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Kiichi Kosuzu
Illust. Yuunagi

The
Reincarnation of
the **Strongest**
Exorcist in
Another World
Monsters Can't Match My Youkai!



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Yuki
Kuda-gitsune

Summoning—
Kuda-gitsune.

“Master
Haruyoshi!”

Seika Lamprogue
(Haruyoshi)
Exorcist



“Sh-Should
I join you
tonight?”

Yifa
Slave



“You can
turn around
now.”

Amyu
Student

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Prologue

How did things turn out like this?

It was a fateful night during the Heian period. As I lay on the verge of death, my manor burning to the ground around me, that was the only thought that crossed my mind.

I had lost nearly all my talismans, and my shikigami had all been sealed. The kishin that had been my trump card, still burning with blue flames, lay defeated, its corpse flattening my manor. My left arm was gone, preventing me from making hand signs, and my lungs were full of smoke, so I couldn't even chant mantras.

Hailed as the most powerful exorcist in history and feared as “the Parade of One Hundred Spirits” and “Hell’s Gatekeeper,” I had lived for over a hundred years yet still appeared youthful. However, that all ended here.

I had sought power from a young age. I had thought that as long as I had ample strength, no one would be able to take from me. I had thought I would be happy. I had obtained the power I so desired and become the strongest—and then I’d lost it all.

Scheming and betrayal—that deadly combination had slain the strongest exorcist. It had all been planned, from my disciples being taken hostage to being forced to make an enemy of the Imperial Court. Then there was her, shedding tears as she’d come to kill me. It was flawless.

I didn’t know which noble or member of the imperial family orchestrated it, but they had truly driven me into a corner. All the strength at my disposal was useless. There was a limit to what power could achieve. I should have strategized and surrounded myself with allies.

What I had lacked was now all too clear—cunning. *No matter. Next time, I’ll do better.*

With my trembling right hand, I made an incomplete hand sign. I chanted a

quiet mantra through my scorched throat. The single talisman I had protected above all else floated up into the smoke. In my final moments, I used a secret art—the Spell of Reincarnation.

I would try again, one more time. I had no idea how Japan would change in the future. It was likely that I would be reborn in a different country entirely. But this time I wouldn't fail. In my next life, I would be happy.

The talisman emitted a light, and a magic circle appeared, centered around me. My consciousness faded away. And then, I—

Chapter 1

Act 1

I opened my eyes and slowly inhaled. I was alive. My line of sight was close to the ground, and my hands were small. I was in the body of a child, probably around three years old.

It had worked. I'd been reborn. I was relieved, though the integration of memories that began a moment later made me feel ill. I'd had confidence in my success, but obviously, I had still been worried, as failure had meant death.

Now, what's going on here? I sat in the middle of a dim room, with a magic circle drawn on the floor around me. It wasn't the magic circle for the Spell of Reincarnation I had seen at the end of my past life. It was hexagonal, unlike any magic circle I'd ever seen before. Unusual stones were placed at each of the hexagon's vertices. They appeared to be minerals of some sort, but I didn't recognize them.

Then I felt the presence of people behind me—several of them. I could hear what seemed to be a spell incantation as well. The magic circle was faintly glowing, so I assumed I was at the center of some spell. I was unsure if I should run away or not, but I didn't feel anything negative in my body's memories, so I decided to stay put. I didn't want to act strange and cast suspicion on myself.

"In the name of Blaise Lamprogue, I beseech you! Show me the power this child possesses!" I heard a man's deep voice, and the magic circle glowed brightly—then faded away. Nothing happened. Everyone behind me was quiet. Had the spell failed?

"Pft! Ha ha ha!" Childish laughter broke the silence. "Ha ha, seriously? Is that even possible? Ha ha!"

"Don't laugh, Gly. It's not over yet."

"We already know the results, Luft. Look! None of the elemental stones are

glowing. That means what I think it does, right, father?”

I looked over my shoulder. There were three people, two of whom were children slightly older than me. One wore a mocking smirk, while the other appeared sincere. It was difficult to tell due to how dark it was, but it looked like they had golden hair and blue eyes. Were they foreigners? Was I in a Western nation? They were speaking a language I’d never heard before, and their features resembled those of Japanese people, so I couldn’t be sure.

“It does. The ritual is complete,” said the last of the three—a middle-aged man—as he closed his book. His disappointment was readily apparent. “Seika has no magical power whatsoever.”

Seika. That was my name in this life. My body remembered it.

“That’s too bad,” said one of the boys.

“Heh heh heh! Ha ha ha ha! That’s hilarious! How could a member of the Lamprogue family of magic scholars be born without magic?! They say mages without magical power are destined to be failures. Did you know that, Luft? Even father’s blood can’t save him! You’re a total disgrace, Seika!”

The three people—presumably my family—looked at me with disappointment and ridicule. It was the first time I’d ever been treated in such a way. I was at a loss. Magical power was likely a means of utilizing spells, which meant they were saying I had no talent for sorcery.

But that couldn’t be the case. My reincarnation spell automatically selected a body capable of recreating the structure of my soul. It was guaranteed to resemble my old body. That included looks, build, and aptitude for sorcery as well. I could feel the power flowing through me. I didn’t even need to confirm it—it was greater than I could have possibly imagined. How could they say I had no talent for sorcery? My body was overflowing with cursed energy.



Ten days had already passed since I’d reincarnated. The sky was clear, and I was in the manor’s courtyard, holding out the hem of my shirt to gather falling leaves. By all appearances, I was a three-year-old boy. Yet as I gathered leaves, my head was filled with entirely different thoughts.

I had come to a conclusion: this was a different world. The night of the ritual, after emerging from the basement into a luxurious manor, I had looked up at the sky to check the constellations—only to see two moons overhead.

According to ancient Greek scholars, the Earth was a rotating sphere. That being the case, if I were on the other side of the sphere from Japan, I should have seen different constellations in the sky. It was supposedly possible to see the moon from anywhere, but there was no reason for there to be two of them.

I had listened to my family's conversations for several days, and not once had I heard the name of any place or country I was familiar with. I could only assume that I was in another world. The sole condition for my reincarnation was a body capable of recreating the structure of my soul. I'd had no idea where I would be born, but I certainly hadn't expected it to be another world altogether.

The spell had likely been unable to find a suitable reincarnation vessel in my world, so it had expanded the scope of its search to others. That wasn't something I had foreseen, but there was nothing to be done about it now. Collecting my thoughts, I went back over what I knew.

In this life, my name was Seika Lamprogue. The head of the Lamprogue family was a count, making us nobility. Although I was the third son, that was still a fortunate position to be in. Had I been born as a commoner like in my past life, a simple plague could have been the end of me.

It was a land of abundance and progress. Much more so than Japan, at the very least. It was likely on the same technological level as the Song dynasty or Eastern Roman Empire, if not greater. There was still much I didn't know. I needed to gather more information.

I carried the leaves I had gathered to the shade of a tree. Letting go of my shirt, I watched the leaves slowly fall to the ground. *That should be enough for now.*

I recited a short Sanskrit mantra, and the leaves floated back up into the air, exposing their veins to me. Gathering them together, I wrote characters on them with my cursed energy. "There." I gave an order, then checked the quality of the leaves flying in all directions. It was decent. They were simplistic, but I

had successfully created shikigami—pawns that served as my eyes and ears.

I would have liked to make them out of hitogata—paper cut into human shapes—but paper was valuable in this world as well, and I couldn't ask for such a luxury. I would have to prepare them little by little.

I turned a third into the shape of crows and released them into the sky, then turned another third into rats and released them on the ground. I had the rest turn invisible and remain nearby. Shikigami were used as mediums for spells in place of talismans, which made them handy to have around.

“Hey, Seika! What are you doing out here?”

Startled by a loud voice, I turned around. Standing behind me was a child with ill intentions clearly written on his face—my older brother by three years, Gly.

“I saw you playing with those leaves, weirdo. What are you collecting them for? Wait, where did they go?”

Watching Gly look around in confusion, I let out a sigh of relief. He hadn't seen me make the shikigami. I had to keep my past life a secret, no matter what.

“Say something, failure!”

Seemingly annoyed that I had remained quiet, Gly kicked dust at me. I wiped myself off without a word. He was just a snot-nosed brat. My disciples in my past life had all been good kids, which made the disparity between them all the more stark.

Our daily lives were generally tended to by maids. Our father didn't look after his children very much, while our mother spoiled Gly. Maybe that was why he was so incredibly selfish. Yet despite that, our eldest brother was respectable and well-behaved.

“Knock it off, Gly.” The moment I spoke, Gly's lips twisted into a smile.

“Don't you mean, ‘please stop’? Watch your tongue. You don't think you're in the same position as Luft and I, do you?”

“I'm not?”

“Obviously! You're not even part of our family!” I tilted my head in confusion.

What did he mean by that? “I heard the maids talking about it! They said you’re the son of a mistress! That’s why you don’t have any magic, failure!”

That explains it. Finally, it all came together. For a while now, I had felt like my mother had been ignoring me. So that was why. It was no wonder the maids treated me like a nuisance. That must also have been why my father and eldest brother were so cold to me. *Thank you, Gly. That was very useful information. Though given I’m being raised in this house, I think that does make me part of your family.*

“That means you have to do what Luft and I say! Got it? Actually, I was just practicing martial arts. You’re gonna be my training dummy.” A smirk on his face, Gly backed up to make room for a running start. “You better not move!”

Immediately after shouting, Gly started running at me. Was he planning on drop-kicking me? It wasn’t something I had ever seen someone do in a real fight, and I wasn’t interested in letting this be the first time.

I slipped one of my invisible shikigami under his foot, causing him to trip and fall flat on his face. *Ouch. That looked like it hurt.*

“Bleh! H-How dare you!” He still seemed intent on coming at me, so I called back two of the crow shikigami I had sent out. The crows cawed and swooped at him, their large beaks pecking at his head. “Wah! Wh-What are these things?!” Gly flailed his arms and tried to fight them off, but before long he was covering his head and crouching on the ground in tears.

I felt bad for him. I had taken it too far—he was still just a child. Just as I was about to call off the crows, I heard another child’s voice.

“Gly!” My eldest brother Luft came running over, swinging a stick. “Get away from him!” Brandishing his stick, he chased the crows off. Though in reality, I just made them fly away. “Are you all right, Gly? Are you hurt?” Luft consoled his crying younger brother. Compared to Gly, he was a much more upstanding child. He had the maturity I would expect of a brother five years my elder. That said, he was still only eight. “What was with those crows? Are you okay, Seika?”

“I’m fine,” I answered with a smile.

But Luft just looked at me with an uneasy expression on his face. I didn’t

blame him. It certainly *was* strange that I was the only one who hadn't been attacked. Luft took the still-sobbing Gly back to the manor to treat his injuries, and I was left alone.

Despite the minor setback, I had managed to deploy my shikigami. That would make gathering information significantly easier. There was a lot I needed to do. I was limited by the fact that my body was only three years old, but I could spend the next few years steadily preparing. My new life had a long road ahead of it.

Act 2

Four years passed in a flash, and I reached the age of seven. It was the middle of the night, and I was in a hut in the mountain forest a short distance from the manor. I silently stirred a huge pot, illuminated by the dim light of my shikigami.

It was not the behavior of a typical seven-year-old. I needed to avoid being seen acting suspiciously, which was why I was out so late at night. Doing simple work in a quiet place allowed me to think. I had learned many things over the past four years.

The Lamprogue family's territory was part of the Urdwight Empire, a large and powerful nation. It was similar to Western nations in my previous world, even surpassing them in many ways on a cultural level. It was a land of peace and abundance.

Although the land was ruled by various lords, the military directly controlled by the empire was powerful, so military service wasn't mandatory. The lords' duty was solely to manage their territory, and fighting between lords was prohibited. That made the empire much more peaceful than my old world.

However, there were still elements that threatened the peace—monsters and demons. Monsters were similar to the ayakashi of my previous world. They were creatures that would sometimes attack humans. However, their corpses supposedly provided resources, making them more useful than ayakashi. Demons ruled a vast territory outside of the empire's lands and were hostile towards humanity. From what I had heard, they were a race similar to monsters.

The empire's military was generally stationed along the nation's border, maintaining the peace by exterminating troublesome monsters and hunting bandits. However, the military alone was not sufficient to handle every single monster. As a result, cities would hire their own self-defense forces or utilize adventurers. The Lamprogue family's territory had its own vigilante group to keep the peace.

Speaking of self-defense, this world had a unique system of magic. It was primarily composed of four elements—fire, water, wind, and earth. There were also light and dark, but I wasn't entirely sure how they fit in. It seemed similar to the Five Elements system my spells utilized. I had my questions about this world's magic, but I would learn about it in due time. I was certain there was useful information to be gained from it.

"But this comes first." I looked down at the large pot and sighed, thinking about the work ahead of me. I was currently making paper. I needed paper to create the hitogata that served as mediums for my shikigami, but it was a precious commodity in this world as well. It wasn't something a child could easily come by, so I had decided to make it myself.

To start the process, I had to cut suitable plant material into small pieces, then boil them in an alkaline solution saturated with a high concentration of metal ki. Then I would remove only the fibers and pound them. After adding the nut that served as a thickener, I poured the pulp into a mold and dried it.

I was fortunate. I had been picky about the materials used to make my talismans in my past life, so I had learned how to make paper. I was fortunate enough to find substitutes for the mulberry and gampi I used before, as well as a nut that could replace the thickener. That said, making the tools and finding those plants had taken a considerable amount of time. It was difficult work for my child body, but it had to be done. Although I employed spells and shikigami where I could to make things easier, they couldn't do everything.

"Hmm..." I felt a discomfort in my mouth. I pushed a wobbling tooth with my tongue, and it popped right out. I spat a baby tooth onto the palm of my hand. Smiling, I placed it inside my pocket. Teeth made excellent materials for sorcery. Reincarnation was the perfect opportunity to try things I hadn't experimented with in my previous life.

If I was to make the number of hitogata I wanted, I needed to have options. My second life was proceeding smoothly.



It was morning. I opened my closet to grab my mantle, then tilted my head in confusion. “Huh.” It wasn’t there. *That’s odd. I could have sworn I left it here yesterday... Unless...*

“Seika! Seika!” Turning towards the source of the voice, I saw a girl peeking at me through the gap in the door. She had soft, unassuming golden hair. She was around the same height as me and seemed to be about the same age.



“What is it, Yifa?”

“Um, here...” Looking at the floor, she held out the mantle I was looking for. It was covered in small leaves and twigs. I let out a sigh in my head.

Of course. It was likely Gly’s handiwork. He was still at it four years later, harassing me every chance he got. However, he had been on guard lately, perhaps because I would always retaliate using my shikigami and no longer did anything direct. Instead, he had started doing petty pranks like hiding or breaking my belongings. *Is that really how you treat your younger brother?* I was worried about his future.

“Thank you, Yifa. I was looking for this.”

She hung her head as I thanked her. Yifa was a slave who belonged to the Lamprogue family. Children born to slaves became slaves themselves, though the slaves in the manor were treated well, not unlike ordinary servants. This was another way in which the empire resembled Western nations in my previous world. Slaves who worked on plantations or in mines were probably treated poorly.

“I’m surprised you manage to find my things every single time.”

Yifa had found my hidden belongings several times now. “Um...I just happened to come across them. You don’t deserve to be treated like this, Seika. I’m going to talk to the master. Then maybe Sir Gly will stop...” Yifa said in a subdued voice.

As she had just shown, I was the only one Yifa didn’t use honorifics or titles with. At first, I had thought even slaves looked down on me and had been disheartened, but it seemed like she just felt like she should be friendly with the outcast boy around her age. It was touching. Too few people in this family had a conscience.

“It’s fine,” I said to her with a smile.

“But...”

“I’m serious. I can handle it.” To be honest, it was kind of cute. Back when I had first become my own master’s disciple, his other disciples had tried to kill

me. I'd ended up having to curse them to death.

"No, I really think I should—"

"Seika! What are you doing there?!" A sudden loud voice made Yifa's shoulders jump in surprise. The middle son Gly came stomping down the hall and glared at her. "And what do you think you're doing slacking off, slave? I'm gonna tell father!"

"M-My apologies!" Yifa bowed her head in fear, then ran off.

Gly snorted as he watched her go, then looked at the mantle I was holding and clicked his tongue. "Going outside to play in the grass again? You sure take it easy for a mistress's kid. It must be nice not studying magic. Not that you could even if you wanted to." Then he flashed me a malicious smile. "Well, suit yourself. You're gonna get kicked out of the house anyway. The military's the only place that'll take you."

"I'm going to be joining the military?" That didn't sound so bad. If they served the empire directly, they were probably compensated well. Granted, I didn't expect to actually have to join.

"Why do you look relieved? Don't you know the military's training is so hard it'll make you puke? And you have to do everything your superiors say. Even if they're commoners."

I was at a loss as to how to respond. It was the military—obviously that was the case. You would die if you didn't go through basic training or follow orders.

Gly seemed to interpret my silence as fear. Clearly pleased with himself, he spoke in an excited tone. "You better start practicing with a sword! Though a runt like you will probably die in your first battle!"

"I'll get taller. More importantly, what are you going to do, Gly?"

"Huh?"

"Luft is going to succeed the family, right? You're going to be forced to leave the house as well."

Gly scoffed and glared at me. "Don't lump me in with you, failure! I'm going to the magic academy to become a magic scholar like father."

“What’s the magic academy?”

“You don’t know about the Lodonea Imperial Magic Academy? The famous school that’s produced a bunch of court magicians?” If I remembered correctly, Lodonea was a city near the imperial capital.

I see, so there’s an educational institution for magic there. It must be a rather large-scale one to be called an academy. That’s good to know. “Hmm. How old do you have to be?”

“You can take the exam at age twelve, but I’m a member of the Lamprogue family. I don’t need to learn the basics with a bunch of uneducated commoners. I can just enroll in the upper section when I turn fifteen! Maybe I’ll get scouted to become a court magician the moment I enroll and can use that to build my career.” I was taken aback by his shamelessness. Even if he could back it up, it wouldn’t hurt him to have some humility. “And don’t even think about going down the same route as me. In order to expand its influence, the Lamprogue family doesn’t allow its members to pursue the same career. Of course, you don’t have any magic anyway. Hmph.” Naturally, he didn’t forget to throw an insult in there.

“That’s fine.”

“Huh? What’s with that atti—”

“Gly, how long are you planning on talking?” It was a deep, powerful voice. A tall man with a mustache had at some point come to stand behind Gly.

“Father!” My older brother panicked and turned around in a hurry.

“Luft is already outside. Where’s your wand?”

“Uh, I was just about to get it...”

“I told you I was going to watch your magic practice today, did I not?”

“W-Well, Seika was...”

You really think he’s going to believe it’s my fault?

The man looked down at me. “Seika, remain here in the manor today.”

“Father.” I looked the man straight in the eyes. I wasn’t going to stay put. That

was why I had been looking for my mantle. “May I join you for today’s magic practice?”

My father in this second life looked at me silently. His name was Count Blaise Lamprogue. He was the current head of the Lamprogue household. The Lamprogue family had produced a number of talented mages and had been granted the title of count for their achievements in magical research. Blaise had apparently been a leading magic scholar before taking over as head of the family, and even now he would often leave the manor to visit magic research facilities. On top of that, he was supposedly quite talented at magical combat and had been invited to become a court magician several times.

That said, I didn’t know how impressive that truly was. I had been a court magician myself back when I had worked for the Bureau of Exorcists, and some of my colleagues had been morons who didn’t know the first thing about divination.

“What are you saying, Seika?! You don’t have any magic! What’s the point in you coming?!” Gly shouted.

“Very well.”

“Father?!”

“However, you will only watch. If that’s fine by you, then hurry up and get ready.”

I smiled sweetly at the dumbfounded Gly. “Thank you, father. I’m already prepared.”



The training ground where the Lamprogue family practiced their magic was a short walk from the manor. Calling it a training ground might have been somewhat generous—it was just a row of rock targets lined up on wooden stands. The Lamprogue manor itself was located at the foot of a mountain a short distance away from the city. Gly often boasted that he would one day hunt monsters living on the mountain and gain real combat experience. Regardless, it was a location where we could make a lot of noise without being a nuisance.

“Let’s start with Luft.”

“Yes, father.” My eldest brother Luft nervously readied his wand, pointing it at the rock target in front of him. “Surging green! Spirits who fill the air, gather and turn your rage into a blade!” Power flowed into Luft’s wand as he spoke. “Wind Edge!” Wind was fired from his wand, striking the stone and leaving small cuts in its exterior.

“Your stability and force both get a passing score. You should be ready to attempt incantationless casting.”

“Yes, sir!” Glancing at my delighted older brother, I thought to myself.

A spell dealing directly with matter. It’s a rather practical form of magic. Teaching combat spells before anything else is based on the presumption that you’ll be facing your opponent directly. It’s quite different from curses and divinations that were the focus in my previous world. It seems almost more like a form of martial arts. How do I put this? It feels wasteful.

The other thing that bothered me was the fact that the incantations were spoken in colloquial language. Any language would suffice, so that wasn’t strange in itself, but it was somewhat embarrassing to hear chanted out loud.

“You’re up next, Gly. Give it a try.”

“Yes, sir!” Gly stepped up in high spirits, confidently holding out his wand. “Blazing red! Spirits who birth heat and sulfur, roar and turn your rage into a sphere! Fireball!” Gly’s wand unleashed a bright red ball of flames. It forcefully struck the stone, then scattered. Rock wasn’t flammable, so this was to be expected. “How was that, father?!”

“Gly, why did you not use wind magic like Luft?”

“Well...”

“There’s nothing wrong with learning new spells, but you’re still a beginner. I believe I told you to master one element before moving on to the next.”

“Yes...”

“You aren’t lacking in talent. So long as you apply yourself diligently like Luft, I’m certain you will excel in both wind and fire magic.”

“Y-Yes, father!” Casting a sidelong glance at Gly, who seemed unlikely to reflect on his actions, I pondered to myself once again.

Hmm... Was that fire created by burning pure cursed energy—or rather, magical power? On top of being inefficient, it lacks physical force, and the spread of the fire is difficult to control. Wouldn't a simple fire arrow be more effective? Well, maybe Gly's just bad at it. The real thing probably has more impact.

“Heh heh heh! I know! Seika! You give it a try too!” Full of himself, Gly suddenly called out to me.

“Hey, Gly,” Luft said softly.

“It must be boring just watching. Father came all the way out here with us, so why don't you show him something worthy of the Lamprogue name? I'll even let you borrow my wand.” Ignoring Luft's protest, Gly walked over to me and shoved his wand in my face. He wanted to turn me into a laughingstock because he knew I couldn't do it. He truly did have a nasty personality.

“All right. I'll give it a try.” Passing by the grinning Gly, I stood in front of a rock. Truth be told, I wasn't enthusiastic about showing off my spells. Standing out made you a target. As a result, the stronger you became, the easier it was for you to die. This was a universal truth even the strongest could not escape. However, it was also true that the weak would be taken advantage of. Being ridiculed was inconvenient in its own right. *There shouldn't be any harm in taking this opportunity to prove a point.*

“Ha, look at you holding your wand like a grown-up when you don't even have any magic.”

Ignoring Gly's voice, I focused my cursed energy. I couldn't speak a mantra or use any hand signs or talismans while they were watching, but I would manage. I chanted a mantra in my head and formed a hand sign with my mind. I called forth fire and earth. In an attempt to maintain the illusion, I said the name of one of this world's spells. “Fireball.”

Phase of fire and earth—Oni Flame. A pale blue ball of fire was launched from my wand—or more accurately, the space directly in front of my wand. The fireball hit the rock directly, blasting it to bits.

Silence fell over the training ground. Everyone stared at the half-destroyed stone and the smoke rising up from the remaining embers. *Not good... I think I overdid it.*

“Was that a Fireball?”

“It was so powerful even without an incantation...and the fire was blue...”

My face stiffened as my brothers mumbled in astonishment.

The Five Elements system I had devised applied the components of the world to the five phases of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, as well as yin and yang, allowing me to call upon their respective ki. The Oni Flame I had often used in my past life was a simple spell that called forth a mass of phosphorus as earth ki and ignited it with fire ki. However, I had used too much phosphorus, and when it had shattered upon hitting the rock, all the fragments had ignited at once and caused an explosion.

In addition, the fragment of quartz I had used as the core to maintain its shape had pulverized the rock in the blast. I had also forgotten about the color of the flame. Had I mixed in some lime or salt, I could have made it look more natural. *What a blunder.*

“Seika,” said my father in this life, his voice calm and composed. “Aim at the next stone and try that one more time.”

“Yes, father.” Good. This time I would limit myself. “Fireball.” I launched another blue fireball, and just like before, the stone was destroyed with a loud explosion. “Huh?” It was an improvement over last time, but not by much. The cursed energy coursing through this body was too potent. I couldn’t control my spells very well. I needed to rectify that urgently.

“Father...wh-what’s going on? Seika doesn’t have any magic. He shouldn’t be able to cast spells. Maybe some of my magic was left in the wand?” Gly looked up at our father hopefully. Obviously, that wasn’t the case.

“There are instances of those born without magic casting spells. And I’ve heard that depending on the nature of a person’s magic, fire can take on a distinctive color.”

Making up my mind, I called out to my father. “I want to study magic like my

brothers.” I had miscalculated slightly, but this was still a good opportunity. Now that he knew I could cast spells, he might be willing to teach me. However, my father just shook his head.

“No.”

“May I ask why?”

“Although there are instances of those without magic casting spells, there has never been a case where someone without magic has made a name for themselves as a mage. There’s no point in you studying magic. Starting this year, I’m going to assign you a private tutor like your brothers. Focus your efforts there.”

“Yes, father.”

My father turned to my two older brothers. “That concludes our practice for today. Fetch new stones to serve as targets and continue practicing on your own.” After they answered in the affirmative, he left the training ground, Luft following after him.

As Gly got ready to leave, he snatched his wand out of my hand and snarled at me. “Don’t get full of yourself, magicless loser.”

With that, I was left by myself. That had been quite productive. I had learned a lot about both this world’s magic and my own challenges. I was pleased to be receiving a tutor—there were limits to what I could learn from books alone. The magic practice was no big deal. I could still learn by sending out my shikigami and watching.

Oni Flame

A spell where easily ignited white phosphorus is burned and launched. The burning phosphorus makes the flame a light-blue color.

Act 3

Since then, another four years had passed, and I had reached the age of

eleven. It was the dead of night, and my room was silent. Under the light emitted by my shikigami, I carefully used a quill pen to write characters onto the hitogata I had cut from paper.

Come to think of it, I had done something similar in my past life when I had been around this age. That brought back memories. I'd had my coming-of-age ceremony during this time of year. From that perspective, I'd come a long way in this life.

"Done." Looking at the completed hitogata, I exhaled all my tension. It was a gateway. In my past life, I had exorcised and sealed several ayakashi, using them to fight for me. The talismans I had used to seal them had nearly all been burned in my previous life, so naturally, I didn't have them here. However, in theory, summoning the ayakashi I had sealed to this world should be possible.

Sealing, in essence, was sending something to another plane. Talismans were nothing more than gateways. The planes were also other worlds, meaning that so long as I could create a gateway, I could connect to them from any world. In theory, anyway. I was about to find out if it actually worked.

I placed the hitogata on the floor, made a hand sign, and chanted a Sanskrit mantra. Truth be told, I didn't know what was going to happen. That was why the first ayakashi I planned to summon was my most obedient one. Finally, the spell was ready.

Summoning—Kuda-gitsune. The hitogata lit up, casting shadows all around me. Then, a girl appeared in the middle of the dim room. Her hair was as white as untrodden snow. She wore an oddly short kimono, and the arms and legs extending from it were similarly pale. Her appearance was whimsical—almost mystical in a way. She slowly opened her eyes, revealing jet-black irises that contrasted the white of her other features.

Was it a success? Something seems off...

"Master Haruyoshi!" The girl suddenly embraced me. Pushing me down, she rubbed her cheek against mine. "Master Haruyoshi! Master Haruyoshi! I'm so happy to see you again! You have no idea how many times I dreamed of it while asleep in the other plane!" She inhaled deeply. "Ahh, Master Haruyoshi's scent!"

“Stop that! Get off me!” Pushing the girl off of me, I backed away and cautiously looked her over. “It is you, right, Yuki?”

“Yes, Master Haruyoshi! It’s Yuki!” I carefully observed the smiling girl. Yuki the kuda-gitsune. She was an ayakashi I had granted a human form and commanded in my past life.

“Did you get smaller?” In my past life, she had been a beautiful young woman.

Yuki looked down at herself. “Oh, you’re right. Why is that? It’s probably the result of your current cursed energy. Or maybe it’s due to the influence of the world itself.”

Both plausible answers. Regardless of her form, she’s still Yuki, so I guess I can call this a success. I sighed to myself. “I was right to summon you first. It’s been a while, Yuki.”

“Master Haruyoshi!”

“I get that you’re happy! Just quit clinging to me!”

“Okay... Thank goodness,” Yuki said with a tearful voice. “Back then... When you realized that girl had turned against us, it was like you had already accepted your death.”

“Yes, well...”

“I’m glad I believed you when you said you’d call me in your next life! It was worth waiting all that time!”

“There, there...” I patted Yuki’s head as she sniffled and wiped her tears. “I’m surprised you recognized me in this body.”

“It’s obvious. You’re a little younger, but your cursed energy and face are the same.”

“Really?” I certainly *was* the only one with black hair and eyes in my family. I assumed I had simply inherited it from my father’s mistress, but perhaps that was why this body had been chosen across worlds.

“Master Haruyoshi!”

“Hmm?”

“Now that you’ve summoned me, I’ll do whatever you want! This place doesn’t seem like Japan, or even the same world, so I’m sure you’ve got a lot of work to do. What are my orders?”

“Oh, well... Nothing in particular. I just wanted to try summoning an ayakashi...”

“Huh?!” Yuki’s shoulders drooped in disappointment. I felt bad, but Yuki was completely worthless as a kuda-gitsune. Kuda-gitsune were ayakashi employed by fox-users for casting spells. Fox-users of the Shinano province used them to perform various types of sorcery, including divination, exorcisms, and possession. Skilled practitioners could even manipulate possessed targets at will.

At one point, an acquaintance of mine who was a fox-user had told me that a rare white fox with black eyes had been born. Assuring me that she had to have some sort of incredible power, he had foisted Yuki on me with the best of intentions. I’d had high hopes for her at first, but she had no talent for possession or the foresight kuda-gitsune were known for. No matter how many times we’d attempted it, it had always ended in disappointment.

However, I couldn’t bring myself to get rid of her, so I’d instead given her a human form. That way she could at least serve me tea. I’d never had children in my past life, but through Yuki I had come to understand the phrase “the more hopeless the child, the cuter they are.”

All that aside, I had nothing for her to do. “I can’t let anybody see you in that form.”

“But I don’t wanna go back to the other plane...”

“Then figure out a way to hide yourself.”

“Okay!” Yuki turned back into her fox form and shrunk in the blink of an eye. Then she crawled into my hair. “This is where I feel most at home.” Making herself extremely tiny was one of Yuki’s few skills. She had been fond of crawling into my hair since I had first gotten her. If only she was capable of using other kuda-gitsune abilities.

“Oh, also, my name is Seika in this world. Call me that from now on.”

“Master Seika?” Yuki giggled. “That name suits you perfectly!”

There’s a reason for that... My name had been misread as Seika many times over in my past life. *Anyway, it’s time to go to sleep.* After putting all my tools away, I crawled into bed.

I could summon ayakashi in this world as well. I had accomplished an important step in my plan. *Now to see if the rest goes as I hope...*



I had spent the last four years steadily gathering information. I diligently made paper and cut hitogata from it, memorized everything my private tutor taught me, and observed my father and brothers practicing magic through my shikigami. I did exercises outside, and whenever I had the chance, I would study languages and history by reading the books and scrolls in the family library.

All I had done since arriving in this world was prepare. However, my body had changed. I’d grown taller, put on muscle, and all my baby teeth had fallen out. It was about time to start taking action. Those around me had changed as well—particularly Gly.

As for how he had changed, well, first he’d stopped hiding my things after I had revealed that I was capable of casting spells. Although he continued to act full of himself, it seemed like he was actually afraid of me. As a result, my life had become considerably more pleasant. He was now taking his anger out on the servants, but he wouldn’t go after servants who were older, bigger than him, or close to our parents.

“Hey, slave! Do you have any idea what you just did?! You got my clothes dirty!”

“M-My apologies, Sir Gly!” That meant his primary targets were slaves who were female and younger than him. In other words, Yifa.

How far are you going to take this, brother? Give it a rest.

“It seems like father and mother are so kind you don’t understand your place. You’re our family’s property! You don’t get to complain, even if we kill you!”

“Yes... I’m sorry...”

“Hmph, don’t think crying is going to make things better.” Gly wrapped his arm around Yifa’s shoulder. “But as long as you learn your lesson, I won’t be too harsh on you. Come to my room tonight. I’ll teach you exactly where you stand.” Yifa stared at the ground, frozen in fear.

And the dirty teenager finally reveals himself. I guess he’s at that age now. He even stumbled over his words for a second. I can’t bear to look at you anymore, brother.

“You’re making a ruckus first thing in the morning, Gly.” Unable to take it anymore, I butted into their conversation. Naturally, that earned me a nasty glare.

“This has nothing to do with you, Seika. Get outta here!”

“I have business with Yifa. If you’re going to lecture her, get on with it.”

“You think you can talk to me that way?!” Gly raised his fist. As it hurtled towards my cheek, I caught it in my palm. Neither of us budged. “Tch!” Gly clicked his tongue and yanked his arm back. “I’ll remember this, failure!” he shouted back at me as he trudged off.

I let out a sigh. *I put a lot of strength into that. Did I hurt him? I can’t imagine he’d lose out to an eleven-year-old in strength...* Though I had optimized the flow of my ki, my physique was still appropriate to my age.

“Th-Thanks, Seika.” Yifa got close to me.

I can’t say I don’t relate to Gly’s feelings. I’m not certain exactly why, but, well...her chest... She should only be around twelve or thirteen. What happened there? Is it a characteristic of the people of this world? I’ve only seen the manor’s maids, so I can’t say for sure. No, enough of this line of thought.

“Think nothing of it, Yifa. Actually, I have a favor to ask you.”

“S-Sorry! Come with me for a second!” Yifa said, suddenly grabbing my hand and pulling me.

What’s this about?



Yifa dragged me all the way to the edge of the manor’s yard. When she finally

stopped, she looked around as though she was searching for something. “Ah!” Letting out a short cry, she ran to the base of a large tree. “Here it is, Seika.”

“It?” A small creature with jade-green fur was lying beneath the tree. It was around the size of a kitten and had a thick tail. There was a gem the same color as its fur affixed to its forehead that I could feel a faint energy coming from. It was covered in wounds, over half of its coat marred with dirt and blood. “Is this an aya—excuse me, a monster?”

“Yeah. I think it’s a baby carbuncle” Come to think of it, I had seen a drawing of a similar creature in the manor library. “It was probably attacked by an owl or a crow.”

“Normal animals attack monsters?”

“It can happen while they’re still small and weak.” I had assumed they were similar to ayakashi, but this made them seem more like ordinary animals. “Can you save it, Seika?” Yifa looked up at me.

So that’s why she brought me out here. Hmm. “Let’s see...” I had healed pets and livestock in my past life, but I wasn’t confident I could heal a creature I was only seeing for the first time—and a monster at that. That said, I had a spell that generally worked on everything. “All right. I’m not sure it’ll work, but I’ll give it a try. I can’t focus with you looking at me, though, so turn around for a second.”

“Huh? O-Okay.”

I plucked a bloodstained hair from the carbuncle’s coat and stuck it on one of the hitogata I had on hand. I inscribed a character on it with my cursed energy, made a hand sign, and chanted a quiet mantra. The spell took effect, and the carbuncle’s wounds were transferred to the hitogata. “It’s done.”

Shoving the now-torn and blackened hitogata into my pocket, I called out to Yifa. Her eyes went wide when she turned back around. The carbuncle had gotten up and was licking the blood off of its fur. Although it was still weak, it was much more energetic than it had been. Its wounds should have been mostly closed now, despite the blood still covering it,

“Wh-What happened?! This is amazing! Ah!” Yifa reached out towards the carbuncle, and just like a wild animal, it raced off into the forest. It turned back

and looked at me over its shoulder for a moment, before disappearing into the shade of the trees. It seemed like it would be fine. “Did you heal it, Seika?”

“Yep. I’m glad it went better than I expected.”

“You can use healing magic?!” Yifa stared at me in wonder. “You’re incredible! I thought only light mages in big cities could do that!”

“Oh, uh... Ha ha...” I tried to brush it off with a laugh. *Didn’t she want me to heal it with magic? I thought that was why she brought me out here. More importantly, healing magic should be one of the most desirable spells, yet only mages in big cities can use it? Even with their educational institutions?* There was a lot I didn’t understand about this world’s magic. Surely healing should come before creating fire or wind.

“You’re amazing, Seika,” Yifa said quietly. “They said you didn’t have any magic before, but now you can cast spells just like Sir Luft and Sir Gly. And that’s not all... Bad feelings don’t even faze you. I’ve always thought you were really strong.”

Bad feelings? I had been fed up with the middle son a few times, but that was really all that came to mind. If anything, the eight years since I had reincarnated had been relatively carefree. I didn’t have to worry about starving or having an attempt made on my life, and I didn’t have any disciples to worry about either. That said, I didn’t want to remain here forever. “Maybe so. But I think you’re the same way, Yifa.”

“Huh?”

“You always found my clothes when Gly would hide them. That made you a target, but you didn’t care. You might not realize it, but I really appreciated that.” I wasn’t lying. She was surprisingly strong-willed, and the incident with the carbuncle today proved that.

“I-I had no idea! I’m not good at noticing things like that. I’m not very smart, and I’m always getting yelled at... You found your things before I even noticed them a lot of times.” That was because I used divination when looking for them myself. It was a real pain, though. “I wasn’t born to a rich family, and I don’t have anything I’m good at... I’m nothing like you. I’m not special like you are.”

“Ha ha, I wasn’t born under the best circumstances either. And besides, you *are* special.”

“What do you mean?”

Finally, we arrived at the main event. “You see things other people can’t, don’t you?”



Yifa was clearly caught off guard. “Um... Wh-Whatever do you mean?”

“I’ve seen you follow the spirits of animals with your eyes several times.”

“You can see them too?!”

“To an extent.” I had been born with the ability, but with a bit of training, anyone could learn to see different varieties of spirits. Things besides spirits, however, were a different story. “But that’s not all, is it? I’ve witnessed you follow things even I can’t see. Yifa, what is it that you’re seeing?”

“You’re incredible, Seika. You could tell all that. Before she died, my mom told me never to let anybody else find out.” Yifa held out her hand. I couldn’t see anything there. “This is an elemental. Like the ones in fairy tales.”

“What do they look like?”

“They’re round and kinda vague. A lot of them have little wings. Sometimes they take on the form of small animals, like birds, lizards, fish, or moles. Those are probably the more powerful ones. When they pass through an area, it’ll get warmer, or there’ll be a breeze. You don’t believe me, do you?”

“No, I do.” I had felt the presence of beings that were neither spirits nor ayakashi in my previous world. During a trip to the West I had made in the pursuit of knowledge, I had met a Celtic druid who’d had a staff made of mistletoe. He had told me that an elemental resided in his staff. Although I couldn’t see it myself, I had certainly felt the flow of power within the staff.

A man of your ability can’t see it? There’s an indigo raven right here.

The druid hadn’t appeared to be lying. So they existed in this world too. Perhaps they were the remnants of souls, like spirits, or souls that didn’t require bodies, like ayakashi. Alternatively, they could be something else altogether.

“Your mom was wise. I don’t think anything good would come from the people around you knowing about that ability.”

“I doubt anybody would believe me except for you.”

Perhaps not. I was more inquisitive than most. “Are the elementals what allowed you to find my clothes and the carbuncle today?”

“Y-Yeah. They gather around magic. Your things are a little different though.”

“Different how?”

“The elementals act weird around your belongings. They swarm around them, and some start spinning around like they’re drunk. That’s how I can tell your stuff is nearby.”

“Interesting. What about me?”

“They don’t get anywhere near you. It’s like they’re avoiding you. Normally, people with powerful magic like the master will have several around them at all times. It’s strange.”

Hmm, I wonder why that is? Oh well. “Can you touch elementals? No, I imagine not. Can you communicate with them?”

“No, they live freely, completely separate from humans.”

“Really? Not at all?”

“Well...there was this one time.” Yifa seemed to have a sudden recollection. “One time they listened to me. When I was drying laundry, a couple of elementals who looked like birds were playing nearby. It looked like the wind was about to carry off the master’s shirt, so I yelled at them to stop and they ran away. They came right back, but ever since, they’ve been more well-behaved. That’s it, though. Sorry it wasn’t anything important.”

“Don’t worry about it.” They would obey instructions. That in itself was a major finding. I had an idea. “Yifa, I know this is sudden, but do you have any interest in casting spells?”

“Huh?! W-Well, I’d like to, but I can’t.” Yifa gave a weak smile. “Elementals don’t approach me. I think it’s because I don’t have any magical power—or at least not much.”

“You don’t need magic.” I held my hands behind my back and, using a hitogata as a medium, opened a gateway. “You can just make these guys cast spells for you.”

Summoning—Hitodama. Called forth from another plane, several orange balls of fire floated behind me, gently wavering. *Actually, they’re really hot. I should step away from them.*

“Wh-What are those monsters, Seika?! What’s going on?!”

“I, uh...found them.”

“You found them?!” It wasn’t a lie. I had found them floating around a cemetery in my past life. They were dangerous because they could start fires, so I had collected them. I pushed them with invisible shikigami, and the hitodama floated towards Yifa.

“They’re monsters similar to elementals, I guess you could say. They don’t attack humans though, so you don’t need to worry.”

“They’re kinda hot...”

“Then try putting out the fire.”

“Huh?”

“Just ask them. Like you did with the wind elementals.”

“Okay, I’ll try it.” Yifa looked at the hitodama, then closed her eyes as though praying for something. Around fifteen minutes passed. Nothing had happened.

“Seika, is the fire gone?”

“Still there.”

“But I begged them!” Yifa’s shoulders slumped in disappointment.

“Why don’t you try using your words? It doesn’t have much effect on spirits, but it at least conveys your feelings.”

“All right... Please go out.”

“...”

“Please go out. I’m asking nicely.”

“...”

“Um... Please, I’m begging you.”

Nothing.

“Just go out already!” The fire went out. All of the flames disappeared as though water had been poured over them. The surrounding temperature dropped rapidly. “Huh? Th-They’re gone!”

“They’re still here. Look.”

Yifa looked up to see small fires flickering in the sky. “You can stay gone.” Yifa glared at them, and the fires shrank.

“Nice. Let’s try a little more.” Around an hour later, after calling forth and extinguishing the fire several times, Yifa had grown able to control the hitodama without speaking out loud.

“L-Like this?”

“You’re improving quickly. I’m sure soon you’ll even be able to control the direction and strength of the fire.” Internally, I felt a sense of self-satisfaction.

In my previous world, kitsune often manipulated hitodama. Hitodama rarely showed wills of their own, so no ayakashi-user had managed to control them, but I believed that if a kitsune could do it, so could a human, and therefore had devoted a lot of research to the subject. In the end, neither I nor any of my disciples had managed it, so I had nearly given up. I certainly hadn’t expected to find a girl with the talent for it here in another world. Being treated as an oddball by my colleagues for collecting all those hitodama had finally paid off.

“Eventually you’ll be able to use them like a kitsune’s flame... Excuse me, you’ll be able to use them like fire magic.”

“Really?!”

“That’s not all. You might be able to get the elementals you can see to listen to you too. Like a princess from a fairy tale.” The druids of my previous world had managed it. It should be possible in this world as well.

“Wow... You know everything, Seika.”

“Not everything, but I’ve done a lot of studying.”

“I’ll try my hardest! I always thought I wasn’t good at anything, but this has given me a little more confidence! Thanks, Seika!”

Good, good. Do your best. I was fortunate to have found such promising talent so soon after reincarnating. Although she was still a little inadequate in some regards, it was better to have her around than not.

“Have you ever thought about leaving the manor and going somewhere?” I asked Yifa.

“Huh?”

“I don’t mean running away. Even if slaves are freed, they often end up working for the same household. That’s what your dad is doing. It must be hard to leave a place you’ve lived your entire life. I was just wondering how you felt.”

“I’d like to leave,” Yifa said matter-of-factly. “I don’t hate it here, but I wanna go to a bunch of different places, learn a bunch of different things, and see a bunch of different sights. This country is really big, isn’t it? So it feels like a waste to stay here my whole life. If I’m ever freed, then that’s what I wanna do...”

“Hmm, is that right?”

Yifa looked like she was staring at some far-off place. Underneath her meek demeanor, there was an unexpected fire. She reminded me of myself, once upon a time. Or maybe not—I’d never had such a positive attitude.

“Oh, that reminds me,” I said. “I have one more job for you. I’m going to be leaving the manor a few times after this. Would you mind covering for me? Just tell them I’m not feeling well so I’m resting in my room or something.”

“S-Sure...”

“There are some things I want to check out, and I’d rather not have Gly getting in the way. Thanks.” Yifa nodded in understanding.

And that was another step complete. Tomorrow I would begin my preparations. Yifa said she needed to get back to work, and I stuck a shikigami to her back as she hurriedly returned to the manor—a hitogata with a water

spell attached to it for emergency fire extinguishing. I didn't want the hitodama burning the manor to the ground.

Act 4

Another half a year had passed since then. My birthday came and went, and I was now twelve years old.

The culture here didn't use East Asian age reckoning where you turned a year older at the new year. Instead, you turned a year older when the day of your birth passed. This world had a custom of celebrating birthdays, much like how the new year was celebrated in my previous world.

On Luft's and Gly's birthdays, they were showered with lavish meals and opulent gifts. I, however, was not granted such luxuries. It was a little alienating. Being a mistress's son was harsh—not that it particularly bothered me.

I was thinking to myself as I sat at the breakfast table. Despite the entire family being present, the clattering of silverware was the only sound anyone was making. It was almost amusing—it was as though the silence was to avoid mentioning that yesterday had been my birthday. That said, there was nothing in particular to talk about. Nothing of note had happened recently.

If I had to come up with something, there was how excited Gly was to be going to the magic academy. He was now fifteen, and it was time for him to decide his future. Unlike Luft, Gly couldn't succeed the household, so he was planning on taking the exam next spring to transfer into the imperial magic academy's secondary school section and pursue a career as a magic scholar. That was what he had said for years.

Yet despite his excitement, he hadn't been doing any extra studying or practicing. *I don't know what the exam entails, but are you sure you're going to be okay, Gly? Is this really the time to be silently chewing your bread?*

"I'll be visiting the city council today. I'll be back this evening. Watch the house."

"Take care."

My father, Blaise, announced today's plans, and my stepmother quietly answered.

Breakfast ended a short while later, as though that had been the cue. *Come to think of it, I don't have my private tutor today. What to do.*



I was walking through the yard of the manor, towards the detached building. I had business with Yifa, and when I'd asked a maid where she was, I had been told she was cleaning the detached building where guests stayed. I was going to ask her about the hitodama, and there was something I wanted to warn her about.

"Hey, Seika! Wait up!"

Just as I was about to reach the detached building, I heard a voice call out to me. Turning around, I saw two figures.

"Gly, Luft, what do you need?"

"Seika! I'm gonna teach you how to use a sword starting today! Be grateful!"

Huh? Where did this come from? Looking more closely, I saw that they were both holding wooden training swords. Gly shouted at me as I tilted my head in confusion.

"You're already twelve. Have you thought about what you're gonna do when you leave home?"

"Hmm... Not particularly."

"How long are you planning on slacking off? You know you can't succeed the family! The prestigious Lamprogue household isn't gonna let a useless, magicless bastard freeloader in their manor forever!"

You've got some nerve acting like the head of the house when you won't be succeeding the family name either.

"And you can't even become a magic scholar like me. All that leaves for you is the military. That's why we're gonna start teaching you how to use a sword! Don't forget to thank me."

“As you know, Seika, the head retainer, Theo, has been teaching us swordplay, so I think we can train you a little. If you’re interested, of course,” Luft added.

Swordplay, huh? Gly probably just wants an excuse to beat me up, but I don’t mind joining them for a little bit. “Sure. Where are we doing it?”

“Here’s fine.” Gly tossed a wooden sword at my feet. “Practice swings are boring. Let’s start with a mock battle.”

“Gly, hold on...” Luft tried to stop him.

“I’m leaving in the spring, so I’m gonna train you up until then.”

Ignoring Gly’s contempt, I picked up the wooden sword. How many decades had it been since I’d last practiced my swordplay? I had been trained in using two-handed tachi, so I wasn’t sure how much would carry over to the one-handed shortsword I now held.

“I don’t want to do practice swings either. Luft, you can be the referee.” I took up a stance and pointed my wooden sword towards Gly’s eyes.

“Try to hold back, Gly. Begin!” Luft started the match. To start off, I decided to wait and see what Gly did. My sword still pointed at his eyes, I awaited his approach.

Hmm, he’s surprisingly cautious. We crossed blades a few times, but they were all feints. He didn’t attack me for real. “What’s wrong, Gly? Aren’t you going to attack me like usual?”

“Sh-Shut up! He’s got no openings...”

Fine. If you won’t come to me, then I’ll come to you.

“S-Sir Luft! Sir Luft!” A sudden shout interrupted our fight, and both Gly and I lowered our swords. A servant ran up to Luft, out of breath.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?!” Luft asked.

“A-A large monster appeared near the city!”

Luft’s expression changed quickly. “A monster?! Was anyone hurt?!”

“F-Fortunately, the master was there and was able to drive it back with fire

magic, so there weren't any major injuries."

"I see. In that case—"

"B-But the monster ran off into the forest. If it's fleeing along the foot of the mountain, there's a good chance it's headed this way! The master ordered everyone to stay inside until the day after tomorrow."

I sensed a large presence and tossed aside my sword, focusing on my shikigami. "It's coming, Luft."

"Seika? What are you talking—" Loud stomping drowned out his voice. Then a large shadow appeared, crashing into the side of the detached building with a thunderous roar. "Wh-What is that?!"

The red shadow was covered in rubble from the detached building. The large, mucus-covered creature slowly raised its head. It was a salamander of tremendous size.

"A-An elder newt?! Why is it so big?!" Luft shouted. It was a full ten meters tall. Its smooth head was so high up you had to crane your neck to see it. It was like a whale. Was it the lord of the mountain?

"Aaaaaaaah!"

"Run! Hide inside the manor!" Gly gave a pathetic scream and took off running, followed by Luft and the servant who was on the verge of tears.

That figures.

"Seika! Hurry up!"

I ignored Luft calling out to me. I couldn't retreat just yet.

"Crap..."

I saw something I didn't want to see. Several maids and Yifa were beside the rubble of the detached building. Yifa desperately dragged one of the maids, who seemed paralyzed by fear. Her movement must have alerted the elder newt, as it turned its head towards Yifa. Its pitch-black eyeballs followed her as though tracking its prey.

This is bad... The elder newt opened its jaws wide. Just as it was about to

attack Yifa, an orange wall of flames rose up to protect her. It let out a sound like a frog being crushed, then writhed in pain. *What was that? Did the hitodama protect her? No, they're basically natural phenomena—they don't have wills of their own. Which means...Yifa did that herself.*

“Excellent.” With a slight smile on my face, I halted the instant death curse I had been about to cast. I was glad I didn’t have to use it. I’d almost wasted a lot of effort. Yifa and the maids seemed to have gotten away, so I was free to slowly approach the giant salamander.

Now that it had recovered from its panic, it chose me as its next prey. The dark red giant approached me, and I responded by pointing my wand at it. The monster appeared to be weak to fire, so I needed to make it look like I’d defeated it with a fire spell.

Elder newts were of the water element. Water regulated fire in the Five Elements system, however, an exceptionally strong fire could reverse that relationship. Salamanders were considered naked in the Five Elements system, and naked beasts were of the earth phase. The roots of trees smothered the earth, making the wood phase effective against it. The spell I was about to use was unrelated to the Five Elements system but inadvertently ended up aligning with it. *I’m fine with anything as long as it works.*

Phase of wood, fire, and earth—Poison Oni Flame. I launched a blue fireball that collided with the elder newt’s lower jaw. Letting out a desperate roar, the giant salamander writhed once again. However, this time it didn’t last long. Its movements grew more feeble, and it soon began to convulse on its back. Finally, it stopped moving altogether.



“Exorcism complete.” Although it hadn’t been a particularly strong flame, the elder newt had breathed its last. That was because the Oni Flame had been mixed with poison.

The Dalmatian pyrethrum cultivated by the Eastern Roman Empire contained an unusual poison that was deadly to creatures such as insects, frogs, and snakes, yet was harmless to humans. The spell I had just used called forth that plant as wood ki. When vaporized by the phosphorus flames and absorbed through the skin’s mucus membrane, the toxic pyrethrum was likely highly effective against salamanders.

I had breathed in a little as well, but it had no effect on me. *That was my first time casting that spell. I’m glad it worked.*

“Seika...defeated the monster?” said Luft, a dumbfounded look on his face.

Oh, he hadn’t left yet.

“Did Sir Seika just...?”

“He took down that massive monster in one hit...”

“Sir Seika defeated the elder newt!” Cheers and applause erupted throughout the manor. Apparently, the servants had all been watching the commotion from a distance. Good. That was what I wanted.

Come to think of it, it was my first time receiving real praise in this life. It made me a little uneasy. Even in my past life, I had never grown accustomed to this sort of thing.



Word of my exploits soon spread throughout the manor. As a result, we ended up having a lavish feast for dinner.

“Wow...” There was an entire roast pig. I was amazed they had managed to prepare it in a single day.

“This was all made for you, Seika!” Yifa whispered in my ear as she helped set the table.

Hearing it put so bluntly was a little embarrassing. If anything, I would have

preferred them to have prepared it yesterday. Not that I particularly cared about my birthday.

“This feast is to honor my son’s extraordinary achievement.” My father spoke to begin the dinner. “I had never seen such a large elder newt before. It probably lived deep in the mountains for years. Even an experienced adventurer would have had trouble taking it down.”

“Seika was very brave, father. He faced the monster to rescue the maids in the detached building.”

Oh, Luft actually praised me. He’s a nice guy, but he’s always stayed out of my life. I’m a little touched. Meanwhile, Gly’s glaring at me really hard. Is it that hard for him to accept that I did something good? And mother won’t even make eye contact. I guess that’s to be expected.

“Thank you, father, brother.”

“Tonight’s food is a gift from a company in the city. Later on, you’ll be receiving a thank-you letter from the city council, and you’ll be awarded a certificate of extermination and a medal from the Adventurers Guild.”

“Really? That’s quite the honor.”

“On that note, Seika, would you mind telling me how you defeated the monster?”

“Of course. It seemed to be weak to fire, so I used a fire spell.”

My father returned only a silent gaze.

Huh? Does he suspect me? “Um, after that it was a little hectic, so I tried not to overthink it...”

“Although elder newts are water-element monsters, you’re correct that they are weak to fire.” After pausing for a while, my father continued like nothing had happened. “I’m impressed you knew that.”

“I read it in a book before. I also heard that you had repelled the monster using fire magic.”

“A wise judgment. You’ve done your homework. However, don’t let it get to your head. There’s no guarantee things will go so smoothly next time. You

should prioritize escaping unless you absolutely need to fight.”

“Yes, father. I agree that I got lucky.” He was correct. There was a chance that even I, maybe once in every one thousand times, could— No, never mind. I could never lose to an enemy of that level.

“Nonetheless, your actions were commendable. I feel obligated to offer you a reward. Seika, is there anything you want?”

“In that case, father, I have a request.” I got down to business. “I may not have any magical power, but I didn’t give up and continued practicing alone. That practice has paid off, and I can now cast a few spells.” I pulled out my wand and showed off a blue flame. “I have been content until now just having the ability to cast spells, but this incident spurred on a new desire within me. I want my spells to be of use to others. I don’t yet know what form that may take, but as a member of the esteemed Lamprogue family of magic scholars, I wish to use my talents to serve the empire. Therefore, father...” I paused for a moment. “Please allow me to enroll at Lodonea Imperial Magic Academy.”

“What?!”

Ignoring Gly’s shout, I continued. “I’ve heard the magic academy has produced a number of renowned mages. I would like to polish my skills there and determine my future path. As I’m still a novice, I’ll need to enroll in the primary education section. I’d like to begin attending next spring if possible.” I’d put my entire being into my speech, but my father was silent. However, I wasn’t worried. I had done something so impressive that whatever reservations he might have, he would have to acknowledge it.

“Very well,” he finally said.

“F-Father?!” Gly immediately protested.

“However, my position as a count does not exempt you from the entrance exam. You will have to pass it by your own merit.”

“Yes, father. Thank you very much. I’ll begin studying for the exam tomorrow. Although I have one more request.”

“What is it?”

“I would like Yifa to join me as my servant.”

“Huh?! M-Me?!” Yifa panicked, but after a brief pause, my father nodded.

“I will allow it. I’ll have her ownership transferred to you while you’re outside our territory. Consider it a parting gift.”

“Thank you. In addition, would you allow Yifa to attend the academy as well?”

“What?” This time my father knit his eyebrows. “I’m afraid not.”

“Why not?”

“Her parents had no talent for magic. Commoners rarely gain a significant amount of magical power in a single generation. There’s no point in her attending. Forget it.”

“In that case, there’s no problem. Yifa is more than capable of using magic. I’ll show you right now.” I got up from my seat, opened the large dining room window, and then walked over to Yifa.

“S-Seika, I...”

“This way.” I led the perplexed Yifa over to the window. “Yifa, if you want to come with me, shoot the hitodama’s fire out the window at full strength. Just shout ‘Flamenaut’ or something along with it,” I whispered, handing her my wand.

Yifa stared at me for a moment, then turned to the window. She quietly pointed the wand out the window, using it more like a commanding officer’s baton than a magic wand. “Flamenaut.” A pillar of orange flames pierced the sunset. It spread far and wide, illuminating the landscape in red.

“Huh?!”

“I know Flamenaut is a midlevel spell, but what’s with that power...?” Gly and Luft both got up out of their seats, astounded.

It was a nostalgic flame. A kitsune’s flame sorcery could scorch entire mountains, though Yifa was only around the level of a four-tailed kitsune at the moment. She had improved rapidly and was just as talented at utilizing spirits as I’d hoped she would be.

“What do you think, father? Yifa used fire magic to protect a maid from the elder newt. She was fortunate enough to be born with a talent for magic. I would hate to see that talent go to waste.”

My father was stunned into silence for a moment before he finally looked down and spoke. “Very well, do as you wish. However, she must pass the exam as well. Am I understood?”

“Of course. Thank you, father.” I turned back to Yifa. “Sorry for doing all that without asking. You said you wanted to leave the manor and visit all sorts of places before, so would you like to come with me?”

“Y-Yeah... Seika, I...”

“Not yet. We have to pass the exam first. We’ll be studying nonstop from now until spring.”

“Okay! I’ll do my best! Oh... I guess I need to change the way I speak to you if I’m going to be your servant, Master Seika.”

“You can continue talking to me the way you have been.”

“But...”

“It feels weird. Besides, we’re going to be classmates starting this spring.” I’d rather not have her overlap with Yuki either.

“R-Really? Okay—”

“I can’t accept this!” Gly suddenly slammed the table, his voice echoing through the dining room. “What are you thinking, father?! You’re letting a failure and a slave attend the imperial magic academy?!” Yifa cowered in fear. “And the Lamprogue family doesn’t allow siblings to pursue the same career! I’m enrolling in the magic academy next spring! Those two aren’t worth breaking tradition over!”

“Right you are, Gly,” Blaise responded quietly. “In order to ensure that the Lamprogue family’s magical talents serve the empire as extensively as possible, siblings aren’t allowed to walk the same path. I have no intention of letting my generation be the one where that tradition is broken.”

“Then...”

“That’s why you will be joining the imperial military, Gly.”

“Huh?” At a loss for words, Gly’s eyes went wide. It didn’t seem like he could comprehend what father had said to him.

“You have talent with the sword and good endurance. I’m sure you’ll be well suited to it. Do you remember my cousin Petrus? He’s a commander stationed at the eastern border now. I’ll contact him and ask him to look after you once you enlist.”

“Wh-Why?” Gly struggled to get the words out. “Why me?! I-I’m the second son! And I have magic, unlike him!”

“Then tell me, Gly—what have you been doing these past few years?” Gly was once again at a loss for words. That figured. “Ordinarily, you would be receiving a primary education right now. Have you made any new discoveries? Have you tested anything? Have you striven to improve your magic? I’ve only seen you practice the sword and fool around with those good-for-nothings in the city. Do you know what a researcher needs most of all? Drive. And I don’t see any in you.”

“B-But...”

“Seika, on the other hand, has put in the effort and has results to show for it. That’s all there is to it.”

Faced with that sound logic, Gly silently seethed in anger. His complexion was nearly purple. “Duel me.”

“Hmm?”

Gly suddenly pointed his finger at me. “Seika! I challenge you to a duel! Winner goes to the academy!”

“Gly, stop this.” Though Luft tried to stop him, Gly refused to listen.

“If you lose, you leave the manor right now! Got it?!”

“Uh...” *Father is the one who has to pay tuition.* I looked over at my father and saw a pained expression on his face.

“Are you all right with that, Seika?”

“Blaise!” Our mother, who had been quiet this entire time, suddenly shouted.

I reflexively looked at her, and she immediately averted her eyes. *What’s that all about?* Perplexed, I answered my father. “It’s fine by me.”

“And you consent to those terms as well, Gly?”

“Yes, father. I’m going to prove that I’m the one who’s better at magic! Then I hope you’ll allow me to be a researcher.”

“Very well.”

“Gly! Cease this foolishness. Siblings shouldn’t be dueling each other!” said my mother.

“Stay out of this,” my father replied.

“But—!”

“This is between me and Seika, mother,” said Gly. “There are some things I can’t give up.”

“Then it’s decided.” My father rose from his seat. “The duel will be held tomorrow at noon. You will follow official imperial etiquette. Real swords and spells midlevel and above will be banned. I will serve as the witness. I’ll be going to bed early today.” He then left the dining room.

Before I knew it, the sun had set outside the window.



“This has become a real pain, hasn’t it, Master Seika?” It was night in my bedroom, the moonlight coming through the window illuminating me as I cut hitogata out of paper. Yuki popped her head out of my hair in her long, slender fox form.

“A little.”

“Can you handle it?”

I heard a knock on the door along with my eldest brother Luft’s voice. “Seika, do you have a moment?” Yuki quickly hid inside my hair, and I shoved my paper and scissors under my bed.

“Sure. What is it, Luft?”

"I'm coming in. I figured you'd still be awake." Luft hung his lantern from the ceiling and sat next to me on the bed. Then he was silent for a while.

What does he want? "Um, Luft?"

"Seika, I know it's a little late, but happy birthday."

"Huh?"

"I got you a present," he said, handing me a small wooden box. "Open it up."

Grabbing the fancy leather strap, I removed the lid. Inside were a transparent pen and an inkwell. "Is this glass?"

"Yep. It's a glass pen. It was made by a craftsman who mastered high-level earth magic. I bought it when I went to the capital with father. They're quite popular there."

"How do you use it?"

"The same way you would a quill pen. You just dip it in the inkwell and write. But unlike a quill pen, you don't need to replace it. You're so passionate about studying you must go through quills pretty quickly, so I thought it'd be perfect. And just in time too. You're going to have to do a lot more writing if you go to the academy. Be sure to write letters home every now and then too."

"I... I will. Thank you, Luft." Unable to think of anything else to say, I went quiet. After a brief silence, Luft was the first to speak.

"I'm sorry, Seika."

"Huh?"

"For always being so distant. How do I put this...? I was just never sure how to approach you."

"Because I'm the child of a mistress?"

"Because of our environment, really. Father, mother, and even the maids all treated you that way, so I wasn't sure what to do. I guess I lack independence, huh?"

"I don't think so."

"I'm just trying to keep up appearances. I have to act the part of a lord's heir,

but really I'm just a coward. I was scared of you."

"Huh... You were? Why?"

"Hmm... Now that you mention it, why *was* I scared of you? I've forgotten the reason. It was a long time ago." Luft laughed. "But you've grown into a fine person. I'm proud to call you my brother."

"Mmm..." I held my tongue. I had never considered the people of this house to be family. My only family was the older sister who passed away in my previous childhood. In some respects, that made being the son of a mistress more convenient. Yet it also made this all the more surprising. I hadn't expected anyone to be concerned about their relationship with me.

"Go easy on him, Seika."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about tomorrow. You're not supposed to have any magic, yet you managed to take down a monster. I don't think there's any way you would lose to Gly. So take it easy on him. I'm sure he'll learn his lesson."

"All right."

"And I know it's still a ways off, but take the academy seriously."

"I will. You do your best to become a fine lord as well, Luft."

"I can't say I'm confident."

"Then would you rather have me or Gly take your place?"

"Hmm. That doesn't really fill me with confidence either. I'll just have to do what I can. Good night, Seika." Luft left my room, and Yuki peeked out of my hair again.

"A gift, Master Seika? Hmph, he seems like a decent human. Though I'm sure it's nothing valuable."

"Now, don't be like that. It's a good gift." Dipping the glass pen into the inkwell, I tried writing a spell on a hitogata with it. It felt rather nice—I could see why they were popular in the capital. It had probably been expensive.

"I'm glad you like it, but be careful. It might have a poisoned needle inside."

“It’s fine.”

“Fine in what way?”

“Every way.” This wasn’t my past life. I didn’t need to fear that sort of thing anymore. And even if there was a poison needle inside, I wasn’t worried. “I’m more concerned about *that* right now.”

“That?”

“Yuki, go back into hiding for a moment.”

“Huh? Master Seika?” Yuki retreated into my hair as I ducked.

A moment later, a blade of wind flew through the window, going over my head and slicing the door. Wood chips clattered all over the floor. “Come on. I can’t fix that...” Turning my gaze from the poor door to the window, I saw a solitary figure. Illuminated by two beams of moonlight, Gly was pointing his wand at the window with an angry look on his face.

Guess I have to deal with this. It seemed our duel had been moved forward.



The moons glowed over the magic training grounds, setting the stage for our midnight duel.

“You’re a little too worked up, Gly.” Gripping my wand, I spoke to Gly as he glared at me. “Couldn’t wait until tomorrow? Father said he would serve as the witness.”

“Shut your mouth.” Gly’s face twisted with anger. “Shut up, shut up! How long have you been planning this?!”

“Planning what? If you mean the magic academy, I’ve wanted to go since I was seven. You made it sound like so much fun. Have you forgotten?”

“Don’t get full of yourself! You just got lucky! If that monster hadn’t just happened to show up, and you hadn’t just happened to be the one to defeat it, you’d be the one joining the military!”

“Luck, huh?” I gave a forced smile. “Then you should have defeated it yourself instead of screaming and running away.”

“Father said not to leave the manor! I was just obeying his instructions!”

“Then why not tell him that? Oh, wait, father gave up on you a long time ago because of your poor behavior.”

“My behavior doesn’t matter as long as I’m good at magic!”

“Isn’t that why he told you to prove it tomorrow?”

“Father’s terms are too lenient!” Gly tightly gripped his wand. “Midlevel spells are banned? How am I supposed to show my skill? We’re fighting with no rules, Seika. We duel until somebody surrenders or can’t fight anymore. If you lose, you tell father that you’re giving up tomorrow. Then you leave the manor!”

“Midlevel magic is dangerous, you know? I might not be able to speak tomorrow.”

“Is that supposed to be a problem? I never liked you, Seika.”

“I’m well aware, brother. I’m not sure why, but it’s very apparent you’ve always had it out for me.” *Come to think of it, why does he hate me? I always assumed it was because I’m a mistress’s child, but is that really all there is to it? Oh well. It hardly matters.* “I’m tired, so let’s get on with it. We’ll begin on—”

“Screw you!” Power surged into Gly’s wand. “Flamenaut!” A torrent of bright red flames spouted from his wand, illuminating the night sky and engulfing me. “How’s that?! If a slave can do it, then it should be even easier for me!”

“In that case, you should put a little more power into it.” The flames cleared away, and Gly’s eyes went wide with shock when he saw me standing there unharmed.

“Wind Lance!” Spears of wind came hurtling towards me, but they never reached me. They collided with the empty air, vanishing and leaving only ripples of light behind. I didn’t feel so much as a gentle breeze. “A barrier?! You can use light magic?!”

“Oh, so barriers are light magic,” I mumbled to myself. It was a simple barrier made of only eight hitogata, yet it didn’t seem like Gly would be able to break it. I took out another hitogata, then affixed one of Gly’s hairs to it with wax.

“Wind Lance! Wind Lance!”

“Quiet down. Your magic has been forbidden.” I drew a seal on the hitogata that had Gly’s hair on it with my cursed energy. Gly continued to futilely shout spell names and swing his wand, but nothing happened.

“Wind Lance! Damn it! Flamenaut! Why can’t I use magic?! What did you do?!”

“Now to forbid your movement as well.” I channeled cursed energy into my hand, then pounded the hitogata. Gly suddenly stopped in his tracks, no longer able to approach me.

“Wha... I can’t move... I-Is this dark magic?”

“Is this what the dark element does?” It did seem rather dark. This world’s light and dark elements didn’t appear to correspond to yin and yang. Sighing, I casually walked up to Gly. Then I crushed the hitogata’s right foot.

“Gaaaaaah!” Gly screamed as his right knee buckled and he fell to the ground. He didn’t even manage to catch himself with his hands, so his face hit the dirt.

“If you were going to ask to duel with no rules, you should have brought a sword. Aren’t you good at swordplay? Not that it would have mattered at this point.” Next, I crushed the hitogata’s left arm.

Gly let out another brutal scream. “Wh-What is this spell...? I’ve never heard of anything like it...”

“Exactly. Doesn’t that strike you as odd?” I circled around Gly as I spoke. “Sorcery can do anything, right? It breaks the laws of the world. You can curse people to death from afar, find the location of objects you’re looking for, and even predict the future. You can heal any wound or disease, and in some cases, even control souls and death itself.” As I spoke, I crushed the hitogata’s left leg. “Yet when it comes to these four-element spells, all you do is inconsequential stuff like hurling fire and wind at each other. Doesn’t that feel like a waste? Are you listening, Gly?”

Gly was gasping for air. He didn’t even scream when I crushed the fourth limb. He appeared unharmed despite all the pain, but if I left him there, his limbs would begin to rot away after a few days. It was a curse. “What will it be, Gly? Do you surrender?”

“Yes... Forgive me.”

“You’re forgiven.” I ran my hand over the hitogata, and all the crushed limbs immediately straightened out, good as new. Peeling off the hair I had attached with wax, I tossed it aside. The curse had been fully removed.

“Ah...”

“You probably won’t be able to move for a while, but I expect you to keep your promise. Tell father that you’re withdrawing from the duel tomorrow, then leave the house to go join the army. No more arguing. That is all.” I left the training grounds without looking back. *What a waste of time that was.*

“Hmph. I can’t believe he thought he could challenge you. That human has no idea where he stands.” Yuki poked her head out of my hair in her fox form. “Are you sure you want to leave it at that, Master Seika? You only showed a fraction of your power. You even let him live.”

“I made a promise to Luft.” I had taken it easy on him. Hopefully he would actually learn his lesson like Luft had said.



The next day, Gly was sick and didn’t get out of bed. I won the duel by default. For the record, I hadn’t given him the fever.

Gly ended up joining the military, though after what he had just experienced, I imagined that even the harshest training would feel lenient in comparison. *You’re welcome.*

Poison Oni Flame

A spell that creates a phosphorus flame infused with toxic pyrethroid from a pyrethrum plant. Though not very toxic to mammals or birds, it is highly effective against insects, reptiles, and amphibians. Often used as an ingredient in mosquito-repelling incense. Dalmatian pyrethrum is native to Serbia, which was part of the Eastern Roman Empire when Seika visited in the eleventh century.

Act 5

The day after my win by default, I was in the mountain forest behind the manor. I was panting and out of breath. Following an animal trail wasn't easy, and it was made all the more difficult in this body. Fortunately, I knew where I was going.

"I finally made it." Taking a breather, I raised my head. Before me was a giant. He was a large, muscular man, around fifteen meters tall. There was a large string of prayer beads around his neck, and the only clothes he wore were ragged work pants. He was lying on his side with his back turned to me.

"Hey!" I shouted at the giant, and he turned his bald head towards me. There was a single eye in the center of his face, fixed directly on me. The giant stood up, his one eye opening wide.

"Oooooohhhhh!" he roared, startling the birds and making them take flight. The giant placed his hands on the ground and leaned forward, bringing his bearded face near me. Then he spoke. "Oh! It's been so long! I haven't seen ya in forever, Master Haruyoshi!"

I looked up at his rugged face and smiled. "You recognized me in this form, Nyuudou?"

"How could I not? Who else would that sinister cursed energy belong to?" Tears were falling from his massive, singular eye. "I'm so happy I get to serve ya again."

"Hmph. Don't get ahead of yourself, Nyuudou. I was the first one Master called. Hey! Are you listening?!"

"Hmm? Oh, it's the kuda-gitsune lass! Now there's a familiar face. You were summoned too, huh? Good to see ya again."

"Hmph, of course I was. I was first!" Listening to my ayakashi bicker, I breathed a sigh of relief. I had been worried they wouldn't respect me in this form and would try to rebel, but fortunately, that didn't seem to be the case.

"I apologize for summoning you so suddenly, Nyuudou. You must have been confused without me around."

“Nothin’ to worry about, Master Haruyoshi. But what is it ya want from me?” Nyuudou had an uncertain look on his face. “This place don’t look like the capital. It ain’t even Japan. I followed your shikigami all over the place, but a barrier stopped me around here. I didn’t know what to do, so I was just lyin’ down.”

“You’ve already done your job. All I needed was for you to follow my shikigami around the mountain. I wanted to drive a suitable monster out of its home.”

“Monster?”

“They’re similar to ayakashi, though they’re probably insignificant from your point of view. You didn’t see it? The giant salamander-looking one?”

“Ah, I remember somethin’ like that. I thought it was pretty weird, but it just got scared and ran off. That thing was what ya wanted?”

“Yes. It served its role well.” I remembered Gly saying a monster had just happened to show up. *Funny. That was no coincidence.* I had come to the mountain, sent out my shikigami to find a monster, placed the talismans to create a barrier to hide Nyuudou, and set up a gateway. I had been steadily preparing this plan for six months.

It had all been so I could accomplish a great feat right as the entrance exams approached and get my father to listen to my request. I had sent the monster towards the city, and though there had been a few mishaps, it had more or less gone according to plan. Gly’s hair that I had used on the shikigami was also something that I had planned far in advance. I had shikigami prepared for Luft, Blaise, and even all the servants. Naturally, this included Yifa. It had been nine years since I’d reincarnated. I’d had plenty of time to prepare.

“Nyuudou.” I called out to the one-eyed giant. “I lost much of my strength in my final battle in my last world. In this life, my body is that of a child. The exorcist who once boasted of being unparalleled is now but a shadow of his former self. However, I intend to surpass my past self here in this new world. I will surpass the man who commanded one million ayakashi and was feared by even the gods themselves.”

“Y-Yes, Master!”

“I ask that you accompany me on this path, Nyuudou. I have need of your strength.”

“Yes, Master!” The giant bowed before me. “How I miss those happy days! The days when you scattered armies of thousands, subdued evil gods, and crushed foreign champions! The return of those days fills me with excitement! My blood is boilin’!”

“I’ll show you all-new sights. Look forward to it.” Space itself warped around Nyuudou, sucking him inside a gateway. Once his giant figure fully disappeared, the hitogata making up the gateway returned to my hand, and I took a deep breath. “Phew, I’ve finally made some progress.”

I tore a barrier talisman off a nearby tree I had stuck it on. The scrap of paper fell into the undergrowth, disappearing among the leaves. Now that one had been broken, the rest would follow suit. I had finished all the tidying up I needed to do.

“This was a really roundabout way of doing things, Master Seika,” Yuki said, popping her head out. “It’s a weak world filled with powerless humans. You could do whatever you want here.”

“Have you forgotten, Yuki? In my past life, I was killed by those very same powerless humans.”

“Ugh, but...”

“Yuki, in this life, I want to be like them. I want to be one of those weak humans.” Unfortunately for Nyuudou, I had no intention of ruling through force like I had in my past life. I would avoid standing out, skillfully maneuver my way through any situation, and eventually get what I wanted. I was certain that was the smart way to live. This incident had essentially been practice for that.
Hopefully this will turn out to be the cunning I lacked in my past life.



Another six months passed, and it was now spring. “You didn’t forget anything, did you, Seika?” Luft had come to see me off. All my things were already loaded onto the carriage.

“I’m good. Looks like you’re the only one who came to see me off, huh?”

“There’s no one else *to* see you off. Father is in the capital, and Gly is in the military. And mom, well...”

“I was just kidding. I’m happy just to have you here.”

“You’ve grown into a smooth talker. Yifa, I know how he is, but try to take care of him.”

“O-Of course, Sir Luft!” Yifa yawned. “Ah, I-I’m so sorry.”

“Seika, did you make her stay up late studying again?”

“I certainly did. We can’t enroll at the academy if we don’t pass the entrance exam.”

“It’s not good to overwork yourself. Though I suppose the carriage ride from here to Lodonea *is* a full seven days.”

“We’ll be studying during the trip as well.”

“Aww, S-Seika...” Yifa looked like she wanted to say something, but we didn’t have time.

“Anyway, you seem to have taken a liking to Yifa, Seika,” Luft said with a smile.

“Hmm?”

“You gave her that necklace. It couldn’t have been cheap. You shouldn’t dress your pretty servant up too much or people will start rumors.”

“I think you’ve got the wrong idea. These gems are all magic stones. This is to improve her life at the academy.”

My goal for Yifa was for her to be able to cast spells via elementals. That meant she needed elementals around her at all times, but they tended to keep their distance due to her lack of magical power. To make up for that, we’d decided to use minerals filled with magical power to draw them in. We had climbed the mountain and looked all over for any rocks elementals gathered around. It hadn’t been easy, but in the end, we’d managed to find several high-quality ores and had them made into a necklace in the city. According to Yifa, a lot of elementals gathered around her now. Our efforts had paid off.

“Hmm, I really never know what you’re thinking.”

“I get that a lot. We should head out soon, Luft.”

“Take care. Stop by during your holidays.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said as I boarded the carriage. Yifa followed behind me.

“Are you looking forward to this, Yifa?”

“Yeah! It’ll be fun! How about you?”

“Hmm...” I looked out the carriage window. Cities and stores from another world stretched as far as the eye could see. “A little bit.”

Interlude

Count Blaise Lamprogue in the Capital

Sitting at a desk, Blaise Lamprogue closed the book he had been reading. He was staying at a luxury inn in the imperial capital. Unlike the cheap rooms found on the second floor of a pub, his room was quiet and clean. Yet despite that, he was having trouble focusing on his studies.

Today marked Seika's departure for Lodonea. They had probably reached the first city along the way and were staying at an inn right about now. Had he made the right decision? It was the only question occupying his mind.



Seika wasn't Blaise's son. Twelve years ago, a mysterious woman in a black robe had brought the infant Seika to his manor, claiming he was the son of his younger brother, Gilbert.

Even to his brother, Gilbert was a peculiar one. He was free-spirited, with no trace of nobility about him. So much so that he had said he wanted to see the world and became an adventurer after graduating from the magic academy. In a long line of magic scholars, Gilbert was the only Maproque to ever become an adventurer.

However, Gilbert was exceedingly talented. He had been at the top of his class at the magic academy and accomplished many great feats as an adventurer, quickly rising to the top ranks. Though many members of their family wouldn't acknowledge him, Blaise was secretly proud of his younger brother.

One day, Blaise had received a report that Gilbert had gone missing in demon territory. When the mysterious woman brought Seika several years later, he hadn't even considered sending the child to an orphanage. It might have all been a lie, but he'd felt it was fate and thus decided to raise Seika as his own.

His wife suspected Seika of being the child of a demon. Although Blaise thought the idea was ridiculous, he understood her rationale. Seika was undoubtedly a child of dubious birth. However, the woman had seemed quite desperate when she'd said Gilbert's name. He couldn't bring himself to abandon the child.

Not wanting others to harbor the same suspicions, he had decided to tell his acquaintances that Seika was the son of a mistress. He had even hidden the truth from his two sons. Yet as time went on, Blaise himself had begun to suspect that Seika had inherited demon blood. There was more to it than just his black hair and eyes, which were uncommon in the empire.

At the age of one, he had begun using magic. It was primitive magic, simply moving objects without utilizing any element, but it shouldn't have been possible. Magic and language were intrinsically connected. That was an immutable fact, even among talented mages who had mastered incantationless casting. So an infant who had not yet learned to speak casting magic was impossible—unless it was the child of a demon who had been born with the ability to use magic.

Seika's magic steadily grew stronger. By the age of two, he had become capable of not just moving objects, but destroying them as well. It had escalated over time, with Seika choosing larger targets as he grew. Then he moved on to living creatures. He would take no delight or amusement in it—he destroyed his toys and beds and killed wild insects and birds with complete indifference. It was as though he had been trying to test his capabilities.

Blaise had kept Seika's magic hidden from everybody except his wife and a select few servants. However, his sons had picked up on their mother's fear. Luft had grown afraid of Seika, while Gly had come to view him with hostility.

When he'd reached the age of three, Blaise had decided to perform a measuring ritual to determine how much magical power Seika had. Contrary to his expectations, he turned out to have no magic whatsoever nor aptitude for any element. It was odd. He shouldn't have been capable of casting spells without magical power. Certainly there were exceptions, but those were simply people who had so little magical power it couldn't be measured, and they were only capable of casting extremely weak spells. That didn't apply to Seika.

The strangest thing of all was that after the night of the ritual, Seika had become noticeably more normal. He had stopped destroying things with magic and started engaging in conversation more. At times he had even seemed more mature than Luft. Blaise had hoped that he might be able to grow up normally, but that hope shattered when Seika turned seven.

The fire spell he had cast during that magic training hadn't been Fireball. On top of its unusual force and color, it hadn't even been a fire spell at all. He had most likely ignited some sort of mineral. It was an entirely different kind of spell. Despite Blaise carefully keeping him away from magic, Seika had once again shown him a unique type of spell.

The monster attack had been unusual as well. When Blaise had examined the elder newt's corpse, he'd found that it very clearly hadn't been killed by fire. Its burns were light and barely went past its skin. It seemed more like it had been killed by poison.

And then there was the midlevel magic the slave girl Yifa had used. She had said the spell's name when she'd cast it, yet it had been slightly different from a real Flamenaut. Her father had been a capable man, but he had no talent for magic. Neither had her mother, who had passed away a few years earlier. She and Seika had grown close recently, and Blaise didn't believe that to be a coincidence.

There were many things Blaise didn't understand about Seika. That was why he'd thought it was perfect when Seika asked to attend the magic academy. Sending Seika to the military would be too dangerous. The imperial military was the cornerstone of the country's defenses—he couldn't take the risk of losing Seika.

He felt bad about what he had done to Gly. He was a talented child, capable of using midlevel magic at a young age, and would certainly have excelled at the academy, but sometimes sacrifices had to be made. In truth, Blaise had hoped to discern Seika's true nature through his duel with Gly. He hadn't expected Gly to be able to put up much of a fight and had planned on intervening if things got dangerous—even if that had meant killing Seika. Yet for better or worse, that hadn't happened. It was probably for the best.

Although Blaise's wife still feared him, the current Seika was a kind child. He treated the commoners with respect and even forgave slaves who made mistakes with a smile. He no longer killed living creatures for no reason, and had even captured and released a spider he'd found in his room. He got along with Yifa and had recently opened up to Luft as well.

Even Gly was no exception. The night before the duel, ignored his father and challenged Seika. Fortunately, Seika had defeated him without putting so much as a scratch on him. Gly would never say what had happened, but the result was enough. His son was still alive and well.

Treated with kindness by the people around him, Seika could well become the Hero who would protect the country. Conversely, if met with betrayal and destruction, he could become the Demon Lord who would destroy it. That was the feeling Blaise got.

Gilbert had once said the academy was a good place. He prayed that was still the case.

Chapter 2

Act 1

It had been seven days since I'd left the Lamprogue estate. I sat in a carriage, wearily looking out the window as Yifa patted my back.

"Are you still feeling sick, Seika?"

"Yes." I had completely forgotten—carriages made me feel terrible. I had ridden one when I'd visited the West in my past life and had an absolutely miserable time. Compared to oxen, they were too fast, they made my butt hurt, and they made me sick. "You're doing a good job hanging in there."

"Oh, yeah. I am feeling a little tired though." Regardless, she was still doing a hundred times better than I was. It made me feel pathetic. "Look, we're almost there."

I silently looked at our destination. A large, walled city stood in the distance. It was the academy city Lodonea. A fortress city built by scholars.



After parting ways with our coachman, I made my way to the inn we would be staying at and collapsed onto the bed. *I feel horrible...*

"Are you okay, Seika?" Yifa asked, setting her luggage down and sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Yeah..."

"I didn't realize you had weaknesses too." Yifa giggled. What did she take me for?

"I'm only human. Oh, and your room is next door."

"O-Oh, is that right? Hmm..."

"What's wrong?"

“I’m just surprised I get my own room.”

“Of course you do. There were some small towns along the way where we didn’t have a choice but to share or stay in a common room, but we’re going to be staying here for several days.”

“R-Right.” Yifa was fidgeting. “Um, you’re my master now, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, seems like it. I got a certificate or something from father.” Apparently, there were various legal complications when it came to taking a slave out of a lord’s territory, and— *Ugh, I feel so sick I can’t think straight.*

“U-Um, Seika.” Yifa seemed to make up her mind and spoke to me. “Sh-Should I join you tonight?”

“Huh? Why?” I responded lifelessly, still face down. “Oh, you mean for dinner? I’m not really hungry. You can do whatever you want.”

Yifa remained silent for a moment, then sighed. “I’ll buy you some fruit in case you get hungry.”

“Thanks.”

After leaving my luggage, Yifa exited the room.

The moment the door slammed shut, I heard Yuki on top of my head. “Hmph! I can’t believe that girl!”

“What’s the matter now?”

“She has no idea where she stands!”

“What do you mean?”

“That lowly servant is trying to win your affection!”

“Huh? Is that what all that was about?” Come to think of it, Yifa was now fourteen. It was still a little early in this world, but in my previous world, it wouldn’t have been strange for her to already have been married. I rolled over on the bed and faced the ceiling. “Yifa *is* pretty conscious of her status. I wish she wouldn’t worry about it so much.”

“That’s not what I mean, Master Seika!”

“Huh?”

“That girl is in love with you. She’s head over heels! She’s trying to use her status as a slave to get you to lay with her!”

“I doubt that.” *Yuki sure does say whatever she wants.*

“It’s true! I can tell!”

“Oh? And what would an ayakashi know about the human heart?”

“More than you, at least. Especially when it comes to women.”

You’ve got some nerve saying that. You probably just read about it in a novel about the Imperial Court. I tried to come up with a retort, only to realize that I didn’t have one. I hadn’t had much luck on that front in my past life. Once I’d obtained eternal youth, people had stopped approaching me. “The heart of a woman is beyond me anyway.”

“Don’t pout, Master Seika. You need to learn or you’re going to get into trouble.”

I’d really rather not.



It was the day of the entrance exam. Upon arriving at Lodonea Imperial Magic Academy, the first thing we noticed was its sheer size.

“Wow...” Yifa voiced her wonder next to me.

It was incredibly vast. It was almost as large as the Greater Palace in Kyo, though the forest behind it also seemed to be part of the academy’s campus. When that was included, it was far larger. With its many school buildings, it almost seemed like a castle.

“Hmm?”

“What’s wrong, Seika?”

“It’s nothing.” I felt strange deposits of energy all over. *Well, it’s a magic academy. That’s probably not unusual.* Taking another look around, I saw several other examinees.

“Come this way if you’re here to take the entrance exam.” There was a reception desk set up beneath the blue sky. Prospective students lined up in

front of it, and we followed suit. “Your name, please.”

“Seika Lamprogue.”

“Oh, you must be the son of the famous Lamprogue family.” The female receptionist’s words set our surroundings abuzz.

“Seriously?”

“*The* Lamprogue family?”

“Maybe I should try to be friends with him.”

Huh? Is my family that famous?

“Place your hand here, please.” After several questions, the receptionist instructed me to put my hand on what appeared to be a crystal ball with a magic circle engraved in it.

“What is this?”

“A magic item that measures your magical power. It’ll be my first time seeing the magical power of a member of the Lamprogue family, so I’m looking forward to the results. It glows white if you have an aptitude for every element, but I’ve never seen that happen.”

“Interesting.” I did as I was told and placed my hand on the crystal ball. However, nothing happened.

“I’m sorry, try it again.”

“Sure.” Once again, nothing happened.

“Th-That’s odd. Could you wait just a moment? I’ll go get a different one.”

“I don’t think there’s any point in doing that. Apparently, I don’t have any magical power.”

“Huh?!” Everyone around us started murmuring again. I grew nervous.

“Can you not take the exam without magical power?” I asked, trying to keep the creeping uncertainty from my voice.

“This is just a confirmation, so you can, but...there’s a practical exam,” the receptionist replied.

“Then there’s no problem. I’ll be taking the exam.” Leaving the reception desk, I heard whispers all around me.

“No magic?”

“Seriously? He’s a Lamprogue.”

“What’s the big idea?”

Yifa was talking to a receptionist at another desk. “Your name, please.”

“Yifa. I don’t have a family name.”

“Are you a commoner?” the receptionist asked, eyebrow raised.

“No, I’m Seika—um, Master Seika’s slave.” The other examinees started whispering for a third time now.

This is getting ridiculous. You’re holding up the line.

“A slave? Servants have enrolled before, but there’s no precedent for admitting a slave. Although you’re legally considered property, the academy can’t be held responsible for any escapes. Now, please place your hand here.” Yifa put her hand on the crystal ball. Unlike when I had tried it, it glowed a faint yellow. “It looks like you have an aptitude for fire and wind, though it’s quite weak. The exam has a practical component. Are you sure you want to take it?”

“Y-Yes, please.” Yifa returned to me, and the whispers grew irritatingly loud.

“What kind of failure doesn’t have any magical power?”

“How’s he gonna pass the exam?”

“With his connections, probably.”

“Noble bastard.”

“He’s the son of an upstart count, after all.”

“He even has a pretty slave serving him.”

“Why’d he bother coming here?”

I felt the temperature increase and turned to Yifa, only to find orange flames flickering around her. She was fuming.

“Yifa, your fire is leaking.”

“Huh? Ahh!” Yifa waved her hands and extinguished the flames. I gave a small smile, then sighed.

We aren't starting off under the best conditions. Still, I'm used to this sort of—

“Quiet down.” A frigid voice pierced the air, and a girl with hair the color of red autumn leaves passed by me. “Outta the way. If you're not going to the reception desk, move.” The crowd immediately fell silent and cleared the way for the beautiful girl. “Amyu. Commoner.”

“R-Right,” the flustered receptionist responded. “Place your hand—”

The girl put her hand on the crystal ball before the receptionist even finished speaking. A moment later, a dazzling white light illuminated the area.



The receptionist's eyes went wide. "It's white. That means every element..."

"We're done here, right?"

"Ah, hold on!" The girl pulled back her hand and walked off as though nothing had happened. The rustling of surprise and gossip filled the air again.

"Every element?"

"And her magic's so strong."

"Is she really a commoner?"

"Maybe she's a secret child of royalty."

"No way..."

"Excuse me," I called out to her without thinking, and the red-haired girl stopped. My heart was pounding. She really did look like her. "Um, thanks."

"Huh? What are you thanking me for?"

"Well, you—"

"Just so you know, I wasn't taking your side. They're just annoying." The girl stuck her finger out at me. "I hate people like you the most. People who can't use magic have no business here. You're probably gonna use your family's influence to pass anyway, so at least stay outta my way." Leaving me with that, the girl walked away. I stared at her back for a while.

"What's wrong, Seika?"

"Nothing." I was just a little surprised. Her hair color was different, but her face looked just like two people I had known in my past life: my older sister, who had passed away when I was young, and my favorite disciple, who had practically been her mirror image—the girl who had killed me.



The written exam concluded without any issues, though Yifa didn't feel the same way.

"What should I do, Seika? I think I messed up."

"Hmm... You'll just have to make up for it in the practical exam." I tried to

console the teary-eyed Yifa.

“I studied so hard too.” Still, we’d only had half a year. There had only so been much we could do.



The site of the practical exam was outside. Six stone slabs stood lined up in front of the examinees.

“Aim at a target, and fire a spell at it,” the bespectacled examiner explained. “From the left, we have fire, earth, water, wind, light, and dark targets lined up. Choose your preferred elements. Scores are cumulative, so you’ll receive more points for attempting as many as you can. However, please take care that you don’t attack the wrong target. They’re only protected against a single element, so you’ll end up damaging it.”

I see. So we can attempt as many as we want, and failure doesn’t matter. That’s a good system.

“Blazing red! Spirits who birth heat and sulfur, roar and turn your rage into a sphere! Fireball!”

“Bursting yellow! Spirits who nurture rock, shatter and turn your rage into stone! Stone Blast!”

“Bubbling blue! Spirits of cold springs and hail, freeze and turn your rage into a spear of white! Icicle Spear!”

The exams had already begun around me. Although everyone was energetically shouting incantations, most of them only chose a single element. They weren’t particularly skilled. It seemed that Luft and Gly—who could cast without incantations and had learned multiple elements—were actually quite talented.

“Oh, looks like it’s my turn. I’ll be right back, Seika.”

“Do your best.” Yifa stepped in front of a target. Given what I had just seen, she would be fine.

I caught a glimpse of red hair out of the corner of my eye. *That Amyu girl is at the examination site next to us. She doesn’t seem to have gone yet. I’m curious*

what she's capable of. They said she could use every element. Wait, is that a sword at her hip? What's with her? As I was lost in my thoughts, I felt a weak gust of hot air brush past my cheek. Looking forward again, I saw Yifa holding her wand. Both the examiner and other examinees were staring at her, dumbfounded.

"Wh-What was that fire?"

"Flamenaut?"

"Midlevel magic?"

"With no incantation."

"Look at the target."

Upon closer inspection, the corner of the stone slab was melting and turning to glass. Yifa bowed to the examiner. "I-I'm sorry. I didn't think it would melt."

"I-It's fine." The glasses-wearing examiner tilted his head, muttering something about that being the fire-resistant target.

"May I move on to the next one?" The examiner nodded, and Yifa moved three targets over.

Wait, "the next one"?

Standing in front of the wind target, Yifa once again raised her wand. "Wind Lance." A gust of wind strong enough to make my ears hurt from the difference in pressure went hurtling towards the target, breaking the stone slab to pieces. The exam site fell silent. A moment later, the upper half of the stone slab fell over with a thud.

"Wind Lance is midlevel magic, right?"

"She cast midlevel magic with no incantation."

"Was that really Wind Lance?"

"What are we supposed to do now that the target's broken?"

"Q-Quiet, everyone!" the examiner shouted.

"I-I'm done now. Sorry about the target. Thank you!" Yifa bowed, then ran back over to me.

“Wh-What did you think, Seika? They won’t fail me for breaking the target, right? I tried really hard.”

“Yifa!”

“Eek!”

“You used wind! That was amazing! When did you learn to do that?”

Yifa giggled bashfully. “I’ve been practicing. I wanted to surprise you.”

“Consider me surprised. Can you use other elementals?”

“Not yet. There were a bunch of the green ones at the manor, so I was able to bring some with us. It’s probably also because I have an aptitude for wind, though I only just learned that.”

Not good. I’m getting a little choked up. Seeing how much your disciple has grown is really moving.

“The other elementals are slowly starting to gather around me. I rarely see light or dark ones, but I think soon I’ll be able to ask the others—Seika? Are you crying?” Yifa asked, concern touching her features.

“I am not. Also, one more thing. That didn’t look like Wind Lance. The real thing is much weaker.”

“R-Really?”

“You don’t need to worry about it though. You’ll grow even stronger.” The druids in my old world could never have done anything like that.

“Listen up, everyone. There was a slight accident, but the exam will be continuing. We’ll have a replacement target set up soon, so anyone hoping to try wind magic, please give up your spot in line for now. Next person, please.”

“I’m up.” Yifa saw me off as I stepped forward.

“Which element will you be using?”

“Fire first.” Standing in front of the target, I casually held my wand. *I’m not trying to destroy it, so I’ll only use a moderate amount of power. Let’s get this over with.* “Fireball.” A weak Oni Flame hit the stone slab, leaving blue flames in its wake. *That should be good.*

“A blue Fireball?!”

“The fire isn’t going out!”

“Is the fire resistance not working?”

“Wait, he’s not supposed to have any magical power...”

“I’ll do earth next.” Informing the astonished examiner, I moved to the next target. *What should I do now? The others just hurled rocks at the target, but I don’t have any worthless spells like that. It’s too far away for Keystone, and I can’t use Brilliant Iron or Rockfall in a place like this. Wait, is that stone slab made of granite? I’ve got it. What was that spell’s name again? Guess I’ll just make something up. “Stone...whatever.”*

Phase of earth and metal—Cubical Gold. Five or six massive gold cubes grew out of the stone slab. The target had been destroyed from the inside. “Sorry for breaking it. I’ll do water now.”

“H-Hold on a second!” The glasses-wearing examiner stopped me. “What was that spell?”

“Stone...”

“What was that?”

“Sorry, I need to move on to the next one.” I briskly walked over to the next target.

“What did he call that spell?”

“The target broke from the inside...”

The other examinees fell silent behind me. Good. I didn’t want to have to explain it. The golden cubes were pyrite, a gold-colored mineral known for sparking when struck and forming beautiful cubic crystals. Granite was a rock made from hardened magma that contained iron and sulfur. By pouring metal and earth ki into it, they would crystalize, splitting the rock from the inside. It was a spell created for civil engineering, but it had finally come in handy.

“Now for water.” *The other examinees launched icicles at the target, but naturally, I don’t have a useless spell like that either. Hmm, that might do it. It’s large-scale, so I’ll use a hitogata to be safe.* I pointed my wand at the target.

“Icicle...whatever.”

Phase of yin and water—Frozen Cascade. A wave of water was released from my invisible hitogata. By excessively cooling it with yin ki, it would freeze the stone target upon impact. The massive torrent of water instantly turned to ice. *Oops. It was so wide I froze the dark and fire targets too. I might have overdone it a little.* “Uh, sorry about that. I’m done now. This should all melt eventually.”

Not a word was spoken in the ice-covered exam site. I walked back over to Yifa. “Let’s go.”

“O-Okay. What about the other elements?”

“Those three are the only ones I think I can do.” Wind wasn’t part of the Five Elements, and I didn’t fully understand light and dark. It didn’t seem like I could use this world’s magic to begin with. I’d tried several times over the years, but it had never worked. Magical power and cursed energy seemed to be two different things. Still, it wasn’t an issue as long as I had my sorcery. Judging from what I had seen, I could safely assume I would pass this exam.

Yifa giggled. “What is it?” I asked in response.

“Nothing. Everybody was just shocked by your magic, so I’m in a good mood.”

Cubical Gold

A spell that splits stone by applying metal ki to iron and earth ki to sulfur to create pyrite crystals. Also known as Fool’s Gold, pyrite is a gold-colored mineral that can form hexahedron, octahedron, and dodecahedron crystals. Its existence was already known in the first century CE, as Pliny the Elder wrote about a rock that sparked when struck in his encyclopedia, *Natural History*.

Frozen Cascade

A spell that unleashes a torrent of water excessively cooled by yin ki to freeze a target. Yin ki governs negative energy. The cooled water freezes rapidly upon

impact. The water is cooled to a lower limit of around -40 degrees Celsius. In theory, it could be cooled even further while still remaining liquid, but it turns into a glasslike substance known as amorphous ice, making it difficult to use. For that reason, Seika set a lower limit.

Interlude

Instructor Cordell at the Exam Site

Instructor Cordell adjusted his glasses and sighed. It was just before dusk, and no one was left at the exam site. This year's entrance exam had turned into a real mess.

"Good work today, Cordell."

"You too, Karen." He returned the female instructor's greeting.

"How did things go this year?"

"It was one accident after another," Cordell answered as he pushed up his glasses. "As you can see, the exam site I was in charge of is completely unusable." The exam site was covered in ice that had yet to melt, leaving it uncomfortably cold.

"The Lamprogue son, was it? I recall he used three elements."

"Yes. Even his servant was unusual. She just used fire and wind, but she melted one target and blew another away. I guess she broke the elemental resistance circles." Cordell had never seen anything like it in the three years he had been administering the entrance exam.

"That's all fine and well. The real problem is grading the boy."

"Do you have any idea what those earth and water spells were?"

"Not in the slightest. So how are we supposed to give him a score?" The practical exam was scored based on how accurately the examinee could cast standard spells. It wasn't meant to grade spells that were outside the ordinary.

"Unfortunately, I think fire is the only element I can grade him on."

"You know, I was actually working the reception desk when they showed up. Did you hear how much magical power they had?"

“No, was it some amazing amount?”

“The exact opposite. Yifa had so little it’s a miracle she can even cast spells, and Seika has none whatsoever. He’s magicless.”

“That’s unbelievable. Though to be honest, I’m not even surprised at this point. We have an even more outstanding talent than those two this year.”

“Amyu, the one whose exam I administered, right? I think she might be the first examinee in academy history to have destroyed the targets for every single element.” The female instructor chuckled. “She might be the Hero.”

“The Hero? Like from the fairy tales?”

“Indeed, the legendary Hero, said to be born when the Demon Lord revives.”

“Do you have kids, Karen?”

“Unfortunately, I’m single. I don’t mean to treat you like a child. I just happen to like fairy tales.”

“I’ve never thought they might be true until now, but you may have a point.” Cordell pushed up his round glasses. “It would certainly be interesting if they were real.”

“Yes, it would.”

Act 2

The day the exam results were announced, I dragged the pale-faced Yifa to the academy. “Ugh, I’m so nervous...”

“Looks like that’s it, Yifa.” There was a large noticeboard immediately past the front gate.

“Seika!” Yifa cried out, grabbing my sleeve. “I tried really hard. Please don’t abandon me if I fail.”

“I-I won’t, don’t worry.” *Now, where’s my name... Ah, there it is. I got 600 points on the written exam, and 120 points on the practical exam, for a total of 720. Third place overall. That’s probably a perfect score on the written exam. My practical score is a little lower than I expected, but this seems about right*

with regard to overall ranking. There are geniuses at any time and place. Now, second place is... “Wait, Yifa?!”

“I-I-I got second place?! I-I did it, Seika!”

She got 590 points on the written exam and 200 on the practical, for a total of 790. Wow... That’s kind of shocking. “I-I used three different elements and still scored 80 points lower than Yifa?”

“Hmm...” Yifa thought for a moment. “Maybe it’s because you didn’t destroy the targets.”

“Y-You’re right!” Yifa had scored 200 points by destroying the fire and wind targets. Meanwhile, I’d scored 120 points because I had only destroyed the earth target. If the other 20 points came from my fire and water spells, then it added up. Which meant the examiner saying not to destroy the targets had been a trap meant to trick the examinees. “Congratulations, Yifa.” I turned to face her. “Your cold, calculated decision not to pay attention to the examiner’s words and to ruthlessly, mercilessly destroy the targets paid off. I see I’m still quite naive. It’s my loss.”

“U-Um... You kinda made me sound like a monster, so I’m not sure how I feel about that, but thanks, Seika. It wasn’t on purpose though.”

Thus, the student surpasses the master.

“Anyway, Seika.”

“What is it?”

“You kept saying that getting anything less than a perfect score on the written exam was unacceptable, but everyone besides us scored less than 500 points.”

“Huh? Oh.” *It’s true. But why? The exam was so simple. Compared to the monjou tokugoushou distinguished scholar exams and the Song dynasty’s civil service exams in my past life... No, wait. This is an exam for twelve-year-olds. I was foolish to compare it to exams for becoming an elite government official.*

“Um... Th-That was just to motivate you! Since we only had six months to prepare.”

“Sure, we can go with that. I *am* grateful for it.”

I felt intense pressure coming from Yifa. I would have to do my best not to upset her in the future. *Hold on. The rest of the examinees scored below 500 points? That means the person in first place...* I was taken aback when I saw it. A total score of 1,060 points—600 points on the practical exam. The name said “Amyu.”

“Isn’t that amazing? Amyu was that red-haired girl, right?” Ignoring Yifa’s question, I stared at the noticeboard.

Interesting. I might have already found who I’m looking for.



A few days later, a formal notice that we had passed the exam arrived at the inn Yifa and I were staying at, and we were admitted into the academy. The entrance ceremony was today.

“Hey, Seika. Don’t you think this skirt is a little short?”

“N-No, not really.” *It’s definitely short. Still, that’s just how the uniform is designed.* I hadn’t noticed it much back in the Lamprogue family’s territory, but it seemed to be a popular style in big cities.



“We’re gonna be living in the dorms starting today. I wonder if they’ll let me in the boys’ dorm.”

“I seriously doubt that.”

“Then how am I supposed to be a good servant...?”

“Here, you’re just an ordinary student.” We walked through the academy’s campus as we talked. This world had two moons, so despite it being nighttime, it was still bright. The academy was especially bright tonight in particular—magical lights had been lit all over the place, illuminating the paths and buildings. “Yifa,” I said, coming to a stop.

“What?”

“Are there any elementals around here?”

“Um...ah!” Yifa ran over to a bush. “Bats.”

“Bats?”

“They’re dark elementals. That’s weird. Why are there so many here?”

“Probably because of this.” I pushed my way through the thicket. On the other side, a large, bluish-white magic circle had been drawn. “Yifa, do you think you can get the dark elementals to follow you?”

“Y-Yeah. The dark ones really like one of the magic stones we found.”

“Good.”

“How did you know that magic circle was there?”

“Intuition, I guess. I’ve always been pretty perceptive with regards to this stuff.”

“I see. What are we gonna do with this magic circle? It gives me a really bad feeling.”

“It belongs to the academy, right? Taking the elementals is one thing, but I don’t think we should mess with it. We don’t know what it’s used for.”

“Yeah... You’re right.”

“Let’s hurry on to the ceremony hall. We still have time, but it’d be bad if we

got lost,” I said, walking on ahead. Yifa followed behind me. *A bad feeling, huh? I couldn’t agree more. I haven’t done enough research on this world’s magic circles, but that flow of power is probably...* For some reason, I felt like the situation would end up working out well for me. That really was just my intuition.



The entrance ceremony was being held in a large hall. “Wow, it’s so big,” said Yifa. “Look at all the food.” There were a lot of new students. Probably two or three hundred. It seemed like we were supposed to grab a plate and eat while standing. What an odd party. “Seika, you’re already eating?”

“You should eat while you can too.”

“You sound like a commoner.” The host said a few words, and the ceremony began. Things were proceeding smoothly. “Seika, are you listening? Look, that Amyu girl is going to give a speech next.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s because she got the top score.” Looking up, I saw her red hair swaying onstage. She spoke with a clear, dignified voice.

“I don’t know everyone’s reason for being here today.”

I put down my plate. *Oh, here they come. I’m not sure if this is good timing or bad timing.* I was monitoring the situation through several shikigami I had sent out beforehand. Seeing through an owl was blurrier than a crow, but they had better night vision. *There they are. That’s really close. They’re right outside.*

“My reason for enrolling at this academy is—”

The next moment, the walls of the ceremony hall were blown away with a thunderous roar. Screams echoed through the hall. Rubble and fragments of stone fell to the ground. Through the dust clouding the air, the outside could be seen via a hole in the wall. Large, dark figures emerged from the hole, each nearly three times the size of a human. Their muscular bodies were covered in jet-black fur, and their faces were strange—not quite either cow or goat.

“D-Demons!”

“Lesser demons!” The students screamed. Taking that as a signal, many of them rushed towards the ceremony hall’s exit.

“Aaaah!”

Yifa cried out as I pulled her away from the crowd of people and into the cover of a large pillar. She’d been liable to get trampled where she had been standing just then. Peeking out from behind the pillar, I observed the enemy. There were three lesser demons. It seemed all the ones I had seen nearby had entered the ceremony hall.

They looked scary, but they were nothing to be afraid of. Although they wielded clubs, their movements were slow, and since all three had entered through the same hole in the wall, they were getting in each other’s way. In the meantime, flames and icicles had started pouring down on them. Struck by several spells, the demons faltered and froze in their tracks. However—

“They’re certainly taking their time. What are they doing?” *This is taking too long. Why aren’t they taking out these weaklings instantly?* One of the demons hid behind another and took a swing at the students casting magic with its club. *They’re too slow. They’re going to die.* Just as that thought crossed my mind, I saw a flash of red hair slip under the demon’s club.

The club was deflected with a loud clang, and the lesser demon was forced to step back. “If you can’t fight, get outta here!” Amyu cast a wind spell as she shouted, destroying the eye of another demon who cried out in pain.

The tide turned in an instant. The human side has the upper hand now. They’re going to be all right. That was bad for my heart. Still, those monsters are acting strange. Their attacks are sluggish, and they seem like they’re searching for something. Three of them feels needlessly excessive too. Is it a diversion? No, maybe it’s a recon group meant to see how we respond. No matter. Now, where’s the summoner hiding? I looked through the view of all the shikigami I had sent out through the campus. *Found him.*

“Yifa.”

“S-S-Seika? What is it?” Yifa’s voice was trembling. “Th-Those are demons. How did they get inside the academy?”

“It *is* surprising, isn’t it?”

“This is serious! I don’t wanna die!”

“Calm down. The instructors will be able to wipe them out easily enough. They’re just weaklings.”

“Weaklings?! They’re demons! They say a single one can wipe out an army!”

“Demons come in many forms. I’m pretty sure those are the weakest kind.”

“That doesn’t mean they’re weaklings...”

“Listen up, Yifa. You should hide here for a while. There are too many people crowding the exit right now. The demons should be taken care of pretty soon, but if the need arises, don’t hesitate to use your spells to run away. Got it?”

“Y-Yeah.” Just to be safe, I would leave a few shikigami around. That should be sufficient. “What about you?”

“I’ve got some business I need to take care of.”

“Huh? Business?”

“I’ll come right back if anything happens.” I stepped behind the pillar out of Yifa’s sight and swapped places with the shikigami I had watching the enemy.



There was a large forest behind the academy. Valuable medicinal herbs grew there, which was why the school had been built in this location to begin with. Although all the dangerous monsters had long since been eliminated, the forest’s depths remained an untouched sanctuary of nature.

A figure lurked in the forest. It was standing atop a bluish-white magic circle drawn in a clearing, deep in concentration. Its black fur was illuminated by the moonlight, and it had curved horns growing from its head. It was clearly not human. In my previous world, it might have been mistaken for an oni.

“When met upon a moonlit field, even the inhuman feel refreshing.” The figure turned its head at the sound of my voice, and I smiled at it. “That was a poem written by my master. I despised him, but I’ve always liked that poem. It means that when you meet someone on an eerily beautiful moonlit night, you’ll

feel strangely refreshed, even if that person is a monster. It perfectly describes the way I feel right now.”

The creature shot me a threatening glare, but I continued, undeterred. “My master grew mad in his later years. Inhuman applied to him as well. Even though he had lost his human heart, his appreciation for the moon’s beauty still remained. That’s another way to interpret the poem. How about you? Can you appreciate the beauty of this moonlit night despite being an inhuman monster?”

“Who are you?” the creature finally responded in a low, rumbling voice. Its face resembled both a human’s and a black goat’s. I had only read about them in books, but it had to be a demon. The race known as devils, no doubt. Its lips curled. “Why is a human child here? Did you seek me out? If so, you are a fool to face me alone.”

“I just wanted to play a little. My body’s grown weak.”

“So you acted hastily in the pursuit of glory. Pitiful, short-lived human.” The devil seemed to have interpreted my statement in a convenient way, so I asked it a question.

“If you’re so confident, then answer this question. I won’t run away. What are you looking for? I saw those lesser demons searching the place.”

“Oh?” The devil’s eyes opened slightly. “So you noticed. Yet you ask a foolish question—there is but one answer.”

“Do tell.”

“You need me to spell it out for you? The Hero, of course.”

“The Hero?” I tilted my head in confusion. I had read about the Hero in this world’s books, but I didn’t fully understand. “Like, that legendary person?”

“Indeed.”

“Why are you looking for the Hero?”

“Because despite a Hero having appeared amongst you humans, our Demon Lord has yet to be born! So we came to crush the Hero before she grows strong!”

“Hmm. Just to be sure, by ‘Hero,’ you mean the one from the fairy tales, right?”

“Fairy tales?” The devil fell silent for a moment, then burst into laughter. “How amusing! Foolish humans! You would call that legendary battle a mere fairy tale? If you are unaware, then it would seem that you’ve lost the means of foretelling the birth of the Hero and the Demon Lord! Has this extended peace made humanity fall so low?”

I sighed. “I’m not sure I follow.” It seemed to be saying that there were powerful individuals known as the Hero and the Demon King who were periodically reincarnated. The interval in between reincarnations was so long that the human side regarded them as fairy tales, while the demons, with their long lifespans, had passed the knowledge down orally. “Do the Hero and Demon Lord truly exist? They aren’t just your kind’s delusions?”

“The oracle’s revelation twelve years ago was no falsehood. I saw the Hero on this very night: the red-haired girl with unusual power.”

“Red-haired?” Could it be? “You mean Amyu? She did seem oddly powerful. Hmm, so she’s the Hero.”

“Her name is Amyu? That makes things easier.”

“You’re welcome. Although”—I broke out into a malicious grin—“you’re going to die here.”

“Hmm. Is that the end of your questioning? Then we shall settle this quickly. Come, my retainers.” Three demons emerged from a smaller magic circle within the huge one.

Hmm, they look kind of strong. They’re smaller than the ones in the ceremony hall, but I can feel immense power flowing through them—especially the one in the center with the red pattern on its body. Still, compared to me...

“These are no lesser demons. They are my most elite, capable of facing a human army alone. Unfortunately—”

“Anyway.” *Phase of fire and earth—Oni Flame.* The demon on the left was struck by a large, blue ball of fire. The Oni Flame burst, its core leaving a gaping hole in the demon’s chest. As it was distracted by its collapsing ally to its left, I

stealthily attached a hitogata to the demon on the right. I made a hand sign with one hand.

Phase of yang—Fallen Fruit. The rightmost demon was crushed instantly. The ground gave in under its own weight, which had been increased one thousandfold. The demon's body had been turned into a pile of mush in the center. "I don't need the weak ones."

Not so much as glimpsing at its allies who had been defeated in an instant, the red-patterned demon rushed at me, brandishing its claws.

"This one, however, I'll be taking."

The final demon froze in place—its outstretched claws didn't budge. It was surrounded by five hitogata. They formed a pentagram with a hitogata at each of its vertices, sealing its movement. Hitogata which would become the gateway floated in the air as I made a hand sign and chanted a Sanskrit mantra.

Protection—Anti-Demon Plane Shift. Space itself distorted, light leaking out. The final demon was sucked into the gateway the hitogata had created. A moment later, the forest grew silent, unchanged except for the embers of the phosphorus fire and the foul-smelling sludge that had once been a demon.

"What did you just do?"

"Hmm? I took it. I don't need it or anything, but I figured, why not?"

"Teleportation magic? While I do not know where you sent him, you must be at least a little competent to be able to transport my retainers even with their mastery of dark magic." The devil devised a convenient interpretation of what had happened and glared at me. "Very well. Take pride in the fact that you will die by the hand of the champion of the devil race, Gal Galeos." The devil introduced himself, then the ground around him began to swell. Lumps of earth transformed into several black, metal swords. "I am a metal devil who controls fire and earth. Do not think the same tricks will work on me." The blades floated into the air and pointed towards me.

Are those made of iron? He certainly seems stronger than the other demons. Although, I did beat them in an instant, so I don't actually know how strong they were.

“The same tricks won’t work?” I fired several Oni Flames at him to test that theory. Galeos launched his floating blades in response, intercepting the fireballs. They pierced right through the blue flames, causing them to burst in midair. “Hmm. Then how about this?”

“It’s pointless.” All the Fallen Fruit hitogata I had secretly sent at Galeos burned up the moment they got near him. “Are you finished? Then die.” Galeos launched a blade at me.

I easily dodged it as it whistled through the air. *That’s it? That was so slow. This might be a letdown.*

“Fool!”

I instantly dodged to the side, managing to avoid the blade flying towards me from behind with only a small scratch on the cheek. Glancing behind me, I saw the fading glow of a magic circle in the air.

Did he teleport the blade after launching it?

“I am a devil. I can use dark-element teleportation magic as though it were my arms and legs.” Galeos lightly swung his arm, sending bright red flames flying towards me. I leaped back to avoid them, but the bright fire disoriented me for a moment. Because of that, I was a second late in noticing that Galeos had closed in on me. “Did you get conceited?” He swung the black sword in his hand.

Burning pain raced through my right arm as blood flew through the air. My arm had been severed at my elbow. Fortunately, it only took me a moment to realize that. I clicked my tongue in annoyance. Swapping positions with a nearby shikigami, I distanced myself from Galeos. After curbing the pain in my arm with a flow of ki, I used a hitogata to stop the bleeding. Although I could still fight, I couldn’t help my frustration. He had gotten one over on me.

“You use strange magic, human. But how will you fare against this?” Before I knew it, Galeos had created countless small blades and fired them in every direction. They accurately pierced through my shikigami. Having lost their power, the paper hitogata fluttered to the ground.

I could feel my face stiffen. “So you can tell where my shikigami are. I’m

pretty sure I made them invisible.”

“Now you can no longer teleport,” said Galeos. “I acknowledge your strength, human. You effortlessly defeated my retainers and wielded various spells against me. I will tell my people of your defeat alongside the Hero’s.”

“You think this is over?” I fired several Oni Flames at Galeos, but he disappeared amid the glow of a magic circle.

“Your arrogance was the cause of your defeat.”

A moment later, black swords rained down on me from every angle. With nowhere to run, my entire body was pierced through. I fell to my knees. Blood gushed from my entrails and overflowed from my mouth.

Galeos stood before me as I was slowly dyed red. “It’s unfortunate that you possessed such strength as a child. Had you been more mature, you would not have taken on such an ill-advised battle.”

“Like I said...you think this is over?”

“It *is* over.” Galeos casually swung his sword, sending my head flying.



Looking down at the headless corpse, Galeos sighed. “I never expected to have such an entertaining battle with a human child. No, there will be another. The Hero still remains.” The devil turned around.

When he did, I recited a poem at his back. “*Lonely is the clear midnight sky in absence of those accursed dark clouds.*”

Fallen Fruit

A spell that increases the target’s weight and crushes it. Yang ki governs positive energy. In the sixteenth story of the twenty-fourth volume of the *Konjaku Monogatarishuu*, Abe no Seimei is recorded as having used a similar spell.

Act 3

Galeos slowly turned his head. His normally expressionless face was warped with astonishment.

I smiled at him. “That was the poem I wrote in response to my master. A night sky without any clouds is missing something. Even though I detested you, like a cloud that hides the moon, I felt that way when you were gone. That’s the idea. What do you think? I’m not too good at poetry. I never got to hear my master’s thoughts, seeing as I killed them. By the way, ‘inhuman’ in that first poem was referring to me. Isn’t that awful?”

“How are you still alive?” Galeos asked, ignoring everything I had just said.

“What do you mean, how? As you can see, I’m alive as can be.” I spread out my arms. Not only was I in perfect health, there wasn’t a drop of blood on my uniform.

“Light element healing magic? No, revival magic? I suppose I’ll just have to kill you again to find out.” Galeos created a massive sword in a flash and hurled it at me. It pierced right through my forehead, splitting my skull. I died.

And then, the spell activated. The sword stuck in my head vanished. My wounds healed in an instant. “And I’m back.” I had come back to life. I discarded the powerless hitogata with a hole in its head that had served as my replacement.



“What is that magic? Reviving is one thing, but why did my blade disappear? Did you turn back time?”

“No, nothing like that. I simply devised a means of erasing all foreign objects. It fixes my clothes as well. It wouldn’t be useful when getting burned otherwise.”

“Very well. Then I need only continue killing you until you die for good.”

I was shocked to see Galeos create more blades. “You still want to keep going? Normally this would be when you retreat. Do you want to kill the Hero that badly?”

“That goes without saying. She must be defeated before she can become the strongest. I won’t let this opportunity escape me.”

“The strongest, huh?” I couldn’t help but snicker. “How dull.”

“What?”

“I’m saying being the strongest isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. The Hero, the Demon Lord, and you, for being obsessed with them—you’re all stupid. The people of this country who think the Hero is a fairy tale are all smarter than you. Think about it for a second. Who actually runs the world? Is it the strong? People who excel at martial arts?”

In my past life, there had been others who had possessed unbelievable strength. There had been an Islamic leader of an assassin cult with the blessing of an evil shaitan spirit. A Jewish philosopher with unfathomable knowledge had controlled countless mechanical dolls. Even in Japan, there had been a warrior capable of slaying an oomukade giant centipede and oni despite only being human. Yet these were not the people who had run the world.

“Power is in numbers. Strength means having the cunning to manipulate the masses. The individual means nothing in the grand scheme of things.”

“You say that only because you don’t know true strength. All people bow before overwhelming force!”

“I’m speaking from experience as the former strongest.”

“Enough nonsense!” All of Galeos’s floating swords disappeared.

Oh, he teleported them. “I’m getting tired of that.” Black swords rained on me from every direction, yet they all crumbled before ever reaching me. Broken iron returned to the earth, piling up around me.

“A barrier?! But that shouldn’t disable my magic!”

“Is it not the job of a barrier to block your spells? And this one is made with eleven hitogata. It won’t break so easily.”

“Then I just have to destroy those talismans!” Galeos launched fire and blade, aiming at the hitogata at the vertices of my barrier.

That’s not going to do much, but I guess I’ll play along. Phase of water—Cascade. A vast torrent of water poured out of my hitogata. The flood swallowed up the fire, the blades, and finally, Galeos himself. Even without yin ki freezing it, a massive torrent of water was still powerful.

“Argh! What is this water spell?! How much magical power do you have?!” Galeos reappeared. He had likely used his teleportation to escape. “If magic won’t work, then I’ll finish you directly!” Galeos leaped at me with inhuman force.

Yeah, that figures. As I retreated, I opened up a gateway with my hitogata. *Summoning—Raijuu.* I called forth a small, black, badger-like creature from another plane. It let out a strange cry, like a growl mixed with electrical sparks. Perhaps sensing the danger it posed, Galeos immediately turned his attention to the raijuu. *He’s got good intuition. Unfortunately it’s too late.*

The raijuu fired a massive bolt of lightning at Galeos. With a loud zap, the devil was blown away, rolling across the ground. The light was so bright it blinded me for a moment. *It’s as impressive as ever.* Raijuu were ayakashi that occasionally fell to the surface when lightning struck the ground. Although their appearance was that of a small mammal, they had the full force of a lightning bolt contained within their bodies. Soaking wet like Galeos was, even the lightning-repellent blessing sailors had wouldn’t have been able to protect him.

“Hey, are we done already? Ah.” The devil had disappeared. It seemed like he had teleported again. *Is he coming at me from behind?* I turned around—then Galeos’s sword pierced through my stomach.

“Did you get conceited?” Galeos asked, glaring at me.

Coughing up blood, I simply smiled and grabbed his arm. “Caught you.” *Phase of metal and water—Ashen Flowers.*

I activated a spell between Galeos and myself. A yellow pillar of fire rose up alongside a tremendous explosion. Blown away by the blast, I stood up a few moments later and dusted off my uniform. Looking over at Galeos, I saw him in a terrible state. He was missing an arm, his entrails were spilling out of his stomach, and his body was melting in places.

“Metal devil,” I said to Galeos as he lay on the verge of death. “Did you know that when you break salt down into its two components, metal ki will appear in one? That means salt contains metal. When in its pure form, that metal reacts violently with water, as you just saw.” I sat unharmed next to a hitogata with its arms and legs torn off. They had been dissolved by a strong alkali.

“I’ve never heard...of such a metal...”

“You guys aren’t very well educated.”

“What?”

“I’ll admit, your four-element magic is fairly useful. Particularly against monsters.” In terms of pure strength, the ayakashi of my previous world were far more powerful. However, ayakashi rarely harmed humans. Even wild dogs and bears were scarier. And because they were beings of the spirit, not of the flesh, sorcery was highly effective against them.

Monsters, on the other hand, were more dangerous than wild dogs and bears, and they attacked humans. Because their state of being was closer to that of animals, sorcery was comparatively less effective on them. In order to quickly obtain the force necessary to take them down, the four-element system of magic that simply launched ice and fire had been developed.

“That’s all fine and well, but why not dig deeper? Have you ever thought about what fire is? About how water can be broken down into air? About how when air is cooled, it becomes water that’s even colder than ice? Did you know that the most common component in the earth is actually the same as what’s in air?”

“What...are you talking about?”

“You can’t even keep up with a conversation of this level? That’s no good. I’m talking about observable concepts, not processing those observations or understanding their origins. You should really do some more studying. I once crossed the seas in pursuit of ancient wisdom. I wonder if there are any mages in this world with that level of passion.”

Pushing himself off the ground with his one remaining arm, Galeos unsteadily stood back up. “You would lecture your enemy? You certainly are relaxed.”

“I guess.”

“But I can still fight. You can’t have many of those strange talismans left. There’s still a chance for me to win.”

“Talismans? You mean these?” *Summoning—Hitogata. Summoning—Hitogata. Summoning—Hitogata. Summoning—*

I retrieved countless hitogata from the alternate plane, filling the night sky. “I’ve got plenty left.” I had spent years diligently making them. I smiled at Galeos, who responded with a blank stare.

“Impossible... I defeated the previous chief... I was hailed as the second coming of the champion... I even crushed a human Sword Sovereign...”

“Are we done already? You were weaker than I expected.”

“Wha...”

“I don’t need you if all you can do is run around and summon weaklings. You’d probably die if I sent you to the other plane now anyway.” I let out a sigh. “All right. I know the party is at its peak, but it’s time to wrap things up. For the final act...” I pulled out a hitogata and opened a gateway. “You will become my servant’s meal, and we’ll draw this banquet to a close.”

Summoning—Mizuchi. Space itself distorted, and a long, serpentine body emerged. Clad in turquoise scales, it twisted around as it ascended into the sky. Though the creature resembled a snake, it was no mere serpent. It had a long snout filled with fangs. Two whiskers as thick as ropes. The white hair on its head fluttered in the wind next to its horns.

Mizuchi turned around and approached the devil, opening its jaw wide to consume its prey. Galeos's eyes went wide with terror.

"What is that thing?! This isn't possible! Even the Demon Lord couldn't subjugate dragons!"

"It's not a dragon."

Mizuchi's fangs seized Galeos. The devil's body was taken into the sky, crunched on a few times, then swallowed into Mizuchi's stomach. I spoke a few words to the devil champion who could no longer hear me.

"It's a ryuu."



In the now silent forest, I took a deep breath. "Now to recover Mizuchi and be done with this. Wait... Hey!" Having eaten Galeos, Mizuchi was now rampaging through the sky. *Is it food poisoning? No, it's trying to run away!* "Damn it! Behave yourself!"

I sent out several shikigami in an attempt to restrain Mizuchi. Opening a gateway, I somehow managed to push its massive body back into the other plane and let out a sigh of relief.

"Master Seika!" Yuki came running over from a nearby tree in her long, slender fox form.

"Sorry, Yuki," I said, waiting for her to climb onto my head. "Did you get left behind when I swapped?"

"It's fine. I just didn't think I'd be helpful, so I was hiding."

"I completely forgot about you. You could have said something sooner."

"I'm a kuda-gitsune, so hiding's not a problem. More importantly, was it okay to use up three of your precious substitution hitogata against that level of opponent?" Yuki asked with concern in her voice.

"I was always planning on dying three or four times to test them out, so all went as expected."

"I see. So how was the spell's effectiveness?"

“Excellent. Better than I expected, even. Using an entire tooth as a medium is completely different, and those were only baby teeth.” The spell to pass all one’s wounds and illnesses to a hitogata required part of the target’s body. Normally, I would use hair, but this time I had ground my baby teeth that had fallen out into a powder and pasted them to my hitogata. I had used my wisdom teeth the same way in my past life, but I had been stingy and divided them up rather than using the full tooth, so I hadn’t revived in such a dramatic fashion. “I used a couple of them up for this experiment, but I’ve still got over ten left, so I should be fine. I’m not planning on letting myself die so easily from here out. The other hitogata are mostly done for, though.”

I had lost many of them stopping my bleeding, and others had been destroyed by Galeos. It seemed unlikely that I would be able to make paper at the academy, so I would have to purchase the materials to make more.

Yuki spoke to me as I sighed. “After you died the first time, couldn’t you have left the rest to Mizuchi? Or maybe your ushi-oni or rokubi would have been better.”

“I haven’t had an opportunity like this since I reincarnated. I wanted to do the fighting myself.”

This time Yuki was the one to sigh. “Did you enjoy yourself?”

“More or less. I got to test several spells. I’ve definitely lost my touch, though. I didn’t expect an ayakashi on Mizuchi’s level to defy me.” Frankly, it had come as a shock, but I shouldn’t have been surprised. I was indeed weaker than in my past life. My stock of hitogata was less than a tenth of what it once had been, and the ayakashi I had sealed had dwindled as well.

My trump card, the kishin Sukuna, had been defeated. My rairyuu and hyouryuu, powerful ryuu that could control even the weather itself, had been stolen from me by that girl as well. Somehow, Mizuchi was my strongest ayakashi now. What a sad state of affairs. The one thing this body had going for it was its circulation of cursed energy—aside from that, it was woefully insufficient in many ways. I didn’t need to be the strongest, but I at least wanted to recover the strength I’d had in my past life. I wouldn’t feel at ease until I did. I needed to work harder.

“Today looked like the most fun you’ve had since summoning me, so I’m glad!” said Yuki. “Master Seika?”

Looking back on it, maybe I did get a little carried away. I feel like I said some embarrassing things. “Yuki, don’t tell anyone else about what happened today.”

“Of course. Oh, and I didn’t know you wrote poetry! That was wonderful! I’d love to hear some love poems or something you wrote in the past!”

“Please stop...”



When I returned to the ceremony hall, I could hear all sorts of commotion within. Although it was still packed with people, I entered through a door where the panic had subsided and quickly found Yifa.

“Ah, Seika! Where’d you go?”

“I just had something to take care of. Were you okay?”

“Y-Yeah. Everyone beat the demons like you said. A few people got hurt, though.” I surveyed the hall. The bodies of three lesser demons lay face down beneath the lights. They had been burned and pierced through by a sword too large for a human to wield. It seemed the fighting had continued until not too long ago.

I had been worried about what would happen to the lesser demons after Galeos went down. I was glad they hadn’t exploded or anything. A few wounded were to be expected. Even when the enemy was weak, it was difficult to properly respond to an ambush.

A red-haired girl standing atop the corpse of one of the demons caught my eye. She was covered in blood and her sword was still stuck in the corpse. Her shoulders heaving, the other students stared at her from a distance. They all had looks of awe on their faces. *Did she...?*

“Amyu took down a demon all by herself,” Yifa said, her voice faintly trembling.

That explained it. This was a sight I knew well. In my past life, that had been me. *The Hero, huh? Not bad.* I covered my mouth as a smile broke out on my

face. “Yifa, I’m going to head back to the dorm.”

“Huh? Seika?”

I turned around and left the bright ceremony hall, heading down a dim corridor. “Master Seika?” Yuki sounded worried, but I didn’t feel like responding. I had entered the magic academy in search of a certain person. If it was a place where talented people gathered, there had been a chance I would find them here. However, I hadn’t expected to find her so quickly—the person suited to become the strongest.

“It seems like I’m quite fortunate in this life, Yuki.” The world was, in fact, driven by force. Galeos hadn’t been wrong about that. However, just as the hunting dog is cooked after the nimble hare is caught and the nail that sticks out is hammered down, no matter how strong you may be, once you’ve served your purpose, you’ll be dragged down by your surroundings and crushed. I had learned that firsthand in my past life.

That was why I needed someone who could become the strongest in my place. The same role I had played for those arrogant officials in the Imperial Court. It was under the umbrella of the strongest that the most profit could be made. Yifa wasn’t talented enough, but the Hero—she was perfect.

I would become her ally. Her trusted confidant. She might end up getting crushed in the end, but this time, I would simply mourn from the sidelines. This time, I would be happy. I could barely contain my grin. *Demons may attack again, but you have nothing to fear, Amyu. I’ll make you the strongest, even if I have to defeat the Demon Lord to do it.*

Cascade

A spell that uses water ki to create a torrent of water. “Cascade” refers to a waterfall.

Ashen Flowers

A spell that uses metal ki to create sodium, then combines it with water to cause an explosion. Alkali metals

such as sodium react violently with water. The flames of the explosion take on the yellow color of sodium fire, and the water that is sent flying becomes a strong alkaline solution capable of melting flesh. The word “alkali” is derived from the Arabic word for plant ash, thus the name Ashen Flowers.

Chapter 3

Act 1

Due to the chaos during the entrance ceremony, our academy life had started about ten days later than expected.

“Seika! Good morning.” Yifa came running over and greeted me with a smile as I walked from the dorms to the school building. I returned her greeting.

“Good morning, Yifa.” We had been living this life for a month now. Since the demon incident, the school had been working feverishly to resolve everything. Supposedly, some people had even suggested temporarily closing the academy and sending the students home until their safety could be guaranteed.

The one who had summoned the demons was still unknown—because he had been eaten by my ayakashi—so I couldn’t blame them for their caution. However, the academy had ended up not going down that route for a variety of reasons. Although the summoner was unaccounted for, they had found the magic circle on campus grounds, meaning they knew how it had happened and could take appropriate countermeasures. Then they had hired adventurers to patrol the academy campus. Said adventurers were still here even now. That was the gist of the school’s response.

I spotted a familiar redhead by the school building and raised my arm, greeting her with a smile. “Hey. Good morning, Amyu.”

The Hero, Amyu, stopped, then looked at me, her displeasure readily apparent.

“You mind not talking to me so familiarly?” she said, flipping her red hair and walking off.

“S-Seika...” Yifa gave me a pitying look as I stood there frozen with an awkward smile on my face.

No matter. The plan I had come up with after reincarnating was a simple one.

I would befriend someone strong, then reap all the rewards of being under their umbrella. It was a wonderfully lowbrow plan if I did say so myself. No one would pay attention to such a person. I wouldn't have either. There was no way I would meet the same end as in my last life. The only potential roadblock was finding someone with the requisite strength, but fortunately I had met her very quickly—the Hero.

Furthermore, she was a classmate. I was in the ideal position to get close to her. Our academy life had only just begun. I had plenty of time to spare. Her not liking me at the moment was of little consequence. We would slowly become friends, and then—my mind went blank. *Huh? How do you make friends?* I tried my best to remember, but I'd made very few friends in my past life. It had always been other people approaching me, never the other way around. Now that I wanted to make a friend, I didn't know what to do. *To think I've lived well over a century...*

I broke out in a cold sweat. A dreadfully frightening possibility had just occurred to me. *Am I socially awkward?*



After our morning classes, I headed to the cafeteria with Yifa. “Seika, you look pale. Are you okay?” she asked with a worried look.

“Y-Yeah, I’m fine now.” I would be all right. I could make friends. In this life, I came from a good family and had decent looks. A womanizing aristocrat I had known in my past life had told me that interacting with someone more frequently made it easier to get close to them, regardless of the form those interactions took. If I kept proactively reaching out to her, I could pull it off. I just had to believe that.

I decided to ignore the fact that in the month since school had begun, Yifa was still the only person I was close with. Thinking about it only made me more anxious.

“You’re pretty rude, aren’t you?!” A voice echoed down the hall, and all the nearby students looked over. Four tall, male students were surrounding Amyu. They seemed to be upperclassmen.

Oh boy. She’s in trouble again. After single-handedly taking down a lesser

demon, Amyu had suddenly become a legend at the school. I had been certain lesser demons were weaklings, but as it turned out, the general public didn't think so. Had she taken it down with a small group, she would certainly have been considered a legend. However, by doing it alone, she had gone beyond that—she was considered a monster. She was too strong. The people around her all looked at her with awe, but it came from fear rather than respect. Amyu was alone.

To make matters worse, her grades had invoked the envy of the upperclassmen who hadn't been at the entrance ceremony. Only a few high-achieving upperclassmen had been at the ceremony. The rest didn't know how terrifying demons were—they had just heard Amyu's name. Already at the top of her class, that made Amyu even more of a target.

As a result, I frequently saw her getting into this sort of trouble. The harassment showed no signs of stopping, likely because Amyu never gave in, no matter what they did. I sighed. *That's what happens to the strong. The other students are just watching from a distance. They're probably afraid of the upperclassmen. Fine, then.*

"Excuse me, is something wrong?" I called out to them, and the four upperclassmen immediately turned around and eyed me with suspicion. I simply smiled and continued speaking. "I have plans with her after this."

"Who're you?" Standing at the group's center, a blond upperclassman, the lankiest of the four, spoke to me. "Get out of here. I'm educating this commoner. Anyone who ignores me, Regulus Cid Gable, needs to learn how the world works."

"I don't have time to listen to some wimpy noble's boasting. Get outta my way." Amyu's provocation drew the upperclassmen's ire back to her.

Give me a break... "Amyu, let's leave it at that."

"Didn't I tell you to get out of here? What family do you belong to? Surely a commoner isn't getting an attitude with me."

"I..."

The student to his right whispered into Regulus's ear. "He's the Lamprogue

son. The one everybody's talking about."

The moment he heard that, a fake smile appeared on Regulus's face. "Well, well. I had heard a son from the prestigious Lamprogue family had enrolled this year. That must be you. It's an honor to meet you, Seika Lamprogue."

"Uh-huh. Thanks."

"I must say, Count Lamprogue is quite bold to send his magicless, illegitimate son to a *magic* academy—with a slave, no less. I don't know how much money he paid to get you in, but it must have been a lot."

Is that the kind of rumor people are spreading? I get that rumors are just part of being nobility, but still... Am I being isolated just like Amyu?

"The quality of students here sure has declined. The head of the class is a commoner, second place is a slave, and third is an illegitimate son. Let me ask you again—surely a bastard isn't getting an attitude with the son of Marquess Gable?"

"..."

"Good, that's what I thought. Now, for your apology..." Regulus looked over at Yifa. "Lend us your slave for the night, and we'll be gracious enough to forgive you. Isn't that right, everyone?"

His lackeys laughed vulgarly. A particularly large upperclassman wrapped his arm around Yifa's shoulder.

"Forget one night, we should just buy her, Regulus. This slave's not half bad." Yifa looked down at the floor.

"That's not a bad idea at all," Regulus said in an exaggerated voice. "How much for her? Name your price and I'll pay."

"Sorry, but Yifa isn't for sale."

"Then what will you offer instead? Oh?" Regulus reached into my breast pocket and pulled out the leather pouch containing the glass pen I had received from Luft. "What's this?"

"Those pens are pretty hard to find, even in the capital, Regulus."

“Hmm, this is too good for a bastard. You know, I was just thinking I needed a replacement quill.”

“That pen is important to me. Please give it back.”

“Did you not understand me? I’m saying I’ll forgive you if you give me this pen. Or do you want to give me your slave instead?” Regulus asked with an insincere smile.

I heaved an extra large sigh. *I’m sick of this.* I filled my voice with cursed energy. “Regulus Cid Gable.”

“What? You better watch your mouth—”

“Freeze.”

The moment the words left my mouth, Regulus stopped moving. He looked like a ridiculous statue with his mouth hanging open. In fact, if it weren’t for the movement of his eyes, it would have been easy to mistake him for one. I took the leather pouch and glass pen out of his hands.

“Thank you for returning it.” Next, I turned to the well-built student with his arm around Yifa’s shoulder. “What’s your name?”

“I-I’m Mark, son of Viscount Pleng. You may be from a count’s family, but don’t think a bastard like you can boss me around!”

“Now, Mark Pleng, punch the marquess’s frozen son over there.”

“Huh? A-Ahh!” Mark involuntarily sent Regulus flying with a loud thud. “Regulus?! Wh-Why did I...”

Mark and the other lackeys rushed over to Regulus, who was now stretched out on the floor but didn’t respond. He seemed to have been knocked out.

You should become a martial artist, Mark. You’re more suited for it. At any rate, this guy’s a lost cause. Get hung up on status and this is what happens. Even an amateur in my previous world would have put up a better fight.

“Let’s go, Yifa.” I took her hand and started walking away. I could feel her hand faintly trembling in mine. “You’re a bit of a scaredy-cat, aren’t you, Yifa? You could yawn and turn them to ash now.”

“I couldn’t do that,” she responded in a small voice. Maybe not literally, but she was stronger than them. There was no reason for her to be afraid. “I’m your property. Everything I do becomes the responsibility of you and the Lamprogue family.”

I stopped in my tracks. *So that’s why.* “I’m sorry. You’re right. I’ll be more careful in the future.” I patted Yifa’s head. Her soft blonde hair felt nice to the touch. *Living a cunning life certainly isn’t easy. Granted, I didn’t intend for that to become a fight... If you don’t fight back, people take from you, but if you do, you end up standing out. Nothing can ever be easy.* “Yifa, don’t worry about me or my family and just do what you want. I’ll figure something out.”

“Hey.” I heard a voice behind me. Turning around, I saw Amyu with her hands on her hips. “What was that?”

I responded with a smile. “That lackey seemed to have a lot of pent-up frustration with the marquess’s son.”

“Quit screwing around. You did that, didn’t you?”

“Who can say?”

Amyu walked over to me and brought her face close to mine. I could see the intensity in her bright green eyes. “Answer me,” she said threateningly.

I just exhaled in response. “Do you expect me to answer that honestly? I’m not going to reveal my hand so easily. Who would?”

“Fine, then.” Her red hair passed right by me and I got the urge to say something uncalled for.

“I thought you were going to thank me.”

“Huh?” Amyu turned around. “Were you trying to help me?”

“Yes.”

“Well, don’t bother. Those guys are nothing to me.”

“Carelessly making enemies everywhere you go will come back to bite you one of these days,” I warned.

“That’s none of your business. What’s your deal? Stay away from me.”

I'm getting tired of this. "Why don't we be friends?" I said, forcing a smile.

"Huh? Where did that come from?" she asked.

"We're both having a hard time due to rumors and prejudice, aren't we? We should help each other out."

"Rumors? Putting aside you not having any magic and making a slave serve you, I only just now heard about the illegitimate child thing. You just don't have any friends, do you?" Amyu shot me a cold glare as I faltered beneath her psychological attack. "I didn't come here to make friends. I came here to get stronger."

"Is that why you're always so grouchy?"

"So what if it is?" Amyu demanded.

"It's a bad plan. If you want to get stronger, then that's all the more reason for you to make allies."

"Huh?"

"Strength comes from numbers. There's a limit to what you can accomplish alone. Right now, you're the weakest person in this academy."

Amyu glared at me. "So you're saying I should hang out with the other overachievers? *Lame.*"

"Is it lame?"

"At any rate, not interested. I'd rather have no allies at all than weak ones. I don't care how famous your family is—you don't have any magical power."

"That doesn't mean I can't cast spells. We have class together. You should know that."

"So what? Your own servant scored better than you on the practical exam. The only reason you even got third place is because you probably cheated on the written exam. A perfect score? That just makes you look more pathetic."

"No, that exam wasn't even—" As I was trying to respond, Yifa took a step forward.

"Th-Then does that mean I cheated too? I only scored ten points lower than

Seika.”

Amyu looked apprehensive for a moment. “Didn’t you adjust your score based on his? Because your noble master couldn’t afford to lose to his slave on the written exam too.”

“Seika is the one who tutored me. He taught me magic too.” Amyu fell silent, so Yifa continued. “Seika’s actually better at magic than I am, but he’s kind, so he...”

“What does being kind have to do with anything?”

“He held back so he wouldn’t damage the targets! If the examiner hadn’t pretended that was a bad thing, he would have destroyed all three and gotten a perfect score on three elements!”

“Pretended? What are you talking about? Destroying the targets shouldn’t have any impact on your score.”

“Huh? But we heard you got a perfect score by destroying all six targets.”

“Look...” Amyu put her hand on her temple. “The practical exam is for grading how accurately you can cast standard spells.”

“Huh?” Both Yifa and I expressed our surprise simultaneously.

“Did you think destroying the targets would get you a perfect score? I can’t believe you. When did the examiner ever once say that? Think about it for a second. Those targets aren’t disposable, you know? Obviously they don’t want them to get destroyed. You guys really are stupid, aren’t you?”

Yifa and I looked at each other. We had nothing to say in response. “S-Seika.” Yifa shot me a pleading glance, but I just averted my eyes.

“Yifa was the one who suggested it,” I muttered.

“B-But you agreed with me!” she objected.

“What are you even arguing about? You’re both equally stupid. Actually, don’t try to blame it on your servant. That’s petty.” Amyu let out a big sigh. “A stupid noble and his stupid slave. Dealing with you two is way more exhausting than those other morons.” Amyu turned around to leave, then suddenly lurched forward. Although she hadn’t lost her footing, she was pinching the inner

corners of her eyes like she was in pain. Had we exhausted her that much?

“Are you okay?”

“It’s nothing,” Amyu replied, leaving us behind.

Hmm. I have a bad feeling about this. But that’s just my intuition speaking.

“She called us stupid, Seika.”

I looked to my side and saw Yifa giving Amyu a resentful look. I couldn’t help but give an awkward chuckle.

“You know, you’re brave at the strangest times.”

“What do you mean?”

“You kind of exploded on her. Personally, I’d be way more afraid of upsetting Amyu than that marquess’s son.”

Yifa hesitated for a moment. “I get angry too.”



Afternoon classes were to be held in a large lecture hall a short distance away from the main school building. While we were divided into classes based on our scores on the entrance exam, we didn’t always attend lectures with the same peers.

Our magic practice classes let students choose the elements they wanted to focus on, but occasionally there were classes like this one that the entire year would attend. For that reason, Yifa and I were walking from the cafeteria to the large lecture hall. The academy’s campus had as many paths as it did buildings. They weren’t arranged in any regular order, making it difficult to remember where everything was.

I looked up at the clear sky above. It was a comfortable spring day.

“Hmm?”

I noticed something strange as we approached a school building. There was a pot floating in the air outside a window on the third floor. *What’s going on?* I silently observed the pot, and just as we walked underneath, it started to shake ominously. *I’ve got a bad feeling about this.* I pulled Yifa close to me.

“Eek! Wh-What is it?”

A moment later, the pot tipped over. It spun around, spilling a large quantity of black liquid. Just before it rained down on us, I had two shikigami around six meters away swap places with me and Yifa. The black liquid poured down on the spot where we had just been standing, dying the path black.

A foul smell filled the air. *Gross. I don't know what that is, but I don't like it.* My blackened hitogata were likely unusable now, but I recovered them with another shikigami anyway. Yifa was spacing out.

“H-Huh? What just happened?”

“Hey, you two! Are you all right?!” An instructor wearing round glasses came running out of the school building. He looked at the path that had been dyed black, then over at us, confusion evident on his face. “Huh? Weren't you just over there?”

“Ah, Instructor Cordell!” Yifa called out to him.

Instructor Cordell walked over to us, then adjusted his glasses as he spoke. “Oh, it's you two. Sorry for scaring you. Did anyone get hurt?”

“We're fine, but what was that?” she asked.

“Just a medium I was planning on using for research. It's monster blood mixed with some herbs and minerals.” That explained why it smelled so bad.

“Instructor Karen was supposed to help me bring it up to the top floor, but I couldn't find her. So I tried to do it by myself, and, well... Now I have to start all over.” Cordell sighed, his shoulders slumping.

“You were the one making that pot float?” I asked.

“Yeah. Though it's not my specialty, so I'm not very good at it.” Gravity magic fell under the dark element, as I recalled. I had learned in class that gravity, as well as the closely related time and space magic, were all dark elemental magic. Conversely, the light element controlled lightning and light itself. There was more to it than that, as dark also included attacks using shadows and the creation of cursed items, and light included barriers and healing spells—it seemed like they were grouped arbitrarily based on whether they felt more like dark or light.

I now understood why it had never made sense to me until now. The classification itself was just vague. In addition, very few people had an aptitude for dark or light. So few that the magic system was referred to as the four elements, despite there actually being six. Instructor Cordell was a ritual specialist, but as I recalled, he mainly used light magic. He must have been a rare talent to be able to use a dark magic gravity spell as well.

“Sorry, were you on your way to class? I didn’t mean to hold you up,” said Instructor Cordell.

“It’s fine.” Now that I think about it, Instructor Karen is the lecturer for my next class. He said he couldn’t find her. Is she okay?



Instructor Karen was fifteen minutes late to the lecture hall. She was a young woman with long black hair and was usually calm and composed, but today she seemed unusually stressed. “S-Sorry for running late. Many of you may not know that ice from the northern part of the empire goes on sale this time of year, and dessert stores in Lodonea use it to...”

Instructor Karen went on for another fifteen minutes explaining Lodonea’s frozen desserts, how difficult it was to buy them, and how much trouble she had gone through to get hers, delaying the class for around thirty minutes in total. “Today we’ll be talking about a field of magic that’s unique even within the dark element—curses. The most famous curses are...”

Her lecture was actually quite intriguing to me. Curses in this world were classified into two main groups. The first group composed of curses applied to weapons, armor, accessories, and the like, designed to cause harm to the wielder. These were known as cursed items. The second group included curses cast directly on the opponent. A curse mark would appear on the target’s body, usually accompanied by powerful effects.

To be blunt, both forms sounded incredibly unwieldy. While cursed objects had existed in my old world as well, they were generally created by chance. What was the purpose of deliberately creating a cursed item? To give it to someone you wanted to curse as a gift? The second group sounded powerful, but much to my surprise, you had to get near your opponent to use them. At

that point you might as well just use a sword or bow to mortally wound them.

It made sense to me why curses were a minor group of magic in this world. Even Instructor Karen, our dark element teacher, wasn't good at using curses. This world's four-element magic system was overspecialized for combating monsters—it was different from my old world's sorcery on a conceptual level.

In my previous life, curses had been one of the leading forms of sorcery. They could be disguised as illnesses and used to kill with certainty from far, far away. Curses weren't without their flaws, but when it came to killing a single target, there was no better form of sorcery. *I can't believe curses are so underexplored here. I suppose different cultures use magic differently.*

"We're almost out of time, so we'll wrap things up here for today." Although she had found a good stopping point, it didn't seem like things had at all gone as planned. As everyone was tidying up their supplies to head to their next classes, Instructor Karen hurriedly said one more thing. "Also, I have an announcement for you all. All lectures will be canceled ten days from now. We hold a ceremony to celebrate the school's founding every year on that day, so it's a holiday for you all."

The lecture hall immediately came alive with chatter—some people even shouted with joy. *A ceremony, huh? It's probably some gathering for important people where they invite a bunch of nobles and government officials.*

"However, I will need the help of two students," Instructor Karen added. "Amyu and Yifa."

"Huh? M-Me?" a surprised voice cried out next to me.

Smiling, Instructor Karen continued. "The head of the class and the runner-up will be asked to bring a scroll bearing the names of this year's new students to a shrine in the forest on the day of the celebration. As you all may know, the founding of the academy city Lodonea is attributed to Lodonea Forest, a treasure trove of rare herbs, and the Great Sage, as well as the sage's disciples. Deep within the forest lies the ruins of a temple that belonged to the ancient inhabitants of this land. It's said that the various herbs grow due to a source of magical power that remains within those ruins."

Karen took a short breath, then resumed her speech. "Although the

authenticity of that claim is up for debate, the Great Sage and the sage's disciples did pay the utmost respect to the temple. That principle has been upheld since the academy's founding, and every year, during the ceremony, the top-performing new students are expected to pay their respects at the temple."

"What exactly does 'paying our respects' mean?" Amyu asked, resting her chin on her hand.

"What I told you before. You just take a scroll with the names of the new students on it and leave it at the temple. It's a formality more than anything. You bring last year's scroll back, and then you're done."

"Where's the temple located within the forest?"

"It'll take a little while to get there, but it's within walking distance. There's nothing to worry about, Amyu. We do this every year."

"All right, then."

Huh. She's surprisingly cautious. Though I understand why. Forests are dangerous places. Lodonea Forest is carefully managed, so it may be a rare exception, but we were just attacked by demons. Entering the forest Galeos made his base feels like a bad idea, especially now of all times. And then there's my real concern. Actually, I should...

"Still, it's a long-running tradition and a great honor. On that day—"

"Instructor." Raising my hand, I interrupted her speech.

"Ah, yes. What is it, Mr. Lamprogue?"

"If one of them were to decline, would the other enter by themselves?"

"No, in that case, we would ask the third-place student to take their place. They may be weak, but there are still monsters in Lodonea Forest, so we wouldn't make a student go alone."

"I see. Thank you." I turned to face Yifa, then spoke loudly enough for the people around us to hear. "Yifa, please withdraw." Whispers immediately filled the lecture hall.

Yifa sat there stunned for a moment. "B-But Master Seika, I..." she said sadly.

“Did you not hear me? I said please withdraw.”

“As you wish.” Yifa stood up and bowed to Instructor Karen. “Instructor, I’m sorry, but I can’t accept this honor.” The whispers filling the hall grew louder.

“What’s that about?”

“Does he want to participate in the ceremony that badly?”

“He must be mad that he lost to his slave.”

“He’s an embarrassment to the nobility.”

“Magicless bastard...”

Instructor Karen knit her eyebrows. “Mr. Lamprogue, I can’t say that’s very admirable behavior.”

“This is an honored tradition, is it not? It shouldn’t be carried out by a slave. As third place, I will do the honors.” With that, I got up from my seat and left the lecture hall. Yifa panicked and hurried behind me.



“I’m sorry, Yifa. Did you want to participate in the ceremony?” I asked Yifa as we walked down the path.

“No, not really.” She shook her head, seemingly unfazed by what had happened. “You seemed like you wanted to make a show of it, so I was just playing along.”

“Oh, so you picked up on that.” I had thought as much ever since I had tutored her, but Yifa really was smart.

“Why did you do that? I wouldn’t have expected you to care about the ceremony.”

“Is that the impression you have of me? Well, you’re right.”

“It’s for Amyu, isn’t it?” Yifa said, her voice faltering a little. “You purposely drew everyone’s attention so they wouldn’t say anything about her.”

“That’s one reason, I guess.”

Yifa went silent, then whispered another question. “Do you like girls like her?”

“Huh?”

“You’re always worrying about her. She’s pretty, slim, has beautiful hair...”

I was taken aback for a moment, then couldn’t help but laugh. “No, no. I just want to be her friend.”

“Why? She’s not a noble, and she said those awful things to us.”

“Well...” I hesitated, then decided to answer honestly. “Because she’s strong. You saw her, didn’t you? She took down a lesser demon. I don’t think there are many people as talented as her. I want her on my side. Whatever it takes.”

“Am I not good enough?” Yifa said as though tormented by something. “I can get stronger too! I just get that feeling. I’m slowly collecting elementals, and they’re even starting to listen to complex orders. I’m sure I’ll be able to do amazing things eventually! I won’t lose to Amyu!”

I stopped, then spoke to Yifa with a smile. “I’m sorry, Yifa, but you don’t have what it takes. Can you imagine it? Being praised and feared by the masses? Them clinging to your strength? One day, that’ll be her. She has the talent.”

“I see,” Yifa said in a small voice. Her usual smile returned to her face. “Then I’ll help too. We’re in the girls’ dorm together, so I might find a chance to get close to her.”

“That would be great.”

“But I don’t think you should keep doing stuff like what you did in the lecture hall. I don’t like hearing people insult you.”

“Hmm... All right. It affects your reputation as well,” I said, patting Yifa’s soft, golden hair. Truth be told, I actually didn’t mind making scenes like that. It was one of my bad habits.

“By the way, what are the other reasons?”

“I wanted to make sure nobody would complain if you withdrew, and I wanted to end the conversation then and there. Finally...I get the feeling something is going to happen during the ceremony.”

Act 2

Finally, it was the day of the ceremony. After the opening rites, Amyu and I entered Lodonea Forest with the scroll. We were seen off by the academy faculty, invited guests, and a few upperclassmen.

We proceeded through the forest in complete silence. The path to the ruins was well-trodden and easy to traverse. It seemed to be regularly maintained, so we didn't get our uniforms dirty. Lodonea Forest was on the academy's campus, within the city walls. Frankly, I found the idea of a forest living within a fortress to be bizarre. It reduced the living space inside and forced you to build longer walls, making it more difficult to defend.

However, Lodonea had been built around the academy that stood next to the forest, so this construction had probably been necessary. I had heard that Lodonea was a nicer place to live than the densely populated imperial capital. Nobles in my past life had recreated mountain scenery in their gardens. Perhaps there was something nice about living in close proximity to nature.

It apparently took about an hour to reach the temple, and we had to be back before the end of the ceremony, so we couldn't take our time. "Hey," Amyu suddenly called out to me. "What are you planning?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm asking why you put on that whole charade to participate in the ceremony."

"Even in a merit-based academy, events like this should be performed by someone of a certain status," I responded with a smile.

"Liar. Even that smile is fake. You think ceremonies are a waste of time."

"Is that really the impression I give off?" I wouldn't go *that* far.

"To start with, you don't normally talk to your servant that way. She even deliberately deprecated herself."

"I'm surprised you've been paying that much attention to us."

"It's hard not to when you two are constantly all over each other in public."

"I don't really think that's true." *Seriously, give me a break.*

"What are you trying to accomplish by making a scene like that?"

“I just wanted to split some of the negative attention. I don’t think it’s fair that you’ve been getting it all when you put your life on the line for us.”

“Huh? What are you talking about? I didn’t really...”

“Also, I wanted a chance to speak with you.” I smiled, and Amyu just looked at me like I was garbage.

“That big-boobed slave isn’t enough for you, so now you’re trying to lay your hands on a classmate?”

“That’s not it at all. And Yifa and I don’t have that sort of relationship.”

“Maybe not, but you still do dirty things to her, don’t you?”

“I do not.”

“Like I believe that,” Amyu scoffed. “I know lords have that ‘right of the first night’ thing. Nobles really come up with the scummiest ideas.”

“You can pay money to be exempt, so it’s really just a marriage tax. It’s actually more troublesome for the lord if they don’t pay.”

“Even if that’s true, they can still lay their hands on any woman in their territory.”

“If a lord did that, their population would flee and they’d lose tax revenue, putting them in a bad spot,” I countered.

“Hmph.”

“Actually, why are we even talking about this stuff?”

“I don’t know! You started it!”

“No, I’m pretty sure that was you.” I sighed. “Like I said before, I just want to be your friend.”

“Why me?”

“Because it’s easier to talk to other loners.”

“Don’t you feel pathetic saying that?” she asked, eyebrow cocked.

“Then how about because you’re strong?”

“And why should someone strong like me be friends with someone weak like

you?”

“I’m a little more competent than you think.”

“Only a little?” Amyu drew the sword at her waist, then thrust it at me with no warning. It went right past my ear, striking the core of a slime that had been jumping at me. I gave a sidelong glance at the slime, now dissolving because its core had been broken. “I wouldn’t call letting a weak monster sneak up on you competent.”

I silently put away the gateway hitogata I had pulled out. I’d been hoping to stealthily capture the slime, but no such luck. My attention turned towards all the decorations on the sword she was holding. “Do you use that sword instead of a wand?”

“It’s a spellblade. Never heard of them?”

“They’re weapons used by magic swordsmen, right?” Being both a mage and a swordsman felt wrong to me, but apparently, it was normal in this world. Spellblades were weapons for fighters who used both magic and swordplay. “I’ve been wondering, isn’t it inconvenient to bring that thing everywhere? I’m surprised they even let something so dangerous in the academy.”

“What are you talking about? Wands are plenty dangerous too. I’m just using what I’m used to. Is that a problem?”

“No, not particularly.” Truth be told, I didn’t think it was wise to be picky about your tools. They weren’t an essential part of spellcasting. Wands, spellblades, talismans, hand signs, and mantras were all unnecessary. The essence of a spell lay within the words inside one’s consciousness. That was everything. Given Amyu’s talent, she would probably realize that on her own.

“I don’t really care, but try not to get the scroll dirty. I’m not here to protect you.” Amyu swung her sword to get rid of the slime’s fluids and sheathed it. A moment later, she staggered, clutching her head as though she had a headache.

“Are you okay?”

“It’s nothing.”

“It doesn’t look like nothing. Maybe you should have withdrawn too.”

“I’m just feeling a little sick. It’s nothing for you to worry about.” Her headache seemed to abate after a while, and Amyu trudged on with renewed vigor.

Well, let’s just get this over with. We walked in silence, and just when I felt like we should have been nearing the temple, I felt a faint flow of power and stopped.

“What’s that?” Amyu seemed to have sensed something. Following her gaze, I saw a bluish-white magic circle in a grove of trees.

“I’ll check it out. You wait here.”

“Ah, hey!”

Stepping off the path, I pushed my way through the bushes and reached an open area in the trees. There was a bluish-white magic circle painted on a large stump, much like I’d seen during the demon incident. The stump itself was freshly cut. There were a bunch of small, white flowers around the base, some of which were crushed as though they’d been stepped on. The entire area seemed to be man-made.

“What is that? A magic circle?” Amyu followed along behind me, then stepped forward towards the stump.

“You can get closer, but don’t touch the circle.”

“I know, I’m not stupid—” An offended look on her face, Amyu stepped into the clearing. The next moment, a larger magic circle appeared, covering the entire clearing beneath her feet. “Wh-What is this?!” Amyu’s voice was shaken. The flow of power suddenly increased drastically.

Not good. This is a... “Amyu!” I grabbed her hand, getting caught in the range of the magic circle for a split second. Then my vision went dark.



I couldn’t see anything. I couldn’t hear anything. In pitch darkness, I breathed slowly and put my hands together. I could feel my body heat from my hands. I was conscious. My senses were working. I hadn’t died.

“Master Seika.” I heard Yuki whispering into my ear. “It seems like we’ve been

teleported. There are no enemies within thirty meters.” Yuki had apparently been teleported with me. That was good.

“Do you know where we are?” I asked, my voice so quiet it nearly disappeared the moment it left my lips.

“Unfortunately not.”

“It’s fine. Where’s Amyu?”

“Right next to you.”

I raised my voice and called out to her. “Amyu, can you hear me?” A spot of light appeared in the darkness.

“Good, you’re safe too,” Amyu said with a relieved look. The tip of her sword had been illuminated.

“Where are we? It looks like we’re underground,” I said as I looked around. We seemed to be in a wide corridor with stone walls. The dark path extended in front and behind us. It didn’t seem like an ordinary cave.

“Beats me. But I don’t have a good feeling about it. It must have been that magic circle.”

“Probably. The circle on the stump was just part of a bigger circle covering the entire clearing. It seems like it was set up to teleport anyone who stepped on it.” The part on the stump used a different paint, probably to draw us in. *They got us good. My intuition must have dulled.* “I don’t think we’re too far away from where we just were.”

“How do you know that?”

“Just a feeling.” My link to my shikigami still on campus hadn’t been broken. Distance didn’t matter, but if the addresses drifted too far apart, their connection wouldn’t hold and it became impossible to maintain the spell. We were likely beneath the forest—or rather, beneath the temple. Granted, I didn’t know that for sure.

What should we do now? All my shikigami were left behind when we were teleported, so I don’t have any on me at the moment. However, I have hitogata that can open up a gateway to my stockpile, so I can get more. If I want to

ensure our escape, I should send out shikigami and figure out the layout, though I doubt I'd find the exit that easily—especially since this was a trap. Hmm... If only I knew exactly where we were. Then I could swap positions with one of my shikigami in the forest and escape.

“Master Seika!” Yuki whispered in my ear, her voice full of tension. “They’re coming from the passage to the right.”

I could hear it as well. Footsteps and the faint clanking of metal. “Amyu, to the right.”

“I know.”

Before long, enemies entered the range of her light. They looked like lizard people. They walked on two legs, were covered in green scales, and had claws at the ends of their limbs. Holding curved swords and shields and clad in basic armor, their appearance was almost comical. If I recalled correctly, they were a type of monster known as lizardmen. There were three of them in total.

Six unfeeling eyes observed us. The rightmost lizardman opened its mouth threateningly, but Amyu had already sprung into action. Her sword moved like the wind, piercing the lizardman’s open mouth. The lizardman on the left raised its curved sword, only to be kicked in the chestplate and sent flying into the wall. Then Amyu fired an incantationless Fireball at the lizardman in the center. Engulfed in flames, it gave a muffled cry before finally collapsing and falling silent.

That was pretty strong for a Fireball. Amyu finished off the lizardman she had kicked into the wall. She wasn’t even breathing heavily. “That was impressive. Are you used to this?” I asked.

“A little.”

“You probably shouldn’t use fire in an enclosed space, though. The air will go bad.”

“One or two isn’t gonna hurt anything. What are you gonna use instead?”

“Something like this.” *Phase of wood—Impaling Stakes.* Nine wooden stakes appeared from nowhere, impaling a massive orc that had been approaching me from behind. The pig-faced monster staggered for a moment, then collapsed on

the spot. It seemed to be dead.

Amyu looked at the orc's corpse, then knit her eyebrows. "What was that spell? Wooden stakes?"

"Yep." Impaling Stakes was a spell I had formulated as a vampire countermeasure during my trip to the West, as I'd heard wooden stakes were effective against them. Although I'd never ended up encountering any while I was in Transylvania and Hungary, the Japanese ash wood I used as a base had exorcist properties to it, so I had used it from time to time after returning to Japan. It was probably suspicious as wood wasn't one of the four elements here, but I was limited in what spells I could use safely in an enclosed space. I didn't have much choice.

"I've never heard of a spell like that."

"You haven't? Well, I am a member of the Lamprogue family. I've had the opportunity to learn some spells that aren't widely known." Hopefully she would believe that.

"Whatever. Anyway, I can say one thing for certain now," Amyu mumbled, looking at the corpses of the defeated monsters. "This is a dungeon."

I raised an eyebrow and repeated it back at her. "A dungeon?"

Dungeons were underground labyrinths where monsters appeared. They were practically other worlds unto themselves, filled with items, spellcasters, and the boss monster that was the dungeon's core.

"Given there are monsters here, it's the logical conclusion."

"I see. It's my first time in a dungeon." I sat down on the ground.

Amyu looked down at me with a puzzled expression on her face. "What are you doing?"

"Sitting."

"Why?"

"There's no use wandering around at random. We'd just be wasting energy. We're better off sitting still and waiting for help. The monster corpses will help mask our smell."

“Help isn’t coming,” Amyu said flatly. I raised another eyebrow.

“How come?”

“They aren’t going to rescue people who didn’t return from a dungeon. There are rarely any survivors when that happens. It’s a waste of time.”

“Isn’t that only true for adventurers? We’re students who got stuck in here by accident.”

“That makes it even worse. We didn’t come in through the entrance. We got teleported into some dungeon that could be anywhere. Even if the teachers find that magic circle, do you expect them to deliberately get teleported to come after us? That’d only be increasing the number of victims.”

“If they analyze the magic circle, they should be able to figure out where it teleported us.”

“Even if they did, it wouldn’t matter. This probably isn’t a dungeon managed by the guild. Not even specialist adventurers would search an unmapped dungeon for people who suddenly went missing.”

“Then what should we do?”

“There’s only one thing to do when you’re lost in a dungeon. Walk.” Amyu extended her hand to me. “Keep walking and find the exit or another party before your stamina or willpower gives out.”

“Ha ha, that sounds pretty hopeless.” I took Amyu’s hand and got up, dusting off my pants. *I actually just wanted to observe the surface for a few hours through my shikigami, but oh well.* Continuing on was fine. I wasn’t worried about running out of stamina. The more pressing concerns in areas like this were starvation, thirst, and suffocation. However, I could provide food, water, and air through my spells. We’d be fine for a few months.

If it came down to it, I could brute force it and use a bunch of shikigami to find the exit. It was just a waste, so I would prefer not to have to. I wanted to preserve as many of my hitogata as possible. There was something else I wanted to try.

“Yuki,” I called out, my voice not even amounting to a whisper. “I don’t want

to use too many shikigami. Can I count on you to locate enemies?”

“Leave it to me, Master Seika!” Yuki replied happily. Monsters weren’t particularly threatening. Yuki was by no means a specialist, but she would be sufficient here.

I’d only be able to use snakes or bats in this darkness, and they’re not particularly easy to handle. Actually, I should do something about the darkness.

“Hold on a second, Amyu.” I stopped Amyu before she could start walking. “You can put out the light on your sword. I’ll handle the light.” I floated several hitogata in the air and illuminated them. The underground corridor was lit up considerably brighter than it had been before.

“Are those talismans?” Amyu asked in surprise. “Did you just cast a spell with them? And this is light magic...”

“I told you I’m a little more competent than you think.”

Amyu exhaled. “Our chances of surviving just went up. Only by a little, though.”

Seeing the look on her face, I couldn’t help but comment. “You seem pretty relaxed given the situation.”

Returning alive should have seemed hopeless from her point of view. Amyu’s eyes went wide for a moment, then she turned away. “Not really.”



With the swordswoman Amyu taking the lead, we proceeded through the dungeon. Every time we progressed a certain distance, I would attach a hitogata to the ceiling and channel cursed energy into it.

“Um, Master Seika, what exactly are you doing?”

“Just trying to see if I can locate us from the surface,” I replied quietly so Amyu wouldn’t hear. Save for a few crows, I had turned all my shikigami left on the campus into honeybees and dispatched them throughout the forest. However, I still hadn’t been able to detect the effect of my spell. We’d have to continue on a little farther.

I’ve got to say, it’s hard to see through honeybees. On top of having

compound eyes, they see colors humans can't see, which makes even familiar objects look different. Still, this is a job only these shikigami can do, so I'll just have to put up with it.



We frequently encountered monsters as we progressed. Aside from lizardmen and orcs, there were also other monsters commonly found in dungeons, such as skeletons, slimes, and goblins. The more we encountered, the more I felt like it was another world. In general, there weren't that many creatures that could survive in caves. At most there would be rats and insects that fed on bat feces. It was strange that a place like this could support so many large life-forms.

The dungeon's core must have been what created the monsters. I had thought they were similar to animals, but it seemed monsters were more supernatural in origin. There had been places similar to dungeons in my previous world—other worlds such as haunted houses and hidden villages that existed via supernatural power. However, unlike those places, the dungeon actually had a physical presence, which meant it had a physical exit.

"They aren't too tough. This must be a low-level dungeon," Amyu said as she kicked a skeleton's skull off its neck. She had been constantly swinging her sword, taking down monster after monster. I had barely done anything.

"Don't push yourself. I can take the lead if you want."

"Are you kidding? Leave taking point to the one with the sword." Amyu gave a threatening smile. "A good vanguard can transform magical power into physical strength. This is nothing." True to her word, Amyu showed no sign of slowing down. She was so quick with her sword that it was barely visible, and she had the strength to repel a demon's club. She was more than just talk. In addition to her sword skills and defensive prowess, she was capable of using every element without incantations.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised. She's the Hero. Though she's still an inexperienced child, who knows how much strength she'll obtain as she grows?

"Master Seika!" Yuki let me know that an enemy was coming. It soon came into view.

“Oh, this one actually looks kinda strong,” Amyu said happily. Illuminated by my hitogata, it was a goblin like we’d seen countless times before. However, this one was massive. It was just over two meters tall, with the same green skin and hooked nose as other goblins, but its build was completely different. It was likely a superior species of goblin known as a hobgoblin. It had several smaller goblins with it as well.

The hobgoblin let out a roar upon seeing us, holding up its large cleaver and charging. Amyu met it head-on, repelling its downward swing and knocking it off-balance. The hobgoblin swung again, but Amyu took a wide step forward and cut off the entire arm holding the blade. An ear-piercing scream echoed through the corridor. Just as she was about to finish the hobgoblin off and behead it, Amyu suddenly lurched forward.

Amyu held her temple, staggering as though she was in pain. The hobgoblin used its one remaining arm to punch her right in the head. With a dull thud, she went flying into the wall, then slumped down onto the ground. The hobgoblin and its goblin followers surrounded the motionless swordswoman.

“Amyu!” A wooden stake pierced the hobgoblin’s skull. Finishing off the surrounding goblins with Impaling Stakes, I rushed over to Amyu. She was still breathing, but she seemed to have lost consciousness.

“Master Seika, there are still some left!”

“I know.” Wiping the blood off her face, I impaled an oncoming goblin. Although I wanted to heal her, dealing with them came first. I impaled another. And another. And another. “How many of these things are there?!” I sent out one of my lit-up hitogata and was taken aback. The corridor in front of us was crawling with goblins, with several hobgoblins mixed in as well. My face stiffened up. *What a pain! Impaling Stakes can’t handle this many. It’s a good thing Amyu is unconscious.*

Summoning—Oomukade. Space distorted and a giant black centipede appeared. The centipede rushed at the goblins, using its vicious mandibles to bite them apart. The surrounding goblins swung their knives at it, but it paid them no mind. Even the hobgoblin’s giant cleaver was incapable of damaging its exoskeleton.

The oomukade then turned its attention to the owner of the cleaver, biting into the slightly larger prey and consuming it without so much as letting it scream. The goblins in the immediate vicinity routed and began to flee. Using its multitude of legs, the oomukade swiftly pursued its escaping prey, eating as many as it could.

I simply sat back and watched. *The oomukade certainly excels in places like this. It can't be hit by fire arrows from afar, and it can use the walls and ceiling as footholds. I think I can let it handle the monster cleanup.*

Impaling Stakes

A spell that impales a target with wooden stakes. Ash, juniper, hawthorn, and poplar are all said to be effective against vampires, but Seika chose ash wood both because he was familiar with it as it was native to Japan, and because it was a sturdy building material. Although Seika's visit to Eastern Europe in his past life came well before the birth of Count Dracula, there were still many vampire legends during that time, such as strigoi and kudlak.

Act 3

"Mmm..." Amyu stirred with a faint groan.

"Ah, are you awake?" I asked.

"Where... What happened to me?" Amyu straightened up and looked at me as I sat with my back against a nearby wall.

"Unfortunately, we're still in the dungeon. You were knocked unconscious by a hobgoblin."

"I remember now. How did such a weak monster...?" Amyu frowned when she felt her hair—it was wet with blood. Then she touched her head all over and confusion spread over her face. "What happened to my injury?"

"I healed it."

“You used healing magic?” Amyu then turned her attention to the goblin corpses littering the corridor. “Did you do that too?”

“More or less.” The oomukade was a messy eater, so it looked pretty bad. That said, since it had gone quite a ways down the corridor, we would be safe for a while.

“What are you? I know I’m not one to talk, but there’s something weird about you—” Amyu suddenly clutched her head in pain again.

“Are you all right? Do you have some kind of chronic illness?”

Her eyes still shut, Amyu shook her head.

“Do you have any idea what’s causing it?”

She shook her head again. I pulled out a few hitogata. If it was a disease, then there was nothing I could do. But I had just transferred her injuries to a hitogata not that long ago; it was odd that her symptoms had shown up so fast, which meant it might be something else. Arranging my hitogata, I made a hand sign.

“Ah...” She let out a small gasp of relief.

“Well? Do you feel better?” I asked.

“Y-Yeah...” Amyu slowly stood up. “Did you do something?”

“I put up a barrier. Curses can’t reach us in here.”

“Curses?”

“Yes. When did those symptoms start appearing?”

“Um...about a month ago. At first, it was just dizziness, but then it gradually turned into a headache.” A month ago—right around when we’d entered the academy. “Anyway, I don’t think it’s a curse. I thought it might be too, but I looked all over my body and didn’t find any curse marks.”

“There are places on your body that you can’t see.”

Amyu had no reply.

“I’m not telling you to let me see them, just for the record,” I added.

“I know. But could you look? Then we’d know for sure.”

“Huh?”

“Turn around for a second.” I did as I was told and heard the rustling of clothes a moment later. I waited silently. “You can turn around now.” Turning back around, I saw Amyu’s pale, naked back. “Well? Hurry up, it’s cold in here,” she said, turning her head to the side.

As instructed, I looked from her nape down her back, to her small rear and calves, yet I didn’t see any sign of a curse mark. “Nothing.”

“I figured as much. Mind turning around again?” I turned around once more and heard the rustling of clothes yet again. I heard Amyu sit down and I turned back around. She was reclothed and seated with her back to the wall. While she seemed mostly composed, upon closer inspection, her face was slightly red. “I told you it wasn’t a curse.” Her voice faintly trembled.

She might be really worried about this. Still, I have to speak up. “We don’t know that for sure. The curse mark could have been made close to skin color, or it could be really small and hard to see.”

“Are you telling me to show you again?!”

“No! I’m just saying there are loopholes! There’s the scalp, the back of your throat, various other holes. I can think of plenty of places to hide a curse mark. We can’t rule it out.”

“Then why did I just show you my naked body?” she demanded.

“Well...”

“Besides, I don’t have any recollection of being cursed to begin with. Didn’t Instructor Karen say you had to be near the target? Is that not enough to rule it out?”

“If you’re that certain, why did you strip just a moment ago?”

“Shut up! Do you want me to kill you?!”

“Sorry...” *I wish she wouldn’t take her frustration out on me.* “Anyway, the fact that the barrier is working means we should assume it’s a curse. And as it happens, it’s also possible to cast curses from a distance.”

“Is that more Lamprogue family knowledge?”

“Something like that.”

“So, what now? I have to stay inside your barrier forever?”

“No. Just as there are loopholes for the caster, there are loopholes for the victim too. Could I have a strand of your hair?” I asked. “One with blood on it would be best.”

Amyu pulled out a blood-dampened strand of hair and handed it to me. I tied it to a hitogata, wrote a character on it with my cursed energy, and chanted a mantra.

That should do it. “Keep this talisman on your person. It’ll act as a substitute for you.”

Amyu accepted the hitogata and eyed it suspiciously. “Is this really gonna work?”

“It will. But it doesn’t last forever. It’ll stop working after protecting against the curse a certain amount.”

“Then...”

“I’ll make you another one if that happens. That said, I’m planning on doing something about it before that becomes necessary.”

“A-All right...” After a brief silence, Amyu suddenly stood up. “Let’s keep going. If the curse isn’t gonna affect me anymore, I can keep fighting.”

I grabbed her hand before Amyu could walk off.

“What?” she demanded.

“You’re in too much of a hurry,” I said. “We’ve been walking this whole time, and I only just healed you. You should rest a little longer.”

“Fine.” Amyu sat back down surprisingly obediently.

“Are you thirsty? I’ve got water,” I said, offering her a kettle hanging from the ceiling.

Amyu looked at it suspiciously. “I’ve been meaning to ask this whole time—what is that thing?”

“It’s called a kettle. It’s used to boil herbal medicine and is from the Song dy—

Uh, it's from a foreign country. There's just water in it right now, though."

Amyu cautiously grabbed the handle and tilted the spout into her mouth. "It's good."

"Right?"

Satisfied with her answer, I took a gulp of water from the yakan-zuru as well. Yakan-zuru were ayakashi that took the form of a kettle and hung from trees in the mountains. They weren't particularly harmful. On the contrary, their water was so good that I had specifically hunted one down. It hadn't been easy due to how rare they were, but it was well worth the effort.

I wonder if Amyu would get mad if I told her she was drinking a monster's fluids. It's just water, though. "Let's talk," I said.

"Talk?"

"The whole reason I'm here today is because I wanted to talk to you. Do you have anything you'd like to ask me?"

Amyu thought for a moment, then spoke in a low voice. "You're actually a talisman user, aren't you?"

This world also had a system for writing characters and magic circles on paper and using it to cast spells. It was quite different from my old world's system, but maybe that was the easiest way to explain it.

"I guess. I was born without magical power, so I've had to come up with some tricks. It wasn't easy," I said, forcing a smile.

"So why do you use a wand at the academy?"

"Because everyone else does. I'd rather not stand out."

"Really? That's why? You're weirdly hung up on that...especially since you end up standing out anyway," Amyu said with amazement. "So what elements can you actually use? It's more than just the ones you're taking classes for, right?"

"Don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I don't actually know what elements I'm using myself." I gave a bitter smile.

“I’d prefer if you didn’t ask so much about my spells. There are some things that are hard to explain.”

“Hmm... Then how far have you gone with that servant of yours?”

I sighed. “This again?”

“What? You’re the one who asked if I had any questions.” Amyu scowled at me. “Have you kissed?”

“We have not.”

“But you’ve at least groped her boobs or butt.”

“I told you, I haven’t. What do you take me for?” I demanded.

“She’s your slave, isn’t she? Nobody would blame you for laying a hand on her. The other boys all look at her that way.”

“What? Who?”

“Don’t suddenly turn scary.” Amyu sighed. “You’re so boring.”

“I’m boring? You’re the one acting like a dirty old man.”

“That girl probably likes you.”

“You’re not the only one who’s told me that, but it’s not true. We’ve been together since we were kids. Yifa and I are like family.”

“Would a noble consider a slave family?”

“It’s not that unusual. Many nobles educate their slaves alongside their own children, then free them when they grow up and have them help them manage the territory or run businesses,” I said. “You only need to hire one tutor that way, so it’s a beneficial arrangement.”

“What are you, poor?”

“Yifa and I weren’t like that, but since I’m the son of a mistress, I’ve always been treated like an outcast. My mother ignored me, my older brother harassed me, and the maids gossiped about me behind my back. Yifa was the only one who treated me normally. That’s also the reason she speaks to me so casually.”

“All right, then.”

“Do you get our relationship now?” To be honest, I just didn’t want to get attached to Yifa. I wanted to be able to discard her at any moment. Even in this second life, I found it difficult to trust people.

“I guess you’ve had it rough too. What happened to your actual mom?” Amyu asked. “If you were taken in by the count’s family, does that mean she died?”

“Huh... I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“I’ve never really thought about it.” It didn’t matter to me. “She’s probably dead, though. I probably wouldn’t have been taken in otherwise.”

“Didn’t you ever get lonely being treated like that?”

“Honestly, it never bothered me. Oh, but things aren’t that bad anymore. Mother and my middle brother are the same as ever, but father allowed me to go to the academy, and I got a letter from my eldest brother just the other day.”

“I don’t know how to put this, but you’re really weird,” Amyu grumbled, seemingly exasperated.

I smiled and asked her a question this time. “Your family are adventurers, right?”

“How do you know that? Did somebody tell you?”

“No, you just know a lot about dungeons and adventurers, so I figured that must be the case.”

“Well, you’re right. My mom’s a guild manager, and my dad’s an active adventurer.”

“You seem used to fighting monsters too. Have you ventured into a bunch of forests and dungeons?” I asked.

“Ever since I was ten. With my dad.”

“That explains it. Are you strong compared to the average adventurer?”

“Beats me,” Amyu replied. “I’m not officially registered with the guild, so I’m

technically not even rank ten.”

“Why aren’t you registered?”

“You can’t join the guild until you turn fifteen.”

“But you’re allowed to enter dungeons?”

“You’re not supposed to, but they aren’t too strict about it.”

“Huh.”

Amyu went silent.

It doesn’t seem like this is something she wants to talk about. I should change the subject. “Do you have any hobbies?”

“Not really.”

“I heard there was a fencing club at the academy. Why don’t you join that?”

“They seemed weak, so I quit. Practicing by myself is better.”

“Then...is there anything you like?”

“Fighting,” she said flatly. “I don’t care if it’s monsters or people, I like fighting. More than anything else.”

Did she just change the subject? Amyu seemed like she still didn’t want to talk, and I was at a loss for words.

“I’m weird, aren’t I?”

“Huh?”

Amyu sat hugging her knees and pulled her spellblade close. “That’s what my mom and dad said. That I’m weird.”

I didn’t respond.

“No matter how rowdy the adventurer, they always have something they value more than adventuring. Money, fame, family, friends. Nobody seems to live for adventure itself.”

“...”

“They avoid getting injured because it hurts, and they’re afraid of dying. That

stuff isn't a big deal to me, but apparently that's not normal. Deep down, everything else hates fighting. I think that part of me is broken."

I silently listened to Amyu's monologue.

"I'm strong, right? I always have been. I picked up on swordplay and magic immediately. Everyone at the guild said I was a genius—the second coming of the Hero. When I first entered a dungeon and defeated several monsters, they all said I was brave. After a year, they acknowledged my skill and I was allowed to join parties other than my dad's. But then...that all stopped."

"..."

"Looking back on it, I know why. A large party I'd joined had suffered a major defeat, losing half its members. Everyone else in the guild was somberly mourning, but there I was kicking up a fuss about wanting to go back. They all said I was crazy and bloodthirsty, or that I had a death wish. I didn't wanna cause trouble for my parents, so I stopped joining other parties. But I still kept sneaking into forests alone after that, so I guess they were right about me."

"..."

"I came to the academy partly because I wanted to get away from the guild, but also because I wanted to get stronger. I thought that if I learned more about magic and became stronger than anyone else, maybe I'd get bored of fighting. Then I could be normal...but maybe that's not possible for me."

"..."

"I mean, I had more fun fighting with lesser demons than taking classes. That's definitely weird. So..."

"I don't think it's particularly weird," I interjected. "Everyone is different. We all have our quirks."

"There's a limit to what you can call a quirk."

"No there isn't. If there's such a thing as normal, then you're normal."

"What are you talking about?" Amyu shot me a sidelong glance. "If you're just trying to make me feel better, knock it off."

"I'm not. Let's see..." I thought for a moment, then spoke again. "Not only

humans, but all life exists to leave behind offspring that will form the next generation. So, what kind of kids should they leave behind?”

“Strong ones?”

“And what is strength?” I asked.

“Physical ability, intelligence, stuff like that.”

“In an environment where physical strength isn’t needed, a muscular body weighs you down and becomes a hindrance. Likewise, intelligence sometimes gets in the way of new ideas.”

“Then what kind of kid is good?”

“One with a diverse skill set,” I answered. “What strength is varies depending on your environment. But not even the gods know how your environment might change. Will it get hotter, or will it get colder? How much will your food supply decrease? How much will your number of enemies increase? Life is about leaving behind a child who can deal with a variety of situations. A child who can survive no matter their environment. That’s why people are all different. You’re one of those different people.”

Now it was Amyu’s turn to go silent.

“The environment you’re searching for just hasn’t come yet. Once more wars start to break out, the normal people you’re talking about will be exhausted by the fighting. If you took the lead and encouraged everyone in that situation, they’d be thanking you. Nobody would call you crazy.”

“But that time might never come.”

“And that’s fine too. There’s still a reason for you to be here. To prepare the world for war. At the very least, I don’t think you’re weird.”

“Maybe you’re right...”

“Besides, even you have something you like besides fighting.”

“Huh? What’s that?”

“Dirty talk. You looked like you were having the most fun all day when you— Ow!” Amyu smacked my butt with her scabbard.

“Adventurers always talk about vulgar things, s-so I just took after them!” Amyu glared at me, red in the face. “If you tell anyone, I’ll kill you! And about me stripping too!”

I just chuckled in response.

“What are you laughing at? Are you threatening me?!”

“No, I was just thinking it’s nice how positive you are.”

Amyu blinked repeatedly, then fell into thought. “You’re right. I should save that for after we get out of here.”

“We’ll get out of here. I’m sure of it.”

“Okay...” Amyu went silent.

There was still one thing I hadn’t told her—that her desire to fight was probably because she was the reincarnation of the Hero. She didn’t seem to have reincarnated with her memories like I had, but her talent for swordplay and magic and her personality were likely all connected to that fact. I had deliberately avoided mentioning that.

At that moment, I suddenly raised my head and looked at the ceiling. *Huh, is that...?*

“Thanks, Seika.”

I found myself unable to speak.

“I’m glad I was able to talk to you. And thanks for saving me.”

I maintained my silence.

“Seika?”

I turned my gaze from the empty ceiling back to Amyu and stood up. “All right! Let’s go, Amyu!”

“H-Huh?”

“We’re in a dungeon, right? It’s my first time adventuring, so I might as well enjoy it. Our party may only be the two of us, but together we have nothing to fear.”

“Fine. As the experienced adventurer, I’ll teach you the ropes. Watch me carefully.” Amyu reluctantly smiled and held her hand out to me.

Act 4

After walking for a while, we arrived at a room.

“What’s that?” I asked. Beyond the bronze doors, there was a massive snake coiled up in a wide room.

Its body was as thick as a tree trunk, and it was covered in black scales. However, its upper half was human, though its skin and arms matched the color of its scales. It regained its serpentine appearance from the neck up, bearing the head of a snake. It was like a god worshipped by a heretical religion. Was it asleep?

“That’s a naga,” Amyu said, peering through the crack in the doors with me. “It’s my first time seeing one too. It’s probably this dungeon’s boss.”

“Boss?”

“The core of the dungeon, or a monster that protects it.”

“I see.” That meant if we defeated it, we would have cleared the dungeon. “Does an exit path appear if you defeat the boss?”

“Not if the dungeon extends to lower floors, but this one’s been flat. It seems like it was originally ruins, so it’s possible. It looks like there’s a path on the other side of that room.”

“All right, in that case—”

“But I don’t think we should fight it,” Amyu interrupted me.

“Why not?”

“Nagas are pretty strong. You’d need a six-man party of rank-four-and-above adventurers, or a four-man party of rank three and above. And I’ve never heard of a black naga before. They’re usually sand-colored. Red ones are supposed to be able to breathe fire, so that one probably has some special ability too. It’s too dangerous unless we know what that is. Let’s turn back. There should be

another entrance. Searching for that would be safer.”

“We can’t do that, Amyu. We don’t have the supplies for a lengthy search. We’re lucky to have found this room while we still have stamina left. Let’s beat it. Even if that path isn’t an exit, if we smash the core, we shouldn’t have to worry about monsters anymore.”

“Are you confident you can beat that thing?”

“As long as you’re with me.”

Amyu looked down, then gave a small smile. “All right. But if it seems too hard, we run away. Got it?”

“I’m good at running away. Just say when.” We could escape at any time.

Amyu drew her spellblade from its scabbard. “I’ll count down from three. The naga should wake up when we enter, so launch a spell at it before it can prepare.”

“Got it.” I would omit the hand signs and mantras if I had to.

“Three, two...”

I floated my hitogata in the air.

“One!” Amyu kicked the doors open and rushed inside. The naga’s snake eyes suddenly opened. It spread its arms wide, holding a sword in each hand and staring at the intruder, Amyu.

Phase of wood—Impaling Stakes. I launched a loglike ash stake at the naga, knocking its sword out of its left hand. A second and third stake pierced it in the chest and torso, staggering it.

The force is definitely different when I apply myself. Still... “It’s not enough.”

The naga had only taken minor damage. It pulled the stakes out with its left hand, fixing its vertical pupils on me this time.

“Don’t look away from me!” Amyu launched a Fireball at the naga’s snake head, causing it to recoil back. It swung the massive sword in its right hand, which Amyu repelled with incredible strength before firing more spells at it.

Oh? This is my chance. Phase of wood—Impaling Stakes. I launched more

wooden stakes at the naga as it was preoccupied with Amyu. I impaled its shoulder, then its neck. This time I seemed to have done some damage.

I see. So this is what a vanguard does. It was easier to cast spells with Amyu drawing its attention. Perhaps exterminating youkai in my old world would have been easier if warriors and sorcerers had worked together.

“Look out! It’s doing something!” Amyu shouted.

The naga’s chest had expanded. A moment later, it spewed some kind of liquid from its snake mouth. Amyu rolled to the side, while I took a big leap backwards. The floor bubbled and dissolved where the liquid struck it.

Huh... Does it spit acid?

The naga swung its sword down on Amyu before she could regain her posture, but I blocked it with an ash stake. Now that I had drawn its attention, the naga attempted to approach me as Amyu kept it at bay with wind magic.

“Amyu, I want to get a little closer. Can you cover me?”

“A-All right!”

“Then fall back when I give the signal.” I waited for my chance as I supported Amyu with Impaling Stakes. *Not yet...*

Finally, Amyu’s magic forced it back and its chest expanded again. It was about to spit acid. *Now!*

Phase of metal—Bursting Nail. A white metal spear pierced the naga’s mouth when it opened it to spit acid. The naga writhed in silent pain as acid spilled from its mouth, melting part of the spear and its upper body. “Now, fall back!”

After giving Amyu the signal, I fired an Oni Flame. However, it was blocked by the naga’s flailing tail.

No good. It’s on guard now... Wait, I don’t have to do it myself. “Amyu! Aim a Fireball at its head!”

She was in a better position to hit the naga. Amyu responded by launching a Fireball. It flew true and struck the naga on the head, then the spear lodged in its mouth exploded.

Now defenseless, the half-man, half-snake monster writhed on the ground in pain.

“It finally lowered its head,” Amyu said, plunging her sword into the eye socket of its still-blazing head.

Both the human and snake halves convulsed violently before the dungeon boss finally stopped moving. Its flow of energy weakened, then disappeared altogether. It was dead.

Phew. That was easier than expected. “Amyu! We did it. It’s over—”

“Seika!” Amyu ran up to me and embraced me. “We did it! It’s my first time beating a dungeon boss! Our teamwork was perfect even though we only just formed a party.” Amyu grabbed my hands and jumped with joy.



Seeing Amyu smiling and laughing, so carefree, reminded me of her. That girl had often laughed just like that at my estate just a few short years before my reincarnation. However, the events that had transpired had convinced me. Amyu had no connection to her.

When we'd first met, it had crossed my mind that she might have also reincarnated to pursue me, but that was functionally impossible. Not even she would be able to find my soul among the countless worlds and reincarnate here. Her flow of energy was different, and she didn't seem to have her memories either. Above all else, I didn't think it was in her nature to pursue me.

It was just a coincidental resemblance. Things like that weren't particularly rare. That girl resembled my older sister as well, but in the end, they hadn't shared the slightest blood relation. My life in that world was over. The world wasn't so forgiving as to allow me to speak to those I'd left behind.

"Ah! Uh, ahem!" Perhaps noticing my look of affection, Amyu suddenly came to her senses and coughed, pulling her hands away in embarrassment.

I just smiled awkwardly. "You were pretty reckless. You didn't have to finish it off when it was on fire and rampaging."

"S-Some monsters come back to life if you take too long," she objected. "It's best to make sure you deal the finishing blow."

"You're impressive, Amyu. It's not easy to pull something like that off."

There had been warriors in Japan who cut down oni in human form as though they were oni themselves. Watching Amyu had reminded me of them. I absentmindedly stroked Amyu's red hair, prompting her to frown at me.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, s-sorry." I panicked and pulled my hand back. *I do that to Yifa sometimes too. They just make me feel like I'm with my disciples again. She probably thinks I'm treating her like a kid, though, so I should stop.*

Amyu turned away. "I didn't really mind."

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Anyway, what was that silver spear? It exploded when it was hit by

fire magic.”

“That’s one of the characteristics of that metal.”

Magnesium was a metal discovered by alchemists in the ancient Greek city of Magnesia that had the unusual property of being highly flammable. Moreover, it was easily dissolved by acid and produced a similarly flammable gas, meaning it was easy to cause explosions with Bursting Nail if used properly. Fortunately, the naga had just so happened to spit a powerful acid.

“Were you hurt?”

“No. It’s actually weird how unharmed I am. I thought I’d at least gotten singed.”

“The talisman I gave you must have taken your place. It’ll probably last for a while longer.”

“It can do that too? Talismans sure are handy.”

“It can’t heal major wounds, though. Anyway, let’s head on.” As we walked, I looked up at the ceiling and spoke. “If the exit is ahead, we’ll probably come out right next to the temple.”

“How do you know that?” Amyu asked.

“Oh, uh...just a feeling.” I panicked and tried to brush off Amyu’s suspicion.

“Master Seika, did you figure out where we are?” Yuki whispered into my ear.

“I figured it out a little bit ago,” I whispered back.

“H-How did you do that?”

“I used magnetic force with one of my spells.”

A magnet’s ability to attract iron—magnetic force—was one of the few forces that wasn’t weakened by the earth’s thick crust. If I created a strong magnetic force with yang ki, it would reach the surface even if it was a good distance away. That force was then picked up by the shikigami I had turned into honeybees.

Honeybees had minerals in their abdomens that responded to magnetic force, allowing them to detect changes in the magnetic field. My shikigami had no

such thing, of course, but they acted according to the form they took, meaning the result was the same. By putting up magnetic fields in different locations and at different heights and sensing them from the surface, I could get a rough estimate of our current location. Foxes and pigeons could do the same thing, but bees were the best when it came to sensing small changes near the surface. It was a shame that it was hard to see through their eyes.

“So could you swap with them and escape at any time?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah.”

“Th-Then why are you going through all this trouble?”

“I said it before, didn’t I? I want to enjoy myself. It’s my first time in a dungeon.” I also wanted Amyu to gain experience. So that one day she would become the strongest.



We continued down the path on the other side of the boss chamber and eventually arrived at a small room.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, but it’s probably a room for that,” Amyu replied. What appeared to be an altar was in the center of the room. Above it, there was a sword thrust inside.

Although it’s covered in dust and clearly quite old, that’s an excellent sword. The grip is modest, yet ornate, and I can sense a faint flow of power emanating from it. There’s not a speck of rust on the beautiful silver blade. What metal is that? It doesn’t look like bronze or steel.

“Is this mithril?” Amyu mumbled.

“Mithril? That’s...” If I recalled correctly, mithril was a rare metal that conducted magical power.

“I’ve never seen a mithril weapon before, but I think that’s what this is.”

“Does that mean it’s pretty high quality?”

“It’s the best material for spellblades. They’re expensive because of how rare

they are. This sword would probably fetch a pretty high price in town, though I don't think we can pull it out and take it back with us," Amyu said with a look of discomfort. The mithril sword was thrust inside a giant hand on the altar. While it had five fingers, it was clearly nonhuman. Its gnarled skin looked more like that of a reptile. "This is a seal, right?"

"Most likely," I responded.

"What do you think happened to the rest of the body?"

"It was probably cut to pieces and sealed in various locations." Powerful ayakashi had been sealed that way in my previous world. It was a different form of sealing from sending them to another plane.

"Does that mean this thing was really dangerous?"

"Probably. But..." I grabbed the sword and easily pulled it out of the hand.

"Hey!"

"It's fine. This hand has long since lost its power." After I pulled out the sword, the giant hand cracked and crumbled to dust. It had to have been quite old. I couldn't sense even a faint flow of energy. "I wonder why it was sealed inside a dungeon, though."

"This place might not have been a dungeon yet when it was sealed. Back when that hand still had power, it probably attracted a naga, and that naga became the core of the dungeon that eventually spread over a long period of time. It seems like this place was originally some kind of ruin."

"Hmm. I see." *It doesn't really matter.* "Here you go." I handed the sword to Amyu.

"Huh?"

"It's a good sword, right? You should use it."

"Really? Half the credit belongs to you."

"I don't use swords. We could sell it, but it's rare, so we might as well get some use out of it."

"Are you sure? My current spellblade got damaged by the acid, so I

appreciate it, but..." Amyu grabbed the handle and held the sword vertically. When she did, something fell off the pommel and rolled along the floor. "Did a decoration come off?" she asked.

"No," I said, picking the object up. "It's a ring."

It had been hanging from the pommel, so I'd also assumed it was a decoration. Despite the dust, it was a beautiful ring. Like the blade of the sword, it was made of mithril, with a small, multicolored magic stone in it. It didn't have any characters or magic circles on it, but I could feel the power within the ring. *Could it be...?*

"Amyu, do you mind if I take this?"

"I've got no reason to say no. Anyway, this is definitely a good sword. It needs some repair though," Amyu said with satisfaction, giving the mithril sword a swing. "I can't believe we made such a good find."

"We're quite lucky." *I'm quite lucky indeed.* I had been dismayed at falling into such a dull trap at first, but because of it, I had learned about Amyu's curse and obtained an interesting souvenir. It could have been a disaster if I'd let Yifa go instead—my decision had worked out well.

"I wish we could have gotten a dungeon drop too, though," said Amyu.

"What's a dungeon drop?"

"Depending on the dungeon, items like weapons and jewels sometimes appear inside. They're created by the dungeon itself like monsters, so they're called dungeon drops."

Come to think of it, I had obtained a cursed object that brought wealth to its owner from a haunted house in my previous life. "Searching for that stuff sounds like fun."

"It is," Amyu said with a smile. "Adventurers are good-for-nothings, but the job's fun. Not that a high and mighty noble would be interested."

"It doesn't sound so bad, actually."

"Are you serious?" she asked incredulously.

"I may be a noble, but a mistress's son can't inherit the family title. I'll have to

work.”

“Usually people who get good grades at the academy become government officials or something. You could probably become a court magician if you tried.”

“A government official, huh?”

Truth be told, I had grown fed up with the civil servant life during my time at the Bureau of Exorcists. It was all trivial busywork, and associating with incompetent colleagues was a drag. I really wasn’t interested in going back to that in my second life. “I think I’d rather not. Besides, isn’t being an adventurer profitable?”

“If you’re successful. That comes with danger, though.”

“I don’t mind. I like the freedom it provides.” So long as you had the strength, you could quickly earn money without anything holding you back. It was the perfect occupation for me. Money was important no matter where you were. “I’ve enjoyed fighting with you this time. It’s still a long way off, but I’ll give it some thought.”

“R-Really? Um, if you do become an adventurer...”

“Let’s go adventuring together again. Next time we’ll be properly prepared. I feel like I can go anywhere as long as I’m with you.”

“S-Sure... It’s a promise.” Amyu bashfully averted her eyes.

If I became an adventurer, I could remain by Amyu. That was the most important thing of all. As an adventurer who was a member of a party, being a little strong wouldn’t make me stand out. I would remain inconspicuous and happy in the shadow of Amyu’s incredible success.

I had managed to gain her trust through this series of events. My second life was progressing smoothly. *Is starting over really this easy?*

“A-Anyway, we should keep going. If these are man-made ruins, there should be an exit nearby.”

“Wait.” I stopped Amyu before she could walk off. “There’s a door ahead. I’ll check it out.” A narrow path extended from the altar room with a bronze door

at the end.

“We beat the boss. There’s nothing to worry about,” Amyu said, confused.

“Just in case. Hold on.” I walked up to the door.

“M-Master Seika...”

“I know,” I whispered back to Yuki. I had noticed when we’d first entered the altar room. There was a large flow of energy coming from beyond the door. The dungeon hadn’t lost its power yet. The core was still alive.

Slipping an illuminated hitogata through a crack in the door, I peered inside. It was a wide room with three nagas inside. A gold one on the right, a silver one on the left, and a gaudy, rainbow-colored naga in the center. They were coiled up, sitting with their arms crossed solemnly. They were clearly much stronger than the one we had faced.

My face stiffened up.

Come on, read the room. We were almost done. Cut us some slack—I don’t need this right now. I glanced over at Amyu. *Hero or not, I don’t think she can take those three. Fine, then.*

I slipped three more hitogata through the door and attached them to the nagas as they sat unmoving with their eyes closed. Then I made a hand sign with one hand.

Phase of yin—Frozen Trees. I used yin ki to instantly take all their body heat, turning the three nagas into frozen statues. Power disappeared from the dungeon itself like a light going out. It seemed like they had been the real core.

“Wh-What just happened?”

“Uh...the dungeon lost its power?”

“But we already beat the boss...”

“Maybe the naga was still alive until just now. Snakes are pretty tenacious.” Brushing her off, I sent out gateway hitogata to dispose of the naga corpses in an alternate plane. *All right, the evidence is gone.* I opened the door. “Looks like there was nothing here after all. If the dungeon were still alive, there could have been some monsters.”

“Hmm... Weird,” Amyu said, not fully satisfied.

I pointed at the other end of the room to distract her. “There’s another corridor inside. It might be the exit.” I had already sent out my shikigami and confirmed that it was a stairway up. The exit was a trapdoor covered in dirt and seemed like it would be difficult to open, but I had plenty of means at my disposal.

I saw several instructors from the academy by the temple ruins aboveground. They had probably come to look for us. They seemed to be panicked. I was a noble’s son, after all. I suddenly caught sight of one of them in my honeybee’s vision, then chuckled to myself. *Now I get it. I really am lucky.*



I used Ashen Flowers on the trapdoor to blow away the dirt on top, and Amyu and I safely escaped the dungeon. I scared the instructors in the process, but no one was hurt, so it worked out.

As we were escorted back to the academy, the instructors questioned us about what had happened. We told the truth—a magic circle in the forest had teleported us to a dungeon, then we’d defeated the boss and escaped. However, I had arranged with Amyu beforehand to keep my spells and her curse a secret. Telling them about it would be inconvenient.

The instructors didn’t seem to have been aware that there was a dungeon beneath the temple. There probably wasn’t anyone in Lodonea who knew. People wouldn’t want to live in a city if they knew there were monsters lurking within its walls.

The magic circle in the forest had already disappeared. It seemed to have been set up to disappear after activating a single time. How cautious. As a result, the culprit was unknown. I had expected another panic, but this time the academy only canceled classes for three days. I was surprised they were willing to continue as normal with the culprit still at large. Granted, they hadn’t even gone into lockdown after the demon incident, so that was probably to be expected.

Seven days had passed since then, and Amyu and I had returned to our normal lives.

“Excuse me,” I called out as I descended the stairs to the basement of a research building. “I’m here to return the thing I borrowed from you, Instructor Cordell.”

In the middle of a large room with a bluish-white magic circle drawn on the floor, Instructor Cordell looked up at me. “Lamprogue? I’m sorry, did I lend you something? Actually, how did you get in here? The door should have been locked.”

“I melted the lock. My apologies. The magic items to alert you of intruders are also currently inside a barrier. I’ll return your stuff later. There’s something I want to ask you.”

“Did you not understand something in class?”

Chuckling at Cordell’s joke, I walked through the basement. “Is your ritual going well, Instructor?”

Cordell eyed me silently.

“Amyu’s still perfectly fine.”

“How much do you know?”

“Who can say? I did think it was weird, though. No matter how skilled devils are at teleportation magic, how could one infiltrate an imperial city alone and set up that magic circle? Then there was the dungeon incident the other day. It’s possible it was a parting gift from the assailants, but looking at it logically, it makes sense to assume it was set up by someone on the inside.”

Cordell sighed. “Are you the one who defeated said assailants by any chance? Good grief. I don’t know who they sent, but I told them to make sure it was someone competent.”

“He sounded pretty sure of himself.”

“At any rate, how did you know it was me?” he asked. “I don’t believe I left behind any evidence.”

“Call it intuition.”

“Dodging the question, hmm?”

“It would take too long to explain. Anyway, you can show your true form now.”

Cordell stifled a laugh. “Was that a joke? Unfortunately, I’m just human. This is my true form.”

“Demons use human spies, huh?”

“Admittedly, I do have some demon blood in me. The empire uses demon spies as well.” It made sense that the human side was doing it too.

“Did the demons know about that dungeon too?”

“No, I found it myself. It was recorded in some old documents. There weren’t any entrances or exits a human could use, so escape should have been impossible.”

“How dangerous. Combined with that curse, you must have really wanted to get rid of the Hero.”

“You figured that out too, huh?”

“Was it something you invented yourself? That would make you quite the genius.”

“I’m glad you can at least appreciate that.” Cordell squinted his eyes behind his round glasses. “It’s a revolutionary curse that incorporates a light element ritual. You can curse someone from a distance, disguise it as a disease, and kill your target, guaranteed.”

I remained silent.

“All the people I’ve tried it on so far, no matter how talented the mage or resilient the warrior, died without any means of fighting back, suffering all the while. She may be enduring it for now, but the Hero will meet the same fate. The dungeon doesn’t matter.”

“...”

“However, there is one flaw—it takes time. If I’m interrupted partway through, the spell I so carefully prepared will come undone. Which is why I need you to die.”

Cordell swung his wand and countless magic circles appeared in the air. Illuminated by their light, this other world's curse user pushed up his glasses.

"This is my workshop. I was prepared for this. Perhaps I should seal this place up and escape in case you told somebody. Unfortunately, you'll have to watch from hell as I kill the Hero and make my triumphant return!"

"Before that, do you have a moment?" I raised my hand and interrupted Cordell. Seeing my lack of tension, he knit his eyebrows and fell silent. "You said 'one flaw' earlier, but there are actually two."

"What?"

"Haven't you noticed? Your curse isn't cast on Amyu anymore."

"Excuse me?"

"This is what's cursed now." I undid the invisibility spell on it and revealed a half-melted, pitch-black hitogata. Cordell's face went stiff the moment he saw it. "It's difficult to specify a target with curses. Usually, you'd use the target's name and hair or nails, but you chose an interesting condition—anyone covered in demon blood."

A pot full of black liquid was in the center of the magic circle on the floor. It was likely demon blood. "Amyu got some on her during the attack. Were you targeting Yifa and me too? That was a close one. Of course, thanks to that, I was able to transfer the curse to this hitogata."

The blackened hitogata had gotten covered in that smelly black fluid—demon blood—when I'd switched places with it after Cordell had spilled the pot. The hitogata had been the very first thing I'd tried to transfer Amyu's curse to—I was actually surprised at how easily I'd figured it out. Granted, that was only because I'd been suspicious of Cordell from the beginning.

"No matter what conditions you set, this is what happens when they're discovered. You didn't notice at all, did you? The caster doesn't know what's happening to the one they cursed. In my previous life, it wasn't uncommon to hear tales of women continuing to curse men they hated even after they died, turning them into oni. It's also easy to hit the wrong target with curses. There are even things like inugami possession and kodoku poison that take advantage

of this tendency to miss.”

“Past life? What are you talking about? How do you know about my technique?”

“Now, before we get to that other flaw.” *Summoning—Demon*. I withdrew the demon I had captured during my fight against Galeos from the alternate plane. A demon with red markings floated above my head, unmoving. It seemed to be dead. As I’d suspected, unlike ayakashi, monsters that depended on their physical forms couldn’t withstand being in another plane. Regardless, that wasn’t an issue at the moment.

Cordell’s eyes went wide behind his round glasses. “Wha—?! An archdemon?!”

“Then I do this.” Using my shikigami, I tore the demon’s corpse apart. Its blood and guts rained down on top of me.

“What are you—?!”

“And then this.” I chanted a mantra and burned the black hitogata with fire ki. “Now the curse has been transferred to me.” I could feel the energy flowing into me. *This is actually pretty strong. I feel bad for Amyu. Meanwhile, Cordell looks dumbfounded. That makes sense. I must seem pretty crazy right now.*

“Have you lost your mind? You won’t make it out unscathed after taking my curse!”

My lips curled into a smile. *That goes for both of us*. My voice filled the room.

“I worship you, O wise goddess Izanami.” I filled my words with cursed energy. “As you lie in the halls of the dead, crawling with maggots in the underworld, waited upon by the eight gods of thunder and foulest of hags, I ask that you devour all curses, punishment, and grudges”—my words bent the laws of the world, altering the curse affecting me—“and send them back from whence they came. I humbly, humbly, beseech you.” I looked Cordell in the eyes. “He who curses digs two graves, Instructor.”

Cordell suddenly coughed up a massive amount of blood. It poured out of his mouth as though his heart was being wrung out, covering the magic circle on the floor. The other world’s curse user gasped in pain. “What have you...”



“The biggest flaw of curses is that they’re easy to turn on the user. It’s called curse reversal,” I explained as I walked towards Cordell, who had collapsed onto the floor. “Reversing a curse turns it on its caster at several times its original strength. Are you listening, Instructor? Curses are by no means spells that can be used safely from a distance. They’re dangerous techniques that can turn on you in an instant if the target has the proper expertise or hires an exorcist.”

I continued explaining as the curse user bled out from his eyes and nose. His breathing gradually grew weaker. “Your experiments were only successful because that isn’t common knowledge in this world. Your technique will quickly become obsolete once countermeasures are developed. That’s too bad, isn’t it? Instructor? Can you hear me?”

Cordell was no longer moving. I looked down at his lifeless corpse as it lay in a dark pool of blood.

“I must admit, inventing curse methodology from scratch is impressive. However...” I sighed, then mumbled softly, “curses are an exorcist’s specialty.”



“Reversing that curse felt really good.” My master had often used Shinto ritual prayers to reverse curses. They were a little lengthy, but they ended up working perfectly for this world’s curses. It was incredible.

“It’s pretty rare for you to use ritual prayers, Master Seika,” Yuki said, poking her head out of my jacket pocket.

“That’s true. They’re the easiest way to reverse curses on yourself, but I hadn’t been cursed in quite some time.”

Onmyoudou was a system of sorcery that combined Shintoism, Buddhism, and Taoism. It was extremely versatile. The mantras I chanted were Sanskrit, the characters on the talismans I used were Chinese, and the ritual prayers I spoke were Japanese. Depending on the sorcerer’s preference, some systems could be ignored altogether. Shinto was effective for purification and exorcism, but the prayers took so long that it was a pain.

“By the way, there’s something I don’t understand,” said Yuki.

“What is it?”

“You seemed to suspect that human ever since you got back from the dungeon. How did you know?”

“Back when I was scouting the surface with honeybees before we escaped, I saw pollen on his jacket,” I explained. “It was from the flowers growing around the magic circle that teleported us.”

“Pollen? I’m surprised you noticed something like that.”

“Pollen reflects ultraviolet light. Honeybees are quite good at spotting it.”

“What’s ultraviolet light?”

“You know how purple is the bottom of a rainbow? There are actually more colors beneath it that the human eye can’t see. That’s ultraviolet light. Of course, that’s just a translation from the ancient Greek phrase. Birds and insects can see a lot of things we can’t.”

“Neat.” Yuki gave a flat response. I wasn’t sure she really understood.

At any rate, the demon insider has been handled now. I can finally start living a normal academy life. There was only one issue left. I looked down at my blood-covered clothes and sighed. “I guess I should change.”

Bursting Nail

A spell that launches a magnesium spear. In addition to being flammable, magnesium is easily dissolved when exposed to acid or even warm water, creating hydrogen. Although it was actually discovered in the modern day, in this work, it was isolated from talc by ancient Greek alchemists.

Magnetic Force Cloud (name does not appear in story)

A spell that uses yang ki to create a powerful magnetic field around a hitogata. Originally an arrow-repelling spell utilizing Lenz’s law, Seika used it as a beacon to identify his location from aboveground.

Frozen Trees

A spell that uses yang ki to steal all of the target's heat and freeze it.

Act 5

Five days later, it was announced to the students that Instructor Cordell had retired. *This school is still shrouded in mystery. Somebody had to have found the basement and his corpse, but I don't know how the academy reacted to that bloody scene. Ideally, they'll accept the truth—that a traitor's spell failed and killed him. That might be asking for too much, though. Oh well.* We had made it through the crisis. If the academy could continue running, that was good enough.

"Ah, Yifa!" I noticed the unassuming blonde on the path out of the dorms and called out to her. Noticing me, Yifa came running over.

"Good morning, Seika," said Yifa, narrowing her orange eyes.

Amyu and I had spent around five hours in the dungeon, and Yifa had had no idea what was going on that entire time. She had been really worried when we'd gotten back. She had even been concerned for Amyu. Yifa really was a nice girl.

"Yifa, hold out your hand for a moment."

"Huh? Okay." Yifa held out her right hand. I paused for a moment, then slid a ring onto her index finger. "Wh-What is this ring?"

"I found it in the dungeon. It took a while to polish it. What do you think?"

"It's pretty..." Yifa held her hand out and stared at it, then made a surprised sound. "Ah! The elementals are reacting to it like crazy."

"I thought so." The ring had reminded me of a druid's staff, and sure enough, it was also related to elementals. "Does it seem like it'll be useful? I can't tell."

"Y-Yeah." Yifa waved her finger slightly, and a breeze blew through the area.

“It’s incredible! They all do what I want so easily! I-Is it really all right for me to have this?”

“Of course. You’re the only one who can use it. Does it fit all right? We can have it adjusted in the city if we need to.”

“It’s perfect. Thanks, Seika. I’ll treasure it,” Yifa said, touching the ring with her left hand. If she could use it, then it was worth giving to her. Increasing the strength of my allies was a desirable outcome.

A moment later, I saw a girl with familiar red hair pass by—Amyu. Our schedules hadn’t aligned since I’d undone her curse, so it felt like it had been a while since we’d last met. She had looked disgusted the last time I’d said good morning to her, but now that we were on good terms, it should be fine. I raised my hand and greeted her with a smile.

“Good morning, Amyu.”

“I told you not to be so familiar with me,” Amyu said with a slight scowl.

Wh-Why?! It doesn’t make sense. This is the exact same as half a month ago. Aren’t we friends now? We promised to go on an adventure together. What happened? As my smile froze on my face, Yifa happily called out to her.

“G-Good morning, Amyu!”

Amyu responded with a slight, yet noticeable smile. “Morning, Yifa. Nice weather, huh?”

“Huh?!” Ignoring my bewilderment, the pair happily began a conversation.

“Thanks for helping me study yesterday,” said Amyu.

“It’s no problem at all,” Yifa replied.

“I should treat you to something as thanks. Wanna go get that frozen dessert Instructor Karen was talking about?”

“Really?!”

“Y-You two sure get along,” I said timidly. Amyu shot me an annoyed glance.

“We started talking in the girls’ dorm. Is that a problem?”

“No, not at all, but...” *Aren’t we on talking terms now too?* Yifa looked at me

apologetically.

“Um, let’s study with Seika before the exam!” she said.

“Sure,” I mumbled.

“I’d appreciate that,” Amyu replied. Amyu and Yifa walked off together.

Did I do something to make her mad?

“What are you doing, Seika?” Amyu asked, turning her head back at me.

“We’ve got class, don’t we? Hurry up or you’ll be late.”

“R-Right.” I hurried after them.

“She’s just embarrassed, Master Seika. I can tell,” Yuki whispered into my ear.

I hope so...

Epilogue

In a dense forest in demon territory, a fortress suddenly appeared near the border with the Urdwight Empire. Inside, demon baron Bol Bophis sat on a luxurious chair in the lord's room. He sighed wearily as he swished a goblet of wine. "I suppose we must assume Galeos has been killed," he grumbled, stroking his black fur-covered cheek.

It had already been two months since he had departed. Only one conclusion could be drawn from the fact that he hadn't returned yet. That youngster had been the most promising warrior of the Black clan. He'd had both exceptional magic and physical strength. Though he had grown old, Galeos had defeated the devil champion Gol Godolga. He had even brought down Sword Sovereign Adanov, who had slain countless demons.

Whether the Hero was real or not, had he completed this mission, he would have surely been given a court rank by the king. Bophis had hoped that Galeos would rise through the ranks like he had, or perhaps lead the Black clan as its chief. It was tragic that he had met such an untimely end.

"Have we received word from our dog within the academy?"

"Not yet, Your Excellency," the ashen-furred subordinate by his side answered.

It was reasonable to assume that he had died as well. The mixed-blood was a competent but untrustworthy man. However, it would have been an odd time for betrayal, and Galeos wouldn't have fallen into any ordinary trap. That said, there was no sign of him having fallen for a large-scale trap either. There was nothing unusual in the reports from the other dogs sent to and from Lodonea. The only things of note were a student finding a dungeon beneath Lodonea Forest, and dubious rumors of a dragon flying around at night.

"The Hero, hmm? How troublesome."

If Galeos had indeed been defeated, it had to be assumed that the Hero truly

was at the academy. Yet the report from the dog hadn't mentioned the Hero's name or their intentions. In addition, Bophis no longer had any pawns, making further moves difficult. Was it even the Hero's doing to begin with? Assassination was out of character for the traditional idea of the Hero.

Thoughts raced around in Bol Bophis's head before the absurdity of the situation finally began to sink in. Why had he been sent to the border, forced to exhaust his own troops? Forget the Hero. The days spoken of in epics were long since past. Demons and humans had both increased their populations and grown wealthy. They had refined the tactics used by their armies. Heroes and champions were no longer relevant.

Did El Eldentrada, the Grand Duke of Gold who sought the death of the Hero and resurrection of the Demon Lord, understand that? Did the nobility, the king, and his fellow demons understand that?

With a heavy sigh, Bol Bophis made his decision. "Increase the number of dogs. Focus on Lodonea and the imperial capital Urdnesc. Monitor them carefully."



On the top floor of the main building of Lodonea Imperial Magic Academy, an elderly man with a back as straight as a cypress tree—the deputy headmaster—folded up a sheet of paper and handed it to the room's owner.

"Here you are, Headmistress."

An elderly woman short enough to be mistaken for a little girl accepted it. "Hmm. Their assassin hasn't come home, and they've lost contact with their dog. It seems young Cordell was indeed a spy." The report in the elderly woman's hands burned up in an instant, turning to soot and disappearing. She hadn't used a wand, an incantation, or even said the spell's name, yet the fire had been expertly adjusted to the perfect amount of force.

"What shall we do?" asked the old man.

"Which are you talking about?"

"Both."

“Hmph.” The headmistress snorted. “Leave our kindly janitor alone. The demons, however, are a problem. Fortunately, they don’t seem to have been able to identify her yet. I’m sure we’ll receive instructions from the imperial court eventually, but I suppose we should start thinking about it now.”

“Thinking of a way to protect the academy and the Hero from them?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. We can take a more passive approach.” The elderly woman’s lips curved into a smile. “We’ll draw their attention away from the academy.”

The deputy headmaster disappeared in an instant. The setting sun grew darker. Night would soon fall.

Extra Story: The Snow-White Kuda-Gitsune

The first time I heard his voice, it was from within a bamboo tube.



“Haruyoshi! Are you there, Haruyoshi? I have arrived! Enough with the shikigami, show yourself!”

Shaken around inside the bamboo tube that was my home, I awoke. I could hear my master’s voice outside the tube. She sounded somewhat elated—I’d never heard her sound like that.

Born into a family of fox-users who utilized kuda-gitsune for their sorcery, my master was hailed as an unparalleled talent despite still being a young woman. Her usual manner of speaking inspired awe in those around her.

After a short while, I realized that the flow of energy around me was different. It seemed we had arrived at the final stop on our journey from Shinano.

“I hear you, —.” I heard quiet footsteps and the voice of a human man. “I’m in the middle of teaching my disciple to cook. Surely you can wait just a moment.” The voice seemed slightly irritated, yet it also sounded like he was close with Master —.

“Heh, sorry, Haruyoshi. Guess I interrupted your mealtime.” Master — sounded surprisingly cheerful.

“It’s fine. Come on in. You might as well join us for breakfast. More importantly, what brings you here so suddenly? Normally you’d send a letter via one of your kuda-gitsune.”

At that time, I had no idea he was Haruyoshi Kuga, the exorcist extraordinaire said to be the most powerful sorcerer in all of Japan—and the man I eventually would go on to serve for a very long time.



“Heh, I wanted to surprise you!” My previous master pompously broke the

ice. “An exceptionally unusual kuda-gitsune was born the other day, so I’ve personally brought her to you!”

“An unusual kuda-gitsune? What exactly does that mean?”

“Take a look,” said my previous master, opening the lid of the tube I was inside. Light shined down on me. Curious as to my whereabouts and who my master was talking to, I popped my head out.

“Interesting.” My eyes met the human’s. He had shapely features. Though he was a man, there was something oddly feminine about his eyelashes and well-defined nose. His pale skin and almond eyes gave him a cold impression, yet the color of his irises bore a certain gentleness. He gazed at me with intense curiosity. “A white kuda-gitsune, huh? But her eyes aren’t red like the others’.”



“Heh, you’re as sharp as ever. That’s exactly right, her eyes are black. And her fur isn’t translucent—it looks almost as if she were covered in white powder.”

I was a white kuda-gitsune. That in itself wasn’t particularly rare—half the kuda-gitsune the family used were of a white-furred, red-eyed lineage. But I was a little different from all of them.

“Hmm...” The man seemed deep in thought. “I’ve heard of similar beasts and fish being born on rare occasions. Unlike the red-eyed ones, their scales are genuinely white rather than colorless. The colorless variety is said to be some form of disease, but that doesn’t seem to be the case here. One theory states that the land was once covered in snow and ice, and that beasts had changed colors in order to survive in that world of white. The blood of those ancestors still flows through creatures today, resulting in these white specimens.”

The human continued grumbling to himself. “However...that shouldn’t have anything to do with ayakashi. While kuda-gitsune are a relatively animallike type of ayakashi, could such an individual really be born among them? No, there’s already the red-eyed variety, so I suppose it isn’t all that unexpected.”

“Are you this particular about the details in everything?” my previous master asked, fed up with the man’s eccentric behavior. “Enough with the complicated explanations. What do you think? She’s perfect for you, isn’t she?” My previous master wore the smile of an ordinary girl, something her usual demeanor made all but unthinkable.

“Huh? You’re giving her to me?”

“What do you think I brought her for? You told me before that you were interested in kuda-gitsune. This one’s pedigree is excellent. She’s the offspring of my most skilled kuda-gitsune. And look at that fur. She must have some sort of incredible power. Kuda-gitsune like this aren’t born very often! What do you say, Haruyoshi?”

The man looked at me for a moment, then at my previous master. “Are you certain? Something this valuable should probably go to the head of—”

“Forget about father! She’s the offspring of my kuda-gitsune, so I get to decide what to do with her! Besides, I owe you, so...” Ignoring the sudden

bashfulness of my previous master, the man stared at me, pondering something. My previous master started to get nervous. “Wh-What? Is she not to your liking? I-I don’t think you’re going to find one better than her.”

“No, that isn’t it.” The man smiled at my previous master. “I was just wondering if I could take proper care of her. As I recall, it’s better not to send them to the other plane. It’ll probably be hard to find her a mate too. Is that all right?”

“If you’re just doing it as a hobby, that’s for the best. I doubt you’d die from possession, but the pups are a handful.”

“I see. Then I’ll gladly take her.” My previous master’s face lit up, and she handed my tube to the man. His hands were gentle.

“Oh, right. What’s her name?”

“Name? Kuda-gitsune don’t have names. We just call them One, Two, Three, and so on. When they die, we replace them.”

“How tasteless.”

“Then give her a name yourself. Unpaired kuda-gitsune live a long time, so that would probably be good.”

“In that case...I suppose I’ll go with ‘Yuki.’”

My former master seemed a little annoyed when she heard the name. “You’re deciding just like that? Well, she is a female... Where did you get that name from? I-Is it the name of one of your past women?”

“No. It means ‘snow,’ because she looks like she lives in that white world of snow and ice.” The man looked at me and smiled. “It’s nice to meet you, Yuki.”

Thus, I became Yuki, and I started serving Master Haruyoshi.



Kuda-gitsune were ayakashi that served humans. While there were incidents where they quickly multiplied and killed powerless sorcerers, they generally lived alongside humans and obeyed their commands. That’s why I did my best to serve Master Haruyoshi!

“Yuki, is the weather going to clear up tomorrow?” One day, Master Haruyoshi asked me that question, and I thought it’d be nice if it was sunny the next day, so I answered, “Yes!” The skies were clear the next day, and Master Haruyoshi praised me a lot. My predictions were accurate for a while, but once the rainy season hit, they started to be off the mark.

“Yuki, are there any spirits living in this cave?” Master Haruyoshi asked me another time. “According to the villagers, an ayakashi has been appearing in this area. They aren’t certain what kind it is. What do you think?”

I could feel some sort of power within the cave, so putting myself on guard, I answered, “There’s a strong one inside!”

Master Haruyoshi looked confused for a moment. “I see. It doesn’t feel particularly strong to me, but I suppose I’ll be careful just in case,” he said, his face stiffening up. He prepared a few talismans and we stepped inside the cave.

The spirit showed itself immediately, and I got scared and ran up Master Haruyoshi’s back. “Eek! M-Master Haruyoshi, there it is! Exterminate it, quick!”

Master Haruyoshi looked down at the small, stout, puppylike creature circling his feet. Eventually, he grabbed me off his head by the scruff of my neck and put me on the ground.

“Eek!” The ayakashi bumped into me.

“It’s just a sunekosuri.” I would learn later that sunekosuri were mostly harmless ayakashi that just got in people’s way as they walked.

“Yuki, possess that thief and make him reveal the location of his stash,” Master Haruyoshi once ordered me. We were by the side of the road in the early morning. A thief had been tied up and was kneeling on the ground with an arrogant look.

“I told you, I already sold off all the stuff I stole and spent all the money too!” A crowd of onlookers had gathered to watch the spectacle.

“How do you possess someone?” I asked Master Haruyoshi.

“Huh?” Master Haruyoshi sounded surprised, as though he had never expected to be asked that question. “If I recall correctly, her kuda-gitsune went

inside through the ear.”

“I see.” I was a kuda-gitsune too, so I could freely shrink myself. Turning small enough to fit inside a human’s ear was a simple feat. I didn’t want to go inside such a filthy person’s ear, but it was Master Haruyoshi’s order. “I’ll give it a try!” I shrank myself down and entered the thief’s ear.

“Urgh!”

Ignoring the thief’s groan, I continued on. I reached some sort of membrane before long. It looked thin, so I cut through it with my claws and continued.

“Gaaaaah!” The thief screamed. He was quite loud.

Passing under tiny bones, I continued traveling inside until I found a small hole. I made myself even smaller and kept going.

“Mgh... Mrgh!” The thief let out groans that didn’t even sound human anymore.

Eventually, I entered a slightly wider area. Light was shining through. I moved forward, and it turned out to be his mouth, wide open. “Master Haruyoshi! I made it out.” I exited his mouth and looked around, only to see all the onlookers taken aback, Master Haruyoshi included. The thief’s eyes went wide.

“Wh-Why did you exit from his mouth when you went in his ear? Did you pass through the auditory tube?” Master Haruyoshi asked, his face stiffening up. “Why did you physically go inside him? You were supposed to possess him spiritually.”

“Huh? I’m not sure what that means. Could you show me how it’s done?”

Master Haruyoshi’s shoulders slumped. “I can’t. I’m a human.”

“I didn’t realize.” The way things were going, I wouldn’t be able to live up to Master Haruyoshi’s expectations. “All right! Then I’ll go in through the other ear and try one more time!” I exclaimed after thinking for a moment.

“I-I’ll talk! I’ll tell you where it is! Just no more of that!”



To be honest, I was hopeless. Nothing I tried worked out. From what I’d

heard, skilled kuda-gitsune could predict earthquakes and disasters, identify spirits, and possess people and take control of them. I couldn't do any of that.

I might have been from an outstanding bloodline, but I wasn't talented at all. I felt pathetic and sorry for both Master Haruyoshi and my previous master. Master Haruyoshi could easily cast spells that were more powerful than anything a kuda-gitsune could do. It made me think he'd never needed me to begin with.

Feeling down, I crawled into Master Haruyoshi's hair and sulked. When I did, he took off his hat and patted me. That made me feel a little better.



One day, Master Haruyoshi granted me a human form.

"It'll probably be more convenient for you to work in that form from now on."

"Whoa!" I lifted my arms and spun around. My white hair and the sleeves and hem of my white kimono spun with me. It felt strange to have such a large body and a tall line of sight. "So this is how humans see the world." I'd had no idea Master Haruyoshi was even capable of giving me a human form. "Can I take these clothes off?" I asked, tugging at the kimono's collar.

"No, and don't play with them too much. I haven't fine-tuned the details, so you'll go back to your original form if you take that off."

"Okay." I walked around the estate, then stepped barefoot into the garden and looked at the pond full of carp. I saw the face of a slim young woman reflected in the water. She had large eyes and a high nose. She didn't look like anyone I knew. "Who is this human?"

Master Haruyoshi's eyes went wide with surprise. After a moment of hesitation, he opened his mouth to speak. "Well..."

I tried to stand up as he began to speak, and, not used to my new body, I immediately lost my balance and fell into the pond with a splash. "Aaaah!"

"Are you all right?"

Back in my original form, I crawled out of the pond and shook myself off, sending water flying everywhere. I had completely forgotten about what I'd just

asked.

Haruyoshi forced a smile. “You should get used to that body before I give you any new work.”

Just as Master Haruyoshi had predicted, I spent a while bumping into pillars, hitting my arms against sliding doors, and generally hurting myself. While the tasks I was finally given in my human form were all simple things like cleaning, serving tea, and greeting guests, I was just happy to finally be useful.



Master Haruyoshi would often welcome children to his estate as his disciples.

“Yuki, — will be staying with us starting today.”

They were usually children whose parents had abandoned them, orphans, or the children of nobles who had disowned them—whatever the case, they all came from sad backgrounds. The child with him that day clung to Master Haruyoshi’s clothes and timidly looked around.

“Oh!” I propped my broom up against a pillar and crouched in front of the child, smiling. “Are you a new disciple? It’s nice to meet you! I’m Yuki, a kudagitsune who serves Master Haruyoshi!”

“W-Waaaaaah!” The child started to cry. It happened every time. Reluctantly, I turned back into my original form. “Waaah... Huh?”

Seeing my original form, the child stopped crying and stared in wonder. I stuck my neck out and sniffed the child’s hand. The child pulled back in surprise, but their eyes still looked at me full of wonder.

“A fox?”

“That’s right. Try petting her. Gently,” said Master Haruyoshi. The child started hesitantly stroking my bushy tail. I wished they would stop going for my tail first thing, but I endured it.



“Master Haruyoshi, I feel like children are always afraid when they see this form.”

“Yes...you’re probably right,” Master Haruyoshi responded awkwardly. “Your form is a little upsetting by Japanese standards. Your white hair makes you look inhuman, so they’re probably afraid of that. Your original form is more animallike, so it’s easier for them to be friendly with you.”

“I’m unappealing?” I was dejected. I felt disappointed with the human form I had come to like so much. Why had Master Haruyoshi deliberately given me an unappealing appearance?

“No, only by Japanese standards.” Master Haruyoshi tried to smooth things over. “In the West and the Islamic world, your double eyelids, large eyes, and high nose would be considered beautiful. I’m sure children would be fond of you too.”

I sighed. “But not here...”

Master Haruyoshi had told me there were a great many countries across the sea, far to the west. He had once gone on a long journey to those lands. Apparently, different countries had different standards for beauty. Humans were strange creatures.

“Do you like this form, Master Haruyoshi?”

“Yes, I do,” he answered quietly. The expression he wore had a bunch of different emotions mixed into it. I, on the other hand, was simply happy.



Master Haruyoshi, who possessed exceptional power and never aged, was feared by many humans. However, he was loved by many as well.

A crude warrior, a wise sorcerer, an eccentric noble, and an imperial prince who sang strange songs—Master Haruyoshi was always surrounded by peculiar people. My previous master was one of them. However, I could tell that she didn’t just like Master Haruyoshi—she wanted to be his mate.

Of course, that dream never came true. She was a human with an ordinary lifespan, and she became the head of a distinguished family of fox-users in the Shinano province. She eventually mated with another man and had a child. My previous master lived to see the birth of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well.

As a fox-user, she was without equal, past or present. Still, nobody could compare to Master Haruyoshi.



“You may enter.” I heard Master —’s voice from the other side of the sliding doors we had been guided to. Brought along by Master Haruyoshi, I was visiting the Shinano province for the first time in decades. The manor I had once lived in had been rebuilt twice as large. None of the humans I recognized were still around, but a familiar-looking young girl had guided us to Master —’s room.

“I’m coming in.” Master Haruyoshi slid the door open and I followed him inside. A moment later, dread ran through my entire body and I froze up.

“It’s all right, Yuki,” a hoarse voice called out to me from the bed set up on the tatami floor, and it coughed. “I made an exception for you. Any other youkai that might have tried to pass through 618’s barrier would be turned to dust.” A brown kuda-gitsune was standing next to my previous master’s pillow. The power I felt from it was so intense it was hard to believe it was also a kuda-gitsune. It alone would be enough to deal with any ordinary spirit. That type of barrier was usually maintained by several kuda-gitsune together, but this one was handling it all by itself.

“It’s been a while,” said Master Haruyoshi, sitting down by the pillow. “I didn’t get a letter from you this year, so I was worried.”

“My apologies. I can’t hold a brush anymore...” My previous master coughed.

“Don’t push yourself.” Master Haruyoshi stopped my former master as she tried to sit up. Elderly and bedridden, she looked smaller than she ever had before. Master Haruyoshi smiled at her. “Even if you can’t hold a brush, I see your skill hasn’t waned in the slightest. I’m surprised a kuda-gitsune can possess such power.”

“You mean 618? Heh, she’s my masterpiece. I never thought I’d use her again, but I decided to let her out of her tube today. I wanted to show you, Yuki.”

“Huh? M-Me?” I asked.

“Indeed.” There was a smile on my previous master’s wrinkled face. “This is the descendant of one of your siblings.”

“Huh?”

“I want you to know there’s nothing wrong with your blood.”

I looked at the other kuda-gitsune. She didn’t look anything like me. Kuda-gitsune held no attachment to their family to begin with. Still, hearing that made me feel strange.

“Do you resent me?” my former master asked. “Had I raised you personally, I might have been able to strengthen your kuda-gitsune powers. I even told Haruyoshi it was best that you never be given a mate. I took away your chance to be a normal kuda-gitsune.”

“No,” I told my previous master. “I’m happy to serve Master Haruyoshi. I don’t resent you one bit, Master —.”

“Is that right?” My previous master closed her eyes and laughed at herself. “To be honest, Yuki, there were times when I was jealous of you. I wished I could have been born as an ayakashi, rather than an ayakashi-user...” she said before falling into another coughing fit. Somehow I knew what that meant.

With a serious expression on his face, Master Haruyoshi asked my previous master a question. “Do you desire eternal life? I could...”

“Heh. I no longer have any use for it.” Despite her feeble voice, my previous master spoke clearly. “Even if you were to offer me eternal youth and beauty, I’d turn it down.”

“I see. That’s a surprise. I thought everyone would desire eternal life.”

“Don’t need it. Death comes to humans and kuda-gitsune alike. No matter how much power we have, the end result is the same. For me, and for her.” My previous master looked over at the kuda-gitsune next to her. She continued as Master Haruyoshi frowned. “Neither 618 nor I are long for this world—she’s already pregnant.”

Master Haruyoshi’s eyes went wide with surprise. I looked closer at the kuda-gitsune, and its stomach did seem to be slightly distended.

“Kuda-gitsune die shortly after giving birth. Normally I wouldn’t let her out of her tube anymore, but today was a special case. Her mate snarled at me a

little.”

“Why?” asked Master Haruyoshi. “Unmated kuda-gitsune can live forever. Why would you deliberately shorten the lifespan of such an outstanding specimen?”

“Heh... Say, Haruyoshi. You once told me that life was originally limitless, right?” my previous master asked quietly.

“Indeed. A sage from the Ryukyu Islands told me that although corals appear to be like trees, they’re actually colonies of small creatures that can live forever. There are other species that don’t have finite lifespans as well, but they’re all primitive. If humans and beasts were once like them, then we wouldn’t have had limited lifespans either.”

“Heh. If the myth of Iwanaga-hime granting humanity fleeting lives is untrue, then that means aging and death are things man and beast acquired for themselves. Why do you think that is, Haruyoshi?” Haruyoshi had been alive much longer than my previous master, yet she seemed like a wise sage explaining the truth of the world to the young.

Master Haruyoshi quietly returned the question back to her. “What do you think, —?”

“To reproduce,” my previous master answered bluntly. “Among ayakashi, only kuda-gitsune produce offspring, thus only they have limited lifespans. That’s the logical conclusion, is it not?”

“Indeed...” Master Haruyoshi agreed, then listened to my previous master as she continued.

“So long as the parents live, they continue to consume resources. The food, shelter, and even opportunities and experiences available to the offspring decrease. Even if the child is superior to its parents, it won’t be able to overcome the difference in size and experience. An individual with incredible potential will be deprived of the opportunity to grow.”

Master Haruyoshi remained silent.

“That’s why people and kuda-gitsune die. So that they may entrust the future to the offspring who will surpass them.” My former master looked over at 618.

“So long as she lives, an even more talented kuda-gitsune will never be born. Fox-users would rather have a powerful, experienced kuda-gitsune like 618 than an immature pup. Even if a pup superior to her were to be born, it would never have the chance to grow.”

“ ... ”

“Humans are the same. I only became the head of the family because my father passed away. That made me stronger. It made me capable of acknowledging my weaknesses, relying on others, and enduring the pressure of making decisions that affected the future of the family. It was all because of experiences I never would have had if my father had still been alive.”

“ ... ”

“That’s what human life is. My children may be somewhat unreliable now, but when I pass, they’ll grow in a flash.” My previous master gave a goofy smile. “How’s that, Haruyoshi? I can do some philosophizing too. Though I’m sure it all seems shallow to you.”

“No, it was quite astute. I’ve thought the same thing before. However, there’s one thing I feel the need to point out,” Master Haruyoshi said with a gentle smile. “Your children are by no means unreliable. At the very least, Yuki’s been far more reliable in her time with me than you ever were.”

“Oh, is that right? I seem to recall things differently... Heh, but if that’s what you claim, then it must be true.” The wrinkles on my previous master’s face grew deeper. “I hope that one day you find someone you want to entrust the future to, even at the cost of your own life.” Her smile was not that of a wise old sage, but rather a girl who had overcome a broken heart.

Before the arrival of the next season, my previous master passed away.



In the sixth month of every year, a festival was held in the capital city of Kyoto. Master Haruyoshi would regularly take his disciples to sightsee and mingle with commoners during the event.

“Master, buy that!”

“Hmm? Oh, all right.”

“Master! Buy that too!”

“That too? Ha ha, very well. Today is a special day.”

“Master! You’re wasting money again!”

There were many peddlers mixed in with the sightseers. Master Haruyoshi was always in a good mood and would buy his younger disciples whatever they wanted, then get scolded by his older disciples. As the younger disciples grew older, they would realize how bad it was for his finances and join the side scolding him. Humans were mysterious creatures.

“Phew. It’s already this time of year, huh?” Master Haruyoshi walked next to me, eating a skewered sparrow as I watched the lively dengaku performers dance. “I wasn’t sure we’d make it this time. I’m glad we were able to finish things up quickly.”

A few days ago, Master Haruyoshi had taken a request from a noble all the way in the Higo province to exterminate an ayakashi. Sometimes he would even have to cross the sea and head to the continent.

“It was just an umibouzu. You could have let one of your disciples who is about to set out on their own handle it. If you gave them a treasure from the Song dynasty, I’m sure they would have gladly gone,” I said.

“I couldn’t be certain it was just an umibouzu from what I’d been told. I wasn’t comfortable sending one of them.” Master Haruyoshi wasn’t soft on his disciples, but he could be overprotective at times. No, rather than overprotective, it was more like he always considered them children no matter how much time passed. He wasn’t necessarily wrong. In terms of skill, with one exception, none of them had ever come close to Master Haruyoshi. “Also, I’m the only one who could have made it back by today. I’m sure they wanted to see the Gion Festival too.”

“You really love this festival, Master Haruyoshi. I think I prefer the one from two months ago if anything.”

“The Kamo Festival? Why?”

“This one’s a little too chaotic for me...and I liked the light show those sorcerers put on with their talismans.”

“Ah, that performance.” Master Haruyoshi looked uncomfortable. “I’m actually the one who came up with it. Though that was over a century ago.”

“Huh?! Really?”

“I was part of the Bureau of Exorcists back then. One year, the imperial envoy was an irritating show-off and forced all the festival arrangements on me for some reason. It was such a headache. Just remembering it annoys me,” Master Haruyoshi said, his irritation audible in his voice. Although he was regarded by the public as a practically supernatural being who brought disaster, I knew from my long time serving him that Master Haruyoshi had a somewhat childish, human side to him. “The sorcerers in the Bureau of Exorcists might resent me for giving them extra work.”

“That’s not true. They were all having fun. I’m sure the sorcerers are all proud of you.”

“I hope so.” My words seemed to cheer him up a little.

“At any rate, I’m glad we were able to see the horseback parade this year,” Master Haruyoshi said, watching the festival. “Ever since the cloistered emperor fell ill, things have started to smell rotten around the Imperial Court.” A faint frown appeared on Master Haruyoshi’s face. He was probably worried about his disciples who held noble status and his friends in the Imperial Family. “Well, I’m sure things will calm down soon. It’d be nice to watch the festival with everyone again next year.”

I thought it’d be nice if we came back next year, so I answered, “Yes!” But as it turned out, I really was an incompetent kuda-gitsune. That prediction didn’t come true either.



The end came all too suddenly.

“Ha ha, they got me good. I’ve got no tricks left,” Master Haruyoshi grumbled in his manor.

Thunder boomed outside, and pounding could be heard on the roof alongside the vicious howl of wind. Despite it being the middle of summer, a hailstorm was pummeling the building. The two powerful ryuu that served Master Haruyoshi were responsible for the absurd weather—a rairyuu that controlled lightning and a hyouryuu that controlled ice.

The campfires of the warriors who had surrounded the manor were gone. Nobody should have been able to withstand the storm. Yet in spite of that, her presence hadn't disappeared—the one disciple who had grown powerful enough to rival Master Haruyoshi. Like water moving from one container to another, she had inherited each and every one of his exorcist techniques.

I didn't know what was going on. Why had she turned on the master she had adored so much? And why had Master Haruyoshi seemingly given up and accepted the situation? I didn't understand complicated things, but I could tell a battle nobody wanted was about to begin.

"I can't believe I got wrapped up in a battle for imperial succession of all things. I was careless. Is it his son pulling the strings? Or perhaps his grandson? Without knowing who's behind it, I can't even use a curse. Politicians can be surprisingly adept. Ha ha ha." Master Haruyoshi laughed, which suddenly made me anxious. Did humans consider times like this funny? "That girl has her own position to worry about now. I suppose this is the end for me."

"Master Haruyoshi...I'll go with you," I said, finding my resolve. I could tell he had accepted his death. He would never lay his hands on his disciples. And even Master Haruyoshi wasn't capable of beating that girl if he was holding back.

"What are you saying?" Master Haruyoshi looked at me in confusion. "You're in danger. Get inside the other plane before you die."

"B-But—!"

"Don't mistake my intent. I won't perish here."

"Huh?" I expressed my confusion, and Master Haruyoshi responded as calmly as ever.

"My body may die, but my soul will remain. I'll be reborn in the future." I was at a loss for words. The miracle of reincarnation was said to only occur by

chance, under special conditions, yet Master Haruyoshi was going to make it happen through one of his spells. He gave me a smile that seemed to say, “Good grief.” “While I might have failed in this one, I hope that in my next life, I can be happy.”

“You...” I wanted to say something, but I couldn’t find the right words. My head was filled with frustration. If only I were a smarter, more capable kudasune.

“We’re out of time,” Master Haruyoshi grumbled. Before I knew it, the storm had suddenly weakened. The incredible power I had felt through the barrier was gone. The two ryuu with strength rivaling the gods seemed to have been sealed. “I promise I’ll call you in my next life. Farewell for now, Yuki.”

The area around me was distorted, and I was sucked inside, isolated away from the world. The alternate plane was a dark, empty place. With no objects, light, or even the concepts of time and distance, humans and animals were unable to endure it. Ayakashi and spirits, however, were not limited in that way. It simply made them tired. They would fall asleep and be forgotten by humanity, just like the gods.

During that sleep, I gradually grew sadder.

“I hope that in my next life, I can be happy.”

Had Master Haruyoshi not been happy in that world? Had he not been happy spending his days with me, Master —, and his precious disciples? If that was the case, then the cause had to lie within Master Haruyoshi. Those days should have been happy for anyone.

In a trancelike state, I thought to myself—what would make Master Haruyoshi happy in his next life? No... What would have made him happy in this life?

“I owe you, so...”

“I really appreciate it...”

“It’s all thanks to you...”

“Master!”

“It’s been a while, Master...”

“Hey, Haruyoshi...”

“Thanks a bunch, Haruyoshi...”

“Haruyoshi, I know you can...”

“What do you think, Master? Isn’t it amazing?”

“I hope that one day you find someone...”

“I wasn’t comfortable sending one of them...”

I realized something. What Master Haruyoshi had really needed was—



“...Yuki. Yuki.” I was shaken awake. It was night, and the academy dorm room was illuminated by the light of a lamp. It seemed like I had fallen asleep on top of a desk. Master Haruyoshi—no, Master Seika had woken me up.

“I’m getting ready for bed. You should— Wait, were you crying?” When he said that, I realized that the corners of my eyes were wet. Master Seika smiled, then brushed away my tears with his finger. “Did you have a bad dream or something? Hey!” I shrunk myself down and swiftly slipped into his hair. He forced a smile, put out the light, and got into bed. “Good night, Yuki.”

“Good night, Master Seika.” In Master Seika’s hair, I closed my eyes once again and thought to myself. I hadn’t forgotten what I’d realized back then.

It’ll be okay, Master Seika. I’ll make sure you’re happy in this life.











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The Reincarnation of the Strongest Exorcist in Another World: Volume 1

by Kiichi Kosuzu

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