, the answer would be simple.

I pretended to muse over the question for a few moments before I answered, “Well, let me see... I think I would give everyone on the team a crossbow.”

“Crossbows! Interesting. Why do you say that?”

Colette’s voice was shrill, but her eyes were dead serious. Her tone sounded

condescending... But maybe she was just excited. And I didn't blame her. I'd named the very strategy that Colette herself would use in the future, when she'd commanded her army to send Eltania's rebel forces at Mylene's execution into utter chaos.

"In a shooting match of magic spells like that, the soldiers' resources get depleted awfully quick. That's why flamboyant magic spells should only be utilized at the start of a battle. That was basically what happened in this exhibition—right after the start of the battle, the troops were able to close the distance between their opponents and cast spells that used fewer resources, yet had ample lethality, correct? Therefore, if you added arrows to their arsenal, the White Team could whittle down the enemy before they even had a chance to get closer. An arrow can kill you if it strikes the right place, you see."

I coquettishly tilted my head as if to say, *"Isn't that funny?"* It was an impressive performance of feigned innocence, if I do say so myself.

But Colette didn't flinch. Neither did she frown at my innocent act. She was smiling—her lips flushed red with excitement. Her eyes were brimming with a bellicose light, reminiscent of a lion.

*Damn... Talk about beating around the bush.*

I doubt that Colette had gone out of her way to invite the daughter of a duke to visit just because her lands happened to be near her doorstep. Neither had she done so to discuss present-day battle techniques or to show off the might of her knights.

The Hair of Sulberia was important in Eltania, but as far as other nations were concerned, it only signified you had great magic powers. Nothing more.

That meant the real reason Colette called me here today was—

"To someone like you who thinks on such a high level, this must have been quite the boring spectacle indeed."

—because she was interested in Mylene Petule de Lilie the person. Nothing more.

"Not at all, Princess, I found it terribly fascinating." I casually waved away her baiting question.

She was right, it was a boring spectacle. But I wasn't lying. It *was* fascinating. Because I'd learned that only an extraordinary woman like Colette could whip a merely *strong* band of knights into an army with accomplished battle tactics.

"Hee-hee, oh, don't say that. Tomboys like us get tired sitting all day, don't you agree, Miss Mylene? Doesn't it make you eager to get up and move your body a little?"

Colette slowly rose to her feet and smiled back at me, unable to mask her fighting spirit. I could tell she wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Truth be told, I've been aroused all this time. The chosen one with the Hair of Sulberia is said to have such immense magic power... And I simply *must* see it with my own eyes!"

*For fuck's sake. Is my name really so big that tall tales of me have spread to other countries? If all of that came about just from that one fight at the castle, I'll need to rethink a few things...*

"If you wish me to join you, Princess Colette, then I humbly accept."

Anyway, she was kind enough to ask me to join her. I'd be a far cry from a proper daughter of nobility if I couldn't even be a decent dancing partner. Though the person who'd asked me to dance was a fellow tomboy, of course.

"That's the spirit! Is anybody around?!"

As soon as I gave my answer, Colette gave her cloak a flutter. Those were the words she was waiting to hear. And she'd been right earlier—I was starting to get sick of sitting around. A little exercise wouldn't be a bad thing in the slightest.

A soldier approached at Colette's command. After hearing a quick set of instructions in his ear, he ran off. Colette watched him leave in silence for a while... Then, with an eager snort, she turned her sparkling eyes on me and said, "All right, we're relocating! The field's all clear now!"

"Oh my... Aren't we very assertive."

And with that, she grabbed my hand and moved me down to the very battlefield we were watching.



And that's how we got here.

Before I knew it, I found myself in the public arena, facing off against Colette after a flurry of instructions.

*So I was right. This was her plan all along.*

Colette had invited me to the military exhibition because she'd heard stories about a young noblewoman who was a competent fighter, and she wanted to spar with her here.

I'd known that from the start. Normally, I'd scoff at the idea of attending an invitation all the way from the next country over. But even though *this* Colette was different from the Colette I was familiar with, she definitely reminded me of her a little.

"Incidentally, I've been wanting to meet you ever since I heard stories about you, Miss Mylene. You're everything I imagined you would be... And I'm kind of freaking out."

"Oh my."

As I got a feel for my wooden sword, I gave her a playful smile. I liked to think I wore my innocent-girl mask well whenever I was in public. So if I was *everything she imagined I would be*, it made me wonder which version of me she was talking about.

Then again, the feeling was mutual. This Colette was about half *the other* Colette's age, but when you considered how people calm down with age, it was quite easy to see the resemblance. I'm not sure if *calm down* was the correct phrase to use to express it, but anyway.

It was clear that her hotheaded side had come to the forefront. If a confident fighter heard stories of another confident fighter, it was only natural that they'd want test their strength. People like her were a dime a dozen in the mercenary world.

"Defend yourself! Let me see that great power of yours!"

Colette raised her sword gallantly and gracefully, and the roar of the crowd

boomed loud enough to part the seas. That was how she had clinched the soul of her people. I could imagine no bigger pain in my ass than the prospect of making an enemy of her in the future.

I did as she commanded and defended myself. I adopted a top-tier stance out of the swordcraft playbook. My beast stance would have little effect against a girl of slight figure like Colette. The cards you play changed with each opponent. That was just a little something I'd learned in my years of experience fighting for a living.

*Now, how should I handle this? I'm in an honorable position as her guest, but she's this country's princess. Making my opponent look good is a classic move, and it would be a good way to pacify her, but—*

"Just so we're on the same page, let's not go easy on each other. There's nothing I hate more than being underestimated."

—When the princess in question was like *this*... Well, y'know.

Colette must have meant what she said about being underestimated. Otherwise, she would never have used Mylene's rudeness as a pretense to invade her country. Still, it wouldn't be mature to go all out in this fight, and Colette aside, I was worried that doing so would overstimulate the audience.

So what if I didn't go *easy* on her per se, but I eased into my full attacks while building up my opponent?

I shot Colette a piercing glare. Her lips broke into a grin. "Let's go!"

Without anyone sounding the signal to fight, Colette charged at me. From her surge of magic, I could understand why she was confident in her fighting abilities. I would have liked to have played the role of the delicate daughter of the nobility for a while longer if possible...but with only a wooden sword, there was no way I could defend myself against her without using magic.

*Well, guess I should've known this would happen when I was summoned here in the first place.*

"Shee-yah!"

With a spirited shout, Colette thrust her sword at me in a sharp jab that was



imbued with intense magic energy. Her technique was still crude, like an unpolished gemstone. But from the way her blade danced, it was easy for me to imagine that the empress I'd once known—though she never had a chance to exchange blows directly with anyone—was even more gifted as a warrior than as a leader.

This brought me a little comfort. It was a relief to see that my future nemesis, the woman who had put me in the ground in my last life, was not a cowardly fool.

“That was most impressive, indeed, Princess. But it's not enough.”

I blocked her blows with my raised sword. There was a loud, metallic clang, not from the wooden blades, but from the magic inside them. If I had blocked her attack without magic, my sword would have snapped like a twig. Now I understood why people who could sling spells called people who couldn't *magicless plebeians*.

In reality, there weren't many fighters out there who could break a well-seasoned steel blade with magic alone. And yet, I had blocked the attack just by expending the same amount of magic energy that Colette had used. I guess I was *technically* going easy on her. However...

“Hmph!”

...when it came to swordplay, I was gonna give her an honest fight.

I pulled back for a second, then pushed forward. I used the opening created from those undulations to slash at Colette's blade. Then I plunged my sword at her wide-open shoulder—but Colette kicked off the ground and managed to shoot backward to safety.

*Interesting. While I can feel the sheer exertion she puts into her sword moves, she's got keen combat senses. Her reaction speed isn't too shabby, either.*

But most impressive of all...

“The stories about you were true... No, the stories don't do you justice! I am impressed, Miss Mylene!”

...was her ferocious spirit. The way she could still smile even after I'd showed

her the gap in power between us. She could have gotten a sense of that difference from just one attack. But I also enjoyed the idea of her fiery warrior spirit burning on as she refused to accept she was inferior.

Truth be told, I didn't particularly resent the girl. I understood that all roads led to my kingdom's destruction. I'd gone back there of my own volition, and somebody was going to strike the final death blow in Eltania anyway—it had just been a matter of *who*.

And even though I knew what the future held, the girl standing before me had done nothing yet. She was a different person from that empress. I smirked, coming to the realization that I was starting to like this warrior girl.

"I could say the same of you, Princess Colette. What sublime technique you have. This is just a guess, but do you find your sparring partners at the palace somewhat lacking?"

"Ha-ha, yes! Exactly. Tales of their pathetic fighting would make your ears bleed—yah!"

Colette charged at me again. I faced her head-on. When our wooden swords locked a second, then a third time, the violent clash of our magic energies simulated the clanging of steel. In war, numbers were indeed important, but the battles were often decided by a single lionheart. From the magic and the technique in Colette's sword, I could tell that only people worthy to fight her were those sorts of fierce warriors.

In my former incarnation, it would have been difficult for me to give her an honest fight. If she had struck my sword with such fiery vigor, I doubt I would have been able to block it with technique alone.

...Though now, I had not only the technique but the matching magic to deflect it.

What a vexing scenario. The magic I'd spent my former life wondering how to fight was now the very power in my grasp. Irony's a bitch.

But thanks to my colorful past, I understood magic *very* well. Both its uses and its weaknesses. Magic was a conversion of the power in your spirit—or at least that was what somebody had once told me. At the time, I couldn't grasp the

concept, but there was one thing I had comprehended: Arousal in your inner consciousness can leak out into your magic. Take, for example:

“Hmfmf!” Colette’s eyes flashed with a remarkable glow. It was a light of conviction that would lead her to victory.

*Smart girl. She’s paying close attention.* I gave a silent sigh of adoration.

When you’re in the middle of combat, sometimes your heightened spirit surges with magic before your movements do. It served as an omen to your opponent: Get ready—she’s about to make her move. But it was so subtle that you couldn’t sense it if your magic was underdeveloped. And if both parties possessed high levels of magic, the fight moved so quickly that you didn’t have time to pick up on it. It was a sensation as weak as the electric tingling you get in your fingers during wintertime.

But Colette had picked up on my spirit. She whisked her blade back from her side to the front of her face in a defensive stance. It was an excellent show of perceptiveness and reaction speed, and I had nothing but praise for her.

I swung wide, from her left shoulder to her waist. That was what the spirit I’d unleashed telegraphed I was doing anyway.

“Gah...?! What...?!”

But my *actual* move was a small horizontal sweep to the opposite side of her torso—the complete opposite move that I’d projected to her with my magic energy. I could have slashed her torso in two just like that if I wanted to, but this was only a friendly sparring match. I didn’t hit her hard enough to break her bones, but it definitely didn’t count as *going easy* on her.

Clutching her side in pain, Colette scooted backward. A clear look of bewilderment showed on her face. Only a master could have sensed what I’d just done. It was rare for somebody as young as us to achieve such proficiency, and even then, most of them would die before getting a chance to experience it.

That was to say that Colette was alone in a realm of her own design. The world that existed only in her consciousness crumbled away—my one attack did more than simply draw on her subconscious. And I’m sure the truth hit her

hard.

“Wh-what did you just do?!”

“I am deeply impressed—there are no words. The fact that you could grasp what I just did was nothing short of a marvel.”

A *move* consisting of a mere surge of bloodlust. I’d devised this technique after starting my new life. But it was a feint that only worked against opponents of a terribly high level. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t have used it against a fourteen-year-old girl—there would be no need to.

“Impossible... How could she?!”

“B-but she did... Unbelievable!”

The two generals who participated in the exhibition battle cried out in astonishment from amid the murmur of the crowd. From their perspective, their princess had misread my move and gotten hit. And the last part of that was true. But they both seemed to understand *exactly* what had really happened.

Even though the two generals were stuck in their ways when it came to battle tactics, their potential was genuine. With guys like them in the army, the Colornian Empire had a bright future ahead of it... Though, that was ironic for me.

“Do you still wish to continue, Princess?”

“Hmmf!”

Behind my icy words lurked the question, “*Wanna be a little bitch and make me stop?*”

Even though her wound was a light one, Colette had been struck in her bare torso. If this were a real battle, she would obviously be in no condition to keep fighting. What I was really asking was, “*You’re dead. Are ya still gonna move?*”

The onlookers who picked up on my rudeness (but failed to grasp the underlying situation) began to make a fuss. “Get off your high horse! It was just one lucky shot!” they protested. Their outrage spread like a virus, until the entire crowd was in an uproar.

Colette seemed to be popular with the masses. And even though I was her guest of honor, I was still some random chick who'd lightly tapped their princess in the chest. That was nothing. I bet they were thinking that Colette should proudly take the victory she deserved.

"Will you all just *shut up*?!" But Colette knew more than anyone that the audience was mistaken. Her face was red with anger. She couldn't take it anymore. "Are you all trying to embarrass me? If this were a real battle, I would have *died* from that attack! And more importantly, she deliberately avoided causing me serious harm...!"

Her anger was directed not at me but at her protesting audience—which was to be expected, from a girl in her position. To Colette, the biggest blow of all was her people refusing to admit her defeat. This burned her especially hard *because* she was such a ruthless fighter.

"You dogs would *never* recognize the sheer greatness of the technique Miss Mylene used! Yet you cause an uproar over it? For shame! Do you mean to coerce me into being *foolish*?!"

The agitated crowd dampened in a flash. They knew that the fiery wrath of their beautiful princess was well beyond the flames of all their indignation combined. It was not a tantrum but a rebuke. Her people knew this. And *that* was why they could say nothing in reply.

This girl was *deeply* fascinating. Once again, I realized that I did not want to make an enemy out of her.

With a satisfying stomp of her boots, Colette turned around to face me. "My apologies...Miss Mylene. Forgive the discourtesy of my incompetent people. All you did was rise to my challenge, yet I find my well-trained body in such a wretched state. There is no greater shame than this."

And with that, she bowed deeply. The princess of an empire shouldn't have bowed to just anyone, but I imagined she was fully aware of this.

A score of whispers escaped from the crowd of onlookers. For all the fuss they'd made earlier, at the end of the day, they thought the world of their princess. And they understood that their adoration of Colette had forced the princess to bow to a woman of lesser standing.

Seriously... What a pain in the ass this empire this was. Their charismatic leader had both valor and the trust of her people. I could imagine nothing worse than getting on her bad side.

“Please, lift your head, Princess. I can sympathize with the feelings of your people.”

“Miss Mylene...”

*Well, let's just count our blessings that she's not my enemy yet. I'd like to at least try to prevent going to war with Colorne.*

I lifted Colette's face up close to mine. Silence fell, as if the air had been plunged underwater. And after a few moments of staring up close into each other's eyes, Colette finally broke into a grin.

“Ah... You win! Did you see that, everyone?! She's strong, she's sublime, she's stunning! Despite being from another kingdom, Miss Mylene bested the best. We must give credit where credit is due. I want you all to burn this image of me into your memory and to live with grace so as not to bring shame to the name of Colorne!”

Colette tossed aside her wooden sword, grabbing my arm in its place. She raised it high, in honor of my victory. And in reply, the loudest roar I'd heard from the crowd all day swept around us like a hurricane.

“Hurrah!”

“Hail, Princess Colette!”

“Hail, Lady Mylene!”

To be honest, I was a bit taken aback. Part of it was the complete reversal of the situation, but mostly, it was because I had never experienced such a huge crowd singing my praises before.

*In my former life, my enemies always called me a cheater or a savage, and I just took that as praise, but this—this ain't a bad feeling at all.*

I struck my wooden sword into the ground and put my good-girl mask back on. Since my right arm was currently engaged, I waved to the crowd with my free left hand. Even I was impressed with how smoothly I had been able to

switch between personas. Then again, I *was* being commended for my valor in a fight—that was a far cry from the gracious wave a royal might give from the balcony to her subjects below. Regardless, a part of me felt giddy about the whole thing.

“Say, Miss Mylene?” As she raised my arm, Colette addressed me in an icy tone that clashed with the warm atmosphere around us.

“Is something the matter, Princess?” I asked, smiling through the virtual splash of ice water I’d felt on my face.

*Did I really piss her off?* But I dismissed the thought as it came to me. This princess wasn’t that petty. She had balls. More importantly, something was familiar about her expression.

“I’ve grown quite fond of you. *Ardently* so. You make me want to make you mine...by any means necessary.”

It was those eyes. The same eyes that she’d trained upon me during the final moments of my past life.

“Oh my. Aren’t we passionate?”

“Please, don’t wear a mask around me. I see a lion lurking deep within your eyes—no, a proud and cunning wolf. I know it’s there.”

“Well, shit... And here I thought I was putting on a bang-up performance.”

“Any fellow warrior would notice who you really are. So *that’s* how you normally speak. You are even more charming than before.”

“Ya think so?”

Keeping my expression the same, I changed only my manner of speech. I thought I’d gotten pretty good at pretending, but now that someone had unmasked me so easily, I felt like I needed to reconsider that.

Still, having a woman come on to me for once was a pretty valuable experience. Sex workers had made sales pitches to me before, but this was a completely different feeling. Under the cover of the crowd cheering for us, we continued our intimate conversation.

“Say, Mylene... Wanna come to Colorne? I’m not interested in the whole



God's Gift legend, but I can tell that someone with powers like yours will be valuable to the empire in the coming years. If you would come live with me, I would make all your wishes come true."

"Ooh, that's a pretty alluring pickup line."

This was royal flirting. She wanted me, but she was going to be the provider—it was a position she refused to give up. If your average, mediocre rich boy tried that shit, it would be a real laugh. But when a sexy girl like her said it to me, it made me feel blessed to be a man... Well, I technically *wasn't* a man anymore, but let's just ignore that.

"Truth be told, I got a similar offer a little while ago. Now, I turned them down, but I don't think it's a bad deal. I was thinking of leaving home and becoming a mercenary regardless."

"Oh! Well, that is splendid."

I was planning on leaving home and living footloose and fancy-free. And if Colette was going to provide me with an environment for that, I had no reason to turn her down.

Her eager smile was clear. But I had more to say. "*All my life*, I've had the spirit of a stray dog. I ain't ever met a master I clicked with. If you can be a master like *that*, then I wouldn't mind serving under you."

Now, that was a sarcastic way of putting it, but translated simply I meant: "*I won't be tamed by a bitch like you.*"

And Colette understood what I meant. Her jaw dropped in surprise... But she quickly flashed her ferocious smile and squeezed my raised hand even harder.

"Ha-ha! Interesting. Well, fine. Then I'll just have to become a suitable master for a pet wolf. Let me make this clear one more time: I *will* make you mine. By any means necessary."

*By any means necessary...* She was coming on a bit too strong, but I didn't mind it. This time around, I was gonna live my life on my terms. It was an absolute, unshakable creed of mine... But as long as I kept my freedom, serving someone else wouldn't be a bad thing, either. And if it turned out that serving Colette was something I *wanted* to do, then I would gladly wag my tail for her.

“Heh! I can’t wait to see ya try.”

“Ooh, shots fired.”

We smirked savagely into each other’s eyes and lowered our clasped hands. Then she extended her hand to me again. This time, I took it without hesitation.

“Now we are sworn friends! You are the first person I’ve ever wanted as a comrade and an equal!”

“Well, I’m honored. But I ain’t looking for flattery, y’know? Let’s just be friends and see where this goes.”

“Hmph! Is that how you see it?”

As the crowd gave their loudest cheer yet over us holding hands, I winced at the noise.

Colette smiled and said, “All right, then—let’s be friends and see where this goes. *For a very long time.*”

“Sure thing. I wish ya the best of luck, Princess.”

And that was how I became friends with the empress of the enemy empire who destroyed my homeland in my past life. At the very least, it was a much better experience than the *fated encounter with Colette* I’d had in my past life. For both Colette and for this mercenary stray dog.

But would our bond be peaceful? That was still unknown.

All that I could say with conviction was that I’d finally found a friend I could hang out with one-on-one. And so had Colette.

*Going all the way to the neighboring nation for a visit wasn’t such a bad thing after all.*

“Let’s return to the palace. I’ve prepared a feast of Colorne’s best dishes for you!”

When Colette said that, it only confirmed my last thought.

Though, if I had to make an addendum, I could certainly do with slamming down some booze at this feast.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# A Sheltered Girl

I had never once felt the gloomy elegance of a rainy day.

I abruptly looked up from my book and out the window to see a gray skyscape. As I gazed at it from behind the windowpane in the comfort of my own home, I thought, *Aha, I do sense a different sort of pathos from this sky.*

At its core, mercenary work was about running around outdoors and selling your services. Once I got a gig, whether it was as a bodyguard or bandit killer, I'd be walking around in the open air. My employers couldn't give less than a shit about my own needs. So whenever it rained, I'd mutter "It's just not my day" or "What a drag" and move on.

It didn't rain year-round, either. But the only times a mercenary had a roof over his head was when his coin purse was full. Then he'd either be drinking at a tavern or sleeping at in inn. You could say we rarely gave the weather a passing thought.

But watching the weather from inside a house, as I was now...I couldn't remember how many years it had been since I'd done that. I absentmindedly touched the window. The condensation moistened my fingers. I touched the pane with my palm, not caring about the wetness, taking in the refreshing sensation of the cold outside air.

If a passerby was to see me from the outside, pressing my hands against the window so emotionally, they'd probably think I was a sheltered girl. I brought

my lips up in a smirk. Removing my palm from the window, I returned to my reading and wiped my hands roughly with a handkerchief.

*Rainy days ain't so bad now and then.* Without the rain, I probably wouldn't have gotten the opportunity to take some time off from my training. Resting due to inclement weather was a luxury only someone of my status could afford. I imagined this special feeling was one of the things that gave rain its elegant ambiance.

What's more, Albert couldn't come to visit on rainy days. And if I read a book like this, my maids wouldn't be so boisterous, either. These newfound moments of quiet in my life were probably another factor that made rainy days feel all the more special.

*But wow... Envil, reading. Never thought I'd see the day. My old buddies would probably laugh their asses off if they could see me now.* Even I couldn't think of an activity more off-brand for me than reading, but trust me when I say I wasn't just poring over a book as a hint to my maids to give me some peace and quiet.

The title of the tome in my hands was *Hair of Sulberia*.

I had zero interest in religious matters, but I did need to learn more about *myself*. I suppressed my cynical laughter as I read about Eltania (the deity, not the kingdom) and the Hair of Sulberia. I needed to know about my country's legends and the alias I would adopt.

As luck would have it, you might say, Balzac had scrambled to gather all the books he could find on the Hair of Sulberia after Mylene was born with those blessed locks. The Petule estate was overflowing with books on the subject.

*The Hair of Sulberia refers to locks colored like the flower of the same name that our Lord Eltania was said to have loved. It is also used as a title for those who don the hair. People with the Hair of Sulberia are loved by the Lord Eltania, and most of them are blessed with special gifts and great magic. Consequently, those with the Hair of Sulberia are called God's Gifts and are incredibly valuable to the people of Eltania.*

*Dang, what a fishy story.* Just reading it made me snort from deep in my chest.

Having said that, I could still understand the logic behind it. If somebody had hair colored just like the flower God loved, and they were also gifted and abnormally magical, it would make sense that God loved them.

But it was that *God's Gift* title that gave me issues. I just couldn't make myself believe that God existed.

...So this was my theory: I think people had it all backward. White hair streaked with vermilion was a physical characteristic of people born with high levels of magic. And since there was also a flower that resembled this hair color, people made up stories about how it was God's favorite bloom. In other words, the whole theory started with the existence of somebody with red-and-white hair, not with God.

Since it was impossible to know what had really happened all those years ago, I couldn't confirm my conjecture, but I had the feeling I wasn't far off. And I guess it wasn't really proper for someone with the Hair of Sulberia to even be having this conversation in the first place. After all, Eltania was a kingdom that had named itself after its God. If I tried to get *too* logical, I would just be asking for trouble.

Still... It was surprisingly fun, learning about all this. Maybe it was because school and studying hadn't been in the cards for me in my past life, but reading books and wondering about things on my own felt incredibly novel. Maybe I was more studious than I'd given myself credit for—that was another new discovery I'd made.

*Learning* was actually quite a luxury. Most peasants couldn't spare a moment of their busy lives to do it, for one. And for another, applying what you'd learned to develop theories of your own required advanced education, which existed primarily for the nobility.

*That's right—I could go to school if I wanted.*

In my past life, I'd thought studying was a waste of time. But now that the thing that had never been attainable for me was in my grasp, there was no harm in giving it a try. And while learning itself was a hassle, education could give ya the upper hand in life. Keep a full deck so ya never run out of cards to play—that was Envil the mercenary's motto.

And apparently, there was a boarding school just for the nobility. As far as I was concerned, the prospect of getting the hell out of the chaotic Petule estate alone gave the idea of going there merit.

It was a nice thought and all...

With a hearty sigh, I closed my book and lazily stared out the window. It wasn't a very ladylike thing to do, but nobody was watching me. It went to show how much my worries were weighing on me. And the source of my anxiety? Someone was standing between me and attending boarding school.

...And that someone was Balzac.

It wasn't the case with every single noble family in Eltania, but most children of nobility my age attended the magic academy in Zelfore.

Zelfore was a neutral nation in the middle of the continent. It wasn't known for any particular goods, but it was a trading home for all sorts of products owing to its location. And they made a fair amount of money from it.

If you messed with Zelfore, you'd be blacklisted in the trade world. Because of that, even when Eltania was on its last legs, Zelfore had maintained its status a sanctuary state that managed to stay out of the war and keep the peace. And since it was a peaceful nation with cash to spare, it founded a school for the nobility to contribute to world peace... That was basically Zelfore in a nutshell.

Mind you, Eltania's efforts didn't really change the fact that wars popped up everywhere, or prevent Eltania from falling, but let's just ignore that.

So naturally, I assumed that when I reached a certain age, I would go to school just like the other rich kids. However...

"School? No, Mylene, I simply cannot endorse that. You are referring to that boarding school for the nobility in Zelfore, right? I could never send you so far away all by yourself."

...And the matter was closed. Balzac hath spoken.

At first, I'd assumed that Balzac would do anything I asked since I had the Hair of Sulberia, but apparently, he just hated the idea of me being out of his sight. He probably had reservations about sending his little *treasure* out of reach. He

kept speaking to me as if I were *his* Mylene, but he was the kind of parent who refused to accept the fact that his daughter was a different person on the inside. I knew exactly what was on his mind.

Personally, I would have been grateful for some distance between us, but his perceptions of me were hindering him. And my stupid ego was hindering me from putting my foot down and telling him I wanted to go away to school. Even though I thought it was an admirable aspiration, I felt a little embarrassed being as old as I was and needing to beg Daddy to let me go to school.

So that's why I was here, playing the sheltered princess, reading books by the window. Then again, this was me we were talking about. There wasn't a single princess-like bone in my body, so the picture I'd painted wasn't even slightly ephemeral.

Be that as it may, if I couldn't go to school, I'd have to resign myself to doing what I could on my own. That was what had led me to doing research in the library. I couldn't move my body outside when it was raining anyway. So I figured I might as well study up on how to bullshit my way through life with this hair of mine... That was the gist of it.

The Mylene of the former timeline seemed to have used her Hair of Sulberia to its full potential, so I wondered if she'd done the same level of research. If it turned out she had honed the weapons that had been at her disposal, I could respect her for that. But she'd been negligent in every other respect and had destroyed her own kingdom. So I really did need to learn the bare minimum on how to use my hair to get what I wanted.

At the end of the day, my goal this time around was to live life on my own terms, *without* needing to rely on my stupid hair.

*But this is at least a way of adding more cards to my deck. Maybe I should learn more about the Lord Eltania for the time being...*

"L-Lady Mylene...are you in there?!"

But just after that thought crossed my mind, a maid tumbled into the library without knocking. Most noblewomen would scold her for that, but it didn't really bother me.



“Hey, Lisa. You look scared shitless. Come on, breathe.”

“Y-y-yes, my lady-ee-ee...!”

Her name was Lisa. She was one of the usual distant admirers of my training sessions—but she wasn’t my exclusive maid. That would be Leah. If they’d sent Lisa instead of Leah, there had to be some big emergency.

I told Lisa to take a few deep breaths, and she did just that. It took a while to stop panting from all that running. I could see the fatigue in her eyes.

I waited quietly for her announcement. And once she finally caught her breath, she looked into my eyes and said, “Th-the master wishes to see you. He seemed most out of sorts—he insisted that I summon you as quickly as possible...!”

“Pops? Eh, sure... I’ll be right there. Where is he?”

“In his study.”

I frowned slightly at the summons. It wasn’t because I was annoyed that he wanted to see me. As long as I was within his line of sight, my dad had a rather hands-off parenting style. That was why he didn’t even bat an eye when I was abusing Albert, as long as the prince was enthusiastic about it—after all, this was the guy who had never once scolded Mylene before I took over her body, no matter how arrogant and cruel she was.

So the fact that a laissez-faire father like him suddenly wanted to see me—*that* was what gave me pause.

He acted like a big shot, but he was a doormat. He would never want to do anything that would ruffle my feathers.

*Well, I can always theorize about that later. If I take too long to get there, I can practically see my maid getting a scolding in my place.*

I closed my book, set it on my desk, and left the room. Since I sensed Lisa behind me, I quickened my pace to match hers, like we were in some kind of footrace. Spacious as these halls were, our destination was still within the mansion, so we arrived there in no time.

“Ah, Mylene! Sorry to summon you so abruptly. You must’ve had a hard time

of it, maid. You may go now.”

Just as we opened the particularly grand door to Balzac’s study, he sent the maid away with a word of appreciation.

*Shit, Pops, it wouldn’t hurt to learn the names of your own servants... Guess that’s a bit harsh. Oh well, whatever.*

“So whaddaya want?”

“Hmm. Well... We’ve received a letter from a certain individual.”

I wondered what the hell could have made him summon me on such short notice... And it was a bloody letter. I didn’t think that was exactly cause for alarm. I took the letter from my father and saw that Colette was the sender.

*Aha. Yeah, now I can see why he’d feel rushed.*

The princess of an empire had sent a personal missive to a common daughter of the nobility. The significance of it didn’t exactly strike me, but its arrival was more than effective in making my father panic.

From his satisfied grin, I could see that he, too, was probably thinking, *Good. Another useful card in my deck.* And yeah, making a personal connection with the princess of a mighty empire meant you had to pull some strings.

I tore open the envelope. Inside were tidy rows of lettering. I’m not sure if that suited Colette’s persona or not, but her handwriting was beautiful. And as I ran my eyes over her words...a chuckle escaped my throat.

“Wh-what is it? Please, can’t you just give me a hint of what it’s about, dear?”

Balzac was trying to act cool and composed, but his nostrils were spread wide. I didn’t mind his commitment to selfish greed, but I doubted he was ever destined for greatness.

With a snort, I handed him the letter between my thumb and forefinger. Balzac took it gingerly in his hands, as if it were poisonous.

And as for the contents of the letter...

*“I—‘I look forward to attending the academy with you’...?!”*

...That’s right. Colette and I were the same age. It was also time for her to

consider going to boarding school.

The princess's letter contained a deeply affectionate message to me, along with her dreams of our reunion at the academy many months from now. Balzac didn't want to send me to boarding school where I would be out of his reach, but Colette didn't know that. She'd probably assumed I would go to school just like her.

Well, then. How would Balzac react to the letter?

My father, his face quivering quietly, looked up at me and said, "But this is wonderful! Just think, the princess of a mighty empire like Colorne has taken a personal interest in a friendship with you! That's *my* daughter! That's *my* Mylene!"

His smile filled his whole face. It was the picture of someone who had been totally consumed by avarice. I was a bit taken aback by it.

*Well... After all, this guy's an ego in greed's clothing. Maybe I should've seen this coming.*

"So? Whaddaya think my answer should be, Father of mine?" I snorted cynically.

This wasn't the first time it had come up. Beneath my sarcasm were the words *Can I go to school?* If my father's position remained consistent, his answer would be "*We should write back and tell her you can't go to school.*"

But if we did that, he would lose his precious connection to Colorne's imperial family.

"Well, naturally, you should say that you have the same intentions as her. We mustn't be rude to Princess Colette, you know."

And to my father, that was something that must be avoided at all costs.

Even if it meant completely going back on something he'd said, Balzac had to prioritize staying on Colorne's good side. That's just how much of a money-grubber he was. I wasn't even pissed about it. I felt maybe a little sympathy for past Mylene—and that made my stomach churn.

"Oh? Well, glad to hear it. So, old man, does that mean I can go to school

after all?”

“Hmm. Well. I suppose I was being rather narrow-minded before. It is a father’s duty to wish for his child to grow up, and it’s about time I stop being a clingy parent who can’t let his daughter fly free.”

He was silver-tongued as ever. Though his facade was transparent, I had to admire his lack of principle. Maybe it was worth emulating. Though, unfortunately, I sucked at that. I just wasn’t much of a bootlicker.

“Sure. Guess I’m fine with that... So is that all ya wanted with me?”

“Yes, well, it was a letter from the princess of Colorne, after all. I doubt any other matter could surpass it in urgency.”

Still, if it meant I finally got to go to school, this wasn’t such a bad thing after all. And even if the boarding school was a gathering of rich kids without much actual freedom, I was pretty excited at the prospect of leaving home and living in a dormitory. At the very least, it would be much quieter there.

“So... Are we good? I can’t just sit on my ass—I’ve gotta write a reply.”

“Hmm. Indeed. Just don’t pen anything rude.”

“It’s just a couple kids passing notes, for fuck’s sake... Still, this is a foreign princess I’m dealing with. Don’t worry, old man, I’ll be polite.”

I took the letter back from my father and fluttered it showily at him. Writing notes wasn’t really my thing, but I was grateful for the chance to go to boarding school. It wouldn’t hurt to say thank you.

I left my father’s study and headed back to the library with a spring in my step.

*How do ya like that...? Colette killed both me and Mylene in the former timeline, but thanks to her, we get to go to school now. Fate sure has a weird sense of humor.*

And when you gave it a good thinking over... If Colette and I were such good friends that she would write me a love letter, maybe Eltania’s worries were over, after all. Now that I was Mylene, I couldn’t imagine any of the bad things she’d done to the kingdom repeating... Maybe Eltania’s future was bright.

Still, in order to live my life on my terms, I needed as many cards in my deck as possible. That part hadn't changed. I had to take this opportunity to absorb as much noble magic education as I could.

Even I was taken aback at this lust for power. It was just that the more power I gained, the less it satisfied me. I needed more.

This was merely a theory, based on no evidence whatsoever, but I almost wondered if insatiable thirst was actually a curse of the Hair of Sulberia. It wouldn't be a bad idea to learn about the former chosen ones with this hair... That aside, I still didn't have enough power. So I was going to keep drinking up all the knowledge and strength I could until I was satisfied.

The sheltered girl in the window smiled, sharp fangs protruding from her lips.

*Ah, I can hardly wait,* I murmured to myself as I hurried to the study to write a letter to my savior.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Academy

The days passed, bringing us to one year later. I left the Petule estate in Lilie and arrived at the Zelfore Academy of Magic in the middle of the continent.

“Whoa... It’s much bigger than I imagined.”

The boarding school was so majestic you could call it a masterpiece. It was an exhibition of what a nation could create when no expenses were spared. I didn’t have a positive opinion on the nouveau riche aesthetic, but I couldn’t help but marvel over being in the presence of something so grand.

Being that it was a gathering of children of the nobility from different kingdoms, this academy’s opulent design served to appease the aristocracy and to raise the reputation of Zelfore, among other things.

Once my admission here was settled, I threw myself into my training even harder than before. However, since I had no experience with magic from my past life, I wasn’t sure if my self-study was yielding any results.

I’d feverishly pored over every book on magic in the Petule library from beginning to advanced, but I was hitting a wall. There was nothing more I could learn from self-study. So in a way, the timing of Colette’s letter was a godsend.

Balzac was a magic outsider—a fat cat who’d merely gobbled up his wealth and social standing from his parents and the generations before them. When you were on a quest for power, you couldn’t afford to miss out on being in an

environment where you had access to experts on any field of knowledge you were seeking.

I'd had to go through all sorts of bullshit formalities and obstacles, but now I was finally here. It was an emotional moment.

The weather today was—at the risk of sounding cheesy and sentimental—cheerful and sunny. But a big part of it was that I was finally out of that damn Petule estate. My annoying yet adoring servants aside, being under the same roof with that old man hadn't been very good for my mental health. I'd always been planning on leaving it at some point, but boarding school was a sort of dress rehearsal. I felt like I was on top of the world now that I could finally enjoy my freedom again.

"Did you see her? *That's* the little lady everybody's talking about."

"Well, she's not at all like the rumors implied, I must say. Though I do sense an air of grandeur about her..."

Though, I had the sneaking suspicion this environment was still far from peaceful. It seemed no matter where I went, my Hair of Sulberia would always make me a target for gossip.

I was still especially important in Eltania—that hadn't changed—but people outside the country were also aware that it signified I was *gifted* and *loved by God*. Even in this boarding school filled with the children of the global aristocracy, Mylene seemed to be just as much of an anomaly.

"But you know, *I've* heard she's terribly rowdy."

"Yes, I've also heard that she never fails to toot her own horn, bragging about how God loves her and all."

And as one would guess, not all those rumors were favorable.

Rowdiness aside, I didn't recall ever bragging about God loving me. If God actually did exist, He'd absolutely loathe me, if anything. Then again, I'm sure it was *Mylene*—not I—who had done all that bragging. That girl was really...*really* an endless pain in my ass.

Between Mylene's family ties, her childhood misdeeds, and her anomalous



Hair of Sulberia, I would probably be haunted by the old version of her for the rest of my life. The thought depressed me a little, but I'd long made peace with it.

Because above all else, I'd come to this school to obtain a power that could not be shackled by my reputation. I didn't have time to waste fuming over what those rich babies had to say about me... But still.

"Lady Mylene! It's a pleasure and an honor to finally see you again!"

"Shit... Er, why, hello there, Prince Albert. So good to see you again."

Our favorite girlie prince pushed his way through the crowd and extended a hand to me. With a collective gasp, I felt the stares of everyone in the crowd shoot to us. Cursing under my breath, I put on my best ladylike smile to greet the prince.

"Oh, Lady Mylene, please don't trouble yourself speaking in such an unfamiliar manner! You and I are friends, aren't we?"

"Our relationship aside... Isn't everyone else here from another kingdom? I mustn't offend the royalty."

"Nonsense! I have been your humble servant since that fated day we met. If anything, we should take the opportunity to inform everyone here just how grand you are, Lady Mylene!"

"Cut it out, jackass..." I scolded him, maintaining my elegant grin. "I keep telling ya, people'll belittle Eltania if ya keep acting like that."

I was living life on my terms—nobody was gonna screw with me. That's how it would all work out in the end. But the truth of the matter was that it couldn't be that way just yet. As annoying as Albert was, the prince's title held explosive power. I didn't have enough power of my own to slip from his clutches yet.

"It would seem...that Prince Albert is serving her."

"*Worshipping* her, from the looks of it... What an enigma she is..."

If they were well versed in Eltania's religion, that would be another matter. But as far as outsiders were concerned, a prince was bowing his head to a common lady... That was guaranteed to confound a few people.

Albert being belittled was one thing, but I didn't want Eltania's reputation to be soiled as well... Yet this careless moron had to go and worship me. Then again, I had heard he'd improved his swordplay quite a bit, though I was too busy getting ready to attend school to see it. And that did make me feel proud.

But he would need another stern talking-to. I wasn't sure when I'd get a chance to speak with him one-on-one, though...

"Ooh... There you are! I've been looking all over for you, Mylene!"

*Of course. Just when I already had enough shit to deal with, a new pain in my ass has to come barging in.*

"Princess Colette, so good to see you again."

"Ugh, so *formal*. Though I *will* make you mine someday, you and I are friends for the moment. Equals. Don't put up walls with me, my dear."

It was Colette, the princess of the great Colornian Empire. Just the act of maintaining a smile was already an ordeal in her presence. And when we were in public, there was no way in hell a daughter of a duke like me could be so casual with an imperial princess.

"Did you hear that? *Princess Colette* called her a friend. An equal..."

"Mylene Petule de Lilie... Who the hell *are* you anyway?!"

Colette's status was astonishingly high—Albert wasn't even in the same league as her. And while I liked them both on a personal level, they were nothing but an inconvenience to me. As I held my elegant smile (feeling crushed by the crowd's death stares all the while) I approached Albert and Colette.

"You get it, don't you?" I sighed, snapping at Colette and Albert in a voice only they could hear. "You two and I come from different worlds. Figure that out already."

"She's absolutely right!" Albert agreed. "I respect you, Princess Colette, but I do wish you would stop giving Lady Mylene a difficult time!"

*Er, you're one to talk, dipshit.*

"Prince Albert. I don't think you're exactly in a position to place blame."

“No, I am behaving as my authentic self, so I am doing nothing wrong. I could never behave disrespectfully toward Lady Mylene; not even in public.”

“Then the way I am behaving is also publicly appropriate,” Colette argued. “Someone of my standing has no need to concern myself with how others perceive me. I think it’s only appropriate that I should be able to converse with a friend freely and to my heart’s content.”

Eltania and Colorne were the two most powerful nations in the world. And their prince and princess were fighting over me. To put it lightly, this was the scoop of the century. The bewilderment of those around us had increased beyond measure.

*Maybe things would’ve been easier for me if I’d just stayed home. I think I underestimated just how crazy these two are.*

“Never gonna be a dull moment here...,” I murmured sarcastically. But a loathsome smile spread across my lips.

For better or worse, I’d have to be the center of attention for a while. It’s not that I was looking to stand out or scream for everyone’s adoration. But it was an eventuality I’d prepared myself for, and once I finally did strike out on my own, it would be a lot easier to get things on track if I got my name out there first.

The only problem was that being the center of attention was nothing but a headache. It seemed my fears of being unable to attain a quiet and peaceful life were coming true.

As my eyes shifted, and my mind escaped reality, I caught sight of a girl who was staring daggers at me. When our eyes met, her shoulders jerked, and she ducked out of sight.

*Well... Between Albert, Colette, and everyone else, I’ll definitely never be bored here.*

In the end, my goal was to live my life on my own terms and answer to nobody. If I couldn’t get over a little petty teen gossip, then there was really no reason worth my staying here.

*I’ll crush everyone who gets in my way.* I fiercely bared my fangs, my mind

racing over the campus life that lay ahead of me.





## CHAPTER SIX

# A New Leaf

A few days had passed since I'd started life at the boarding school. And the verdict: The academy itself was a lot more fun than even I imagined it would be. We used such a wide variety of textbooks—everything from world affairs to magic to general knowledge. Our manners and etiquette classes were boring, but the world affairs lessons would definitely come in handy. And the magic lessons improved my form immensely, even on top of spending the past few years obsessively training on my own.

In my former life, I'd taken great pains to develop strategies against magic because I couldn't cast a single spell. And I still had no desire to learn magic. But when I finally took the plunge and started to study it, I discovered it was actually a lot of fun.

I guess it was only natural that I would find the lessons engaging, but as for dorm life itself...it actually wasn't so bad, either.

"Lady Mylene! May I accompany you to lunch?"

"Mylene. It's lunchtime. Come with me to the dining hall."

...Though, the two royals were as demanding as ever. But I knew it came from a place of deep affection, so it wasn't really all that bad. I didn't mind having a rigid schedule where I went to bed, woke up, and ate at the same times every day. And the lively atmosphere in the dining hall reminded me of my mercenary days, so I liked that quite a bit, too.

Before coming to boarding school, it had sounded like a dismal place full of annoying kids, but now that I was actually here, I found that it wasn't really that bad after all. Funny how life surprised you like that.

"Yes, I am delighted to join you for lunch."

Constantly wearing my good-girl mask tired me out at first, but I'd gotten used to it lately. Back in my mercenary days, there had been no hierarchy between my peers and me, since we were all free agents. Because of that, my prim-and-proper speech had been pretty questionable at first. Still, if you kept at something long enough, you got used to it whether ya liked it or not.

So anyway, that's why I was having a lot more fun at boarding school than I thought I would. I was used to communal living from my mercenary days. And now that I was actually living this way, it made me wonder if my temperament had been suited to this lifestyle all along... Yeah, I know. Crazy, right?

Of course, the kids here were loud and annoying. That expectation of mine held up. As the other students gossiped around us, the two royals snorted in disgust.

"Humph! I do wish they would come to realize that we aren't the anomaly they think we are."

At Colette's rebuke, the chatter around us hushed in an instant.

"Please don't blame them, Princess. They all still know very little about Lady Mylene."

Apparently, even rich, spoiled little shits couldn't gossip about the heirs of big, important nations. But even though it had been days since I'd moved in, I was still at the center of all the gossip. Teenagers just liked gossip, I guess, whether they were rich or poor. And as a daughter of a duke who was in the constant company of a prince and princess, I was their punching bag. They talked shit about me to their hearts' content.

But that didn't matter. They were all weak little bastards anyway. If their talk caused any harm, I could just kick their asses later. No problem.

I smirked as Colette hurled a melodramatic sigh at the gossipers, and we walked to the dining hall. Along the way, a male student in our path suddenly



looked surprised. He'd noticed something.

"Um... Thank you so much for your help the other day, Miss Mylene!"

He bowed all the way to the waist. I racked my brain, trying to remember where I knew him from... Then it came back to me. It took everything in me not to sneer at the guy.

"Oh, it was my pleasure. You needn't concern yourself," I answered after a slight pause, raising my hand and waving lightly.

Colette gave the still-bowing boy a dubious look. "Mylene. What's that all about?"

"I had a minor interaction with him recently. You needn't concern yourself, Princess," I answered her dejectedly. I didn't think it needed any elaboration, so —

"Hey. You. How do you know Mylene?"

"I'm ashamed to admit this, but she saved me the other day when I was being bullied by some upperclassmen. They were all a full foot taller than her, but she was not at daunted in the slightest. She neutralized their magic spells with such grace... *Beautiful*. That is the only word I have to describe the fight!"

See, that's why I hadn't said anything. I felt so awkward.

But under the flames of Colette's furious glare, the boy's voice was loud and proud, like a poet singing a hero's epic.

"Ohh? My, that was *quite* a kind thing to do." Colette narrowed her eyes dubiously at him and smiled.

*Yeah, what she said, motherfucker. Envil the mercenary helping out a bullied kid at school? Ain't even worthy of being a tall tale.*

"Oh, but didn't you know, Princess Colette? Lady Mylene is a terribly kind person."

"Kindness comes in many forms. I'm sure Mylene was merely angered by what poor sports those boys were." Colette raised an eyebrow at Albert's knowing smile, but she still didn't hide the implied surprise in her words.

To be honest, I was surprised, too. I thought I wasn't cut out for looking after little shits who couldn't even wipe their own asses, but I'd been really pissed off at how those rich upperclassmen rattled their sabers at the kid.

In short, I think my temperament just changed a little. But even I was astounded by how I'd mellowed out.

"As her vassal, I cannot accept that explanation. Lady Mylene is a noble warrior, like the Valkyrie of legend," Prince Albert said.

"Stop putting me on a fucking pedestal. C'mon, I keep tellin' ya to act more like a prince." After making sure nobody was within earshot, I gave my self-proclaimed vassal a swift smack to the head to get my point across.

"Oww! B-but, my lady—"

"No buts, dumbass."

Sometimes, ya had to beat the message into people when your words didn't reach them. That's something I'd learned recently. Well, then again, that probably wasn't the right thing to do. When I saw how happy Albert looked, despite the tears in his eyes over the bump on his head, it made me seriously worry about the fate of Eltania. I may not have been able to fix his stupidity, but at the very least, I wanted to pound some self-awareness into the future leader of a kingdom.

As I trudged along, dragging all that pessimism in my feet, the students around us giggled. I'm sure something like "*He's so whipped!*" was on the tips of their tongues. If they were laughing in scorn, we'd have a big problem. Luckily, the students seemed to have taken this scene as a charming school tradition.

I was starting to realize that all the stories about me weren't so bad when I took attitudes like these into account. Maybe it was a side effect of rescuing a wimp from bullies on a whim.

We arrived at the dining hall and walked through the open door.

"Miss Mylene! I've bought some candy in town to thank you for your kindness the other day. Will you accept my little token?"

A girl ran over to me as soon as she saw me. The *kindness the other day* in

question was me helping her look for something.

“Why, yes, I would love to receive it. I appreciate the courtesy.”

She giggled. “Oh dear, you mustn’t repay my gratitude with another thank-you. Well, I must be on my way. Prince Albert, Princess Colette, do forgive me for intruding on your little party. ♪” The girl handed me a cute little bag and skipped away.

As I awkwardly scratched my cheek, I caught a glimpse of Albert’s sparkling eyes and Colette’s dubious grimace in my peripheral vision.

*It really is a struggle.*

I sighed and said, “Might we hurry up and get our lunch?”

“Yes, my lady!”

“Yeah, good idea.”

If it meant putting up with the teasing of my devotees, I thought maybe I should put a stop to my random acts of kindness. But maybe this was my actual disposition. Perhaps not turning a blind eye to injustice was an effective means of gaining stability. Not that I’d ever played the hero when I was a mercenary. Just when ya think you know a person, right?

*Wow... This is the kind of stuff an old man pondering retirement would think about. I’m losing my mind here.*

It had barely been five years since I had come to be known as Mylene. Even if you added that to my former age, I wouldn’t be *that* old. Still, mellowing out wasn’t a bad thing. It was a laughable idea for a mercenary, but there was no better feeling than having nothing to fight about.

*I guess having a life of health and abundance makes a person go soft. Then again, maybe I’m only thinking about this because I’m sitting in front of such a luxurious lunch.*

We were served a new meal at lunch every day, and they were always made with tremendous finesse. It was lavish. Very lavish. I got my tray and sat down. Today’s main course was fish meunière. I could just feel my cheeks lift as the aroma of butter hit my nose.

Colette giggled lovingly. “Oh, Mylene, you always look so happy to see your food.”

“Well, of course I am. Everyone has to eat to survive, but that doesn’t mean I take my meals for granted. It’s a blessing to be able to eat delicious food like this every single day. I imagine you’re quite familiar with the concept as the princess of the military superpower of Colorne, right, Princess Colette?”

“Hmm. I suppose so.”

I just had to answer in earnest. If you were a mercenary, you *knew* food was a blessing. You felt it in your bones. Soldiers were human beings, too; and an army marched on its stomach. So if you were in command of an army, you couldn’t ignore the importance of proper provisions for your troops. It was a luxury enough just being able to eat every day, but eating such carefully crafted cuisine like this? I couldn’t imagine a greater blessing.

And let’s not forget that I was only able to concern myself over flavor in the first place because I was blessed with stability.

“Ooh, I see!” Prince Albert said. “That was most illuminating. I suppose it is important to be grateful for your daily bread.”

“Well, yes, so many people were involved in the production of this meal. From the farmers growing the ingredients to the chefs who selected and prepared them. In many ways, we must say thanks for each and every meal.”

Albert nodded dumbly, in awe of every single word that fell from my lips.

...I’ll just have to keep praying that this guy won’t make *that* future come to pass.

I began to eat my lunch. The dishes prepared by the highly skilled chef were not the sort of meals that should be unceremoniously dished out in a cafeteria like this. They were worthy of an expensive restaurant.

“The deliciousness of the food never ceases to amaze me,” I said.

“Yes, indeed,” Albert agreed. “I’ve heard our chef is quite skilled, and that does seem to be true.”

The meals were so good that even the prince, with his unrefined palate, could

recognize it. The chefs did have to make some compromises since they had to cook in such large quantities, but the food still received a higher than passing score from me. It was no easy feat.

I don't have many words in my vocabulary to express flavor other than *yum* and *yuck*, but this meal definitely fell well into the yum end of the spectrum. As I ate my meal, I thought how great it would be to someday eat this chef's cooking in an environment where they could go all out.

Just as I was daydreaming about this over a bite of my dessert, it happened.

"Hey, babe. Got a moment?"

*Hark. A pretentious voice above me drawls.*

I looked up in the direction of the voice to find a kid with long brown hair standing there. I say *kid*, but judging by the color of the badge on his collar, he was an upperclassman—my senior. Green badges meant you were a third-year student, the most senior of all.

I was under the impression that fraternizing with the third-years was a thing that just didn't happen. I looked up at the fuckboy's vacant eyes, and everyone within earshot erupted into a hushed murmur.

"I don't suppose you have business with me?"

"That's some attitude—the rumors about you weren't wrong. I think I could have a lot of fun with her. Don'cha agree?"

Mr. Pretentious was addressing a boy next to him. His shoulders were shaking, and he had a blue badge on his collar. That made him a second-year. Upon closer inspection, he was vaguely familiar. If I had to guess, he was one of the upperclassmen who I'd given an ass-kicking a few days ago.

"You really let this chick beat you up? You goddamn disgrace."

"P-please! F-forgive me, William..."

The bruise on his face hadn't come from me. It looked like punishment for letting a girl fuck with him.

"Excuse me... But I don't believe you've answered Lady Mylene's question," Albert said, contributing to the tension in the air. He must have felt

uncomfortable about the exchange transpiring in front of him. William was smiling, but there was no friendliness behind his grin. I bet the prince had picked up on his hostility and was trying to de-escalate the situation...

“Oh, there’s no need for that, Prince Albert. I don’t gotta answer to an underclassman. You leave your former station in life at the door when you come here. It’s written in the school rules, remember? I’m your upperclassman, kid. Your *superior*. So you need to know your place, or we’ll have a little problem.”

...but the dickhead just snorted and spread his arms wide in a posturing manner.

He was right about the school rules, which stipulated that you left your station in life behind when you entered the doors. The academy had probably made that rule to avoid getting into trouble, since this school was a gathering of the world’s elite teenagers. But all you had to do was look at the way first-year students like Colette and Albert were treated to understand that the stipulation wasn’t functioning as intended.

This guy was clearly a stuck-up dumbass. As Colette seethed beside me, I kept my angry sigh to myself and said, “So...what is it? I’m asking you what business you have with me.”

Even though we were a boarding school full of rich kids, this sort of tiff always reared its ugly head. Actually, it was probably *because* we were a school full of rich kids. The upperclassmen sure knew how to boss people around.

“Isn’t it obvious? I want to *mentor* a young, promising student like you, babe. Word has it you’ve been really frisky—I was thinking I’d better *pound* some practical magic techniques into you *before somebody gets hurt*.”

*Mentor*—that was the word these pricks tossed around to justify their triumphant posturing. Fighting between students was strictly prohibited. But no matter where you went, guys like this suddenly turned into geniuses when they needed to bend the rules to get away with something shady.

In short, *mentoring* was code for beating the shit out of an uppity lowerclassman. That’s probably what had given rise to the hushed murmur. Everyone knew what he meant.

No longer hiding the bloodlust in her eyes, Colette folded her arms and stared daggers at William. “Ooh. That’s some bark you’ve got there. And who the fuck might you be?”

The upperclassman choked a little from the cutting words of the princess of Colorne, but he still answered, “William of Stilledda. My father’s an admiral, so I’m confident in my abilities.”

“Heh-heh!” A guffaw escaped me when I heard the name.

“What’s so funny?” William ran his fingers through his hair and struck a pretentious pose... And I just couldn’t stop laughing. A guy lecturing us on leaving our titles at the door one minute, then bragging in front of royalty about being the son of an admiral the next was hilarious enough as it was—

But the main reason I was cracking up was that the kingdom of Stilledda would cease to exist in the very near future. I didn’t recall the exact year it would happen, but before long, that kingdom—no, the very land itself—would have a name change. It would become one of the colonies of the Colornian Empire.

I wouldn’t have been surprised if this exact same scene had happened in the former timeline, albeit with a slightly different cast of characters. Colette was a bad bitch who’d never let it go if you underestimated her.

“Oh, it’s nothing. Anyway, I would love to take you up on that offer. It would be an honor to receive your guidance on the practical application of magic.”

At the end of the day, the school rules weren’t really that effective. Which was hilarious. I stifled a laugh as I accepted William’s challenge. And I think he picked up on my cocky attitude, because even though he was the one who’d picked the fight, his face was red, and he was shaking all over.

“Meet me in the courtyard. I’ll teach ya a lesson there.” And with not a word more, William left.

*Well, now that I agreed to the fight, I’ll look pretty lame if I don’t show.*

The reactions around me were split. Some students looked at me with worry, while others smiled smugly, like I’d gotten what I deserved. Their emotions were in sharp contrast, but both came from the belief that I would lose the



fight.

I found their lack of faith upsetting but understandable. As this was an academy with magic at its focus, the difference between grades was stark. The upperclassmen were simply more powerful. They studied more subjects, had been training longer, and were just older. When you were still young, the gap in ability was striking.

“Hmph. It’s that bastard’s lucky day.”

“Indeed. At least he didn’t interrupt Lady Mylene’s lunch.”

But Albert’s and Colette’s reactions were the polar opposite of the other students’. To wit, they believed I would win.

“On that note, if you need me, I’ll be in the courtyard. I assume you’re accompanying me there anyway?”

“Of course. I love a good after-dinner show.”

“As it will be an opportunity to see you at your most valiant, Lady Mylene, I shall of course accompany you!”

Colette was only half smiling, while Albert’s eyes were sparkling. These two were so predictable. Then again, for all their differences, I got the feeling they’d make a good pair. If they became friends, all my worries of the fate of Eltania would be no more... But I’d set that aside for now.

“Heh... You guys are into some weird shit. Well, if ya wanna come along, suit yourselves,” I told them quietly in a voice nobody else could hear.

Despite my grouching, I just couldn’t give up on being savage like this. Even though I had mellowed out, my true nature still hadn’t changed. I returned my tray, and bubbling with enthusiasm, I headed to the courtyard where my fuckboy was waiting.



“Hi, kiddo. Way to keep a guy waiting.”

Quite the crowd of onlookers had formed by the time I arrived in the courtyard. Word had probably gotten around, so everyone was here to observe

the “lesson” William was going to teach me.

I noticed that I didn’t recognize many of the students watching, then realized they were mostly upperclassmen. I’d built a reputation for myself as a cocky bitch, so they were probably all very eager to watch me get my ass handed to me. The jackals smirked and opened a path for me with each step I took.

“She’s facing off against William. Not even Miss High-and-Mighty has a prayer this time.”

“Karma’s a bitch. Serves her right for flaunting her good looks.”

*Looks like my read on them was spot-on.* But it seemed like their predictions were based not on the fact that we were upperclassman and lowerclassman... but on William’s abilities. Which meant he had to be a pretty good fighter.

“Come, choose your weapon. I heard you favor the blade.”

As I stood across William, the second-year student from earlier brought me a wooden sword. I took it and gave a couple practice swings. I didn’t sense any tampering. He probably thought he didn’t need to cheat. Though personally, I’d find him more likable if he did.

After handing me the sword, the kid scurried off to join the crowd of jackals. Guess I wasn’t going to be ganged up on after all.

William spread his arms wide, brimming with confidence. “Let’s get things started, shall we? Come at me any way you want!”

He never once gave up the facade of *Don’t worry, kiddo, this is just a fighting lesson.*

This guy sure was prudent in the weirdest ways. I would have preferred it if he had an “*if* I win” attitude over a “*when* I win” attitude. The fight would have been so much more fun for me that way.

“Very well. I shall attack freely, thank you,” I said in a slow, contemplative tone, smiling softly.

William made a goofy face for just a moment... And in that instant, I took an explosive step forward.

“Hah—gah?!”

Then I closed the gap and struck his right hand. A dull sound filled the air. If I'd wanted to, I could have broken or hacked off his hand, but this was just a *lesson*, through and through. I couldn't do that here.

"Oh my. Were you demonstrating the importance of good defenses just now, teacher?"

"Y...you little bitch!"

I let out another giggle. It was partly to mock the idiot who'd underestimated me, but it was also to piss him off. Anger made your attacks monotonous. No matter how high-level his technique was, no matter how powerful he was, the rust of fury would quickly corrode his blade.

On the other hand, the ability to make somebody angry was a power in its own right.

William channeled Lightning magic into his sword. Getting hit with that unarmed would be pretty dangerous.

"Ryaaa!"

He swung at me angrily, his blade crackling with lightning. However. An attack from a sword imbued with high-level attack magic was not much different from a slash from a conventional sword. Taking full advantage of my tiny frame, I easily dodged the sideswipe by crouching, then delivered a graceful kick to William's gut.

"Oof! Ack!"

I could tell William had used quite a bit of magic energy, so I'd made the kick extra powerful. He shot up into the air...then smashed into the ground of the courtyard, breaking the shrubs as he skidded along.

"Gah-ha! Graaa...!"

Coughing violently, William crawled along the ground. He shot a glare mixed with shame, astonishment, and malice at me. It gave me a cozy feeling inside. It was the same look I'd seen so many times in my former life. The look of contempt my cocky enemies gave me right after they got a taste of pain from my attack. I guess it was the same with kids as well as adults.

“Y-you fucking bitch!” William somehow managed to curse, wiping the contents of his stomach he’d just spewed from his mouth.

It was rather impressive really, that he could still cuss me out this late in the game. Though, if you asked me, he would have been better off taking the time to catch his breath and stand up. Maybe he thought there was some unwritten rule that I wasn’t allowed to attack him if he was lying down. If so, he had quite the juvenile conception of how fighting worked.

“I don’t particularly have a preference... But are you sure you don’t need to get off the ground?”

“D-don’t fuck with me!”

Guess he no longer had the confidence to be pretentious. Then again, I kinda liked the way he struggled to his feet on wobbly legs.

If ya asked me, the correct move here would be for him to be a good boy and surrender. That would guarantee his life would be spared, too. Plus, you got the added bonus of not getting injured, either.

“Do you still wish to continue the lesson?”

“Ha...ha-ha! You only got in two measly hits—do you think that means you *won*?!”

But—and this is something I’d known all along—this guy wasn’t very blessed in the brain department. I calmly let my eyes wander to Colette, who shrugged in reply.

I could have easily killed him with the *two measly hits* I’d gotten in—he just hadn’t noticed that.

*But some of the crowd has probably caught on: I haven’t used any magic yet.*

No doubt incensed by me looking away, William gritted his teeth and raised his hand.

“Thunder Needle!”

Then he screamed the name of a spell.

But I jumped out of the way before it landed. Thunder was the fastest variety

of magic. Even the spell of a novice was hard for someone like me to see through after it was shot.

“Wh-what the hell?!”

But if you clued in to the direction the light was hitting *before* the spell came out, it was easy to dodge. And even if you were hit by it, you could minimize the damage you took by filling yourself with magic energy.

“H-hey, did you see...?”

“Y-yeah... Is it just me, or has that crazy chick not used any spells?”

Apparently, our audience was starting to notice.

“She’s the chosen one with the Hair of Sulberia, right? She has a lot of magic...”

“So wait, if she *had* used magic...would this fight be even more one-sided?”

Confusion buzzed in the air. Their comments might have been loud enough to reach William. His cheeks flushed red.

“You just won’t stop fucking with me, will you...?! ”

His shower of thunder needles increased in density. But at the end of the day, it was just a lightning-fast attack and nothing more. All I had to do was look at his fingertips to know where they’d fly—it didn’t matter how many there were.

That being said, he did have an impressively high level of magic energy. It was clear that this son of an admiral had really put in the training. Though, none of that mattered if he couldn’t land an attack.

“Why...why do I keep missing?! ”

William’s face was twisted in panic. His attacks, monotonous with anger, had gotten even cruder. I waited for the moment that weakness possessed him, then charged forward with everything I had.

“A-ahhh!”

Then his expression quickly morphed into a look of utter terror. This was just one of many attack patterns I would end a fight with. I no longer had any need to dodge attacks. William was incapable of locking onto me anymore.

I slid into my opening and—

“Ah— OOF!”

—sank my fist into his gut. William folded in two as he fell to his knees. That was the second hit he’d sustained in an already-damaged area. It must have hurt. Just like that, William fell all the way to the ground, twisting and writhing into a little ball.

“Wh-who the fuck *are* you...?! First-year, my ass...!”

“She beat William...without using magic...”

Whispers filled the dead-silent air.

Now *that* was a good punch. I’d held back a little, so I doubted it was damaging enough to keep a spoiled rich kid who loved to pick on the weak on the ground.

“You little shit...! No first-year baby fucks with me...!” William cursed, coughing up puke as he glared at me with contempt.

This guy sure hated my guts—but I got the nagging sense that something was different about him. On the surface, he was your garden variety sadistic dickhead who loved picking on the weak. But in spite of that, this guy had balls. Going into this fight, I’d just assumed one good whacking would shut him up.

But as William clutched his stomach and stumbled to his feet, I saw an extreme bloodlust in his eyes. It was unnatural for a spoiled rich kid like him to seriously want to kill a daughter of the nobility from another country, no matter how much she’d humiliated him.

I’d seen those eyes before. They were the same that the people of Eltania had worn during its final days, when madness spread through the land like a virus. In that regard, I guess it was fitting that he was fixing those eyes on “Mylene” right now.

With incomprehensible feelings, I watched him closely to see what his next move would be. He brought his hand, visibly gnarled with anger, into his pocket. Then he pulled out a tiny envelope and...

“Hah! Ha-ha!”

...swallowed its contents.

*Was that...drugs?* I was too far away from him to get a good look, but at the very least, I knew he had swallowed something.

“Phew— ...Good. The pain’s gone... Well. You sure made a fool out of me. I’ll make you pay for this. You can’t apologize your way out of it...”

William’s eyes were visibly bloodshot as he glared sharply at me.

*Whatever that drug was...it had to be something sketchy. And he just took it. Right out in the open. This guy sure doesn’t think about the consequences of his actions, does he?*

That showed just how serious he was about killing me. I sensed that William’s magic had been boosted by the narcotic. That wasn’t the magic energy of a child. It was the kind an elite could only attain after years of devoted training—it was even more powerful than Paul’s magic, for comparison. There was an elixir that regenerated your magic energy. But I’d never heard of one that amplified it.

“I’ll kill you... I’ll fucking kill you...for making a fool of me...!”

He had clearly gone batshit insane. While magic did amplify the power of your emotions, *this* was on a whole other level.

William gathered lightning in his hands. The magic energy formed into spheres, shooting electricity in every direction. Make no mistake. This guy definitely wanted to kill me.

“Wh-whoa... Maybe this is going a little *too* far?”

“Somebody stop him...! If he kills her, we’re *dead*...!”

The murder of a daughter of the nobility would be a huge scandal. The onlookers began to panic.

*Mother. Fucker. I’m so done with pains in my ass.*

“Take my Thunder Ball! Drop dead, Mylene Petuleee!”

William thrust the ball of lightning up high...then released it. It was about the size of a carriage, and it came hurling right at me. If the energy inside it

exploded, Thunder magic would instantaneously surge through my body and char me to a crisp from the inside.

The crowd screamed, imagining the worst. Not many of them were worried about me, but if the daughter of one of Eltania's powerful families was murdered by someone from another country, international relations would worsen overnight. Even war wouldn't be out of the question.

Well... That was only if I got hit.

As the giant orb of electricity hurled toward me, I filled my hands with magic energy. Then I took the posture of a pitcher and released it. Apparently, that technique was called Energy Sphere, but I couldn't care less about the name.

Just as the orb left my hands, it expanded abruptly, to a size large enough to envelop a grown man. My Energy Sphere swallowed the carriage-sized Thunder Ball. And the spell, maintaining its large size, it hurled right back at William—  
—before it shot skyward.

Once the orb of light reached a certain height, I waved at it. At my signal, the Energy Sphere exploded, ripping a hole in the heavens with a tremendous crackle.

“Aaagh?!”

“She's goddamn insane!”

The tremendous explosion threw the crowd into a frenzy. Meanwhile, William calcified as he blankly took in the explosion. I marched up to him and grabbed him by his scruff.

“Wh-what are you doing?! Get your filthy hands off me!” William raged, his eyes red with blood.

*Yeah, this guy's too far gone. He's utterly insane.*

But it was still a mystery why this sadistic worm of a man would harbor genuine murderous intent.

“Whatever. Take a nap, pal,” I murmured, raising my clenched fist.

“You crazy bitch! Do you know who the hell I—oof?!”



My clenched fist made contact with his face, and William stopped moving.

The crowd had fallen silent at some point. Perhaps the dramatic turn of events was just too much for them to keep up with.

I took a slow look around. About half of the students avoided my gaze. They were probably the ones who'd been jeering just a minute ago, praying for my defeat. I'm sure William's friends were in there somewhere, but nobody looked like they were in the mood to avenge him on the spot. This was a callous thought, but there probably weren't many weirdos out there who would side with guys who might trigger a war. With an angry snort, I walked over to Albert and Colette.



“That was incredible, Lady Mylene!”

“That’s my girl. I was worried there for a second when he suddenly tried to kill you—but I guess it wasn’t even a problem.”

My friends greeted me with praise and adoration.

With a cool giggle, and my public persona on full blast for the crowd, I said, “I considered it some easy after-lunch exercise.”

This received enthusiastic applause from Albert.

And while the duel had taken an unexpected turn, it was a rather enjoyable workout. The jackals began to scatter.

I couldn’t have predicted this, but thanks to that fight, I was going to have a little more peace and quiet at the academy from now on. In my former life, I’d gotten used to haters coming after me. And from those experiences, I learned that most of them would retreat into their shells if you showed them a little muscle.

Now I could finally get back into my studies. It might even be fun to try to be an honor student.

“Miss Mylene! It was *you* again?!”

But a moment after that thought crossed my mind, a man’s voice boomed through the courtyard.

I looked in the direction of the voice and saw a graying middle-aged man pushing his way through the crowd toward me.

“Agh... It’s Pearlman! Professor Pearlman.”

Enter Pearlman. My homeroom teacher. The eyes behind his spectacles were brimming with meekness. He had a reputation of being one of the kindest instructors at the academy—but his gaze was currently filled with a rage that would make you think his good reputation was a fabrication.

The best phrase to describe Pearlman wasn’t *gentle*. It was *gentle, yet firm*. All sorts of drama had followed me ever since I’d set foot in the academy. And in the end, Pearlman always came to calm everyone down.

I felt so indebted to him that I could never look him in the eye. My mask always slipped around him.

“P-Professor...Pearlman. Good afternoon...”

“Good afternoon, *my foot*, young lady! You’ve gone and tormented an upperclassmen yet again!”

Up until this point, I’d gotten out of scrapes by acting polite and putting on my best dignified young lady voice, but I’d gotten myself in such a big mess this time... And Professor Pearlman had rightly determined that I was part of the problem.

“Miss Mylene! I’ve told you not to fight *countless* times! Do you remember?”

“Y-yeah... Yes... I do remember, sir...”

My good-girl persona was worthless. As Pearlman hounded me with the force of a volcano that had just erupted, I just couldn’t find a way to push myself out of the way.

“I’ll see you in the guidance room after class! Today’s the day I’m going to give you a piece of my mind, missy!”

“Now, don’t be so hasty, sir. Mylene merely put out the sparks that were raining down on her.”

“She’s right, professor! Lady Mylene would never be the one to start a fight! *All* the blame sits with that upperclassman!”

Colette and Albert came to my defense. They knew I hadn’t started it. And yet...

“Of course I know that. However... As a professor, I simply cannot ignore a fight like this. My only recourse is to have a talk with you and make you promise never to do it again. The very mission of this academy is to bring all the aristocrats of the world together so that we may help rid the world of war.”

Pearlman also knew I wasn’t at fault. He’d come to me knowing this, to give me a stern warning as I always seemed to find myself at the center of mayhem.

“Well... Hopefully, this incident will quiet things down for a little while,” I said. “Even I don’t want to deal with a scuffle every single day.”

Which is exactly why I couldn't come down too hard on anyone. I didn't hate Professor Pearlman at the moment. And one of the reasons was because I had a hunch this guy could *go hard* in his own way.

His face was the epitome of meekness, but the calm magic energy I sensed from him was the sort that could only be achieved by a man who'd made it out of quite a few bloodbaths. I guessed he was a textbook-perfect professor for a boarding school for the nobility. His past was shrouded in mystery, but he was revered by his students as being a "kind, gentle teacher"—that fascinated me.

*The cunning hawk always hides his claws*—I'd always liked that saying. Though I didn't really give a shit if loathing him with all my being would get me punished.

"I cannot accept that," Colette said.

"Neither can I, but as long as Lady Mylene says so..."

But sometimes, I found myself in the middle of an unsolicited lecture. And whenever that happened, I was grateful to have Albert and Colette as friends. It's not that I wanted people to accept me or understand me; it's just that it was nice to have some sympathy.

"Phew... You've got yourself a couple of good friends there. Please wait just a moment."

Pearlman gestured for me to stay put, then walked over to William to see what condition he was in. He placed his hand on the boy's neck and nose. He had a solemn look on his face.

"Hmm... He appears to be merely unconscious. His cheek is swollen, but that shouldn't be a problem. We'll just need to ice it..."

After examining him for a while, Pearlman produced some ice with Ice magic, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and gently affixed it to William's swollen cheek. There was a quiet gasp of awe from the crowd.

Somebody once told me that Ice magic was a variant of Water magic. Variant magic tended to have a large-scale output, so seeing it manipulated so delicately was proof of his proficiency. That was why Pearlman was a professor at the top academy of magic.

“Well... I’m no fool, Miss Mylene. I know you don’t get into scrapes every day by choice. I can tell you’ve been showing restraint, too... But as a professor, I must take disciplinary action. Don’t worry, I won’t be hard on you.”

As Pearlman smiled meekly, Albert’s and Colette’s faces lit up.

Later, he turned his attention back to William. He picked up the mysterious little envelope, tucked it away in his pocket, and rose to his feet.

*Well, yeah... That was definitely some sketchy drugs. The school will have to conduct its own investigation.*

The next thing I knew, the crowd in the courtyard had all but disappeared. In the end, William was one of the more skilled third-years...or should I say, one of the *smuggest*. Anyway, he’d definitely made his influence felt. But with me kicking the shit out of a well-known guy like that, I was sure even the other idiots would be smart enough to leave me alone for a while.

One way or another, mayhem would still follow me wherever I went—that would never change.

“All right, let’s go back to class now. Lunch break is almost over anyway.”

“Oh, dear! Let’s go, Mylene, Prince Albert.”

“Now, don’t you go calling the shots, Princess. Let’s go, Lady Mylene!”

But for some mysterious reason, I didn’t really mind it. Maybe mayhem wasn’t the right word for it. Maybe I should call it *merriment*.

*Nah, that’s crazy talk.*

I caught myself scoffing...and smiled.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Unrest

About one month had passed since I began my residency at the boarding school. By then, I was completely acquainted with the routines of my new life. And while Pearlman still scolded me at times, most of my haters had retreated into the shadows as of late.

“Oh! H-hello, Miss Mylene...!”

“Hee-hee, y-you’re lovely as ever today!”

“Aw, thank you very much.”

The second-years were singing my praises like usual. Flattery felt a little gross to me, but it was a behavior I’d seen plenty of back in my mercenary days. In a way, it made me long for the past... But that just didn’t feel right to me. Still, I’d gotten used to speaking elegantly and responding elegantly in turn by then.

Albert giggled and said, “Ooh, Lady Mylene! Your power of influence has reached all the way over to the second-years now!”

“Indeed,” Colette agreed. “I sense you have the essence of a natural leader.”

“Oh, please don’t put me on a pedestal.”

All that praise embarrassed me. What exactly did those two want me to be? Was it really in Colette’s best interest for the girl she wanted as a subordinate to gain prestige? And as for Albert... Well, he was a mystery. Sometimes it seemed like he worshipped me as a goddess...which, in a way, was the most

terrifying thing of all.

My relationship with the prince had its red flags, but I didn't mind the closeness Colette and I shared. Though I had some confusion over how to interact with friends, now that the annoying gossiping of the upperclassmen had tapered off, I was actually enjoying myself as of late.

If I ignored one item of concern, that was.

I looked up at the sound of the bell. "It's time for class."

"Aw, already?"

The chime for afternoon classes had rung. We hurried the rest of the way along the path from the dining hall to the classroom, making it just in time. As I sat in my seat, our professor for fifth period arrived.

"All right, class, let's begin our afternoon lesson. We have...six students absent today. Everyone else is in their seats, I see."

Six students were absent. Quite a lot.

And *that* was my one worry.

There wasn't a virus going around town or anything, yet six whole students were absent. You could say it was an abnormal situation.

This academy was a boarding school to begin with. And because it had a long, esteemed history, the attendance policy was very strict. So there had to be *some* reason that a whole six students were missing.

It had started sometime around last week... More and more students were dropping off the map. And of the students who'd stopped coming to class, not a single one had come back since.

There were about twenty students in each grade level. But when all twenty of those students were sons and daughters of the nobility... Well, I think you can see just how abnormal this whole thing was.

*"I might be next tomorrow."* A pervasive sense of danger spread through the school, and a vitality greater than that of the number of students missing disappeared from the students remaining.



The rumors about the missing students varied; either they'd contracted a rare disease or had been kidnapped by human traffickers.

"So it's Heloise today..."

"I didn't think she was the sort of girl who'd go near drugs..."

But the flow of gossip couldn't be contained. And that little thing called the truth always found a way to come out.

According to witnesses, all the missing students had disappeared from their dorm rooms. The story went that they had all been gathered into one of the dorm's vacant rooms and quarantined—no guests allowed.

As for why they were being treated like people with the plague—it was drugs.

And we're not talking about normal drugs that cure illness and whatnot. No, these were substances that eroded your mind and body for a moment's pleasure.

Narcotics.

As you'd expect, the academy wanted to hide this scandal from the public, but you couldn't keep the mouths of susceptible teens shut. Drugs and their users had cast a dark shadow over this academy, like an eclipse. Such were the current conditions of the campus.

Then again, it wasn't my problem. If anything, I liked that the school was much quieter now. Dope was for the feeble-minded anyway. I'd watched so many poor bastards destroy themselves with the stuff. At the very least, I had never been tempted by it.

During the fall of Eltania, I'd come across plenty of addicts. It had been a miserable sight.

So if some spoiled rich kids wanted to destroy their lives with substances, it wasn't no skin off my back. They had my blessing to go crazy with the stuff, as long as they did it far away from me.

Though to be honest, I was a bit surprised that kids who had the privilege of such a moneyed upbringing would even want to touch the stuff. My mind raced with worthless ideas as the boring lesson I'd already reviewed on my own

trickled into my ears. Then class was over before I knew it.

Albert and Colette gathered at my desk as a matter of habit. And the topic of the day was the talk of the academy.

"I really am surprised how many people are missing, though. *Six* already... Do you suppose the rumors are true?"

"Don't know, don't care. It's not our problem."

"Ha-ha! That's harsh, Mylene."

Yup. It wasn't our problem. But talking about this tedious nonsense nonstop did bum me out a little. It was the most bothersome thing in my life right now.

And when something was happening in my own school, I couldn't exactly say it didn't concern me. As I sat there, not even bothering to hide my annoyance, a mysterious expression formed on Colette's face.

"But it is quite the tragedy," she remarked. "That the sons and daughters of the nobility with every comfort in the world would mess with narcotics." There was a twinge of anger in her words. As a budding young stateswoman, she probably had her reservations about it.

I gave a frustrated sigh and replied, "I thought it was a tragedy, too, at first, but I think it's *because* they're so comfortable that they want some stimulation. I personally fail to understand it, though."

If you had money to burn and could do anything you wanted, alcohol would be a much healthier vice. It certainly wasn't safe, but it was more than enough to satisfy any hedonistic urges. And yet for some reason, when you got a lot of money, you started to want much more than that. It truly was confounding.

Now, the biggest villains in all this were the fuckers distributing the drugs, but as for the feeble-minded people who were dumb enough to use? Well, they reaped what they sowed.

...Then again, if Colette or Albert became junkies, I'd raise hell about it. On that note, as long as the users didn't hang around me, I didn't really care what happened to them. That much was the truth.

And I wasn't the only one who felt that way. Everyone had their lines in the

sand.

“P-Princess Colette...!”

A girl ran up to us, short of breath. I didn’t know her very well, but I did recognize her. She hung out with Colette sometimes when I wasn’t around.

“Doris, what’s wrong? You look flustered.”

Hearing the name jogged my memory. Now I remembered Colette calling out to her before. In a boarding school like this where the children of all the continent’s elite gathered, it wasn’t unusual for kids from the same country to hang out together. That was partly why Albert had stuck to me like glue, but Colette wasn’t an exception to the rule, either. She had her own little clique outside our friend group.

Having said that, Colette was royalty. Since not anybody could just go up and talk to her, the clique she’d fostered was incredibly small and exclusive. It consisted of Colette, Doris, and *one other girl*.

“It...it’s Hannah! She’s gone missing...! I asked the dorm matron, and she won’t let me see her right now...!”

Colette’s eyes widened...and stayed that way.

Filled with bitterness, I cursed under my breath. Only the weak did drugs. But they existed in every layer of society. Even influential daughters of the nobility in Colette’s inner circle.

“I have a sudden matter to attend to... Mylene, will you tell the professors for me?”

From where I was standing, I could only see Colette from behind. But one look at Doris’s face was enough to tell me what the princess was feeling. I sensed an intense rage surging through her body. She was probably angry with Hannah for being so feeble. But more than anything, her anger was directed at the drug dealer.

“Shall I assist you, Princess?” I asked casually, folding my arms.

“I appreciate the offer, but this is a problem for Colorne and me. As someone who will lead the empire someday, I must be able to resolve a problem of this

degree on my own. Besides, I want to stand tall and proud by your side. I have to do this alone.”

That was very like Colette. So I said nothing more. Instead, I gave her a little wave good-bye. The princess left with a smile.

*Shit, that girl's on fire. Even if I were in a position to lead an empire in the future, I doubt I'd have the balls to do that.*

Then silence fell. If I were to keep my promise, my next move would be to go to class and inform Pearlman that Colette was absent, but...

“Tsk!” Doris shook her shoulders with a click of her tongue.

“Say, Doris... That’s your name, right?”

She caught her breath and stammered, “Y-yes! What is it, Miss Mylene?”

She was a lot more scared than she had to be, but I could just let her do it.

“Could you please deliver a message to Professor Pearlman for me? Tell him that Colette and Mylene will be absent from class today.”

“M...Miss Mylene!”

Doing something about the annoying fly buzzing around took priority over telling Pearlman. I was fine with letting people do their thing as long as it wasn’t my problem. But once their problem came dangerously close to becoming mine, I would mercilessly smash it.

Even though Colette still had traces of youth, she had the skill and the valor to someday come to be known as the Black Lioness, the strongest empress to rule the great empire of Colorne. She could easily tackle a measly drug dealer all by herself.

I felt a revelation coming on. But I shook my head to deny it.

*I won't be able to sleep at night if I let some stupid kids get preyed upon. That's all there is to it. I know it.*

Okay, it was time to get ready to go out into town. Things could get messy, so I figured I should go back to the dorms to get my weapon. All I had was that rapier my old man gave me. It was built for show, but it was definitely better

than nothing.

“P-please, wait for me! I’m coming with you!” Albert cried, tugging on my shoulder.

I cursed in annoyance under my breath, loud enough for the prince to hear it.

*I guess having just him tagging along shouldn’t be too much of a problem... But I’m a bit hesitant to get Eltania’s crown prince mixed up in a criminal organization. Then again, trying to argue will just be a pain in the ass. We need to move quickly.*

I leaned in close to Albert, whose face turned red as I whispered, “I ain’t got time to argue... If ya wanna tag along, suit yourself.”

I backed away from him, and he smiled brightly and nodded dumbly in reply.

“Doris, my apologies, but please add Prince Albert’s name to the list of absentees.” I turned to the prince. “Albert, please choose a weapon for yourself.”

“Yes, my lady! I am so truly grateful, Lady Mylene!”

My life was just full of pains in the ass. And once again, I heaved a tired sigh.



“Ooh, how lively it is here. And I don’t see any suspicious activity as of yet...,” Albert said, sighing in awe at the sights of the town.

And he was right. The streets were filled with the usual things you’d find downtown, but at a glance, there was no shady activity. There was a greengrocer selling fresh fruit, stalls selling preserved snacks—all sorts of shops were lined up in rows, the majority of which were bustling.

As this was a place where the elite children of the world gathered, you could also say it was where all the money in the world gathered. The booming economy knew no ceiling. And as Albert had said, there were no signs of a black market...

“They wouldn’t just deal in the open, dumbass.” As there were no students around us, I’d returned to my natural way of speaking in my rebuke to Albert.

“People like that work underground.”

...But that’s because black markets operated out of sight. Since this was a place where the children of the elite gathered, extra care was put into the security. But every town had its underbelly, tucked just out of sight.

Take, for example, that little alley off the main street or that deserted tavern. The dealers in Eltania close to its fall had been a little more carefree about their enterprises, but nobody here would be stupid enough to hold up a big sign saying DRUGS FOR SALE!

“Y-yes, you’re quite right. Please forgive me, my lady.”

“Nah, most people don’t get a chance to see the underbelly of a town. It ain’t your fault for not knowing.”

And under normal circumstances, royalty like Albert would never be given the opportunity to even glimpse such a place. That was a task for state security. I didn’t know exactly what their job entailed, but looking back, it’s a wonder I never butted heads with them in my former life.

“Okay, if ya wanna get shady news, the tavern is your best bet.”

But I knew all too well the way one had to go about asking for such intel. Chic taverns were one thing, but deserted bars like these always attracted the craziest riffraff.

“The tavern, my lady? But that sort of place is out of the question for people like us.”

“I know. Which is why we’ll pass on that for now.”

We wouldn’t resort to that tactic for now. Albert was absolutely right. Ditching class to go to a shady tavern was just asking for trouble. If the academy found out, even Albert’s status wouldn’t save him from consequences. So the big question was this: What we should do instead?

“Hey, Albert. Got any cash?”

“Huh? Oh yes. I don’t have much, though... Ah, I see. You intend to buy intel, my lady?”

“That wouldn’t be a bad idea, either, but they’d definitely rip off rich kids like

us. Just follow me; you'll see."

I yanked Albert by the hand and led him into a shop. It was a clothing boutique. We wouldn't get our intel at a tavern or from an informant. We'd find it in this shop.

I looked over many items in the shop before pulling out a few to have Albert try on. And when he stepped out of the fitting room...

"Wh-why did you pick out lady's clothing for meee?!"

...Albert was the spitting image of a lovely, dainty young lady.

"If you looked a little manlier, I'd have given you men's clothes. Don't blame me, blame your physique."

I'd dressed him in what had recently come to be called a maid's uniform: a long-skirted dress with an apron.

"B-but this is just too much... And for that matter, why must we even wear disguises?"

Incidentally, I was wearing a blond wig. I wasn't playing dress-up on a whim or for funsies, though. I had my reasons.





“You’re a fucking prince. Somebody might know what ya look like. And my hair is a whole thing. If we went out there looking like our usual selves, somebody could recognize us.”

For starters, we were way too conspicuous. We were Eltania’s crown prince and the girl with the Hair of Sulberia. But our high status would do little to help us dig up intel on shady dealings in this town.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right... So we’ve disguised ourselves. What’s our next move, my lady?”

*What’s our next move? That’s easy.*

“We go for a walk. The dealers probably target students from our school. So we’ll just wander the streets and let them come to us.”

Just go on a stroll. That was all.

“O-oh, I see...! So that’s why we had to mask our true identities!”

Looked like Albert had an aha moment. In the first place, many of the academy’s students had already fallen victim to narcotics. So while we couldn’t tell the extent to which the drugs had seeped into the general population, it was reasonable to theorize that they were targeting our school specifically. So if they saw a couple delinquent girls like us ditching class, they wouldn’t ignore the opportunity to prey on us. One of the dealers was bound to approach us if we just wandered around.

“Good, now that we’re on the same page, c’mere. Just for today, you’re my servant, Lulu.”

“Yes, my lady! It is an honor!” Albert looked overjoyed that I’d finally acknowledged him as my devoted servant. I was already worried about Eltania’s future as it was, but seeing how Albert looked oddly good in women’s clothing made my anxiety flare even more.

We left the clothing boutique and walked down the street. With my Hair of Sulberia hidden beneath the blond wig, I shouldn’t have garnered much attention. But we were getting a strange number of looks from everyone around us—I doubted I was imagining it.

Annoying as it was, my complexion often attracted a lot of *stares*. I now had the kind of face that would have turned my own head in my former life. And to make matters worse, Albert was with me now. And the maid look really *worked* for him, beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Maybe it was the dissonance between his maid outfit and his natural dignified elegance...

"Oh, oh... We're standing out, aren't we, my lady...? Are you sure we're going to be okay?"

"It's good that we're standing out—that was my plan."

You could call it a lucky miscalculation. If we simply made ourselves eye-catching, it would be easier for the guys we were looking for to find us. Besides, there were no clients more highly prized to creeps like them as attractive young ladies.

"Walk as naturally as ya can, like any girl you'd see in any town. Eat candy and giggle a little, and I'm sure they'll come find us."

"Understood, my lady! Your humble Lulu shall accompany you steadfastly!"

Albert was really getting carried away with his role. Dude was a moron, but his mind was sharp. He probably wouldn't blow our cover.

But all that aside... Albert looked like he was genuinely enjoying this. His pleasure was so natural it couldn't have been an act, and that gave me pause. On the other hand, it was convenient for us that he was totally at ease.

The rest was in my hands.

"Here, Lulu, give this a try. They say it's a frozen dessert. I think you'll find it has a very intriguing flavor."

"Ooh! Yes, my lady-eee..."

Though it made me cringe a little, I toned down my usual noble girl voice a little as I offered Albert a treat. It was an unusual dessert made of frozen milk—they called it ice cream, apparently. When he took a bite off a spoon, he literally melted into a soft puddle of joy.

*Seriously... Is Eltania gonna be okay?* A frustrated sigh tried to escape my lips, but I managed to shove it back inside.

But to the untrained eye, we probably looked like a daughter of the nobility slipping out incognito with her maid for a little fun. I could just hear the sighs of adoration around us. It's not that I didn't understand why—he and I both had pretty faces—but I was kind of pissed at how good my acting had gotten. I don't even think it would be egotistical of me to wonder if I had a natural gift for the theater.

We kept walking around town, just like that. Albert looked happy about it, but I was starting to fume with irritation. We hadn't come here for fun.

But after we walked around for a while...

"Hello, esteemed young ladies, might I have a word with you?"

...a guy who definitely looked the part approached us.

"Do pardon me...but Father told me I mustn't speak with strangers. Let's go, Lulu."

"Er?! Um, yes, my lady!"

I would not take the bait that easily. Right now, we were a rich young lady of the academy and her servant. If we changed our colors so readily without any concrete information on the table, we'd be sketchy as hell.

"Now, now, don't go, dear. Aren't you tired from all your studies? Well, I've got just the thing for young ladies like you who struggle with lessons and romance."

"Ohh...? Pardon me if I'm mistaken, but you wouldn't be talking about that dangerous drug that's been making the rounds, would you?"

*I got a bite*—that's the look I saw in the dealer's eyes. But he wasn't the only one thinking it. I, too, felt an eager tug on my fishing line.

"Oh, no, my dear! It is not at all dangerous! It's a folk remedy. Of course, there are drugs that cure fatigue instantaneously, and those are dangerous, but this one is safe. It eases your heart and soothes your weary body without any negative side effects! And that's not all! Just one dose of this little potion, and your magic energy will get a big boost! Your grades will go up, your fatigue will disappear, and your mood will go to nirvana! It is the absolute number one way

to have a little fun in your spare time!”

As anticipated, the dealer pushed his sales pitch on us. The sleazy buzzwords vultures like him used to push their product made my ears bleed a little... But I’d gotten some good intel from him.

*It boosts your magic.* The words jogged something in my memory. After I’d beaten William to the ground, he took that sketchy drug, and he got weirdly hyperactive, and his magic energy was amplified. If that was the product that had been making the rounds...

*It has to be. But I need a little more information.*

Back to my fishing metaphor, the dealer was like a fisher with their net ready to cast. The only thing I had to do was jump in.

“Hmm. Well, that sounds delightful—if it’s true. I fear if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.”

“Okay, you’re a smart girl, so how about I sweeten the deal? What do you think about a free sample for today? You can do with it as you please. If you find it suspicious, you can throw it away. Or you could test it out for yourself. Or you could give it to a friend to try. So how about it? Why not take a free pouch as a show of goodwill!”

*These guys have no self-awareness, do they? This whole pitch has red flags all over it.*

“Well, if you insist...then I suppose I shall take a pouch.”

“Thank you very much! If you find yourself wanting more, you can find me here again—do keep in touch. I’ll offer you a great discount!”

After practically shoving the pouch into my arms, the man scurried away.

“Mission accomplished, my lady.”

“Yeah. We’ll probably never see him again.”

*Or at least the blond rich girl and her maid will never see him again.*

I tucked the drugs in my bag and began walking again. “Let’s move.”

“Are we returning to the academy, my lady?”

“No, dumbass. We’re going back to change clothes. Unless ya wanna go back to school dressed like that?”

“Oh...! Y-you’re right, my lady.”

*C’mon, Albert... You’re wearing girl’s clothes. Doesn’t that feel at all strange to you?*

Feeling a headache coming on, I pressed a palm to my forehead.



After Albert changed, our next stop was a quiet teahouse. There weren’t many customers inside, and there weren’t many people staring in from the outside. The shop owner didn’t seem to care much about making sales, so they left us alone.

It seemed like the ideal place to have a conversation you didn’t want anyone overhearing. As we sipped our tea, which was passable at best, I took something out of my bag. It was the pouch of drugs I’d just gotten from the dealer.

“Do you suppose this is the substance in question, my lady?”

“I’m ninety percent sure, yeah. Besides, it’s the only fishy thing we found today.”

Albert and I talked in hushed voices as I emptied the contents of the paper pouch. Inside it was a small paper bag glued shut. I shook it and heard the sound of powder shaking around inside. So it was a powdered narcotic.

I absentmindedly turned the bag over, and there was a word written on the paper. It was probably the name of the drug.

“Ludus...” Albert read the name before I could.

I was overcome with a strange sense of déjà vu as I sat there in silence.

*Ludus? That word sounds oddly familiar...*

I ripped open the pouch and dumped a small amount of the powder on top of the spread-out paper bag it had come in. It was a bright-red powder—when I saw it, I remembered where I had heard of it before.

“Impossible... What is *this* doing here?” I muttered, spitting out the bitterness I felt welling up in my chest. I was unable to hide my disgust as a flavor that tasted like pure panic spread over the top of my tongue.

“Lady Mylene? Is something the matter?” Albert asked, peering into my eyes with worry.

“Nothing’s the matter, dumbass. I’m just a little surprised, that’s all,” I answered gruffly, calming myself down a little.

Ludus—it meant *sensual pleasure*. I’d heard it was made by grinding a dried red flower into powder. It was the same drug that had swept through Eltania like a plague.

When you were a mercenary, you tended to get news from the underworld fairly quick. After all, most of the guys who went into that line of work—especially in Eltania just before its collapse—were the sorts who couldn’t get a legitimate job. So a lot of them used sketchy stuff like this. I guess they just lacked ethics—they’d talk about drugs the same way they would wine or tobacco.

All this was to say that I could pinpoint the exact year that this narcotic had started to circulate. It would be about ten years from now. This red powder was a rarity. I’d never heard of anything else like it, so I had to be right.

*Things are starting to get really fishy now...*

“I was gonna leave right after this, but I wanna keep investigating just a little longer.”

“Understood, my lady. I shall accompany you.”

Ludus had some unique properties as a narcotic. In Eltania’s final days, it had circulated more widely than cold medicine. Because of that, I’d gotten plenty of opportunities to see junkies—but I remember that none of the users ever complained about bad health.

Most euphoric narcotics usually harmed the body. You could see their users deteriorate before your very eyes. But the people who partook in this drug experienced no changes in their physical condition or their skin. I remembered them being oddly well put together.

Having said that, the drug was a far cry from harmless.

Ludus devoured not your body but your soul. I hadn't heard the details about why, but the substance made a person's very soul go berserk. And as reality would have it, in late-stage Eltania, fights or murders involving ludus junkies had been a daily occurrence. The stark uptick in verbal abuse and violence was also thanks to our little friend here.

And the lack of apparent physical damage it caused to the body was likely what had helped it spread so far and wide. It was inexpensive, not detrimental to your physical health, but it was highly addictive. Ludus's explosive spread through Eltania had been one of the causes of her demise.

And this devil's dust, which was supposed to be circulated ten years in the future, was already on the rise here in Zelfore, a famously safe country. I got the sense there was a mastermind behind this.

I had no time to meditate over the tiny details. I needed to use every tool in my arsenal to get to the bottom of things.

"Okay, back to the boutique. We've got unfinished business with that fitting room."

"Huh? We're...going to dress up again? Hee-hee, oh, right, I remember. We have to disguise ourselves."

*...Is it just me, or does Albert look a little too pleased with himself? Well, no matter. I ain't got time to ponder that shit.* I crushed the bag of powder and stood up. *I just hope Colette's okay...* A sense of panic lingering on my tongue, I slammed some money onto the table, and we left the teahouse behind us.



"It seems...a bit different from what I imagined."

That was Albert's observation after we reopened our drug investigation in town and went over all the intel we'd gathered thus far. Since we were disguised, we weren't as picky with our investigation sites, so we went around the taverns to gather intel this time. And if I hadn't witnessed Eltania's future firsthand, I would have had the same observation as Albert.

The people of this town seemed to have positive feelings about ludus. At school, people talked about it like it was a nasty narcotic, but at least from what we'd heard from the people in town, it was practically accepted as a legitimate miracle drug that served as a health tonic or mood enhancer. Perhaps because nobody was experiencing the side effects yet, the vibe in town was exactly the same as it had been in Eltania when ludus first took off there.

But its end effect was a violently insane, immoral population with damaged psyches.

"Yeah, but one thing doesn't make sense to me."

"And what might that be, my lady?" Albert asked.

"The way they sell it... I don't see their intentions behind it. With magic narcotics, isn't the primary goal making a lot of money? So they sell it cheap at first, then ratchet up the price when their clients are hooked—it happens all the time. But not this drug. I haven't heard shit about people raising the price, and they ain't selling it for much to begin with, either. They even give out free samples all the time."

Most drugs were sold for practically nothing at first. That part was the same—usually what came after was different. These dealers were still marketing the substance as a tonic or restorative medicine and selling it at the same low price, even after their clients had gotten completely dependent on the stuff.

The users still hadn't realized it was the drug's doing yet, but you could see addicts with signs of a distinctive violent temperament cropping up here and there. Those poor bastards were likely already fully hooked.

"It's almost as if they want to make everyone addicted to the drug... Is that what you mean, my lady?"

"Yeah."

Their true master plan did seem to be exactly that. If they simply wanted to earn a profit, they could have easily increased their prices. But one thing was clear: They were not spreading this "tonic" far and wide out of the goodness of their hearts.

So what *was* their master plan? In the other timeline, ludus had started



popping up just before the war. War erupted, and the drug spread like a virus. But what if, unbeknownst to me, the order of those events were actually flipped?

“Are those dickheads trying to start a war...?”

“A-a *war*, my lady?!”

“No... That’s too big a reach. Forget about it.”

“Y-yes, my lady...”

For all my scoffing at my own theory, I stayed on that train of thought. Since we didn’t have the slightest idea what was going on, it was like a little thought experiment.

*Why are they distributing the drugs for practically nothing? Is it because the distribution itself is their master plan? If that’s the case, there must be something special about Zelfore...* And the first thing that popped into my mind was the boarding school.

War might have been a big leap of logic, but maybe they were trying to turn the kids of the world’s most powerful people into addicts and throw diplomatic relations into turmoil.

“Shit, thinking about it’s getting me nowhere... Hmm?”

Just as I angrily muttered that under my breath, I heard a voice coming from the opposite direction. It was an angry shout. Maybe it had something to do with the drugs.

“Lulu.”

“Hmm...? Oh! Uh, yes?!”

I pointed down the street with my chin, signaling Albert to follow me. While I walked along, I heard a soft patter of footsteps behind me. As we left the hustle and bustle of the main street and ducked into the dark, narrow alley, it felt as though we were in a completely different world. We continued down the rank street for a little while until—

“Well, look what we have here. Don’t see many kids of the nobility in a place like this. Do you want a magic tonic, sweetie?”

It was a suspicious-looking man in a hooded robe. There was another man lying at his feet.

“And...who is this gentleman?”

“Him? He marched up to me and was like, ‘*Don’t sell those drugs!*’ He was looking for violence, so I shut him up.”

*Don’t sell those drugs...* I repeated the words in my mind. This meant the man lying on the ground had noticed exactly what those narcotics really were.

“So what’ll it be? I’ll sell ’em for cheap.”

“Oh, no, thank you. I already received a free sample earlier.”

“Did ya, sweetie? Well, then I hope our paths will cross again sometime.”

After exchanging only a few words, the hooded man passed us and walked onto the main street. The pendant on his chest struck me as rather odd. It was too dark for me to make it out, but it looked like—a horned snake? It had red gemstones for its eyes.

An overwhelming sense of déjà vu filled me. I’d seen that snake before. But before I could have another look, the man walked out into the light.

*Forget about that. Intel gathering comes first right now.*

“Hey, sir, are you all right?” I called out to the man on the ground.

If he knew just what those drugs really were, maybe he had some vital intel, too. But there was no answer. Thinking it suspicious, I approached him.

I stared at him...and then I noticed it.

“He’s dead...”

“Dead?!”

*The guy had already snuffed it. So I guess that meant he’d gotten ahold of some really damning evidence against the dealers?*

I flipped the lifeless man over and saw he had a hole burned through his clothes and flesh. He must have been killed by a lightning attack.

They had to keep him quiet. So urgently, in fact, that they killed him before he

could so much as raise eyebrows. From every angle, it looked like this was no respectable drug cartel we were dealing with.

“Wh-what shall we do, Lady Mylene...?!”

“We’ll at least alert the authorities. I don’t wanna be stranded here for hours.”

The way things were going, I was starting to worry about Colette, who was gathering intel all on her own. All I could do was pray that she not try to be a hero.

I flipped the man over again, and we vacated the alley. We notified the police that we’d seen a man passed out in the alley, nothing more. Then we changed out of our disguises before the shit hit the fan. That way, nobody would suspect Prince Albert for the murder.

We left town and headed back to school. Albert looked glum the entire way back. Seeing the dead body had probably shaken him up.

But after all the shit I’d seen in the other future, just seeing a dead body with recognizable features was a consolation. Though, I guess if I told Albert that, it would only make him feel worse.

“So we’re wrapping up for the day. Don’t say a word to anybody about what you saw.”

“A-as you wish, my lady...”

*This guy’s genuinely freaked out. I wonder what I was like the first time I saw a dead body...?*

It was pointless worrying about shit that hadn’t even happened in this timeline yet. Organizing the intel we had and ensuring Colette’s safety came first.

Luckily, classes were over for the day, so we could reenter the dorm without a problem. Once I arrived, I found the girls’ dorm lively and filled with students.

Yet the lady I was looking for—Colette—was not to be found. It was likely she might have simply not come home yet...

But in the end, Colette didn’t come back that day.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Heresy

Colette didn't return that night. It wasn't uncommon for students to be out until dawn, but given the era we were in and the fact that Colette was a princess, the school was in a tizzy as soon as the sun rose.

I was waiting at the school, hoping that maybe she was headed straight there, when I heard somebody calling my name.

"Lady Mylene!" It was Albert.

"Al—Prince Albert... I'll ask you just in case, but did you happen to see Princess Colette?"

"No, my lady..."

I cursed under my breath. Albert didn't even flinch—he understood the implications.

But Colette being gone all night long... It was highly likely that something exceedingly bad had happened to her. These fuckers didn't hesitate to kill. Not even royalty like Colette was guaranteed to be safe—or if my theory from the previous day was correct, Colette would be the ideal *offering* for them since she was the princess of a huge empire.

*This means it's completely and utterly my problem now. This is so damn annoying...*

I was so irritated I couldn't think straight. It would be pointless to attend class

in this state. I wouldn't learn anything. Ditching two days in a row would get Pearlman breathing down my neck again, but—

“Shit...,” I spat out. I didn't have time to worry about school. “Prince Albert, could you please deliver a message to Professor Pearlman for me? I'm going to find Princess Colette.”

We didn't have time to waste. I had to let Albert know how serious the situation was.

“P-please wait, my lady! I'm coming with—”

But before he could finish that thought, I nudged my face close to his and said, “You're not that dumb, Albert—you *know* what I'm implying here. I'm *sayin'* stay the fuck away from me.”

I needed to make it clear to the prince that he needed to *stay put*. That was the other thing I was trying to convey to him.

“B-but I cannot do that, my lady. I am your devoted servant, Lady Mylene. So that command is one that I simply cannot obey...!”

Nevertheless, Albert persisted. His grit was admirable, really. To think he would not blindly obey my words and express his own intentions so clearly. Under normal circumstances, I would've praised him for it.

“Do I have to spell it out for ya? I'm sayin' *you'll just get in my way.*”

But these were not normal circumstances. These fuckers were willing to kill. They might have something outrageous on their minds. I would be able to move lightly if I was alone. I wouldn't say I was invincible, but at least I knew when to run away. But if Albert was with me, everything would become more uncertain. And it would suck majorly if we were taken hostage.

“I—I don't care! I am a full-fledged sword fighter, Lady Mylene! You trained me yourself! I swear I will not be a burden to you. So please...!”

“Do you care that you're already burdening me right now?” I snapped angrily at his dogged persistence. “Come on, just give up. You ain't up to the task, jackass.”

It wasn't that I didn't like reckless and foolhardy people. But I did hate little

shits who didn't know their place or their abilities.

"I...I will not give up! I am well aware of my shortcomings, my lady. But Princess Colette is my friend! And while you are the one-and-only Lady Mylene, I cannot sit idly by and let a girl take care of this all alone... That is the exact *opposite* of what a man who carries the weight of his kingdom on his shoulders should do!"

Nevertheless, Albert wouldn't step down. This was why I hated little shits who didn't know their place. They were impossible to deal with.

Then again, I had natural weakness for this. I just couldn't hate his idealistic naïveté.

"You dumbass. A man who carries the weight of his kingdom on his shoulders is supposed to give orders to his subordinates to do his work for him. They lead with their *brains*, not with their *balls*."

"Urk!"

Albert shrank back. I'd probably struck a nerve. He'd probably defied me and insisted on coming along knowing full well how I would react. As a prince, it was a dumb move. But as a man...I kinda liked it.

I pulled back and gave a heavy sigh. Then I glanced around, my eyes resting on a male student the next seat over who was looking at us dubiously.

"Um... You're Clive, right?"

"Y-yes?!"

The obviously sketchy boy jumped in his seat and sat up at attention. He looked like he was about to salute me.

"Please deliver a message to Professor Pearlman for me. Prince Albert and Mylene will be absent today."

"A-as you wish, my lady!"

*I guess he's just a normal classmate, after all...* I thought it was a little strange that a rich kid from a kingdom unconnected with Eltania would be so polite and formal with me, but I shook it off and stood up.

“Are you coming? I’m getting the hell out of here,” I called out to the dumbfounded Albert.

After a very long pause, Albert gave a wide smile. “Tha...thank you so much!”

And with that, we left class and returned to the dorms. I had a feeling that, this time, that blunt rapier of mine would have to make an appearance...



When we got to town, it was bustling as ever. The atmosphere was so cheerful that you’d never think there was some shady shit going down behind the scenes.

In reality, this day was probably no different than any other as far as the townsfolk were concerned. They must have thought that the drug was nothing more than a new miracle cure they’d heard about that was starting to get popular.

But behind the scenes...something so big was going down that it might lead to war. That wasn’t in anyone’s wildest dreams.

“Lady Mylene, what’s the plan for today? Will we be in disguise again?”

“We didn’t come here to gather intel this time. There’s no need to hide our identities. We’ll just find a dealer and beat some answers out of him.”

It was a race against time. We had to do it before we were caught. And there was a possibility it was all over already—but my friend’s life was on the line. I couldn’t just give up.

I dragged Albert around the town with me. To no surprise, there weren’t any dealers walking around in broad daylight. That meant I’d have to seek out the guy who gave us the free sample. He was clearly an underling, but we were grasping at straws here. Besides, even a common goon would have some useful intel we could drag out of him. And goons sang pretty easily with a little encouragement—everybody knew that.

As we walked toward the place we’d met him before, we noticed that the crowd was starting to thin out a little. I guess they did try to stay inconspicuous after all.

When we arrived at our destination, the dealer in question wasn't there. But we did find a narrow alleyway nearby. Just like that sketchy guy in the hood the previous day; evil worms sure did love gloomy places.

Without a moment's hesitation, I stepped into the alley. And then—

"Oh, what are a nice young lady and gentleman like you doing in a place like this?"

Deep in the alley, we spotted the same dealer who'd given us the sample the previous day. He didn't seem to think we were the same people who he'd served. He was speaking to us in a cheerful tone.

*You cheeky bastard... Well, let's play along.*

I walked toward him with a nice, even tempo in my step—

"Are you by any chance seeking out ludus? In that case, you're in lu—uck?!"

—and buried my fist in his cheek. He went smashing into an empty barrel with a twinkling crackle. Unconcerned, I grabbed the groaning man by his collar and yanked him to his feet.

"Y-you little bitch! What do ya think you're do—? Oof!"

Before he could regain his cool, I gave his other cheek a smack for good measure. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. Then tears filled his eyes, and he spat out a tooth.

"E-eep... Why are you hurting meee...?"

Judging by his reactions and the way he looked at me, this guy was definitely an underling. But even a minion like him could sing for me.

"I want to ask you about the drugs."

"Wh-why are you...? Oof!"

This time, I punched his nose. A colorful splash of blood spurted out of his nostrils.

"It's broken... You brok..." The man melodramatically covered his nose with his hands. It was clear this guy would be easy to break.

"Every time you give me an answer I don't like, I'll hit you. Keeping quiet ain't



an option, either. Got it?”

“Y-yes, I got...”

Before he could finish, I landed a third punch. He’d only taken two jabs to break. Damn, I’ve still got it.

“Hey, asshole, why are ya selling drugs? What’s your endgame? It ain’t money, and we both know it.”

“I—I don’t know...?! P-please, don’t! I really don’t know anything...! Everyone at the top is insane. I’m just an underling. I know nothing...!”

I raised my hand suggestively, and he furiously shook his head to stop me. It looked like he really was in the dark. They were making lackeys like him do their dirty work so they could keep their hands clean.

“I—I just sell the stuff for my bosses and get money for it... I’m just a distributor; that’s all! A high-yield salesman, I swearrr!”

That didn’t sound like a lie, either. He really was a goon. I guess we’d hit a wall in any information he could give us.

“Do ya know what kind of drug this is? Don’t lie to me.”

“I don’t really know... I just heard it fucks up your mind and that I shouldn’t use it...”

“Who told you that? Your bosses?”

“Y-yeah... They said they would pay me if I shut up and pushed the goods... They also told me not to spill the beans, ’cause it’s a pain in the ass to replace their dealers...”

If this guy was telling the truth, then it really did seem like the cartel’s plan was just to distribute the drugs far and wide. There was no telling what the unit cost was, but a small-profit, large-sale model had its limits. If they were paying their distributors, it was even likely that they were in the red.

“Okay, next question. Where do you get the drugs?”

“There are stockpiles all over town. I’ve seen guys dressed in the same uniforms drop them off there once or twice...”

*So it's possible that they're making the drugs themselves. This is getting to be much more complicated than I expected... Motherfucker.*

"Last question. You know the guys who want you to distribute the narcotics, right? Take me to them."

"F-fine... But please let me run away just before we get there...!"

"No dice. I ain't lettin' ya dupe me and run away."

"Please, I'm begging you! They'll kill me!"

From the panic in this guy's eyes, it was clear these were some pretty dangerous bastards we were dealing with. But that wasn't a problem. He'd known how bad they were when he agreed to sell their drugs for money. I wasn't gonna shed a tear of sympathy for him.

"I wouldn't worry about getting killed if I were you. I was gonna take down the whole organization today anyway."

I didn't care who this cartel was—I was gonna crush them today. I couldn't knock them completely out of commission, but at the very least, I could freeze their distro in this town. But this guy was still whimpering and whining...

"Please...please stop hitting me..."

With another swift fist to the nose, our boy readily resigned himself to helping us.



"Th-this is the place... I don't know about the other sites, though..."

A while later, the dealer led us to one of the drop-off sites for the goods. At a glance, it looked like an ordinary house...except all the curtains were shut tightly, so that not a single inch of the inside could be seen from the outside. It looked rather suspect.

"This is where we come to pick up the drugs... But I have seen guys wearing the same robes carrying it in."

*Men in hooded robes... That probably means the fucker who killed that guy yesterday was one of them.*

Since he said he'd seen "guys" wearing robes carrying the goods, there must have been at least two of them. It looked like it wouldn't be a problem to assume the organization was pulling the strings here.

In that case, I knew exactly what I had to do.

I would raid this place. If Colette was here, great. If she wasn't, I'd probably be able to beat our next destination out of somebody. We'd just have to comb this town, house by house.

"All righty, then," I said, giving him a little poke. "Well done. Once this is over, I'll let ya go."

"Y-you mean it?!" His face filled with a smile.

If I happened to find out that Colette was beyond saving, my mission would shift to revenge. I couldn't even let the underlings survive in that case, but we weren't at that extreme scenario yet. I didn't have any need to deal with a pawn of a punk like him anymore.

But I did still plan on squeezing every last bit of usefulness out of him.

"Do you know the house floor plan?"

"I know the first floor pretty well, yeah..." He proceeded to describe its layout.

*Okay... I got the gist of it. That means I can let things get a bit messy if I want.*

"I-is that enough?" the man asked.

"Yeah. It's plenty."

He sighed in relief.

"Hey, Albert, we're gonna bust in from the front. Are ya ready?"

"A frontal breakthrough, my lady? Yes...yes, I understand." Albert nodded in agreement. "I assume you have your reasons."

Our plan was set.

"Hey, punk. I'm done with you now. As promised, you can go fuck off wherever ya want after this is over—but first, I have one last little task for ya."

"What?! Whaaat?!"

Ignoring the man's bewilderment, I hoisted him over my shoulder. He kicked and struggled to get away, but it was no easy task to escape a shoulder hold.

"It's go time, Albert!"

I might've been a little amped from my first good rumble in a long time. Chuckling over how pathetic the poor bastard looked, I let out a morale-boosting roar—and tossed our boy through the window.

"Aaagggghhh?!" He screamed in terror as he smashed through the glass. It shattered with a mighty crash, and our boy landed inside the house.

At the same time, I kicked down the wooden door. "Yo! I've come to pick a fight!"

"What?!"

"A rich bitch?! W-wait... That hair... It's *you*!"

The first thing I saw when I entered the house were three men in hooded robes. Looked like the dealer was right—the bosses in charge of the drug distro all wore the same uniform.

But none of that was relevant right now.

Everyone around me was confused—I alone had a firm grasp on the situation. As soon as I stepped in the room, I charged at the man on the left. He fumbled for his weapon. There weren't many people who could remain calm in a chaotic situation like this.

I charged up my magic energy and let my fist sail into his chin. The sound of cracking bones rang in the air as a shower of blood and teeth danced out of his mouth.

"Y-you little bitch!"

The second guy—the one centered in front of the front door—held his sword aloft.

But he never got a chance to swing it.

"It's stuck in the ceiling!"

Using long weapons in a small space like this required a certain level of

proficiency. That was one of my strategies here. When somebody felt like they had mastered something and were caught in an emergency, they would default to their muscle memory.

The only problem was that nobody factored things like sword fighting in a tiny house with a low ceiling into their training regimen. *That* was why I'd kept my dull rapier in its sheath and opted to use my fists instead.

"Too slow, dumbass!"

I slid into my opening while he was distracted and landed a punch in the man's gut. He crumpled over, and just before his head hit the floor, my foot traced a half-moon in the air and landed on his face. His consciousness was now far away, on another plane.

*Okay, down to my last guy...* I shifted my gaze, and I saw Albert fighting him. Well, I say "fighting," but it wasn't exactly an epic showdown. More like, the prince was holding out his rapier and restraining him.

But a rapier was a liability in a small house like this. My fists were much faster, so that was my weapon of choice, but the attacks made by rapiers were easily influenced by one's terrain. Besides, for all his faults, Albert was a prince who had received an excellent education. And since I'd whipped his balls into shape, he'd actually gotten pretty good at fighting by now.

If this guy was the same caliber as the other two, and you took the geographical advantage into account, then Albert would be sure to win if left to his own devices—

But there was no need to give the hooded man the privilege of a one-on-one fight.

I sneaked behind him, grabbed him by the arms, and pulled him to the ground.

"Oof?!"

I shoved his chest hard. The guy let out a guttural scream; I was now sitting on him.

"Well done, Albert. You made my job much easier."

“I am honored, Lady Mylene.”

The fight would’ve ended mostly the same with or without Albert. But he’d enabled me to hold back a little. That was the reason these guys were still conscious—and it was going to save us some time.

“Ughhff... That hair... Y-you’re Mylene Petule?!”

“Correct. You really know your internationally famous kids, don’t ya, shithead?”

“Mmf...! What a foul mouth you have...! So you really are the divine child of that shithole country Eltania?!” The man smiled sadistically, catching his breath.

In Eltania, the chosen one with the Hair of Sulberia was worshipped as God’s Gift to the kingdom. However, most other nations thought of the Hair of Sulberia as nothing more than a signifier of special talents. And yet, this guy had known my name just from the color of my locks alone. I’d *thought* there were a lot of flies buzzing around... It looked like the pile of shit had been a lot closer than I thought.

“That doesn’t matter. I’ve got a lot of questions I wanna ask you.”

“Hah! I ain’t telling you *shit*.”

Unlike the underling punk, these guys had grit. As the man looked up at me, I could see from the look in his eyes that he was ready to die if it came to it.

*He’s just daring me to beat the answers out of him. What a pain in the ass.*

“Uh-huh. That’s nice.”

But that wasn’t a problem. With a nonchalant answer, I ripped out one of his fingernails.

“Eeep?!”

“Damn, you’re a trooper. That must really hurt.”

I tossed his fingernail aside, and it made a light scratching sound on the wooden floor. If he wasn’t gonna sing, he left me little recourse.

“It pains me to do this, but I guess I’ll have to pry the answers from your body.”

“Shit! You’re just *God’s Bitch*! Don’t underestimate my piety...!”

The man was screaming, likely in a vain attempt to boost his own morale. But in a matter of seconds, I was able to extract all sorts of information out of him. *Piety* and *God’s Bitch* stuck out in particular. The crime organization—no, the *religion*—this guy belonged to must have regarded the Hair of Sulberia as an evil thing.

*Is that why they distributed the drugs at the academy? To target me? Well, I can always just ask.*

“Okay, first things first. Since ya seem to recognize me, I’ll just ask directly: What did you do to Colette?”

“.....”

*The silent treatment. Well, this guy doesn’t seem to mind getting his fingernails ripped off. Must be that piety of his. Oh well... It’s not really my thing, but I guess I’ll just have to keep torturing him.*

It was a shit experience that made me vomit just thinking about it, but when I was a mercenary, I’d witnessed how an *enhanced interrogation* was done. It had happened when I joined a group of many sent to take down a den of bandits. I was with one of the soldier platoons... And yeah, official state torturers were some sadistic motherfuckers.

*I don’t wanna be like them, but time’s running out. So I’ll let a little monkeying slide for today.*

“Okay, fingernail number two’s coming off.”

“Nng... Ah!”

I made good on my warning and ripped off a second nail. This time, he wasn’t able to hold back his scream. So how much longer until he sang for me?

“Colette. Where is she?”

“I... I’ll never tell you... Agh!”

I wasn’t going to bother repeating myself anymore. I just kept ripping away. But even after fingernail number five, the man still wasn’t talking.

“You’ve got balls, buddy. Though you don’t have fingernails anymore,” I joked.

The man glared at me, but there was a faint sense of peace in his eyes.

*I don’t have time to fart around, but we might be here awhile.*

I heaved a loud, suggestive sigh, and the corners of the man’s mouth slanted upward slightly, in an air of victory.

“Oh well. Guess we’ll move on to *Phase Two*.”

“Huh...? Mm?! Ga—AGGGH?!”

I wasn’t exactly *finished* with him yet. The part I’d dubbed Phase Two involved finger breaking. I twisted, yanked, and warped the shape of his fingers with a loud cracking noise.

The key point of torture was to let the victim know *it will never end*. Each section would drag on, like an eternity in Hell, but instead of ending in death, it would proceed to the next section.

“Gah...ack...!”

The man could do nothing but moan in pain. Well, no shit. If I were in his shoes, I wouldn’t be able to stay quiet, either. The matter at hand was getting him to talk. Personally, I didn’t like dragging it out this long.

“A little late to be telling ya now, but just so ya know, this is an enhanced interrogation,” I whispered matter-of-factly. “Unless ya talk, I’m gonna do the same thing to your left hand. And once that’s done, I’ll break your arms. After that, I’ll do your *bottom half*. I’ll start with your toes and finish with your eyes and ears. There won’t be a piece of you that makes it out unscathed. And if you won’t cooperate, then I’ll do the same to your two little friends over there.”

The faint traces of triumph had faded from the man’s eyes. All that remained was pure terror.

“You mentioned earlier that you were pious, correct? You have a stronghold in your soul that you would put your body on the line to protect—I think that is most commendable of you.” I took a breath and continued in a gentle tone of voice. “Since I’m nice, I’ll give you one little word of advice before we get



started: *Even if you hold out until the bitter end, can you guarantee the same from your two compatriots? Don't ya think it might be prudent for everyone involved to squeal now, when you're still at a place where a doctor can mend you?"*

I pressed the man harder, to agitate him. When he heard that the things I would do to him next would be beyond repair, his face turned green. I was glad that I'd gotten through to him. But it was also possible that the man's face had changed color because of the way out I had offered him. The sugar cube must have looked extra appealing after all that whipping. I didn't know anything about this bitch of a god they thought I was, but right then I must've looked like the Devil himself to the guy.

"Now, let me ask you again. Where is Princess Colette?"

There was no longer victory in the man's eyes. The provision that "not being broken means you win" was making his resolve falter. Even if he successfully took his secrets to the grave, there would be no telling whether his friends would do the same. Resisting the allure of an excuse like that was a truly difficult thing to do.

He opened his mouth to say something—then shut it. He repeated the motion twice more. Then I touched his middle finger.

"F-fine! I'll...talk..."

And with that, the guy finally broke. But not his fingers—his soul.

"A-according to what I heard...the princess of Colorne was captured today. But she wasn't brought here. She was moved to our storehouse instead... She ought to be there right now, held prisoner."

When I heard the word *storehouse*, I didn't have to ask to know he was referring to the place where they managed their product. It looked like our girl had gotten *closer* to our mastermind than we had. Unfortunately, she'd stumbled along the way.

*Shit. What a hassle*, I cursed silently.

"What state is she in right now? She'd better be alive."

After all the progress we'd made, I didn't need to shake him too hard. I dropped the gentle tone and stuck to short questions.

"She's not unharmed, but she is alive... The bosses are still on the fence about how they want to handle her. So I dunno what's gonna happen to her."

My top priority—Colette's safety—seemed to be stable for now. But based on what this guy was telling me, she still wasn't out of the woods yet.

*So...are they trying to make an enemy of Colorne? Is that their endgame? If they are, this enemy might be an even bigger pain in the ass than I anticipated.*

"Shit... Well, whatever. Last question. Tell me where the storehouse is."

I had a million things I wanted to ask him, but it turned out we didn't have time for a leisurely interrogation. I needed to get Colette's whereabouts out of him and tie things up here. I could always find out what their endgame was later.

"It's a stone storehouse in the west of town...the one with the horned serpent deity on it..."

He readily gave me the information I wanted now that he'd lost the will to fight. And it was all I needed. But the last thing he told me piqued my interest. The horned serpent... That had been the symbol on the hooded guy's pendant yesterday. I flipped the man over.

"Wh-what're you doing?"

I'd flipped him onto his back... And sure enough, the pendant in question was dangling from his neck. Its distinguishing feature was the horned serpent, which according to him was a deity. Considering how obsessed he was with piety, it had to be the god he worshipped.

"Dia Milus...", I murmured absentmindedly.

"What...?!" the man gasped loudly. "How do you know the name of our god...?!"

Upon seeing his reaction, I didn't even bother to hide the grimace of disgust on my face.

*Fuck. This pile of shit's just gotten smellier.*

“I have no more use for you. Take a nap.” I gave his chin a shake with my fist and shut the man up.

“Lady Mylene...?”

I cut the string and took the medal-shaped pendant into my hand. I slowly stood up to hear Albert call out to me in confusion.

*Oh, right. He’s still here.*

“Did that turn ya off?”

“Oh, no. Your torture methods were splendid, my lady. You’re the best... What concerns me more, however, was the way in which you reacted to this man’s religion.”

Rather than cower in fear from the intense scene, Albert had calmly asked me a question. I considered my response for a while. The real answer was quite simple: I knew about the religion... But the reason I couldn’t tell him that was because the religion hadn’t popped up yet in this moment in time.

Still, if time headed on its prior course, we’d have to deal with that religion eventually. And it was a problem Albert wouldn’t be able to ignore.

*“Gods of the Moon... Ever heard of them?”*

“Gods of the Moon? I’m ashamed to admit this, but no.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve only heard a little about them recently myself. And there’s no guarantee that’s what we’re dealing with here, either.”

Though its origins were a little vague, Gods of the Moon was the name of a cult that had infested Eltania just before her demise in the former timeline. It wouldn’t rear its ugly head until much later. So there was no telling if this Gods of the Moon was the same group.

“All I know about ’em is that they worship a serpent deity known as Dia Milus. From what I’ve heard, they hate all other religions in existence—especially Eltanism, our country’s state religion. They think it’s heresy.”

What made them extra suspicious was the fact that they saw Eltania’s religion in particular as their enemy. From the dehumanizing way they’d referred to me—the chosen one with the Hair of Sulberia—as God’s Bitch, it was highly likely

that the three men were members of Gods of the Moon.

“They’re what you’d call a cult. I don’t think they’re acting in broad daylight yet, but they’re the ones distributing the drugs. They’re bad news; that much is clear.”

Yes, they were a cult. It was their true nature. Though I wasn’t sure why they’d made Eltania’s religion their nemesis. Either it was convenient for them or their doctrine called for it. Since I was never a part of that cult, I didn’t know any specifics, but one thing about them was clear to me: They’d whispered soothing lies about doomsday into the ears of a susceptible portion of a population, infecting an entire kingdom right under everyone’s noses. Just before the fall of Eltania, I’d heard a lot of these cultists say some pretty macabre things about Mylene.

“They consider Eltanism...heresy, my lady? Do you suppose they distributed the drugs to students to target us?”

“That, I don’t know. We can’t even be sure if these guys are the cult anyway... Shit, I should’ve asked ’em that.”

It would’ve been better to have thrown them at least two or three more questions—but Colette was our true objective. We didn’t have time to have a chat here.

“Let’s move. We’ll have time to find out who these fuckers are *after* we’ve rescued Colette.”

“Yes, my lady.”

But...former timeline aside, it was a bit unsettling that the drug and the cult that were supposed to pop up in the future were already on the move in this timeline.

*Well... I don't really care. I won't sweat the intricate details of my obstacles; I'll just smash through them. That's my mission in life this time around.*

I knew a peaceful resolution was off the table. In that case, I figured I might as well use this kidnapping to test out my new powers.

Quietly and firmly, I clenched the pendant featuring the horned serpent. My

thin fingers sank into its metal. I would become so powerful that not even God could stop me. That was my goal this time.

I uncurled my fingers and tossed the pendant down.

*I hope Colette is okay. Don't you dare make me see what it feels like to be powerless.*

I wasn't praying to God. But with a hopeful thought for my friend's safety, I put the thug's drop-off point behind me.



## CHAPTER NINE

# Cold-Blooded

“Nng...”

In the dim darkness, Colette whimpered hoarsely, experiencing the worst waking of her life. She had slept poorly. Battle fatigue lingered in her body. She searched her foggy thoughts to remember what had transpired.

After hearing that one of her friends had fallen prey to a drug that was infesting the town, she’d stormed out of school. Then she strangled one of the men in hooded robes and got the location of the cartel’s storehouse out of him. And then—

And then, she’d lost the fight and was taken hostage. She had overestimated her capabilities and had been defeated. Worst of all, she was in this mess because she had turned down her best friend’s offer to help. Colette cursed bitterly, feeling utterly wretched.

“You’re awake. Have a nice sleep?” a man sitting on a chair across from her asked sarcastically.

“Hmf... Not on a pathetic bed like this,” she answered emotionlessly, in a half joke, matching the man’s sarcasm.

He continued, unfazed. “Colette, imperial princess of Colorne. I never dreamed you would be such an idiot. But thanks to your stupidity, the plan’s going off without a hitch.”

There had been a faint but distinctive hint of anger mixed in the emotionless tone of Colette's voice. Upon hearing the heartless contempt in the man's, Colette pursed her lips tightly. The creep who had bound her in chains was seated in a chair across from her, muttering in annoyance.

The dim room darkened his face under his hood, so she couldn't make out his features. But she glared hard into his darkness-shrouded eyes all the same.

"Master, we finished taking inventory of our ludus stock."

After a while, another man appeared, called the sarcastic man "master," and politely gave him an operations report. It seemed like the hooded men were operating under some sort of hierarchy.

Colette removed her gaze from the man in front of her to witness the exchange. Then one of the many men who had entered noticed her stare, gave her a bestial smirk, and spoke.

"But still... I can't believe this is the princess of Colorne. She's young, but she sure is sexy. Do ya suppose it's because people with noble blood only fuck pretty faces?"

Colette grimaced in disgust. What a vile thing to say. She would have been enraged even if his words had not been directed at her. And she wasn't the only one. But the lower-ranking creep didn't seem to notice or care.

He continued, "If you're gonna kill her anyway, can we have some fun with her first? It'd be such a waste to just do her in."

"He's right. I mean look at those tits—she can't be a kid."

Her clothes had been torn in the fight, exposing her bare skin. The men hungrily fondled her with their eyes.

Colette's face twisted with fury. But not even her death glare could stop their depraved lust from oozing into the air.

"Shut your filthy mouths, cretins," the man they'd called *master* said.

That was enough to drain the color from their faces in an instant. The creepy leader walked over to his subordinate, his wooden clogs making a satisfying *thud* on the floor.

“F...forgive me, Master!”





“The putrid desire spilling from your mouth is an offense to the ears. I suggest you keep your trap shut.”

“P-please, have mercy—”

With an irritated huff, the master reached out to shut his subordinate’s mouth. And then—

“Nng—mmm?!”

His scream reverberated through the room. The extraordinary sound compelled Colette to look at him—to see frost run from his mouth to his cheek, freezing the man’s face solid.

The master released his hand. And the man, unable to open his mouth, writhed in agony. A fierce wave of panic rushed through the other men at the sight. The man’s indiscriminate punishment had served as a warning to them all. Seeing this, the leader heaved a sigh of annoyance, as if to say, *Don’t make me do that again.*

He clearly had no regard for human life—rather, he thought of the lives of his subordinates as no more significant than rocks in the road. Colette was at a loss for words.

*He treats his own men like they aren’t human...!*

In spite of the ice deep within his hood—which Colette was now able to see—he did not seem like the sort of person who would treat his fellow man with such cruelty. Frigid air stabbed at her lungs. For the first time in her life, Colette was afraid. Afraid of this very special enemy.

Or rather—this fear was a direct extension of the emotion she’d felt once as a little girl. The same terror she had experienced when she was confronted with the idea of that enigmatic and inevitable thing—death.

After giving the horrid, frozen-mouthed man an emotionless glance, the master turned his attention to Colette in an intense glare. The wrinkles around his mouth, illuminated gently by the light, were strained with impatience.

“The plan’s gone to shit—it’s beyond infuriating. Who could’ve possibly foreseen that the king’s chessman would be foolish enough to make a move on

its own?”

He stared at Colette from the darkness of the hood. His eyes were unnaturally cold—nothing more. But Colette bravely held her gaze without faltering. The leader cursed under his breath.

“Well, what are we going to do with you? We can’t exactly kill you here and now, but we also can’t let you go unharmed. Good grief—you are incredibly vexing.”

Magic energy filled his body. A thick smoke shimmered around him—at a glance, Colette knew it was an evil magic energy, dark red like blood. Its sheer might and ghastliness took her breath away.

It was a vexation directed at an adversary of absolute might. The magic was so visceral it evoked an emotional response—and thus, even a girl as strong-willed as Colette was afraid.

But what terrified her the most was the sense she got from the man’s eyes. Even though they were directed at her, it seemed like they were looking somewhere else entirely. Until then, Colette had never seen a person with a psyche this utterly inhuman. His very existence was alien to her.

If she took the man’s words at face value, she wouldn’t have to worry about them killing her. But these people weren’t exactly trustworthy to begin with. And when she accounted for the unstable psyche, she realized that there was no guarantee of her survival. Colette knew that if their leader had a passing fancy to kill her, his men would easily carry it out.

And their master possessed extraordinary powers—she had witnessed that firsthand. It was the very reason why she was being held captive in chains in the first place.

The leader stared mechanically at her with his icy eyes. Chills ran down her spine. She squeezed her eyes shut, thinking this might be the end.

And then it happened.


The door to the storehouse burst open. The collective gazes of the occupants of the room darted toward the noise.

There stood a girl, of silvery hair streaked with vermillion. With the sun's light shining at her back, she looked godlike to Colette.


And the girl said, "Hey, boys. You took my princess—and I'm here to take her back!"

Then she slammed the orb of light in her hand to the ground.

In an instant, a flash of light and a roaring explosion took hold of the place.



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## CHAPTER TEN

# Storming In

“Albert, we’re about to storm the enemy base. Do you understand what that means?”

We were hunched in the shadows with the storehouse in sight, ironing out the final details in our plan. Drawing up a basic plan and nailing down each other’s patterns of movement so it ran smoothly was the very basic of strategy. And we were at the final stage of comparing notes. Once I saw that Albert had nodded in understanding to my question, I continued.

“If I’m being honest, I don’t think that shit brain of yours can fully grasp the finer details of our operation. It’s partly because you’re just a fledgling, but in a perfect world, a rescue mission like this wouldn’t even be in the cards for your lousy ass. All that means is I’m making a big mistake bringing you with me, but I’ll let that go for now.”

Now that I stopped to think about it, bringing a royal along on a mission to rescue a princess was the most absurd thing I could imagine. But this guy was stubborn in the weirdest, stupidest ways. And in spite of that, he still insisted on calling himself my devoted servant—the prince was full of contradictions.

I knew that mulling it over was a royal waste of time. So I forced myself to think instead about the task that lay ahead of us.

“Now, *because* you’re so pathetic, I have only two rules for you. The first is that you don’t do anything reckless. These people don’t care that you’re a

prince—if it's you or them, they'll choose their own lives over yours every single time. The more desperate ya make them, the less secure your own survival will be. Your life ain't to be taken for granted, and it's about time ya learn that."

"Yes, my lady... And if my actions here cause a war, it will result in the loss of even more lives."

"That's right. Glad that's clear. Well, I only told ya that just to make sure. The most important stipulation is rule number two."

Now that I was sure he understood the first part, I held up two fingers. Albert's face filled with tension. And as he held his breath, not wanting to miss a single syllable of a single word, I said, "The first five seconds after we storm the storehouse...cover your eyes and ears."

*Cover your eyes and ears.* I elaborated no further than that.

"Yes, my lady! Er...huh?!"

Albert was either startled by the simplicity of the command or the vagueness of it. It was probably both. For all the pompous airs I'd put on, the plan was incredibly simple, and it didn't take a genius to figure out that the act of covering your eyes and ears in enemy territory was both inappropriate and dangerous.

"If ya wanna know my reasons, I don't have the time or the need to explain them in detail. I'm gonna use magic when we storm the storehouse. It's a spell that'll hurt everyone—friend and foe alike. You protect yourself from its effects by covering your ears and eyes; that's all."

"Oh... I get it? Well, I don't *really* get it, but I've received your order loud and clear. I shall do as you have commanded, my lady!"

At times like these, I really was grateful for how much of a trusting sycophant this guy was. Blindly obeying me would be more than enough.

I stared at the entrance to the storehouse. At a glance, there was only one way in or out. There wasn't even a single window, perhaps on purpose. We had to use that door, whether we wanted to or not, so I would need to devise a strategy for a forceful entry from the front.

I signaled to Albert as I sneaked up to the entrance. Once I got close enough to break through in a single motion, I charged up my magic. A little orb of light appeared in my hand, and Albert stared eagerly in rapt awe.

“Why, that’s Light magic!”

“Yeah, apparently, this is the element I’m best suited for.”

Every magic user had an elemental proclivity. This element took them comparatively less energy to cast.

And my proclivity was Light. I could generate illusions, inflict damage with feverish energy—at the moment, there wasn’t a single tangible thing about it, but my powers worked in a variety of ways.

“That’s my Mylene! I can think of no other person worthier of God’s choosing than you...!”

Albert’s eyes sparkled when he heard my special element was Light. This was probably because the Lord Eltania Himself was believed to govern the power of Light. But even Albert seemed to understand that we didn’t have time to drag out the conversation. He said nothing more on the matter after that.

“I’m gonna count from three to zero, then we storm in. As soon as the door is open, cover your eyes and ears and count to five.”

After a quick recap of the plan, Albert nodded in agreement. He still didn’t have a clue about what I was trying to do, but he wasn’t *that* stupid. When the time came, he’d understand everything he needed to.

“Here we go. Three...two...one...zero!”

On my signal, I ran forward, yanking the iron door open. I took a quick look inside the storehouse. The area was wide open. There were four hooded cartel members and Colette—she was tied up but alive!

That made my task quite simple: Translate my thoughts into violence. Beat the shit out of these fuckers and rescue Colette. That was all.

“Hey, boys. You took my princess—and I’m here to take her back!”

That was my own special way of firing the first shot—and it was battle time!

With a smirk, I smashed the orb of magic light to the ground. At the same moment, I set up my magic defenses. I closed my eyes and erected magic shields—or plugs, rather—around my ears.

My magic energy smashed into the ground, generating a powerful flash of light and a crackle that defied reality.

Once my attack landed, I waited a beat before releasing my ears and opening my eyes.

“Wha...what’s happen—? I can’t hear anything?!”

“My eyes... I can’t see!”

Two of the men had been rendered unable to see or hear. Another was dumbstruck. The last man was quietly taking stock of the situation.

*That guy’s good...*

All the while, I expanded my magic energy outside my body, readying my next attack.

*I know my next course of action. Smash the lackeys.*

I rushed at the two men who were blindly flailing their swords and sunk my blade deeply into the tendons by their ankles.

“O-owww!”

“Wh-what’s happening?!”

Now that the muscles they needed to move had been cut, the two collapsed and howled in agony.

*“Gah!”*

*“Ack!”*

I drop-kicked them in the chins, robbing them of the ability to scream or remain conscious.

I wasn’t killing anybody yet.

I turned to the next lackey and hit him in his stomach with the hilt of my rapier.



*“Ke-HACK?!”*

I interrupted his violent coughing fit with a swift fist to the chin. His consciousness slipped away.

Now the three goons were neutralized. Whittling down your opponent’s numbers was Fighting 101 stuff. I only had one guy left. The fact that he’d been able to remain calm in the face of losing his sight and hearing was impressive.

Upon further observation, it was clear that he was quite skilled. In spite of his lost sight and hearing, his magic energy was tranquil and steady. In fact, it was so quiet and composed that you could almost hear him saying *“I’m only doing this because I have to—may I help you with something?”*

*I knew that victory wouldn’t come to me so easily...* I raised my fist like I was winding up to throw a stone and imbued it with magic—obviously of the Light variety, which I was suited for. Then I bundled the energy into an orb, the most obvious shape I could think of, and threw it!

My Light Magic Lump—it didn’t even have a proper name—hurled toward the man like an arrow. It wasn’t tremendously strong, but it was exactly as fast and as powerful as the object it resembled: a rock about the size of three clenched fists.

The guy might put up a magic shield, but if my attack hit his head, he wouldn’t be able to stay conscious. And the unfamiliar magic attack was moving so fast that he wouldn’t be able to dodge it on perception alone.

...Yet my magic bullet did not meet his head.

Instead, a sudden wall of ice blocked my magic orb. A crashing sound like that of shattering glass filled the room. His thin ice shield had shattered to powder, but my magic orb had also exploded on contact, rendered useless. One could say the lone windowpane had served its purpose well.

*“Shit...,”* I cursed, unable to hide my frustration.

He had seen my attack not with his senses but with his magic perception. And on the spur of a shield of just the right magnitude, he showed an intuitiveness for battle on a minimal scale. I had known the man was good, but I didn’t expect him to be *this* good.

“Albert, get Colette.”

“Y-yes, my lady!”

The prince had done as he was told. And at my signal, he sprang into action. Meanwhile, I held my glare on the man who had cast the ice wall. By directing my obvious bloodlust toward him, I could both hold him back and keep Albert safe.

“Yah!” Albert swung his sword and cut Colette free from her chains. “Princess Colette, your hand, please.”

“Er—hmm. Is that you...Albert? What in the world happened...? A flash of light came out of nowhere, and then I...”

Colette’s hearing still seemed gone, but her sight was returning to her. She questioned Albert but followed him just the same.

“There’s no time to explain, Princess. Come with me.”

He tugged her by the hand and ran with her over to me. Now we had avoided the worst-case scenario of our enemy using our hostage against us. It would be tricky for Colette to help us out, but that was always part of the plan.

Meanwhile, the skilled man pressed a hand to his face and muttered bitterly, “The Hair of Sulberia... It’s you...Mylene Petule...!”

*I guess his eyes are working again. Which means he should hear my voice anytime now.*

But...speaking of *voices*... My face twisted with scorn at the sense of *wrongness* I got from the sound of his.

“So what if I am?” I answered.

“Hmph... I didn’t think God’s Bitch would find her way here. You truly are an insufferable girl.”

*Okay. He can carry on a conversation no problem now... Noted.*

The effects of my spell had worn off much sooner than I anticipated. Could a person block the sound and the light with basic defensive magic? Alternatively, it was also possible that his recuperative powers were stronger than the others.

The spell I'd used when we stormed into the storehouse was called Dazzle Sonic. It was an original spell that temporarily incapacitated anyone whose eyes and ears were burned by the explosive flash of light. I'd come up with it to mimic the effects of the huge explosion you heard in your ear when a magic spell was cast. Rather than inflict pain, it immobilized whoever it hit for little while. I guess you could say it still had room for improvement.

I would have liked its effects to last longer. More concerningly, it took a while to charge up the power of sound, so it was a significant problem that the orb of light took so long to form.

This all was to say...I couldn't use the same move twice.

Then again, if my opponent was that perceptive, the effects would have been flimsy regardless.

"Ya don't strike me as a typical dealer. Who the fuck are you?" I asked, swinging my rapier high. Not like I was holding my breath waiting for a proper answer.

"You want to know who I am...? Aha. Now, how should I answer that?"

Sounded like our boy was gonna play ball.

Yeah, religious zealots did tend to talk your ear off even when ya *didn't* ask them a question. And that went double for cultists.

The Gods of the Moon bastards were excessive in that regard. Ask them how the weather was, and they'd respond with "*The God Eltania is evil*" this and "*The bearer of the Hair of Sulberia must die*" that.

Suddenly, a memory returned to me. I almost let a waterfall of thoughts sweep me away, but I was on a battlefield. I couldn't let myself lose focus.

"N-no, Mylene! You mustn't fight him...!"

But Colette's unexpected cry created a faint rift in my focus. It was a heart-wrenching scream, filled with genuine concern for my safety. Aside from me, Colette knew better than anyone just what I was capable of. At the very least, she had deemed me near the level of the commander in chief of her own country. Yet here she was, telling me to let our enemy go. The unexpected

response caught me totally unaware.

But there was a silver lining. The man, who hadn't taken the opportunity to attack in the meantime, chuckled in amusement and said, "We are devotees of the Gods of the Moon. As a follower of Dia Milus, the serpent deity of icicles, I am one of many loyalists who has gathered here for a glorious cause."

As the man spoke in exaltation, he removed his hood. And when I saw his face, my jaw dropped in astonishment. Simultaneously, I realized what had been so *wrong* about his voice earlier.

"I thought you sounded familiar—but I must've been mistaken. I never would've imagined I'd see your face here." However, my astonishment lasted only an instant. I glared into the middle-aged man's smiling eyes and asked, "You sure do love lecturing me on how I should behave, so why ain't ya at school? Eh, Professor Pearlman?"

Behind the hood was the tranquil, smiling face of the gentle yet strict teacher of the first-year class at the Zelfore Academy of Magic.

His past *was* shrouded in mystery—but who would have thought that the man who taught at a boarding school for rich kids was actually the leader of a cult? I definitely hadn't seen that one coming.

Then there was the *Gods of the Moon* he named. What the hell were they doing in *this era*? Just how far did their claws reach? I felt cold beads of sweat form on my brow, but I held my cool, cynical smile.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Freeze-Tag

“No... Professor Pearlman... Why?” When he saw the face behind the hood, Albert’s voice shook with shock. At this, Pearlman smiled, half in satisfaction, half in cruelty.

To be honest, I was just as shocked as Albert. Not at Pearlman’s true identity, but at the fact that Gods of the Moon had sent one of their members to infiltrate a prestigious boarding school. That’s what threw me for a loop.

It was a school that the global aristocracy sent their sons and daughters to. As the academy already had its hands full keeping the students out of trouble, it had taken special care to beef up security.

Which brought us to Pearlman. An educator in a position to teach the students directly. And while the students didn’t know his backstory, the academy surely would have vetted him thoroughly before hiring him. And yet, one of the followers of Gods of the Moon had managed to worm his way in there. I couldn’t have imagined something crazier than that.

The crucial question was this: Had he already been a member of Gods of the Moon *before* he was hired, or did he join the cult *afterward*? Or the third option—had an impostor taken the real Pearlman’s place after he was hired? But if we went down that road, the possibilities would be endless, so let’s just stop there.

Regardless, the cult I’d encountered in the future that I thought was new actually had a long history, and it was much bigger than I’d imagined. I couldn’t

ignore the reality of the situation.

I cursed and glared at Pearlman. Meanwhile, he thoughtfully rubbed his chin, then put on his gentle teacher's smile.

"Bah! You're pretty slick. When did ya find the time to get involved with all this shit?"

"I don't exactly have much free time. But I've been doing this for quite a while."

I was trying to casually get some answers out of him. And whether he noticed this or not, he was polite and cheerful in his reply.

"Though it vexes me to say so, your existence is incredibly important to us. The reason I was placed on this assignment was because I was in the most convenient position for it. As your teacher, I was able to keep close watch over you. Though in practice, the plan was full of unexpected twists. That was quite irritating."

Keeping his tone even, Pearlman kept telling me things he didn't need to... Or rather, he was talking to me as though I was a small child.

"Ohh? So you're saying because of me, you got your turn holding the reins?"

"Exactly. As someone with the Hair of Sulberia—the chosen one, loved by the Lord Eltania Himself—you are a terribly important person to us."

A hint of anger colored his cheerful tone when the topic of the Lord Eltania came up. I already knew the Gods of the Moon hated Eltania, but they seemed to hate Him even more than I'd thought.

"Is that why you distributed the drugs? To get to me?"

"No, that's one of our primary activities. Our aim is to create a better world where people live in their natural state."

We still hadn't touched upon the core of the matter, but the drugs *weren't* connected to me... Or were they? The cult's activities seemed to have a wide scope. At the end of the day, I supposed that the version of the future I'd seen was their endgame. Through the proliferation of drugs, more and more of Eltania's people turn violently insane and unanimously curse the Hair of

Sulberia—that future.

I wasn't so tenderhearted that I cared what other people had to say about me, but it would definitely be hard to walk down the street in broad daylight with these locks in a future like that.

Pearlman gave a disgusted snort before resuming in a composed tone. "We at Gods of the Moon carry out activities such as this to make the world a better place. And so I have a proposal for you, Miss Mylene: Would you like to join us?" He extended a hand as if he were asking me for a dance.

It was Albert who responded. "How dare you! Lady Mylene would never work with scum like you!" He was shouting, his face red with anger.

I didn't like that he was speaking for me—but then again, he wasn't wrong. And of course, I highly doubted the sort of "help" I would give these guys would be legitimate.

"You are a hopeless soul who has been chosen by Eltania. But the huge supply of magic energy residing within your body, the body Eltania so painstakingly created, is extremely valuable to us as a *vessel* for our god. So...what do you say? Would you like to host our deity in your body and use those powers to shape the world as you desire?"

Pearlman's voice was colored with feverish passion as it once again grew peppered with the maniacal tone I'd heard from him before. It gave me the familiar feeling I got from all brainwashed cultists: *Aha. There's just no reasoning with this nut.*

I shrugged. "Not interested. Nothin' good will come from that thing you bastards call *God*."

"Blasphemy... And here I was going to purify that filthy body and soul of yours."

In all likelihood, the man I knew as Professor Pearlman had never existed from the very beginning. He was just your garden variety crazy cultist.

"I shall save your soul at once. This will divert our plan quite a bit, but as long as we have your corpse, that will more than suffice as an offering to our god. When we rip off your head and offer it unto our deity, it shall serve as a catalyst

to bring about the new world order of chaos.”

To say this guy had a short fuse would be the understatement of the year.

Pearlman, now in full-on battle mode, discharged his magic energy. The air in the room immediately plunged in temperature.

*What tremendous magic... This guy's no ordinary teacher. Not your average drug dealer, either.*

His tranquil expression vanished, replaced by a blank, emotionless mask. He was just God's Bitch now, completely devoid of his sense of self.

“Mylene...!” Despite being overwhelmed by the magic, Colette still managed to croak out my name.

She must have wanted me to run for it. And I didn't blame her—this guy's magic was something else. It was a magic energy more inhuman and diabolical than anything I'd ever encountered, even during my days as Envil the mercenary, when I'd needed to fight to live.

But I'd had my own fair share of enriching experiences.

“Fine, take my head. I'd love to see ya try. It ain't much, but it'd be a shame to give it up to some god I've never even heard of, so I ain't partin' with it for cheap.”

The prized commodity, *Mylene's head*, was already sold. I'd gotten it basically for free, but it was a gift from an empress. I couldn't just hand it over to somebody else willy-nilly.

And besides, if a god ate my noggin, he'd probably wreck his guts.

I gave my sword a gentle swing to check in with the sensations in my body before I discharged my magic energy. A powerful light flowed forth, embracing my entire body.

“Mylene, no...! That's too much power...!”

“Yes, she has always told me that she gets by on technique alone,” Albert said. “But I doubt anybody has ever seen the extent of her true powers when she channels them.”



The sight of his proud smile mellowed me out a little. Any more mellow than that, and we would've had a problem, but a calm mind for a task like this wasn't a bad thing at all.

"It's go time," I announced casually. Then I shifted my balance and stepped forward.

As I glided smoothly along the ground, Pearlman's eyes widened in shock. It was my beast stance. But I waited on standby.

With a surge of magic energy, Pearlman swung his arm high. Then the next thing I knew, a wall of magical power shot up right before my eyes. Barely a second later, icicles exploded from it.

But I was prepared for that. I immediately kicked off the ground, sharply changing my angle.

"Shit!" I cursed softly. Another wall of ice, the exact same kind as Pearlman had erected earlier, shot from the ground to shield him from my magic. Evidently, he had no qualms about relying on that kind of magic. If he kept using ice attacks that sprang out from the ground, my normal beast stance techniques would have little effect against him.

Between the way he'd subtly sneaked in the first attack and the speed with which he released his spells, he really was first-rate, just as I'd pegged him for.

"I'm not finished yet!" Pearlman cried, swinging his arm high again the same way he had last time. Three ice arrows shot out horizontally from his hand. It was spell after spell with no break in between. The sheer momentum of his attacks made it impossible for me to get any closer to him. And then he was on to Phase Three. As he lowered his raised arm, a lump of ice formed over my head and smashed down on me. I jumped sideways to dodge it.

The lump of ice that fell where I used to be was the size of a stocky adult. And judging by the way it had shattered on contact, it could have easily smashed someone open like a pomegranate.

He was definitely a pain in the rear. That last attack was not the sort of thing you could just whip out after firing off two other spells without recharging. He had an unnaturally large store of magic energy, and he was gifted in the art of

one-on-one combat on top of that.



*I can see why he bested Colette. I guess we should consider ourselves lucky that the gap in skill level was so stark that he was able to capture her alive instead of kill her.*

“Well, shit. That’s some powerful magic you’ve got there,” I told him.

Pearlman’s red eyes flickered with a smile as he answered, “My abilities are a gift from our god Dia Milus, bestowed upon us devoted followers.”

“Ohh, they were bequeathed to ya, eh?” I joked.

But behind his calm voice was a tone that evoked a sense of excitement.

Gift from god...*my ass*. I didn’t know just how seriously I should take the deranged ramblings of a cultist, but if there really was some way to attain that much power...then that made things much more dangerous.

“You’ve got more tricks up your sleeve, right? Show me what your god’s divine protection is made of. It might get ya a little more attention than a botched kidnapping.”

“You impudent child... Allow me to seal your vile lips shut for all eternity.”

I tried to provoke him...but it didn’t seem to work. He had a short temper, but he was more the *lose my mind quietly and calmly in an insane fury* type.

*Okay, what do we do now? It’s a bit of a headache that the techniques I cultivated in my past life have no effect on him.*

*Guess that can only mean one thing: I’ll have to make do with the powers I’ve attained in this life.*

*In other words, magic. Pound him head-on with it. This is what I’ve been refining it for.*

Pearlman grunted in surprise. “So young...and yet so powerful. So you really do have the divine protection of that false god Eltania...”

“Yeah, well, I am blessed with talent. I won’t deny that.”

Anger showed on Pearlman’s face when I released my magic energy. I suppose from their point of view, it really was *Eltania’s divine protection* at play.

*It breaks my heart to have all my hard work denied by a stupid hair color.*

Well... I didn't really mean that. After all, I did all that hard work *because* I had talent to begin with—it's only natural.

And *that* was why, in my past life, I'd let go of what I didn't have found a different path to pursue. *Use all the tools at your disposal.* But quickly determine which tools you *can't* use. That was my way.

I cloaked myself in magic energy and bent my knees. Then I kicked off the ground. A crack formed in the stone floor as my feet sank slightly into it. I converted all that energy into propulsion and shot right toward my enemy.

To put it bluntly, all this God shit was driving me up the wall. All that mattered was that Pearlman was standing in my way, and I had to beat him. And while I certainly didn't mind a little craziness, right now I was rather enjoying my peaceful life. I wasn't gonna let him jeopardize it.

Pearlman grunted bitterly. Maybe the speed of my bull rush caught him off guard. He failed his arm around to counter me, point-blank. His gaze was still steady and strong, but it lacked the cool confidence he had when he was anticipating my moves and discreetly dodging them.

With subtle movements of my head, I dodged the flying arrows. Since he was aiming with such exact precision, all I had to do to avoid getting hit was slightly alter my trajectory.

"Right back at ya, buddy!"

As I ran, I shot magic energy out of my hands. It was the same spell he had blocked with his wall of ice earlier. Naturally, if it hit him, the damage would be more than light. However—

"Not happening."

He easily blocked my attack, just as he had the first time. But that was exactly what I wanted—him doing that was all part of the plan.

I blasted another magic orb at the right side of his ice wall. But that really was all I had done. I wasn't yet able to do anything fancy like make my magic attack curve its trajectory at the end.

"*That's* your move?!"

But that was also exactly what I wanted.

Let's just call it *something coming from inside the wall*. All living beings, not just people, have the instinct to follow movement with their eyes. And in a battle where one missed punch or kick can spell defeat, it's very difficult to discern at a glance what something is.

Consequently, magic is nothing more than a diversion. I ran up the ice wall and jumped over it.

"What?!" Astonishment filled Pearlman's cool face. His reaction speed was superb, but he had already missed his window to actually do anything about it.

"Nngh!"

My heavy dropkick met his left shoulder, breaking the bones. I landed as he sank and grabbed his left arm without skipping a beat.

"*Ryaaah!*"

Then I spun him around by the robe, smashing him to the ground!

His shoulder ripped out of its socket, and his muscles split on impact with the hard stone floor.

I had completely disabled his arms. That had to hurt like hell.

I jumped away, putting distance between us. It would be great if he would just give up then and there—the only reason I entertained that thought was because I had the feeling this was far from over.

"How dare you...! You're just God's Bitch!"

Pearlman rose to his feet, his arms dangling by his side. He swayed like a ghost, his face filled with wrath, and his eyes bloodshot with red lightning. At a glance, you could tell he was an anomaly. This guy just got crazier by the minute.

The fall to his back had messed up his breathing. Between his broken left arm and his dislocated right, whose muscles were torn, he should have been in too much agony to talk. And yet he had gotten to his feet without skipping a beat, even cursing me out as he did. That could only be possible if—

“Aha. You must not feel pain. That’s convenient.”

—pain simply did not exist to him. There was no other explanation for it.

That’s how he was able to keep fighting to the death. And if that power also came from his *god*, then his god sure was a taskmaster.

*At any rate, I don’t get the sense that this is over yet.*

Both of Pearlman’s arms, which should have been immobilized, shot up to the heavens.

“O, our mighty god, Dia Milus! I offer mine eyes as an offering unto thee! Please bestow upon your lowly servant the power with which to smite this hellhound!”

Pearlman shoved his thumbs into his eyes. And to answer his scream, the eyes of the serpent deity etched on his pendant glowed red.

“Wha...?!” Albert and Colette gasped in horror. I was also feeling sick over the absurd turn of events.

But the next thing we knew, bloodred magic rose from Pearlman’s body like smoke. Having little time to stop and stare, I fired a couple magic test shots at him. But a giant red lump of ice, its color reminiscent of blood, materialized to shield him. And this time, the lump of ice did not shatter. This proved it was clearly imbued with much more magic energy than the last.

“Wh-where is all his power coming from...?”

“What sort of ominous magic is that...?!”

Colette and Albert both shuddered at his might. And I didn’t blame them. Even I had never faced an opponent with that much magic.

I could have run away if I’d known he was unbeatable from the outset. That was a wise way to live if you wanted to survive.

But leave my friends...my royal friends, at that? Now that was beyond absurd.

*Therefore, I stay and fight. That’s all there is to it.*

With a snort of my nose, the red ice broke and vanished. And Pearlman’s eyes, revealed from deep behind it, were dyed in red. They were like a

serpent's, thin and slanted, glittering with bloodlust.

"I am going to kill you now, God's Bitch...! I will rip your head clean off, and it shall be the spark to ignite the flames of chaos!"

Pearlman howled, all attempts to obscure his rage long gone. And the ridiculous amount of magic energy I sensed from him was far bigger than any I'd—you know what, it's pointless to even try to make comparisons. His magic was inhuman.

And if that was the case, then maybe he really was possessed by a god. If such a thing really existed, did that mean Eltania did, too?

"If God does exist...then I'd love to give His cheek a good punch."

If God really did exist, that actually gave me a reason to dream; I'd love to tell Him off for His incompetency in choosing such a motherfucker of a woman like Mylene and letting her screw over her own kingdom. I'd also love to hit Him with all my rage for forcing me to occupy the body of such a tyrant.

*But let's deal with that later. For now, I'm itching to beat this asshole to a pulp.*

With a menacing glare, Pearlman let out an earsplitting hiss from the back of his teeth and charged at me with tremendous force. Even though I modeled my stance off a beast, his form resembled that of an animal even more. He was growling like a monster; all traces of reason were gone. He was trying to crush me with sheer power alone.

And *this* was the sort of opponent I was specialized against... Or so I thought.

"Shit!"

Pearlman swung his arms high overhead...then slammed them down, shooting crimson icicles out of his fingernails like daggers!

I quickly jumped away to see the magic blades shoot right past my eyes. The blades grazed my hair before plunging into the stone wall behind me—then boring right through it.

Daylight streamed through the holes his fingernails had made in the wall. His powers were so great, he could cut through a thick stone wall like it was a slab



of cheese!

“You’re making a face—I can’t see it, but I know.”

An opponent who tried to power his way to victory with brute force was easy to fight...or at least it *should’ve* been...

But Pearlman’s *brute force* was on a whole other level. While his direct attacks were simple to read, it felt like I was facing off against a giant dragon.

He was powerful enough to slice through a thick stone wall. A blunt, razor-thin rapier wasn’t even enough for a friendly fight.

“What’s wrong, God’s Bitch?! Aren’t you gonna keep dancing for me?!” Pearlman jeered in a high-pitched cackle as he cheerfully waved his arms. The red icicles he’d created remained airborne for a moment before shooting at me with tremendous speed.

I jumped out of their way and used my momentum from the tumbled landing to quickly leap to my feet again. From the sound of the stone wall cracking behind me, I could tell that this volley of projectiles was weaker than the last.

“The rocks... They’re breaking! Lady Mylene!”

But it was immediately clear to me that this was not good news. In short, his attacks were still as powerful as cannonballs. That wall wasn’t gonna hold, regardless.

And to make matters worse—

“For fuck’s sake... Talk about overkill!”

—there were dozens of ice stakes around Pearlman, standing at the ready. Instead of hurling them as a slash attack, he had amplified their power by quantity and speed.

*Geesh... Now things have gotten really annoying.*

“Die!” Pearlman swung his raised arm downward like a baton. And with that, his virtual army of icy needles rushed at me.

“Motherfucker!”

I snapped into a sprint. Barely a second later, icicles struck the spot where I had

once stood, sending shards of rock flying into the air. But he still had more projectiles to spare. One by one, he sent them after my shadow. It was like a torrent of cannonballs. And as I ran, the fragments of ice and rock cut my cheeks and thighs—it didn't hurt much, but it was only going to get worse.

*Pearlman's magic ain't running out, either... I can keep running around for a while longer, but it's only a matter of time before my foot gets caught in the cracked floor. The longer we play this game of tag, the more at a disadvantage I'll be.*

*I'd love to fight back before that happens—but if I want to run toward Pearlman or block his line of fire, I'll need to slow down for just a moment. As long as I'm working within the confines of a human body, I can't make a sudden change of direction without dropping my speed.*

*And if I rush my move, I'll be skewered by an icicle before I can blink. Then it'll be either a snake hole or the butcher shop for me.*

*But I don't have time to drag my ass over this.*

*"Keep it in your pants, you pompous prick!"*

I filled my hand with magic energy, transformed it into an orb of light, and released it. It was an elementary spell, but if I got a clean hit in, it would have enough power to knock someone out cold . However—

"I don't think so!" One of the icicles near Pearlman transformed into a sword and deflected my ball of light.

*Yeah, figures. I knew one measly orb wasn't gonna end this fight.* During the exchange, his icicles hadn't stopped their steady volley of fire.

*But if I can distract him for just a moment—that's all I need!* I bent my knees and sprang energetically into the air.

*"You pesky little brat!"*

Then I grabbed the metal pillar holding up the storehouse shelving and used my elbow as a hook to whirl myself in a wide circle. If I stopped running, I'd get smashed by the icicles. So my only choice was to keep moving...or rather, to keep moving while I made a counterattack.

“What are you—?!”

Thrown off by my wild maneuver, Pearlman shot his icicles slightly ahead of their target. He was already starting to recalibrate them, but—

*I can still make it!*

Just as I let go of the pillar, I twisted my body in midair, adding a spiral flip to my trajectory.

Pearlman grunted. “I can’t...lock on!”

Due to my complex trajectory in the air, Pearlman couldn’t line up a clean shot on me. Sure, my line of sight was a blurred mess, but I’ve survived magic tsunamis with the power of my own body alone; I had faith in my eyes!

“Just—”

I looked at Pearlman, his arms spread wide at me. From the placement of his hands, I could see his aim was slightly off. I kept flipping, imbued my rapier with magic...

“—*die* already!”

...and I thought about all the hell he’d put me through as I paid him back in full.

“Guh! Rahh?!”

As I violently slammed my rapier against his magic-cloaked body, Pearlman shot backward like a cannonball. I couldn’t cut through him, which proved the magic imbued in my rapier was vastly dwarfed by the magic in Pearlman’s body. His defenses were quite impressive. But nobody could come out of an attack with that much momentum behind it unscathed.

Pearlman slammed into the stone wall, spitting out all his breath. It was the same as slamming back-first onto a stone floor without taking a defensive posture. A normal human would have died from that. However...

“Curse you...! I can’t let someone with powers like yours live...!”

Though he was far from unharmed, Pearlman got to his feet as if nothing was wrong with him. Even so, a hit that hard square in the back should have at least

knocked the wind out of him.

*I had no idea he was this big of a pain in the ass. You can't let someone with powers like me live? Right back at ya, buddy. If there were about ten of you, you guys could easily topple a small country.*

*"You're still not done yet? C'mon... Let's just end this, buddy."*

*"Never, God's Bitch! This isn't over until I offer your head to my deity...!"*

I wiped the blood off my cheek and rolled my eyes at him. Pearlman bared his thin, snakelike fangs and howled with laughter.

*Yeah, this guy's gone completely off the deep end. And it's funny how he keeps calling me God's Bitch. It's almost like they think I just do whatever the great Eltania commands me to. Well, for your information, I don't worship any deities. If God really did exist, I'd wanna bite His face off—I'm no nobler than a rabid dog.*

*But even stray hounds have a few tricks up their sleeves. We do what we've got to do to stay alive.*

Pearlman transformed his arms into blades of ice, raised them high above his head, then slashed. I slipped my sword away from his attack, leaving a punch in his gut behind as I passed through.

*"Ka-HAH...!"*

But Pearlman didn't stop—he even kept smiling as he slashed at my blade.

*Did ya think ya had an opening? Big mistake.*

Pain was meaningless to him. I already realized that long ago, from the way he was freely swinging his broken arms. And from my little experiment of slamming him into the wall, I observed that damaging his body would not dampen its ability to move.

Next, I darted in and out of his space, lightly kicking his back to put distance between us. Even though he didn't feel any pain, his postured did distort if I applied pressure to the problem areas of his body. Of course it did. Divine powers aside, in the end, the only thing supporting a human body is a pair of legs.

“Damn you!”

He must have thought I was making a fool of him. Pearlman charged at me, the veins in his neck bulging. I held up my rapier. But after everything we’d been through, I knew a dull blade wasn’t going to be that effective.

But there was one sword move in particular that I’d loved during my mercenary days.

It was sword throwing.

Blocking a spinning iron blade someone had hurled at you was quite the difficult feat.

Pearlman snorted. “You think throwing your *sword* will work?!”

This time, I was aiming for his head. Even a monster who could still move his arms when they were broken would be immobilized if his head got smashed. He would stop moving his arms and evade my attack with a big jump.

That’s right—if I threw my sword at him, he would have no choice but to evade it. And unless my calculations were off, that would give me an opening. For people who relied so heavily on magic, the thing about fighters is that they feel a lot of pride in their weapons. If I had to describe it, it was like the reverence you would feel for an ornamental heirloom with the family crest on it. But I only have that sense of it because a part of me still remains from my magicless days, where I’d perceived my weapon as simply the tool I entrust my life with. And *that* was actually why fighters scorned weapons, but at the same time, they tended to have pride in their swords.

And shit—I couldn’t think of anything stupider than that.

Putting your life on the scales and measuring it up against pride or whatever—the whole concept was wrong. The thing you should prioritize above all else was always the same; it never changed. It was your *life*, for cryin’ out loud.

I’ll use anything I can use to achieve my goals. And if something I have is weighing me down, I’ll throw it away, no matter how valuable it is.

That’s how Envil the Savage Fang lives his life!

Granted, in this lifetime, I’d gotten stuck with two things that I couldn’t part

with so easily—but that’s another matter entirely. The possessiveness I felt might be *Mylene’s* way of living.

Anyway, throwing my sword was such an unexpected move that it was more than enough to throw Pearlman off guard. But the real shocker was yet to come. Because I had already slipped into the chink in his defenses.

“Gffaw!”

I punched him in the gut, hard enough to kill him this time.

I was sure it caused him no pain, but he would be drowning for breath after having all the air punched out of him. That aside, the concentration of force on his midsection made Pearlman fold in half. As his nose fell downward, I smashed my knee into it.

After feeling the bones of his nose shatter against me, I pushed myself off Pearlman’s shoulders up into the air. Pitching backward from the kick, widened his eyes at the sight of me floating above him. But there was little he could do to resist the tug of gravity.

“Nighty night!”

And with that, I took all my weight, all my momentum, into my legs and smashed my feet right into his face. The back of Pearlman’s head smashed into the stone floor...and sank.

Regaining my balance, I slowly removed my legs from the depressed floor Pearlman’s face had sunk into. Red threads of blood dragged from my shoes with a moist, squishy sound. His nose was smashed, and his head was split open. I could see a great amount of blood—but he had probably lost consciousness from having his brain rattled, not from the other damage inflicted.

Now that Pearlman was unconscious, the red magic energy that had enveloped him had vanished. The special pressure possessed by those with vast magic powers had subsided.

“Is he...dead, my lady?” Albert asked, timidly peering at the body.

“Nah... He’s still breathing. To be honest, though, I kicked him hard enough to

kill him.”

He was in a precarious situation—that hadn’t changed—but Pearlman was still clinging to life. I had wanted to keep him alive, but it was true that I wasn’t in any place to hold back during that fight.

In part, I’d chosen not to kill him because I thought I was still too young to take a life, being a student and all. But on second thought, these bastards had kidnapped a princess and tried to kill her. They were dangerous. I didn’t think anybody would have punished me for it if I had done them in.

“Okay. What’re we gonna do with you now?” I sighed with fatigue.

Now that the fight was over and my adrenaline was dropping, I realized just what a mess I’d gotten myself into.

There was Colorne’s imperial princess with her clothing ripped all over—and the cultists who had kidnapped her. And for some reason, the prince of Eltania and his betrothed were there. On top of this, the kidnappers had been led by the homeroom teacher of a boarding school for the world’s elites, and the one who’d kicked all their asses was the aforementioned little lady betrothed to the prince.

Seeing as how I barely stopped short of killing him, there was no way I could let this go unreported. My brain began to hurt with all the crazy things I’d have to explain. I’d love to just shove everything onto Albert, but there was no telling what kinds of shit he’d say.

“Nng...”

And while I was musing over all this, the source of my ails groaned from the ground. Now I needed to add “knock my teacher out again” to the list of things I had to do, but as long as he was awake, I had questions.

“Hey, there. You awake, sweetie?”

“You little bitch...,” Pearlman grunted, looking up slightly—that was as far as he could move. His face sank again, into his own pool of blood, with a dribbling noise.

So my suspicions were true: The powers he’d been imbued with earlier were

all gone. Now that I knew his abilities were only temporary, it made this whole divine possession thing a little more plausible.

*No... There's no other explanation for that level of power, regardless. If our fight hadn't been contained to a room, it probably would've dragged out even longer.*

I carelessly walked up to Pearlman, sat on his stomach, and pulled him up by his collar. “What the hell made you guys do all that shit? I assume you only kidnapped Colette because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time—but what was the point in distributing those drugs?”

I pressed him hard—but Pearlman only snorted cynically with a cool demeanor. This guy wasn't like his lackeys. He wouldn't sing so easily. And besides, if I roughed up this middle-aged man any further, he really would meet his death. Torture was meaningless if the guy died.

But Pearlman suddenly got a somber look in his eyes, and he said deliriously, “To think Eltania's protection was so powerful... I guess even a rotten god is still a god...”

The bitter words felt extra malicious, coming from a man with a vacant expression in his eyes. Of course, the *god* he was referring to in this case was not the deity they worshipped, but Eltania.

“Why exactly do you hate Eltania that much?”

“I have nothing to share with the likes of you.”

But he wouldn't tell me why.

“To our deity Dia Milus...our Sovereign God Lesewelk...and to the future world of the Gods of the Moon... Glory to the world of chaos to come!”

Maybe those really were the delirious words of a madman. It's not unusual for a man to mutter prayers to his gods on his deathbed.

Pearlman stuck out his tongue at me. A magic bullet of blue ice rested atop it. He yanked his tongue into his mouth, crushing the blue ice with his teeth. Then thorny ice crystals sprouted all over his face, ripping his skin apart.

“What—?!” Albert gasped in shock.



Our homeroom teacher had just killed himself. I guess it was only natural for Albert to be shocked. But I wasn't surprised... I imagined something like this would happen. It's important to let kids be sensitive, though.

"Well, shit. Yet another thing to deal with..."

I gently set Pearlman's face on the floor and stood up. Taking your own life to keep your secrets protected was a pretty ballsy move. It seemed like these Gods of the Moon were a much more *organized* religion than I'd taken them for.

Being a martyr sounds noble and all, but it's not worth a damn. You're nothing more than a fanatic who's eager to throw away what should be most important to you.

Knowing that guys like this were coming out of the woodwork this early made me realize that my former impression of them as a new religion was probably wrong.

"What a mess."

I hated it when things got complicated. What I'd assumed was a simple problem had gotten much bigger than it was at the start, like a snowball being rolled into a snowman.

I gave a heavy sigh, pressing a hand to my forehead and said, "Okay, first things first—let's get a guard."

We had mountains of problems to deal with. So our only choice was to start tackling them one at a time. And our first task at hand was to tell law enforcement what had happened.

But we couldn't leave the scene of the crime—the kidnappers' friends might come back and tamper with it—and I didn't want to split us up and weaken our defenses, either. These were guys who had no qualms about putting the murder of royalty in their master plan. I didn't want to let Colette and Albert out of my sight, at least for now.

"Guess we should go find someone nearby..." I sighed loudly, my shoulders slumping. But first, I had to worry about Colette's injuries. I knew she could move and talk, but some people with a high pain threshold could still walk and talk even when they were on death's door.

“Are you...hurt bad?”

“Huh? Oh... Hmm, no, I’m all right.”

She seemed a bit dazed, but she wasn’t as hurt as she looked.

“Good... Glad you’re okay,” I said quietly, sighing in relief.

“Whew?! R-really?” For some reason, Colette’s shoulders shook dramatically.

I frowned dubiously at her... But I guess for now, she at least *seemed* to be feeling okay. “Hey... Are ya sure you’re all right?” I asked, her out-of-character timidity concerning me.

They had held her captive all night. There was no telling what they’d done to her. We might have had a national crisis on our hands. She’d already been abducted—it was too late to change that now—but if those freaks had done anything worse to her, there really would be no coming back from that.

“Oh...uh, yeah. I’m just a little frazzled... That’s all.”

Strong, aloof Colette’s face turned red. She was coyly avoiding my gaze, a gesture I would never have been able to imagine coming from her.

“I’m fine, truly. They still hadn’t decided what they were going to do with me. And Pearlman ordered them not to lay a finger on me until they’d organized their thoughts.”

As long as Colette was telling me the truth, it seemed like she was mostly all right. She wasn’t hurt, but the more I looked her up and down, the smaller she shrank. It didn’t seem at all like her, but as long as they hadn’t done anything gross to her, we were in the clear.

*Phew... That’s a weight off my shoulders.*

I cast a glance at Pearlman, ice spikes growing through his face. The fanatic had died a martyr. And the one who made him do it was that god hanging from his neck—the horned serpent deity, Dia Milus.

*That Sovereign God he mentioned also concerns me... Lesewelk, I think he said? I highly doubt it, but I sure hope the Gods of the Moon isn’t a polytheistic religion. I don’t even want to think about the possibility of multiple deities like that.*

I crouched over Pearlman's body and borrowed his pendant with a crest. It had glowed whenever he'd charged up his magical energy. I felt no power coming from it in my hands, but I figured I might need to have a better look at it later.

"Okay... I'm gonna go find somebody to get us a guard."

"Understood, my lady."

I left the dazed princess in Albert's care and temporarily put the storehouse behind me. I cast one final glance at Pearlman, whispering a silent farewell.

Even if that madman was who he truly was inside, I did think he was born to be a teacher. What a waste. I wasn't going to pity the guy for making the wrong choice and dealing with the consequences—but I just wished he'd realized he could have chosen to live his life a different way. Even I acknowledge it's a bit out of character for me to say this, but I really do believe that all it takes is a change of your way of life to turn enemies into earnest friends. Colette was living proof of that.

*At the end of the day, we choose how to live our lives. Even though you were a fake teacher, ya taught me a great lesson, buddy.*

I looked away from him and turned back to walk out of the storehouse. The outside light streaming through the half-shut door felt crazy-bright on my eyes as I pushed open the heavy iron door.



## EPILOGUE

# My Second Life, the Second Timeline

Three days had passed since the Princess Colette Kidnapping Scare.

Then again, tales of her abduction petered out the next day around lunchtime. Since Colette had returned discreetly in the night after a full day away from the dorms with no explanation, criticism circulated that she was a naughty little princess... So the whole ordeal was reduced to a little joke.

To be strictly accurate, Colette hadn't exactly been kidnapped. But she had been captured, and if things had gone down just a bit differently, we might have found ourselves in an international crisis or even a war. But not very many students knew the truth.

"So on that note...now that Professor Pearlman has officially retired, I, Ibrahim, shall be taking over as your homeroom teacher."

When our new homeroom teacher was introduced to the class, the room was filled with whispers lamenting Pearlman's retirement.

*Ignorance really is bliss. No, scratch that. There's nothing worse than something horrible happening without you knowing about it. I experienced that firsthand when Colette led Colorne's army in a surprise invasion of Eltania.*

Still, Colette hadn't wanted what had happened to go public, so the case was closed as far as everyone else was concerned. The curtain had lowered on the dark rumors that had alarmed the school population; only Zelfore's soldiers and

higher-ups and the teachers at the Zelfore Academy of Magic knew the truth. Even the plausible rumors about the drugs were now no more than one of many urban legends. The more popular interpretation was that a nasty cold had circulated through the student body.

“Well, let’s begin our lessons for the day. We’re missing—three students, I see.”

But in spite of the matter being resolved, the academy was beginning to change. Two of those changes were huge. First, half of the absent students had returned to class. Once the school officials found out exactly what ludus was and that a cult was mixed up in it, they lifted the suspensions of the students who had been comparatively less affected by the drug. This included the those who had tried the drug once but were scared straight of it once its effects wore off.

Additionally, as far as I could tell, the ludus that had circulated this time was much weaker than the variety I was familiar with, probably so it could spread more easily among the student body without suspicion. So it was much easier to quit the stuff. All the students who had used ludus were undergoing treatment to get clean and be returned to school in turn. The only students who knew this were Albert, Colette, the other students who’d been deemed problem-free and had already been returned to class, and me.

What surprised me was how the drug use hadn’t really become a big problem. For a start, the government still hadn’t decided how they were going to deal with ludus. Along with that was the fact that not very many students or their parents admitted to them using the stuff.

But the most influential factor in this whole thing was the secretive nature of the Zelfore Academy of Magic. This was pretty admirable for an institution that advocated for world peace, but since they were designed as an academy for the sons and daughters of the nobility of various countries, they were built to keep secrets. Perhaps the noble life wasn’t as easy as I’d initially pegged it for.

Now that everything was over, my days at school were back to normal, almost the same as they had been before. My new homeroom teacher wasn’t as strict as Pearlman, but as I sat in the peaceful classroom, the students in front of me

began to speak in hushed whispers.

“Hey, why do you think Pearlman left?”

“I dunno... Somebody said he went home to take care of his sick parents.”

The one teacher everybody trusted had vanished into thin air. Pearlman was highly regarded among the students, but our time with him had actually been quite short—not even a month. I was certain he would be forgotten not long from now.

But then again, because of all that, I had my normal, peaceful life at school back.

Maybe it was because I was in the beginning of my first year, but my days of relearning everything I already knew were dull. But thinking about it, I’d worked myself to the bone in my past life. And my days as Mylene had consisted of back-to-back daily training sessions and poring over books that might be useful to me. Taking it easy and killing time like this was a new sensation to me... And it wasn’t all that bad.

As I lazily sat at my desk, reviewing the main points the teacher had covered, my new homeroom teacher left and was replaced by another teacher to start my next course.

“Good morning, class. Let’s begin today’s geography lesson.”

Three exchanges of teachers later, we were at fourth period. It was history, a subject I wasn’t all that fond of. History would pan out differently in this timeline from the last timeline. The drug that reared its ugly head ten years from now in the former timeline was already on the rise in this one, and this time, Mylene would not bring about Eltania’s destruction—I hoped so anyway. At the very least, I was taking steps to ensure that it didn’t happen.

It just felt ridiculous to me to study something that was so uncertain. Inevitably, the lecture went in one ear and out the other as I began to think about something else.

And as expected, my mind drifted to Gods of the Moon.

In the former timeline, Gods of the Moon was a doomsday cult of fanatics

that hadn't reared its ugly head until ten years from now... Or at least that's what I'd thought.

Screaming at the top of their lungs, the cultists had vilified and demeaned the Lord Eltania. And as the kingdom who worshipped him, Eltania was unscrupulous beyond measure. The cult condemned Mylene, God's beloved chosen one of the Hair of Sulberia, fomenting anger from Eltania's people with their harsh words.

Gracefully brushing my Hair of Sulberia out of my face as the wind rustled it, I remembered the past—rather, the future.

In the former timeline, I'd always thought that the Gods of the Moon's proselytizing was one of their attempts at propagandizing the people of Eltania by riling their anger over Mylene's tyranny and currying their favor. But in this timeline, the Gods of the Moon's powers were already vast, and they already considered Mylene and the Lord Eltania as entities who needed to be crushed.

As for their master plan, it seemed to be something along the lines of making Mylene—me—a vessel for their *Sovereign God* or whatever by cutting off my head or something like that... I wasn't at all sure just how serious they were about it or how much of it was true.

But let's say for the sake of argument that they meant every word and that gods like Eltania and the cultists' deities really did exist... What would all that mean?

“...And so, Lorenzo Zelfore, the king at the time, founded this very academy...”

Under the pretense of taking notes as the lecture floated over my head, I drew out a diagram of everything I knew about Gods of the Moon.

Pearlman had said they were creating a world for their gods. That probably meant they needed Mylene to aid in their deities' resurrection. Then there was that word he'd uttered more than once: *Chaos*. I thought about how they were distributing drugs among the students at a school of the elite and that they had considered Colette one of the important pieces of their plan and were torn over killing her to shut her up.

I could only conclude they were trying to start a war.

Either that, or the war itself was only one goal. What if they needed Mylene to bring the gods they worshipped down to Earth? And what if the war itself was only a means to an end?

What if in the former timeline, those cultists had been pulling the strings behind the war? It was impossible—I knew I was grasping at straws. But I just couldn't ditch the sensation that something was very odd about the fact that the cult was already in play so early in this timeline.

*In this world, the cult distributed the drug and began their criminal activities earlier—why is that?*

Just as I asked myself that question, it dawned on me that there was one difference in this timeline that perhaps dwarfed all the others: Mylene.

In my former life...Mylene's rotten personality and the high status she'd attained had sealed her doom. *That* was why the Gods of the Moon hadn't needed to do much, aside from giving her a little push.

But in this timeline, even though we still didn't know how events were going to unfold, things weren't proceeding in the same way, at the very least. *That* was why the cult had to get going much sooner.

Truth be told, this was all getting much too big to keep track of. And fully believing the words of a dying fanatic who'd killed himself to keep his secrets safe was a silly notion indeed. Then again, I was a common mercenary who'd traveled back in time and taken over the body of the woman who had sparked the war. I was well aware that it didn't get more ironic than me using the word *impossible*.

So if all this was true, the Gods of the Moon would continue to steer this world in a bad direction. They would also continue to threaten my life.

I almost cursed out loud, even though I was in class. For all my griping, I still planned on being at the top of my class here. It might serve my hand of playing cards well in the future. So it was important for me to take my lessons seriously.

As I let my frustrations go in a sigh, the school bell rang.

"Oh, dear. Where did the time go? Well, we'll end here for today. Rise!"



At the teacher's command, we all stood up, bowed, then sat back down. With that, morning instruction came to a close. All that remained was to eat lunch and get ready for the afternoon lessons—but wait. I'd forgotten to mention the other big change that happened to my life at school.

"Lady Mylene! It's lunchtime. Let us retire to the dining hall."

Albert approached me as he always did. That part was the same. I hated that I'd completely gotten used to him calling me Lady Mylene with such reverence, but other than that, our relationship hadn't changed that much.

"Mylene! Let's go to the dining hall. I heard they're serving that smoked pork you love so much."

What had changed was my relationship with my other companion: Colette. The things she said weren't very different, but there was an oddly feverish look in her gaze, and her voice was coy and gentle.

"S-sure..."

She'd concealed the dignity in her voice so reminiscent of the future amazon she would become. Instead, her voice was...favorably put, like the honey-sweet voice of a girl on the cusp of womanhood. It was almost like she was in— *Nope, I won't go there. But I do still want to know one thing...*

"Um...Princess Colette? Why are you behind me? Were you not always by my side whenever we walked together before?"

"Hmm? Well, isn't it obvious? In my country, it is expected for a vassal to stand behind someone she has accepted as her master. Isn't that what your Albert does, Mylene?"

From how she blushed as she said the words to me, I knew there was no escaping reality. I *thought* she'd been acting strange ever since I rescued her.

"Hey, bitch," I murmured, leaning in close. "Didn't you say you would make me yours? So how is it that I'm your master or such nonsense?"

"Oh my. How bold of you...!" Colette's cheeks turned even redder. "It's not nonsense, I assure you... When you rescued me from those cultists, I had a realization. I was wrong to try to make you mine."

Colette stared intensely at me. Her smile was shy but full of unabashed affection. Her smile was—

“The moment you rescued me...I became *yours*. It hit me just now.”

—that of a young woman in love. Simply that.

*Seriously... This is making my brain hurt.* Albert being enamored with me... Well, that was okay. I mean, it *wasn't* okay, but as long as Eltania swept this little national embarrassment under the rug, crisis averted.

But Colette was technically the same sex as me—and the princess of the most powerful nation in the world. That made the situation quite different.

*What the hell do they want me to do?* Looking back, I realized that I'd had none of these woes before coming to school. Maybe I would have been better off if I'd just been a good girl and stayed home.

Not knowing how I should respond, I vaguely said, “Oh really...?”

“Indeed!” Colette chirped happily in reply.

As the princess stared at me with a smile so uninhibited and so audacious that it put Albert to shame, I pressed my palm to my face.

*I never was much of a good thinker. And my brain is already full of so many things to chew on—I really wish she wouldn't give me one more thing to stress over.*

I was so lost in thought that I didn't even notice we were in the dining hall now. I ignored the collective stares, walked to my usual spot at the table, and sat.

“Oh! Agh! Princess Colette, please do not sit beside Lady Mylene! You always used to sit across from her, remember?!”

“I used to, yes. But now I have the right to sit beside her. Learn to show a little restraint, Prince Albert.”



Albert and Colette began to squabble over who got to sit next to me.

*God dammit... I can't imagine anything more annoying.*

But then again...it was better to be gazed at with admiration rather than antagonism. And I was surprised by how I didn't really resent them that much for it.

As I watched the ridiculous scene unfold before me—a little giggle escaped my nose.

Hearing my laughter, Albert's and Colette's bickering came to an abrupt halt. They stared at me in suspicion.

"Huh?" I grunted, my mask slipping in response to the sudden change in mood. Then I suddenly remembered we were in the dining hall, a place with prying eyes. I regained my composure with a little cough and asked, "Is something the matter?"

"L-Lady Mylene, it's just, you laughed with such gentle grace just now that—"

"It was bewitching, Mylene. It was so beautiful. Nay! You are always every bit as beautiful as that!"

"Please stop... Your flattery is embarrassing me." Suppressing every urge to punch them both for saying such humiliating things about me, I turned away in a huff.

And then, the two nobles who'd been at each other's throats a few seconds ago began praising everything about me, inside and out.

*They really are the same at their core. This is why I hate royalty...* But I dropped that thought when I noticed I was smiling.

They may have been ridiculous, but I was ridiculous for overthinking things when I was with them. In spite of everything, I think I've acclimated rather well to my second life.

*That's right... I'm just a dumb mercenary at heart. No amount of musing over complicated problems will bring me any closer to understanding them. Isn't that why I have to get as strong as I can, to break through any obstacles that stand in my way?* I clenched my fist, answering my own question.

Not that I can exactly say I'm that strong yet—but c'mon, I kicked a *god's* ass. There's nothing I can't do.

Be it Lord Eltania or the cult's Sovereign God, if they're standing in my way, I'll just smack them upside the head until they get out.

*And until that day comes...I guess I'll try a graceful, ladylike way of life for a while.*

I snorted, scorning the out-of-character thought.

Seeing this, Albert rolled his eyes as if to say, "*That's the Lady Mylene I know.*" And when Colette agreed that she felt more at ease with me being this way, I realized being a little lady was actually a damn sight harder than I imagined.



## Afterword

First, let me sincerely thank you for getting your hands on *Miss Savage Fang: The Strongest Mercenary in History Is Reincarnated as an Unstoppable Noblewoman*. I'm the author, Kakkaku Akashi.

I truly have so much gratitude in my heart for my illustrator Kayahara, my editor, and the proofreading and marketing teams for all their help in releasing this book.

So with the customary thank-yous out of the way...

I finally have a moment of peace now that I've somehow managed to get my new series out into the world. Yaaay!

Seriously, so many things came up during this project.

I overbooked myself (which is unusual for me), I wrecked my health, I started writing a modern-day fantasy for fun, which wound up turning into a whole book... I truly do believe I made life difficult for people in many ways.

Wait a minute... Is it just me, or do I always spend my afterwords apologizing for making life difficult for people?

Okay, if I think about this anymore, all the conflicting emotions will tear my heart apart, so let's just end it there. But seriously, I am so sorry, everyone...

So anyway, I'd like to talk a little about this new series... All my projects up until now have had long titles, but yes, this one is especially long. I guess you

could say it's in a main title: subtitle format. From this point forward, whenever I talk about it in the afterword or to myself, I'll refer to it simply as *Miss Savage Fang*.

Content-wise, *Miss Savage Fang* is my first reincarnated-in-the-same-world story since my first series: *Devoting My Life to Martial Arts for One Hundred Years and Counting: Repeating My Warrior Training as an Elf*. But unlike my first series, instead of being reborn in the same world after their death, the main character is reborn into the past before their death and in a different person's body. So it's a twist on the idea.

So how did you like my little story about a savage mercenary who got reborn to live his life as a little lady? I hope I was successful in expressing the garish manliness.

At the start, this project was a real struggle to get through, but once I got halfway through, I started to vibe with it. I hope you didn't notice—that would be awkward.

And truth be told, compared with past projects, during this one, I was changing and fixing things up until the very last minute. I really do owe my editor a big thank-you for joining me in a three-legged race to get this book over the finish line. With your help, I was able to ditch the insecurities I had over my first draft and turn in my final copy with confidence!

I also need to give a multitude of thanks to my illustrator, Kayahara. When I got the character designs while I was revising the first draft, I felt the character of Miss Savage Fang come to life in my mind. When I was working on the last battle, I was like, *Ooh, I wanna see a character like her kick ass like that!* It gave me the creative fuel I needed, and it really did greatly impact this book.

Once again, I express my sincerest gratitude to you!

Okay, I think that's all I'll say about the story itself.

As I write this afterword, my friends and I have been really into a certain monster-hunting game. I haven't been playing it since the first one, but new installments of it are still coming out after nearly fifteen years. What's more, the story is finally getting close to coming to an end. I truly do think that's a wonderful thing.

It's just so awesome having a series be so beloved for that long... And a part of me is envious of that, but I'm genuinely happy to see a long-running series evolve and improve into the best it can be and to receive such high praise.

To continue to evolve for so long without compromising the foundation you started with is truly a tremendous accomplishment. I only hope that I can achieve a fraction of what that game did.

Okay, now that I've finished talking about my main hobby (gaming) like I always do, I've run out of pages for this afterword. When you've written as many of these as I have, you start thinking you've run out of things to say. But then before you realize it, you're close to the end, and you're surprised to find that you actually kind of like writing afterwords.

Let us end this afterword as we always do, by leaving everyone with a final thank-you as I set down my pen. Thank you, sincerely, for reading *Miss Savage Fang*! The world is in such a terrible state right now. I hope that this story gave you a moment's escape from the increasingly stressful lives we live.

And on that note, I hope we get to meet again soon!

*Kakkaku Akashi*



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