

Making Jam in the Woods

My Relaxing Life Starts in Another World



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MORI NO HOTORI DE JAM WO NIRU Vol.3 ~ISEKAI DE HAJIMERU SLOW LIFE
~

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Meeting the Spirit

"I wanted to
see you. Margaret..."

"...Are you the Spirit?
Huh? My voice—"



Making Turnip Soup That's

Gentle on the Stomach



"I wonder what kind of food Lord Walter would want to eat?"

Marie-Louise

Rachel Lindgren

Margaret

Lady Rachel's turnip soup had Lady Rachel's own flavor profile. It was thick, soft, and had a gentle taste, with a slight hint of sweetness. It's very delicious.

Making Jam
in the Woods 3

My Relaxing Life Starts in Another World

Prologue: Winter Preparations in Miselle

MY room on the second floor of the estate looked out onto the vast forest of trees via a wooden framed window. I enjoyed the view. Green leaves that had once sparkled in the sun had begun to change into a golden yellow, contrasting against the blue sky. As we got further into the season, the leaves started to fall, leaving only the evergreen trees and sharp, bare branches.

As if keeping pace with the falling leaves, the days had begun to shorten. The river that flowed through the village had started to reflect an ashy-gray sky.

This country also has four seasons. Spring and fall are long, summer is short, and winter falls somewhere in between.

I was relieved it didn't snow that heavily in winter. Shoveling snow was difficult, and if it snowed a lot, we'd end up being secluded from the rest of the village. I would never admit it out loud, but I did find the idea of shoveling snow with Lady Adelaide and the others fun.

Cloudy days were cold and came often. The air wasn't that dry, so it was more cool than cold. When I looked up at the sky, I noticed there were ominously heavy-looking clouds. *It doesn't seem like it'll be long before it starts snowing.*

As we approached the winter months, the people of Miselle were busy with preparations for the colder season, getting thick mattresses out of storage and beginning to change the clothes they were wearing.

The most important part of winter preparation was chimney sweeping. Birds often made nests inside of chimneys when they weren't being used during summer, so people had to check for that especially. *That reminds me, in my old world we sometimes had birds breaking into the air conditioners. We'd listen to them chirping all through our lessons.*

Chimney sweeping wasn't difficult, but it required special equipment and was a labor-intensive activity that required you to go up onto rooftops. It was safer to leave it to someone accustomed to the job, so we had an older man we knew

come to the estate and do an excellent job of cleaning the chimney.

I had only heard about chimney sweeps in children's stories and books, so they let me fulfill my childhood dream and watch as they worked. It seemed that children were never forced to do it at any point in this world's history, so that was a relief. After they finished cleaning, we were told to light the chimney to test it out—or rather, that was supposed to be the case, but there was a sudden chill in the evening, so we just put it straight to work.

And so, we began to use the hearth, which during spring and summer was purely decoration, and we began to make warm dishes, such as pie and stews. Teas such as ginger tea and milk tea were now regulars at the table after dinner.

The crackling fire warmed the room while the flames' light reflected off Dr. Daniel's cup, on the surface of mine and Lady Adelaide's drinks, and in Buddy's eyes.

Although I loved sitting on the veranda, I had found myself in the living room more at nighttime, drawn in by the hearth. Buddy would lay on the rug near me, and I felt like I could watch the flames dance all night.

I often fell asleep as I watched the flickering tongues of flame with Buddy by my side. I would regularly lose track of time and drift off only to notice Mark was going to carry me to bed, so I would panic and jump up. That's happened more times than I care to count.

Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel would simply put a blanket on me and avoid waking me up. *I am closing in on my thirties, yet they treat me like I'm the youngest child. I don't mind, but it's embarrassing.*

The rocking chair and the table on the veranda had been adorned with cotton quilt cushions for winter. I would put on a shawl hand-knitted by Lady Adelaide to protect against the chilly wind that blew in from the forest. Buddy would still bring fairies from the forest, and I would play with them in the evening as always.

Thus, I spent my first winter in Miselle since arriving in the spring.

"I wonder if they'll be here soon," Lady Adelaide said as she looked out the

window at the setting sun. She had paused from making soup and had an expectant look on her face.

Lady Rachel and Lord Walter were set to visit Miselle today, but they were running late. That said, it was hard to predict how long it would take when traveling by horse and carriage or on foot. It wasn't like they worked similarly to Japanese trains, where they had a strict schedule to follow. It could be that they had left later than planned, but they had nothing like a phone to call us up and let us know.

But honestly, I've grown quite used to not having a phone and having to wait like this. It's relaxing. Having every activity of the day in the modern world planned by the minute made me anxious. *There's no real need to measure time so closely in this world.*

I finished the laundry and wiped my hands clean. I approached a slightly open window. *Ah, that's a familiar sound.* It was the sound of a horse and carriage coming down the road.

Lady Adelaide and I smiled at one another before she headed to the living room to tell Dr. Daniel. I quickly cleaned the countertops and took off my apron.

As I headed towards the entrance hall, I could hear Buddy's nails clicking on the floor as he came running over. When Buddy arrived, there was a knock at the door. I opened the door with a click.

"Heeey, Margaret, long time no see! How ya been?"

It wasn't Lord Walter. Instead, it was Hugh, dressed in a long black robe from the Magic Academy, with a wide smile on his face.

Chapter 1: A Sudden Unexpected Request

“OH, you’re more surprised than I expected. Yay! I feel quite accomplished.”

Hugh laughed as he grabbed my hands, moving them up and down in a handshake. It was certainly *quite* the greeting from him.

I felt like all he ever did was surprise me. *I don’t think he’s trying to scare me, and it’s not like I mind being a little surprised. I just wonder what this feeling of defeat is.*

“Do you plan on standing there all day?”

“Oops, sorry, Marie-Louise,” he apologized. “All right, pardon the intrusion.”

Behind Hugh was Marie-Louise, Lady Rachel’s maid, and next to her was Lady Rachel.

Lady Rachel wore a fall coat with fur adorned on the collar and sleeves. It was white and looked well insulated. *She looks beautiful today, too, but...*

“Oh, you look a little pale,” Lady Adelaide commented.

“You do. You should rest here. Are you able to walk?” Dr. Daniel asked.

Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel had come to welcome Lady Rachel but had become worried seeing her pale complexion. They led her into the living room. Although she was trying not to hide it, she was a little unsteady on her feet. She didn’t look very well at all. *I wonder if she’s okay.*

Marie-Louise, looking equally worried, took her lady’s purse and followed after the three of them, leaving behind Hugh, Buddy, and me.

I looked up at Hugh for an explanation. He looked back at me with his troubled emerald eyes as he shrugged.

“We went slow, but it seems I’m not good enough to prevent travel sickness. Oh, well!”

The only effective medicine for that is Lord Walter. Nothing can be done about that, I guess. I agreed with him as we smiled wryly at one another. I greeted Roy, who was unloading luggage from the carriage, and went back to work.

I returned to the kitchen, boiled some water, and prepared some tea. *Hmm, I guess for motion sickness, some cold water and a wet towel would be better.*

I headed into the living room with the towel and water. There I saw Lady Rachel looking exhausted on the sofa.

"I'm sorry you have to see me like this..." she said weakly.

"It's fine," Lady Adelaide said. "Don't worry about greeting us properly. If we can get you to bed, you'll be able to lie down, but getting up the stairs will probably be tough for you, right?"

"I suggest you rest first," Dr. Daniel said. "Ah, thank you, Margaret."

Lady Rachel tried to sit up as Marie-Louise was carefully seeing to her. Lady Adelaide gently stopped her. I passed the cold towel over to the doctor, who then put it on Lady Rachel's forehead. She let out a relieved exhale as the coolness seeped into her skin.

I used to get motion sickness when I was younger. I especially suffered in taxis and on buses. I often felt sick before they even started moving. I'd take medicine for it, but it never worked, so school trips were tough. I was always sitting at the front of the bus, right next to the teacher, gripping a plastic bag tightly with a pale face. When I drove with my father, I'd manage to struggle through it with having the window cracked open. *It's rough, I get it.*

As I got older, my motion sickness improved, but the impact from when I was a child was so strong that I still struggled with taxis. It was a relief that I was fine with the horse carriages here.

By the time Hugh had returned to the living room after putting his things away, the color of Lady Rachel's face was looking a bit better. Roy said he would go tend to the horses.

Hugh accepted a cup of tea before going on to explain how he ended up accompanying Lady Rachel. "You probably heard, but Walter was supposed to come with her today like usual."

That's right. That's what was written in his letter. I nodded.

Lord Walter tended to make quick visits, often opting not to stay for the night. Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel looked forward to it every time. They were just happy to be able to see him, no matter how brief.

"It seems like he had some urgent work come in, so he contacted me. He probably didn't make it home yesterday," Hugh explained.

"Oh dear..." Lady Adelaide seemed worried, whereas the doctor seemed anxious.

"I see he's busy as always. Is he taking breaks?" Dr. Daniel asked.

He's always busy with work. Even the work relating to me—letters regarding the children's book I was writing—would be meticulously written by him. I was incredibly grateful that he was helping me out. But I did tell him that maybe it would be better if he left the status updates to someone else. However, he just agreed with me and didn't change a thing.

"Hmm, I've been quite busy at the Magic Academy, so I can't really say. Lady Rachel's older brother will probably know more," Hugh replied to Dr. Daniel's concerns, glancing at Lady Rachel as he did.

Lady Rachel had taken the towel off her face and was sitting up. She was sitting differently than usual, leaning heavily against the back of the sofa. It seemed she had yet to fully recover.

I honestly was a little happy that she was showing this side of herself to us. Nobles had to be very careful about appearances in the presence of others. I was glad she was comfortable enough with us.

"Yes. According to my older brother, he is eating and sleeping, but he does seem awfully busy," Lady Rachel responded.

Lady Rachel's older brother and Lord Walter had been friends since their days as knights—although their work differed now, they worked together in the House of Lords.

When I first heard that, I had a bit of a rude reaction to it, thinking: *Oh, Lord Walter has friends at work. I mean, c'mon. He seems the type to keep his work*

and personal life separate. He seemed the type to keep workplace friendships strictly business... Ah, I wonder if he would call Hugh a "friend." If so, I guess his relationship with Lady Rachel's brother is similar.

"It seems my brother is always disturbing Lord Walter at his home. However, it seems he's not been there a lot, or often turns him away at the door," Lady Rachel said.

Oh, I see. Their relationship's about what I expected.

"He's a better worker than most, so he always gets the annoying work pushed his way. In fact, it was thanks to that happening that I was able to come this time," Hugh added.

"Will you be staying the night, Hugh?" asked Lady Adelaide.

"Yeah, since I came all this way and all. I'll be staying at Mark's place, so don't worry about making room for me. But I would like to eat at your place, if that's okay," Hugh requested.

"Of course you're welcome to join us."

"Awesome, thank yooou!"

Hugh looked beyond delighted by Lady Adelaide's quick response. Lady Rachel, on the other hand, looked a little troubled as she smiled. Her first visit in a while had taken an irregular turn.



EXPECTING that Lady Rachel could be hit with motion sickness, we had prepared fresh and light foods for dinner, meaning Lady Rachel could also enjoy it. As for Hugh and Roy, who had come as her escorts, we had prepared some meat. The two of them gobbled it up.

The satisfaction felt when people cleaned their plates was a special feeling reserved for those who made meals for others.

Although Lady Rachel seemed to be feeling a lot better, the doctor recommended that she head to bed early, so she and Marie-Louise headed to their room not long after dinner. Roy went to tend to the horses again. Hugh and Lady Adelaide were in the living room—Hugh was telling her all about Lord

Walter and the most recent news about the Royal Capital.

I grabbed the teapot and headed into the kitchen, filling it with water to boil, when Mark approached me.

“Ah, that reminds me, Hugh said he’ll be staying at the clinic with you?”

“I have no in-patients and him being a spontaneous visitor is something I’m used to now. Plus, I’d have more of an issue if he stayed here,” Mark replied. He had his arms crossed and didn’t look too pleased. I found it quite funny.

“It’s not like I’d be alone with Hugh if he stayed here. More importantly, we don’t even see each other in that way.”

Or rather, Hugh shouldn’t act in a way that could cause any misunderstandings.

“Ah, I see you already knew,” Mark replied.

He looked a little surprised as I giggled. Although I wasn’t *that* clued-in on gossip, I was very well clued-in on what was going on behind the scenes.

Hugh often came to Miselle to see the magic current in the forest. He’d come for tea and something to eat. Although it wasn’t that often, he would stay at the houses of people he knew or at the clinic. Even if he was staying over or only visiting for the day, he would always, without fail, visit Ms. Sarah at the bakery.

Hugh thought that no one had realized his feelings, but the intelligence network at the women’s association had noticed. Before that, Ms. Sarah’s daughter Emily had already come to tell me about it directly. *Kids can’t keep anything quiet!* However, I kept the fact that she wished Hugh would become her father a secret. *I mean, I should know nothing about it, after all.*

“So that’s that. I’ll be heading back to the clinic with him,” said Mark.

“Okay. Keep him in check,” I responded.

Since my hands were busy rinsing the teapot, Mark put his forehead against mine to communicate. Although I was used to it, I still found it embarrassing, and let out a giggle as I responded. He then slightly brushed my lips with his.

He’s been catching me off-guard like this a lot recently. Always when my

hands are occupied.

Mark laughed as he watched my face turn bright red. *Could you give me a break sometime, Dr. Mark?* Even when I tried to protest with a glare, he still fearlessly stroked my cheek with his finger.

“Don’t get mad,” Mark said sweetly.

That’s an admission of guilt! Buddy, this man right here! Get him!

Buddy trotted into the living room—it was as if he had heard me—then squeezed between us. Mark laughed at the forced space between us as he stroked Buddy’s silver-gray fur.

I could hear a bright laugh from the other side of the door that Buddy had left wide open...

Minus some minor concerns for a guest on the second floor and some in the distant capital, the night passed by without much trouble.



LADY Rachel seemed to be doing a lot better after resting for the night. Lady Adelaide and I were relieved when Lady Rachel appeared in the kitchen with a bright smile.

“I apologize for worrying you all last night. As you can see, I am feeling a lot better,” said Lady Rachel.

“What a relief. The color has returned to your face,” Lady Adelaide commented as she softly touched Lady Rachel’s cheek, causing her to blush.

The two of them had opened up to one another, already seeming like mother and daughter.

“S-So, what can we harvest today?” Lady Rachel seemed shy, yet her eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm. There was nothing left to do in the fields, which was a shame, as she seemed so excited.

“Margaret brought the eggs and leeks in earlier, so there’s nothing to do this morning,” Lady Adelaide explained.

“Oh... I’m sorry that I couldn’t help. I-I’ll do my best to get the eggs next

time!” Lady Rachel replied.

“Sure. You can do it tomorrow,” Lady Adelaide said.

“Yes! Tomorrow!” Lady Rachel said with both fists clenched, however... Remembering how it went last time, I locked eyes with Marie-Louise.

Today’s breakfast is a leek omelet.

I wondered if we called them leeks in Japan, or was it *poronegi*? The leeks were like scallions in that they were thick yet small, but like *shimonita* onions, a type of Japanese onion. The shape was identical, yet the taste was different. It was bitter and had a sharp taste yet lacked the strong smell of scallions.

Unfortunately, they were hard and not to be eaten raw. However, when cooked, they became soft and surprisingly sweet. They didn’t take long to cook and were easy to prepare. I treat them similarly to onions by boiling them and frying them, or often adding them to soups and gratins.

I lightly heated the diced leek, the thinly sliced potato, and the ham before adding cheese, and making an omelet. The cheese had salt in it, so I was light on the seasoning, making it a perfect dish for the morning.

Lady Adelaide’s omelet wasn’t grilled nor burned—it was a perfect golden egg color. It looked like what a child would draw when drawing an omelet. It looked perfect—I could never replicate it. Even the plain omelet she made had a firm filling. I thought it was amazing she could make them so well.

She would say it was simple, but I knew that she was carefully watching the temperature as she prepared it. Even the omelet we ate that morning, the insides were perfectly cooked. *It must feel so good, being able to make it like this.*

Alongside the wonderful omelet, we had a salad made with finely diced winter vegetables and herbs, such as endive and parsley. The freshly picked vegetables were delicious and tasted fine without any dressing or mayonnaise.

I could have opted for a squeeze of lemon or a pinch of salt. Even just a sprinkle of oil would be enough. *Even if I could make mayonnaise with eggs and oil, I don’t think I’d put it on this kind of green salad.*

I lightly toasted some bread that resembled English muffins, which we had alongside a variety of jams, and for drinks, we had warm tea and hot milk. It was a simple yet delicious breakfast. *I'm so happy.*

It seemed Mark and Hugh wouldn't be coming over today, so we enjoyed a warm breakfast with Roy, who had come back from seeing to the horses, Dr. Daniel, and Buddy.



I had the day off from helping at the clinic, but Doctor Daniel was working.

I packed a lunch of ham and cheese sandwiches, potato and bean salad, and an apple pound cake and handed it to the doctor.

"Feel free to have it for lunch or at teatime."

Mr. Pat's restaurant wasn't that far from the clinic, but the doctor rarely had time to take breaks, so it was easier to prepare something he could pick at without having to leave the clinic.

On days when I was helping at the clinic, I would warm the food up using the kitchen on the second floor. Most days, Dr. Daniel just ate it as prepared. So, I tried to spice it up a little by adding some nuts with slight flavoring and to give it a bit of texture. Dr. Daniel was used to eating Lady Adelaide's delicious cooking, but Mark was happy to eat anything if it was edible.

He wasn't very picky and was equipped with a good palette. However, it felt more like he ate for sustenance and not because he enjoyed it. If we were in my previous world, he probably would have just gotten by on convenience store meals or supplements.

That said, recently, he started to show some preferences, which was good.

It's not all about gourmet meals or having preferences, though. Eating in general is important. I thought it was good to know what you liked and to have a firm understanding of what your body needed. *It's good to know yourself well.*

I often thought that while Mark was a quick thinker, he tended to ignore the basic things. Lord Walter was similar in a sense, though not on the level of Mark. Lady Adelaide had once accidentally mentioned that she wished she had

done more as a mother for him.

It seemed like a common issue among nobles... Something I felt far removed from as someone raised as a commoner in modern Japan. I never got to spend a lot of time with my parents as they were always busy, but I never once felt like I had been neglected. After all, my grandmother, who used to look after me, wasn't just a servant who came when my parents were gone.

That said, that didn't mean those who had been born in a warm, caring household were limited to those who weren't nobles. How people experience things differs largely from person to person. I guess it is purely case by case.



ONCE I had finished putting away everything after breakfast, I went through and cleaned all the rooms. As I didn't have to tend the fields or do any weeding, my workload was a bit lighter compared to the summer. After seeing Dr. Daniel off, Lady Adelaide soon followed, heading to the women's meeting. Once she had left, I found myself with nothing to do.

"Hey, Lady Rachel, wanna make some jam?" I asked her.

"Yes, of course!" Lady Rachel smiled widely as she put on her usual apron.

"All right, let's get started."

Old man Tom had a selection of citrus fruits at his shop, as well as pears and apples. The pears weren't like Japanese pears, which were full of juice and had a nice mouthfeel, they were more like Western pears. They were also different from firm, sweet common pears. They were a little lighter and had a fresher taste. It felt like you could taste the scent more than the flavor when eating it. I found them delicious when I tried them for the first time and ended up eating them a lot.

I had heard that you could make pear jam, but I had yet to try it. *That reminds me, I got a lot of apples from Mr. Tom, so I should make jam with them today.*

I brought in the apples from the veranda and lined them up on the table. Lady Rachel's eyes sparkled when she saw them.

Hmm? She's entranced by them.

“Have you never seen an apple before?” I asked.

“Oh, no, it’s not that. I think it’s my first time seeing them while they’re still round,” Lady Rachel responded.

Oh, I see. That’s how the other half live.

She had only ever seen them when they had been sliced up and served on a plate. *This is probably new to her.* I had heard of children who had never seen an actual fish, and only knew what it looked like when it was chopped up on a plate. *Of course, it varies from place to place, but it’s not unheard of, I guess.*

I would recommend using sour apples—like ruby apples—when making apple jam. For a short while, it seemed farmers were unable to sell ruby apples, so they had stopped growing them and they were rarely seen in stores. *I remember being so happy once I saw them in supermarkets again.*

I think it’s tastier when the apples are firm and sour in jam and pies. They could be made with other types of apples, but I preferred the ruby ones.

“All right, wash the apples then peel the—”

Ah, wait, I guess I should peel them. I decided to ask Lady Rachel to help with something else for safety’s sake.

Depending on the size of the apple, we would cut them into either six or eight slices. *Ah, when cutting it into quarters, make sure the apple doesn’t fall or your hand slips. It’s all right if they’re not all the same size. Just cut them freely, and don’t forget to take out the core.*

Then, take the peel and the core—or rather, the seeds, and put them in a different, small pot.

Cut the already-sliced apple slices into smaller slices. They can also be cut up into cubes if preferred. Firm apples are different from strawberries in that they are less likely to break when being boiled, so it’s best to cut them into a size that is preferred first. If you want to really be able to taste the apple, then it’s best to cut them a bit larger. If you prefer to spread it easily on toast, then cut the slices smaller.

Once we finished cutting the apples, we then measured the amount, making

sure we had around half the amount of sugar. *Yep, I always add half. If I had a refrigerator and freezer, it might be different, but... I don't think it would change anything. It's easy to remember, too.*

If we continued to make it like this, we would end up with a golden apple jam. While we were making it, Lady Adelaide taught us a way to make it a cute color, so I decided to try that out.

I brought water to a boil in a small pan with the peel and seeds.

If you boil the peels, it makes them even more red. Boiling it will bring out the pectin, and if we had the colored water to it, it'll apparently turn the apple jam into a pink color. Ah, of course, if you use a strainer with small holes, or just decide to use fluid that rises to the top, you wouldn't need to put in the peel or the seeds.

While the peel is boiling, sprinkle sugar over it, which will cause the apples to release some moisture. You can put them to one side for a while like strawberries, however with apples it's best not to let them sit for too long as they can become discolored. I always boiled them straight away. Not much water would come out even if you waited.

You could soak them in salt water to stop them from oxidizing. I had never tried adding salt to jam; it just didn't seem right. I didn't mind adding salt when making adzuki from adzuki beans, so I wondered why it bothered me when it came to making jam. It is kinda weird. It had no effect on the flavor. It was just a mind over matter thing. Well, there's nothing better than homemade cooking, after all.

All right. It's time to turn on the flame under the pan with the apple and sugar and simmer the contents. Yeah, simmer while removing the scum until it's ready.

We first started off on low heat to melt the sugar, and then when the water content came out, we turned up the heat. *Keep stirring it so it doesn't burn.*

"Margaret, this is a little more difficult than usual," Lady Rachel commented.

"Shall I take over?" Marie-Louise offered.

"It's okay, Marie-Louise. It just needs a little longer," Lady Rachel replied.

Although she had beads of sweat on her forehead, she seemed to be enjoying herself in front of the stove. Apples were firmer than strawberries and blueberries, so they didn't release much water, making it more difficult to stir.

Once the water has simmered down and reduced, keep a close eye on the colored water from the skin and seeds and continue heating it. Add lemon juice to taste. As we were using sour apples, we didn't really need the citrus, however, if we were using sweet apples, I would have put some lemon juice in.

Eating apple jam feels like eating actual apples, so it's best to boil it until it's at a desired softness. If left to cool like other jams, it'll harden, so it's best to stay close to it to avoid that happening.

Lady Rachel did her best to continue stirring it, muttering to herself that it was almost done the whole time. We then put the jam into a sterilized jar while it was still warm, fastened the lid tightly, and turned it upside down to cool.

The jars filled with light pink jam lined up on the window were sparkling in the sunlight. They were pretty enough to rival a display counter at a jewelry store. I wanted to take a picture.

"Th-They look so cute...!" Lady Rachel looked adorable as her cheeks blushed a similar pink, her eyes sparkling.

Thanks to Lady Rachel and Marie-Louise's help, making the jam went without a hitch, leading us to lunchtime. *I think we'll have some leftover jam with scones today.*

When I mentioned that idea to Lady Rachel, she looked ready to burst at the seams with excitement. *Yeah, I get it. I wanna eat it already, too.* I rolled up my sleeves and got to work, preparing the flour and butter.

Lady Adelaide's tried and tested scone recipe used whole wheat flour. *Whole wheat flour that is milled with the cuticle and wheat germ still intact is high in nutritional value, it also has a slight fragrance to it, which I like.*

However, as it lacked gluten, it didn't rise as well, and it was quick to harden.

I crumbled the butter with the tips of my fingers, added milk, then began kneading the dough in the palm of my hand. *Okay, the dough is done!* Although it's simple, the outcome differs every time, based on the weather, temperature,

and the combination of ingredients. It was always fun making it.

My personal preference was to keep the dough somewhat wet, so that it stuck slightly to the fingers, then covering it in flour. I separated the dough with a knife and passed it over to Lady Rachel to shape it, we then lined them up on the countertop and put them into the oven.

The scones swelled up rather big even though it was only a little warm, and a clear line appeared on the side. *They look delicious.*

“Look, Marie-Louise! They cracked perfectly!” Lady Rachel gushed.

“The last time you tried to make them, they became biscuits, didn’t they?” Marie-Louise retorted.

“D-Don’t talk about that. I wonder why I never make mistakes in Miselle?”

“Ah, yeah, there are times when they don’t rise for some reason. But it would be boring if the outcome was the same every time, so it’s fine to have those days occasionally,” I assured her.

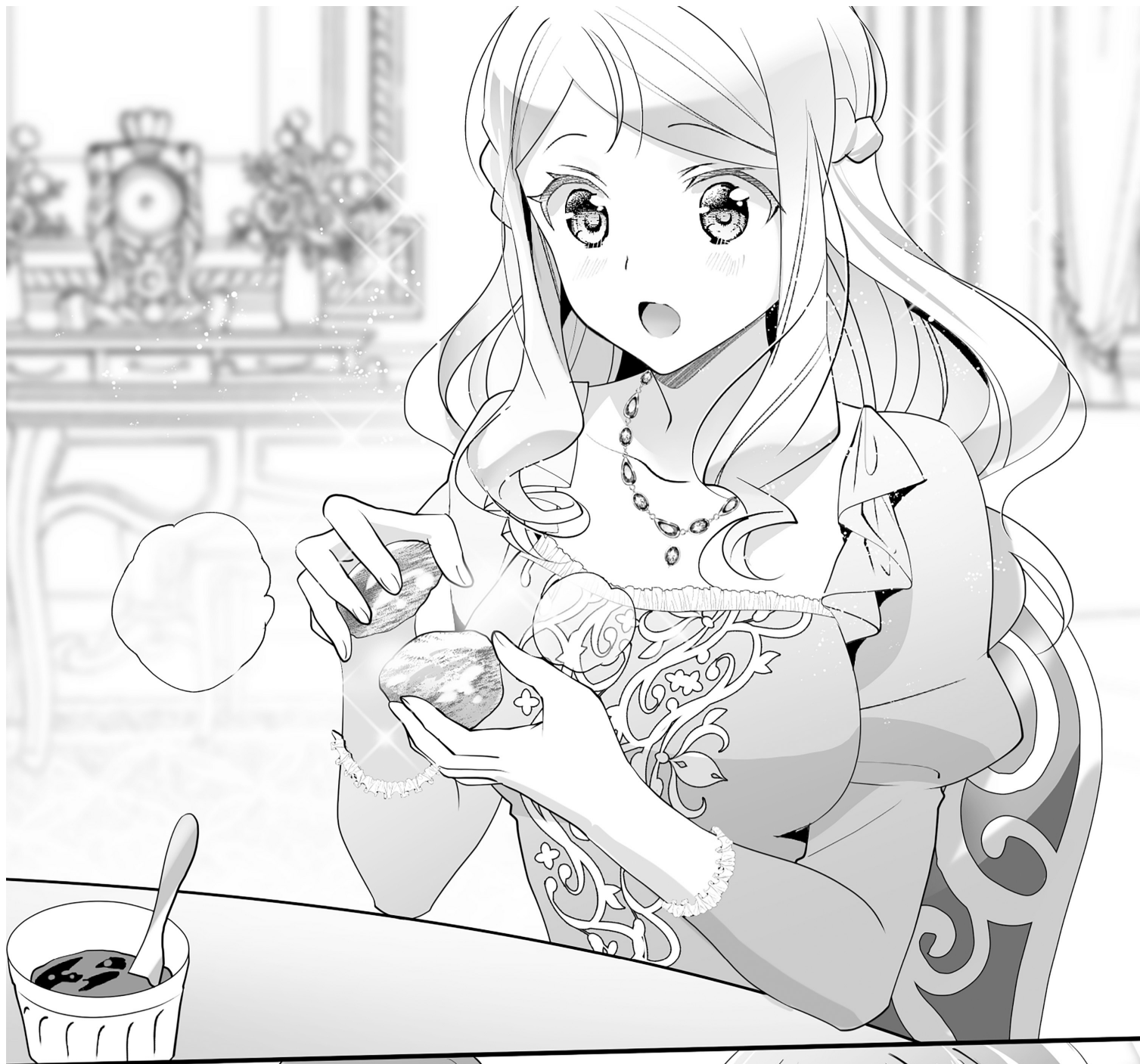
“That’s true. But they look extra delicious today...” Lady Rachel mumbled to herself as she looked inside the oven.

I knew what her next words would have been—*she wanted to eat them with him*. I thought of the tall, stoic young man as I looked at her lonely expression.

I piled the piping hot scones up onto a plate and prepared some salad with the vegetables and ham I had used in the doctor’s lunch earlier. *There, lunch is ready.* Marie-Louise prepared some milk tea. Roy joined us, and we all sat around the table.

I took a scone and cut it in half along the crack that had formed in the side. Steam poured out of it as it opened. The lightly baked colored outside was crunchy, and the pale white insides were bouncy and fluffy. The scent of the flour rose alongside the steam. *It’s so delicious.*

Lady Rachel looked like she couldn’t wait any longer as she spread jam and cream on her scone. Her eyes lit up as she elegantly brought it towards her mouth. The corners of her mouth twitched as she enjoyed it.



All right, I'll take a bite of it as is... Mmm. It's delicious even on its own. I've often heard that you couldn't have a scone without clotted cream. I had prepared butter and cream, however I really enjoyed eating Lady Adelaide's scones on their own.

On the other half, I plopped on some butter and jam. Of course, it was the apple jam we had just made. It was sweet, sour, and had a refreshing smell. *Mm, this is delicious too.*

The freshly made jam still had a strong flavor. *It's so nice.*

We enjoyed a peaceful lunchtime as we discussed what jam best suits a scone. Once the conversation died down, Lady Rachel took a deep sip of tea as she leaned forward.

“Margaret, I would love to hear more about the celebrations for Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel's wedding.”

We held a surprise wedding party around a week ago. We had kept it a secret from the doctor and Lady Adelaide. Although the topic had come up at dinner the night before, Lady Adelaide was bashful, and didn't really talk about it. Lady Rachel looked like she wanted to know more.

I moved my empty plate to the side and brought out the magic writing device to write about the celebrations.

Both Dr. Daniel and Lady Adelaide had stated they didn't want anything extravagant as they were both getting on in age, so they had a small ceremony at the Royal Capital's temple and had their photo taken.

I understood that they valued their time together more than anything else and weren't too interested in the ceremonial side of things. But everyone in the village who owed a lot to the doctor wanted to celebrate. I naturally shared the sentiment, so we began preparing in secret.

It seemed to be the custom that the celebrations would be held at either the bride or groom's house. We couldn't use the clinic, and if we tried to prepare at the manor, we would've been discovered instantly. So we spoke with the village chief and asked if we could use the village hall for the celebrations.

We decided on a buffet party. I took the lion's share of the cooking while Mrs. Tanya—who had recovered from her bout of morning sickness—would pop in sporadically to help. Mr. Pat from the restaurant also helped where he could.

Everyone from the village helped too, bringing various assortments of food and sweets, resulting in a large variety of dishes. There were three huge cakes which the children were *very* happy about.

The flowers found in our gardens and the forest were no longer in full bloom, but the children from the village had brought flowers from a secret spot only they knew about. Mrs. Anna used her talents to make a wonderful bouquet, and we decorated the village hall with the rest of the flowers. It looked so beautiful.

We had managed to keep our plans secret up until the day of—or well, I had absolutely zero confidence in my poker face since coming to this world, so they had probably figured out that I was up to something.

Mark had called the doctor to the clinic that morning, and I did Lady Adelaide's hair and makeup without telling her why. I had also dressed up more than I usually did, so it seemed Lady Adelaide had thought that I wanted us to match like we did for the Festival of Eve.

Lady Adelaide no doubt realized something was different when a horse carriage arrived at the manor to pick her up. Mr. Thomas from the grocery store was unusually dressed up and acted as the coachman. The bewildered Lady Adelaide and Buddy, who had a bow tie around his neck, both got into the horse carriage and headed straight for the village hall. Every time she asked what was going on, I laughed it off.

Once Lady Adelaide arrived in the village hall and saw Dr. Daniel standing there, she was surprised to realize what was going on. It was so cute. I guess it's rude to call an older woman cute. But I swear, she really was adorable.

The doctor, who had been left to Mark, was dressed in white formal attire. He had a brooch that was the same color as Lady Adelaide's bouquet affixed to his left breast pocket. Dr. Daniel was a handsome silver fox. Even I was taken by his looks.

Both Dr. Daniel and Lady Adelaide were nobles, so both should have abided

by the rules and held a reception party. But since I knew that Lady Adelaide didn't want to hold a reception, I instead opted for a mixture of a common party by this world's standards and what I knew a reception party to be like from my old world. Eating, singing, drinking, and dancing. Everyone from the village gathered. The party lasted from morning until night. It was a party filled with smiles.

"That sounds wonderful. I have no doubt it was more astounding than any party I've ever attended," mumbled Lady Rachel with a spellbound expression after she read what I wrote.

When I wrote that I wished I could see the kind of ceremony they held at the Royal Temple, she responded that I would see it in due time.

"The Temple ceremony is just filling out forms. You'll no doubt be doing it for yourself soon, no?" Lady Rachel teased.

Wait. What? Why did this become about me all of a sudden?

Marie-Louise and Roy nodded along like this was the natural course of the conversation. I wouldn't—and couldn't—deny it, but it was too awkward to say anything.

Lunch ended as we talked about such things, and once I had finished putting everything away, Marie-Louise started a conversation with Lady Rachel.

"My lady, is it okay if I have an outing with Roy today?"

"Of course. Did something come up?" Lady Rachel asked.

"Thank you. Lord Julius wants to know more about Miselle. I am still not that acquainted with the village, so I thought to go for a little walk."

It seemed Lady Rachel understood the reason for Marie-Louise's request.

"Ah, that brother of mine. Okay, that's fine. Take your time to make the most of it."

I recognized his name. Along with Lady Rachel's father, Lord Julius fawned over his little sister. He seemed to be friends with Lord Walter.

Marie-Louise stood up to excuse herself as she winked at me.

Since that morning, Lady Rachel looked like she had something she wanted to say to me but couldn't. Marie-Louise had no doubt noticed and was giving Lady Rachel an opportunity to talk freely.

After seeing them both off, all who remained were Buddy, Lady Rachel, and myself.

I thought it would be better to talk while having a walk through the garden, but the wind was chilly, so we moved to the living room to sit in front of the fireplace.

I poured her a new cup of tea, which she silently, yet awkwardly, accepted. *Oh man, what should I do? She's so nervous it's making me worried.*

Lady Rachel knew a lot more about this world than me. Especially regarding noble affairs, there was no way I could give her any helpful advice.

I can only really listen to what she has to say. I think everyone in the village comes to me with their stories because it makes them feel better just having someone to listen to them.

"Um, so..." Lady Rachel began speaking but stopped. She repeated that a few more times.

It was hard for her to talk while I looked at her directly, so I sat diagonally from Lady Rachel and stroked Buddy while I looked at the fire dancing in the fireplace.

Lady Rachel took a deep breath then put her cup down. I would never have imagined what would follow—

"Um... I've had some... marriage proposals come in lately..."

What?!

I was shocked, but Lady Rachel *was* the daughter of a marquis. Not to mention she was beautiful and had a wonderful personality. This kind of talk should be expected. It wouldn't even be that surprising if she was receiving propositions from outside the country, even. Once she started speaking, it seemed she had made the decision to continue with what she had to say.

"There have been people in the past who had propositioned me. There were

a lot of people who I knew through family or through my father's work."

"I guess both your father and brother rejected them all, right?"

Lady Rachel nodded in response to what I had written. "Both my father and brother say that I'm too naive. They still seem to think of me as a child and say that I'm too young for marriage. But I should have been married by now," Lady Rachel frowned as she laughed.

I'm even older. Women in this country are usually married at the age of twenty. I had already missed the boat before I arrived in this world.

"While there is the matter of my age, the problem now is, if I were to receive an official proposal, it would be difficult for me to decline... I'm sure they would be wonderful, however." Lady Rachel then returned to stuttering and stumbling over her words. She took another deep breath. "I... um... like... L-Lord Walter..."

"...I know," I wrote on the magical device. I decided not to tell her what I really thought, which was: *What's that, did you think I didn't notice?! Even though you were that obvious.*

"I-I see. Y-You knew." Lady Rachel's cheeks turned redder than a kettle allowed to boil over. *Oh, she looks like she's going to cry.*

She put her hands on her cheeks to cool them down. She looked around the room as if searching for somewhere to hide herself. *Ah, she's the pinnacle of a young maiden in love.* I grinned with delight. *Wait, this isn't the time to do that!* I schooled my features like a proper listener.

"I s-suppose that was bound to happen. I did think that maybe some people had noticed. Um, I-I apologize," Lady Rachel continued.

"Oh, you don't need to apologize."

Her face turned even brighter red as she took several deep breaths. Once she calmed down, she gradually started to talk.

"I've...always had feelings for him ever since I was a child. I did once give up, but I just couldn't give up on it completely, and that's how it's been to this day."

I had heard before that when Lord Walter was still a student, he joined the knights and once protected Lady Rachel, who had gotten lost in the town near

the castle. Since then, it had been a full-fledged unrequited love on her part.

“It must be difficult to give up on that kind of love,” I wrote.

“Indeed. However, I understand that I am in a position where I need to prioritize certain things over my feelings. So that’s why, before I take that next step, I want to finally... um, tell him how I feel.”

To then—give up?

I didn’t plan to ask her that, but it must have been obvious from my expression. Lady Rachel looked away with a sad expression.

There were a lot of restraints when it came to marriages between members of the nobility. It wasn’t rare for the result to be nothing like you wanted. Lady Adelaide experienced that painful part of noble life firsthand.

I know there’s nothing I can do about what’s commonly accepted in this world. Love is based on one’s personal emotions, status and expectations have no bearing on the outcome.

Even though I understood the way things worked here, I at least wanted the people around me to be happy. *Surely, they’ll let me get away with that much.*

“So, Lady Rachel, what do you like about Lord Walter?” I wrote.

She went into an incoherent speech in response to my question, the result of which was: “I-I would say how Lord Walter doesn’t really see me as anyone, I guess. It’s not that I want to be separated from my title as the daughter of a marquis or from my looks, but when that’s all people see, I feel suffocated. I think Lord Walter still sees me as a ‘lost little girl.’ Even then, rather than considering what I am and everything around me, he just sees me as myself.”

Whenever I talk with Lord Walter, he always listens attentively. He listens to my opinions, without any regard for age or status, then makes decisions as if it is his responsibility. I think it’s difficult for people to put fairness above their own pride. Especially for those with high social positions. Although, he doesn’t seem that way at first. He’s brusque, always wears a serious expression, and rarely sugar-coats his words.

“That’s why I pay no mind to Lord Walter’s position as prime minister’s

assistant and like—a-a-adore h-him for who he is.”

Ah, and that’s all you need. I reached my hand out and patted Lady Rachel’s clenched fists, which rested on her lap. She looked at me with teary violet eyes.

“I just want to be able to finally tell him... It will no doubt cause issues, and well, there’s probably someone more suited for him anyway.”

“Nah, no way. That’s not the case at all. There’s no one better than you, Lady Rachel.”

I hadn’t met all the nobles in the royal palace, so I mightn’t have sounded very convincing. I was sure that Lady Adelaide and the doctor would say the same thing, though. Plus, this was my own selfish wish, but I wanted Lord Walter to have someone who worried about him by his side. Someone who understood how much he prided himself on his work, his position, and his responsibilities. Lady Rachel’s concerned expression was genuine when Hugh mentioned just how busy Lord Walter was. It would have been nice for Lord Walter to have someone like that waiting for him when he came home. He rarely spared any thought for himself and only focused on work.

Lady Rachel had plans to visit neighboring territories next month once she returned from her visit to Miselle. It seemed she had planned to confess to him while here in Miselle. However, Lord Walter couldn’t make it this time, leaving her unable to go ahead with it.

I wonder if by talking about it with me, she decided not to give up... If she didn’t do that, her years-long crush would be for nothing. I found it admirable that she was able to long for someone for so long. Same as Dr. Daniel. I really found it impressive.

I didn’t really want to think about it, but even if Lord Walter was to turn Lady Rachel down and she couldn’t turn down the marriage proposal, her feelings wouldn’t be for nothing. Her genuine feelings would always remain.

There was just one thing I was worried about. As I wrote about it, Lady Rachel’s expression clouded.

“That’s right. I’m unsure if he’ll take me seriously.”

I also didn’t have a lot of confidence that Lord Walter, who often had his

guard up regarding matters of the heart, mightn't take her confession seriously.

"Well, I will be super straight with him so that there are no misunderstandings. If he doesn't believe me, I'll say it as many times as I need... Y-Yes. I'll do my best," Lady Rachel said before hiding her face in her hands.

Oh, she's gone completely red. She looked so adorable as she repeated "as many times," her voice quivering.



LADY Rachel's visit to Miselle was a lot shorter than usual. She only stayed for five days. On her final morning in Miselle, a letter arrived.

"Oh, is it from Walter?" Lady Adelaide sounded surprised as she looked at the letter in my hand. It wasn't too strange to receive letters from Lord Walter. Rather, it was the first time we had received a letter with such urgency. Two copies had been sent via express delivery. One was addressed to me and the other to Lady Rachel.

Lady Rachel looked delighted to have received a letter. I looked at the contents of my letter, which were rather surprising. Noticing I looked surprised, Lady Adelaide asked what was wrong.

I passed it over to her. It'd be faster if she read it herself.

"Oh, what's wrong?" Dr. Daniel asked.

"Daniel, you're just in time. There's a letter from Walter... it's asking Margaret to come to the capital," Lady Adelaide's surprised tone caused Lady Rachel to look up.

"This letter is asking for me to escort Margaret in a Lindgren horse carriage," she said.

Everyone exchanged looks, all equally surprised by the contents of the letters.

Chapter 2: My First Visit to the Capital

IT'S so big! That was my first impression. When it began to move, I was shocked by how quiet and stable everything was.

Wondering what I'm talking about? I'm currently in Marquis Lindgren's pride and joy—their horse carriage.

As Lady Rachel often suffered from motion sickness, this horse carriage was made especially with her in mind. The interior and the exterior were luxurious and focused on comfort. My jaw dropped as I let out an awed sigh.

The wood they used seemed to be mahogany; it sparkled with an amber glow. The cushions were neither too soft nor too hard, making for very plush and comfortable seats. I always found it was easier to get motion sickness when the seats were too soft. It was evident the carriage-makers had ensured that it wasn't only extravagant, but also had some thought put into the passenger's experience, too.

Roy was seated in the driver's seat. Lady Rachel and I sat next to one another inside the cabin. Marie-Louise and Mark sat opposite us. Hugh had already left Miselle the day before.

We were headed to the Royal Capital.

Here's the long and short of it: Lord Walter, sympathizing with my wish to work and support myself, suggested that I write children's books on the fairy tales from my world. As picture books didn't exist in this world yet, we were currently working on trying to make one. As for the stories, I had begun writing down fairy tales and folk tales from what I could remember. It was going well so far.

The sample book we had used for a trial run was received well. Though it goes without saying, I wasn't that good at drawing, so my pictures couldn't be used in the final product. But you couldn't have a *picture* book without pictures. *I mean, they're the whole point.*

So I decided to look for an illustrator, but that brought its own problems.

People expect a sense of openness and fairness from Spirit Callers. It was important that I considered that to avoid rumors or misunderstandings. For example, some people often thought that by being in contact with a Spirit Caller, they had received the Spirit's favor. I also had to be careful not to use my position to benefit me and make sure others didn't try to take advantage of me for that reason too.

In summary, whether I liked it or not, I was unable to treat writing children's books as a business venture, since they would no doubt attract a lot of attention from the world at large. *Well, that makes sense, given a Spirit Caller wrote it.*

Regarding the illustrations, an anonymous artist was chosen to do them, as I wasn't allowed to pick someone myself. *It's quite strict.*

Artists who had received accolades, or artists with specific styles that could be easily recognized were excluded. Plus, they had to enter into a contract, and one of the conditions was that they were never allowed to say that they had done the illustrations. That made it less appealing to newer artists. We were looking for a certain quality, but newer artists couldn't use their work in a portfolio, meaning that working on this project wouldn't lead to more work for them.

As expected, it was incredibly difficult to find someone under these conditions. We were really struggling to find someone, to the point that I almost considered just dropping the illustrations altogether. However, our saving grace was none other than the Queen Dowager.

It seemed the Queen Dowager had an old friend who was skilled at drawing. She was very proud of her position as the matriarch of a noble house—drawing was just a hobby to her. She had no desire to sell her art and grow a reputation.

"Isn't that exactly what you need?" the Queen Dowager asked when recommending her.

Lord Walter had given her illustrations his seal of approval, stating that they matched the aesthetic we were looking for. The Queen Dowager then put in the request with her friend, who happily accepted the project on one condition:

getting to meet the Spirit Caller.

It seemed their request wasn't out of curiosity—it was so that they could get a better idea of what I wanted from talking to me directly. They also had some illustrations they wanted me to check.

It's not an easy task drawing a world you don't know, so I can understand why they want to meet. I also really wanted to meet the person who would be doing the illustrations, too.

I waited for her to visit Miselle—or, well, that *was* the plan. Lord Walter had written in a letter that she had injured herself a few days prior.

Her dominant hand was fine and health-wise, she was doing all right, so she could still draw. As she couldn't go out easily, she was making up for it by enjoying drawing indoors, which was reassuring to hear.

However, the problem was she was undergoing medical treatment via healing magic, and due to her age, recovery would take a while. It seemed she was advised that it would take at least a month before she could travel to Miselle.

As it has taken a while to find someone, I would like her to start the illustrations as soon as possible, so we can have the book published in spring. If she can't do that, in a month's time we'll be in the height of winter. *She would have to travel during that season right after recovering...* Realizing the predicament, I offered to go to the Royal Capital myself.

It was difficult for Lord Walter to come meet me as he was incredibly busy with work. It was then recommended that if I go with Lady Rachel, I may feel a little more at ease.

The reason why it took me so long to finally go to the Royal Capital was that I didn't want to leave Miselle or Lady Adelaide. It was my one sole wish. Not to mention Dr. Daniel also asked that I wait until my leg healed fully.

As for my injury, around the time the Queen Dowager visited, we found out that my leg wasn't healing anymore. Along with that news, the strong feeling of "I don't want to leave here" that I felt in spring and summer had subdued a little.

Even then, I still didn't want to leave Miselle and live in the Royal Capital. I still

love living here—that hasn't changed.

This trip—to visit the illustrator, Mrs. Helena—would be short, so I thought it would be fine. So, when I said that I was up for it, everyone was shocked. *Was it that surprising?* It seemed the doctor and Lady Adelaide were more worried about me going to the Royal Capital than I was.

Magic was being channeled to me from the forest behind the manor. As Hugh had previously explained, the magic power was healing my wounds. *I have no idea what will happen if I leave Miselle.* That was one of the reasons why I was unable to attend Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel's wedding ceremony at the temple in the Royal Capital.

We were still unsure about how much magic there was in the forest, so no one could say what would happen. But Hugh had looked into it, and it seemed there wasn't as much magic power emanating from there to me now. Although he couldn't say it was absolutely nothing, he also didn't seem too worried by it, either.

And well, I would eventually have to go visit the capital one day, anyway.

I wasn't going on an official visit as the Spirit Caller—I guess I was going undercover. I had no plans to meet with the royal family or any nobles, so I felt relaxed. If there was a huge "Meet the Spirit Caller" event on my first visit, I'd be a bundle of nerves. *I'd have to have an audience with the royals, then an evening banquet, then a ball with the nobility—ah, too much pressure.*

Mark reluctantly agreed with my decision to go this time. "I guess it's worth trying now," he said.

Right? I'd stay for two nights and three days. Miselle wasn't far from the Royal Capital—I could get there and back in a day. We put together a schedule: we would leave in the afternoon, giving us plenty of time. If I were going there to be introduced to everyone, I would have needed at least ten days. *Even though it would be the first time, that's a little too long. I wonder what is up with me, though. I used to really enjoy traveling. In my old world, I often went on trips, too.*

I guess I just really want to stay in Miselle.

“If you don’t feel well on your way there, cancel the trip and come straight home, okay?” The doctor and Lady Adelaide had reminded me of this multiple times. I forced a smile and acknowledged them.

Everyone’s a worrywart. I guess everyone’s scared because of how bad my injury was when I first arrived in this world. I get they wanna look after me, but I’m just not used to it.

Dr. Daniel said that he would come with me, but then Mark was summoned to help at the clinic in the Royal Capital. Which then led to him taking Hugh’s place in keeping an eye on my health and acting as bodyguard. If the doctor was going to stay in Miselle, then that meant Lady Adelaide would, too. I wanted the newlyweds to spend as much time together as possible.

I was using the magical writing device to explain all of that to Lady Rachel inside the carriage, but Lady Rachel started to turn whiter than a sheet.

Oh wait, I can’t make someone who suffers from motion sickness read. I gave the writing device to Mark, then cracked a window open to let in some cool air.

“Ah, oh, I’m fi— Margaret?”

I plopped Lady Rachel’s head on my lap and helped her lay down. I handed her hat over to Marie-Louise and placed a handkerchief over her eyes to act as an eye mask.

Although it was a large carriage, it wasn’t big enough for her to lie down like she was in a bed. But it was comfortable enough, so it should have helped her relax. The panicked Lady Rachel seemed thankful yet reserved... *Huh, has she never laid on someone’s lap before?*

I paid no mind to the fidgety Lady Rachel and lightly tapped a rhythm known to help with motion sickness on her hands that were folded on her stomach. Marie-Louise gently laid a shawl on her feet. *Keeping her head cool and her feet warm is essential.*

After a while, the once pale Lady Rachel had regained some color in her face.

Around the same time, I heard her make a small sigh as she slept soundly. Marie-Louise looked relieved. I smiled and put my finger in front of my lips, signaling we should be quiet.

As we didn't have to stop on the way to the Royal Capital, and since Lady Rachel didn't wake up, we hit a new world record for travel time from Miselle to the Royal Capital.



THE season of early sunsets. By the time we arrived at the Royal Capital, the sky had already begun to darken. I was unable to enjoy the view since I'd fallen asleep alongside Lady Rachel—it was a bit of a shame. I promised myself I'd see it on the way back.

"There's nothing much to see, anyway," said Mark.

Yeah, that might be the case if you've been here multiple times. It's my first time. Even just how the streets look will be interesting to me. I puffed out my cheeks.

As we entered the more popular districts, I could only hear the hustle and bustle of the Royal Capital, as the curtain of the carriage was pulled over the window. We carried on up the street, turned a corner, repeated that a few times, then we arrived at the Lindgren family manor, where we would be staying for the night.

As I was under Lady Adelaide's care, by all rights I should have stayed at Lord Walter's manor. However, that night Lord Walter was unable to leave his workplace. Or rather, he *did* plan to come back, but he wasn't sure what time that would end up being.

I knew he was incredibly busy, but I hoped his health was holding up.

In his letter, he'd written, *"There's no issue with you staying at my house even if I'm not present, but if you're going to come all this way to the Royal Capital, you should stay at the palace guesthouse."*

I froze when I read it. *Staying in a royal palace on my first visit to the capital—that's setting the bar too high.* I knew it couldn't be avoided, but I still struggled to fill in the gaps in my knowledge regarding high society customs.

I wanted to learn how to balance my position as a Spirit Caller, which was on the level of—if not above—a high-ranking noble, and my experience from my world where I was just an ordinary working adult.

But I'm sorry. Let me take it a little at a time. I've always been an ordinary person, not to mention a working adult for around eight years, so it's difficult for me to change my whole outlook.

When I asked Dr. Daniel about when he did when he came to the capital—my expression still taut from reading the letter—he told me that he and Mark often stayed at a lodge for medical staff. Naturally, only medical staff could stay there. Lady Rachel, being able to read the situation, invited me to stay at her residence. Although it was still a noble's estate, it was a lot better than a palace. Plus, I would be staying with a friend.

As a result, I ended up staying at Lady Rachel's home for two nights during my visit to the Royal Capital.

Hugh, who had left Miselle the day before us, was supposed to have contacted Lord Walter and the marquis about the arrangement, but I felt bad for making them have to go out of their way to host a sudden guest. *I'm sorry, I've given all the servants more work to do too.*

As we entered the grounds of the Lindgren residence, I gently woke up Lady Rachel. She had a childlike expression as she blinked multiple times. *Oh, beautiful women even look stunning when waking up.* Our eyes met as I admired her. She went bright red and jumped up.

"H-How could I have...!" she panicked.

"Now, now, it's fine. I'm the one who sort of pushed you into resting on me."

I held her hand so that she wouldn't suddenly jump up and eased her into a sitting position instead.

"How are you feeling? Are you still dizzy?"

"No... I feel refreshed," Lady Rachel responded. She looked curious as she put her hands on her forehead and cheeks.

That's a relief.

She took her hat from Marie-Louise to hide her bed hair, when the carriage came to a stop. Suddenly, the double doors to the carriage opened with a *crack!* A man dressed in fine clothing stood outside, the background behind him

dazzling with light from the manor's entryway.

"Hey, welcome home, Rachel! And welcome, Lady Spirit Caller!"

The man who welcomed us in such high spirits was Lady Rachel's older brother, Lord Julius.

Weird, I feel like this has happened before. Deja Vu? I suddenly thought of Hugh—even though he wasn't here. Lord Julius, holding the doors open with a smile, had gorgeous blonde hair complemented by light purple eyes. He shared the same good looks as Lady Rachel. His facial structure was like that of a doll—it was easy to tell they were siblings at first glance.

He looked older than me, but younger than Lord Walter. It was hard to tell people's ages in this world. Although, people did often say I didn't look my age in Japan either.

Lady Rachel froze at the sudden appearance of her brother, but soon recovered. "Oh, brother. You surprised me," she said.

"That was my intention." Lord Julius said with a smug expression and a wink.

Yeah... He's Hugh 2. It seems like Lord Walter attracts these types. I'm seeing a pattern now.

Lord Julius then took Lady Rachel's hand and escorted her out of the carriage. After that, Marie-Louise gave a small bow and alighted from the carriage.

"Margaret."

Mark held out his hand for me. The carriages were quite high off the ground, and descending was rough on my legs, so there was a little trick to getting off. *Even though they say lifting me down from the carriage is easier, there's no way I'm doing that in front of people.*

"Shame. I would've offered my hand," Lord Julius commented as he watched Mark help me.

"Brother!" Lady Rachel shot him an exasperated glare as she smiled wryly. Her voice sounded energetic. *I'm glad she's not suffering from motion sickness.*

As I left the carriage, I was met with the sprawling manor entryway. The use of white marble gave off a look of extravagance, but it didn't seem too

overdone. It was still tasteful in design.

The large doors had a lavish design, resembling a historic hall or church. The open doors revealed a hallway lit with magical lanterns and a sprawling staircase with a large painting placed on the wall at the top of it. Although it was fall, there were a variety of different colored flowers with strong scents decorating various spots.

It was plain to see that the siblings who stood before me were raised here. *So, this is what noble households are like. This has got nothing on luxury hotels... I'm glad I didn't stay at the palace.* I would happily go if it was just to look around. I was confident I wouldn't be able to relax if I stayed, though.

"Margaret, Mark, this is my older brother, Julius."

My eyes met with Julius' once again as Lady Rachel introduced us. His cheerful mood shifted as he bowed with a serious expression.

"It is an honor to meet you, Spirit Caller Margaret. I wholeheartedly welcome you, the highly esteemed next-in-line head of the clinic, Mr. Reynolds. I do hope you both enjoy your stay here, and that the great spirits bless us with their divine protection."

I had heard something curious in all of that. *Ah, yeah, that.*

Mark let out a quiet sigh that only I could hear. I tugged on his sleeve and signaled him with my eyes. Then I smiled at Lord Julius, straightened my posture, and bowed just like Lady Adelaide taught me.

I hope this gets across since I can't speak. I made sure I did everything properly.

"I am deeply thankful for your kind greeting and thoughtfulness, Lord Belliol."

Lord Julius' eyes flickered slightly as Mark called him that.

"Legend has it that the Spirit's protection is both broad and fair. Although, I'm sure you're already very aware of that, Lord Belliol, as someone who is so closely involved with the public. For example, the recent discussion on treasury loans..." Mark rattled off in a monotone voice. Lord Julius surrendered.

"You can just call me Julius. I can tell you're an acquaintance of Walter's."

“...Brother,” Lady Rachel quipped.

“He’s right, Julius. You already knew that beforehand. No matter how old you get, you’re ever the problem child.” A noblewoman appeared and bowed gracefully. She was beautiful. She had the same color hair as the siblings. I could tell that they were family.

I giggled when I saw Lord Julius grow flustered under his sister’s icy glare and his mother scolding him like a child. *They look like a really close-knit family.*

“Welcome, Margaret, Mark. I am Rachel and Julius’ mother, Sofia. It is a pleasure to meet you both,” she greeted us. “You must be exhausted, please rest inside.” Her smile bloomed like a flower as she motioned for us to go inside. She turned around and led us through.

I took Mark’s arm as we walked, followed by Lord Julius, and Lady Rachel, who was quietly scolding her brother. Following them was Marie-Louise.

We were shown to the family living room. The living room was also lavish, yet with the balance of natural light and tasteful artificial lighting, as well as the well-used furniture, it gave off a cozy, antique feel.

I had a quick glimpse of the receiving room for guests, and it looked like it had been taken right out of a castle. I was relieved when we continued past it. As suggested, I nervously sat down on the deep brown colored velvet sofa. There were speckles of gold in the brown. With expert timing, Marie-Louise quietly served tea on an elegant table with clawed feet. She was wearing a white apron and cap. *When did she change into those? Is this a talent required of a marquis’ servant?*

Lady Sofia and Lady Rachel sat on the sofa opposite, with Lord Julius sitting on a recliner next to the sofa.

“My husband will be home soon,” Lady Sofia said. “I apologize he wasn’t here to welcome you.”

“No, I apologize for suddenly imposing on you,” I wrote.

But she dismissed my apology with a wave of her hands. “Nonsense! I had wanted to visit with you sooner—even going as far as to meet you in Miselle—but everyone stopped me. You and Lady Adelaide have been looking after my

Rachel, and Count Dustin is friends with my troublesome son. I wanted to give you all something as thanks but got told not to do that either. I found that quite ungrateful of me—”

“Mother, that’s enough.”

Lady Rachel tugged on her mother’s sleeve with a troubled expression. It wasn’t enough to stop Lady Sofia’s tirade, though. Lord Julius called Marie-Louise over with a wiggle of his finger and whispered something into her ear.

“My lady, pardon me,” Marie-Louise interjected.

“So that’s why I— Oh. Okay. I apologize. I have something to tend to. Margaret, let’s talk again at dinner.” Led by Marie-Louise, Lady Sofia reluctantly left the room.

As soon as the door closed behind her, Lady Rachel looked right at me. “I apologize for my chatty mother. I always talk about you all, so she was very excited to meet everyone...”

“I like her. She’s cheerful. Her voice has a pretty soprano tone. I wanted to hear her talk more.”

“I-Is that so? I am glad to hear that.” Lady Rachel looked relieved.

I was sure that, usually, she was a calm woman. She greeted me in such a friendly manner. *I guess that was because Lady Rachel always talked about me.* I didn’t feel like I deserved such a warm welcome, but I was grateful.

“Not to mention, brother. That was in poor taste.” She shot Lord Julius a sharp look. I swear I heard it cut through the air as it fleeced him. Lord Julius just shrugged in response. “There are other ways to go about such things. I received some homemade apple jam as a souvenir from my trip, but I won’t be giving it to my rude old brother Juli.”

“Huh, you can’t do that?! I’m sorry for testing them. See.” Suddenly, Lord Julius lowered his head to us in an apologetic bow...

Wait a minute, don’t do that! It’s fine! We understand.

“It’s fine. You were just looking out for us, weren’t you, Lord Belliol?” The smile Mark had on his face as he placed emphasis on that last word didn’t show

in his voice at all.

Ah, honestly. This one can stop it too.

“I wonder if you could forgive me. You even know the title I was given in secret—I see nothing gets past you. You know a lot about the inner happenings here, even our closed meetings. I have no complaints, or words of advice. I see the Caller isn’t all that bothered either.” Lord Julius gave a wry smile.

His intentions were exactly as I thought.

I had no plans to visit any of the royal family or any other noble families. Although it was a short visit, since I was in the Royal Capital, I would be visiting Her Majesty Helena at the castle. Of course, I would see people on the way there, but it would not only be people who think favorably of a Spirit Caller.

Although I had yet to be introduced as the current Spirit Caller, my existence was already public knowledge. I had black hair and two different colored eyes. Even my bone structure and face were different from others—anyone would work out that I wasn’t from this country at first glance. If people spoke to me, I wouldn’t be able to reply. With that information alone, people would soon be able to guess who I was even if I didn’t introduce myself. The other defining aspect of me was that I couldn’t use magic. If magic-wielding nobles were curious enough to look into it, they’d be able to work that out immediately.

It was common knowledge that Callers were important people who should be respected. Judging from how the Queen Dowager acted, it seemed even the royal family thought that too.

However, that didn’t mean that *everyone* was of the same mind on the matter. There were going to be people against the Callers’ existence, and people who wanted to use us.

Although I didn’t know a lot about high society, I could imagine that much. I could also imagine how any mistakes I made could become Lord Walter and his family’s problem. *I am nearing my thirties and have experience living and working as an adult.* I think Lord Julius’ choice of greeting was to see if I was cautious, as well as to confirm how I would handle myself in such situations. Even then, he went easy on me. Although I struggled to get used to my position, I didn’t mind it. It was too late for that, anyway.

However, I did want to make sure I didn't end up caught in annoying matters.

Dr. Daniel, Lord Walter, and Mark were all keeping a close eye on how I was treated as a Caller. That was why it had taken so long before my existence had been made public. I didn't want to hold them back after they had done so much for me.

Mark never messes up. I don't understand what they're talking about at times, so I'll just stay quiet for now. I guessed they were talking about Lord Julius' work... *He works in finance, I think. I'll look into it later.*

"I appreciate the sentiment. You needn't worry about us, though," Mark said.

"Yeah, I figured as much," Lord Julius said. "That's why I got rid of my mother—as an apology."

Mark laughed at that. *He's finally relaxing.*

"Now, I wonder if you could free the souvenirs?" Lord Julius asked.

"I guess. With Margaret and Mark's permission, I will give them especially to you, brother." Lady Rachel also relaxed now that matters were settled.

Marie-Louise returned from seeing off Lady Sofia and joined our conversation with permission. "Lord Julius," she began, "everyone has been worried about Count Dustin."

"Ah, that's right, Marie-Louise. I only saw him this morning. He's busy with work as always, and no doubt will be cooped up in his office tonight, too," Lord Julius responded.

"He really is terribly busy..." Lady Rachel responded with a concerned look.

Lord Julius nodded and crossed his arms. "He's always been like that. He's the type that would rather do everything himself. He resembles the former count in that regard."

Oh my. That's common with people who are talented at their job. They'd rather do it themselves than pass it on to someone else. It's quicker, after all. The type that feels like they can handle everything on their own.

"He's very serious," Lady Rachel commented.

“He’s stubborn,” Lord Julius said at the same time.

The way they responded in unison was funny—and they were both right. Both descriptors fit Lord Walter perfectly.

“He’s serious, but in no way is he flexible,” Lord Julius curtly added in an exhausted tone. I could sense how close he was to Lord Walter.

It’s nice you have these kinds of people in your life, Lord Walter.

“And as you would guess, he said he’s secured a time slot for when we can visit, so it should be okay tomorrow,” Lord Julius continued. “Ah, I’ll be showing you to the castle. Hugh might pop up at some point, but I’ll do my best to make sure we don’t bump into any *other* troublesome types.”

That reminds me. Hugh asked me to go to the Magical Academy since I was here anyway. I also wanted to go and say thanks for the magical writing device. But it wasn’t like I could do what I wanted, so it would be difficult to find the time.

“Margaret, how are you feeling?” Mark asked as I picked up my teacup.

“I’m all right. I feel fine.”

That was a tiny bit of a white lie. Ever since leaving Miselle, I felt chilly and couldn’t calm down. Although I felt the same in the carriage, I chalked it up to being outside. However, even in a room with a huge hearth, I felt cold, so it didn’t seem to be because I was outside. It didn’t feel like the chill you get when you’re not feeling well. It felt like there was a constant cold air blowing against my body.

It was difficult to put what I was feeling into words. I didn’t know whether it was the effect of the magic from the forest, or if it was related to the Spirit... *Well, I’ll probably find out during my stay here.* I figured it would work out.

I didn’t feel ill, though.

“I feel a little strange, but I don’t feel unwell or anything,” I explained.

Mark was satisfied with that, but didn’t forget to say, “If there are any changes, tell me.”

“On another note, I wonder what the palace we’re visiting tomorrow looks

like.”

Lord Julius responded to my question, drawing an elaborate map with his finger on the table. “Here is the main gate, and here is the main palace building. Over here, sandwiching the garden, is the House of Lords...”

I was shocked by the scale of the Royal Palace grounds. *Just how many buildings are there inside the castle walls? If I were to go by myself, I’d get lost.*

“The Magic Academy and the House of Lords are next to one another, so you can go between the two just fine. The clinic is a little out of the way, though. You could walk there, but I’d recommend taking a carriage instead,” Lord Julius nonchalantly recommended.

He knew about me struggling to walk. *It’s those qualities that make him seem more like Lady Rachel’s brother.*

As we were discussing Mark having his own things to do tomorrow, a voice called out, letting us know dinner had been prepared. As we stood up, Lord Julius spoke to Lady Rachel. “That reminds me,” he began. “You seem to be doing well today, Rach. Do you no longer get motion sickness?”

“Ah, about that,” Marie-Louise began to explain in place of Lady Rachel. Lord Julius looked delighted by her explanation.

“Ah, next time we go somewhere together, we’ll have to try the same thing!” He was enthused.

“...I don’t think it will work with you, brother,” Lady Rachel responded dryly.

“He doesn’t look that comfortable to sleep on,” Marie-Louise swiftly agreed.

I can see how close they all are.

“Really? I think I’d make a fine lap-pillow. Anyway, thank you for bringing my sister home healthy.”

As my mind was wandering a bit, Lord Julius swiftly approached me, took my hand, and kissed the back of it.

I blinked in shock. Lord Julius flashed me a grin. “I had yet to greet you properly,” he said.

“...Lord Belliol. Let’s leave it there for now,” Mark said in a dark voice.

“Brother, really?”

Mark took my hand back from him. As I watched Lord Julius be scolded by Lady Rachel, I realized something: *Yep, no doubt about it. He’s just like Hugh.*



LADY Rachel’s father—the marquis—had returned home, and we all sat at a large dining table together. He had a sturdy build and a beard. He really gave off a marquis look. *Lady Rachel resembles her mother, I see.*

Every time the marquis laughed, the outer corner of his eyes would go down—it was endearing. He was also very attentive. Even then, he exuded a sense of dignity that made him difficult to approach. Naturally I was very nervous. I was doing everything so as not to come across as rude.

I apologized for our sudden visit, but he in turn thanked us for giving him a chance to sit with his family at the table. It seemed that although they lived in the same house they didn’t have many opportunities to talk as a family. *Households consisting mostly of working adults seem to be the same no matter where you go.*

Lady Rachel and Lord Julius kept the conversation going. As Mark was replying on my behalf, I just nodded and listened. It would’ve been difficult to write on the magical device while eating, so I was grateful for his assistance.

Although it was a last-minute visit, they had prepared a luxurious meal. There were some foods I hadn’t seen before, and they became the topic of the conversation. *It was all super delicious.*

It seemed like Lady Sofia still had a lot she wanted to talk about, but Lord Julius tactfully reminded her that we had to be awake early tomorrow. After dinner, we were shown to our rooms. Even if Lady Rachel wasn’t suffering from motion sickness, it was probably a good idea that she rested early today, too.

My guest room floor was covered with a soft carpet—my feet sank into the plush material. There was a big bed with a large canopy over it. There was a comfortable-looking sofa set and an elegant chest and dresser with cabriole legs. A bright red fire roared in the hearth, and the magically controlled lights

even had brightness settings. *This room is amazing. It's so nice.*

Mark was assigned the room next to mine. He came to confirm our plans for tomorrow, then showed me how to use the lights. As I followed along, I felt his hand on my cheek. His gaze was that of a doctor as he peered into my eyes—he seemed concerned about my response earlier.

“Are you sure you feel okay?” he asked. “If you’re tired from traveling today, please rest. Also, as soon as I leave this room, make sure to lock the door.”

Huh? I cocked my head.

“And make sure that you double-check who is at the door before you open it,” Mark continued.

There's no way a robber is going to make their way into this heavily guarded estate. They have gatekeepers and guard dogs, right? Did you notice something?

“...The young lord living here,” he mumbled as he leaned in close, placing his forehead against mine.

I couldn't help but burst out laughing.

“Not in a million years. I can wholeheartedly say nothing would ever happen between us. Were you bothered by the kiss? That was just a greeting. There was nothing romantic about it—surely you realized that.”

“I should have brought Buddy with me,” he mumbled to himself.

“More importantly, what did Julius mean by saying you were next in line for heading up the clinic?”

“Ah, that. That's a story from a while back. I was approached regarding becoming head physician of the Royal Clinic, but even if I do accept, it won't happen for years. Nothing to worry about now,” Mark replied, seemingly uninterested.

I guess that's true. But I would have preferred it if he had talked to me about it. He doesn't need to ask for my opinion, I just want to know what's going on in his life.

Although he's an expert at exchanging pleasantries and trivial conversation,

whenever it comes to talking about himself, Mark often goes uncommunicative. I wonder when I started to want to be with and support him.

We put our foreheads together again. *There's something I've wanted to say for a while.*

"Don't carry the burden all on your own. Share it with me."

He seemed shocked by my comment, then laughed awkwardly.

"Yeah... I'm not used to this yet."

Even then, all he does is worry about me. He noticed I was nervous about being in the capital for the first time and had been concerned about me.

"I would be lying if I didn't say I was having fun—I do work well under pressure. So, feel free to tell me anything. How the weather is good, or how delicious the tea is. Anything is fine. Like a dream you had yesterday," I continued.

"Dreams? That's boring," Mark scoffed.

"Really? Well, I want to hear about it. Our conversation doesn't always have to be about me. I want to talk and laugh about everything and anything together."

He's so eloquent, yet he's clumsy with his words.

We separated our foreheads, but his hand remained on my cheek. I took his hand and wrapped my little finger around his.

He probably won't understand what a pinky promise is.

Home time, weekend outings, secret fun—the days spent with my grandmother, making promises.

I sang a silent song as I shook our hooked pinky fingers.

Satisfied with our pinky promise, I pulled my hand away, earning a searching look from Mark, who didn't know this custom.



THE guestroom bed was rather comfy.

I thought I would be too nervous to sleep in such a gorgeous bed, but I was able to relax and sleep like a log. Even I was surprised by how bold I could be.

I didn't drink any alcohol last night, right? I just had juice, surely.

It had been my first time traveling long distance since I came to this world, so it made sense I was exhausted from the journey. I thought I had built up some stamina from working in the garden and doing housework every day, but as soon as I got under the covers and closed my eyes, it was morning.

Breakfast was brought to the room—or to be exact, it was rolled into the room on a plate covered by a silver lid! I got to choose a tea, and they poured it for me! It was like a scene out of a movie.

I was a bit flustered as I hadn't even changed, but they told me to change after eating. There was so much stuff I wasn't used to, so it was a relief when it was Marie-Louise who brought the food.

Of course, it would be fine if the other house staff came too. I just feel more relaxed when it's someone I know. No doubt Lady Rachel chose who would do it. I'm grateful.

Once I finished eating, I changed into some clothes. I just tried to change normally, but it became a whole thing.

"Rachel. I think this looks better. Look, doesn't it suit her hair color? It makes her face glow," Lady Sofia said.

"I don't disagree about the color, Mother. However, I feel like this dress would suit her better," Lady Rachel replied.

I stood there absentmindedly while the mother and daughter exchanged opinions. Marie-Louise stood there waiting like this was a sight she was used to seeing.

"I guess they do this a lot?"

"Yes. They both have strong personal opinions about fashion, so it's often like this," Marie-Louise nodded deeply in response to what I had written on the magical writing device.

There was a dress code for when going to the Royal Castle. I had planned to

wear the dress that Lady Adelaide wore when going to the castle, but for some reason they had brought a partition and a lot of dresses into the room. The guestroom was now a dressing room.

“Oh, thank you. All of them are pretty. Any will do, really.”

Lady Sofia spun around when she read what I wrote. “Any *won’t* do! We must pick one that is the most beautiful and makes you glow. That is not only my duty as a member of House Lindgren, but also my own personal duty!”

“You just want her to wear it, Mother.”

“Rachel, you don’t get it. I mean, she has beautiful black hair, and such smooth skin! Ever since I saw her for the first time yesterday, all I could think was any dress would look great on her!” Lady Sofia grabbed both of my arms with such force that I thought she was going to embrace me as she enthusiastically spoke.

Huh, is she complimenting me? That’s a little embarrassing. So, this is the kind of person she is. She’s really friendly.

“Ah, if only I knew you were coming sooner!” she exclaimed. “I would have prepared fabric for you, rather than just using what we have on hand.”

“No, no, this is enough.”

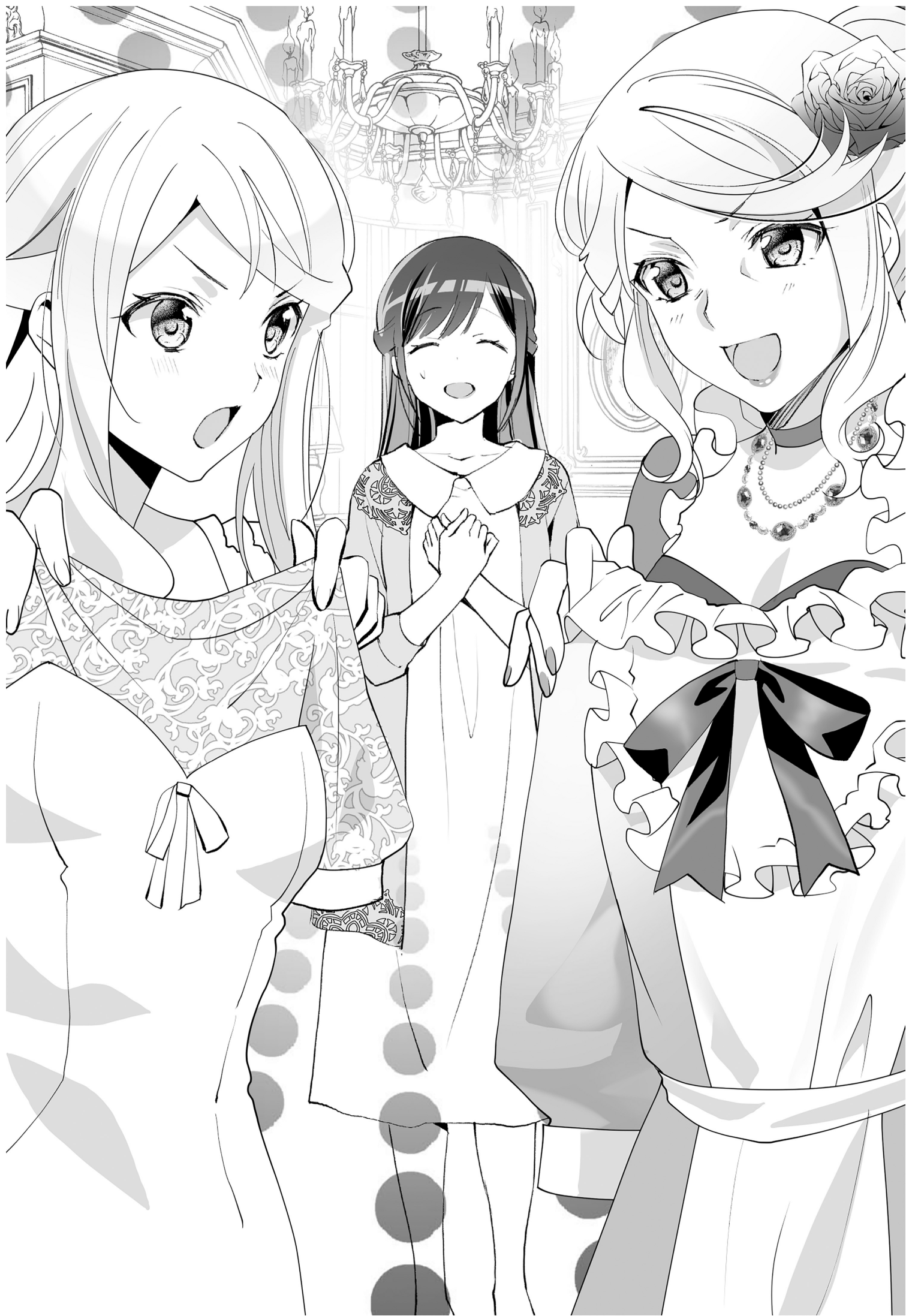
Dyeing the fabric for me is on the level of haute couture... I’m just relieved she didn’t say she would weave the fabric herself.

“My ladies, if you do not decide soon, Lord Julius and the others will be here,” Marie-Louise warned.

“That’s fine, they can wait. Nothing comes before a lady getting ready,” Lady Sofia quipped.

“Mother, we do have appointments today, so we cannot really— Ah! I’ve got the perfect piece. How about this?” Lady Rachel spoke as she pulled out a dress from behind the others. It was a green ombre dress—it was beautiful.

“Oh...that is nice. Though I think it would be better with some more volume on the sleeves,” Lady Sofia said.



“That style’s popular at the moment, but I think this gives off a more ‘foreign country’ feel. It’s like Margaret. It’s wonderful,” Lady Rachel said.

They eventually decided on Lady Rachel’s pick. It was pretty and had a long silhouette. It had been made from layers of soft, thin fabric. It was roomy, elegant, and beautiful.

I was most pleased that I was able to wear a loose corset. All the dresses that Lady Sofia had suggested were tight at the waist. I was worried just how much they’d have to squeeze me in, so I was very relieved by this pick.

The seamstress who worked with the Lindgren family was working to make sure it fit me perfectly. As I admired her work, she soon finished. It looked as if it had been tailor-made for me. *It’s amazing. Woah, thank you so much.*

“Ah, Marie-Louise. It would be a shame to tie up that gorgeous black hair of hers. Let’s leave half of it down on one side—elegantly, of course,” Lady Sofia proposed.

“Of course, my lady,” Marie-Louise diligently responded.

“Mother, I think a thin necklace would look nicer than a brooch or a choker. Especially if we make the color of the gem like her hair ornament and dress...”

“Good idea, Rachel.”

The three of them suddenly formed an alliance. I looked on in amazement as they styled my hair and prepared accessories. I was wearing the hair ornament I had received from Mark, and I was amazed that they had managed to find accessories that went well with it.

But what do I do? If we were in a store, these are the kind of high-class accessories that the shop staff would present wearing white gloves. I was terrified of dropping or losing them.

Um, you really don’t have to put this on me... What, you can’t go to the Royal Castle without fancy accessories? Oh man, I’m gonna be nervous the whole day.

A knock came from the door around the same time Lady Sofia had finished dressing me up like a doll. “I believe we’re done,” she declared, satisfied.

“Excuse me. Are you all ready?” Lord Julius asked.

“Yes, she’s perfect. I apologize for making you both wait,” Lady Rachel said to Lord Julius and Mark behind the partition screen.

Well, I wouldn’t say perfect... Anyone can look good in the right clothes. Ever since coming to this world, all I’ve worn is dresses. I don’t wear jeans anymore, so I guess I’m used to wearing dresses in a way. And I really mean in a way.

“Off you go,” Lady Sofia and Lady Rachel spoke as they grabbed both my arms and led me forward. Behind us, Marie-Louise was deftly cleaning up a large number of dresses. She gave us a firm “You look great” as I moved in front of the partition.

“Oh. Beautiful,” Lord Julius responded in a slightly surprised tone. He gave a charming smile. “Well then, shall we be off?” He reached his hand out to take mine, but Mark swiftly interrupted it.

“Yes, let us be off.” Mark placed my hand on his arm—our usual arrangement—and whispered in my ear, “You look beautiful in everything you wear, and this is no exception.”

Ugh, I can’t get used to flattery. I know compliments are a form of manners here, but I always get embarrassed. I hope it doesn’t show on my face.

“You’ve lost before you even started, Brother. Ah, Margaret, here.” Lady Rachel had a smug smile tugging up her cute lips as she made me wear a hat as a finishing touch. She then passed me a clutch bag that was the same color as the dress. It was a little big, but that meant I could put the magical writing device in it. “I’ll join you a little later. Until then, Brother, keep a good eye on them.”

“Of course,” Lord Julius said.

Lady Rachel gripped my hand above where it gripped the clutch.

I mouthed “thank you” to her and smiled at Lady Sofia. We then left the marquis’ estate.



WE rode the Lindgren carriage for a little while—it gently swayed the whole way. It was a rather smooth ride to the Royal Castle.

There were soldiers at the gate—or rather guards. They wore black and blue uniforms with a stand-up collar instead of armor. There was a golden braid on their shoulder. Although it was a military uniform, it had a sense of elegance. I wondered if it was due to the location.

They didn't check the inside of the carriage, they only peeked through the small window before allowing us through. *A little anticlimactic.* I asked Lord Julius about why it was so easy to get in.

"It's my workplace. I come here every day," he responded.

Usually there would be some sort of process and you would need a permit to enter the palace. It also wasn't strange for there to be a long line at the gate during busy periods.

After entering the palace gates, the buildings were still a distance away, so we stayed in the carriage as we moved forward. I moved the curtain on the small window to the side, revealing the scenery. I gasped when I looked out—*it's really a palace.*

The shrubbery was around waist-high and was neatly trimmed. Although winter was close, there wasn't a single dead leaf on the roads we passed. Late-fall flowers were blooming, and there were refined water fountains made from carved stone.

There were arches of roses and monuments, statues of nymphs... *Wait, I feel like I have seen these in a book I borrowed about Callers. I wonder if that's supposed to be a Spirit.*

The top part of the castle was visible above a few buildings. It had a rounded roof with a tower. It resembled a palace more than it did a castle. *Woah, it looks so pretty. If only I could see it better.*

It was times like this that reminded me of my poor eyesight. Usually, I didn't mind it. It seemed the outside walls were intricate, however I could only see that something was there. It was mostly blurry, and that was a real shame.

Even then, it felt like a long time had passed since we entered through the palace gates. We were probably traveling slowly due to being on the castle grounds, but I wondered just where we were going. *Is the House of Lords that*

far away? Lord Julius seemed to sense what I was thinking.

“There’s a lot of people at my usual stop, so we’ll take the long way around. Not that there’s much need to hide, but there’s also no need to give the more curious people something to talk about, right?” He winked at me playfully. He then turned to Mark. “I’ll take all responsibility for everything that happens here—I won’t do anything to make her uncomfortable. That, I promise.”

“I appreciate that,” Mark responded.

“Don’t mention it. She’s an important friend of my sister, after all.” Lord Julius responded confidently. It seemed Mark had begun to change his opinion about him.

I didn’t think he was a bad person, nor was I worried about him doing anything funny. I realized again that everything he did was based around being Lady Rachel’s brother and found it kind of cute.

“We’ve arrived,” Roy informed us as he opened the window. Mark offered me his hand and helped me out of the carriage.

The corridors along the building were lightly lit; there was a calm dimness to them. Although it was noon, the lights on the wall were the main source of light.

There was no one around, only the wind lightly blowing in front of the old mural with vegetation painted on it. The serene atmosphere reminded me of a temple or a castle... *Wait, this is a Royal Castle.* It seemed being away from the village and the unfamiliar days had me feeling a little strange.

As I looked around, Lord Julius called out to Mark, “If you’re headed to the Royal Clinic, Roy can take you there. I already said this, but you really have no need to worry. The earlier you go, the earlier you can be done, right?”

He must go to work. Mark wore a difficult expression as he slowly let go of my hand.

“...Look after her,” he said reluctantly.

“Yeah, I will.”

Mark looked back once before getting into the carriage. It rattled as it set off.

Our surroundings became quiet again. I could hear the call of a bird in the distance.

“Rach was right. He really is a worrywart. Well, I understand why,” Lord Julius commented. He then held out his hand with a wry smile. “Shall we be off?”

He walked slowly and matched his pace to mine as he talked about the murals and decorations. As I attentively listened, we soon reached a pathway with a lot of people.

While I could feel people glancing at me, nobody stopped us. Even the guards wearing the same uniforms as the men at the gates, once realizing I was with Lord Julius, gave a slight bow and went on their way.

Wow, he has quite the presence here.

“Walter’s office often has a lot of people coming and going, as well as guests, so we mostly meet in my office. You wanted to talk before your meeting in the afternoon, right? If he has time, he’ll come. My office is just ahead...”

As I was amazed by how Lord Julius’ face got him access everywhere, he suddenly stopped talking. Finding it strange, I followed his gaze to somebody I recognized.

“Hey, I’ve been waiting for you, Margaret! Wow, you look especially cute today!”

Dressed in a black Magic Academy robe, with his arms spread wide, was none other than Hugh. Lord Julius let out a loud sigh.

“Hugh Tausend. Are you trying to make us stand out?”

“It’s fine, I set up a barrier!”

“Wasting magic for such trivial things again— Wait a minute, Hugh. Magic is banned in the House of Lords,” Lord Julius chided.

“It’s banned *in principle*. Surely, when it comes to the Spirit Caller, we can make exceptions,” Hugh explained. “It’ll be fine if we don’t get caught.”

Lord Julius furrowed his brow as Hugh bragged.

I thought they were similar, but Lord Julius has more common sense, I

realized.

“First of all, I’m in charge of the use of magic here,” Hugh grinned.

“I know, but use a little restraint, would you? Sheesh,” Lord Julius sighed.

“You got it, milord. With that settled, Margaret, this way.” Hugh wrapped his arm around my shoulder.

Before I knew it, I was now standing away from Lord Julius. *Huh, what way?*

As I looked up from beneath my hat, Hugh responded in high spirits.

“We’re off to the Magic Academy.”

“Hugh! She has an appointment with Walter first,” Lord Julius said.

“Ah, yes, Walter. Lord Barnaby got a hold of him, so I think we have at least two hours.”

“Barnaby? Well...okay.” Lord Julius made a bitter face as he responded in an understanding tone.

Ah, he must be a talker. Like a school principal or a chatty boss at the office. Those types are everywhere.

“So, the plan was if you had time, you’d come to the Magic Academy, right?” Hugh said. “Is that okay with you?”

“Uh, I mean, I’m all right with it.” I glanced over at Lord Julius, who was holding his hands up in surrender.

“All right, I’m going to pass on a message to my assistant so that we don’t miss Walter. Just wait here a mo— Hey, hey! Hugh!”

Hugh had started to swiftly walk off mid-way through Lord Julius’ sentence. He had a firm grip on my shoulders as he steered me off with him. *Wait, wait a minute already.*

“Lord Julius, you can just stay in your office,” Hugh said. “I’ll be borrowing Margaret. Ah, I already told Mark and Walter, so no need to worry about that.”

“This is the only time you choose to do your job?!” Lord Julius exclaimed, full of spite. However, that didn’t stop Hugh.

Nothing we can do now. I turned around to wave. Lord Julius furrowed his brow as he waved back.

“Good timing,” Hugh said. “The Magic Academy headmaster is here for the first time in a while; plus Lisa has been wanting to meet you for a long time.”

“I’ve heard about the head of the Magic Academy before, but who’s Lisa?” I wrote out on Hugh’s palm.

“Oh, my bad, I didn’t tell you her name before. Lisa is the one behind the magic writing device. The one you’ve been using,” Hugh responded.

Oh, that’s right, I had heard the production leader was a woman. So that’s her!

“I’d love to meet her. I want to tell her thanks directly,” I wrote.

“I thought so. Lisa isn’t at the Magic Academy every day though, so I’m glad you came today.”

Strong magic users were mostly noblemen. I had thought that a female magic user would be there all the time, but that wasn’t the case.

Hugh gave a noncommittal “Yeah, I guess” when I brought it up.

“Oh, I guess there’s more to it. It’s fine, I don’t mean to stick my nose in,” I replied.

“You know, I like that about you. Lisa is a noble, so I can’t really tell you the name of her family.”

“That’s fine.”

There were no plans for any nobles to see the Caller on this trip.

““It just so happened that Lisa suddenly bumped into Margaret.”” If we don’t play it off like that, it could cause issues later.”

As I listened to Hugh as we walked, he suddenly got very close to my face.

U-Um, that’s a bit too close. Well, I know that half of my face is covered by my hat, so if you don’t peer in, you can’t see me. But it’s still a shock to my poor heart.

“Did the Lindgrens choose your outfit today?” he asked. “Your eyes are well

hidden—you look like any other noblewoman visiting the castle. Most people would walk right by you, not realizing you're the Caller."

Everyone who walked past us paid no mind, just like Hugh said. I realized it wasn't just because I was with Lord Julius—it was thanks to Lady Rachel and her mother's expert clothing choice. It was moving to know that the two of them, who had gotten excited and treated dressing me up like an event, had thought about all of those details when making their selection too. *When I get back, I'll have to thank them properly.*

Not too long after we had that conversation, Hugh led me through a corridor, stating that the Magic Academy was just ahead. The appearance of the Magic Academy vastly differed from the House of Lords. There were no decorations or murals—it looked rather bleak. It felt like no one else was there; I couldn't even see any guards.

"Are you surprised by how different it is? There's usually administrative staff walking around, but there's also a lot of commoners. They don't really call out to anyone for no reason—especially people who, like you, are dressed like nobles," Hugh explained.

It seemed that the people at the Magic Academy rarely ever left their research rooms. Plus, research was of the utmost importance, so nobody really worried about others... From what I knew of Hugh, I could understand what it was like.

"But even though it's so close to the House of Lords, no one from there ever visits? Is your work that different?" I asked.

"The only regulars are Walter and Lord Julius, I guess. You probably can't feel it, but the atmosphere here is steeped with magic. Outside, we hold back on our magic, but here we can use it as much as we like for experiments and research," said Hugh.

Those who were susceptible to strong magic suffered from a condition called mana sickness—it was like motion sickness. The severity of the condition differed from person to person. People had passed out in especially bad cases. It was also a matter of compatibility—something I wouldn't understand without experiencing it. Magic that was used in general was under control and caused

no issue. But when in a place with a lot of high-level magic users, a normal person would be susceptible to mana sickness.

I couldn't feel anything, but apparently there had been cases of people who were used to using magic and had a lot of mana themselves getting sick too. It reminded me of the time Hugh had used investigative magic on me. When he finished, he was exhausted. That was due to the Spirit sending magic to me directly, though.

There was no one who would want to become mana sick. People who were unable to protect themselves against it never came to the academy. At most, there would be some guards around—even then, only guards who could withstand it.

“Lady Rachel doesn't have much mana but has a strong resistance to it thanks to her lineage. That's partly one of the reasons the Lindgren family looks after both me and Roy.”

Oh, how interesting. Motion sickness and mana sickness are different.

Hugh mentioned that there was a barrier at the end of the corridor that prevented any magic from spilling over to the House of Lords. *That explains why the air feels somewhat closed off despite being an open corridor.*

As we arrived at a small yet narrow hallway, Hugh pointed. “My own research office is just over there. I'll show you next time you come. For today, we'll be heading to the reception office, just over there.” As he spoke, he opened two large doors.

Inside there was already a visitor. They jumped up from the sofa when they saw us. “Hugh, I've been waiting for you! And this must be Ms. Margaret.”

“Sorry for making you wait, Lisa. Is the headmaster not here yet?”

“They should be here soon. Anyway, it's nice to meet you. I'm Lisa.” A young woman half ran over to me and bowed. She looked younger than Lady Rachel.

She had wavy blonde hair and big brown eyes. Her eyes sparkled and reflected everything around her. She was very lively. She seemed friendly and was a charming beauty. She wore a black robe like Hugh's, however underneath she had a deep, amber-colored dress on. She was on the petite side and kind of

reminded me of a small animal. I had a feeling that if I hugged her and rubbed my face against hers, her cheeks would be super soft, like a chipmunk's.

I bowed as a greeting. Her smile grew wider, and she took my hand.

"Let's take a seat and chat. Oh, that's right, thank you for the sweets! We all enjoyed them."

I wanted to give something as thanks for the magical device. Someone suggested sweets, so Hugh ended up taking a mountain-load of them with him when he returned from Miselle.

"I'm glad you enjoyed them." I wondered if they looked forward to their break time to have them.

I sat down on the sofa, removing my hat, which was blocking my vision. I then took out the magical device and got to writing.

Lisa's eyes twinkled as she looked at me. She grinned. "Is it comfortable to use? I've been wanting to make something like this for a while now. I never had a chance to, so when I finally could, I put my all into it. It's all thanks to you, Margaret."

"I should be the one saying thank you."

While I could get by using the palm of people's hands or writing on paper, the magical writing device meant I could communicate quickly and clearly. I didn't have to worry about running out of paper or ink, and I could use the magical writing device as much as I wanted. It was super handy.

I thanked her once again. Although she looked bashful, Lisa sat up proudly.

"You know, I'm making a simplified version now. The screen won't be as clear, and the words won't return to the pen as much, but it will make manufacturing costs cheaper," Lisa explained, grinning. "I hope it makes it more accessible for those who need it."

It seemed they were able to improve a lot while they created mine. The only issue was the cost of materials.

"If we got rid of all the bells and whistles, it'd probably cost less," Hugh said.

"But Hugh! She uses it every day. She'll be carrying it all day, too. It's not a

bad thing to make it look nice,” Lisa argued.

“That’s the one part you won’t give up on, huh,” he said with a wry smile.

“I completely understand. I feel it’s easier to get attached to an item if it has something else to it besides just being handy.”

Lisa nodded emphatically in response to what I had written. “Right? Even people who don’t need it decorated probably want to be able to write their name on it.”

It would be useful not only for those who were mute like me, but people who were hard of hearing, too. A lot of people were using this device. I thought it was wonderful that they had managed to make such a needed daily item look nice.

As I was halfway through writing, Lisa checked the condition of the magic device. She noticed that the mana inside of the magic pen had gone down a little.

“I’ll refill the mana,” Lisa said as she took off her gloves and held the pen in her left hand. She then positioned it in front of her right finger. Light, thin smoke came out of her fingertip. It was then absorbed by the pen’s mana gem. *Woah.*

“Amazing as always,” Hugh whistled.

“Even you can do this, Hugh,” she said.

“I’m not good with intricate movements like that. I’d put too much in and it’d explode.”

Really? I imagined someone with an incredibly strong grip squeezing an apple. *I guess it could be kind of like that.*

Lisa changed the subject as I was thinking about that. “Hey, Margaret. I wanna learn more about you. What’s it like in Miselle?”

As Lisa was a high-ranking noble, it was difficult for her to leave the Royal Capital. Even just going out meant she needed protection. Plus, there weren’t any tourist spots or famous places or products in Miselle, so there was no reason for the average person to go there.

What's it like, huh...? How do I explain it?

Green forest and honey-colored stone houses. In summer, sheep eat the grass. In winter, smoke rises from the chimneys. There is a small river that flows through, and everyone is nice. It has nothing, and yet everything that is important. The small village of Miselle.

As I fiddled with the pen and thought about what to tell Lisa, who looked at me, eyes full of expectation, there was a knock at the door.

“Wah, that gave me a shock! Don’t surprise us like that, headmaster,” shouted Hugh.

Ah, so this is the head of the magic academy.

It wasn’t only Hugh who was surprised, Lisa seemed shocked too.

The headmaster looked around the same age as Lord Walter. He had long platinum blond hair that was carefully pulled back into a ponytail. It seemed he had just come from outside. His long black robe—like Hugh’s—smelled of the winter wind.

“You were surprised even though there’s a barrier in place?” the headmaster responded.

“You see, it’s because you entered without me sensing you come through the barrier that caught me by surprise— Er, what?”

Wow, there’s even a barrier around this room? But something felt a little off to me. The headmaster stood tall, had an expressionless face, and didn’t have the friendliest aura. He looked like he should have been holding a magical staff, but instead he was holding a small basket, covered in a colorful flower-patterned blanket.

“Uhhh, headmaster. What is that...?” Hugh jabbed his finger toward the basket, finally able to say something after many attempts.

“It’s a baby,” the headmaster responded. He angled the basket so we could see inside. A baby with dark brown hair was sleeping peacefully inside.

“We can see that! What happened? Is this a secret child? When did you—*Hngh?!?*”

“Shush. You’ll wake him,”

The headmaster lifted one finger and Hugh suddenly went silent. Or rather, he was silenced? It looked like he couldn’t open his mouth. He was making a strange face. *Oh, so that’s also magic.*

Lisa, coming back to her senses, stood up in a panic and ran over to the headmaster.

“I picked him up in the corridor,” the headmaster said.

“The guest one? Aw, he’s so small... Did you contact the supervisors?” Lisa asked.

“I will after this.”

The two of them had serious expressions as they looked at the blanket-wrapped child. Eventually, Hugh opened his mouth with a *puhaah!*

“An abandoned child. We haven’t had many of those lately,” he spoke in a hushed voice.

I looked up. Hugh went on to explain.

“It happens sometimes. In my case, my mana got super strong after a certain age, but there are some children who are born with it. Babies can’t control their mana, so it leads to them destroying things around them or injuring people. Ah, then there’s also mana sickness. Of course, they’re not doing it on purpose, but there are a lot of parents who can’t handle it.”

...Oh, my.

Lisa, who had remained quiet up to now, continued the explanation. “I was like that. When I was born, my mother almost died... I injured my wet nurses, too. They had to constantly swap. House servants were never able to stay and work for us long. Even after I got older, I kept hurting so many people, and breaking so many things until I learned to control my magic.” She let out a small sigh as she recalled painful memories, closing her eyes.

I’m very much an outsider who has no mana at all. However, even I understand it’s difficult to suffer from something that you can’t control. Happiness is different for everyone, and that doesn’t mean that what you see on

the surface defines a person.

Lisa raised her head, wearing a pure smile. “Even so, I always had my family. So, I was able to overcome it.”

“A lot of powerful magic users are part of the nobility, so when a child is born to a noble family, it’s a rule to measure how much mana they have. Children with a lot of mana are then supported by one of the supervisors here at the Magic Academy. This baby is a bit older; it can hold its head up on its own. I haven’t heard of any children with powerful mana being born lately,” said Hugh.

“Powerful magic users aren’t just limited to nobles, Hugh. Plus, I’ve just had a quick look, and this child doesn’t seem to be particularly strong, so there might be another issue... Oh.” Lisa had her hand hovering above the baby’s forehead when she noticed something. A small piece of embroidery had been exposed, thanks to the way the baby was holding the blanket. “There’s something written... Andy?”

The headmaster also looked down at it. “A name.”

“Are there any other leads?” Hugh asked them.

Lisa looked around inside the basket but shook her head.

“I see,” Hugh said, disappointed but ready to move things along. “For now, let’s report it to the supervisors. Plus, we need to talk to the knights. There are times when they’re abandoned in haste, so the parents might come back. We also can’t ignore the fact this might have been a kidnapping,” Hugh advised.

“That’s right. Headmaster, do you mind putting the baby down? He doesn’t look very comfortable,” Lisa gave a wry smile and suggested that he lay the baby down on the sofa opposite me.

The headmaster didn’t seem very sure about how to hold him—it looked a little dangerous. It was making me nervous.

“Oh, okay.”

The headmaster seemed like he had only just realized as he awkwardly put down baby Andy and set aside the basket, which had diapers inside, to one side.

He let out a sigh. He seemed nervous.

As Lisa and the headmaster discussed reporting on the child, I heard an unsettled voice, as a small hand popped out of the blanket.

Oh, he's awake. Is he gonna cry?

"Margaret, move away!"

I stood up to look at the baby when Hugh grabbed me by the arm and stood in front of me, protecting me. At the same time, a large cry sounded, followed by a huge gust of wind.

Huh, what?

Bang! There was the sound of something breaking nearby. I put up both my arms trying to protect myself. Even though I was standing beside Hugh, I could barely stay on my feet due to the large blast of wind.



The baby's crying blended in with the roaring of the wind in the room. The windows began to clatter. They looked about ready to crack. *Woah, woah. It's getting stronger. What is this, a typhoon?!*

No sooner than I thought that did the wind suddenly stop and my clothes finally came to rest back down after fluttering in the torrential gusts.

"Phew... You all right?" Hugh asked me over his shoulder. I lowered my arms from shielding my face.

It was so windy just now. Now I barely feel the wind despite hearing it blow and the baby cry.

I nodded when asked a second time if I was unharmed. *"I'm fine. How about you, Hugh? You're so pale."*

"It was so sudden. I had no time to defend myself. I'm suffering from a little mana sickness. Ugh, I feel aaawful." Hugh looked pale, though he forced a smile. He had a bead of sweat on his forehead.

So that means that the wind was a blast of magic. Makes sense, both the door and windows are closed.

I looked behind Hugh, and it seemed the wind had only stopped around us. The gusts continued to swirl, causing the chandelier to swing around and around. It looked ready to break.

Hugh's robe was only fluttering a little, hardly touched by the strong winds. *It seems like he's protecting us with a barrier or something.*

"The baby's making all this wind."

Surprisingly, the source of all the wind was baby Andy, who was still crying. Suddenly, balls of fire started popping up around Andy—wait, FIRE?!

"Uh-oh, that's bad. Headmaster! If you would!"

The headmaster was standing in front of Lisa. He did something, causing the wind to weaken, and the fire to suddenly disappear. All that remained was Andy, who was still crying loudly, and a small tornado on top of his stomach. The spinning tornado shone a light, white color.

“Ah, Lisa, were you late in defending too? Your face is an awful color,” Hugh remarked.

“It’s been a while since I’ve been hit with it. It’s hard to prepare since a kid’s magic power just comes straight at you.”

Hugh wore a smug smile as Lisa spoke to him, out of breath. She seemed to be only still standing up thanks to help from the headmaster.

Is everyone feeling ill? I made eye contact with the headmaster as I was trying to take in what was happening.

“The Caller has no magic ability, and no ability to sense magic either, it seems. You don’t feel dizzy, or have a headache, do you? No irregularities with your heartbeat, or any trouble breathing?”

“Nope, I’m all right,” I gestured to the headmaster.

Hugh looked at me teary-eyed. “Unfair.”

Well, it’s not like I can do anything about it. Ah, oh no. I moved out from behind Hugh and headed towards Andy, who was still crying loudly. *We can’t just leave him when he’s crying like this.*

“Hey, Margaret! It’s too dange—”

Hey, c’mon, let me hold you.

Andy had almost lost his voice from crying. I picked him up. I held him close to me, supporting him in my left arm, while patting him on the back with my right hand. *Okay, so you didn’t wet your diaper.*

I softly rocked him and peeked at his face. His light brown eyes were filled with tears. His forehead was bright red as he was sniffing. *Ahh, cute.* I could see my bangs fluttering in the wind still coming from Andy in his teary eyes.

Good boy. It must have been a shock waking up somewhere you didn’t know. There’s no need to be scared, so let’s take another nap.

I silently sang a lullaby and slowly walked around the room. He eventually stopped crying and his breathing calmed down. He began to doze off. *Ooh, he’s so well-behaved. That took nothing.*

“...Hey, Margaret, do you have any children?”

Yeah. Plenty at the clinic. I laughed at Lisa and Hugh as they looked at Andy and me with dumbfounded expressions.

With that settled, I returned to the sofa and greeted the headmaster. He put a Magic Academy robe on top of the floral-patterned blanket Andy was wrapped in. It seemed the uniform-like robes that Hugh and Lisa wore worked to stop their mana from leaking out. The embroidery on their sleeves was a magic circle, made specifically for the wearer of the robe.

Although it was good for stopping mana from escaping them, it wasn't very effective at stopping exterior mana from hitting them. Since they came up with the idea, it seemed controlling their magic was a lot easier.

“Since this is effective at not letting magic leak out, it can also come in handy for surprise attacks. I can somewhat control a purposeful hit of magic, but this baby didn't intend to attack us. Phew, I'm beat. Ah, headmaster, that broken vase was collateral damage.”

“Aren't you the one responsible for this room today, Hugh?” the headmaster asked.

“What?! I had no idea you were gonna bring a baby with you!”

“What are you two going on about this time...?”

Hugh held his head as he muttered about his wages being cut. The headmaster kept the same deadpan expression. Lisa let out a light sigh at the two of them. A perfect representation of all their relationships.

Lisa then looked over at Andy. “Even if not that strong, having the ability to produce fire is dangerous.”

“Well, it'll enable us to investigate who he is more. I'll see if there are any families that have had any house fires lately.”

Oh, I thought of something. Could you help me out? One of my hands was occupied, so Lisa propped up the magical writing device, so I could write.

“I think this baby was raised well. His hair and skin are clean, and he looks healthy. He doesn't seem to be hungry. Plus, he stopped crying and slept. If he

hadn't been looked after this whole time, I don't think he would have been this calm."

"Oh, I see. He might be the type to have sudden explosions of magic. Well, until we find his parents, we'll be looking after him. Even if we do return him to his parents, there is the issue of him controlling his magic, so they'll probably have to come here with him," said Hugh.

"It's fine," Lisa replied. "The supervisors are used to it, so we can leave him with them. They looked after me since I was little."

If Lisa, who has experienced it herself, says so, then Andy should be fine. Lisa then turned to me.

"Ms. Margaret, are you sure you're all right? That was a lot of magic expelled before he went to sleep. Are you sure you're fine?"

"Nothing's wrong as far as I can tell." Lisa looked deep in thought after my response. *"What should I do? I feel kinda sorry I'm so slow with this stuff."*

"Ah, no, it's not that. It's just hard to believe that you weren't affected by that much magic power... Um, Ms. Margaret, I have something to ask."

"Oh, what is it? You've done a lot for me, so if there's anything I can do, please let me know."

Lisa looked like she was struggling to say it. She then turned directly to me. "There are other children like Andy at the Magic Academy. The reasons they come here all differ, but they're all separated from their families. There are some children who don't even know what their parents look like... Even just now and then is fine, but would you like to meet those children?"

If they're orphans, they can be put in the care of an orphanage or the temple. The people there could act as their parents, and they can meet others in a similar situation. However, children with a lot of magic power are unable to stay in such places. That was obvious after what just happened. So, for that reason, they were kept at the Magic Academy.

"The world is a small place for high-level magic users. Those who can't control it are a danger to their surroundings, so there are often strict restrictions on what they can do and who they interact with. It's not the best situation, but

they don't have many opportunities to interact with so-called 'normal people,' and in some cases, they even end up distancing themselves from their family."

Lisa looked down at her own hands as if she had also experienced this herself.

"Luckily, I was able to live in my own home. However, my family and the servants had to keep their distance... Even if the children do have a lot of magic power, I want them to know what it feels like to interact with someone outside the Magic Academy, not just hear about what it's like."

Lisa looked at me sincerely and took my hand in hers. Her hand felt a lot smaller than when we first shook hands.

"It's taken a long time for me to be able to just touch someone like this. I want those kids to experience more than pain and misery over the years it takes for them to do the same."

"Lisa, isn't that gonna be a bit difficult? Margaret is the Caller."

"But Hugh. Even you know..."

Lisa raised her voice towards Hugh's dismissal, but hurriedly closed her mouth when she saw me signaling for her to be quiet as I put my index finger in front of my lips. *You're going to wake Andy up.*

Andy fidgeted a little, so I lightly rocked him back to sleep before writing on the Magic Device.

"'Gladly?' You decided that quickly, Margaret?" Hugh frowned with a defeated look.

"*Huh, what's the problem? You want me to meet with the children, right? I want to see them too,*" I responded.

"Ah...that reminds me, you were a teacher for small children before, right?"

I only studied teaching in my previous world. I ended up doing something entirely different for work. My studies for becoming a kindergarten teacher finally paid off after coming here. Though, I guess I'm more of a babysitter than a teacher.

"*Miselle is not that close to the Royal Capital, so I wouldn't be able to visit often, but if you are okay with that, it'd be a treat for me to come. I'm sure*

whatever brings me to the capital will be annoying stuff I'll want a break from anyway."

Lisa took a peek at the Magical Writing device and seemed delighted. "That's more than good enough! Thank you, Ms. Margaret! Is that all right with you too, headmaster?"

"I'll take all responsibility for anything to do with the Spirit Caller while she's on Magic Academy grounds. Are you fine with this, Hugh?"

"Yeah, well, I can't really say no anyway. To be honest, I'll always welcome Margaret here. There just might be some people who say we're putting too much of a burden on the Caller."

I could imagine Mark or Walter grumbling about it to Hugh. Yeah, those two do worry a lot.

"It's your job to persuade them, Hugh."

"No way, you do it!"

"I decline."

Hugh looked shocked at his swift refusal. *Hey, it's all right. I don't think Mark will be against it...maybe.*

"Oh, by the way, are we good for time?"

"Huh, oh yeah, we still have some time." Hugh looked over at the clock, which now sat at an angle on the wall.

"We should go see the kids then," I suggested.

"Now?!" Hugh's eyes went wide.

Stop. Being. Loud.

I patted Andy, who had jerked a little in fright. I put my finger in front of my lips again. *Ssh.* This time, Hugh panicked as he closed his mouth.

"I mean, after this you'll be taking Andy to the supervisors, right? He's asleep, so it's probably best I take him like this."

"Yeah, well, that's true, but... I'm a little afraid what'll happen if we go ahead and decide this without getting permission from your *guardian.*"

What a way to put it! But he's right, he has become like my guardian.

An image of Lord Walter flashed through my mind, and I found myself chuckling.



WE first went to see the supervisors and asked if they could look after Andy.

I gave Andy a light hug and a soft kiss on his head before the kind-looking older supervisor took him further into the room. It seemed to be a common enough occurrence, as Hugh said.

There were around four children, ages three to nine, under the care of the Magic Academy. With Andy joining them, it would make five. Although everyone had some level of magical ability, there weren't a lot of people with magic so powerful that it caused issues in their daily life. I was shocked when I heard that the academy headmaster, who stood before me, was one of the most powerful magic users on the continent.

Hugh was second to that, which was amazing... *He doesn't look like such a great person, but he no doubt is aware of that and acts as such.* It was said that magic was once used as a weapon in wars. As a result of that past, the subject of magic was an internationally delicate issue. This country, which had generations of strong magic users, seemed to have a strong influence on nearby countries. To have a Spirit then appear in the country, followed by a Spirit Caller—it must make the already sensitive diplomacy even harder to handle. I recalled Dr. Daniel and Lord Walter's struggles to help me live in peace. *I'm nothing but grateful for them.*

After that, I was taken to see the other children. I imagined something like a kindergarten or an after-school club, but they all had their own rooms. Thinking about it, it made sense. They were all here because they had strong magic powers, which could cause problems. The children were independent, so they spent a lot of time alone.

The teacher would join them when they studied, but they rarely had any chances to hang out with the other children. The remainder of their time was spent alone. I knew it couldn't be helped. I began to understand the gravity of Lisa's request.

It seemed all the children knew Hugh, as they were delighted when he entered the room. Then, they looked at me, and froze with surprise.

Lisa explained that I was unable to speak and that I could stay around those with high amounts of magic power. The children seemed half-convinced. *Well, I can't say I blame them.* To avoid any chaos, we decided to hide the fact that I was a Caller and decided to talk about it later.

“Is it okay? Is it really okay?”

They asked multiple times before approaching me a tiny bit... They were still the age where they'd want to be fawned over, however they made no attempt to get close to me. It was a little heartbreaking.

It seems if their feelings are affected, their magic is affected too. The children were also wearing robes—and Hugh and Lisa, who should have been protected from their mana, still seemed to struggle, their faces turning pale. *They must be emitting a lot of magic.* The headmaster's face stayed the same color. I felt mixed emotions about being the only person who felt totally fine.

I held out my hands to the kids. They softly felt my hands with their fingers and looked surprised. I grabbed their hands and gave them a handshake, which made them laugh.

Such small children carried such big burdens, away from their families.

They were a little wary of me, but they didn't reject me. Once they realized it was safe to approach me, they happily stuck to me. *Everyone must be raised well here, they're such obedient kids.*

The last to approach me was one of the oldest, Ryan. His type of magic was special. It seemed difficult to control magic that was influenced by emotions.

As a result, he had been in the Magic Academy since he was a baby. He was able to interact with people like the headmaster and Hugh, who would be able to defend against his magic, but it was difficult for those around the same level as him. That was why he was the most hesitant to approach.

It seemed he was testing how effective my resistance was. The headmaster warned him with a serious expression, and that's how I learned he was testing something. I was fine with it, saying to go ahead.

They probably never had the opportunity to meet someone who wasn't affected by magic. It was understandable that they'd be a little uneasy. When I told him to test it as much as he liked, he started crying. He was always told not to use his magic, so it was his first time ever being told to use it.

It was only meant to be a light suggestion, but it seemed to have a huge impact. Even the headmaster and the others were surprised. *I didn't think he'd start crying.*

As the headmaster couldn't do so, to stop Ryan from crying, I gave him a tight hug. He cried even more.

We ended up staying close together for a while. He finally realized that his magic had no effect on me, and I could see the suspicion leave Ryan's eyes. It had been replaced with childlike joy, which almost made *me* cry.

We were only able to spend a little time with the children.

I promised them that I would write letters and, while still a while off yet, that I would visit them again.



WHEN we returned to the reception room, there was a woman dressed similar to Marie-Louise standing in front of the room.

"Ah," Lisa said. The woman returned a polite bow.

"I came to meet you, Lady Lisa."

"Oh, it's time already, what a shame... Headmaster, that'll be it for today. I posted a report about the magical device production so please have a look at it later. Ms. Margaret, I'm so happy to have been able to meet you today." She shook my hand. "Let's meet again next time you're here."

Lisa, who'd asked me to meet the children with a stern expression.

As I had no magic ability myself, I couldn't imagine how difficult it was for them all—the children, Lisa and Hugh, and the headmaster too.

I hope that they can all enjoy a better tomorrow. I thought to myself as I watched Lisa reluctantly leave us.

“All right, should we head back to Julius’ office?” Hugh suddenly spoke, leaving no time to reflect. The headmaster excused himself and said goodbye. I was the first to offer my hand for a handshake.

“How long will you be here for?” he returned the handshake as he asked.

It felt like the first time he had spoken to me directly. It was a shame that, even though I got to meet him, I couldn’t speak with him a lot. He had met with the Spirit in the Royal Forest the most, so it would have been nice to talk to him about that. *Oh well, maybe next time.*

I pulled out my Magical Device and responded to his question.

“Until tomorrow, I see. Right now, the Spirit isn’t in the Royal Forest, but if you get a chance during your stay here, would you like to see her?”

“Of course, I want to meet her. In fact, I find it strange you haven’t been more forceful about me meeting her.” I still felt a little restless... *Oh, that’s it. I wonder if the headmaster knows about why I feel like this.*

“Ever since leaving Miselle, it felt like there was wind blowing around me. Does it have anything to do with the Spirit?”

I could understand if it was an effect of the magic of the forest, but if it was due to all the new experiences from being here in the Royal Capital, that would be an issue. *I wouldn’t know what to think if I couldn’t calm myself down at this age.*

The headmaster looked around, as if searching for something. “Wind, huh? I can’t sense anything strange, but it might be different in the forest. I’ll let you know if I find anything out.”

“Oh, headmaster, do you plan on going there now?” Hugh asked.

“Yeah.”

“Didn’t you just return from the guardhouse?”

Oh, looking closely, I can see he has dark circles under his eyes. Hugh looked worried as well. *That’s right, he needs to rest if he’s just finished a night shift. I wonder if he’s a workaholic like Walter?*

“I took a nap,” he said tersely.

“You hardly slept. You can’t fool me.”

That’s no good, headmaster. Sleep and food are important for humans. Even if you feel fine now, it’ll sneak up on you eventually.

I wrote on my magical device in huge letters: *“Eat dinner then sleep. If you must go, at least take a packed lunch with you.”*

The headmaster looked confused as he read it. “A packed lunch?”

“Wouldn’t it be nice to eat with the Spirit?” As I wrote that, the headmaster folded his arms, and rested his chin on one hand, deep in thought.

“Margaret, the Spirit sleeps, but she doesn’t eat,” Hugh informed me.

Is that so? But I’m sure the Spirit will be happy or find it interesting. But it looks like even the headmaster doesn’t really care about eating.

“Food is more delicious when you eat it with someone you like. Sitting around a table, laughing as you eat is simply irreplaceable.” As I wrote that, the headmaster looked even deeper in thought. Was what I wrote that hard to understand?

The headmaster was like Walter in a lot of ways. I could understand why Hugh treated them both as he did.

I then tried to invite him to lunch, however he swiftly turned it down.

“It’s fine. However, Lady Caller, you and the Spirit have a lot in common. I’ll see that you two can meet during your visit.” His expression softened as he took my hand again, this time shaking it with a firm grip.

“...Woah, did he just laugh?”

Judging from how far Hugh’s jaw dropped, it seemed it was very rare to see the headmaster smile.

Interlude: Hugh Tausend

I escorted Margaret to Lord Julius' office. Walter hadn't arrived yet, but Lady Rachel was already there in his place. It would've saved time if Margaret and Lady Rachel had come to the castle together, but Lady Rachel would've attracted a lot of attention, bringing unnecessary curiosity Margaret's way in the process. They probably chose to come at different times because of that. The Lindgren family was incredibly considerate of others, which was evident in the lengths they went to pick out the perfect outfit for Margaret.

The girls decided to have lunch while waiting for Walter. *Lord Barnaby sure knows how to talk. Walter should just give him the slip, but he'll stick with him until the end. Nothing he can do about it, as the man has a tendency to pepper his conversations with important political things. But yeah. Good work on all that talking. I mean that.*

As I returned to the Magic Academy, I decided to head to the headmaster's research office. Ever since the Spirit appeared, the headmaster was constantly paying her a visit in the forest. From the way he talked about it earlier, he was probably already back in the forest. I knew I was on a fool's errand, but I went to check if he was in his office anyway.

We need to discuss a lot about Margaret, and no matter how you look at it, that flower vase was just collateral damage.

"Excuse me, headmaster... Isn't here, as I thought," I sighed.

"Should I not be here?" a voice responded.

"Huh?!"

I didn't even knock, thinking he wouldn't be there, but of course he was.

He was standing behind the open door in front of a bookcase reading a book. *Did he do that on purpose? If his aim was to surprise visitors, I'd say he nailed it. Yeah, gave me a shock, all right.*

He gave me a fleeting, sharp look, causing me to spout out some sort of excuse.

“Ah, my apologies. I thought you had already left for the guardhouse.”

“So, you expected no one to be here, yet you still decided to barge into the room belonging to your superior,” he shot back.

“I would be too scared to do that—you might have a trap set up somewhere. Anyway, why are you still here?”

Usually the Spirit came before all else.

“I was told to rest before going,” he responded.

Margaret did suggest that... Wait, that's the reason? The headmaster who, 90 percent of the time, listens to absolutely no one, listened to Margaret?

I was worried that if I didn't pick my jaw up off the ground, he would fire the ball of light he just summoned with a silent incantation straight into my open mouth. *I can't let my guard down around my superior!*

“I don't want to interrupt your break, so I'll come back—”

“What is it?”

Oh, he's letting me talk. All right, then.

I sat down on the sofa he gestured to. The headmaster closed his book and set it down. *Woah, he's reading a pretty difficult magic book. Not to mention, it's even written in an ancient language.*

I wondered if he was looking for the words that the Spirits sometimes use. The Spirits don't speak our language very well. They often mix in words from different languages, making conversation difficult.

“It's about Margaret,” I began. “I know you didn't have much opportunity to talk to her, but I wondered what your impressions were. We also need to work out the details for her visits with the children, too.”

“I agree,” he responded, relaxing a little now that he knew what I was there for.

“I didn't expect the children to take so well to Margaret,” I went on. “They

were so cautious around us in the beginning.”

“It’s different with the supervisors, too. When met with someone of equal magical prowess, it’s both comforting and unsettling,” he said.

“Sure is. Even Lisa was like that.”

“I think the reason Lisa was so cautious is that she couldn’t understand what you were thinking,” he said.

Hey, that’s mean. I shrugged my shoulders, brushing his comment off.

Margaret has no mana. That’s a main trait of a Spirit Caller.

The same applied to magic power and ability; the results of magical power being a physical phenomenon were accepted, and they were used in investigations and the like. However, she couldn’t perceive mana... or rather, she felt it very faintly.

That phenomenon ignited my researcher’s spirit; however, I could say with confidence that I wouldn’t be given permission to investigate further. It wouldn’t just be Margaret—Mark would probably say no too.

If only Dr. Daniel had come this time. I probably would have gotten to look into it. As I thought of that, I remembered what had happened earlier. While the baby was crying up a literal storm, Margaret didn’t hesitate at all to pick him up.

“The reception room just looked like a normal kid’s room when she took charge,” I commented.

She had peeked at the baby’s face and smiled, no doubt singing a silent lullaby. She looked like an experienced mother or wet nurse, humming a lullaby as she walked around the room, lightly rocking the baby.

“It said in the report she liked children, after all,” the headmaster responded.

“Now that you mention it, she was doing the same thing back in Miselle at the clinic,” I remarked.

“Lisa seemed to be on the mark with her request, then.”

“Yeah, I guess. I’m dreading the complaints we’ll be getting from the temple,”

I grumbled.

The Spirit, and the personification of another world in the form of a Spirit Caller, were—although it wasn't a nice way to put it—worthy of putting to use. The current high priest was quite neutral, but the others probably saw Margaret as propaganda material. *They're probably aching to get their hands on her.*

"She has the Queen Dowager, Count Dustin, and the two Reynolds at her side. There's probably no one out there who wants to make an enemy of the Lindgrens, either. Plus, she's not all that clueless about the affairs of the world," the headmaster responded.

"Well, about that. She's studying about our world and current events in the country. Plus, she's not a child—she knows her way around social situations."

"If she's aware of her influence as a Caller, I doubt she will be so easily used. We can deal with secret agents from other countries, but if you're still worried, you should be keeping your eyes wide open for her."

That's true.

I wondered if Margaret knew how amazing it was that she had so many people backing her before she even stepped foot outside Miselle. That wasn't because she was a Spirit Caller, but more because of who she was as a person.

"If her being here will benefit the children under the care of the Magic Academy, I have no reason to reject her presence. Plus, Ryan has already accepted her," the headmaster said.

"True," I responded.

It's hard to control magic.

Even though we had robes and special magic circles that blocked magic, they weren't perfect. High-level magic users constantly had to keep their power under control. Magic especially went haywire when our emotions did, so it was paramount to keep a calm mind. Living such a shackled life could lead to depression. That applied even more so for those who had distanced themselves, or were removed, from their families at a young age.

I didn't have to think too hard about what the headmaster or the children

thought when Margaret gave them a genuine smile and reached her hand out to them.

The oldest of the children, Ryan, had telepathic abilities. It was an unconscious style of magic and without much interference could be quite dangerous, so it was taboo, in a way. To avoid its effects, his main caregivers were often swapped out.

Even if one's magic is strong, if they learn how to control it, they can return to a normal lifestyle. That was impossible for Ryan, though. The chance of him being able to return to a normal lifestyle was low.

Ryan had found himself unknowingly manipulating others, getting his own feelings confused with those of others. He had tried to escape from the academy several times, even though he had no place to run to, stating he didn't need those powers and that he hated himself.

Even his parents had come to the Magic Academy in tears, saying they couldn't handle him.

"It must have been a new experience for Ryan, meeting someone who isn't affected by his magic. Though, you weren't impacted either, headmaster," I added.

"You aren't either, Hugh. It seemed that in the case of Margaret, it was less that his magic didn't influence her, but it just passed straight through her," he responded.

"That's true. That led to an interesting outcome."

Ryan seemed on the verge of tears—though he was smiling—when he told us he couldn't understand what Margaret was thinking. I wondered if he remembered how it felt to be hugged by someone like he was today. *Hopefully he can use this experience and put it towards controlling his ability in the future.*

There was no denying that Margaret would be a great influence on the children.

"To her, the children with powerful magic and the children she looks after at the clinic are probably the same," I mused.

“Did you also want a Caller when you were that age?” the headmaster asked.

“I could ask the same of you,” I quipped.

“Hm,” he responded, looking emotionlessly out the window.

He was born with a high level of magic too. His mother died while delivering him, and to stop his strong magic ability from interfering with his upbringing, he was taken to the Magic Academy not long after his birth.

As a renowned Mage on the continent, he was often the subject of envy, but if they knew about the early years of his life, I wondered if they would want it all the same.

“I’d find it a little easier if Margaret was at least a little more selfish,” I commented. Whenever we had a request, she was more than happy to do it.

I didn’t know what to do when she refused any support, saying she was happy to work and live in Miselle. It took some time for her to accept some financial support, which I wasn’t expecting.

“It seems the only thing she wasn’t willing to bend on was leaving Miselle,” the headmaster responded.

“That’s all she asked for. It ended up working in our favor as it stopped the other nobles, as well as other nations, from getting involved. Plus, we can’t forget—maybe her decision was based on guidance from the Spirit.”

The magic from the Miselle forest that was being channeled to Margaret was beginning to lessen. *It mightn’t be long before she has no reason not to leave Misell.* Though that depended on her own wishes.

“Do you also think the Spirit thought that far ahead, Hugh?”

“I have no evidence for it, alas. There was a description in one of Walter’s reports of something Margaret had said that could be taken to mean that. They may both have a sense of otherworldliness, but Margaret and the Spirit are more aware of things than we give them credit for.”

The headmaster seemed to agree. He then averted his gaze, seemingly remembering something as he changed the subject. “I never thought both the Spirit and the Caller would tell me the same thing.”

“Ah, yes, asking you to eat properly?”

The many times I had visited the Spirit with the headmaster, he was told by the Spirit to stop always going there and eat something.

It wasn't the Spirit's way of avoiding the headmaster—who often asked deep questions related to magic—she seemed genuinely sincere in her concern for him. It seemed to Margaret that “meals” were an incredibly important matter, be it making them or eating them. *The Spirit and her really are similar.*

The headmaster silently stood up, returning a book to a drawer in his desk. He headed towards the door, then looked back at me as I was still sitting on the sofa.

“What are you doing? Let's go. You're coming with me,” he said.

“Huh, where? Wait, for something to eat?”

“...I'm doing as I was told.”

He's serious. I could swear that he would never agree to it if he was his usual self. My eyes went round with surprise—he looked at me with a bored expression.

But, yeah. This is a step in the right direction for him.

“All right, let's go! Ah, I know a great place,” I enthused.

“We're splitting the bill,” he responded dryly.

“Aw man, really...”

Even though he was the one who invited me, he didn't wait for me, and I found myself hurriedly chasing after him. A large, intricate magic circle was embroidered on his robe. It was bigger and more detailed than any other.

The Spirit and the Caller the Spirit summons from another world are both paramount to keeping stability within this world.

While that was the case, it wasn't on that large of a scale.

“Hey, headmaster, aren't you glad the Spirit appeared now?”

Having a Spirit Caller named Margaret made it so that my small world began to take on a new color.

The headmaster remained silent, but I saw the corners of his lips raise ever so slightly, as if he was satisfied with how things had turned out.

Chapter 3: The Longest Day in the Capital

WHEN Hugh led me back to Lord Julius' office, Lady Rachel and Marie-Louise were already there. Rather than just coming to make sure I had someone to talk to, they wanted to be there for me because they worried about me being in the Royal Capital and the Royal Castle for the first time. I was very grateful for their kindness.

"Hugh has just been dragging you around everywhere, I hear," Lady Rachel said. "Margaret, are you not exhausted?"

"Nope, not one bit." There were a ton of surprising things during my time with Hugh, but it was more fun or perhaps more fulfilling than it was exhausting. I realized that I really do enjoy interacting with children.

Lord Julius looked flabbergasted when informed I had met with the children from the Magic Academy. "Already?! What is even going on at the Magic Academy? Hugh, you can't do that. You didn't even ask for permission or let us know about this in advance," Lord Julius accused.

"Well, I never thought this would happen either," Hugh responded.

"Explain," Lord Julius demanded as he rounded on Hugh.

Feeling the pressure, Hugh took a few steps back, then he started explaining. When he brought up the baby that was left at the Magic Academy, Lady Rachel looked close to tears.

"Oh dear, to leave such a small child," she said.

"He's got a problematic mix of magic abilities," Hugh said. "But thanks to that, it should be easy to narrow down his background. We first need to find his legal guardians and talk with them."

We weren't sure if we would be able to bring Andy back to his family. That would probably change if we were able to find out how he ended up at the Magic Academy, though. All I could think was, *I hope he no longer has to go*

through anything upsetting. The small child, sleeping soundly with his wet eyelashes and red cheeks. *I can still remember his weight and body heat.*

Hugh went on to summarize everything that had happened. About how Lisa had asked it of me, and how I was the one who took the initiative to go straight away.

"I apologize for being so rash."

Lord Julius crossed his arms and let out a dry laugh at what I wrote. "Although it was by chance, I honestly didn't expect it to happen. I thought you would not be meeting them for a while yet. But, well. I see. I don't doubt it played out that way because of who you are."

"With that said and done, Lord Julius, please do your best to explain it to Walter and Mark. I'm heading back now," Hugh said.

"What? What are you even talking about, Hugh? There's no way I'm persuading them— Ah, hey!"

"I'll be taking my leave now," Hugh said brightly as he left the room.

"He's fast to flee..." Lord Julius grumbled.

"What did you expect? That's Hugh for you. Plus, wouldn't it be better if Walter and Mark heard about this from you, Brother?" Lady Rachel asked.

"Hm, well, that's true. Okay, I'll do it. Leave it to me," Lord Julius responded.

"I'd expect no less of my competent older brother."

Lord Julius changed his tune after being complimented. Lady Rachel gave me a discrete wink. *Oh, she's good.*

"My lady, I'll be taking my leave and heading to the kitchen."

"Okay, Marie-Louise. Thank you," Lady Rachel responded.

The kitchen? I tilted my head to the side, confused, as Marie-Louise left the room. Lady Rachel turned to me with a smile as she explained.

"I wanted to show you around the restaurants in town, but unfortunately, we do not have the time. I thought we could have lunch here, instead."

Yeah, lunch! Come to think of it, it's that time already. Even though I was just

talking with the headmaster about lunch at the Magic Academy, I had seen and heard so much since, I had completely forgotten about eating. I had a lot to do in Miselle, but there was rarely anything stimulating—it was a peaceful life. One where you didn't forget to eat.

"Next time, I would love to take you out to eat," Lady Rachel said. "There are several places that have delicious desserts. Recently, restaurants that serve frozen desserts have been all that talk."

Oh, by frozen desserts, does she mean ice cream? Now I'm curious.

"I'd love to join you next time," I wrote.

Before long, Marie-Louise had returned, pushing along a tea trolley. As there was a chance we could get called for at a moment's notice, it was a light lunch, consisting of bite-size sandwiches, a small salad, and soup.

"We have everything we need. Thank you."

They weren't simply sandwiches. They were placed on a plate with gold painted on the rim in a wavy pattern. A glance at the cross-section of the sandwich revealed that the utmost care had been taken about the placement of the ingredients—they sparkled in the light. *That's Royal Palace quality for you.* Appearances and taste were both high-quality. I was super satisfied with such a luxurious lunch.

Apparently, Lord Julius often ate multicourse meals in his office.

Huh, the chef comes here and makes it for him? Does he cut up the roast beef? I kinda wanna see it, but not today. I'm fine with the thought of it alone.

As I was smacking my lips enjoying a blancmange for dessert, there was a knock at the door. It was Lord Walter finally making an appearance.

"Oh, you're eating. My apologies," he said.

"We're just about to finish. We have some for you too, Walter," Lord Julius responded.

"I'll just take a drink. Yeah, on its own. Apologies. You coming here worked out for the better." Lord Walter hurriedly greeted me and Lady Rachel before he fell onto the sofa, letting out a deep sigh. He rarely ever showed off that side

of himself. *He must be really exhausted.*

“I heard you were talking with Lord Barnaby,” Lord Julius said. “Sounds like you got caught up in some annoying business.”

Lord Walter glanced at Lord Julius before reaching for the cup of tea that Marie-Louise had prepared for him.

He doesn't look very well. Has he lost weight?

It seemed I wasn't the only one thinking that. Lady Rachel also looked worried.

“Lord Walter, you look pale. I understand that you are busy, but would it not be best to take a break?” she asked.

“Yeah, once I get this work done,” Lord Walter replied.

“There'll be no end to it if you keep saying that,” Lord Julius added.

“There's not a lot I can do about it right now. Hey, Julius, I'm going to borrow the room next door.” Lord Walter motioned to the door beside the entrance to the corridor.

“It's ready,” Lord Julius responded. The room that connected to the office was a reception room where I would be meeting with Lady Helena, the illustrator.

I felt bad having Lady Helena, who was recovering from an injury, come to me, but we had to make it seem as if we had no connection. In the Royal Capital, with eyes everywhere, it would have been difficult for me to visit her home. So, because of that, it made sense for Lady Helena to visit the castle under the guise of dropping by the royal clinic.

The Queen Dowager had offered us the chance to use a royal villa she had; however, we would draw more attention going to a royal villa that no one ever visits. Lord Walter eventually decided that we would borrow Lord Julius' office.

“You no doubt have a lot on your plate right now,” Lord Julius said. “I know it's faster if you do your work yourself, but use your staff. You can at least leave the important parts regarding Lord Barnaby to your secretary.”

“Too much trouble.”

I wonder if the two of them talk like this when Lord Julius invites himself over to Lord Walter's house all the time.

I wrote *"They seem close"* on the magical writing device and showed it to Lady Rachel. Her cheeks blushed ever so slightly as she smiled happily. *Did you see that cute smile just now, Lord Walter?*

I quickly looked over at Lord Walter, but he was still deep in conversation with Lord Julius. *What a shame. I guess their anti-romance sensors are up. Ack, honestly.*

Nothing could be done about it now, so I made eye contact with Marie-Louise as we both shared our disappointment.

"By the way, you're meeting with one of the candidates for the illustrator position, right? But you still can't tell us about her?" Lord Julius asked.

"Yeah, that's right. I just know her name is Lady Helena." As I wrote that, Lord Walter looked surprised. *Did he forget?*

"Ah, that's right, I didn't really tell you much yet, did I? I guess I can reveal who it is in front of the Lindgrens. Keep this between us, but it's Lady Helena Wycliffe," Lord Walter revealed.

"What?" Lady Rachel gasped beside me. Lord Julius also failed to hide his surprise.

"From the Wycliffe family?" he asked.

"She's the wife of the previous duke. You should be acquainted with them, surely, Julius," Lord Walter said.

A duke family?! Since she's the Queen Dowager's old friend, I figured it would be someone of similar standing, but...what should I do? Is it really okay to make her illustrate the book without taking credit? I know she agreed with that knowledge, but I'm having doubts. I'm too normal for someone that important to work with me.

I panicked internally for a while until I noticed Lady Rachel next to me, which brought me back down to earth. Her expression was unconcerned, but she was gripping her hands together on top of her lap. I looked at Lord Julius and Lord

Walter and they seemed nervous too.

There weren't many families who held the position of duke, so it made sense that it was someone they knew. Lord Julius seemed to have something on his mind about it, which raised some suspicion for Lord Walter.

"Julius, did something happen with the Wycliffe family?" he asked, perplexed. Lord Julius denied it.

"We had some interaction over a different matter lately. Nothing troubling, and I didn't have contact with Lady Helena directly."

"I see."

"But...well..." Lord Julius seemed deep in thought as he raised his hand to his mouth—about to speak—but then there was a knock from the door to the connecting room.

A man wearing a secretary's outfit said, "Excuse me. The preparations are finished."

"Understood. Julius, let's talk later."

Although we were in the middle of something, Lord Walter urged me to stand up. It seemed that Lord Julius and the others would be waiting here in the office. I wrote "*I'll be back*" on the magical device, and Lady Rachel smiled at me, like always. I noticed that there was some discontent in her light purple eyes.

The secretary opened the doors to reveal a wide reception room. There was a large sofa set. Next to it was a cart with prepared tea. The door quietly closed behind us, and Lord Walter gestured for me to take a seat.

I really need to focus now. I quietly took a deep breath as Lord Walter sat diagonally across from me.

"Thanks for coming. How are you feeling?" he asked.

...Honestly, this guy.

"I think you should worry more about yourself than me." As I wrote that on the magical writing device, he averted his gaze. *Seems he's aware. We do need to discuss this, so I wonder if we can do it before the meeting.*

"I had no idea Lady Helena was from a ducal family. How should I speak with her?" I wrote.

"How...? Well, she's already retired, and she's friendly. She even said you don't need to be extra careful around her. Plus, she seems rather excited to meet the Caller, too," Lord Walter responded.

"Oh dear, I must apologize already then. Although my appearance today was the work of the Lindgren ladies, I'm just a very ordinary person, which completely betrays how I look on the outside!"

"I've said this multiple times, but Margaret, we don't hold you to our country's standards. You don't have to worry about where you're from or your social status."

"And I've said this multiple times, that's not what I worry about. In all honesty, I don't mind how I look. I dislike it when Lady Adelaide, Dr. Daniel, and the others who are involved with me are mocked because of it."

"Just let them say what they want. I don't mind, at least."

"I mind. Plus, etiquette is also manners, too, right? I don't want to make others feel uneasy."

Lord Walter looked at what I had written. "Hm," he hummed, deep in thought. "One thing I have noticed about you is...you're very close to people when you talk with them. I believe it's fine if they know about your writing and eyesight, however I think you should take more care with the opposite gender."

"Ah. Now you mention it, both the doctor and Mark said the same thing. I need them to see what I'm writing, and I can't see their expressions unless I'm close to them. I guess it's due to my long years working in customer service, I'm rather comfortable being close to others... All right. I'll be more careful."

"Although we don't have time for it now, maybe we could make you some glasses next time," Lord Walter suggested to me as I reflected on what he said.

"Glasses, huh? I couldn't see the Royal Palace that well this morning, so I did think it would be nice to have them. The streets of Miselle, the forest, and the sky at night would probably look a lot prettier if I could see them better. But that's right. The first place I'll be visiting in the town is the bakery and not the

opticians. I'm not sure when I'll be coming back, but the bakery will be my first stop."

Lord Walter, surprisingly, laughed at my response.

"As expected from you."

...Oh, he has gotten some color back. What a relief.

Although he still looked exhausted, I felt relieved as he was beginning to look more like himself. Then, came a knock at the door.

A man dressed in butler clothes appeared in the reception room, pushing an older woman in a wheelchair. Her soft, silver hair covered one side of her face. Her slim figure was adorned in a pearl-colored dress. When she saw us stand to greet her, her pale blue eyes gently narrowed.

This lady who still had vestiges of her younger self in her appearance was Lady Helena.

"Oh my, so you're the lady in question! You are exactly as I envisioned!" Lady Helena exclaimed, holding out her hand to me after I executed a bow. I approached her and gave her my hand in return—she had a stronger grip than I expected. "Nice to meet you. I'm Helena Wycliffe. Thank you for coming to the Royal Capital to meet with me. It's quite shameful of me to fall and injure myself. No one wants to age."

"I'm sorry for making you go out of your way for me too," I tried to convey with my eyes.

She smiled and squeezed my hand again before letting go. Lord Walter formally introduced us, then we enjoyed some light conversation.

"Lady Wycliffe, I am deeply grateful you came all this way to meet with us. How is your injury?" he asked her.

"Ah, about that, Count Dustin. Well, I figured I would *go* to the clinic, rather than pretending. So, I did so, and that pupil of Dr. Reynolds was there. While this is a little rude to say about the doctors, I was surprised—he's so different from the others! I had no idea a doctor could reduce my pain like that."

"Is that so? That's good to hear."

“He’s not a doctor who’s usually here, so I was glad I was able to come today.” Lady Helena laughed. “I feel like I could even dance today.”

As she was the wife of a duke, I had assumed I was going to meet an uptight woman, but she was the complete opposite of what I imagined. She was kind, friendly, and cute—like an ordinary young woman.

I see. So Mark saw to her injury today. That’s good.

“Is over here okay, my lady?” the butler asked.

“Yes, please move me near that table,” Lady Helena responded.

The butler, who had positioned the wheelchair near the sofa, placed several sketchbooks on the table before heading over to the cart and skillfully preparing tea. Lady Helena beckoned me, so I sat near her. She then opened one of the sketchbooks on her knees and showed it to me.

“So, let’s get right to it. Could you look at these? This one has color.”

Wow... They’re beautiful.

They were watercolor paintings that resembled a vacation destination. Wide beaches, a dog near the water’s edge. On another page, there was a field of wind-swept flowers. An image of a man walking through a serene forest patch on horseback.

Although they were all scenery I had never seen before, I felt a sense of nostalgia—I wondered if it was due to the slightly blurry edges in the paintings. They were so wonderful, I couldn’t take my eyes off them. I heard Lady Helena let out a deep breath as I continued to be engrossed in the paintings.

“Oh, I’m glad. You seem to like them. I was a little worried about what you’d think. Oh, here’s how the illustrations for the book look.”

She handed me another sketchbook. This sketchbook contained monochrome images drawn in pencil and charcoal. There were small figures, flowers, and a dog and cat that the duke owned. The lines and pencil strokes were atmospheric, giving the images a unique mood. I began to imagine what the images would be like if printed all monotone.

Does she just do this as a hobby? These are too good not to sell.

“You seem very impressed, Margaret,” Lord Walter remarked.

“It’s hard not to be impressed with such wonderful drawings.”



I nodded enthusiastically and conveyed my strong impressions of the images in shoddy writing on the magical writing device. Lady Helena looked pleased.

“The story I read from you was so interesting and stimulating. He then asked me to pick any scene to draw,” Lady Helena explained as she looked at Lord Walter.

“Yeah, it’d be great if you could pick a scene you like. It doesn’t have to be limited to people, animals, or places. Please feel free to draw anything you imagine.”

She looked shocked after I wrote that.

“Well, it is nice to have that much freedom.”

In this world, books are largely thought of as for study purposes only. *However, with children’s books, the main point is to have fun. The kind that makes you go, “Woah!” when you see the cover. And every time you turn the page, you’re filled with excitement, sometimes spellbound by the story. I’d like people to be able to read my books like that.*

If the person making the book enjoys it, then surely that enjoyment will be transferred to those who read the book, too. Now, making a book is work too, so you have a responsibility to do it well and not haphazardly. But I believe it’s important to find something to look forward to when doing your work.

Thinking of that, though, I wondered how I managed to work eight years in a job I didn’t enjoy in my old world. It wouldn’t be a lie to say I did it because I needed to live, or that it just became a force of habit. But I think there was a reason why I didn’t quit even though I had my complaints about it. Every day, I would meet with different customers at the counter and have small conversations with them. With each one of those short interactions, they gave me a wide variety of things to think about. Even just trifling comments such as it’s hot outside or it’s cold outside meant something in the long run.

Sometimes they would complain about their families, but their love for them would come through. They would tell me of nostalgic memories and how important they were to them. Although we only had a salesperson and customer relationship, there were those who purposely chose me when they

came to the store because of the connection we built.

Although every day felt the same, there were some days when that wasn't the case. Even the annoying complaints and the letter of thanks I had received had all become a part of me—I had only begun to think of things like that after I had arrived in Miselle.

"It's fun, yeah. I'm the same. I only draw what I enjoy," Lady Helena took both of my hands in hers and looked deep into my different-colored eyes with a gentle smile. "...Your eyes are pretty. I wonder how our world looks in them. I wonder how I can draw the stories you experienced in your other world well. Ah, I've been hit with the need to draw suddenly." Lady Helena spoke as if she were in a dream. Her gaze went from my eyes to her sketchbook.

The butler handed her a pencil he had prepared. *Ooh, these two work together well.*

"So, could you tell me a little? I'm thinking of drawing clothes in your world's style. What kind of clothes do they wear in your country? Or what is their hair like? Does everyone have black hair like you?"

We had a conversation where I wrote on the magical device and she drew in her sketchbook. Lady Helena's light strokes mixed Japanese-style sketches with a sense of exoticism. This style vividly resembled an illustration by a Western artist who had been inspired by *ukiyo-e*, a traditional style of Japanese art. Even though it was a quick sketch, it was beautiful. It looked perfect for a book about Japanese folk tales.

I noticed that the sun was beginning to set outside. Although the sun set early, I was surprised by how quickly time had flown.

"Oh, I was having so much fun. It's already that time," Lady Helena remarked.

"Lady Wycliffe, what do you think about our proposal now?" Lord Walter asked her.

"Count Dustin, I would like to go ahead with the contract. I assume the smaller details have already...been confirmed?"

While we were crowded around the sketchbook, Lord Walter had been explaining the finer details of the contract to Lady Helena's butler. The butler

bowed politely when he was passed a sheet of paper. Lady Helena nodded, satisfied.

“I had a wonderful time. When I return home, I will get straight to drawing. By the way, Margaret, the next time you are here in the Royal Capital, let’s meet again. Next time, as friends,” Lady Helena said with a smile as she shook my hand.

I reluctantly saw her off after that.

Once the door shut silently, we both let out a sigh. Finding it funny that we did it together, I looked at Lord Walter and we laughed.

“That’s the type of person she is. She was easy to talk to, right?” Lord Walter asked.

“She really was. She was a wonderful woman in a different way from Lady Adelaide.”

“No need to worry about the illustrations anymore,” Lord Walter said.

Although his exhaustion still showed on his face, it seemed as if one of his worries had been dispelled. He looked cheerful. Then came a light knock from the door that led to the office. The door opened, and Lord Julius and the others came into the reception room.

“I see you’re finished. Good work,” Lord Julius said.

“If it was still going to last a little longer, we were going to ask if you wanted to take a break,” Lady Rachel said.

Speaking of which, I only had a little bit of tea at the beginning. I had completely forgotten to take a small break. I felt relieved that I had achieved one of the things I had set out to do here. *Now I can head back to Miselle worry-free. I’ll be home soon, Buddy!* Relieved, they ushered me into the office. Lady Rachel told me about the plans for later.

“Then tonight, my mother will—”

“What’s wrong, Walter?”

Interrupted by Lord Julius’ panicked voice, we turned around to see Lord Walter holding his head, bracing himself against the wall. From what I could see

through his fingers, he didn't look well.

"...?"

My heart lurched as Lady Rachel let out a gasp.

"...I just felt a little dizzy," Lord Walter said weakly.

"Sit down." Lord Julius wore a serious expression as he supported Lord Walter. As he tried to take a step, Lord Walter fell to his knees.

"Walter!"

"Lord Walter?!"

Lord Julius and Lady Rachel's voices combined as Lord Julius collapsed to the floor.

I heard a sharp noise and had to wonder if it was me sucking in my breath.

Lady Rachel had taken one step and froze in position.

Lord Julius had fallen with Lord Walter and in his shadow, I saw Lord Walter's arm splayed on the ground.

What happened? He was just talking and laughing...

"Call the doctor!"

It felt like I was watching a movie without sound, but Lord Julius' voice brought me back to my senses. The door opened as one of the secretaries hurried out of the room to call for help. The figure already standing on the opposite side of the door almost brought me to tears.

"Apologies. What happened?"

"Ah, you're from the clini—" the secretary responded, surprised to see someone already outside the door before they even left.

"Mark, it's Lord Walter...!"

Mark scanned the room in response to Lady Rachel's cry, passing by the secretary in the doorway and running straight to Lord Walter's side. He put a hand on my shoulder as he passed by, as if he was saying, "It'll be all right." I finally let out the breath I was holding.

Mark told Lady Rachel to step back as he removed Lord Walter's necktie, loosened his collar, and put his fingers against Lord Walter's neck.

"Please tell me what happened, Lord Belliol," he said.

"H-He said he felt dizzy, then—"

Lord Walter looked pale as a sheet as he struggled to breathe.

The staff who were called for came running over to his side to lend a hand. They carried Lord Walter over to a long sofa in the office. Lady Rachel, Mary-Louise, and I all waited in the reception room while Mark administered medical care.

"Wh-Why... Lord Walter..."

Lady Rachel was trembling, with both hands held against her mouth. She looked like she was holding back tears, staring in the direction of the office door. I was sitting next to her. All I could do was hold her slender shoulders.

He didn't look well from the beginning. I shouldn't have gone along with it when he said he was all right and made him have a break, but it's too late to regret it now.

"...I had heard about Lord Walter from my older brother. I should have done something."

It's not your fault, Lady Rachel. If I said something like that, it meant it was Lord Walter's fault for not looking after himself and overdoing it. But that's not right either.

Lady Rachel shuddered as the door quietly opened. Once she noticed Lord Julius slipping into the room, she sprung out of her seat.

"Juli, how is Lord Walter?!"

"Calm down, Rach. The future head physician of the Royal Clinic is seeing to him, he's fine. His breathing has stabilized and he's sleeping now."

"O-Okay..." Lady Rachel collapsed onto the sofa; her eyes filled with tears.

"It's not life-threatening," he continued. "Yes, I'm telling the truth."

As those words sank in, I sank into the sofa... *What a relief.*

Lady Rachel confirmed it with Lord Julius one more time before bursting into tears. Marie-Louise gently handed her a handkerchief.

“How dare he make my little sister cry. He’ll have to make up for it later,” Lord Julius grumbled with a relieved expression.

Lady Rachel tried to stop crying when it was mentioned that we could go back to the office once she had calmed down.

“It sounds like he overworked himself,” Lord Julius said. “It was bound to catch up to him eventually.”

Yeah...it usually does. That said, I’ve rarely heard people talk about overworking themselves since coming to this world. I remember before I came to this world, I often had to work several days in a row, only to be made to come in on my days off too.

When you get too tired, your mind stops functioning. You lose your appetite, and even if you do eat, you’re unsure if it’s even nourishing. I took so many supplements they were no longer “supplements” and were basically my main intake.

If someone asked me to live that life again, I would sprint out of there. The working environment is more important than what the job is described to be.

As I recalled my close yet distant past, Lady Rachel had removed the handkerchief from the corner of her eyes and gripped it.

“I-I’m all right now. Let’s go,” she said, her voice weak from crying.

“Are you sure? You look exhausted. We can just go home, Rachel,” Lord Julius said.

“I don’t want to,” Lady Rachel declared with eyes red from crying.

Lord Julius smiled wryly in response as he opened the door to the office. Inside were Mark and Lord Walter, who was lying on the sofa covered by a blanket. The rest of the staff seemed to be waiting somewhere else.

I left Lord Walter to Lady Rachel, who rushed to his side. I instead made my way to Mark, who was writing something while standing. Once he noticed me, Mark glanced at Lord Walter and shrugged.

“I checked with his subordinates. He hasn’t taken a break from work for more than a month. Not to mention, he’s been working from early morning until late at night,” he informed me.

“That’s no good,” I wrote.

Mark sighed. “He’s always had a lot of stamina, so he probably doesn’t realize when he’s going too far.”

Lady Rachel turned around. “Um, he isn’t sick, is he?”

“He is showing symptoms of anemia, but he doesn’t seem to be suffering from any diseases,” Mark replied.

Lady Rachel let out a deep sigh of relief as she turned to face Lord Walter again.

Lord Julius was staring at the pair before coming over to Mark to talk with him about what to do next.

“How do you want to proceed?” Mark asked. “We could take him to the Royal Clinic.”

“Good question...” Lord Julius said. “We’ll take him to the Dustin estate— No, the Lindgren estate.” Lord Julius looked over his shoulder at Lady Rachel as he made that correction. He then signaled something to Marie-Louise with his eyes. Marie-Louise quietly left the room.

After a while, she returned after having the Lindgren carriage come to the nearest carriage stop and brought a number of staff who were waiting for their next assignment. Lord Julius promptly began to assign them tasks in their superior’s absence. Then he began preparations for moving the sleeping Lord Walter to the carriage. Just like that, we were set to leave the castle.

A cold, winter wind blew as we headed down a different corridor from earlier towards the Lindgren carriage. It looked as if Lord Julius had asked everyone to leave—our surroundings were empty.

“I can take Margaret there myself,” Mark informed Lord Julius as he stepped out of the carriage. He had gotten in briefly to check on Lord Walter, who was still asleep beside a worried Lady Rachel.

“Thanks, that’ll help a lot. We’ll look after him until you get back. Did you contact his household and parents?”

“Yes, just before we left the office. They should get the message in Miselle by tomorrow morning.”

Lord Julius climbed into the carriage after hearing Mark’s response. The carriage disappeared into the distance, leaving us behind in silence, which felt frightfully heavy.

Mark made sure no one else was around before placing his forehead on mine.

“I sent word to Lady Adelaide, too. I asked that she come as soon as possible.”

“Yeah, she needs to scold him.”

Both Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel will probably be surprised.

“Walter is all right.”

Even though it took him ten years to reconnect with Lady Adelaide, he’s already making her worry. What will we do with you?

“So don’t cry.”

Okay, he got me.

“Yeah... I know. It just reminded me of my parents.”

Seeing Lord Walter collapsing in front of me, his closed eyes and his pale face as he lay deathly still.

It reminded me of that day. The sun was setting in the same way when I rushed into the hospital still wearing my middle school uniform.

My parents’ eyes never opened again.

Although what happened with Lord Walter today was different from my parents, who were in an accident, I couldn’t shake the similarity off. The wind blowing past my feet brought a chill in my chest.

I let out a breath that felt like it got caught in my throat when I felt Mark’s hand caress my cheek.

“I don’t like being left alone.”

“I’ll scold him when he wakes up.”

“...As a doctor?”

I moved my forehead away and buried it into Mark’s shoulder. I relaxed a little in response to the warmth from his arms wrapped around me.

“No, as a brother-in-law.”

I looked up at his mumbled response and made eye contact with Mark, whose eyebrows were furrowed in annoyance. I somehow suppressed my tears to laugh in the now-dark corridor.



WHEN we returned to the Lindgren estate, we were met by a worried Lady Sofia. She had plans to go out that evening, but had put them off to wait for us.

“I heard his condition is from overworking himself?” she inquired. “What a thing to happen from being overly zealous about one’s work. I ought to remind my husband to stop relying on him for every new project or idea he has for work.”

We were then led to the guestroom, where Lady Rachel and Lord Julius already were, still wearing their outdoor clothes.

Lady Rachel had drawn a chair next to the bed Lord Walter was lying on. When she noticed us enter the room, she slightly stood up from the chair, before sitting back down again.

“He woke up just once after we brought him here. However, he fell right back to sleep after that...” Lady Rachel explained.

“All right, the doctor is here to take a look at him, so please take a break, Rach.”

“Juli.” Lady Rachel refused to leave with tears in her eyes. It seemed she had no intention of leaving anything to do with Lord Walter to others.

“At least get changed and have something to eat. You look so pale. At this rate, you’ll end up collapsing, too.”

Lady Rachel shook her head. Lord Julius looked at me with a troubled

expression. "Can I leave her to you?"

I quietly headed over to her side. *"I understand just how worried you are. However, the best thing we can do is make sure we're emotionally and physically okay so that we can properly look after him."*

As Lady Rachel read what I wrote on the magical writing device, she lifted her hand up to her chest, closed her eyes, and let out a sigh.

"I understand that logically, but emotionally... Well, all right. I'll do that. Mark, Juli. I'll be gone a short while."

"Take your time," Lord Julius responded.

"I'll be right back," she insisted.

As we left Lord Julius and Mark behind, both wearing wry smiles, Marie-Louise awaited us in the corridor. The moment we reached her private room and closed the doors, Lady Rachel put her back against the door and slid down it until she sat on the floor.

"My lady!"

"I-I wonder what happened. My legs suddenly gave out..."

"You have been on pins and needles this whole time..."

The tension finally went out of her now that she's in her own room. Marie-Louise helped Lady Rachel stand up. She flopped onto the sofa.

"I'll prepare some food and hot drinks right away."

Once Marie-Louise left the room, closing the door behind her, Lady Rachel covered her face with her hands and let out a heavy sigh.

"I...couldn't do anything."

I sat beside her. She looked about ready to cry.

"When I saw Lord Walter collapse, my mind went blank. Honestly, I don't quite recall coming back to the estate," Lady Rachel said in a quiet voice. She clenched her still-shaking hands on top of her lap.

It seems that was her first time seeing someone collapse. Plus, with it being her years-long crush, it's probably a shock to her.

I told her what I had learned from Mark in the carriage on the way to their house. *“First, it’s important he rests. He’s physically fit and has no rare diseases. If he gets his nutrients and proper rest, he’ll recover in no time.”*

“B-But...”

“It’s okay. Mark wouldn’t lie about this stuff. He is, after all, the Dr. Daniel Reynold’s pupil.” I confidently wrote on my magic writing device, hoping to cheer her up. Lady Rachel furrowed her brows.

“Really?”

“Really.”

We had a little bit of a back-and-forth confirming this until Lady Rachel let out a relieved sigh.

“I’m sure he’ll be awake in the morning. Then we’ll make him have something to eat—no ifs or buts. We should make something filling, and that’s easy to eat and digest. Oh, how about you make it for him and get him to eat?”

“M-Me?”

“I think it’s a great idea, even if I say so myself. I’m sure Lord Walter will say he’s all right and pass on eating. But if you make the meal and bring it to him, there’s no way he can say no. I’ll help you, so shall we get started on that tomorrow?”

“Huh, um... O-Okay.”

Lady Rachel finally nodded, her cheeks tinged red, as her gaze fixated on the magic writing device.

Marie-Louise then brought us drinks and a light meal. Although Lady Rachel had no appetite, we got her to eat a little. If Lady Rachel were to end up getting sick too, Lord Walter would feel responsible. She finally forced herself to eat after we told her that.

There wasn’t a lot to eat, but when she finished, she changed from her outdoor clothes and headed towards the guestroom, stating she wanted to see how Lord Walter was doing before she went to rest. I saw her off before going to my own private room.

I guess there's nothing for me to do tonight. I'm worried, but I'll just get in the way. Mark also told me to rest.

My dress was still in perfect condition even though I had spent the whole day in it. I was in awe of the seamstress' ability as I got changed. As the corset was on the loose side, I was able to take it off without needing help. Apart from dresses I didn't know how to wear, most of the time I did stuff on my own in Miselle, so I wasn't used to people helping.

I wore a robe over my nightgown and untied my hair. As I stood in front of the mirror, returning to my usual look, I heard a small *clink* from the window. It sounded like something had hit the window.

I was on the second floor; there were no tall trees near the manor. There wasn't a balcony connected to the large window, so there was no way anyone could have been outside.

I froze with shock as I glanced in the direction of the window, which was covered by a curtain.

Clink! I heard the noise again.

I was startled, afraid it may be an intruder, but I couldn't sense an evil presence outside of the window. I put down the hairbrush I was holding and gingerly opened the curtains.

Outside was a sparkling golden light.

The fairies are here?!

When they saw me, they got even brighter and threw the acorns they were holding. They started clinging to the window, spinning around, generally acting like they wanted to come into the room.

W-Wait! If the Lindgren household sees this, it'll cause huge problems!

I rushed to open the window and they all began rushing into the small gap. They flew all around the room, then zoomed right to me.

"Woah, hello! It's my first time meeting you all, right?"

When the group of five fairies flew into the room, they created a similar, comfortable atmosphere to what I felt in Miselle. I came to this world during

spring, a season where I often got sick. For some reason, when I went outside in Miselle and the wind hit me, I'd suddenly feel better. It felt like that now.

It felt warmly comforting, bringing me a sense of relief. I felt like I was right at home. The fairies in front of me felt it too. We were on the same wavelength, and I slowly felt the uncomfortable feeling leave.

The fairies sat on my shoulders and clung to my sleeves as I sat down on the bed.

"Hey, ever since I came to the capital, I felt a strange chill around me. Now that you're all here, it's not that bad. Do you guys know something? I wonder if it has something to do with the Spirit and the magic from the forest," I asked a fairy who was sitting in the palm of my hand. It crossed its hands behind its back and swayed back and forth as if singing. I relaxed a little while watching their childlike behavior; however, I couldn't forget what had happened with Lord Walter that day. I couldn't bring myself to smile like usual.

Some of the fairies hugged me as if to say, "It's all right." Some of them even held onto my fingers with their little hands to encourage me.

"Thank you. It's been tough today, and I wasn't feeling very energetic. I'm glad I could meet you all."

As I voicelessly expressed that, one of the logs in the hearth popped almost as if in response. The red and orange dancing flames were the same as the flames in the hearth at the Miselle estate. They were also the same as the flames that traveled down the river on the evening of the Festival of Eve. I wondered if the Spirit was able to see it. The Spirit possessed the ability to keep the world in balance and sink an entire nation in one night.

I wonder why such a Spirit needs me, a person from a different world with no special talents. Not to mention, their only connection with a Caller was this different colored eye and the fairies. I figured that I would eventually learn why and didn't give it much thought, but on nights like tonight, I found myself thinking about it. *Because I'm really not special.*

I have no magic, nothing to help Lord Walter when he collapsed, and no voice to soothe Lady Rachel's fears. Nothing.

I was also aware that no one expected anything from me. However, I couldn't help but think how I wish I could do those things. *Ever since coming here, I've definitely become greedier, wishing for things beyond my ability.*

I can't do anything. I'm only human.

But maybe the Spirit—

Just as I was about to get to the bottom of my concerns, a soft knock came from the door, interrupting my reverie. The fairies who were clinging to me all fluttered off, hiding in the sheets. *Ah, they're staying.* I thought about the differences between them and the Miselle fairies as I stood up. As I arrived at the door, a folded card slid in underneath it. It reminded me of getting a newspaper at a hotel in the morning.

I picked it up as I heard footsteps heading away. It was from Mark and said, *"Walter's condition is still stable, but I'll be staying with him tonight just to be sure. Make sure to rest soon."*

The fairies peeked out of the sheets when they realized no one was coming in. There was a line of fairies peeking out at me from beneath the covers. When I picked up the cover and pulled it back, they all laughed. Some flew away and some stayed burrowed in my bed. *Ah, so cute.*

"I was going to go to sleep soon, but should we sleep together? Or will you guys go home?"

As I asked them, the fairies hidden in the sheets came out from beneath them and started arguing. I couldn't help but smile seeing them like that.

I wonder if the other fairies played with Buddy today.

Mark said his letter should reach Miselle within the day. *No doubt Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel were shocked by the contents of the letter and are worried. Probably more worried now that they're far from us.*

I patted my cheeks to cheer myself up, when the fairies looked at me. They all had their heads cocked to one side as if they were questioning what I was doing. Then they all gathered and came towards me, seemingly not too concerned anymore.

“Kyah, wait! Wah?!”

Surprised, I lost my balance and fell back onto the bed while the fairies rained down kisses on me. I was left exhausted, and the fairies took that opportunity to fly out my still partially opened window. I covered my cheek, the one that had been kissed the most, closed the window, and crawled under the blankets.



ALTHOUGH it was the morning after a day of irregularities, I woke up at the same time as always. It seemed the routine I had adopted in Miselle had no plans to change. I had the bell Lady Adelaide prepared for me to let others know I had woken up. I had no courage to ring it after the night we had all had. There were no plans to go to the castle today, so I wore my usual clothes. The servants that were called in to see to the emergency case were all busy. *It's probably good I can get ready myself.*

Once I had finished getting changed, there came a hesitant knock at the door. I opened the door to find Lady Rachel with Marie-Louise in tow.

“G-Good morning. I apologize for how early this is.”

She looks a lot better and more relaxed than yesterday. If she's like this, I wonder if Lord Walter is doing better.

“Please let me style your hair.”

Marie-Louise's eyes sparkled as she looked at my half-done hair before taking me by the shoulders and leading me over to the front of the dresser. Before I could say anything, she had already beautifully tied my hair up. I sat there with my mouth open in awe, making eye contact with Lady Rachel in the mirror.

“She seemed to really enjoy helping you get ready yesterday. Please let Marie-Louise do this while you're here.”

“Um, well, okay. If it's all right with Marie-Louise, that is.”

“Hairstyling is a hobby of mine. Black hair like yours is very rare, so it's enjoyable to style,” Marie-Louise responded in an uncharacteristically enthusiastic manner to what I had written on the magical device as she happily pushed a pin into my hair. I noticed she had done my hair differently from

yesterday, in a simple but elegant manner.

Huh, how does she do that? Darn, I should've watched her do it from the start.

"I went to see Lord Walter earlier with my brother..." Lady Rachel said.

According to Mark, who was with Lord Walter at the time of her visit, his condition had not worsened overnight, which was a relief. Apparently, Lord Julius had taken over for Mark, who was going to take a nap. It seemed Lady Rachel had specifically requested that his care was not left to the servants. She stated that Lord Walter may be surprised if he wakes up in a place he does not recognize, surrounded by people he doesn't know.

"Um, about what we discussed last night," Lady Rachel began, her eyes darting around the room. That's when I realized what she was hinting at. *The meal!*

I thought it was a great idea, but thinking about it now, the real problem is if they'll even let her use the kitchen. I don't really want to cause any issues for the chefs.

"It's fine," she said when I brought it up. "I use the kitchen often, and I already told them about our plans. But this is a time when there are a lot of people in the kitchen, so I was wondering if you were still okay with it or not..."

She's worrying about me at a time like this. I don't really like standing out. But the people of the Lindgren household already know Lady Rachel is friends with the Spirit Caller. Although I hadn't been officially introduced, there was an unspoken understanding when Lady Rachel suddenly went to Miselle, then returned with a guest that it was the Caller.

"It's all right with me. I wanted to thank the chefs for such delicious food anyway. If they don't mind me being there, then it's no problem for me. Plus, I'm kinda curious how a marquis' estate kitchen looks. There's probably lots of new equipment and things for me to discover."

"I-In that case..."

"Yeah, Lord Walter might wake any moment now. We should get to it."

The three of us left my room and headed to the kitchen.

Wow, it's big. Lady Adelaide's kitchen was big, but that was just an ordinary personal kitchen. This was *the* kitchen. It was professional. It made sense as they often hosted large-scale banquets and dinner parties. Not only that, but it was like it was designed with professional use in mind. There were big and small frying pans lined up near the stove, and there were multiple sinks. Behind the food prep counters were multiple serving tables with a variety of different plate shapes... *Man, it's so pro.*

There were a lot of people working. As I stepped into the busy kitchen, everything suddenly stopped. *Oh, sorry. Am I in the way?*

"Good morning," Lady Rachel said. "Please, carry on. Max?"

"Yes, I'll be right there!"

In response to Lady Rachel's voice, a middle-aged man awkwardly maneuvered his way through the chefs who returned to their work. He was somewhat on the larger side with a red face. He wore a white apron and a seamless white hat; underneath were his two dark brown eyes. His firm hands looked like they'd suit having a knife and a frying pan in them. He came over to us, removed his hat, and bowed deeply.

"Margaret, this is our head chef. Max, this is our guest, Margaret. I believe you've heard our plans from Graham," Lady Rachel said.

"I certainly have! Please feel free to use the ingredients and utensils as you wish."

Graham, one of the Lindgren family butlers, had greeted me when I'd first arrived at the estate. He was a little younger than Dr. Daniel, was dressed smartly, and took his job seriously. Alongside the butler, there was also another steward, who was currently back at the Lindgren manor in the countryside.

Butlers, stewards, and plenty of servants... Lady Rachel was a woman who wanted for nothing.

I wonder if it's okay that they're treating me as a guest of honor. After all, I fit working in a kitchen better than being waited upon. I'm used to this kind of busy atmosphere.

I greeted the expectant Max with a smile. *"I'm Margaret. The meal from the*

other night was delicious!” I pulled out my magical writing device and expressed my thanks for letting us use the kitchen and for all the food they made us. I held my hand out for a handshake, and he grabbed my hand with both his thick hands. *Oh, his skin is a little hard. These are the hands of a worker.*

“No need to thank me! That is a wonderful compliment for a chef.”

He seemed so enthusiastic. I was relieved to see my plan wouldn’t cause them any issues.

“I’m sorry for coming when you are so busy here.”

“Don’t be. We have no other guests today, so no one is in a rush. Today we are just preparing meals for the servants.”

“Okay, that’s good.” I looked around the kitchen and made eye contact with one of the chefs in front of the stove. As I waved hello, his pan collided with the stove as he panicked. *Oh, the omelet broke... I’m sorry. I won’t interrupt you anymore.*

Our workstation was already free to use. Feeling like a nuisance, I started to get to work, when Marie-Louise handed me an apron.

“Here you go.”

Lady Rachel was also putting on her apron with well-practiced hands. Her apron was frilly—her usual newlywed-looking apron. The one passed to me had more subdued frills. I was relieved.

“Oh, is Mr. Max joining us?” I asked.

“Yes, I’ll be assisting you both today,” Mr. Max responded, proudly.

Wait a sec, the head chef is acting as our assistant?!

“I often talked about the meals I ate in Miselle, so Max is curious about your cooking,” Lady Rachel apologetically explained as my eyes went round as saucers.

“I would love it if you could teach me,” he said.

I can’t say no when you ask me with a sparkle in your eyes. Um, Lady Adelaide is the good cook. I’m only average at it, so don’t be too disappointed, okay?

I figured we shouldn't be standing around having a chat in the kitchen, so we got straight into cooking.

"I wonder what kind of food Lord Walter would want to eat?" Lady Rachel asked.

"Good question. I would suggest porridge or soup for when one isn't feeling well," Mr. Max suggested.

I agreed with Mr. Max's suggestion. *Something easy to eat and digest is a staple for when people don't feel good. Porridge is made by boiling oatmeal in milk. In Japanese cooking terms, it's probably close to okayu. I was shocked when I heard that it's normal to put fruits, honey, or other sweet things into porridge. Though I suppose we do have o-hagi in Japan, a type of sweet rice ball. As well as pink fish floss, that's sweet too.*

I mulled over the options for a while. *Since Lord Walter hasn't eaten anything for quite a long time, maybe something lighter would be better. If porridge is okay, we can have that for lunch.*

I looked over at the vegetables and spotted a delicious-looking turnip.

Oh, turnips are nice. It's not too strong a flavor and is easy on the stomach. All right, let's make this into a soup. The turnip was firm, and its leaves were a vibrant green. It looked as if it had just been picked from a field. *It would make for a delicious salad if diced. With the peel removed and cut into small pieces.*

I could use the leaves for coloring. I covered them in salt and began to finely chop them.

Back in my old world, we'd dice up the turnip leaves and stir-fry them with shirasu or dried sardines with a splash of salty-sweet soy sauce. It goes so well with white rice. Whenever you heat up a big pile of turnip leaves, the volume will reduce instantly—it felt like a science experiment, so I used to enjoy it. I would sprinkle white sesame seeds on top as a finishing touch. I always made it as a side dish. It's also nice to mix in some fried eggs, too.

I stopped myself from reminiscing. *Okay, gotta get back to the soup.*

I finely chopped the onions and leeks, then fried them in butter. *The color turns ugly when they're burned, so be careful with the temperature so that they*

don't brown.

When the onions became transparent, I added the turnip. Once the butter had melted and blended in well, I gradually added the soup stock and allowed it to simmer. They gave me an already prepared soup stock. *It should be kept at a slow and controlled simmer.*

"Oh, Lady Rachel, it's fine to let the scum accumulate, if you take all of it out, it'll lose its rich flavor."

Once it began to boil, and just before the turnip would melt into a goop, I turned off the heat. I used a sieve to separate the broth and the ingredients, then mashed the ingredients together until it was like a purée, before returning it to the pan.

Blenders and food processors are really useful at times like this. When I lived alone in Japan, I always hesitated about buying kitchen equipment, wondering where I'd put it. In the end, I never bought any of it, since it's not like I cooked for myself every day. *But I guess some of it would have been useful to have at home. You just don't know how much you'd use some things until you try them out.*

I went to check on the thickness of the broth. I added milk to it then heated it before having a taste, adding salt and pepper. *Depending on the soup stock, there may be no need for salt.* I stopped it before it began to simmer so it wouldn't lose flavor. As soon as the bubbles began to appear, I shut it off.

"If possible, strain it through a sieve again and make sure it's smooth. It's a bit of a bother, but if you have the time, you should do it as it's super satisfying."

I filled the bowl, topped it with the boiled turnip leaves, and voilà!

"What do you think? Did we do a good job?"

"I think... it's delicious."

Lady Rachel tried it, but she didn't seem confident. She did most of the work, so she seemed a little uneasy about her work. The head chef and Marie-Louise also tried the soup.

"The texture is nice. It's delicious, my lady."

“Hmm, the ingredients and the way it was prepared are the same as how we would do it, but it tastes different...”

Yes, Mr. Max, I always think the same thing. Even when there’s no recipe, and I’m just roasting ham or sausages, the flavor changes depending on the person making it. It’s strange, right? It’s like tea tasting better when someone makes it for you.

Lady Rachel’s turnip soup had Lady Rachel’s own flavor profile. It was thick, soft, and had a gentle taste, with a slight hint of sweetness. *It’s very delicious.*

There were also fruits that had been cut in a way to make them easier to eat with yogurt, paired with a bit of soft bread. *I wonder how Lord Walter’s appetite is. Even if he doesn’t have an appetite, we’ll have to get him to eat a little bit. He won’t get better otherwise.*

As we were having fun making the food, we soon received word that Lord Walter had woken up.

I left Lady Rachel in the kitchen, saying that I would be going ahead to check on Lord Walter.

“Good morning. Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you.” As I thanked Lord Julius regarding the room I stayed in, he wore a troubled expression and pointed over his shoulder.

I glanced past him and saw Lord Walter sitting up on the canopy bed, almost completely dressed. His back was turned to us.

“Huh? What’s he doing? He needs to rest.”

“Good timing. Maybe you can help me persuade Walter,” Lord Julius said. “He’s saying he’s fine after only resting for one night.”

Lord Walter glanced in my direction when he noticed me. He looked a little better than yesterday, but it was obvious he hadn’t made a full recovery.

“Sorry for causing you trouble, Julius. I’ll make up for it another day,” he said.

“Stay put. You haven’t rested enough.”

“I’m fine.”

Ah, honestly. I agree with Lord Julius entirely.

“Walter, don’t just head back. I’ll call for Mark. Keep him here until then.”

Lord Julius whispered that last part to me as he looked over his shoulder at Lord Walter. He left the room after confirming that Lord Walter had heard what he had said. It seemed he thought it would be useless without having a doctor persuade him.

“I gave you a scare too, huh, Margaret,” Lord Walter said.

“Well, yeah. I’m more surprised that you’re up and about like this after yesterday.” I faced Lord Walter directly as he continued to get dressed. *“Are you planning to go to work?”*

I pushed my writing device in front of Lord Walter as he finished fastening his cuffs. He pulled a face as if I had asked a weird question.

“Yeah. Why?”

“That’s just strange! In what world would someone go straight back to work, the day after collapsing at work?”

“I rested for a night, it’s fine.”

“It’s not fine.” I interrupted Lord Walter as he straightened out his necktie on a side table and pushed my writing device at him. I took that opening to steal the maroon-colored fabric from him.

“...Margaret, this is no time for games. Give it back,” he sighed.

Absolutely. Not.

I batted his hand away, then wrapped the tie around my wrist. Then, I grabbed the disgruntled Lord Walter by the shoulders and put my forehead against his. There was a slight *thud* as I did so.

“Ouch.”

I didn’t mean to bonk him on the head like that. It was an accident. I think.

“Everyone is worried about you.”

“...Huh?!”

It was a gamble if he would hear my voice or not. I had informed him that I could use my voice, but I hadn't yet told him how. Lord Walter also knew that the people I could communicate with were limited. As Hugh explained, it worked with parents, children, and spouses—or, in other words, only family.

I wonder when I started thinking of Lord Walter as an older brother.

The fact that Lord Walter could hear me meant that he also regarded me as a family member—I was a little happy about that. *But it's no time to revel in happiness.*

"I'm begging you, please take a break. Can't you rely on your subordinates to do a few days' work without you?"

When he collapsed yesterday, all his staff paid me, the Caller, absolutely no mind and were only worried about Lord Walter. Lord Walter always puts others before himself, even when he tries to write it off as just another part of his work. I wonder if he even knows how highly those around him think of him.

"It's not that I can't rely on them, it's— Wait, hold on a second, is this your voice, Margaret?"

"If it sounds like the voice of a younger sister who is worried about her older brother who collapsed, then yes, it is," I said and then stepped back from him. Although he rarely ever showed emotion, I could see clearly that he was surprised and a little relieved. I then softly placed my forehead against his again. *"I know you're working so hard because of me. Thank you for protecting me and looking after me. I really appreciate it. But I don't want you to get sick because of me."*

I wouldn't say I'm the sole reason why he's busy—I'm aware that I'm just a part of it. But I shouldn't take advantage of that fact.

"Pass some of the burden onto others. Then put yourself in that empty space."

"...Myself?"

An impatient knock came from the door, and I swiftly took a step back. As I smiled towards Lord Walter, who looked bewildered, Lord Julius and Mark rushed into the room.

“Nice, he hasn’t left yet. Hm, something wrong, Walter?”

“Ah, no. Nothing at all.”

Lord Julius tilted his head to the side, facing Lord Walter, who was trying to hide the fact he was shaken by putting his hand to his mouth. Mark looked from me to Lord Walter from behind Lord Julius and seemed to catch on to what was going on. *Why is this guy so sharp? I don’t think I can keep anything from him.*

Mark, seemingly dissatisfied, pulled out a single piece of paper. “Here.”

Lord Walter took the paper and looked at it dubiously. “What is this...? Vacation notice?”

“That’s a future head physician for you. He works fast,” Lord Julius said. “That form was submitted yesterday. Sounds like the prime minister approved it on the spot. Even your boss is worried about you, Walter.”

“Hey, why are you going ahead and doing stuff like this?” Lord Walter grumbled.

“We’re not going ahead and doing anything. Are you really gonna complain to the doctor, Mr. Patient?” Lord Julius cut Lord Walter off as he looked at the sheet of paper in disbelief.

Mark sighed and crossed his arms. “One week’s rest at home. Though you can stay at the clinic, for all I care. Just rest. Doctor’s orders.”

“... Then I wish to be at my h—”

“Nah, you can’t stay at the Dustin estate. You’ll work when no one is looking. It’s great that your servants are so loyal, but I doubt any of them would want to tie their boss down in bed.” Lord Julius once again shot him down. Lord Walter let out a deep sigh as Mark tagged on his opinion.

“From my point of view as a doctor, a week is the least you need. At the very least, you need to rest today and tomorrow. Rest plenty and eat lots. Once your magic levels have stabilized, then you may go out for short excursions. But I will not approve any work.”

Oh, I see. Your magic influences your health and vice versa. I guess that ties into the magical interference and mana sickness they told me about. It’s starting

to make more sense to me now.

“First, you need to eat,” Lord Julius insisted. “My sister went out of her way to make something for you. She went to all that trouble for you, so don’t say you’re not going to eat it.”

“Huh, what?” Lord Walter asked.

“It’s good that you’ve gotten dressed. I’ll have her keep an eye on you while you eat. You better not leave anything behind. Got it?”

“Julius,” Lord Walter responded.

“I can’t believe this. He gets to eat Rach’s home cooking before I do.”

Lord Julius looked very displeased, while Lord Walter looked baffled. Right around that time, Lady Rachel and Marie-Louise appeared, pushing a wagon through the door which had been left open.

“E-Excuse me...” Lady Rachel said, looking hesitant.

“Ah, Rachel! Keep a good eye on this one,” Lord Julius said. “He’s not to take one step out of the room—doctor’s orders. Well, I’ll be off. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Huh? O-Okay. Understood.”

Lord Julius approached her and gave her a tight hug before strutting through the door. I felt like he was monopolizing the room, but given that Marie-Louise didn’t even bat an eye at his little display, I assumed that was normal in this house.

“As I said before, please eat and rest. If Dr. Daniel was here, he would say the same thing,” Mark said.

Lord Walter held his hands up in defeat after Mark brought up the doctor.

Surely, he’s got the point now. It’s time for us to leave the rest to Lady Rachel, but first, I’ll give this back to her.

“What’s this, Margaret?” she asked me when I removed Lord Walter’s tie from my wrist and tied it into her golden locks in place of a ribbon. Once she realized what I had done, she went bright red.

Good luck. I waved to her as I left the room. Mark then took me by the hand and led me to the room he was using.

I noticed a crumpled bed cover through a gap in the canopy on the bed. *He must have just woken up. That said, he was up all night looking after Lord Walter.*

He bumped his forehead against mine without so much as a word.

"Were you woken up while you were napping? You must be tired."

"I'm okay. So, Margaret?"

Ah, I see, he's in a bad mood because of not getting enough sleep. Wait. That's not it.

"Well, um. It would've been too much of a bother to try to persuade him by communicating in writing..."

"I bet."

"Um, I'm sorry?"

He didn't respond to that and instead moved his forehead away and buried it in my shoulder, letting out a sigh. It seemed he took some time to find his words.

"...It's fine," I heard his muffled voice say. *"I planned to talk to Walter about it eventually. I understand why you did it, but it bothers me so much more than I thought it would."*

I was a little surprised.

I always thought that he was the jealous type, but this was the first time he had ever spoken to me about it.

Ah, I see. Is it because I told him to tell me what he's thinking? I'm...kinda happy.

I put both of my hands near Mark's ears and lifted his head up, touching our foreheads together again.

"A younger sister spoke to her older brother. How can I apologize to you for experimenting without you?"

For a moment, Mark looked as if he had been caught off guard, but then he let out a small laugh.

“Good question,” Mark mumbled before sitting us on the bed. He wrapped his arms around my waist before putting his head on my lap.

Is this what they call a lap pillow?

“I’m going to sleep a little,” Mark said as he closed his eyes. I pulled the blanket over him and could sense a smile creeping onto my face as well.

Interlude: Rachel Lindgren

MARIE-LOUISE pushed a food cart draped with a silver cloth covering the dishes I had prepared earlier. As we approached Lord Walter's room, I stopped in my tracks; I could hear voices through the open door.

"It sounds like he's talking with someone," I said.

From what I could make out, my older brother and the others were stopping Lord Walter from returning straight to work.

Thinking back to yesterday makes my heart quiver even now. The room, lit up by the setting sun. Lord Walter collapsed with a pale face. And yet, he wishes to go back to work? I'll do anything to stop that.

"...went out of her way...you better eat..."

My brother's voice brought me back to my senses.

"Shall we, my lady?" Marie-Louise looked at me and smiled. "Now is our chance."

"...Say, Marie-Louise, do you think Lord Walter will eat the food?" I asked.

"Everyone seems to be giving him clear instructions to do so. I imagine even if he has no appetite, he will still eat it."

"I'm not so sure."

Though that may have been the truth, I had an indescribable feeling in my chest. Marie-Louise took my hand and placed it on the food cart's handle.

"It was delicious, Lady Rachel."

Marie-Louise's words encouraged me, strengthening my resolve. As I stepped into the guestroom, for some reason, the carpet felt thicker under my shoes than it did the day before.

"U-Um," I started.

"Ah, Rachel!" my older brother exclaimed as he made long strides towards

me, hugging me as always.

B-Brother, everyone is, or rather, Lord Walter is here!

He said whatever it was he wanted to say and rushed out of the room like a gust of wind. *Oh, okay, I guess I'll be looking after Lord Walter today, ensuring he doesn't leave the room.*

Although that exchange had taken the wind out of my sails, I soon came back to my senses. Mark and Margaret approached the doorway, ready to leave themselves. Then I noticed Margaret smile and step behind me.

She had tied something in my hair. *A maroon tie...?!*

"M-Margaret?!" I exclaimed.

Before I could even ask what she was doing, Margaret was already waving goodbye with a wink as she left the room. That wave seemed to be her way of saying "Good luck!" I could almost hear my heart beating in my chest.

D-Did she put Lord Walter's tie in my hair?! If hair could blush, mine would be bright red by now!

Only three of us remained in the room: me, Lord Walter, and Marie-Louise. Praying that my face wouldn't reveal how nervous I was, I focused hard on not looking at the mirror on the wall. *I'm just not going to look. At all.*

"Count Dustin, would you like to eat in bed?" Marie-Louise asked.

"Ah, no... Over on that table is fine," he said.

Marie-Louise began to take the food off the food cart. I watched her set out the cutlery. I looked up, feeling someone's gaze on me. As I did so, Lord Walter slightly lowered his head.

"Lady Rachel, I'm sorry for causing you trouble," he began.

"Oh, you did nothing of the sort," I responded.

"I did."

"Um, you didn't trouble me... You *worried* me."

I couldn't do anything about my voice growing quiet as I spoke. *After all, it hurts just remembering what happened.*

“Is it all right for you to be up and about?” I asked. “Do you still feel dizzy, or have a headache?”

“Not really.”

“So that means you do to some degree. You should rest like everyone has suggested. I beg you, Lord Walter.”

I looked at the table, which had been set, as Lord Walter wore a seemingly forced expression and let out a sigh.

“I never once thought the daughter of a marquis would stand in a kitchen to cook,” he remarked.

“Uh, um, Margaret taught me how,” I said meekly.

“Ah, I see,” Lord Walter nodded, accepting that explanation. “However,” he continued, “I can see I am causing you to go through a lot of trouble on my behalf. You needn’t go that far for me.”

“...But I already made it. If you don’t eat it, then it will have been for nothing,” I said.

I felt saddened by how he seemed to demean his value when he spoke. Even though my response was lighthearted, Lord Walter seemed to catch on.

“He’ll probably turn it down, but don’t mind it, no matter what he says,” Margaret had advised me. *“Just tell him you’ll throw it away if he doesn’t eat it,”* she had cheerfully mentioned, and I ended up doing exactly that.

“So, please make sure to eat it while it’s warm,” I urged. “If it’s not to your liking, I can bring something else.”

“...That’s fine. I’ll have this.”

As he wasn’t one to show his emotions, I couldn’t tell if he had given in or if he was happy. *All that’s important is that he eats, so I don’t need to worry about if he’s happy about it or not.* I felt relieved when he finally sat down.

Lord Walter took a sip of his soup, then stopped his spoon in midair. “What is this?”

“It’s turnip soup. Is it not to your liking?”

My heart was thundering in my chest as Lord Walter put his hands together.

“That’s not it,” he said, shaking his head. “I have eaten this dish before, but it’s never been this sweet... It’s delicious.”

For a moment, it looked like his face relaxed. He slowly enjoyed his meal, but he never stopped eating. I felt so relieved to see that.

He ate the soup, bread, and fruit. Once Marie-Louise had finished serving the tea, she approached me with a hesitant look.

“I’ve been given some medicine to give him after he finished eating. However, I didn’t prepare any water. I’ll head to the kitchen to fetch some.”

All that remained on the food cart was the cloth, the pot for hot water, and a medicine pouch. Near Lord Walter’s bed was water from yesterday, which, naturally, we could no longer use.

“Okay, thank you,” I responded.

“I’ll be right back.”

Marie-Louise bowed and took the carafe from the bedside, which had about half of its content left, with her as she left through the slightly ajar door.

I turned towards the table and made eye contact with Lord Walter, who was picking up his cup of tea. “Thank you for the meal. But you really needn’t go through all this trouble for me,” he said.

“Um, was it... Was it a bother for you that I did?” I asked.

“Rather, it’s not something someone like yourself should have to worry about.”

Someone like me—I was taken aback by what he implied with those words. It felt like it had turned a key inside me, opening something long locked away.

“...I mean, I feel like you don’t take good care of yourself at all, Lord Walter,” I said.

“Lady Rachel?”

“So that’s why I’ll take care of you instead.”

I couldn’t make out Lord Walter’s expression through my teary eyes. He sat

dumbfounded, his hand frozen in the air as it was about to bring his cup to his lips.

I'm saying these things while crying. How childish of me. Contradictory to my thoughts, my feelings continued to pour out of me.

"Why do you treat yourself so badly? When you collapsed in front of me... My heart stopped."

"I apologize for scari—"

"No, I don't want you to apologize," I cut him off. "You are always like that. You put everyone else before yourself."

At first, my love for him was born from admiration. However, I knew no one else who did as much for others as Lord Walter did. He never talked himself up, and he probably didn't even think twice about what he was doing for others. But it was plain to see.

That's why people like my brother and Hugh are always by his side. I've loved him for so long because of who he is. It's unbearably sad that someone who cares so much for others has no regard for himself.

"That's why I'll go ahead and look after you myself," I declared.

"...There's no need for that."

"Oh. But anyone would dislike something they care about being badly mistreated. I care about you, Lord Walter."

As my tears overflowed, I could make out Lord Walter's shocked expression.

The guest room was silent, lightly illuminated by the magical lamps. I was woken up several times by the flicker of the fire in the hearth the night before. Although I knew he also needed to rest, I was surprised by how much I just wanted him to wake up already.

"I knew from the minute I saw you yesterday that you weren't doing well. I knew you were busy every day. However, I put my joy in being able to meet you before anything else," I said.



I hate that I couldn't help him. I'm not worthy of being the daughter of a marquis.

All I could do was wait.

Outside, the sky began to lighten with the dawn. I could hear the birds singing their songs on the other side of the curtains—it sounded like a shrill bell.

“That’s why, from now on, I’ve decided I’ll do my best to look after you. You mean a lot to me,” I confessed.

“Lady Rachel.”

“And I will not back down from that. Just so you know,” I declared.

Lord Walter looked at me, shocked, as the tears dripped onto my lap.

I was afraid to tell him my feelings. I was afraid he’d reject me. However, it would have been even harder for me if I was unable to get my feelings across. Yesterday scared me more than any words could.

What if I could never speak to him again? What if I could never look into those eyes again? I...

I had someone I dearly loved. Furthermore, I was finally able to tell them. Realizing how happy that made me, I felt myself smile.

“I dearly love you, Lord Walter. More than you know.”

As I said that, Lord Walter’s eyes looked around, then stopped at a point just beside my head. The maroon tie. Even the soft fabric resting against my hair felt so beloved when I touched it.

“I’ll look after you until you’re fully healed. If you are to return to the Dustin estate, I will return with you.”

“...A true thorn in my side,” Lord Walter mumbled, but I could see the slightest smile.

It was a long while before I realized it wasn’t just the tears making me see things.

Chapter 4: The Royal Forest Spirit

LORD Julius, who had gone to the Royal Castle earlier, returned around lunchtime. The three of us, including Mark, were gathered in the living room, where we had tea with Lady Sofia that first day. We were discussing our plans from here on out.

“No need to worry about his work,” Lord Julius said. “Since Walter had a lot going on, it took some time to contact everyone and organize everything. His subordinates were looking forward to showing him how they could hold out for a week on their own as well.”

“Oh, how nice of them. I expected no less.”

“If only Walter would just rely on them more. He even personally picked them to work for him,” Lord Julius grumbled.

“Did he recruit them from the House of Lords?” Mark asked, surprised.

“Yeah. Although there’s not as many as there are in the clinic and the Magic Academy, there are also commoners among the secretaries. There’s especially a lot where he works. The prime minister uses a merit system, and Lord Walter doesn’t treat people coldly based on their social status,” Lord Julius let out a sigh as he continued. “It makes no sense to gather so many talented people, only to then do it all himself.”

Lord Julius complains about it, but he still likes Lord Walter the way he is.

“So, what will you do?” Lord Julius asked. “It’s not like you’re just going to leave Walter in a hospital bed and head home today as planned, right?”

Mark and I exchanged looks.

Lord Walter had apparently eaten breakfast, then returned to bed. Lady Rachel had mentioned, with a calm expression on her face, that she would be looking after him today too.

"I feel like we have nothing to worry about if Lady Rachel is looking after him," I wrote.

Lord Julius looked at me like the world was ending. "Rachel... Why Walter, of all people?" he grumbled.

"Oh? And here I thought you and Lord Lindgren had every intention of making this match happen ever since you started putting off proposals for marriage from the esteemed duke?" Mark commented.

"Listen, Mark. Just how much do you know about our personal lives? You *do* spend most of your time in Miselle, right?" Lord Julius' face twitched as Mark picked up his cup, feigning ignorance. Lord Julius and Lord Lindgren had nothing against Lord Walter, they just wanted to keep Lady Rachel close to home.

However, Mark's knack for information gathering ought to be feared. Hmm, so that must be what Lady Rachel was talking about back in Miselle. The proposal she received was from a duke's family... Wait a minute, could this family be—

"Yeah, the Wycliffe's. Lady Helena's family. That's why I was surprised when her name came up yesterday." Lord Julius smirked as he confirmed what I was thinking.

Oh... I see now. Although it's a bit late now, I get why Lady Rachel was acting off yesterday.

"Their eldest son—and heir—was away on business but returned last month," he continued. "I have no idea how Rachel caught his eye. She barely ever goes out. Though I could understand him falling in love with her at first sight."

"And if he proposes?" Mark asked.

Lord Julius looked away as he crossed his arms, visibly discontented. "Vexing as it is, he's probably the most suitable candidate yet—regarding his social status, his ability, and how he is as a person. Even if we didn't take his family status into consideration, it would be hard to turn a proposal down if he formally sent a messenger to do so."

But he didn't say they couldn't say no. Nice, Lord Julius. I pictured Lady Helena's smiling face, with her pale blue eyes. If the man they spoke about was

her grandchild, I can imagine him being a nice person. Lady Rachel would get along with someone a rank above her with ease. I should congratulate the happy pairing, but I knew Lady Rachel's true feelings.

Lord Julius shrugged his shoulders and smiled at me wryly. I had to keep quiet regarding what I knew. "I want to prioritize Rachel's feelings as much as possible, but I also must think about the relationship between families. She's much too naive."

"Why not just fortify your defenses around her?" Mark suggested.

"There's zero way I'd let her marry him. I have no intention of letting that happen."

"Yeah, I thought so."

Lord Julius nodded at Mark, who had a know-it-all air about him, before turning to me. "Both my father and I are thinking about Rachel. Since you're already here, why don't you stay a bit longer? You haven't seen the town, right? My parents are disappointed they haven't had much opportunity to speak with you yet too."

The marquis was at work, and Lady Sofia had plans, so neither were home today. Lord Julius had brought his work home with him.

"While that is a tempting offer, I'm not sure that I can walk around in this condition. I appreciate the thought, though. Yes, I'll also pass on the parties and tea parties." My pen smoothly moved across the magic writing device as I carefully turned down Lord Julius' proposals. *His mother wants to go shopping with me... I find that reassuring. I can also see it becoming quite the event, too. However, while I am so grateful for the opportunities, I'll save them until my next visit.*

"You're a tough one, turning down tea parties, dresses, AND shopping. Do you like Miselle *that* much?" he asked me.

"Yeah. I love it there," I responded positively. *"That won't change even if I no longer receive any magic from the forest."* I smiled as I responded. Lord Julius finally gave up with a laugh.

"Margaret, how are you feeling? Have there been any changes?" Mark looked

at me, deftly changing the topic.

Oh, that reminds me. I told them about the fairies' visit last night—they were both shocked when they read what I wrote.

"Fairy Lights... I read the reports, but do they actually exist?" Lord Julius asked.

"They didn't follow you from Miselle?" Mark added.

"I didn't recognize any of them, and they seemed very comfortable here. I think they are fairies that live here in the Royal Capital. Also, that weird feeling I had—that calmed down a little after their visit."

Mark nodded as he read the magic device, putting his hand on his chin. "In that case, I wonder if they have anything to do with the Spirit?"

"Although I have no evidence to support it, I think so too."

Graham, the butler, appeared in the doorway as we talked. "Excuse me. A carriage from Miselle has just arrived," he announced.

"Ah, that's right. I received advance word in the morning. I'll be able to meet Walter's mother," Lord Julius responded.

Huh, Lady Adelaide is here? I eagerly left the living room. As I arrived in the entrance hall, I saw Lady Adelaide getting out of the carriage, followed by something dashing towards me on all fours—*Buddy!*

I also ran towards Buddy—I hadn't seen him in two days—but there was a sharp pain in my left leg, causing me to crouch down.

Ugh, I can't even run a few steps. Buddy started licking my hand. *Thank you, Buddy. You're always so kind.*

"Margaret, are you okay?"

"Ah, Mark. I'm fine. I was so excited to see Buddy, so I got a little carried away. I'm sorry, I forgot all my manners."

I patted Buddy, who had maneuvered himself squarely into my outspread arms, his tail wagging side to side, one more time before taking Mark's hand and standing back up.

“Margaret, are you okay? You shouldn’t run like that,” Lady Adelaide said.

“Ah, yes, I’m sorry.” I told her I was fine, and she gave me a motherly, knowing smile.

Lady Adelaide started to bow when Lord Julius gestured for her to remain as she was.

“Welcome to our humble home. Are you not tired?” he asked.

“Not at all. I apologize for my sudden arrival. Um, so,” Lady Adelaide began to ask about Lord Walter’s condition in place of a greeting.

“He’s had a night’s rest and ate breakfast. Now he’s resting under supervision. He’s doing fine,” Lord Julius assured her.

Lady Adelaide let out a relieved sigh.

“I knew that he was busy. I should have made him rest sooner,” Lord Julius apologized.

“No, it’s not your fault at all... I am grateful that you looked after him and my Margaret here,” Lady Adelaide replied.

“I could say the same. You are no doubt still worried despite knowing he’s okay. Would you like to see him first?” Lord Julius suggested.

Everyone headed to the second story with Graham leading the way. Lord Julius walked beside us, patting Buddy on the head.

“This must be Buddy. You’re free to come along, too,” he said to Buddy.

“Do you like dogs?” Mark asked.

“I’ve heard a lot about Buddy from Rachel.”

Lord Julius chatted with Mark as we walked. It seemed Lord Julius had dogs when he was younger. Apparently, the two Lindgren watchdogs were those dogs’ kids. I recalled seeing the dogs with the guards when we came and went from the estate. *I hope Buddy gets along with them.*

“I see he was also worried about his master. Clever boy,” Lord Julius said.

“Buddy is more reliable than an actual guard in that regard.”

“Oh?”

As we approached the room Lord Walter was in, Marie-Louise came out of the room holding some linen. She gave a polite bow as she noticed us and held the door open.

“Marie-Louise, how is Walter?” Lord Julius asked.

“He’s been resting all morning. He just woke up, actually.”

Lady Adelaide seemed relieved by Marie-Louise’s calm response. We went into the room as Marie-Louise headed downstairs.

“We’re coming in,” Lord Julius announced. “Walter, I bring you guests.”

“Ah, Juli— Oh my, it’s Lady Adelaide and Buddy!” Hearing Lady Rachel’s lively tone, Lord Walter, who was sitting up in bed, looked in our direction with a surprised expression.

Oh, he’s looking a lot better this morning. It’s reassuring seeing him with my own eyes.

“Mother? What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I should be the one asking that, Walter,” Lady Adelaide responded with a sigh. Lady Rachel stood up and motioned for us to come closer to the bed. “You shouldn’t push yourself, Walter.”

“You didn’t have to come all the way here. It wasn’t that bad,” he said.

“Even Daniel is worried about you... Parents worry about their children.” Lady Adelaide sat on a chair near the bed. Her eyes, once colored with worry, narrowed into a kind smile. “When you were younger and took ill, I wouldn’t let anyone else take care of you. Although it’s taken a while, I’ve finally become able to worry about my son again. Let me have my moment.”

“Mother.”

“However, I’d rather you didn’t worry me like this again.”

Lord Walter stayed silent for a while before lightly nodding in response to his mother’s instructions.

The atmosphere in the room, as well as Lord Walter himself, seemed a lot

more relaxed. *That's no doubt thanks to both Lady Adelaide and Lady Rachel, who has been by his side the whole time.*

"I see Lady Rachel has been accompanying you. You're not tired, are you?" Lady Adelaide asked.

"I'm well, thank you. How about you, Lady Adelaide?"

Lady Rachel went on to explain all the events that have happened since Lord Walter collapsed. Lord Walter uncomfortably listened to her. *That's right; you had better do some reflecting.*

"I see. I'm glad he's eaten a little, too," Lady Adelaide said.

"I was about to go to the kitchen again..." Lady Rachel unconfidently responded.

Lady Adelaide looked as if she had realized what was left unsaid. "Can I come with you?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! That would be wonderful!"

"Huh? What are you two—" Lord Walter asked.

"Margaret, would you like to come too?" Lady Rachel asked me, beaming.

Lord Walter seemed panicked as Lady Rachel and Lady Adelaide joined arms and set off to the kitchen.

I'll leave this one to you both, future mother and daughter.

As I waved them off, they enthusiastically left the room, wearing slightly disappointed expressions that I hadn't joined them, but delighted nevertheless to cook together.

"Give it up, Walter," Lord Julius said.

"Easy for you to say with it not being your problem, Julius," Lord Walter quipped.

"Because it's not my problem."

Lord Walter pushed down on his brow as he let out a huge sigh. I unknowingly burst into laughter, causing Lord Walter to glare at me. *If you look at me like that while stroking Buddy, it's not as scary as you think.*

We enjoyed casual conversation until Lady Rachel and Lady Adelaide returned, pushing a food cart filled with potato soup and porridge.



“**WALTER** is fine now, it seems. Maybe we should head back to Miselle? Dr. Daniel’s been looking after the clinic alone the whole time we were here,” Mark said as soon as we had left the guestroom.

“Yeah. Plus, Lady Rachel is looking after him, and Lady Adelaide is here now.”

“Are you really going to head back? I wouldn’t mind you staying longer. How about this? You leave, and Margaret stays,” Lord Julius joked.

“Nice joke.” Mark gave him a fleeting, cold glance. Lord Julius shrugged. I laughed at the now common interaction between the two and returned to my own room. The servants had packed up my things and swiftly brought my luggage down to the carriage.

Although the head chef, Mr. Max, was busy in the kitchen, he had come to see me off. He enthused about how good Lady Adelaide’s cooking was.

“I get it. She looks so laidback as she cooks, and never makes a mistake. I’m jealous of her talent.”

“She’s so well-versed in classic recipes,” Mr. Max said. “Please let me visit Miselle next time, so I can learn from her.”

“If Lady Adelaide is okay with it, then I would love to have you. Though won’t it cause issues if the head chef leaves?”

“I could visit on my days off. I usually visit restaurants in the town for research, so it falls under the same purpose,” he said.

“You’re very welcome to improve your cooking,” Lord Julius said, joining in. “The souvenirs Rachel brings back from Miselle are usually gone in seconds. Discuss your schedule with Graham and learn as much as you can.”

Even Lord Julius is gung-ho about the idea. That reminds me, I remember Mr. Pat from the village restaurant said that he worked at a restaurant in the Royal Capital when he was younger. I feel like he’d get on well with Mr. Max. Seems like we will have much to look forward to even during the winter season!

I looked up from the entrance hall at the second-floor window where Lady Rachel, Lady Adelaide, and Buddy were standing to see us off. I waved at them, and as I headed over to where the carriage waited, I was stopped by what felt like a cold, chilly wind despite wearing a coat.

“What’s wrong?” Mark asked.

I looked around. No blades of grass were blowing in the wind. It was that slight odd feeling I had experienced since coming to the capital—this time I could feel it, not just sense it. *I wonder if I’m imagining things.*

I shook my head to let Mark know it was nothing and carried on walking when —

A loud *kiiiii* noise sounded above our heads. Mark pulled me closer to him. He held me securely in his arms, but the scenery around us began to bend and warp as there was a huge gust of wind. It was even stronger than Mark’s grip on me.

What’s going on?

The wind whistled through the air, carrying the sound of Mark trying to say something, but it was muffled by his coat as he kept me locked in his arms.

Before I worked out what was going on, I heard a familiar, bright voice—it sounded panicked.

“Margaret, you here?!”

Someone had appeared a small distance away from the front garden—*Hugh?!?*

“Hugh, what have I told you about using teleportation magic without letting me know first!” Lord Julius shouted.

“Sorry, Lord Julius, urgent matters and all. Oh, sorry, Max. Uh, Mark and Roy are fine too. You guys handled it well! That’s good.”

Where on earth did he come from?

Mark let out a huge sigh. I could move freely again—within the confines of his arms, still—so I looked around. Hugh, who had appeared out of nowhere, was arguing with a very pale-faced Lord Julius. Mr. Max was sitting down on the ground, his shoulders rising and falling with his ragged breathing. Roy didn’t

look too great either.

Wait, I remember seeing this before... That's it! Mana sickness! I guess it's because Hugh is here. I looked up at Mark who nodded, wearing a bitter expression.

"He came here using magic. Forbidden magic."

I looked at him shocked, my mouth wide open. He teleported? Woah, they have that kind of cool magic here too... I think I heard about it a little from Hugh before. I never thought I'd see it with my own eyes.

Although Hugh was in the middle of trying to calm Lord Julius down, he headed over to me.

"I don't have any time today, so please address any complaints to the Magic Academy. Margaret, let's head to the forest. The Spirit is there! Awesome, we already have a carriage prepared!" Hugh exclaimed.

"Wow, how lucky for you, Hugh! Not. Wait a minute, the Spirit? You want me to go see her? Now?"

"Huh, what's that? Do you not want to see her?" Hugh motioned me over, took my arm, and peered into my eyes to see why I looked so torn.

"You see, it's not a matter of whether I want to see her or not. It's more, I have absolutely no idea what is going on right now."

"Hugh, it's too last minute," Mark chided.

"That's right, Mark. But you see, the Spirit just shows up whenever she wants. We have no idea when she'll disappear, so the headmaster told me to hurry. You can come too, Mark. I'll explain everything on the way there and you can sort out your feelings along the way. Roy, to the forest, please!"

Laidback as ever, Hugh!

I was absolutely dumbfounded by his behavior. I then noticed Lord Julius' tired face, and the shocked faces of Lady Rachel and Lady Adelaide at the window upstairs as I waved goodbye from the carriage.

"Were you just about to return to Miselle? Phew, glad I made it in time," Hugh said, sighing with relief.

“Our bags are already loaded, so we can just head straight back to Miselle now,” Mark responded.

“No, no, entertain me a little. Right, Margar— Margaret?”

“Ah, it’s fine. I’m listening. However, I’m still feeling a cold chill in my clothes. Or rather, a restless feeling. Or something like that.”

I peered inside my sleeves when a small sparkling golden fairy came flying out.

“A Fairy Light?!” Hugh exclaimed.

It had energetically flown out of my clothes, but it seemed it didn’t quite expect to be in a carriage.

Woah, watch out!

The fairy, almost smacking into the roof, suddenly changed direction and clung onto my arm, which I was holding up toward it. It then slowly edged its way back into my sleeve.

Hyah, it’s so ticklish!

“Wow...”

“How long has it been in there?”

Hugh looked at me, his eyes and mouth wide open, while Mark still looked surprised despite having more than seen his fair share of them at the Festival of Eve.

How long...? Actually, just how long were they in there? Is that what I was feeling before? The fairy moved around within my clothes. It had calmed down, occasionally poking its head out every now and then. I found myself smiling at its childish behavior. *You want to have a look, but it’s hard to come out because there’s people around, right? But you’re so curious.* If it were a fairy from Miselle, they would stay completely hidden. This fairy looked like one I saw yesterday.

“Fairy Lights act as guides leading to the Spirit, so I wonder if it came to see you,” Hugh guessed.

“You might be right, Hugh. Hey, did you come to see me?” As I asked the fairy that, it got embarrassed and hid away. *How come you’re so shy? So cute.*

“If she sent the Fairy Lights to meet Margaret then surely the Spirit will wait until Margaret arrives. Is there any need to hurry?” Mark asked.

“You’re too naive, Mark. There’s no limit to how fickle the Spirit can be.”

“You don’t sound very persuasive when you’re wearing a huge grin like that, Hugh.”

“I’m sorry. I’m just having too much fun.”

Mark held his head in his hands like he was suffering from a headache just watching Hugh. “Enough games... So, care to fill us in?” he pressed.

“Ah, yeah. So, I got word from the headmaster, who is currently in the forest, that the Spirit had appeared and to call for Margaret. Then, I heard you were leaving for Miselle today, so I rushed right over here,” Hugh explained.

“So that’s why you used teleportation magic. You do know you should only use that in times of disaster or actual emergencies, right?” Mark pointed out.

“Huh, wasn’t this an emergency? Plus, sometimes I like to check if I can still use it. I have the ability, after all.”

Hugh just wanted an excuse to use teleportation magic... Yeah, I’m starting to feel your pain now, Lord Julius.

It didn’t take long until our carriage—with the unexpected fairy guest—arrived at the Royal Forest.

I stepped out of the carriage and was greeted by an expansive, green forest. In front of it stood the Magic Academy’s headmaster.

“Oh, headmaster. I thought you were waiting in the forest,” said Hugh.

“I’ve confirmed it’s the Spirit light, but the forest has yet to open,” replied the headmaster.

“Oh, I didn’t know that could happen.”

“Hello. Thanks for yesterday,” I casually greeted the headmaster.

The forest was usually protected by a barrier that opened up when the Spirit

appeared, but that had yet to happen, according to the headmaster.

“Even though I had you all rush here, we’re still waiting,” he said as he turned towards the forest. Although it was the beginning of winter, the trees were a verdant green as if it were summer. *I wonder if you can still gather berries here.* It didn’t feel like it was my first time here. The trees were different from the ones found in the forest in Miselle, so I wondered if it was the atmosphere that felt familiar.

“Hugh, that flower blooming over there. You only see them growing during summer, right?” Mark asked.

“Ah, yeah, about that. There’s no sense of time in this forest, so no seasons, either,” Hugh said.

Hmm? I feel like Hugh just mumbled something very interesting. Mark looks surprised, too. Or rather, suspicious.

“Care to elaborate?” Mark asked, narrowing his eyes.

“It’s all right. We’re always going into the forest and we’re fine!” Hugh waved him off.

“It’s not fine at all. Margaret, you don’t have to go.”

“Um, well. I understand your concerns, Mark. But I don’t know what it is—I feel like something has been calling to me since I got out of the carriage.”

It was different from the feeling I had ever since leaving Miselle. I thought I suddenly heard someone’s voice. I strained my eyes, making out a collection of fairies within the forest.

The one hiding in my sleeve flew out and headed towards them, waving at me—*Come.*

I felt the words intuitively. I pulled on Mark’s sleeve and leaned over, putting my forehead on his.

“I’m going. I’ll probably be right back, so don’t wor—”

“Margaret?”

When I heard Mark’s slightly panicked voice, I realized I was surrounded by

fairies. There were tons of golden lights in front of me. It was so bright, I reflexively shut my eyes. I heard a rush of wind close to my ears as I felt the sensation of Mark's fingers and forehead disappear.

Everything suddenly went quiet. I lowered my arms, which I had thrown up to protect myself, and slowly opened my eyes.

I was in a room I didn't recognize.

The first thing I saw was an amber-colored wooden floor made from polished mahogany. I placed both hands on the polished floor and sat down. In front of me was a curved wall—like something you would see in a tower. There were several narrow windows placed vertically in the wall. Through the windows, I could see a forest bathed in rays of sunlight, backed by a summer blue sky. Water sparkled in the sunlight.

I suddenly heard a piano key play behind me.

Shocked, I turned around. There was a crimson-colored cloth sofa. Opposite it was a small grand piano. It was made of dark brown wood with an antique inlaid design. There were fairies frolicking around it.

Someone was sitting there with their back facing me. She was playing a song on the piano. She had long golden hair that resembled moonlight and white skin that almost looked transparent. Her surroundings were brightly lit, making it look like she was glowing.

Although she was in the shape of a human, she didn't look human—

“...Are you the Spirit? Huh? My voice—”

I was so confused that I ended up asking an obvious question, but I was startled by my own voice. The sudden jolt caused me to twist my leg at an odd angle in an attempt to get a better look at her. I tried to stand up in a rush of movement, which caused pain to shoot through my leg.

“Agh!” I cried out in pain.

Ouch! I feel like it hurts more now that I can talk! The pain was worse than when I saw Buddy at the Lindgren estate and ran over to him. It's somewhat nostalgic. I wonder if I've sprained it. And I've finally been able to walk on my

own lately.

I sat down again, and all the fairies gathered around me. They clung to my shoulders and stroked my sore left foot.

“T-Thanks... I’m all right now.” I smiled at the fairies who were looking at me concerned. My foot hurt less. *I wonder if it’s thanks to them touching it.*

My voice sounded weird. I wondered if it was due to me not using my vocal cords for a while, or if it had just been too long since I last heard it. *It is my voice, but it just doesn’t sound right. It’s unusual.*

Once the pain subsided, and I was more aware of my voice, several fairies surrounded me. I felt my body float.

“Huh?!” I squeaked.

I softly floated through the air, landing softly on the only other piece of furniture in the room, the sofa. The fairies proudly puffed out their chests, fishing for compliments. I unwittingly smiled.

“Great job. Was I not heavy?” I thanked them and patted the tops of their heads with my fingertips, earning their laughter. Their voices sounded like the running water of a river.

“How cute.”

Before I knew it, the Spirit, who was playing the piano, had finished her song and was heading in my direction. *Oh, my.*

She was wearing a simple dress that sparkled like the stars every time it moved. Her bare toes were visible under the hem of her dress, which was formed by several folds. She was breathtakingly beautiful, her eyes like precious jewels.

Hey now, who said the Spirit and I looked like one another? They couldn’t have been more wrong about that! I questioned myself internally. The Spirit then pointed to my foot as she looked down with an apologetic gaze.

“Pain. Unable to walk. Voice, too.”

She had eyes that carried the wisdom of an eternity, yet a childlike way of speaking. She seemed so ephemeral, like the slightest touch could make her

crumble into dust. She looked like she was going to cry. I panicked to find a response.

“U-Um, it doesn’t hurt anymore. It’s been well cared for and well, as for my voice, I’ve been managing.”

My foot had been healed to the point that I could walk without issue. I used a magic writing device to communicate without my voice, and I could talk directly with certain people by placing my forehead on theirs.

“Really?” the Spirit questioned.

“I heard you sent me a lot of magic. It’s thanks to that.”

I looked directly at the Spirit and talked clearly. When I nodded as I answered, the Spirit looked relieved. Although she wasn’t the best at speaking, I could sense what she was feeling.

“I wanted to see you. Margaret... Margaret?”

“Yes, it’s Margaret.”

Now that I have my voice, I can probably give my Japanese name too. But I like being “Margaret from Miselle.” The fact I can say that without much dejection is no doubt thanks to everything that has happened since spring.

Although I had no solid proof of it, I had a feeling that I would be meeting with the Spirit at some point.

Meeting her like this, it feels like “finally I’ve met her” and “this was bound to happen.” I can even say I feel overwhelmingly relieved I finally got to see her. It’s like meeting a family member. I feel like I’ve been with her all along... She puts my heart at ease.

I had one thing I had to tell the Spirit.

“Um, thank you for bringing me here.”

To here. To this world.

Living in Miselle, where I’ve learned so much about myself and life. Meeting all sorts of wonderful people. All of it was thanks to the Spirit.

The Spirit opened her eyes wide in response to my words and smiled. Even

though there was no wind, her hair gently swayed, resembling a moon in a dark night sky.

Ah, she really is a Spirit.

I had realized that their human form was a mere shadow. *Now I get it.*

The figure of the Spirit began to blur. She smiled and kept eye contact with me. I blinked, and the air around her suddenly changed—from a childlike feeling to a mature young woman. Although she looked the same, it was like her personality had traveled through time.

“I apologize. If only I had enough strength.”

I continued blinking in shock, then I heard her fluent speech. The words didn’t match her mouth movements, but—

“Is that... Japanese?” I asked.

“Yes, this is your language, isn’t it? I don’t have enough power to keep the present, so I borrowed some from the past.”

Remembering to blink, I looked around at my surroundings. The fairies were all suspended in the air, unmoving. I felt something was off, namely how silent everything was, so I softly reached out to one of the fairies—only for my finger to go straight through them.

“Huh?”

“Only you and I are in this time. We don’t have long.”

The Spirit approached me. It didn’t seem like she had walked—she just appeared before me. She kneeled before me on one leg, making no noise. All I could do was look.

She raised her hand as if she were waving. I felt my own hand drawn to hers. I moved mine forward, placing it on her hand. It was like we were mirroring one another.

It felt like my hand could both reach and not reach, as if there was a distance between us.

“You are...”

"I used to be human once. I've experienced many lives and deaths, then became something known as the Spirit... However, I always forget that, being all alone."

A pale, fleeting light began to spill out of the small distance between our hands. The image of a vivid, sparkling ocean began to fill my mind.

The salty sea wind on my skin. The sound of the waves stirring my emotions. In my arms, there is a small girl with amber brown hair, sleeping soundly. A young boy cheers with joy as he runs towards the sea, followed by a father figure, hurriedly chasing after him. Over the horizon, there are endless waves, splashing in the sunlight, with the shadows of fish below.

Is this someone's memories? Or the future? I wondered.

"It is entirely your choice if you wish to convey this or forget. Margaret, the Festival of Eve was beautiful."

The Spirit thanked me, narrowing her deep, dark indigo eyes as she smiled. A bright light emerged from her hand, causing me to close my eyes.



TO put it simply, I didn't go back to Miselle that day.

I lost consciousness after joining hands with the Spirit, or rather, it felt like I fell asleep. When I woke up, it was morning.

The birds were singing cheerfully, and I could feel something warm yet wet on my cheek. I opened my eyes, greeted by an unfamiliar ceiling and Buddy. *I remember something like this happening before. The sky was a brilliant blue that day.* Instead of waking up on the grass, this time, I had been sleeping in a bed.

My arm felt heavy as I stretched it out to pet Buddy. He responded in a cheerful yawn and pushed his face into mine. *Ahh, I love you, Buddy.*

I tried to call out to him but noticed that my voice was gone. I had expected as much, so I wasn't too disappointed. I moved my legs underneath the blanket, and it didn't hurt. *Oh, I see,* I thought to myself. Looking back, I do think I was a little laidback about the whole situation.

I stopped stroking Buddy and sat up. I was a little unsteady as I leaned up against the headboard. I looked down; I was still dressed in the same clothes as yesterday. *Oh, there's an insane number of creases in my dress.*

I looked around the room. The walls and floor were made from wood. There were bare wooden beams on the ceiling, giving it the look of a luxury wooden hut. It was quite snug and compact, reminding me of a single room in a business hotel on a business trip.

Through the skylight window, all I could make out was a blue sky. I couldn't see any other surroundings. Along with the bed, there was a small chest of drawers and a table that was attached to the wall. On the table lay my bag, which had my magic writing device and hair ornament inside.

Hey, Buddy. Where are we?

I asked Buddy, while rubbing his fur. A knock came at the door in response, and in came Mark.

"Margaret!"

He looked so relieved as he approached me.

"I'm sorry. I made you worry, didn't I?"

"Not really... You came back right away. Well, it felt longer when I was waiting."

Hearing voices, Hugh popped his head in. "Margaret, you awake? I'm coming in!"

"Uh, you know, I just woke up. By the way, where is this?"

I pulled up the blanket and hid the bottom half of my face as I pointed and asked Mark. Apparently, we were in a guardroom owned by the Magic Academy, not far from the forest.

"Guardroom... Oh that's right, there was a building by the forest. Oh, then, is this someone's bed? Ack, I'm sorry for stealing it from them."

"That's what you're worried about?" Hugh laughed. "Nothing's changed, I see."

No, Hugh, it's important. I could cause issues with their work. Although it was unavoidable, I feel bad. Not to mention, you haven't had a wink of sleep, Mark, looking after Lord Walter all night, yet here I am dreaming... Dreaming? That reminds me, I had the weirdest dream. I felt like I could slightly remember it. There was a lot of light shining, someone's voice... The spray of water. The sea? Or something else.

"What's wrong?" Mark poking my cheek and Buddy licking my hand brought me back down to earth.

What was that?

Part of my mind was foggy, but my heart was clear and happy. *In that case, I guess I don't need to remember. I'm sure if it's important, I'll remember.*

"Anyway, I feel fine," I wrote.

"The headmaster is at the Royal Palace, so tell us all about it when he's back. How are you feeling?"

I told Mark I was feeling okay, but he still seemed anxious.

"Take it easy today."

"Margaret has Buddy, so you can go home to Miselle ahead of her, Mark."

"Hugh."

"Woah, I was joking, don't get mad."

Watching them have their usual exchange calmed me down. I was laughing with Buddy snuggled up to me, when Mark turned towards me.

"A while after you went in, the usual entrance to the forest was surrounded by Fairy Lights. As we tried to approach it, you came back."

"I see. I wonder if the fairies brought me back. They did seem pretty strong."

"You were sound asleep and wouldn't wake up, so we just brought you here. We thought people might be worried, so we sent word to Marquis Lindgren, which led to Buddy joining us," Hugh explained, following up after Mark. He seemed to be enjoying the whole situation, as usual.

Oh, and thank you, Buddy. I wrapped my arms around him and gave him a full

pet job. *Ah, you're so fluffy! It's so calming.*

"Ah, that reminds me! Do you guys always have conversations like that?" Hugh asked.

Ah, that's right. Before I got sucked into the forest, Mark and I put our foreheads together to chat. I was in a rush, so I did it without thinking, but I guess Hugh saw us.

Looking at how happy Hugh was, I could already tell what he was thinking without even asking.

"You won't be able to hear her anyway, so there's no point in even trying," Mark dismissed the idea before it was even put into words.

"We won't know without trying. Confirmation is crucial! I didn't get a good look at it, and if you don't want me doing it, the headmaster will want to instead."

The two argued with me, the main person involved, standing off to one side. *These two argue like brothers. Hugh is older, yet he seems like the younger brother.*

Hugh was adamant that if he didn't try it, he wouldn't know. I added that we had considered letting him try before. Mark kept saying no and dismissing the idea, when Hugh suddenly sat on the bed.

"Huh, I thought we'd try it after I got up and was ready. At least let me wash my face and do my hair," I wrote.

"I can't wait for that. I wanna do it now!" Hugh said, leaning over and putting his forehead against mine. *Oh, you're close.*

As Hugh often needed to be close to "see" with his magic, it made sense that he was totally fine with this distance, keeping his eyes open. So, not wanting to lose, I stared right into his emerald eyes and spoke.

Hello, can you hear me?

"I can't hear anything."

We tried it multiple times, but it seemed my voice didn't reach Hugh. *I guess it doesn't work on friends.* Hugh looked disappointed, mumbling that he

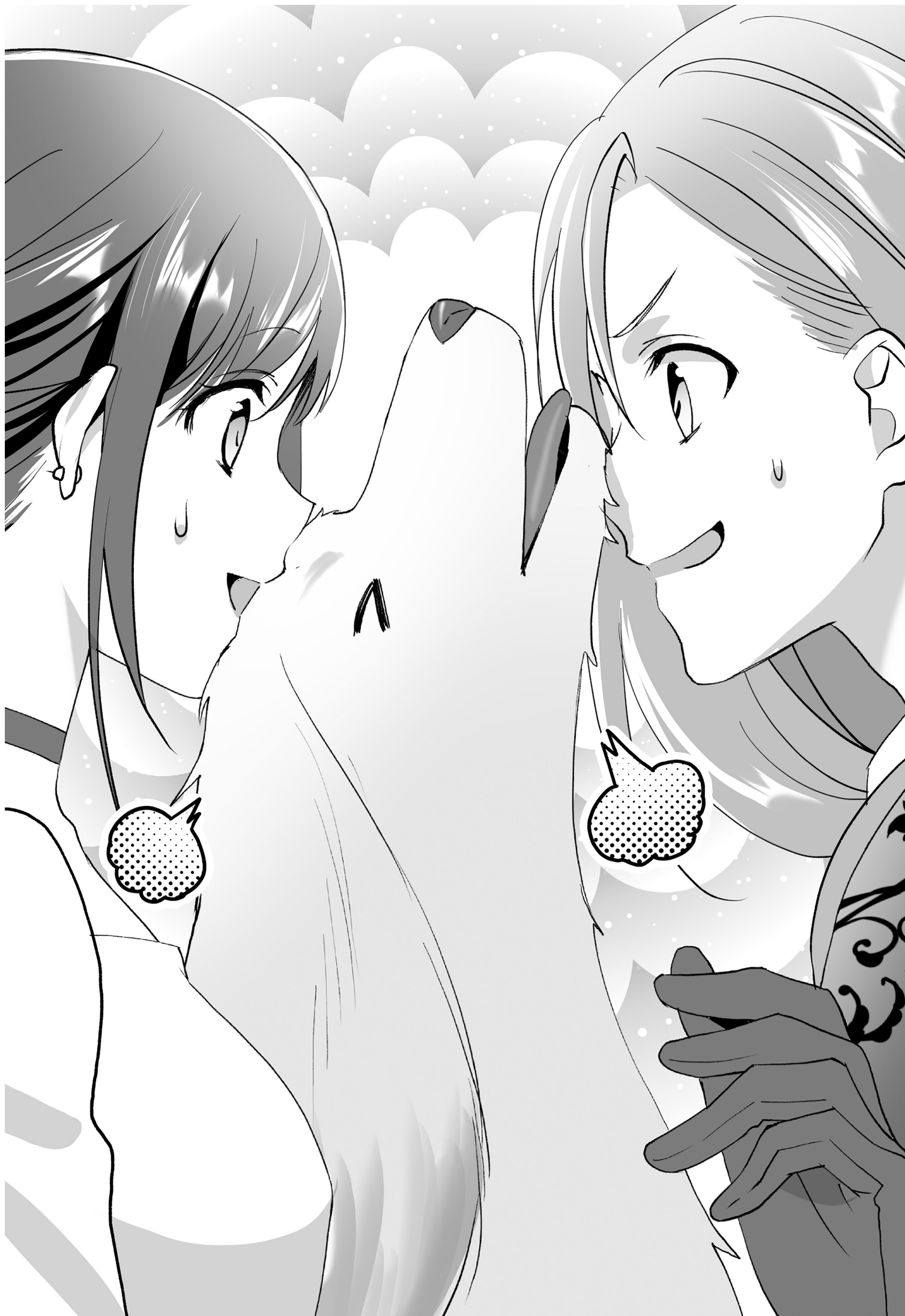
couldn't even see the magic very well, either.

"I guess if we aren't outside, I can't see the magic. Even though I had a chance to test it," he grumbled.

"Well, you confirmed it. Surely that's enough," Mark chimed in.

"Nah, one more time!"

Hugh leaned in closer, nearly covering Buddy, who was sitting on my lap, when I suddenly felt something soft and fluffy on my face.



“Buddy...” Hugh mumbled, his attempt blocked by Buddy. Mark complimented Buddy from behind, which I found funny.

That was around the time the headmaster returned to the guardroom.



ONCE I finished getting ready, I left the nap room and headed towards the reception. The headmaster was sitting on the sofa with Hugh standing next to it. Mark stood behind me, resting a hand on my shoulder. We had let Buddy out to play as he had been cooped up in carriages a lot since yesterday. *He’s no doubt playing with the fairies.*

I told the three of them about what had happened with the Spirit and the room I was in with the red sofa and the piano. From what they could discern, I had been in a building called the concert hall, where the Spirit usually appeared.

“My voice had returned, but my leg hurt exactly like it did on the first day I came to this world.” As I wrote that, Hugh’s eyes sparkled with curiosity, whereas Mark wore a complicated expression.

“Oh, I wonder if that’s limited to that place, or was it the Spirit’s power at work? Right now, it’s just how it normally is for you, right?”

“I’m glad your foot is fine, but it’s too bad about your voice.”

“Maybe. I’m not too bothered by it, so I’m fine.”

“And you say you can’t remember everything that happened?” the headmaster asked.

“Ah, that’s right. I’m sorry.”

The headmaster was obviously disappointed.

“I’m sorry, for some reason, my memory is really foggy. I met the Spirit, spoke with her, held hands... Then I can’t remember what happened after the light shone from her hands. I feel like I heard something or saw something.”

“There’s not much we can do about it, headmaster,” Hugh said. “This was the first time the Caller met with the Spirit, so this is more than good enough for now.”

“I guess so.”

Ah, wait. I do remember something. I struggled to put it into words.

“The Spirit used to be human?”

The three of them were surprised, but I was sure I remembered that correctly.

It was hard to say if they were in fact a human before they became a spirit, or if they just held human memories. It wasn't clear if she was a reincarnation or what.

But I wonder how it feels for her, not being human, but remembering being human.

The Spirit cast her eyes downward, saying being alone makes her forget. *I wonder if she's clinging onto her fading memory, or maybe it's not memories she doesn't want to lose, but something else.*

The Spirit with the power to destroy nations and to hold all balance within the world. A beautiful entity. So far removed from humans, yet in the form of a human.

“Saying that she's unique or irreplaceable sounds good, but is she not lonely, all by herself? Not to mention, having memories of her time as a human.”

“...It is said that by the time the Spirit's existence stabilizes, around ten years have passed in human time. They only ever summon one Caller, and there have been no records of the same Spirit summoning a second Caller,” the headmaster said, as if recalling something. “Spirits summon a Caller as soon as they get the smallest amount of magic.”

“I guess you could say Callers are required as a boundary between humans and the Spirits,” Hugh added, which got me thinking.

“Just like how I wanted a direct link to this world, maybe the Spirit needs a direct link to humans so that they don't forget something important when they're most vulnerable. So that they aren't swept away by their own magic. They do this through fairies and a human not from this world, a Caller. They use this person's eyes to experience the world.”

“It’s anyone’s guess, but that may be it,” the headmaster said, looking out towards the forest.

A place with no time or seasons, a place where one can transcend time with the Spirit.

“By the way, Hugh. What’s happening with the magic the Spirit was channeling?”

Hugh’s eyes went wide in response to the headmaster’s question. “The only thing that has changed is, the source of the magic is now the Royal Forest instead of Miselle forest. When she was at the Lindgren estate or the Royal Castle, the channel was cut off due to the distance.”

Even Mark seemed surprised by that. “Is it the same after meeting the Spirit?” he asked.

“I thought it would change too, so I was surprised. I guess it’s low yet stable, now.”

I see. So that’s what I was feeling when I was in the castle and the Lindgren estate, it was the magic being cut off. Explains why I felt better when the fairies came to visit at night. Then, in that case...

“If she stops needing magic from the forest, her voice might return.”

Ah, Mark. I was thinking the exact same thing. I turned around to face Mark, who was standing behind the sofa I was sitting on. I looked up, and we placed our foreheads together.

“Honestly, I don’t really mind not having my voice.”

“That’s a whole different issue.” Mark laughed, patting me on the head. Hugh, who had been watching us, shot up.

“What was that magic channeling just now?! That was awesome! Do it again!”

“No.”

“Hugh, I expect a report,” the headmaster ordered.

“No can do, I don’t have enough samples to go off of. Ah, the magic is fine. It’s awesome and doesn’t seem to have any lasting effects. It disappeared instantly.

Shame, I wanted to see more of it.”

I smiled at their usual back and forth. Mark then reached his hand out to me.

“Shall we head home?”

I looked back at the other sofa, where the headmaster nodded. Hugh grinned and said, “Until next time!”

I then took Mark’s hand and headed outside. Buddy ran over to us from the direction of the forest. The fairies that were clinging to his silver-gray tail all headed back towards the forest, as if they were dancing.

I waved goodbye to the Magic Academy employees who were looking towards the Fairy Lights flying away, the two men dressed in robes with their magical crests, and finally, I faced the forest and waved with a smile.

See you later. I’m glad I got to meet you.

The forest shone with light in response.

For some reason, I felt as if the Spirit was singing when she was playing the piano. *The next time I see her, I’ll sing with her. I wonder if we can sing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” together.*

And thus ended my first visit to the Royal Capital.

Chapter 5: Changes

LADY Adelaide returned to Miselle a few days after Lord Walter finished recuperating at home. It seemed they spent the first two days at the Lindgren estate before spending the remainder of the time at the Dustin estate.

In the ten years since Lady Adelaide moved to Miselle, the butlers, maids, and other staff at the Dustin estate had changed several times. I wondered if Lady Adelaide felt more relaxed knowing that none of the servants she knew back then still worked there. During her days at the Dustin estate, she said she spent most of her time in the kitchen. At the risk of sounding obvious, the head chef displayed his disapproval of having the lady of the house use the kitchen.

However, the head of the house, Lord Walter, asked the chef to let Lady Adelaide use the kitchen, and just like the head chef of the Lindgren estate, she had become enamored with Lady Adelaide's skill. *No surprise there.* They shared recipes and cooking methods. The head chef was also a woman, so they apparently had gotten on very well.

Dr. Daniel smiled at Lady Adelaide, who got busy writing down her recipes once she came home, wondering if she should take them with her to the Royal Capital next time. It seemed the doctor also welcomed Lady Adelaide making new memories in that place, overwriting her old memories. It seemed the two of them were planning to go together for their next visit.

As for Lady Rachel, she had asked to stay at the Dustin estate, but Lord Lindgren and Lord Julius didn't give her permission, so she visited every day instead. She had kept a close eye on Lord Walter, who attempted to work in secret. She also sent away guests who were visiting to ask unreasonable requests under the guise of a welfare visit, and she helped Lady Adelaide with cooking. She seemed to quite enjoy her time there.

According to Hugh, who had visited the Dustin estate, the servants had taken to calling Lady Rachel "the lady of the house." *I don't think they're wrong to call*

her that.

Lady Rachel was currently visiting the Lindgren territory, but she and Lord Walter continued sending letters to one another during her time there too. Lord Walter often looked pleased when her letters arrived, according to Hugh.

Lord Julius seemed upset that Lord Walter was getting more letters addressed to him. *I can imagine the look on his face.* I had heard from Lord Julius that the duke had stopped sending them requests for Lady Rachel's hand in marriage. Meanwhile, Lord Julius occasionally interrupted—or rather, worried about Lord Walter's health, so he went to see him regularly. He mentioned that when Lord Walter returned to work, he began relying on his subordinates more.

Training your subordinates is an important duty as someone's superior, so it's good he's doing that. Not to mention, it's difficult for the subordinates to rest if their boss never does so.

The day for my official Spirit Caller visit to the Royal Capital had been finally decided. The plan was to push it further ahead, and have it line up with the announcement of the children's book that was supposed to be finished by the spring. Lady Helena seemed to be getting along fine with the illustrations. Lord Walter, who had already seen the illustrations, sent me a letter singing their praises. *I'm so excited to see them myself.*

Eventually, my first year in this world ended, and we welcomed the new year. There were new year events, however only the people in the Royal Palace and Temple did them. We spent the new year like we would any other day in Miselle. It seemed the Festival of Eve was more of an event for the public.

In my old world, I would work right up until New Year's Eve, then would start work early on New Year's Day. I never had New Year's Eve soba, a dish we would traditionally eat, nor were there any bells nearby. It was customary in Japan to ring the bell 108 times on New Year's Eve, so it didn't feel too strange to me that I didn't do this in Miselle, either.

It's our first snow this winter, and I'm busy harvesting the garden. I've been waiting for a day like this since summer.

In summer, I would often harvest tomatoes from Lady Adelaide's garden. The bright red, ripe tomatoes on the plants were so rich and delicious. I mostly used

the big ones for cooking, and the small ones would be put into a lovely glass with a lid and served as a small snack.

There were no convenience stores or supermarkets where one could simply pick up some snacks. So, whenever I felt like a snack, or I was a little thirsty, I would just throw one or two tomatoes into my mouth. They were relatively chewy, and their juice was the perfect amount of sweet. I spent every day of summer in the fields. I noticed in the corner of the garden, in a small space between the forest and the fields, there were several trees with white flowers blooming on them.

Their fleshy, oval-shaped, vibrant green leaves were somewhat familiar. I calmed my overly expectant heart and asked Lady Adelaide about them—she answered exactly as I'd expected.

"In winter, they grow small, yellow fruits."

Small yellow fruits—yes, kumquats! To be honest, they're my favorite. I love any kind of fruit, but I especially like sweet and sour citrus fruits, with a refreshing aftertaste. Kumquats are great on their own, and wonderful in jam or boiled in sugar to make a candy. They don't need to be peeled, and they look stunning growing on trees. They're just a great fruit.

According to Lady Adelaide, so many of them grew that she struggled to eat them all, so she often just left them on the tree. *Well, what can I say, it's like these trees were waiting for me. Don't worry, kumquats! I'll harvest you all this year!*

Usually, to have a successful, delicious harvest, the fruits would have to be thinned out. In other words, the less nice-looking fruits would be culled. But there was no need to do that with the kumquat tree. *How amazing.*

At the very least, I pruned some branches, so it wouldn't be as overcrowded. As a result of that, I got Lady Adelaide's stamp of approval. She commented on the trees, saying that we should have a good harvest this year. *Yay.*

I might thin out the fruit next year, too. But the size they're at now is easy to eat, so it'll be a shame if they get too big. There are a variety of kumquat trees, so maybe I can test one tree and compare.

So, I waited for the green fruits to ripen yellow... At one point, I got ahead of myself and tried one, but they were really sour. That's my and Buddy's secret, though.

I spent my days waiting. The fruits had changed color and I figured they were ready, so I plucked one off the tree, and although it was bad-mannered of me, nibbled at it on the spot. *They should be ready soon.*

I stopped myself from reaching for another and headed back to the estate. I picked up my special harvesting basket, which saw a lot of activity back when it was blueberry season, and prepared everything for when the kumquats were ready.

I went on my merry way with the basket fastened to me underneath my winter coat. The trees themselves weren't that tall, and the fruit had grown on the lower parts of the tree, so they were easier to harvest. Plus, with both of my hands free, I made good progress. Fastening the basket to me was a good idea.

With the energetic Buddy running around me, his breath white in the cold air, I started picking the amber-gold fruits. The fruits had a light dusting of snow on top, and due to them being exposed to the chilly morning wind, they were cold to the touch.

The wind carried the faint smell of citrus. *Mm, it's so refreshing. I wonder why picking fruit makes me feel so energetic. It feels different to when I cut flowers for decoration, pick parsley, or collect eggs. It feels uniquely special. I wonder if it's the sensation of picking fruit. That said, it's different when I pick eggplants or cucumbers.*

I pondered over that as I made my way around several trees, plucking fruit as I went. I had a sizable amount in my basket. *Uh-oh, that's no good. If I pick too many, there won't be any left for next time.*

Deciding to stop there, I headed to the kitchen to wash them. First, I put them in the special glass I usually reserved for the small tomatoes and headed to the dining room table.

Winter was a season that lacked color, so I decided to put the glass there to brighten up the room with the orange color from the fruits. Eating them was a good way to get vitamins and keep any colds away. In my old world, kumquats

were expensive, and as I lived alone with a measly salary, I couldn't have them daily. *Now I can just easily get them from the garden... I'm in paradise.*

To stop myself from eating them all, I decided I would make the rest into candied fruits. Jam would be nice too, but I was feeling like candied sweets today.

Removing the stems from kumquats was like removing stems from apricots. *It's satisfying seeing them fall.*

I used a knife to make a shallow cut all the way around the fruit. Unlike peaches and apricots, kumquats were small enough that it was difficult to hold them in my hand. So, I found it easier to put them down on a chopping board and turn them around as the knife glided over them. There were people who would cut plenty of notches, then remove the seeds. I kept them as is. *Kumquats don't have that many seeds, and it's such a bother... ahem. Erm, rather, they are like grapes. Just take them out when you eat them and it's a non-issue.*

Oh, I do recommend you take the seeds out for small children or the elderly. I always end up messing around with the fruit too much when trying to take the seeds out, resulting in them being misshapen. It's a shame because they're so small and cute. I think the problem is that I'm too awkward with my hands. I could probably do it if I tried a little harder.

Kumquats that were sold in stores normally were fine to just be washed, then boiled. As these kumquats were the wild variety, their skin was a little tough, so boiling them should remove the bitterness and astringent taste. It wasn't that hard to do, all I had to do was parboil them.

I boiled them in plenty of water for around five minutes, then discarded that water, and put them into a bowl with newly poured water where I left them for around one hour. Just like when I made marmalade, it was okay to use the quicker method when making candied kumquat. If they were quite bitter or the skin was hard, I would recommend adding a little baking soda as they boiled.

Once I had removed the acidity, I drained the water with the kumquats and put them into a pan that I often used to make jam. I added just enough water to cover the fruit and put it on a medium heat. Once it began to boil, I turned the

heat down and let it simmer.

While it simmered, I prepared the sugar. I would need about half the weight of the kumquats in sugar. *Yeah, around half. Even though it's not jam, we use half.* I added the sugar, removed the scum when it came to the top, then continued boiling it. *Unlike jam, there is no need to boil the water content out of the kumquats.* Usually, I would put the lid on, but I decided to put a drop-lid on top too. I then put the pan lid on at an angle, so it had two lids covering it.

As for how long it'll take, yeah... When the skin becomes transparent and soft, and the broth starts to thicken is a good estimate to aim for. That does depend on the size and the softness of the fruit. All I can recommend is to just keep an eye on it.

After a while, I turned off the heat and put the lid firmly on the pot, allowing it to cool down. *When working with kumquats, even though they keep their shape well into cooking, when they're finished, they end up shriveling up. It always disappoints me. While they're boiling, the juice from the kumquats spills out and when they're cooled, the sudden change in temperature makes the fruit wrinkly. I remember one of the older residents at my apartment complex telling me that. That's why I make sure to use a drop-lid. When it's cooling, it means the air can't get to it, and it allows it to naturally cool down inside the pan. Like nimame, simmered soybeans.*

Kumquats made this way become plump and round. They were a bright, glossy yellow color. I put the kumquat, which was covered in sugar molasses, in my mouth. The sweet-sour taste spilled onto my tongue... *Ah, that's the best.* It was so delicious, I touched my cheeks, making sure they hadn't melted away from how good it tasted.

Candied kumquats reminded me of *o-sechi*, a set meal eaten during New Year's in Japan.

As my grandmother was the type to pickle her own plums at home, naturally, she made her own *o-sechi*, too. It contained a lot of preserved foods, so I wasn't a fan of it when I was a child. However, seeing the foods stacked in the lacquerware boxes, with all the food tightly compacted inside, had a sort of special feeling around New Year.

Among all the small, dried anchovies, black soybeans, *kobumaki*, a type of food that contained herring wrapped in a *konbu* wrap, the foods that stood out most to my brother and I when we were young was mashed sweet potatoes with sweetened chestnuts, a rolled omelet with fish paste, and bright, golden kumquats. My grandmother always made sure to include more of those for us.

Once I started working and living alone, I was often so busy that I didn't go home for New Year. I never prepared any *o-sechi* when I was just celebrating alone. The one thing I did was boil kumquats in sugar. As I looked at the sea of orange simmering inside the pan, I was reminded of my grandmother. I'd often think of my grandmother during not only *o-bon* and equinoctial week, but also around New Year's. I put that down to the kumquats. Memories that revolve around food always stay the longest. *It's totally not the fact I'm a glutton for food... I hope.*

In my mind, candied kumquats were a dish as they were a part of *o-sechi*, but in this world, they would be seen as a candy or a dessert. Lady Adelaide had mentioned that she had never had them candied before, so I hoped she'd enjoy them.

What should I pair it with? I guess I could play with the citrus flavor and serve it with earl gray tea or milk tea. I had fun deciding what to do.

I glanced at the ready kumquats, wondering what dish to put them on as I looked in the cupboards, when Lady Adelaide entered the kitchen.

"Margaret, this just— Oh, it's the candies you talked about. Are they ready?"

They were cooling in the pan.

"They should be ready to eat with tea after dinner tonight. Please look forward to it."

"Oh, I sure am. A lot came for you today. Someone's popular." Lady Adelaide laughed as she winked, handing over several letters and cards.

After returning from the Royal Capital, I kept my promise and sent letters to the children at the Magic Academy. I sent letters to the children who were able to read and opted for pretty postcards for the smaller children. We have been exchanging letters and cards ever since.

Wanting to enjoy them, I poured myself a cup of tea and decided to read them all. Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel were sitting in the living room. They warned me not to catch a cold as I took my hot cup of tea outside to the veranda.

I can finally see the blue sky today. The air had been cooled by the remaining snow hidden in the shadows, making for a refreshing breeze. I put a shawl on my shoulders and sat in a chair in the sun instead of the rocking chair. Buddy, who was playing outside, noticed me and came running over. *Hehe, I'll use Buddy instead of a lap blanket.*

I stroked Buddy, who had put his head in his usual spot on top of my lap, as I looked at the cards. The children who couldn't write yet had drawn me pictures. Due to their powerful magic, they didn't have many opportunities to go outside and play like children their own age, so they did a lot of reading and drawing instead. As a result, their drawings were really good. There was a drawing of a face on the card that had all its features. Underneath was a message, seemingly written by the supervisors. "I drew missus' face."

Oh, how cute is that. Buddy, look at this, it's me. They even colored my hair black. Isn't that great?

The older children wrote about books they had read, how their magic control lessons were going, and mentioned some things about the headmaster and the others. *All the names they mention are people from the Magic Academy. I hope one day I receive a letter that talks about people I don't know. That would mean their horizons are expanding beyond the academy walls.*

Oh, that reminds me. Andy found his family.

Hugh's suspicions were right—there had been a fire in the castle town. He found the house where it happened, and he had hit the bullseye. It wasn't a noble family; instead, it was an ordinary, commoner family that owned a clothing store. Apparently, there were constant small fires in their store as well as their home.

It seemed the parents hadn't realized Andy had been born with magic abilities. Only nobles are able to measure a newborn's magic ability, so it made sense that if nothing really stood out to them, they wouldn't have noticed.

They were shocked when their unusually peevish son suddenly produced both wind and fire, setting fire to the curtains. They panicked, not knowing what to do, which then led to the fire spreading to their products. In other words, it caused quite the commotion. It was a blessing no one was hurt.

Due to the house being built from stone, the flames didn't spread to neighboring houses, but the damage was still devastating. Their house and shop were doused in water, and all their products burned. Andy's parents were then inundated with things to do after the fires, so they decided it would be best to entrust Andy to some relatives. However, the friend they had asked to take Andy to their relatives suddenly became ill, entrusting Andy to someone else. That someone else was mistakenly told to take Andy to the Magic Academy, and not to a relative. *The power of hearing the wrong thing.*

A friend of Andy's parents often went to the Royal Capital, so he opted to take Andy there out of the kindness of his own heart.

He had received a time-limited permit thanks to his job and was able to enter the Royal Palace. However, when he first visited the Magic Academy, he didn't understand where to go and who to speak to, and with his time-limited permit close to expiring, he ended up leaving Andy at what he thought to be the entrance. The fact that he was told that the people taking Andy in already knew what was happening, and to just take Andy there, somewhat backfired.

The Magic Academy, which was steeped in magic, wasn't a place someone would want to be for long. Not to mention, if he overstayed his permit, he would incur a harsh penalty, so that was another reason for him being so hasty.

"Well, we rarely ever leave our rooms. It would be hard to bump into someone without a prior appointment," Hugh had said with a wry smile.

I do remember there not being anyone around when I visited too.

Although there had been a misunderstanding, I was relieved to know that they had no intention of abandoning Andy. Apparently, they had come right to the Magic Academy once they heard that he wasn't on his way to a relative but was there instead. It was decided that he would stay at the Magic Academy while his parents finished fixing their home. It was still dangerous that he could produce fire magic whenever, so he would be attending the Magic Academy

under the watchful eye of the supervisors.

It might become difficult for him to only attend if his magic continues to get stronger, but if he wears a robe, it shouldn't be too much of an issue, and he should be able to stay with his parents.

Powerful magic didn't only influence the person themselves, but also their families and those around them. It wasn't entirely a good thing for both parties if they were able to live together. But I hoped that they could live a peaceful life. If you're surrounded by people with powerful magic from a young age, surely, it'll become normal for those around you, too.

Lisa said that the world was small for powerful magic users. For those who have never been in contact with a powerful magic user, they may think of them as some great person who is difficult to approach. But if that person is a friend of your family or is a childhood friend? Then surely you wouldn't think of them as someone scary.

Hugh said it was an instinctual fear. Even if that were the case, I wondered if they were feared because of their power, or because others couldn't understand them. I knew that didn't sound convincing coming from me, someone who had no mana and couldn't use magic. However, since I had no mana, I was able to hug the children at the Magic Academy. *If I were asked what I would prefer, I'd struggle to answer, but as of right now, I have no issue with being able to interact with both children with mana and children without.*

I piled up the letters as I finished reading them on the veranda table. On the quiet winter afternoon, all I could hear was the sound of paper, the voices of birds in the forest, and the sound of Buddy's tail wagging.

And the sounds of the carpenters at work.

Currently, the old servant building was being renovated. It was located on the land that Lady Adelaide had entrusted to me through the royal family. It hadn't been used for many years and was damaged as a result; however, the main structure was still sturdy. It was a good size, too. It was being reformed as I was considering moving into it. Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel both said I could continue living with them. *But I don't want to get in the way of your newlywed life.* Mark was overseeing all the carpenters' work and managing the project.

Yes, he was planning on living there with me too.

Why am I so embarrassed? I'm really blushing. Oh gosh, I am bright red. Well, it isn't going to be finished until spring, which is a while off. I'll still have dinner at the main manor, and I'll still have the fields. Thinking of it like that, I realized my life wouldn't change...much. I wonder if it'll change.

I'll face these small changes with a positive outlook. Being able to think that made me realize just how happy I was.



THE seasons silently passed by.

Birds signaled the coming of spring as they sang their songs from high up in the trees, and the hearth in the living room only saw use occasionally at night. I had found that the orange trees near the forest had begun to sprout firm buds a little while ago. Yesterday, one or two of them had begun to blossom. It wouldn't be long until they were in full bloom.

"I'm sorry we can't come to your ceremony tomorrow," Lady Adelaide said, forcing a smile through her coughing fit.

"It's fine, I've been there before, so I'm used to it, and everyone said there's nothing difficult to do."

I'm heading to the Royal Capital. I won't be going to the Royal Castle, instead I'll be going to the Temple for, well, a wedding ceremony. Mine.

We had promised to marry when the orange flowers were in bloom... *Woah. Repeating it sounds a little cringe.*

We had already submitted the notification of marriage. Around that time, Dr. Daniel had gone in my place as my guardian, so I didn't go to the Royal Capital.

Just like in my old world, we were required to deliver documents to the Royal Castle's administrative division. Commoners would have it accepted there and then, and it would be done. There were people who would hold a reception party and those who wouldn't. It was incredibly casual.

On the other hand, nobles had to confirm ranks, possessions, and land. Once that was cleared, they would get formal confirmation from the Royal Palace,

and it could take a few weeks for their documents to be accepted.

The database was a written logbook. Just one check took long enough, so I couldn't imagine how long several checks would take. Following that, a receipt-like document is issued in front of many people from the Temple. That seemed to be the ceremony that took place at the Temple. Commoners didn't have to do it, but it was compulsory for nobles. As Mark was a noble, and I was the Spirit Caller, it applied to us too.

As for tomorrow's ceremony, Lady Adelaide seems to have caught a cold, so she'll be staying in Miselle. Naturally, the doctor will be staying with her too. It was a shame they couldn't attend, but at least they were together.

"Has Walter already contacted the witnesses?"

"Yeah, he has. They'll be Lord Julius and the headmaster of the Magic Academy."

Lord Walter counts as my guardian, so he said I should choose someone else as a witness. So, I asked if it could be people that I knew, and those were the people I selected as a result.

Lady Rachel was more excited than me. When I told her the plans for the wedding ceremony, she had sent me a letter with "Leave your clothes to me!" written in gorgeous handwriting. Everyone said it would be fine to accept, so I decided to take her up on it.

They had shortened their stay in their territory to return to the Royal Capital, where both Lady Sofia and Lady Rachel were waiting for the ceremony. As the ceremony was going to take place early in the morning, I said goodbye to Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel and left Miselle the evening before. I was once again at the Lindgren household receiving their hospitality, however...

"Rachel. I think this one is better. It's pure, however, it has a lovely pop of color."

"I agree with you that it is pure and vibrant with color, Mother. However, isn't it a little too glamorous for today? We're not going to a ball."

It was a clear morning at the Lindgren estate. Marie-Louise and I watched over Lady Sofia and Lady Rachel's usual exchange as we sat in the same

guestroom I had used before. The beautiful mother and daughter not budging on their opinions, the clothes rack filled with dresses—it brought to mind a certain day from the past.

“Rachel, these kinds of dresses are the norm, now,” Lady Sofia protested.

“I do believe it’ll suit her. However, I think something more subdued would be better.” Lady Rachel moved her gaze over to the dresses that Lady Sofia had picked and began to look for a different dress.

There were fewer dresses than last time, but the two of them had gathered ones they thought would suit me. I almost passed out when Lady Sofia presented them to me—I could have sworn I heard a *ta-da!* come from somewhere. They were all made-to-order and had been especially dyed for me. Lady Sofia had said she loved picking out clothes for others, and tried to have double the amount than what was there, but Lady Rachel had handpicked the ones we were working with now, stopping Lady Sofia from going overboard. *Thank you, Lady Rachel.*

My eyes went wide. I wrote I simply couldn’t receive that many dresses from them, close to tears. Only for Lady Sofia to cry too, saying she was so happy that she had another daughter. She even said that if I didn’t like them, she’d have them destroyed and thrown away. When I panicked and thanked her for them, her tears suddenly stopped. *Coy as ever, Lady Sofia!*

Lady Rachel had whispered into my ear that Mark had also paid for the dresses, but that was to be kept a secret. *Huh, when did he get around to that?*

The plan was to let me pick a dress today, but they were all so wonderful. I couldn’t decide, leaving it to the mother and daughter to decide for me, which led to the situation we were in now.

I mean, there’s seemingly unwritten rules on what is acceptable to wear. I’ve only ever bought some clothes at a store to attend a wedding party, so I have absolutely no idea how to deal with the dress code here in this world.

My assignment after this was to learn about the clothing here. This would be the last time they would prepare clothes for me. Going forward, Lady Sofia would give me advice and teach me about the clothing rules.

Personally, I like Lady Adelaide's hand-me-down dresses, so that's enough for me. Lady Adelaide had told me to think of an official event as something to wear different clothes for and that was how she had gotten through it too.

Plus, it seemed it was common knowledge among the nobility that they wouldn't out-dress the Spirit Caller, so I had no choice but to go along with this dress session. As I mulled over these things, it seemed the mother-and-daughter duo had reached a conclusion.

"I've got it, Rachel. How about this one?"

"Oh, I think that's it!"

The two finally decided on a pale green dress. It was beautifully tailored; there was a pale green lace that overlaid a simple yet elegant white dress. The only decoration was a flower made from spare cloth that sat high on the waist. It was elegant and didn't stand out too much. *It seems my color here is green. I wonder if it's because of my association with the Spirit in the forest. Well, green is my favorite color, so I'm happy if they think I suit it.*

Marie-Louise helped me get dressed. She applied some light makeup and tied my hair up. Once that was done, I put on my hair accessory, my earrings, and lace gloves that matched the dress. *I'm ready.*

"...You look wonderful!" Lady Rachel took my hands in hers, her cheeks dyed pink.

"This is a lovely dress."

Even though it was long and had two layers, I was surprised by how light it was. It didn't feel stiff on my shoulders and arms. The hem was tailored masterfully, meaning it wouldn't be too difficult to walk, thus putting no extra strain on my left leg. My heart warmed at the care put into the dress decision.

"I love it that girls can do these kinds of things!" Lady Sofia exclaimed, crossing her arms, satisfied.

Then, there was a knock at the door. Lord Julius and Mark entered the room.

"Excuse us. Oh, now, now."

"It really suits you, Margaret. You look beautiful."

Blocking Lord Julius, who offered to escort me, Mark stepped forward and offered me his arm like a dashing prince. *This is also like my last visit here.* That realization helped ease some of my tension about the day.

Meanwhile, Mark was dressed like a nobleman today. He was stunning. As I'd have no time to use it, I hadn't brought the magic writing device with me. I rested my hand on Mark's arm, so we could leave, but...

"...What's wrong?" Mark asked me, noticing that I was a little awkward. I gave him a look. *I'll tell you later.* We then headed to the entrance of the Lindgren estate, where two carriages were waiting for us.

"I'll get in the carriage behind. I'll see you both at the Temple," Lord Julius said. I waved goodbye to everyone who had helped me.

"I'm sorry, after this, I have something I really can't get out of..." said Lady Rachel. She had really wanted to attend the ceremony.

"That's all right. You've done more than enough already."

Lord Walter was bringing the receipt-like document with him to the Temple, but he also had a lot of work he couldn't get out of, so he had no plans to attend the ceremony either. The ceremony was only done for the sake of appearances, so I was glad it wasn't going to be something big and extravagant.

"Thank you. I'll be leaving now."

Lady Sofia, Graham, and Max all waved goodbye. The door closed, Roy seated himself at the front of the carriage, and we set off. Mark then looked at me.

"So, what's up?"

"Nothing. In fact, thank you, Mark. For the dresses."

"Don't worry about it. But that's not it, is it, Margaret?"

I had carefully placed my forehead against his to not mess up my very nicely styled hair, but even at times like this, I couldn't be vague with Mark.

"Um, well. Seeing you dressed like that made me realize you really are a nobleman."

I mean, I was surprised that just by changing his clothes he could look so

regal. It reminded me of how before he met Dr. Daniel, he had no good memories of his time as a member of the Disraeli family.

Just as I thought he would, Mark frowned.

“...Should I take them off?”

“Why? You look great. Not to mention, this is the Mark I met, after all.”

Everything that happened back when he was in the Count Disraeli family, everything that happened in Miselle—it all led to now.

His eyes widened in response. In the carriage, with only the sound of the wheels turning and the horses’ hooves, his lips pressed against the corner of my eyes.

When we arrived at the Temple, Lord Walter and the headmaster were waiting for us in the neatly manicured garden.

Oh, even Lord Walter is dressed more formally than usual. The headmaster is in his usual black robe, wearing noble clothing underneath.

“Sorry for making you wait,” Mark said.

“Ah, no, we just got here ourselves. Here, take this.” Lord Walter handed Mark a rolled-up piece of paper. Lord Walter had brought it for me, so I didn’t have to go to the Royal Palace.

I bowed to the headmaster to thank him for coming, and he congratulated me with his usual stiff expression.

“This is from the children.” He handed me a clutch bouquet with yellow daffodils bundled up. Apparently, everyone had gone with Lisa to pluck them from the garden near the Magic Academy.

“Aw. I love it. I’m sorry I can’t go see them today.”

“You’ll have a chance soon enough. They love the letters.”

The headmaster had also brought letters from the children, and he briefly showed me them in his inner pocket, mentioning that he’d give them to me later. I hid my face in the bouquet, smelling the daffodils, which put a lump in my throat. *Oh no, I’m gonna cry.*

“Oh, you’re all here,” Lord Julius said. “Walter, you can use the carriage I came in.”

“Thanks, Julius. Well, congratulations...you two. Spirit’s blessings upon you.”

Lord Walter got into Lord Julius’s carriage. Even though he’s so busy, he still got dressed up to deliver the receipt. He really is like my older brother.

We saw Lord Walter off before deciding to head inside. We climbed around ten flights of stairs. At the top, we were greeted by a large door with white stone pillars on either side. The tall building matched what I imagined a temple or a church to look like. The stained glass on both sides of the door was beautiful.

We passed through the doors into a dim, high-ceiling hall. I couldn’t see an altar, and it was similar to the outside, with a number of large stone pillars. The atmosphere was chilling and solemn.

“I have been waiting for you.”

Two priests silently appeared, wearing bright white religious clothing. The only accessory adorning their clothes was a single, small yellow sash with an intricate pattern woven into it. They guided us through the long hallway, and we came out into an open space.

At the center of the roofless courtyard, there was a large circular fountain surrounded by white stone. Water wasn’t spouting out of the top of the fountain, and instead there was a large tower with water trickling down into several separate basins. Surrounding the fountain was white gravel; the water from the foundation swirled down to the outside like a whirlpool.

It was rather warm out due to the sun shining down. It was a beautiful area, with the water reflecting the sunlight along with the quiet trickling noise.

“They hold the Festival of Eve ceremony here,” Mark told me as we walked through, looking around.

I wonder if they have decorations with the flames flowing from the top of the fountain. I thought of Lady Rachel dressed in her shrine-maiden outfit, helping with the ceremony. I let out a sigh. She’d suit it so well.

We walked further down the corridor overlooking the courtyard, when we arrived at a room with an altar lit only by candles.

There stood the high priest, a man with white hair and a white beard. He was dressed in the same white garment as the other priests, but he had a deep crimson-colored cloak on top, as well as a red sash that hung from his neck. He was holding a staff that was almost the same height as him. *He reminds me of a certain man who gives out presents...* I thought to myself before hurriedly shaking my head.

Mark handed the rolled-up sheet of paper to a different priest waiting nearby. As he did so, the priest declared it would begin.

“Huh, already? No one’s going to explain how this even goes?”

“Just go along with what they say. Well, there’s not really anything to do,” Mark whispered into my ear.

Everyone told me that I’d have nothing to do, but... I guess they really meant it.

We stood in front of the altar that had the flames of several candles swaying in the area where the light from the stained-glass illuminated the floor with its colors. Our two witnesses sat towards the back in two large chairs, while the priests who showed us here walked around the room ringing a religious bell.

The high priest chanted, and the priests sang a hymn. Apparently, the song was filled with old words from their language. While I couldn’t understand it, the deep melody strangely resonated with me.

“Mark Reynolds. Spirit Caller, Margaret.”

When the last notes of the hymn finished, the high priest stood behind the altar and called us to step forward. A thick, leather-covered book sat on a slanted pedestal. The information from the document we handed over earlier was on it.

“Witnesses, your signatures.”

Lord Julius first stood up and came forward, followed by the headmaster. Once that was finished, the high priest then placed his hands above the

document and mumbled a very quiet incantation.

Suddenly, light engulfed the book. It disappeared before I could react, and the thick book suddenly closed. The priests then came forward, took the book, and headed back to the sides of the room.

The high priest then turned to me and smiled.

I guess it's over... I really didn't have to do anything. That was so quick.

Relieved, Mark and I put our hands on top of the high priest's extended hand.

"May you both remain wonderful companions for all time. Blessings of the Spirit upon you both."

The bell rang once again. The sound echoed throughout the hall, making me look upwards. As I did so, I noticed there were collections of sparkling, golden lights on top of the wooden beams.

Huh, fairies?

They seemed happy that I had noticed them, and with the second sound of the bell, they all fluttered down towards us.

"What...?"

The high priest's hand trembled as his eyes went wide with shock. I heard gasps fill the hall. The fairies jumped up onto my shoulder and showered me with kisses. They seemed interested in the bouquet I was holding and touched it. Some of them even clung to Mark's hair. *You all seem to be having fun.*

Seemingly satisfied and having had their fun, the fairies then funneled out towards the courtyard. The high priest, still speechless, slowly pulled his hand back. Mark's hand remained on top of mine. It felt like a strong force pulled us together as Mark's other hand softly touched my cheek. His finger then moved towards my hair, as if checking for something. My orange flower hair accessory had been placed there.

He looked at me with his sky-blue eyes— *Has he always been capable of that soft smile?*

He gazed at me, as if searching for something. Then, his lips touched my forehead. Then, my eyelids, my cheeks, before finally touching my lips. He

kissed me softly before moving back, then placed his forehead on mine. We smiled at one another as the ceremony ended.

We bid farewell to the priests, who were reluctant to let us go, then retraced our steps through the hallway that looked out onto the courtyard. I wondered if the fairies ever appeared at the Temple. It seemed like it was the high priest's first time seeing them. In that case, what happened on the Festival of Eve in Miselle must have been a rare happening. Even Mr. Tom was happy.

"That was lovely. Shame I was just a mere observer, but I'll live with it," Lord Julius commented.

"Lord Belliol." Mark gave him a sideways glance.

"Hm? I didn't say anything."

Observer? Just living with it? Lord Julius looked at me with a nonchalant expression as I puzzled over what he meant. As we stood in front of the carriage, the headmaster gave me the letters from the children at the Magic Academy.

"Ah, thank you! I hope I can spend more time with them next time. I want to say thanks for the bouquet, too."

"I'll pass it on. It seems the Spirit would like to meet with you again, too," he said.

"Yeah, me too. I have no doubt the fairies will tell her all about today."

We waved goodbye to Lord Julius and the headmaster as we got into the carriage. Our luggage had already been loaded in, so we set off for Miselle.

Although it was a bit rushed, the ceremony was finished. I was worried about Lady Adelaide's condition. *I know the doctor is with her, but I can't help but worry.*

I kept turning around, looking out the small window at the back, until I could no longer see the headmaster and Lord Julius. I then closed the window.

"Are you tired?" Mark asked.

"I'm fine. I didn't really do anything."

“Yeah, I guess so. For now, anyway.”

For now? I was curious, but I couldn't ask Mark, who was quite giddy, any more than that. The driver of the carriage slowed down, so we could enjoy the scenery a little more as I read the letters from the children and admired the bouquet. Eventually, I had completely forgotten what I wanted to ask Mark.



WE had arrived in Miselle shortly after our last break on the road, after which I promptly fell asleep. I woke up when Roy notified us we had arrived in Miselle. The curtain, used to keep the sunlight out, had been closed.

“Margaret, close your eyes. Keep a hold of the bouquet,” said Mark. It seemed like he was planning something. It sounded fun, and I was in a good mood, so I sat obediently with my eyes closed. The door to the carriage opened with a *click* as the wind brought in the smell of grass.

Ah, Miselle. I'm home.

Mark got out of the carriage before me, and took my hand, reminding me not to open my eyes. *Wait a second, it's scary not being able to see where I'm going.* I hesitated to leave the carriage when I felt Mark's hands around me. He picked me up—he was carrying me in his arms. *The so-called princess carry.*

Uh, hey!

I opened my eyes in shock and was greeted with, not the usual estate in the forest, but our usual meeting place in town. And the smiling faces of all the villagers.

Huh?

“Welcome back, Margaret, Mark.”

“How was the ceremony at the Temple?”

We were greeted by Lady Adelaide, who looked a lot better, and a smiling Dr. Daniel.

“Congratulations on getting married!”

“Congratulations, you two.”

Lady Rachel and Lord Walter are here too? So, this is what you meant when you both said you were busy...

“Tada. We’ve been waiting for you!”

Wait, even Hugh?!

I was shocked, I could barely think straight. I looked around at everyone.

“Everyone wanted to celebrate us here,” Mark said, looking proud. He softly lowered me to my feet. While I was unable to find any words, Lady Adelaide and Lord Walter approached me.

In Lady Adelaide’s hand was a flower crown made from orange flowers. “Congratulations. You look beautiful, Margaret.” Lady Adelaide gave me a hug as she placed the crown decorated with white flowers onto my head and whispered into my ear, “I faked being ill.” She gave me an apologetic look with a wink.

Lady Adelaide!

I could feel warmth spread through me. Unable to contain my tears, I looked at Mark. The doctor was attaching a matching boutonniere to his breast pocket.

“All right, here we go!” Hugh said cheerfully as my tears began to pour over. Everyone began to cheer and applaud as flower petals showered around us. Through the shower of colorful flower petals, I could see a very pregnant Mrs. Tanya and little John, who was holding the flower petals and throwing them around. There was also Ms. Mei, Mrs. Anna, Mr. Pat... Ms. Sara, and the woman who had gone to the neighboring village to marry, Mrs. Linda. Everyone from the village was there, including Marie-Louise and Roy, who were standing next to one another.

“Miss, come here, come look!”



The rain of petals had stopped as the children took me by the hand and led me towards the building.

“I picked so many flowers.”

“I made the ribbon!”

All the doors and windows had been opened, giving it the look of an open-air café. Inside, it was beautifully decorated. There were a variety of foods and desserts on tables covered with a wide range of decorated tablecloths. There were ribbons tied around the chairs—everyone had prepared the place for a party.

“When did you all prepare this? It couldn’t have been when I left for the Royal Capital, you wouldn’t have had enough time.”

“I was in charge of all the decorations,” said Mrs. Anna.

“I put together some new recipes just for today,” said Mrs. Tanya.

“Mrs. Anna, but you’re so busy as it is! And Mrs. Tanya, you’re entering your final month of pregnancy. The baby could come any minute!”

“Not only did we help with food, but we also called for the band who plays at our restaurant. There’ll be songs and dancing,” said Mr. Pat with a proud expression.

“We also have a photographer,” Lady Rachel added, happily.

Hey, you didn’t have to do all of this.

My tears didn’t stop. While the ceremony at the Royal Capital was a formality, it had become a precious memory. But all of this too—

“The bride looks beautiful even when she cries, but I much prefer it when she’s smiling,” Mr. Tom said as he patted me on the back.

I stroked Buddy, who came running over, finally smiling. I borrowed Mark’s hands to give everyone a message.

“Thank you. I love you all.”

That was all I could say.

I'm so glad that I came to this world—to Miselle. I'm so grateful to have met you all.

We had our pictures taken in the early afternoon sun. *No doubt, whenever I look at those pictures, I'll always remember today. A day full of joy.*

As I continued patting Buddy, I mentioned that I would have liked to help with the food but got turned down.

"There's no way we'd let you put an apron on that dress and be in the kitchen," Mrs. Tanya replied.

Mrs. Tanya! Wait a minute, why does everyone agree? Even Mr. Pat and Mr. Ted, who always helps at the estate, and well, everyone else, agreed.

I-I don't think that's the case, however. I looked up at Mark, hoping he would agree with me, but even he was nodding. *"Yeah, okay, I get it. I'll not."* I heard an eruption of laughter at my response.

Then the music started.

As I couldn't dance, Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel had the first dance. I clapped them on as I sat at the table with the most flowers on it. Then, Lady Rachel and Lord Walter danced together. The air around them was different—it was less awkward, as if Lord Walter had finally let his walls down. Lady Rachel seemed less formal, too.

I'm planning to give Lady Rachel the daffodil bouquet. I wonder what kind of face she'll pull when I tell her the meaning of me doing so.

Encouraged by the cheers, Hugh, Ms. Sara, and Emily all danced together as the onlookers clapped them on.

Everything, from the food to the music, was perfect.

I was delighted to be able to celebrate like this.

"Now I finally feel like we're married."

Mark!

"Though technically, we were married on paper earlier," Mark mumbled with a straight face, almost causing me to burst into laughter.

"Actually, me too." I quickly glanced around before we put our foreheads together. This time, we both laughed. Everyone was full of alcohol and were all merrily enjoying themselves, so no one should have noticed. Behind the flowers and ribbons, fairies were playing hide'n'seek.

Watching the young ladies sing and dance along to the music caught my eye, which brought up a question in my mind.

"Hey, Mark. Are you glad you chose me?"

Mark seemed a little shocked; he didn't seem to be expecting me to ask that.

"I know it's a bit late to say this, but being the Caller is no small thing. I think I'll probably be the cause of more annoying things in the future. Are you okay with that?"

Although I didn't ask to be in this position, there was nothing I could do to change it. *I may be important to the country, but that also means it's easier for me to be the cause of trouble. Thinking about what to do if it were to come to that is a heavy burden, and I think there are too many cons to being with a Caller.*

The people who would suffer the most would be the people close to me.

"Thinking about it, I think you would have been better off marrying someone else. I don't even have anything special, yet I come with plenty of problems."

"Margaret."

I'm not even a noble, nor do I have any knowledge as a doctor to help Mark.

"Wouldn't you have been better suited with a noble lady, rather than me, someone who will just hold you ba— Mm?!"

Mark had put his hand around the back of my neck, pulling me close. He had stopped me from my endless complaining with a kiss.

Suddenly, I could hear cheers and whistles from all around us.

Huh, I thought no one was looking at us!

By the time I finally twisted my way out of his grip, I was out of breath. I had tears in my eyes from the lack of oxygen. Mark had a brilliant smile as he traced

my lips with his thumb.

Ah, no good. He's a bad one.

I tried to look away, but he had me held in place by his finger on my chin.

Hey, don't encourage him! Now's not the time for that!

"I'll be sure to show you that I have zero doubt in choosing you," Mark said, sending a shiver down my spine. I knew he was serious.

After returning to the estate in the woods, I was spoiled even more. Everyone looked at me with such warm gazes, however I felt overwhelmed as always, wanting to bury myself away in a hole somewhere.

Silence is golden. That day, when I learned the true meaning of those words, would be something I would remember for the rest of my life.

Epilogue: Making Jam in the Woods

A few days after the whole village came together to celebrate our marriage.

There was no custom for newlyweds to go on a honeymoon together, so we enjoyed life as always in Miselle. As we no longer needed to worry about frost, I decided to remove all the straw covering the fields. As I moved away the straw, which acted as a blanket for the fields, I found young strawberry seedlings sleeping underneath.

I picked up the withered leaves and the leaves that had changed color from the long winter. Leaving only the healthy-looking leaves behind, I got excited imagining how big they would become.

The small white flowers will most likely bloom next month. Then, around a month after that, their red fruits will bloom, and they'll be ripe for the harvest.

Both fruits and vegetables needed a lot of time before they would be ready to be picked. Being close to nature, I began to realize that there are some things that you just can't rush and how there is a time and place for everything. It was less not being so swayed by the little things but learning to have a bigger heart. *I would like to think that's different from being careless...maybe.*

I finished my yard work and headed into the kitchen, bumping into the two usual delivery people. It was strange to see them chatting before putting down their goods. It seemed they had bumped into Dr. Daniel and were enthusiastically chatting about something with him. *Oh, wait a minute.*

Lady Adelaide noticed me as I approached their lively conversation. "Margaret, Tanya had her baby," she told me.

Oh, I thought so! After the surprise party they held for us, I was sure she didn't have much longer to go. I was right.

"Early this morning," Dr. Daniel added. "It's a boy. Both mother and son are doing well." He seemed happy.

John finally got his little brother. He must be ecstatic.

John was able to talk a lot more now. He had been playing with the other children in the village every day. As he was no longer a baby, whenever I tried to put my forehead against his, he could no longer hear me. He looked a little confused after I had done so. I felt a little sorry about it. Even so, he still enjoyed bumping our heads together. I enjoyed playing with him, so even now, we'd bump our heads together as a game.

"Tanya said feel free to come see the baby at any time. She even said you could go today," the older delivery man enthusiastically told me.

Wait, if she just had the baby this morning, surely today is too early to visit. It's just past lunchtime. Though, that sounds like Mrs. Tanya.

That's what I thought at least, but it wasn't that strange to go visit on the day of the birth here. It seemed ruder *not* to go. *That's surprising. Um, okay. I thought that the first visits were left to family, but... Okay. Everyone in the village is practically family, anyway.*

Lady Adelaide smiled at me as I tried to take in their explanation. "Great timing. Could you take the presents we prepared?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll go straight away. I wanna see the baby."

I hurriedly cleaned up and caught a ride to the village with the deliverymen in their carriage. As I got out of the carriage near Mrs. Tanya's house, I saw Ms. Mei in the entranceway carrying a large box.

"Ah, Margaret. You came to congratulate her too, eh? We had the same idea," she said as she knocked at the door. Mr. Dan answered the door with red eyes. John had been in high spirits since the morning, so he was napping. *Hehe, I thought as much.* "Congratulations! I brought lots of food, so make sure to eat it all up!"

The box had no lid and was filled with flour, eggs, milk, cheese, and a variety of bottled goods. They were gifts befitting Ms. Mei, who owned the grocery store.

"Ah, this is from Lady Adelaide." I handed over the goods I brought too.

After being led inside, we knocked on the door to the room where Mrs. Tanya was with the baby, and heard her usual bright voice come from within. As we entered, Mrs. Tanya was sitting up in bed.

“Tanya, congratulations!” Ms. Mei said.

“You came at a good time. The baby just woke up.”

In Mrs. Tanya’s arms, I could just see the face of the baby and one single hand peeking out from the blanket he was wrapped up in. *Aw, he’s wide awake. How adorable.*

“Oh my, he looks exactly like his dad,” Ms. Mei observed.

“He does. He’s even got the same color hair as Dan.”

I was relieved to see Mrs. Tanya was in good spirits. *It seems the birth went well.* Apparently, her labor pains started late at night and the baby was born in the early hours of the morning. *So, around three or four in the morning? That’s an easy birth, for sure.* Ms. Mei and I took turns holding the baby.

Aw, he’s so small! His whole body was squishy, and he probably couldn’t see well—his eyes and skin were puffy with water. Although I helped at the clinic, this was my first time with a newborn. Andy, from the Magic Academy, was just a bit older.

Woah. Something this small already has fingernails. They’re so small and transparent, though.

I was intrigued by his small features. The baby frowned, and his lips went into the shape of a diamond. Suddenly, his face turned red as he let out a noise. Shocked by his own voice, he began to cry.

“Oh, is he hungry?”

Mrs. Tanya took him from my arms and moved to the side a little as she began to nurse him. Ms. Mei watched on with a smile. *He’s so calm now.*

“He’ll probably fall asleep like that. Shall we head home?” Ms. Mei suggested. I nodded in response. We waved goodbye to the baby and Mrs. Tanya and headed outside.

I said my goodbyes to Ms. Mei and strolled through the small lanes in the

village. *That's right. Now that I'm married, I can walk around on my own.* However, that was only during the day. In the evenings, I would have to be accompanied by someone.

All right. Since I'm here already, I'll make a quick visit to the clinic before I head home.

On the edges of the roads, anemone and snowflake flowers were sprouting out from the tall grass. There was a slight chilly breeze blowing, but there weren't many clouds in the sky. *Sure feels like spring.*

I passed by Mrs. Anna's general store on my way to the clinic. There were large plant pots outside for decoration. Yellow flowers covered the silver-covered leaves—they were a type of flower unique to this world, mimozas. The earth in Miselle wasn't ideal for planting flowers, so people would keep plant pots indoors throughout winter. It seemed having the yellow flowers outside caught a lot of people's eyes, attracting them to come into the shop.

I admired the flowers as I thought about what to make for dinner that night. *Maybe a mimoza salad. I can pair it with green vegetables or potatoes, it even goes well with steamed chicken. Not to mention, I've always enjoyed egg whites from the yolk for boiled eggs. All right, that's one thing decided.*

I waved at the children, who called out to me. I was thoroughly enjoying my walk, when I was stopped by a familiar voice at the greengrocers.

"Margaret, did you see the baby?"

Ah, Mr. Tom. I gestured holding and rocking a baby as I nodded. *He was so cute.*

"We'll be heading over later. Oh yeah, take this."

Woah, woah, apples! I panicked as he passed them over to me one by one.

"They're almost out of season. I guess everyone is sick of eating them. So, you can have them, it'd be a shame to let them go to waste," Mr. Tom said as he tried giving me more apples.

Hold on a sec, usually you give them as an extra when I buy some. I try to give you money for them, but you never accept.

I looked to his wife inside the store for help, but she just waved me off, saying it was okay. I tried to get out of it by motioning that I had nothing to carry them with, but then they handed me a basket.

...Okay. I get it. I'll make some baked goods using the apples, then I'll bring them with the basket. I had dressed light to just offer my congratulations to Mrs. Tanya, but I ended up heading to the clinic with a heavy basket. There were no patients in the waiting room. I found it strange as I peeked into the open door. Mark was staring at a letter with a stern expression on his face.

"Margaret? Ah, did you go see Mrs. Tanya?" said Mark. He seemed to know exactly why I had left the estate today. He welcomed me in and closed the door behind me before immediately placing his forehead against mine.

"What's with the glum expression?"

"...This," Mark said as he showed me the contents of the letter.

A letter of recommendation? Personal information?

"It's from the academy in the Royal Capital. They want me to take on a student here."

Oh, that's it.

He handed it over to me, saying it was okay for me to read it. Although he said they were a student, they had already graduated and it sounded like they could go straight into the workforce. *Kind of like a medical intern.* Although there were no patients at the clinic right now, it was usually quite busy. There were times when they had to go to the Royal Capital, and I thought that maybe Dr. Daniel and the others could benefit from more help at the clinic.

I think what they really want is for Mark to go to the clinic in the Royal Capital. Since he had turned that down, they're now sending him a pupil.

When I asked if he would take one on, he softly shook his head.

"I'm good at researching new things on my own, but I'm not suited for teaching." There was a slight sulking tone in his words, which honestly, I was happy about. He had started getting better at expressing his feelings.

"Really?"

"I think so."

"Have you ever tried teaching someone?"

"...No."

I burst out laughing, and he lightly flicked me on the forehead.

"I think you'd be suited for it. It's not like you dislike the idea, right?"

"I don't think I have enough experience as a doctor yet. I could never teach like Dr. Daniel does." He wanted to give back as much, if not more than he had received. I understood how he felt. I felt the same, after all.

I could sense the enthusiasm in the letter.

"Well, it's your decision to make, Mark, but they seem eager to come here. Is it someone you know?"

"It's a relative of someone who I treated in the Royal Capital."

I see. I could understand their enthusiasm if they had seen Mark in action.

"It just arrived today... I'll talk with the doctor, then decide what to do."

"Okay. Looking forward to hearing what you decide on."

I handed the letter back to him and glanced over at the clock, checking the time. Mark suggested closing early and heading back home with me. Apparently, there were hardly any patients all day. *The clinic being quiet is always a good sign.*

Mark hurriedly cleaned up for the day before we headed for the door, only to find Buddy waiting for us, wagging his tail.

Did you know I was here? Good boy!

I headed home with Mark and Buddy, although the way back was quiet. There weren't many people around at that time of the day. I told Mark about how I received all the apples in my basket from Mr. Tom. He nodded, not surprised.

"Are you going to make something for them again?" he asked.

"That's the plan. Ah, I'll make some for us, too. Which would you prefer, pie or cake?" Talking by tracing my finger on his palm when outside took time, but I

had done it for so long that I still quite liked it.

“Apple pie, I guess. By the way, today is a lot different to how it was a year ago.”

I froze in response.

“It was around a year ago today. I was strangely free for the day, and Buddy had come all the way to the clinic, so the doctor, Buddy and I ran to Lady Adelaide’s estate.”

Oh.

“When we arrived, you were collapsed in the back garden, Margaret.”

They never told me about this before.

I was just trying to get by back then, but once everything calmed down, I started enjoying my life here... *It feels too soon to look back already.*

Three oak trees marked an area where there was a clear view of Miselle. Mark and I stopped at my favorite spot, and I set down the basket of apples. I looked away once before returning my gaze to Mark. In his eyes, was a color that I couldn’t see when I first met him.

The color that kept me in this world.

“As you had no mana, I had a feeling you were a Spirit Caller. But I never once thought that in a year’s time, we’d be here like this.”

My hand shook as I wrote “me too” on his hand in response. Mark then approached me to place his forehead on mine.

“I also didn’t imagine any of this.”

I never once thought I’d be in an accident, and that I’d wake up in a new world. Buddy turned around to face us, his silver-gray fur moving as he walked back towards us. Golden fairies flew up from his tail. It had been around a year since I first saw the fairies when I was lying in bed.

The fairies didn’t run away, even though Mark was there. I began to feel all the time that had passed.

“Me being able to come here with absolutely nothing, yet spend every day

laughing, is without a doubt thanks to everyone here."

"That's not it. It's because you're you, Margaret."

I tilted my head in confusion as Mark pointed to the apples I had received from Mr. Tom.

"This too. You're always making something for someone."

"It makes me happy knowing people are happy that I made something for them."

I know the pain of just making food for myself. Not to mention Lady Adelaide and Dr. Daniel have given me so much more.

But that's right. If I can continue making things for people, that's enough for me. Especially if I can live like that with my special person. That would be such a blessing.

I remembered the deep, indigo eyes of the Spirit—especially the sad look in her eyes. *Your words, your laugh, your love—they only come alive when you're with someone else.*

Even if you can live by yourself, you can't laugh all on your own. I'm sure that goes for both humans and spirits.

"So, are strawberries next after apples?" Mark asked.

"Lady Adelaide said they should be blooming next month. When they bloom, I'll make jam again."

"Nice. I think you should do that here, every year."

"Here?"

"Yeah. Forever."

"...Mm-hm. Forever," I softly repeated, the words filling my heart.

Mark wiped underneath my eyes with his finger. I didn't even realize I was crying.

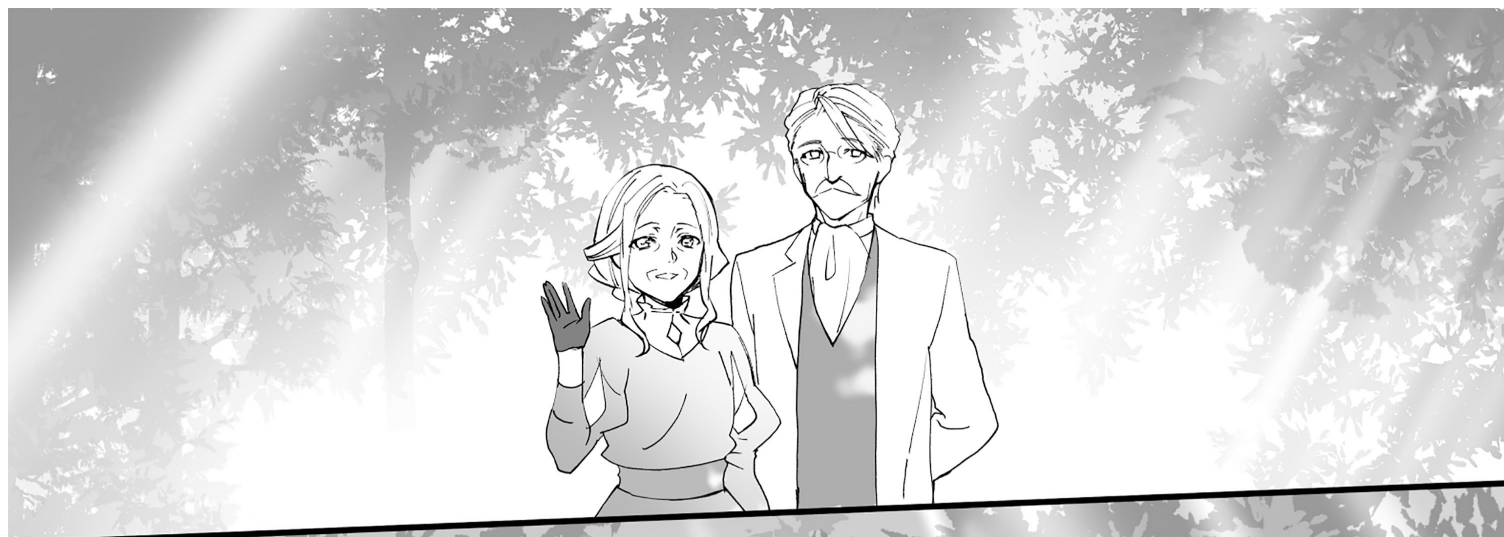
The village of Miselle was spread out before us, dimming in the late afternoon sun. Around the corner was the forest estate, and Buddy was at my feet. When I looked up, I was greeted by sky-blue eyes.

My heart was full. There was a small tinge of sadness, but a lot more warmth.

I lay against Mark's arm as my tears suddenly spilled out.

The wind lightly shook my hair. The sound of the wind passing my ears reminded me of the ocean. The afterglow of a fairy that passed before me, chasing after Buddy, reminded me of the sunlight dancing on the waves. A faint image appeared in my mind, but disappeared before I could grasp it.

I slipped out of Mark's arms, and as we looked to where the fairies had flown, we were greeted by Lady Adelaide and Doctor Daniel. It seemed Buddy had run to get them.



“Well, shall we head home?” Mark held his hand out, like he always did and we held hands.

“Welcome home, you two. Walter and the others will be coming next weekend,” said Dr. Daniel.

“A card addressed to you arrived too, Margaret. Oh, apples,” said Lady Adelaide.

Welcome home. I’m back. Such simple words made me smile every time I entered the estate.

This place surrounded by the woods—strawberries in spring, as well as apricots and blueberries. Oranges, peaches, grapes, and apples.

Every day is spent in close harmony with the seasons.

And so, I spent yet another day in Miselle—making jam in the woods.

Afterword

HELLO, Kosuzu Kobato here. Thank you for buying Volume 3 of *Making Jam in the Woods: My Relaxing Life Starts in Another World*.

The web novel has undergone significant revisions and is all now available in the first two volumes. That means this third volume is “what happened after that.”

Although the story has ended, the world and the characters who live in it always live on in the heart of the author. I especially wanted to write about Rachel and Walter, and Margaret and Mark’s wedding ceremony.

So, being able to make all of that come true in this volume is a true honor, and I hope those who wanted to read more about the characters and weddings are happy with this volume.

Our protagonist arrives in a strange new world and spends her days in a small village at the start of this series; however, in this volume, she is able to get up to a lot more things. I hope you all were surprised and had fun reading about Margaret’s visits to new places, her meeting with new people, and her continuing to enjoy a peaceful life in Miselle.

In volume one, the story began in early spring. Volume two covers summer to fall, and this volume is spent from late fall to early spring. I guess it was a strange coincidence that the seasons of the story lined up exactly with the publication timeline in Japan. It’s a somewhat pleasant feeling.

Yuichi Murakami drew beautiful illustrations for this volume as well. Although there are not many descriptions of people’s appearances throughout the book, and I often give a rather wishy-washy explanation, I’m surprised every time their illustrations look like they peeked directly into my mind. Whenever I look at them, I end up grinning, so I have to be careful not to be caught doing that in public.

Thank you once again to my editor-in-charge, Y-sama! If it weren’t for Y-sama

pushing me on, we wouldn't have been able to get Volume 3 out like this. I would like to give my thanks to the editorial department and everyone inside and outside the company, too.

To my family who always supported me with smiles, to my fellow creators who supported me along the way, and finally, to all the readers who have supported me in every way. I give my heartfelt thanks.

I hope this story, which I began writing on my tablet while standing in my kitchen, reaches all your hearts.

I hope one day, we meet again.

Kosuzu Kobato

2019



Too Strong to Belong! Banished to Another World!

By Kazuki Karasawa Illustration Akane Rica

Still Too Strong in Another World!

Sakurako longs to fall in love. Unfortunately, her super-strength scares everybody off! If only she were normal... But then she would have died long ago.



The Do-Over Damsel Conquers the Dragon Emperor

By Sarasa Nagase Illustration Mitsuya Fuji

A young woman with overpowered magic gets sent back 6 years after being killed. She takes this second chance at life to get with her greatest enemy, the dragon emperor!



Reincarnated as the Last of My Kind

By Kiri Komori Illustration Yamigo

An endearing slice of life fantasy light novel series about a nonhuman girl's journey to become an alchemist to repay the family who took her in!



1
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