

# My Pet Saintess

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MEDIA







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**MORGANAİK**

A former priest-warrior who loved Calsedonia. He was tempted by a demon and ultimately faced heartbreak.

**TATSUMI YAMAGATA**

A Japanese boy, in the midst of mourning the death of his pet, was suddenly summoned to another world.

**BARSE**

A junior deacon in the Savaiv Temple who becomes friends with Tatsumi, as they both share the same rank.

**GIUSEPPE**

Calsedonia's adoptive grandfather and the esteemed high priest of the Savaiv Temple.

**CALSEDONIA**

Chiko's new form after reincarnating in another world. Driven by her strong desire to reunite, she succeeded in summoning Tatsumi to the other world.

**CHIKO**

Tatsumi's pet parrot. After her death, she was reincarnated as a human in another world.

REINCARNATED AS A  
BEAUTIFUL GIRL!

**CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS**



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A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the chapter title.

## Chapter 1: Beginning of Life in Another World

**T**atsumi gently swayed in the darkness, basking in its calm and quiet. The boundless darkness wrapped around him gently, and he took pleasure in its serene quietness.

“Is someone there?... Wake up!”

Suddenly, a voice pierced the silence. It was a clear, pleasant female voice, and it slid easily into Tatsumi’s ears, although it took him a moment to realize that the voice was speaking to him. Who could it be? He was sure he had heard it somewhere before. Could it be his mom? No... the voice was too young for that. It sounded like someone his age. Maybe his sister?

“Mmm... rina?” Tatsumi muttered, uncertain. Suddenly, there was a sharp pinch on his cheek. It wasn’t particularly painful, but it was enough to bring him to full wakefulness.

“... Huh?”

“Good morning, Master.”

Before him stood a woman with long, platinum hair and a smile that reached up to her mysterious, crimson eyes. Now that he was alert, Tatsumi recognized her instantly.

“Chiko...”

Yes, smiling before him was Calsedonia. But there was a question in her smile, and it made Tatsumi’s back break out in an unpleasant sweat.

“Master? I might be mistaken, but did you just mumble a woman’s name?”



“Ahahaha... Sorry, Chiko. I thought you were my sister for a moment there. You remember, right? How she would always wake me up like this?”

Tatsumi’s smile was rather lovely, Calsedonia thought. Seeing him like this, she felt herself relax in an instant.

Indeed, she remembered Tatsumi’s sister well. As Tatsumi’s pet cockatiel, Calsedonia—back when she had been Chiko—had Tatsumi as her partner. However, his sister had also adored her greatly. She would change her food and water, clean her cage, and often go for walks in the neighborhood with her and Tatsumi.

Back when Tatsumi’s family was still alive, it was often his sister who would wake him up, just as Calsedonia had done now. From Tatsumi’s face, Calsedonia could tell he had become lost in thought—and she knew exactly how he felt. She instinctively pulled him into an embrace, burying his face in her ample bosom.

“I’m so sorry!! I wasn’t even thinking about you; I was being so selfish... b-but now you have me!! As long as you wish, I will *never* leave your side!! So... so...!”

Calsedonia squeezed Tatsumi with all her strength. Naturally, with his head lost in her chest, Tatsumi found it difficult to breathe. The soft touch against his face was what many men might consider heavenly. As his breathing became more labored, his consciousness began to fade.

“Drowning” in a woman’s bosom—it was like being in heaven and hell at once.

“Really... I’m so sorry!!”

“No, well...” Tatsumi struggled to get the words out, “I know Chiko didn’t mean any harm, and I, um... didn’t mind it either...”

At the last moment, Tatsumi was released, narrowly escaping a fate that would have been very honorable or very dishonorable, depending on one’s perspective.







Tatsumi smiled wryly at Calsedonia, who was deeply bowing before him, then took a look around the room.

Since the two of them had moved into this room the day before, they'd brought in a mix of new and old furniture, including two beds and a chest of drawers. One of the beds was Tatsumi's from back in Japan; apparently it had come as part of the package when he was summoned to this world. Next to it was a bed from this world, already neatly made, with a folded set of women's nightwear placed on top. Gazing at it, Tatsumi recalled the events of the previous day.

He and Calsedonia had spent the whole day moving in. That night, they'd had a small celebration with their friends Barse and Bogard, who had helped them. Tatsumi, who had never been much of a drinker, had accepted everything Barse and Bogard handed him and had soon become rather intoxicated.

Despite this, Tatsumi had managed to stay awake and enjoy their time together. Minutes after Barse and Bogard left, however, he had hit his limit and fallen asleep on his bed. Calsedonia must have slept in the bed next to him.

As he imagined her lying there, clad only in her thin nightwear, Tatsumi involuntarily blushed.

"Master? Is something the matter?" Calsedonia asked with concern.

"Ah, n-no, it's nothing!"

Casting his eyes around the room for anything to distract himself, Tatsumi picked up the watch he'd left by his pillow. The hands showed it was about 6:40 in the morning.

"Oh, right. Today's the start of Giuseppe's magic lectures."

"Yeah, so we should start getting ready soon, or we won't make it in time for our meeting with Grandfather at the second hour."

*That's like, 8:00 AM, right?* Tatsumi thought. *Better get ready.*

Tatsumi had recently made up his mind to become an exorcist, and today was the beginning of his path. In addition to magic lessons with Giuseppe, he would



soon be starting intensive martial arts training—all while keeping up his duties as a junior deacon.

“I can’t go out like this,” Tatsumi declared, quickly rising from his bed and impulsively stripping off his nightwear.

“Whoaa?!” Calsedonia blushed deeply at the sudden sight of Tatsumi’s bare upper body. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t seen it; she had even touched Tatsumi up there, to heal him after the battle with Morganaik... but that was strictly for medical purposes. And anyway, she’d been so focused on healing Tatsumi that she’d had no time to think of anything else.

Now she was confronted with the unclothed figure of the man she loved most. She pressed her hands to her cheeks, trying to cool the heat, but her blush showed no signs of fading. And yet, Calsedonia couldn’t, or rather didn’t want to, avert her eyes from Tatsumi’s body.

She stared at him in a daze for a few moments, until she suddenly realized what she was doing.

“I-I-I’m so sorry!!” Flustered, Calsedonia turned her back to Tatsumi. Just then, he, too, realized he had undressed in front of a girl, even if it was only the top half, and his face turned red.

“Ah, ah—sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking, doing that in front of you.”

“No, it’s my fault... I couldn’t stop staring at you...”

With their backs turned to each other, neither of them could see how deeply the other was blushing.

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When the two stepped awkwardly into the dining room, Tatsumi saw that breakfast had already been prepared.

The table was set with freshly baked bread, fresh vegetables, and what appeared to Tatsumi to be a lightly seared ham. Everything smelled delicious.

“Wow, this looks incredible.”



“I hope you like it, Master...”

“I’m sure I will. I’ve tasted Chiko’s cooking lots of times before, and it’s never been anything but delicious.”

Tatsumi’s praise brought a pleased smile to Calsedonia’s face.

“Let’s eat before it gets cold.”

“Yeah, let’s.”

Tatsumi and Calsedonia sat down facing each other and simultaneously offered a prayer of gratitude to the gods. The young man was now on a path of proper priesthood, albeit he was just a deacon, and one of the lowest-ranked ones at that. Frankly, he hadn’t yet developed a strong sense of faith, but his position required him to memorize a variety of prayers. At first, it had felt weird to pray before each meal, but it had quickly become quite normal.

After the prayer, Tatsumi reached for the basket of bread. As he munched on a piece, he reviewed his schedule for the day.

“So, I’m off to the temple for Giuseppe’s lecture, but Chiko, you’ll be staying home all day, right?”

“Yeah. I still haven’t finished unpacking, so I was just planning to clean and organize today. Why don’t you leave the housework to me and focus on your lessons with Grandfather?”

“Sure, thanks. I need to become a full-fledged exorcist as soon as possible.”

Tatsumi gazed at the smiling Calsedonia before him. He couldn’t wait until he was capable of fighting alongside her. For the rest of the meal, Tatsumi enjoyed some light-hearted conversation with Calsedonia, then he changed into his junior deacon’s robe.

After asking Calsedonia to check his outfit one last time, Tatsumi put his hand on the front door.

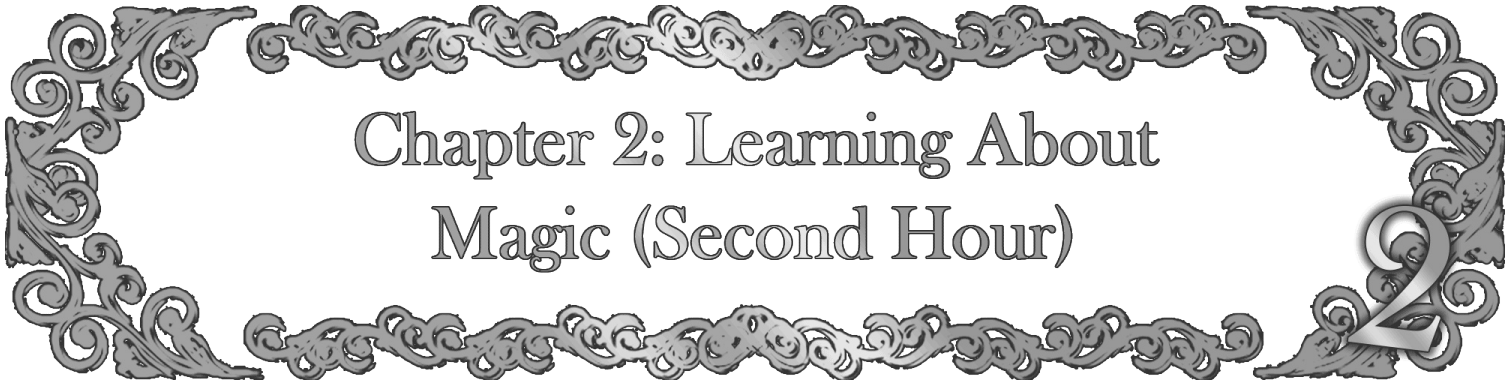
“All right. I guess I’m off.”

“Yeah, have a good day, Master. But, um...” Suddenly, Calsedonia looked down, fidgeting and wriggling slightly. “C-Come back home soon... if you can...”



“Ah, uh... I’ll try my best...”

With Calsedonia looking down and Tatsumi gazing upward, neither made eye contact. However, both of their faces were equally flushed.



## Chapter 2: Learning About Magic (Second Hour)

“**T**here’s nothing for me to teach you.” That was the first thing Giuseppe, Tatsumi’s instructor, said in the classroom for exorcists. Tatsumi was the only student there, receiving one-on-one instruction on the knowledge necessary to become an exorcist from Giuseppe, the Chief Priest.

It would be more accurate to say that he was *attempting* to receive instruction, as the class hadn’t even started yet. Yet, Giuseppe’s opening statement left even Tatsumi, who had prepared himself for various possibilities, dumbfounded, not to mention anyone else who would have been there.

“To be more precise, there’s nothing for me to teach you regarding magic,” Giuseppe elaborated. “To tell the truth, your magic is somewhat... unconventional.” Tatsumi was the second person in history to possess the Heaven type of magical power. He was also an external element user, meaning he manipulated what was already abundant in the world rather than using his own internal elements. This was extraordinary enough, but there was more to Tatsumi’s abilities that went beyond the normal scope of magic.

“To be even more precise, you’re not a *magician* but a *magic power user*,” Giuseppe clarified.

“Magic power user...?”

“Exactly. From what I’ve heard from you and Calsedonia, what you’ve used isn’t magic... It’s something very similar to magic, however.”

Tatsumi wasn’t sure he understood the difference between a magician and a magic power user, but if Giuseppe said they were different, they must be different.



“I believe I’ve explained before that magic needs two things in order to work: magical power and the incantation of a spell. Do you remember that?”

“Yes, I do... You and Chiko told me on my first day here.”

It was a day Tatsumi would never forget. On the day he was summoned to this world by Calsedonia, he had learned a bit about magic from her and her grandfather. He also remembered feeling utterly dejected when they had told him he had no magical power.

“However, as I heard from Calsedonia, you didn’t use any incantations when you used magic. You don’t even know any spells, do you?”

“Well, now that you mention it...”

Tatsumi had never learned any incantations, which should have been necessary for casting spells. In fact, he had never even *seen* any written spells, let alone memorized them. After all, he had only just started learning the written language of this world and couldn’t read a sentence yet.

In other words, Tatsumi didn’t have any spells to recite, even if he wanted to.

“But you did use magic. No, more accurately, you used your magical power directly to create phenomena similar to magic. And people like you, who use magical power directly, are called ‘magic power users,’ not ‘magicians.’”

“To put it in simpler terms, let’s say magical power is like gasoline, and incantations are like the engine. Just as a car runs by pouring gasoline into an engine and burning it, a spell is cast by pouring magical power into the ‘engine’ of an incantation. So, you’re like a car without an engine, running on gasoline alone. Normally, a car like that wouldn’t be able to run. Yet you manage to make it run—this is an exceptional feat.”

“There have been a few magic power users like you in the past. Even now, there are a few. They’re truly rare, but only among humans and demi-humans,” Giuseppe added with a smile. “Among other creatures, magic power users are relatively more common.”

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As soon as the door closed behind Tatsumi, Calsedonia began to tidy up their new home. As she did, she thought about the night before. After the festivities ended, Bogard and Barse had left for their homes and temple lodgings—Barse with a proud smile and a thumbs-up to Tatsumi. It was still early, but Tatsumi had fallen asleep within minutes. He must have been exhausted from the move, sure, but apparently, he also had a pretty low alcohol tolerance.

Calsedonia felt a bit lonely watching him sleep, but she wasn't going to ask him to stay up with her—oh, and that was another thing; he was still recovering from his injuries. Calsedonia contented herself with watching Tatsumi's sleeping face for a few minutes, then she also went to bed early.

Now, it was a new day. Calsedonia was quietly excited about a long-held ambition of hers.

"Master went to bed early last night, but today... today, I hope to spend some time with Master..."

A dream in her mind and a blush on her cheeks, Calsedonia hummed happily as she finished up the housework. Deciding to clean up the yard as well, she took a broom and stepped outside.

"Oh...?"

There was a small handful of women—neighbors perhaps—standing at the gate, glancing at the house and whispering among themselves. They were probably talking about the rumor that the famous Saintess had moved into the neighborhood.

Seeing Calsedonia step out, one of the housewives pointed and gasped in surprise. Her friends turned quickly to see for themselves.

*I haven't introduced myself to the neighbors yet,* Calsedonia suddenly realized.

She walked up to the women with a smile. "Hello, I'm the new owner of this house. My name is Calsedonia Chryso—no, Calsedonia Yamagata. My husband and I look forward to getting to know all of you."

With that, Calsedonia bowed to the ladies. Little did they know, a significant piece of information manipulation had just taken place.





“For example, take magical beasts. There are indeed some that can create phenomena similar to magic, like breathing fire or spreading blizzards. But, of course, they don’t recite spells. In other words, the magic—or rather, the magic-like phenomena that you’ve used, son-in-law, is based on the same principle as these magical beasts.”

That made sense to Tatsumi. He hadn’t seen a magical beast yet, but he imagined the vast majority couldn’t speak human language.

“So, do I need to learn spells from now on?”

It made Tatsumi dizzy to think of adding magical incantations to the list of things he had to learn. The language of this world was difficult enough!

However, he had to try. He had decided to become stronger for his family, and now he had to do whatever it took.

As Tatsumi renewed his determination internally, Giuseppe’s next words almost shattered it.

“No, the thing is... your magic type, Heaven... I told you there was only one user in the past, right? And that was a long time ago. While there are oral traditions about the types of magic in the Heaven category, the actual incantations... They were not actually passed down to the present at all.”

While searching ancient texts might possibly yield some information, he explained, finding such materials would require a tremendous amount of time and effort—like it had taken Calsedonia to discover the spell she’d used to summon Tatsumi.

“Huh...? So, that means...”

“Right. Since you’re not a magician but a magic power user, you’ll have to find your own unique way of doing things. That’s what I meant about there being nothing for me to teach you.”



“Having the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple move into the neighborhood is quite reassuring.”

“Indeed. If we have any emergencies or someone suddenly gets sick, we’ll be counting on you.”

“Of course, I’ll help as much as I can. But if I use Healing Magic too freely, it might impact the temple’s budget... so please consider using the temple’s services from time to time too, okay?”

The almost-serious way Calsedonia said this caused the gathered women to laugh heartily.

“I’m surprised,” one of them remarked. “As the Saintess, I had assumed you’d be more... stern, but talking to you now, you seem like a regular girl.”

“Uh... I’ve lived in the temple for so long, and this is my first time interacting with neighbors like this... To be honest, it’s a bit overwhelming. But I have to make sure I get along with everyone here, or else I’ll embarrass my husband.”

Calsedonia smiled warmly, hand on her cheek. It was true; she wasn’t very good at socializing. Growing up, she’d been treated as something of an odd duck by her parents and fellow villagers. Even after coming here to work at the Savaiv Temple and becoming Giuseppe’s adopted daughter, there were very few people who ever approached her for a friendly chat.

But now that she was living in this house, it would be important to befriend the neighbors. The last thing she wanted was to make Tatsumi uncomfortable by isolating them both.

Tatsumi was working hard every day for Calsedonia, and she was resolved to put in her fair share.

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Giuseppe must have seen the disappointment in Tatsumi’s expression, because he quickly added, “But it’s not like I have nothing at all I can teach you. First, you should aim to freely manipulate the elements around you. As of now, you can’t even gather external elements consciously, can you?” The old man’s face wore a mischievous smile.



“Yeah... You’re right.”

Tatsumi had only displayed the power of Heaven once, and it was almost unconscious. He had used a small amount of magical power a few times, but even then, he wasn’t exactly in control of what he was doing. Becoming able to consciously manipulate magical power would be his first challenge.

“Now, I know you and I are very different, but let me explain how I use magic as a reference. First of all...”

Tatsumi relaxed as he listened intently to Giuseppe’s lecture. There was no need to rush, he thought; he would take his time to steadily acquire the skills he needed.

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“I’m home!”

It was well past the seventh hour—around 6 PM—and it was nearly dark outside when Tatsumi finally got home.

“Welcome back, Master,” Calsedonia greeted him, scurrying from the back of the house as he unlocked the door—one with a magical lock she had made herself that opened with a password.

“How was your first day? How did your studies go?”

“Well, it’s kind of a challenging road ahead...”

Tatsumi had spent the entire day under Giuseppe’s guidance, trying to sense the magical power that filled the air around him, something he had never consciously attempted before. However, despite his best efforts, the day had ended without him feeling any magic at all.

“Nobody can feel magical power right away,” Calsedonia reassured him. “I also struggled a lot when I first started learning to sense it.”

“Really? Okay, I guess that makes sense. Maybe no one gets it right in the beginning,” Tatsumi said, already feeling himself regain some motivation. Indeed, encouragement from a beautiful woman can be more effective than any tonic.

“I’m making dinner right now, so why don’t you go take a bath first? I’ve already heated the water.”

With a magician like Calsedonia around, filling and heating the bath was an easy task. Moreover, while ordinary homes relied on feeble candlelight at night, Calsedonia’s Light Magic kept their home lit as if it were daytime.

“Thanks, Chiko. You’re a big help.”

“It’s nothing... as long as I can be of use to Master...”

“But I can’t leave *all* the housework to you. Let me know if there’s anything I can do... even if it’s just chopping wood.”

As Tatsumi confidently tapped his biceps, Calsedonia’s cheeks flushed red, and she began to fidget.

“In that case... there is something I was going to ask you for...”

“Me? Sure, if it’s something I can do, just tell me.”

“Then... tonight... can we... sleep in the same bed...?”

At her words, Tatsumi’s body stiffened with a snap.





## Chapter 3: Calsedonia's Ambition

Tatsumi stood in their bedroom, gazing at a single gigantic bed, where just the night before, there had been two smaller beds.

The bed was the biggest Tatsumi had ever seen. Was it queen sized? Or even a king? Of course, it wasn't the kind of mattress he was used to, but rather the typical straw-stuffed bed of this world. And yet, the craftsmanship of the bed frame suggested luxury... and Tatsumi had no memory of buying it.

"What's this...?" he asked, bewildered.

"This is... well... it's a housewarming gift from Grandfather, delivered this afternoon..." Calsedonia replied, her cheeks flushed but her eyes shining with joy as she glanced back and forth between Tatsumi and the bed.

Ah, so this was Giuseppe's doing. Suddenly, Tatsumi recalled the man's abnormally smug smile as he left his lessons that afternoon.

"This bed is really huge, though..."

Tatsumi moved away from Calsedonia to get a closer look at the massive bed... and also, maybe a little, to hide his embarrassment. Up close, its enormity became even more apparent. It was clearly meant to sleep more than one person.

His face growing even redder, Tatsumi turned back to Calsedonia.

"So... you want us to sleep together... in this bed?"

"Yes," Calsedonia responded with a beaming smile. "It's been my dream for so long... to sleep in the same bed with Master..."

“For a long time...?”

“Yes. It’s been my dream since I was very young.” Calsedonia spoke with a mix of embarrassment and happiness, holding her flushed face with both hands.

“Since you were young... Do you mean since your previous life as a cockatiel?”

“Yeah. Back then, I was always with Master. Of course, I was in my cage when Master wasn’t home, but whenever you were, you always let me out.”

Chiko, who had possessed some level of self-awareness even then, would go back to her cage to eat when she was hungry and drink water when she was thirsty. Then she would come out again and sit still on Tatsumi’s shoulder or lap for hours.

However, Tatsumi had always returned Chiko to her cage when he slept. He was afraid he might accidentally crush her by rolling over in his sleep.

“I understand it was because you cared for me so much. But... back then, I still felt lonely... But now, we can sleep together!”

Calsedonia clenched her fists tightly as she made her case. Yes, this was her long-cherished ambition.

*Two young people, sharing a bed together...*

If you weren’t old enough to understand what that meant, it might seem like an innocent enough idea. However, Tatsumi was no child; he was right in the midst of adolescence.

Naturally, the idea of sleeping together led him to think of the physical expressions of love. Living with Calsedonia and knowing she harbored romantic feelings for him, Tatsumi had contemplated—hoped—that they would eventually share that kind of intimacy. But it had always seemed much further into the future.

For one thing, Tatsumi had planned to wait until he achieved a certain level of financial stability. Sure, he could have initiated a physical relationship with Calsedonia at any point since he’d arrived here, and she seemed more than willing to accept him, but he knew once they crossed that line, restraining his



desires would be challenging. Before long, this could lead to Calsedonia conceiving their child.

It wasn't that Tatsumi was afraid of pregnancy. But he felt it would be disgraceful to become a father while still relying almost completely on Calsedonia's job. In a way, it was a matter of pride and self-respect.

Now, unexpectedly, just two days into living together, Calsedonia was proposing they share a bed. She knew how that sort of thing worked, right?

His mind raced as he tried to figure out how to respond to her straightforward request.

Tatsumi didn't know this, but female priests serving Savaiv, especially those like Calsedonia, were occasionally expected to serve as midwives. Calsedonia herself had assisted in several births, though she hadn't directly delivered a baby yet. God Savaiv, protector of marriage and bestower of children, also had all his priests bless newborns at birth, a significant duty of priesthood.

For this reason, female priests of Savaiv were given basic sex education. Though this world lacked the scientific and medical knowledge of modern Japan, it had a wealth of experience and knowledge passed down through the generations. The priests learned about the process of conceiving children, the male and female actions leading to conception, and the procedures for childbirth—all taught by more experienced female priests.

Therefore, Calsedonia knew all about the implications of what she was asking. However, as Tatsumi watched her eyes sparkle like rubies and her ahoge wag like an excited dog's tail, he realized he'd been overthinking. Calsedonia was simply overjoyed at the prospect of *sleeping* in the same bed as him. After all, she'd wanted this ever since she was a cockatiel.

Of course, she still harbored expectations of eventually becoming physically intimate with Tatsumi and bearing his children. But for now, she just wanted to fulfill a long-held dream.

Now that he thought about it, Tatsumi felt a hint of disappointment at not being able to physically unite with her yet... but sharing a bed and feeling each other's warmth would be fulfilling enough for now.

So, Tatsumi smiled happily and nodded to Calsedonia.

After taking turns in the bath and finishing dinner, Tatsumi and Calsedonia went back to the room with the gigantic bed—the two beds from the night before had been moved to the attic.

Now, with only sleep left on the agenda, they changed into their thin nightwear and lay down together on the large bed. Calsedonia looked both happy and a little embarrassed, and Tatsumi, his face flushed, found it hard to look directly at her. Nevertheless, every time their eyes met, they shared a radiant smile.

“I’ll turn off the light now,” Calsedonia whispered softly, and the room plunged into darkness as the Light Magic responded to her words.

As their eyes adjusted to the darkness, they could barely make out each other’s silhouettes. After a moment, their hands found each other’s, and they pulled the blanket over themselves. It was the end of the Ocean Festival, what Tatsumi would have known as late spring. Soon the brief Sun Season would begin, then the bountiful Harvest Season, followed by the long Twilight Season.

The blanket was warm enough for now, but during colder times, as Calsedonia had explained during bedtime stories, they would layer several animal or magical beast furs for warmth.

In the dark, with only their faint outlines visible, they quietly shared stories—about their time living together in the past, Calsedonia’s reincarnation in this world, and their hopes and dreams for the future. It was a peaceful, enjoyable time, and they both lost track of time as they lay there.

Eventually, as drowsiness crept in, Calsedonia quietly snuggled closer to Tatsumi.

With her soft, warm body against his, Tatsumi felt his drowsiness deepen. Calsedonia buried her face in the nape of his neck, rubbing it gently, and after several contented movements, she let out a satisfied sigh with a soft “ehehe” and was soon breathing in the steady rhythm of deep sleep.

Birds often tucked their beaks into their shoulder feathers and folded their legs into their belly feathers to sleep, conserving body heat. *That’s exactly what*

*she used to do before. She's still Chiko, isn't she?* Tatsumi mused hazily as he drifted off to sleep.

*Thud!*

Tatsumi woke up when something hit his stomach. He opened his eyes, but the darkness revealed little. Groping for his wristwatch by the pillow, he checked the time in the faint moonlight streaming in. It showed 2 AM... and they had gone to bed around 10 PM.

In a world that ran mostly on sunlight, people tended to sleep soon after sunset and wake up at sunrise. Only households with someone like Calsedonia to cast Light Magic would stay up as late as they had.

Tatsumi looked down at his stomach. He could just barely make out something white and rod-like resting on his abdomen.

“What’s this...?” he wondered. Still half-asleep, he reached out to touch the thing. It was supple beneath his fingertips, further puzzling him about the object’s nature. He then used his palm to feel it, and he was met with a smooth, soft texture. It was also strangely warm.

Comforted by the gentle softness, he unconsciously began to knead the surface of the mysterious object. Suddenly, a soft voice came from beside him. It was, of course, Calsedonia, but her voice was not its usual crisp tone; it was sultry, almost alluring. At that moment, Tatsumi realized exactly what it was that was resting on his stomach.

It was a leg—Calsedonia’s leg. Her nightwear had ridden up, revealing almost ninety percent of her silky white leg in the dim light. Tatsumi nearly gasped in surprise but quickly covered his mouth with his hand.

Then, he felt an impact on his face. “Now, what’s... ahh, an arm?”

Blinking away tears, Tatsumi saw what had hit his face. It seemed Calsedonia’s arm had accidentally struck him. After he gently moved the arm from his face, he also shifted her leg from his stomach. However, Calsedonia soon rolled over again, and her leg swung toward Tatsumi, who quickly turned his body to avoid another hit.



Squinting in the darkness, he saw Calsedonia still sleeping peacefully, unaware that her limbs were all over him. “Could it be... Chiko... has a really bad sleeping posture?” he mumbled to himself.

While he pondered this, Calsedonia moved again, this time rolling in the opposite direction.

If the lighting had been better, Tatsumi might have seen more of Calsedonia’s exposed legs, her disheveled undergarments, and the disarray of her chest revealing a hint of cleavage. But, fortunately or unfortunately, the darkness prevented him from discerning such details.

“Could it be... the real reason Giuseppe gave us this huge bed was...”

Knowing Calsedonia’s grandfather, he had probably given them this excessively large bed precisely because he knew that she tossed and turned in her sleep. This way, there was no need to worry about Calsedonia falling off, and it provided ample room for Tatsumi to dodge her inadvertent nocturnal movements.

Interestingly—and unbeknownst to Tatsumi—despite her restless nature, Calsedonia had never once fallen off a bed.

Silently apologizing to Giuseppe for his earlier misconceptions, Tatsumi curled up in a corner of the bed and drifted back to sleep.



## Chapter 4: Martial Arts Training

**A**round a dozen young men, all looking to be in their early twenties, were performing squats with sacks filled with sand on their shoulders. They bent their knees, lowered their hips all the way, then straightened their legs again—a routine they seemed to have been doing for quite some time. The sand beneath their feet had turned dark from all the sweat they'd shed.

In front of these young men stood an instructor, a man encased in plate metal armor and bearing the unmistakable crest of Savaiv on his chest, which signified his status as a priest-warrior. In his mid-forties, with a muscular build and a stern, bearded face, he exuded the aura of a seasoned drill sergeant. His eyes were fixed intently on the young men continuing their squats.

Eventually, one of the trainees dropped his sandbag, collapsing to the ground. As if on cue, another followed suit, then another, and soon most of the group lay exhausted on the ground. Only one remained standing, continuing his squats as if nothing had happened.

This last young man stood out from the rest. While most had brown hair and pale skin, he had black hair and a light amber complexion.

The instructor watched the lone remaining youth with a sharp gaze. "Come on, what's the matter? Is that all? At this rate, you'll never become a full-fledged priest-warrior!"

It was unclear whether the young man heard his instructor's shouts. In any case, he continued his squats in silence, eyes staring straight ahead in determination.

The rest of the young men watched him in silence from where they sat on the ground, but he seemed oblivious to their stares as well. The sandbags on each of his shoulders weighed about eight kilograms.

The young man had clearly reached his physical limits, yet he persisted out of sheer willpower. Eventually, even his resolve gave out, and he collapsed to the ground like the others before him. Watching him fall, the instructor allowed a sly smile to creep across his bearded face.

“All right, take a break for half a koku!<sup>1</sup> Get some food now, but don’t eat too much, or the next part will be harder!” he said before striding away from the training ground to take a break behind the temple.

Slowly, the exhausted young men got up and left the training ground, most of them heading for a meal as instructed. But the black-haired youth—Tatsumi—remained sprawled on the ground. One of his fellow priests came and stood over him, looking down.

“Hey, Tatsumi, you still alive there?”

“Yeah, Barse... just barely...” Tatsumi gave a weak wave of his right hand.

Barse grabbed his hand and pulled him up. “What’s up, Tatsumi? You hungry?”

“Yeah, I could go for some food!”

“Let’s go then. Your wife’s waiting for you at the usual spot, right?”

“She’s not my *wife*, Barse. Chiko and I aren’t married yet...”

Barse gave a look of exasperation. “Come on, what are you talking about? You’re living together, and she makes you lunch every day, right? Whether you’re officially married or not, Calsedonia is practically your wife,” Barse added with a knowing smirk.

Tatsumi blushed and decided not to say anything to that, staying a few steps ahead of Barse as they walked to the corner of the temple garden that had become their usual lunch spot.

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The sound of a knock echoed, and Giuseppe asked his new assistant, a high priest who had replaced Baldio, to see who it was. Hearing the response he expected, Giuseppe permitted the visitor to enter.

“Excuse me,” said the man, bowing as he stepped into Giuseppe’s office. It was the instructor who had been training Tatsumi and the others.

“Well done, Captain Ojin. How are the priest-warrior trainees doing?”

“They’re still quite green,” Ojin replied, his stern face becoming even grimmer.

The Savaiv Temple had five squads of priest-warriors, each consisting of fifteen to twenty men, led by captains known as chief warriors—with one Grand Chief Warrior over all of them. Morganaik had been one of these captains.

When Morganaik left the temple to live among the common folk, his assistant had taken over as the acting captain, and everyone expected him to be officially promoted soon. Ojin, although a sixth chief warrior, didn’t lead a squad. Instead, he was solely responsible for training the priest-warrior apprentices.

“Especially that boy Tatsumi, whom Your Eminence forcibly enrolled... he’s quite the challenge,” Ojin stated bluntly as he sat down, arms crossed, in the chair Giuseppe offered him. “He lacks physical strength, can barely support the weight of his weapons and armor, and doesn’t even know how to properly grip a weapon. Even the most spoiled noble’s son would be better than him.”

“I’m taking care of him because Your Eminence recommended him, but if it weren’t for that, I would have kicked him out on day one,” Ojin continued, his mouth forming a grim line under his beard. “That boy would always be the first to collapse whenever we did physical training with the other apprentices.”

Giuseppe raised an eyebrow inquisitively. “Oh? ‘*Would* always be,’ you say?”

Ojin grinned. You couldn’t put anything past Giuseppe. “Yeah, ‘would always be.’ These days, he’s often the last one standing. It’s been about thirty days since their training started, and there’s no doubt he’s shown the most improvement. Honestly, it’s become quite enjoyable to push him.”

Ojin’s face lit up with an almost childlike glee, as if he had found a new toy to play with.



“Here you go, Master. Barse, please help yourself.”

“Thanks, Calsedonia,” Barse said. “It’s really a blessing to have a friend with a beautiful, kind-hearted, and skilled cook for a wife!”

Calsedonia smiled happily upon hearing the word *wife* and presented Tatsumi with his lunch. It was a sandwich or hot dog–like dish, with seasoned meat and vegetables stuffed inside bread. Tatsumi had asked her about it, and she’d said such meals were common packed lunches in the Kingdom of Largofieri.

“Really, I can’t thank Tatsumi enough for being friends with me,” Barse went on as he accepted a piece of bread with a grateful nod. “Thanks to him, I get to enjoy meals made by the Saintess herself!”

At some point in the past thirty days, these lunches had become a routine for the three of them.

“Hey, are you sure I’m not intruding here? Maybe Tatsumi and Calsedonia would prefer to be alone?” Barse asked, flashing a mischievous grin to the pair in question.

Instead of showing embarrassment, Calsedonia smiled joyfully in response. “It’s fine, Barse. Tatsumi and I are always alone at home anyway!! Right, Master?!” she added, hugging Tatsumi’s arm against her chest and looking up at him with a beaming smile.

Tatsumi’s face went red, and he continued eating his lunch in silence.

For a moment, Barse’s face wore a resigned expression, but he quickly brushed it off and started eating as well.

“I had no idea you were planning to become a priest-warrior, too, Barse,” Calsedonia commented.

“Yeah, I decided to join the training when I heard Tatsumi was doing it. I won’t lie; I wasn’t taking it very seriously back then. But I regret it now. Training under chief warrior Ojin is no joke.”

When their training began, there were over thirty apprentices in their group. In the days since, the number had dwindled to ten or so.

“I remember training under Ojin, too. I fell over crying several times,” Calsedonia reminisced with a giggle.

“Man, that old guy doesn’t go easy on the ladies either, huh?” Barse said, looking a bit dismayed. Tatsumi and Calsedonia both laughed.

“But hey, at least being here means I get to enjoy Calsedonia’s cooking every day. I’ll take you both to a great restaurant sometime to thank you,” Barse offered.

Tatsumi and Calsedonia exchanged smiles and replied in unison, “We’re looking forward to it!”

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“I mean, that boy... He gets knocked down every day in training, but shows up the next day, and it’s like nothing happened. His recovery rate is truly remarkable,” Ojin commented.

“You probably have Calsedonia to thank for that. She is likely using magic to heal him,” Giuseppe said.

“Ahh, that’s right, he has Calsedonia with him. That explains it. “Speaking of which, Tatsumi isn’t just training in martial arts, is he? He’s also working with Your Eminence and Calsedonia.”

Just recently, in fact, Tatsumi had finally begun to sense external elements, taking his first step toward becoming a magic power user.

“Anyway, he listens well and follows every instruction without so much as blinking. It’s interesting to train someone who’s so straightforward and unspoiled.”

Tatsumi, having no prior experience in martial arts, was like a blank slate. Indeed, having a student like him, who took Ojin’s instructions to heart and followed them unquestioningly, would have been a rewarding challenge for any instructor.

“For now, I’ve been focusing on building the apprentices’ foundational strength, but soon, they’ll need to start training with weapons. Usually, it’s the ones with some half-baked experience and far too much confidence who are the most troublesome. They might be following orders now, but their dissatisfaction is obvious. It won’t be long before they start acting out.”

Giuseppe knew Ojin spoke from experience; this was far from the first batch of apprentices he had trained. “Really?” he asked. “Are you planning to start teaching them how to handle weapons soon?”

“What are you talking about, Your Eminence? No way they’re ready to handle weapons. Not yet anyway,” Ojin replied, his stern face breaking into a sly grin.

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As they wrapped up their meal, Barse noticed the plain, rugged bracelet on Tatsumi’s wrist.

“Hey, Tatsumi, what’s that? Did Calsedonia give it to you?”

“No, this isn’t from Chiko; I’m borrowing it from Giuseppe.”

“Giuseppe... Man, you refer to the Chief Priest like he’s some old man next door... I really admire that about you,” Barse said, shaking his head in disbelief before returning his focus to the bracelet.

Tatsumi raised his hand to give his friend a better view of it. “This is a magic-sealing item, a *Magic Seal* in your language, right?” He looked to Calsedonia for confirmation, and she nodded.

“So, it seals magic, huh... Does that mean you’re a mage?”

“Apparently. But I guess I’m a bit special, so Chiko and Giuseppe didn’t realize it at first.”

In this world, magic-sealing items were extremely expensive, reflecting how difficult they were to manufacture—which was probably why even Giuseppe had only lent the bracelet to Tatsumi, not given it to him.

Given that Tatsumi’s control over his magical power was still developing—as shown during the incident with chopping wood—he could unintentionally



enhance his physical abilities by absorbing ambient magic. Giuseppe had decided to lend him this bracelet to prevent his reliance on magic from hindering his foundational training.

“Well, we better get going, Tatsumi. If we’re late, Chief Warrior Ojin will give us an earful.”

“Yeah, let’s go. See you later, Chiko.”

“Take care, Master, Barse.”

Calsedonia watched Tatsumi and Barse leave the temple garden, standing still until their figures disappeared from sight.



## Chapter 5: Weapon Selection and Spreading Rumors

**U**nder Chief Warrior Ojin's strict guidance, Tatsumi and his fellow trainees endured days filled with running, strength enhancement, and other fundamental exercises. One day, however, Ojin surprised them by leading them to a room they had never seen before.

With an uncharacteristically dramatic flair, Ojin faced his ten warriors-in-training at the door. "Apprentice priest-warriors! So far, you have endured my training well! Today, we finally move on to training with actual weapons!"

His announcement was met with cheers from the apprentices, of which there were now only five.

After about a hundred days of relentless training, every one of them was eager for something new. Some had even confronted Ojin, demanding to move on to weapons training. However, the chief warrior had remained unyielding, saying they still needed to focus on the basics. Those who were too impatient, or too weak, had dropped out.

"This is the warehouse where the priest-warriors store their training weapons," Ojin continued. "Each of you will choose a weapon that you feel suits you. If it doesn't feel right, you can change it as many times as you need. Remember, these are real weapons, even if they're for training purposes. Handle them with care. Got it?!"

Satisfied by their energetic response, Ojin opened the door. The smell of iron and stale sweat wafted out, but the apprentices hardly noticed as they rushed excitedly into the room.

Tatsumi was no exception. His face was glowing with anticipation as he stepped through the door, ready to find a weapon that resonated with him.

Inside the dimly lit warehouse, Tatsumi was greeted by a variety of weapons, variously piled into corners, and hung up haphazardly. Axes and spears leaned against the walls, and a heap of assorted swords lay in one corner.

Tatsumi casually picked up one of the swords, testing its heft with a few swings. The weight initially threatened to throw off his balance, but he instinctively braced his arms and lower body, steadying himself. Realizing that his training was paying off, he broke into a satisfied grin.

From behind him came Ojin's now-familiar deep voice. "Oh? Planning to use a sword, are you? Not many here in Largofiery use swords as their main weapon. Is it more common in your homeland?"

"Well, yes, actually. In my country, there was a time when a certain type of sword called a katana was widely used," Tatsumi answered.

The sword he now held was single edged but with a broad, straight blade, unlike the curved blade of a Japanese katana. Still, in this fantasy world, the idea of wielding a sword had a strong allure to it.

"Guess I'll start with a classic style," Tatsumi decided, putting down the heavy sword and picking up a slightly shorter one that could be wielded one-handed. He paired the sword with a round shield in his left hand—*a sword and shield, the most orthodox armament in fantasy settings*, Tatsumi thought.

"You don't need to limit yourself to one type of weapon," Ojin advised. "Once you get the hang of the sword, try others as well. Of course, specializing in just the sword is also a valid approach."

Mastering multiple weapons and perfecting just one each had its pros and cons. Tatsumi's journey in martial arts and weaponry was just beginning, and the path he would choose remained open.

Being able to handle more than one weapon would mean a broader range of choices in combat. For example, wielding a mace against an enemy who proved difficult to fight with a sword would give a clear advantage. The downside, of course, was the challenge of mastering the depth of each weapon. The

intricacies of weapon handling were profound, and it would be hard to truly learn the secrets of a sword while also giving your attention to another weapon.

Tatsumi's dilemma—whether to be versatile and adaptable or to forsake all else and master one path—was one of opposites, and he wasn't ready to decide just yet. For now, he would start with the sword and think about the rest later.

Satisfied for now with his chosen armament, Tatsumi left the warehouse.

Soon, all the apprentices were armed and making their way back to the usual training grounds. The senior priest-warriors trained there too. Up until now, Tatsumi's group had been relegated to a corner of the grounds for their basic training. But today, that would change.

Although they still weren't on par with the senior warriors, they would begin training in earnest with their weapons. For now, they wouldn't be sparring with each other but rather practicing basic maneuvers on straw dummies clad in leather armor.

Tatsumi wielded his sword, while Barse and the other three apprentices held long spears. As they all faced off against their stuffed opponents, Ojin began explaining the fundamental handling of the long spear. Even though Tatsumi had chosen a sword, he listened intently, knowing this information might prove useful.

Suddenly, a murmur arose among the senior priest-warriors, who had been deeply engrossed in their training. As Tatsumi and the others turned to look, they saw a woman with platinum blonde hair, dressed in priestly garments, slowly approaching the training grounds.

"Hey, Tatsumi, isn't that...?"

"Yep, that's Chiko..." Tatsumi acknowledged.

A minute later, Calsedonia was standing in front of Ojin, giving him a bow, which he returned silently.

"Listen up, apprentices!" Ojin turned back to address the trainees in his booming voice. "From today, you'll start training with weapons. Given that you're handling unfamiliar weapons, accidents might happen. Fortunately, Priestess Chrysoprase, our renowned Holy Woman, has offered to observe your



training. She'll also provide healing if any of you get injured. Let's say thank you to Priestess Chrysopraxe!"

The apprentices, excluding Tatsumi and Barse, heartily thanked Calsedonia. The chance to see the famed Holy Woman up close—as well as her offer of healing—instantly lifted their spirits.

Tatsumi and Barse bowed to Calsedonia, but Barse understood her intentions well. She was there because of Tatsumi—to be ready to heal him in case of any injury. *Typical of Calsedonia*, Barse thought, *to be so concerned about him*.

*Well, we're just an afterthought compared to Tatsumi*, he mused to himself, yet still smiled at Calsedonia.

One of the senior priest-warriors raised his hand. "Chief Warrior Ojin! Does this mean Priestess Calsedonia will heal us too if we get injured during training?"

"No, you idiot! Take care of yourselves!" Ojin barked, drawing laughter from the other warriors. "All right, apprentices! Ignore this fool and start training!"

Their focus renewed, Tatsumi and his fellow trainees readied their weapons. With Ojin watching closely, Tatsumi swung his sword repeatedly at the straw dummy, then stepped aside to give Barse a turn.

Calsedonia approached Tatsumi, her expression composed. "Ahem! Junior Deacon Yamagata, are you feeling any discomfort?"

Tatsumi, slightly bewildered, replied formally, "Uh, Priestess Chrysopraxe... I'm not injured or anything..."

"There must be *something* wrong," Calsedonia pressed. "Maybe you just don't notice it yet. Please don't hesitate to tell me if you aren't feeling well. I can heal you right away."

"I'm really fine!" Tatsumi insisted, his cheeks growing red from the unwanted attention.

The exchange drew the eyes of everyone nearby—except for Barse and Ojin, who were accustomed to their dynamic. But Calsedonia eagerly pressed on, insistent on healing Tatsumi.

“Really, I’m not injured!” he protested, growing increasingly flustered.

Suddenly, a large shadow fell over the pair. Without any warning, a club-sized hand descended mercilessly upon each of their heads.

“Ugh!” Tatsumi grunted.

“Yipe!” Calsedonia yelped.

Both clutched their heads and crouched down.

“Really, this foolish couple...” Ojin muttered, looking down at the two of them with a mixture of anger and exasperation. “This kind of behavior is better suited for your home,” he advised sternly. “As far as I’m concerned, you can flirt all you want there.”

Ojin—a priest of Savaiv, the guardian of marriage—appreciated a loving couple. The issue was knowing the right time and place for such displays of affection.

When he had finished his lecture and deemed that Tatsumi and Calsedonia understood their mistake, Ojin let them go. But when he turned back to the rest of the apprentices, every one of them, save for Barse, was staring at him, dumbfounded.

“What’s wrong? You’re all making such dumb faces,” Ojin said.

“Instructor Ojin,” one of them spoke up hesitantly, “did you just say those two are ‘practically a married couple’?”

“That’s right,” Ojin confirmed. “They’re not officially married yet, but they might as well be. The Chief Priest Chrysoprase, Calsedonia’s adoptive father, is also aware of this.”

For a few moments, the training ground was enveloped by an eerie silence—which was then broken by a collective gasp of shock, loud enough to make Ojin cover his ears.

“What?!” one of the priest-warriors exclaimed in disbelief. “And here I thought that with Morganaik gone, it was the perfect opportunity to get close to Priestess Calsedonia!”

“I heard that Lord Morganaik left the temple heartbroken after being rejected by Lady Calsedonia... Could that be true...?”

“No way... *Tatsumi*, an apprentice warrior and a deacon, is with Lady Calsedonia, the Saintess...?”

“Hey guys, let’s all stay calm here. If Tatsumi is good enough for her, then maybe we have a chance too... right?”

“Oh? Ohhh?! Now that you mention it, maybe... Are you a genius?”

“Nah, that’s not it.”

This last remark came from Barse, who finally put down the spear he had been practicing with. “Lady Calsedonia is head over heels for Tatsumi, man. She’s not interested in anyone but him, plain and simple.”

Barse knew the couple better than anyone else, and he knew there was no space to step between these two.

He also knew that Calsedonia’s affection for Tatsumi was far greater than Tatsumi’s for her.

To be honest, the intensity of her love was enough to smother a lesser man or make him run for his life. But Barse believed Tatsumi could fully embrace such immense affection.

“Oh, and one more thing. Don’t mess with Tatsumi out of jealousy or anything, all right? If you mess with him, the *Saintess* might turn into a *Demon Lord* in an instant.”

“How do you know that?” another of the priest-warriors asked incredulously.

“That’s how well I know Lady Calsedonia,” Barse said with a confident grin and a thumbs-up. “But here’s the good news: if you get along with Tatsumi, you can get somewhat close with Lady Calsedonia too. Of course, as long as Tatsumi’s there, you can’t be more than friends with her, but you can get close, just like me!” Barse pointed his thumb at himself.

He, too, had once admired the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple. However, that had merely been admiration, not romantic love.

It was true; through his admiration for the Saintess, and his friendship with Tatsumi, he'd gotten to know her fairly well.

The reality was that the famed Saintess of the Savaiv Temple was just a normal woman without any particular quirks. Once Barse had realized this, his admiration for her had transformed into familiarity. Now, to Barse, Calsedonia was no longer the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple but simply Tatsumi's wife.

"Remember this," he went on. "It's crucial to discard any ulterior motives. She's really sensitive to that kind of thing, probably because of past experience. Always think of Calsedonia as 'a friend's wife.' If you do that, she'll probably be friendly with you too."

The other apprentices seemed to take Barse's advice seriously. But then, one of them exclaimed, "Got it!! We get close to her first, and then when the time is right, we steal Calsedonia from Tatsumi!"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you *not* to do!" Barse's fist connected swiftly and accurately with the apprentice's face.

After that, rumors spread quickly throughout the Savaiv Temple. The rumor was that the temple's Saintess had finally found a man. Moreover, it was said that the Saintess and the man were already living together, and it was only a matter of time before they held their wedding ceremony.

The followers of the Saintess wept bloody tears upon hearing this news, and they began to devise a variety of schemes to destroy this man. However, another rumor stopped them in their tracks: apparently, anyone who harmed the Saintess's partner would incur the wrath of the Saintess-turned-Demon Lord, suffer the agonies of hell, and then be despised by the Saintess for eternity.

While they hated the man who had won their Lady Calsedonia's heart, being hated by the Saintess herself was unbearable. So, tears still fresh in their eyes, her followers decided to watch over the Saintess and her man from afar. Some fanatics still lurked in the shadows, waiting for a chance to drive the man away, but she and Tatsumi were practically inseparable—and the fanatics never found their opportunity.



Thus, the marriage of the Saintess to this black-haired, black-eyed foreign man gained the begrudging acceptance of Calsedonia's followers.

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the chapter title.

## Chapter 6: Tatsumi's Magic Verification

**T**atsumi closed his eyes, slowly sending his senses out into the world around him. Within seconds, he could feel the magic energy swirling around him, and he began to draw it into his body. The process felt rather like breathing: with each inhale, the ambient magic around him seemed to flow into his being.

Unlike conventional magic users like Calsedonia or Giuseppe, who imagined drawing water from an internal well to harness their magic, Tatsumi possessed no such well. His various mentors had tried using different metaphors to explain the way he used magic, but the one that stuck had been breathing. Tatsumi envisioned the oxygen entering his lungs, dissolving into his bloodstream, and being circulated to every corner of his body by the beating of his heart. Riding on this imagery, he now filled his body with magical energy. He was surprised to realize how much knowledge of respiratory mechanics from modern-day Japan had aided his understanding of magic circulation.

Feeling his body brimming with magic, Tatsumi opened his eyes and picked up a stone lying at his feet. It was just an ordinary rock, about the size of his fist. But when he gave it a light squeeze, it crumbled as effortlessly as if it were a dirt clod.

Next, he turned his attention to a scarecrow clad in leather armor, much like the ones he'd been training on with his sword. As he thrust his magic-imbued fist into the scarecrow with all his might, it exploded into pieces as if detonated, scattering debris all around.

Witnessing this scene, both Giuseppe and Calsedonia simultaneously let out deep sighs.

“And my son-in-law is utterly unpredictable, as always...” Giuseppe remarked.

“*Unpredictable* is putting it mildly, Master...” Calsedonia added, her tone a mixture of awe and resignation.

The reason for their astonishment was clear. In Calsedonia’s world, directly enhancing one’s physical abilities using magical power was almost unheard of. While magic did exist that could augment strength, it was strictly a result of magical effects and not a direct enhancement through magical energy itself.

In this world, magic—or rather, incantation magic—meant invoking pre-determined phenomena through spellcasting. Magical power was the energy source for activating magic, and chanting a spell would automatically consume a set amount of magical power woven into it.

Though it was possible to increase a spell’s power or extend its range by consuming more magical energy, this would involve multiple recitations of specific parts of the spell. For this reason, direct manipulation of magical energy was rarely practiced.

“The amount of magical power automatically consumed by a spell has been refined through long periods of study and experimentation,” explained Giuseppe. “Of course, there are still magicians who dedicate their lives to further refining and improving these spells.”

For instance, consider a spell that activates with ten units of magical energy. No matter who casts it, the energy consumed will always be ten. However, attempting to produce the same effect without a spell, merely through manipulating magical energy, could potentially cost twenty or even thirty units of energy, depending on the caster’s skill.

“I see.” Tatsumi nodded as he listened to Giuseppe’s explanation. “So not using a spell makes it much less efficient in terms of energy consumption.”

Magicians could, in fact, directly manipulate magical power. Suppose Calsedonia tried to distribute magical power throughout her body to enhance her physical abilities, like Tatsumi. Given her limited experience with this method, it would likely take her as much or more time than Tatsumi to deploy the same amount of energy.

Moreover, there was the issue of how much magical power one could hold. After all, the quantity of magical energy that can be stored within a human body was limited. If a magician attempted to use magical power the way Tatsumi did, they would quickly exhaust their magical reserves.

Even Calsedonia, who boasted an extraordinary amount of inherent magical power, would deplete her energy in less than ten minutes if she enhanced her body Tatsumi's way, by distributing magical power throughout it. However, if the same effect were achieved through incantation magic, Calsedonia could use it at least twenty times without running out of magical power.

"Long ago, before incantations were developed, everyone manipulated magical power directly... much like our son-in-law does," Giuseppe recounted. "However, as the use of incantations became widespread, direct manipulation of magical power gradually fell into disuse."

The development of incantations, which allowed anyone with magical power to produce the same effects with optimized energy through chanting, naturally overshadowed the older, less efficient methods. While incantations gave rise to "magicians," they simultaneously led to the decline of "magic power users."

Which was why there were now many magicians and only a few magic power users. Tatsumi, as one of the latter, had no choice but to manipulate magical power directly. Another thing that made him an outlier was that he was an exceptional "external element user."

As he effectively never experienced magical power exhaustion, Tatsumi could use his energy without worrying about depleting his reserves. Also, as demonstrated earlier with the training dummy, only someone like him could directly channel and detonate magical power—a crude but effective technique.

And so, Calsedonia and Giuseppe had labeled Tatsumi's approach as "outrageously unconventional."

"Hmm. It seems my son-in-law has finally become able to sense magical power and consciously manipulate it," Giuseppe noted.

"The way he's deploying his magical power is still too slow, though," Calsedonia pointed out. "It wouldn't be practical in actual combat."

“Right,” Tatsumi piped up. “I can sense the magical power around me and use it to some extent consciously... but it’s still far from combat ready.”

“Well, for now, let’s consider it a success that you’ve managed to consciously control magical power. That’ll be our next challenge,” Giuseppe remarked.

Tatsumi had been receiving instruction in magic from Giuseppe and Calsedonia for quite some time now—all while continuing to fulfill his duties as a junior deacon and undergoing combat training. While he himself felt he had come a long way, from Giuseppe and Calsedonia’s perspective, his progress was nothing short of phenomenal.

Sure, at first, he had struggled to even sense magical power. However, once he overcame that hurdle, his progress had accelerated remarkably. Given that there were no incantations available for Tatsumi’s unique elemental affinity, Heaven, he had no choice but to directly manipulate magical power to cast spells. In this regard, Tatsumi showed exceptional adaptability... which was significantly influenced by where he’d grown up.

In Japan, of course—or indeed in the Earth world—magic and sorcery didn’t exist. Or at least, Tatsumi had never seen real instances of them. However, the supernatural was commonplace in subculture media like comics and games. While Tatsumi wasn’t deeply immersed in either, he had enough exposure to gain a basic understanding.

Having used magic in video games, read comics featuring wizards, and watched spellcasting sorcerers in movies conjure spectacular fireballs and lightning bolts, Tatsumi’s mind was etched with a vivid image of magic.

By connecting these deeply ingrained images with the magical power he absorbed from his surroundings, Tatsumi was able to activate magic. However, the act of transforming such abstract concepts as images into reality required an immense amount of magical power, far beyond what a typical mage could muster.

As Tatsumi became more adept at fusing his imagination with magical power, the amount of power required might decrease. Yet, the ability to actualize magic in this manner would likely remain unique to Tatsumi, an exceptional user of external magical elements.



“Let’s move on to the next training session,” Calsedonia cheerfully suggested, her voice resonating through the room.

She, Tatsumi, and Giuseppe were in a room of the temple that had been purpose-built for magical training. It was completely empty, with reinforced stone walls on all sides and a solitary door for entry and exit, and it was about twice the size of the basement where Tatsumi had been summoned.

Calsedonia took out a silver coin from a small bag tied around her waist. Known as a “trade silver coin,” it was a standardized currency used throughout the Zoisalight continent.

“As you know, Master, I’ve placed an identical silver coin on the table in our living room. I’d like you to try and teleport that coin here,” Calsedonia instructed. Tatsumi nodded. He remembered seeing her set down the coin before they left home that morning.

The task they were about to undertake was teleportation, a magical ability unique to the Heaven system.

Tatsumi closed his eyes, visualizing his familiar living room and the coin on the table. The magic power he had absorbed from his surroundings began to converge at his fingertips. A faint golden light illuminated his hand, growing gradually brighter.

And when the golden light burst into a flash, Tatsumi’s fingertips held... nothing.

“Failed...?” he muttered.

“Seems like it...” came Calsedonia’s dejected response.

He could clearly imagine the silver coin on the table at his house, yet he couldn’t summon it to where he stood now.

“Let’s try moving the coin somewhere else instead,” suggested Calsedonia.

Tatsumi nodded, focusing on the silver coin in her palm. As before, magic power gathered at his fingertips, and when he touched the coin, it vanished from Calsedonia’s palm and reappeared in Giuseppe’s.

“It appears you were successful this time,” pointed out Giuseppe.

“Yes, but... hmm...” Tatsumi furrowed his brow and crossed his arms in thought.

He had felt the same sensation during both attempts. Why, then, had the outcomes been different? Tatsumi wasn’t the only one puzzled; Calsedonia and Giuseppe also looked curiously at the silver coin in the Chief Priest’s palm.

Suddenly, Giuseppe’s face brightened with an idea. “Perhaps... Yes, it might be worth investigating. What do you say, son-in-law?”

“What’s that?” asked Tatsumi.

“This time, try sending this silver coin... yes, to the other side of that door,” Giuseppe suggested, pointing. The door was currently closed, obscuring the hallway beyond from view.

Tatsumi did as instructed, repeating the same process on the silver coin in Giuseppe’s hand.

Then came the burst of golden light, but this time, the silver coin didn’t disappear from Giuseppe’s palm.

“Why is this happening?” Calsedonia tilted her head in puzzlement. But Giuseppe was nodding in understanding.

“Hmm, just as I thought,” he mused, “but we need to run a few more tests. Son-in-law, can you try again, following my instructions more closely?”

Tatsumi gave a nod and attempted several more times to teleport the silver coin. Sometimes he succeeded and sometimes he failed, but the limitations of his teleportation magic gradually became apparent.

First, Tatsumi could only teleport objects that he was directly touching. This applied to both living beings and inanimate objects; anything not in physical contact with Tatsumi couldn’t be teleported. They tested this using a creature caught in the temple’s garden—something like a grasshopper, but with eight legs instead of six—and found that the results were the same for organic and inorganic matter.

There were also constraints on where he could teleport things. He could only teleport to areas within his direct line of sight, which was why he hadn’t been

able to send the coin to the other side of the door.

However, there seemed to be no specific limitation on what he could teleport. It didn't matter whether it was large or small, living or non-living—Tatsumi could teleport it. However, the larger the object and the greater the distance of teleportation, the more magic power was consumed. Given that Tatsumi was an external element user, this was less of a concern for him.

It remained unclear whether these limitations were due to Tatsumi's inexperience or inherent to the nature of Teleportation magic itself.

"Then, let's proceed to the main experiment of the day," Giuseppe announced as the three of them returned to the stone-walled room. The usual gentle smile had vanished from his face, replaced by a serious expression.

For the final and most important experiment of the day, they would see if Tatsumi could teleport a human being.

He had indeed teleported himself before, but unconsciously. The goal today was to achieve this consciously. Of course, teleporting a real person carried serious risks, which was why Giuseppe and Calsedonia, the most skilled magicians and healers of the Savaiv Temple, were overseeing this experiment.

"First, try teleporting yourself," Giuseppe instructed.

Tatsumi closed his eyes and focused inward, feeling the swirling magic power around him and visualizing himself teleporting. He remembered a famous line from a movie, "Don't think, feel<sup>2</sup>."

As the magic power enveloped and absorbed into his body, Tatsumi's form vanished and then reappeared in a corner of the stone room.

"That's a successful first step," Giuseppe commented with a smile, and Calsedonia clapped joyfully.

"But still, it takes too long to activate the magic," Tatsumi noted.

"Right, but that's part of what we'll work on going forward. Now then..." Giuseppe glanced at Calsedonia, who nodded once and approached Tatsumi.

"Now, let's try teleporting someone other than yourself," Giuseppe said.

This was their first attempt at teleporting another person—and the consequences of a failed teleportation were entirely unknown.

The volunteer to be the subject of this hazardous teleportation was, unsurprisingly, Calsedonia, who stepped forward without any hesitation. She stood silently in front of Tatsumi, an expectant smile on her face.

“Giuseppe, isn’t it too dangerous to try on a human just yet?” Tatsumi asked, his face reflecting an anxiety that was completely lacking from Calsedonia’s. “Shouldn’t we start with a smaller animal... like a dog or a cat?”

His concern was understandable; any mistake in the magic could have unforeseeable consequences for his beloved Calsedonia.

“I see what you’re saying, but there aren’t really small animals readily available,” Giuseppe responded. In the Kingdom of Largofiery, it seemed there was no custom of keeping small animals as pets. Dogs here were more like wolves or wild dogs, and cats were more like wildcats. There were no domesticated breeds, and roles like hunting or shepherding were fulfilled by magical beasts.

Anyway, wolves and wildcats were scarce around the royal capital; capturing them would require commissioning a magical beast hunt, which was both costly and time-consuming. There would be no way to procure any animals in time for today’s training.

“Don’t worry, Master. I trust you,” Calsedonia said. Her confident smile left Tatsumi momentarily speechless.

“And in case anything happens,” she added, “my grandfather’s here! He can heal most injuries.”

“Indeed, indeed. Trust in yourself, my son-in-law,” Giuseppe encouraged.

Encouraged by Calsedonia and Giuseppe, who were already like family to him, Tatsumi finally gathered his resolve.

“Then... here I go?” he said tentatively.

“Yes... please...” Calsedonia replied, closing her eyes and standing relaxed.

After absorbing the necessary magical power, Tatsumi placed his right hand on Calsedonia's left shoulder.

He felt the warm, soft touch of Calsedonia's body under his hand. After their last few weeks together—she was someone who often enjoyed physical affection—this familiar sensation was almost comforting enough to make him forget his trepidation. Releasing his hold, along with a slight sense of regret for letting go of Calsedonia's soft body, Tatsumi unleashed his magical power.

The two of them were standing in one corner of the room; his goal was to teleport Calsedonia to the room's center. This spot had been chosen by Giuseppe as the safest option, free from any obstacles that could potentially cause an accident.

As the sensation in Tatsumi's palm vanished, Calsedonia's body appeared in the middle of the room without delay.

"Ah, another successful teleporta... wait, what?!" Giuseppe exclaimed.

"Heh... b-but?!" Tatsumi stammered, bewildered.

In the center of the stone room, indeed, there was Calsedonia. But only her body.

For her part, Calsedonia felt a brief sensation of floating. However, it quickly disappeared, and she slowly opened her eyes. It seemed that Tatsumi's teleportation had been successful, as she had safely moved to the center of the room.

Turning her gaze toward Tatsumi and Giuseppe, who were standing a short distance away, she noticed they were staring at her with eyes wide open. Tilting her head in confusion, her familiar ahoge swaying slightly, she caught a glimpse of something in her peripheral vision.

A pile of clerical robes lay crumpled on the floor, as if hastily discarded. On closer inspection, she could make out a glimpse of white undergarments peeking through the robes. And atop the robes was a medallion that bore the very familiar emblem of Savaiv.

"Wait, is that my medallion? Does that mean those are my robes?"



Only then did her mind catch up with the reality of the situation.

Calsedonia nervously shifted her gaze down to her own body. Her ruby-red eyes were met with the sight of her own starkly white skin, clearly on display.

Her legs were long and shapely, perfectly proportioned. Her hips curved beautifully, crowned with a tuft of hair matching the color of her head. Her waist was slender and tightly drawn. And then, her breasts—full and firm yet retaining their perfect shape, each crowned with a delicate fruit of a pale hue.

“Oh...”

As she realized that she was completely unclothed—utterly naked—Calsedonia’s face and chest both turned a deep shade of red in an instant.

“Whaaaaaaat?!” she shrieked in panic, clasping her generous chest in her arms and crouching down on the spot. “Don’t look, Master! Grandfather, please, turn away *now!*”

At her sudden outcry, Tatsumi hurriedly averted his eyes, while Giuseppe slowly turned his back. Assured they weren’t looking, Calsedonia, with tears in her eyes, scurried to her fallen clothes and hurriedly dressed herself. And yet, she felt a slight pang of loneliness that even Tatsumi had turned away.

From behind, the sound of rustling clothes reached Tatsumi, a young man for whom this was a rather overwhelming stimulus.



Having just witnessed Calsedonia's dazzling naked form, it was no wonder that Tatsumi's heart was racing uncontrollably. Feeling his cheeks flush with warmth, he suddenly realized something.

"Uh, wait? Does this mean the experiment was...?"

"Well, it seems it was a failure," Giuseppe responded, "but it shouldn't be too hard to correct."

Because he had focused too much on Calsedonia herself, he had teleported only her, leaving her clothes behind. Next time, if he recognized her and everything she was wearing as a whole, he would probably manage to teleport all of it.

"So, although it technically was a failure, for you, my boy, it was quite a delightful one, wasn't it? If you set your mind to it, you could strip any lady bare in an instant... even a fully armored female knight! Ho ho ho!"

"I would *never* do that!" Tatsumi whispered, being careful to keep his voice down so Calsedonia wouldn't hear their conversation.

His face turned even redder in denial, but Giuseppe sported a mischievous smile, wryly thrusting his right thumb up.

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the chapter title.

## Chapter 7: With a Student's Spirit

One day, following their usual morning training, Tatsumi and Barse were heading to their regular lunch spot in the temple garden with Calsedonia when a young woman's timid voice called out from behind them.

"Excuse me... Are you Tatsumi Yamagata?"

Tatsumi turned to see a girl he didn't recognize. She looked a bit younger than him, with fluffy chestnut hair and grayish-blue eyes. She wasn't strikingly beautiful or a typical "pretty girl" but she had a charming, cute aura about her.

"Yeah, I'm Tatsumi. How can I help you?"

From her priest's garb and the design of her holy seal, Tatsumi could tell she was a junior deacon like him and his friends. But he had never seen her before.

"Oh, good..." she said, beaming with relief. "They told me to look for a junior deacon with black hair and black eyes, but I was afraid I might have the wrong person."

Then she quickly composed herself. "I'm sorry, I should have introduced myself first. My name is Curie, and I'm a junior deacon. I'm here on behalf of Lady Calsedonia."

"Calsedonia... you mean, she sent you here?"

"Yes," Curie replied energetically, explaining why she had come to find him. Apparently, an elderly noblewoman close to Calsedonia had fallen slightly ill. The lady's servant had asked Calsedonia to come see her, and she'd gone to do a wellness check. She had sent Curie to tell Tatsumi and Barse that she wouldn't be able to join them for lunch.

“I see...” Tatsumi mused. “With no mobile phones or email here, if there’s a sudden change of plans, sending messages like this is the only way, huh?”

He wondered if they had magic for telepathic communication... Calsedonia and Giuseppe had certainly never mentioned such spells. If that kind of magic did exist, Tatsumi thought, she surely would have taught it to him. Or maybe it was beyond her and her grandfather’s capabilities.

“By the way, Lady Calsedonia sent this...” Curie added, extending a basket much like the one Calsedonia always carried their lunch in. “Lady Calsedonia will be dining at her destination, so she said you and the others could have what’s in here.”

“Thanks. Uh, Curie, right? We’re both junior deacons, so there’s no need for formalities. Just ‘Tatsumi’ is fine,” Tatsumi said as he accepted the basket. Curie’s eyes widened in surprise, and she vigorously shook her head, hands fluttering in front of her face.

“No, no, I couldn’t possibly! You’re going to be Lady Calsedonia’s husband, aren’t you? Plus, I heard that Chief Priest Giuseppe is personally mentoring you. There’s talk of you taking on a high position at the temple someday. We might both be junior deacons, but our status is worlds apart!”

“Really? Do people actually think of me that way?” Tatsumi was genuinely taken aback. He turned to Barse, who shrugged and gave a sigh.

“You’re pretty much the only one who doesn’t know. With your involvement with Calsedonia and everything, you’ve become quite the topic of conversation.”

The fact that the Chief Priest of the Savaiv Temple had personally chosen Tatsumi from a distant foreign land to be his granddaughter’s partner was significant. Word was that the Chief Priest was grooming Tatsumi for a prominent role in the temple... possibly even to be his successor. Not to mention that, with his extraordinary magical power, Tatsumi was also rumored to be the next great mage. And his prowess in swordsmanship was widely recognized, leading many to believe he would eventually lead the priest-warriors as one of the chief warriors.



It was even said that Tatsumi had defeated Morganaik, who had once been romantically involved with the Saintess, in a duel and snatched Calsedonia away from him. Tales like these were spreading like wildfire, not only within the temple grounds but across the city of Levantis. A handful of noble households, and even the royal family itself, had recently sent inquiries to Giuseppe, expressing their desire to meet Tatsumi.

“In a lot of ways, you’ve become quite the celebrity,” Barse said with a sly grin, to which Tatsumi could only roll his eyes in reluctance.

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“I’m really sorry for the trouble. It’s nothing serious, but a panicked servant called for you...” the elderly woman lying on the bed said to Calsedonia with a gentle smile.

“It’s no trouble at all. I’ve been indebted to the Great Lady since I was a child. Please call me anytime; I’ll do whatever I can to help.” Calsedonia cast Cure Disease on the older woman, who instantly seemed to feel better and sat up on the bed.

The woman’s name was Elysia Quart. After her husband, Duke Quart, passed away and her son took over the dukedom, she had retired and now lived a leisurely life. Still, she wielded immense influence in high society in the Largofiery Kingdom, especially among the noblewomen and young ladies.

People said things like, “If Lady Quart wanted to, she could replace the queen.” Feared and revered among the noblewomen of Largofiery, she was a figure of significant authority. But to Calsedonia, this amiable old lady, a long-time acquaintance of her grandfather—or technically, her adoptive father—was nothing more than a kind, beloved aunt who had taken care of her since she was young.

“Your magic is as effective as ever. By the way...” Elysia’s gentle smile transformed into a child’s mischievous grin. “I’ve heard, my dear, that you’ve finally decided to settle down. It’s true, isn’t it?”

Calsedonia's eyes sparkled with a hint of joy. "Yes, it seems I've found a suitable partner. Though, I have to say, I'm surprised that you already knew, Lady Elysia!"

Elysia chuckled softly. "Well, I did have hopes of you joining my family by marrying one of my grandsons. But seeing you now so obviously content, I won't press the matter."

Calsedonia knew that Elysia's matchmaking attempts had never been politically motivated—which was something she always had to be on the lookout for as she neared the end of her marriageable age. Both she and her grandfather had always felt a pang of guilt at turning down Elysia's proposals.

"But tell me about this man you've chosen. I'm curious to know what kind of person has won your heart," Elysia urged. And so, Calsedonia began to speak of her chosen partner, her face glowing with happiness. Elysia listened with apparent enjoyment at first, but as Calsedonia's narrative went on, her smile slowly twisted into a look of strain and eventually into a grimace of exasperation.

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Meanwhile, Tatsumi and Barse had said goodbye to Curie and were carrying the lunch basket, not to their usual spot in the temple garden but to the dining hall. With Calsedonia absent, they had decided on a change of scenery for their meal.

The dining hall was bustling with the usual lunchtime crowd. As they looked around for empty seats, they heard a familiar voice. "Hey, Tatsumi and Barse? Don't you guys usually eat lunch with Lady Calsedonia?"

Turning toward the voice, they saw three faces that could almost have belonged to identical triplets.

"Niizu, Sago, and Shiro? You guys are here too?" Tatsumi greeted his fellow priest-warrior trainees.

The trio were, in fact, brothers born in successive years. They all had chestnut-brown hair and bright brown eyes—Niizu was the oldest at seventeen,

Sago was sixteen, and Shiro was fifteen.

Their family ran the Dowaiezu Armory, a well-established and popular business catering to monster hunters in Levantis.

Unlike Barse, who was a live-in trainee at the temple, these brothers walked from their home to the Savaiv Temple daily. Also unlike Barse, they hadn't been part of the Savaiv Order before and started attending the temple solely for priest-warrior training.

In this world, where everyday life was far more perilous than in modern-day Japan, many people set out to learn the basics of self-defense. The temples provided them with training in weapon handling—though it was rather unusual to come to the temple of Savaiv, the God of Earth and Fertility, for such training.

Instead, most civilians flocked to the temple of Golayba, the God of Sun and Light, who also embodied aspects of legal protection and warfare. Those who, like the Niizu brothers, chose to receive priest-warrior training at the Savaiv Temple were quite the oddities.

The Niizu family business, an armory, was to be inherited by the eldest son, so the brothers were considering becoming monster hunters. However, upon becoming priest-warrior trainees, they had formally joined the Savaiv Order and been granted the rank of junior deacons, like Tatsumi.

Their choice of Savaiv's temple over Golayba's was influenced by its proximity to their home... and perhaps a bit by a boyish impulse to get closer to the temple's famed Saintess. Ironically, their unstated goal was more than accomplished through their friendship with Tatsumi.

Niizu gestured to two empty seats next to him and his brothers, and Tatsumi and Barse took seats.

"So, what happened? Isn't Lady Calsedonia usually with you?" one of the brothers asked.

"Calsedonia had to go out for a sudden healing request," Tatsumi explained. "That's why we decided to eat here today." But as he removed his and Barse's

food from the basket, Tatsumi noticed the brothers were staring at the food rather than paying attention to his story.

On the table were Calsedonia's usual sandwiches and some fruit that reminded Tatsumi of pears in both taste and texture. The sandwiches were simple, but Calsedonia's culinary skills made them a delight for both Tatsumi and Barse.

"Thanks for the delicious meal, Lady Calsedonia. I'm forever in your debt," Barse said. Although his hands were folded as if in prayer, his gratitude seemed more directed toward the Saintess than the gods.

Expertly grabbing a sandwich from the table, Tatsumi took a big bite. Niizu's brothers watched him silently, their faces almost drooling with anticipation.

"Ah... If you guys want, you can have some too," Tatsumi suggested, shifting a few sandwiches toward them. Their faces lit up instantly.

"Thank you so much!" All three voices harmonized, pouncing on the sandwiches like famished beasts.

"Lady Calsedonia made these by hand..." one marveled.

"So delicious! Knowing Lady Calsedonia made it makes it taste even better!" another added.

"Thanks, Tatsumi! Or should I say, Lord Tatsumi! If I could eat such delicious food every day, I'd gladly be your slave... No, actually, I'd rather be Lady Calsedonia's slave..."

"No need for any slaves, for either me or Calsedonia," Tatsumi quickly interjected. Laughter erupted among Barse and the brothers, and Tatsumi joined in.

Indeed, Tatsumi was very much enjoying life with Calsedonia. Their home was a comfortable and calming space for him. However, times like this, engaging in silly conversations with male friends, offered a different kind of fun—one that Tatsumi had been missing for years.

All five of them were around high school age, and conversations like these were exactly what Tatsumi knew went on between school friends.

*“Have you heard? Someone in this class just got a girlfriend.”*

*“That gravure idol looks amazing, doesn’t she? Wish I could see her in person.”*

*“There’s a new ramen shop on the way from school to the station. Want to check it out on our way home?”*

*“Hey, when are you going to tell that girl how you feel about her? You should hurry up, you know?”*

Of course, such exchanges had never been part of Tatsumi’s high school experience. There, he had been something of an outcast, with no close friends.

In this new world, however, Tatsumi suddenly found himself surrounded by peers of a similar age. *Meeting Barse and the Niizu brothers... It’s all thanks to Calsedonia bringing me here*, he thought, full of gratitude for these new companions.

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“Hey, Curie! Who was that guy you gave the lunch to just now?”

Curie was on her way back to her assigned station for the day. Among the junior deacons, the men often handled more physical tasks like carrying water and heavy loads, while the women typically did cleaning and helped in the kitchen. Curie’s task for the day was assisting in the healing facility, caring for and attending to patients who came to the temple with injuries or illnesses. When she was there, Curie often helped Calsedonia, serving as something of a personal assistant to the Saintess.

Now, in the temple’s corridor, Curie found herself stopped by several other female junior deacons from her cohort.

“That lunch you gave to the guy with the black hair earlier... that was a lunchbox, right? Could that junior deacon be...”

“Curie has someone to give lunch to? I had no idea...”

“Getting outdone by Curie... I didn’t see that coming...”

“Hey, wait, what are all of you saying?! Lord Tatsumi isn’t that kind of person!” Curie’s cheeks flushed red as she protested, but her frantic denial only seemed to fuel her friends’ curiosity more.

“Oh, so that junior deacon is named Tatsumi? And you’re calling him ‘Lord’?”

“He’s got unusual hair and eye colors... Is he from another country?”

“How did you start dating him? Tell us the truth!” Her friends’ eyes sparkled with curiosity as they pressed her for details.

Even in this world, a friend’s love story was always a topic of excitement for young girls.

“But I told you! Tatsumi is going to be *Calsedonia*’s husband! Don’t say anything stupid, or you’ll make Calsedonia mad!”

Curie’s words left her friends momentarily speechless, but as they processed what she said, expressions of astonishment spread across their faces.

“What? Calsedonia’s... what?!”

“So, that junior deacon with the black hair, he’s the one they’re saying defeated Morganaik?”

“I did hear about an incredibly handsome man from another country, but the guy we saw... He didn’t exactly fit the... um, you know? Is he really going to be Calsedonia’s husband?”

“Yeah, absolutely. The lunch I gave to Tatsumi was made by Calsedonia herself, and she specifically asked me to deliver it to him. Also, I think the rumor that he’s being personally taught by the Chief Priest is true.”

Curie also knew that Calsedonia referred to Tatsumi as “Master,” and it was unthinkable for a mere junior deacon to receive direct instruction from the Chief Priest of the Savaiv Order.

“I see... so the rumors are true, then. That the Chief Priest brought someone from another country to be Calsedonia’s partner.”

“If he’s being taught by the Chief Priest himself, that must mean he’s someone of high status back home too, right? He could even be royalty...”



“I heard there are people in our royal family who proposed to Calsedonia, too.”

“But why would someone of noble birth be a junior deacon? If he’s from a noble family, he should have a higher rank, right?”

The girls gathered in a corner of the corridor, buzzing with conversation. If Tatsumi saw them now, he’d probably think, *This is just like a high-school or middle-school girls’ chat*. Apparently, getting carried away with gossip wasn’t exclusive to the boys.

Later, the girls received a scolding when a supervising priest caught them chatting. But this, too, was part of what Tatsumi would describe as “typical high-school behavior.”

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“Thank you. I understand very well about the man you’ll be marrying,” Elysia said, her face weary.

“I’m sorry... I got carried away talking about... Tatsumi, without thinking about your condition,” Calsedonia said, her shoulders slumping in regret.

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, now I know just how much you love that Tatsumi,” Elysia replied with a sigh. “Thank you for the feast,” she added. She now wore a slightly wicked smile, yet there was also kindness in her eyes.

After a meal sprinkled with light conversation, Calsedonia left Elysia’s mansion. As she watched Calsedonia’s carriage disappear down her street, Elysia thought about Tatsumi, the young man who had captivated the Saintess.

Elysia, who had known Calsedonia since her childhood, had often heard about the “boy of her dreams.” So this was him; Calsedonia really had summoned him... Elysia knew how much time Calsedonia had spent researching summoning magic, but actually accomplishing such a feat—it was beyond belief.

Naturally, Elysia had no intention of revealing to the wider public that Tatsumi wasn’t from this world. The revelation that Calsedonia had successfully

performed legendary Summoning Magic would surely draw even more attention to her—attention that she didn't need.

Elysia couldn't help but worry about the summoned youth. As far as she knew, this was Calsedonia's first serious romantic relationship. It would be easy for any man with just a little experience to manipulate her naivete. Just because this was Calsedonia's dream boy didn't mean he had pure intentions.

"I need to investigate this Tatsumi," Elysia decided, clapping her hands. Within seconds, an older man appeared by her side. As her most trusted retainer, this man managed Elysia's other servants and would carry out any task for Elysia, legal or otherwise.

"Find out everything you can about Tatsumi Yamagata, a junior deacon with black hair and eyes at the Savaiv Temple," she ordered without turning to look at him. "I don't care how you do it."

The servant responded with a simple "As you wish," bowed silently, and left to carry out her command.

Sensing the servant's departure—deliberately leaving a trace of his presence for Elysia to detect—she murmured to herself, not really addressing anyone in particular.

"Tatsumi Yamagata, huh? I suppose he can't be too odd if Giuseppe approves of him... But then, Giuseppe does tend to be indulgent toward his granddaughter. If, just if, Calsedonia is being deceived by that man..."

Elysia thought of Calsedonia almost like a granddaughter. If, by any chance, Calsedonia was being deceived by Tatsumi, Elysia was prepared to split them apart, regardless of how much Calsedonia might resent her for it. And she would never forgive the man who dared take advantage of Calsedonia.

*Be prepared, she vowed silently. If that time comes, I will use everything at my disposal to erase your very existence from this kingdom.*

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the chapter title.

## Chapter 8: Drawn by the Spread of Rumors

2

“**W**hat?! An *engagement* with the Saintess... with Calsedonia?!”

His reaction to his subordinate’s report was a mix of shock and anger. He was a tall man in his early twenties, with carefully groomed, smoky blonde hair and a face of refined features. His attire was of the highest quality, marking him without a doubt as a member of the nobility.

“Engaged to Calsedonia...? Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir. It’s a rumor that’s been spreading all over the Savaiv Temple and in the streets lately... and it seems to be quite credible.”

The man gauged his master’s reaction warily as he continued his report.

“What’s more, they’re saying that Lady Calsedonia... is already living with this... this man who’s said to be her fiancé...”

“What—?!”

His eyes widened in disbelief. Calsedonia Chrysoprase of the Savaiv Temple—the Saintess *he* had already proposed to on more than one occasion—was now engaged to another man, and they were *living* together?

For a moment, his vision went red with anger.

“Who is he...? Who’s stolen *my* Calsedonia from me?”

“They say... according to the rumors, sir... that he’s a commoner from a foreign land...”



“A commoner, you say...?” The heir to the eminent Earldom of Garlathon let out an incredulous snort. “To think that Calsedonia, the Saintess, would reject the proposal of *me*, Larlyk Garlathon, only to choose a commoner as her partner...”

There was a loud thud as the lord kicked a small table across the room. It crashed against the wall, raining shrapnel down around him, but Larlyk was too angry to notice.

“Um, Lord Larlyk...? He might be a commoner, but they’re saying he’s been personally tutored by the Chief Priest of the Savaiv Temple. There are even rumors that he might be the next Chief Priest. So he’s not just any commoner...”

The subordinate tried to add more details, but Larlyk wouldn’t have any of it.

“That disgusting Free Knight is gone from the temple, so I was sure the Saintess would be mine... and now a *commoner*? A commoner has stolen the Saintess from me, a noble?”

Larlyk turned his bloodshot eyes toward his subordinate. “Find out everything there is to know about this commoner! *Now!* And make sure he breaks it off with the Saintess! Use blackmail, threats, bribery, whatever it takes!”

The subordinate saw his opportunity to exit the room and took it, aware that staying any longer could make him the next target of Larlyk’s fury. Alone in a blind rage, Larlyk began the work of destroying the room’s luxurious furnishings.

If all the items in this room had been sold, it would have been enough to sustain a common family for years and years in luxury. The way he now acted on them was a powerful testament to Larlyk Garlathon’s disregard for true class and sophistication.

He smashed an expensive ceramic vase to the floor, shredded a painting by a renowned artist with his dagger, and trampled a rare magical beast’s fur rug underfoot. Servants and maids came running when they heard the commotion, but fearing the repercussions of being caught in his wrath, they didn’t dare enter.

And so, the storm of Larlyk's destruction continued until the once-extravagant room lay in a pitiful state of ruin.

※ ※ ※

Tatsumi stood facing his instructor, Captain Ojin. He and the rest of the acolytes were geared up and facing each other in the center of their usual training grounds. Tatsumi was arrayed in the simple leather armor he'd grown used to over the last few weeks, holding his well-worn training sword and shield. Ojin was clad in plate armor that bore his captain's insignia, and he wielded a two-handed battle-axe.

"Ready to start, Tatsumi? Remember, like I said before, focus on defense first," Ojin instructed.

"Yes, got it!" Tatsumi responded enthusiastically. His fellow trainees, including Barse, the brothers, and several senior priest-warriors, held their breath in anticipation as they watched from several meters away. Among them also stood Calsedonia, still as a statue, only her ruby-red eyes betraying her worry as she gazed at Tatsumi.

"All right, here we go!" Ojin declared, then charged, closing the distance to his opponent as fast as an arrow from a bow. He raised his weapon high and brought it down with full force toward Tatsumi.

Today, the captain wielded a training battle-axe. Like Tatsumi's weapon, it was blunted for practice—but the axe was just as heavy as a combat-ready weapon, and a direct hit could still cause severe injury.

Tatsumi remained calm as he gauged the trajectory of the incoming axe. At the critical moment, his left hand quickly thrust his shield into the axe's path. Bracing himself firmly, he never took his eyes off the descending axe.

The next instant, a loud thud echoed across the training grounds. But it wasn't the sound of an axe and shield clashing; rather, it was the axe striking the ground near Tatsumi's feet.

"Damn..." Ojin grunted, seeing his attack had missed. He instantly leapt backward and directed a glare at Tatsumi, who still held his shield up.



Tatsumi had indeed evaded Ojin's strike, not by dodging but by deflecting. At the precise moment of contact, he'd maneuvered his shield to divert Ojin's blow sideways. Had this been real combat, Ojin's exposed flank would have been pierced by Tatsumi's sword in that instant. Realizing this, Ojin shuddered inwardly—not out of fear, but in exhilaration.

*I've noticed it during training, he thought, but this guy is incredibly skilled with a shield.*

It seemed Tatsumi was more suited to defense than offense. He had a solid strategy: to steadfastly endure his enemy's attacks, then exploit the slightest opening for a counterattack.

Now, Tatsumi stood with his shield raised, covering from his face down to his abdomen and positioning his body sideways to reduce his exposure to Ojin. Pushing the shield forward, he concealed himself behind it, then skillfully slipped his sword in between his body and his shield.

From Ojin's perspective, Tatsumi's sword was completely hidden, making it difficult to predict his attacks. Indeed, Ojin himself had taught Tatsumi this defensive posture and counterattack strategy. But now that he faced him directly, Ojin was keenly aware of how troublesome Tatsumi's approach could be.

Ojin's weapon of choice, a two-handed axe with a long handle, tended to require large movements, which made his attacks more predictable. Moreover, the only direct targets Ojin could aim for were Tatsumi's legs and head, but Tatsumi was well aware of this. Attacking those areas would likely result in easy evasion, creating openings for Tatsumi.

Ojin's face broke into a pleased smile as he contemplated how far his student had come. *Dealing with someone skilled in shield handling really is troublesome, he mused. But I didn't expect him to master what I taught him to this extent...*

As a teacher, he found Tatsumi's growth immensely gratifying. Tatsumi was an incredibly earnest student who never complained and had committed himself wholeheartedly to his training.

In fact, all the trainees, Tatsumi included, had been practicing for quite some time, and their hard work was clearly paying off.

Trading his happy smile for a more combative one, Ojin launched into a whirlwind of continuous attacks on Tatsumi.

Tatsumi calmly parried each onslaught, but he understood that Ojin was holding back. If his teacher wanted to, he could easily shatter Tatsumi's arm along with his shield. But this was training, not real combat; Tatsumi knew that this session was largely about Ojin gauging his current abilities.

This helped Tatsumi maintain his composure. He knew Ojin wouldn't make any reckless or truly dangerous attacks, and even his hardest blows wouldn't result in serious injury.

Tatsumi continued to adjust the angle of his shield so that the heavy blows aimed at his head slid off of it, one to the right, one to the left...

Next came a sweeping upward strike, which Tatsumi deftly avoided by stepping back. As he parried the relentless onslaught, he glanced at Ojin's face and saw a genuinely delighted smile.

*He's acknowledging my improvement,* Tatsumi realized, returning the smile.

It wasn't in response to Tatsumi's smile, but Ojin abruptly halted his attack and spoke up. "All right, now it's your turn to go on the offensive. Feel free to use that magic of yours," he suggested.

At Ojin's words, Tatsumi stiffened slightly. *Giuseppe must have told him about my magical abilities.*

"All right," Tatsumi responded and turned to the Saintess. "Chiko?"

"Yes, Master," Calsedonia replied as she approached him.

Tatsumi's arm was fitted with a magical sealing device Giuseppe had lent him. The device was most commonly used to restrain magicians who had committed crimes, and it couldn't be removed without a special key, which Calsedonia held.

"Do your best," she encouraged, unlocking the device from his arm.

"Okay, but if I get hurt, I'm counting on you," he said.

"Don't worry," she assured him, "I've got you."

Their exchange was brief, but no one watching them could miss the deep bond it reflected. The two shared a smile full of trust, then parted ways—Tatsumi assuming his fighter's stance, shield forward, while Calsedonia returned to her spot to watch over him.

"Then, Instructor... here I go!" Tatsumi declared, taking a deep breath. The very next moment, his figure vanished from the spot.

In the next instant, he reappeared directly in front of Ojin.

"Whoa!" the captain exclaimed in surprise.

Tatsumi's sword was already raised high, but before it could come down, Ojin had swiftly retreated backward.

"So, this is the Instant Teleportation His Holiness mentioned...?" Ojin muttered, blinking rapidly. By the time he finished his sentence, Tatsumi was gone again.

As soon as he realized it, Ojin hastily stepped back, but at the same moment, Tatsumi was back. His sword swept through the air where Ojin had just been, but before it had completed its arc, it vanished again along with Tatsumi.

Tatsumi continued his impressive assault by disappearing and reappearing, again and again. Sometimes in front, sometimes behind, occasionally to the side, diagonally forward, or diagonally backward—he vanished, appeared, struck, vanished again... and again...

Ojin was no novice fighter, but even he found himself completely on the defensive against this barrage. It didn't help that his large, two-handed axe was cumbersome to handle in comparison to Tatsumi's sword.

Despite his still-raw skills, Tatsumi's teleportation brought him within Ojin's reach many times, making for an advantageous matchup. For several minutes, Ojin kept up, skillfully maneuvering his axe to fend off Tatsumi's assault.

As the fight went on, however, Ojin's expression lost its composure. Tatsumi's swordplay was good, sure, but... it seemed to be growing even faster before Ojin's eyes.

"What... is this...?" the instructor wondered, his eyes going wide.

As Tatsumi's motion continued to accelerate, he was surrounded by a golden aura of magical power, visible only to magicians.



## Chapter 9: Graduation Exam

**“W**hat... what is happening here?” whispered a senior priest-warrior.

“That... golden magical aura coming from Tatsumi... could that possibly...?” whispered another. This one was a magician, which meant that, unlike her companion, she could see the golden light emanating from Tatsumi.

“Yeah... Tatsumi’s magical affinity is... it’s Heaven.”

“Heaven...?!” A ripple of shock spread through the assembled priest-warriors.

Heaven was a magical category so rare it was considered legendary—it was believed to have been possessed by only one person in history. The idea that such power was manifesting right before their eyes naturally caused astonishment.

“Tatsumi is a Heaven magician...?”

“But Heaven is the stuff of legends...”

The assembled priest-warriors murmured to one another in awe. The senior warriors had become rather familiar with Tatsumi and his cohort over the past few months; they’d even sparred with them. Yet, they had no idea of Tatsumi’s affinity for the Heaven system.

In fact, none of the senior warriors, not even the magicians among them, had been aware that Tatsumi could use magic at all. This was probably because he’d always worn a magical suppression bracelet during training.

The other four apprentices, however, showed no surprise; they had long known of Tatsumi’s magical capabilities. They watched the duel between

Tatsumi and their instructor with rapt attention. For them, this fight was far more than a spectacle.

Calsedonia, too, was focused intently on Tatsumi and Ojin.

Tatsumi had stopped using teleportation; he stood still, focused solely on delivering a relentless barrage of sword strikes. Ojin now found himself squarely on the defensive. It wasn't that Tatsumi's swordsmanship surpassed Ojin's; it was simply due to the extraordinary speed of Tatsumi's sword swings.

While it seemed that Ojin was managing to intercept every one of Tatsumi's inhumanly fast strikes with the handle of his battle-axe, Tatsumi was in fact deliberately aiming for the handle. Good thing for Ojin, who couldn't even see Tatsumi's sword. All he could do was grit his teeth and endure the fierce onslaught.

If Ojin's earlier attacks resembled a tornado, Tatsumi's were more like a rock drill. He targeted a single point on the handle of Ojin's axe, which was as thick as a child's arm. Although Tatsumi wielded a training sword with a blunted blade, the axe's wooden handle would be gradually worn down by the continuous strikes.

All this damage was greatly accelerated by the abnormal speed of Tatsumi's sword.

"Dammit, this is..." Ojin was beginning to grasp Tatsumi's real intention: to destroy his weapon. No way could he let himself be completely overpowered by his student. However, unable to keep up with Tatsumi's speed, Ojin was left with no options.

Normally, he would have leapt back to escape the situation, but Tatsumi had teleportation. No matter how far Ojin retreated, Tatsumi could close the gap in the blink of an eye. And so Ojin stood his ground, desperately enduring Tatsumi's onslaught.

The gathered priest-warriors exchanged hushed words as they tried to figure out how Tatsumi was swinging his sword so fast. Naturally, their questions were directed toward Calsedonia. Not only was she the most knowledgeable about magic, she also knew Tatsumi better than any of them.



“Calsedonia... How exactly is he doing this?” one of them asked.

Calsedonia turned the question around with a gentle smile. “How much do you know about the Heaven system of magic?”

“Heaven?” the senior priest-warrior began hesitantly. “If I recall correctly, it’s considered a legendary system, situated at the pinnacle above Light and Holy. It’s associated with manipulating time and space...”

Indeed, the Heaven system governed both the temporal and spatial dimensions. Instantaneous Movement, the spell Tatsumi had used earlier, worked in both dimensions.

Now Tatsumi was employing a spell not of space but of time—interfering with his own temporal flow to artificially accelerate his personal timeframe. This spell, which Giuseppe had called Acceleration during one of their sessions together, was essentially unique to him as an external magic user. It took vast magical reserves to manipulate time in this way; the constant magic consumption would deplete anyone else’s reserves almost instantly.

Through rigorous magic training, Tatsumi had become quite adept at spellcasting. Instantaneous Movement, Acceleration, and Magic Strike—the latter involving the concentration of magic into a fist for explosive power—were now fairly manageable for him, although he had yet to perfect them.

Unfortunately, his repertoire was limited to those three spells for versatile use. The only other spell at his disposal was Self-Healing—which couldn’t be used on anyone else and still required considerable time to activate.

Parallel martial arts training was also improving Tatsumi’s strength, enabling him to endure the physical exhaustion from casting spells much better than before. “Both my grandfather and I—I mean Chief Priest Chrysopraxe and I—used to think of Heaven as the supreme tier above Light and Holy,” Calsedonia shared. “But now that we’ve witnessed Tatsumi’s Heaven Magic up close... the Chief Priest has started to reconsider.”

The reason Heaven was considered superior to Light and Holy stemmed from its effectiveness against Demons. For example, there was the spell Exorcism, which belonged to both Light and Holy categories but worked better on Demons than any other spell from either category.

According to historical texts and traditions, Heaven Magic was believed to be even more potent against demons than Light or Holy. This could be an exaggerated account of the deeds of the only known Heaven user, Tiete Zamui, but Tatsumi had already vanquished significantly powerful Demon entities, proving Heaven's superior efficacy.

"The way Tatsumi uses Instantaneous Movement and Acceleration involves mobility, which is entirely different from the healing and light-related spells seen in Light and Holy," explained Calsedonia. "This made the Chief Priest consider Heaven to be a distinct system."

Among the spells Tatsumi used, Magic Strike and Self-Healing were unrelated to mobility. Still, just as Fire Magic included Light and Water Magic included Healing, these were considered secondary aspects by Giuseppe.

Hearing Calsedonia's explanation, the priest-warriors looked at Tatsumi anew. And it was precisely at that moment that Tatsumi's sword, which had been continuing to chip away at the handle of the battle-axe, finally broke through.

"All right, that's enough!" Ojin declared, stepping back a few paces to signal the end of the match as his weapon's handle shattered. Tatsumi nodded, took a moment to catch his breath, then straightened up and bowed respectfully to Ojin. The prolonged use of Acceleration had indeed taken a significant toll on Tatsumi.

Ojin dropped the broken axe at his feet and approached Tatsumi with a congratulatory smile. "Well done," he declared. "I would like to acknowledge your graduation. From this moment onward, you are no longer an apprentice but a member of the Temple Knights."

"Yes!" Tatsumi cried. "Thank you so much!"

This battle with Ojin was not just a training session or a practice fight—it was a graduation exam for advancing into the ranks of the priest-warriors. This was why Barse, Niizu, Sago, and Shiro had been watching the duel so intently—because they too would soon face their own tests.

Stepping over to Tatsumi, Ojin extended his hand. "You've done well up to this point. But being recognized as a priest-warrior doesn't mean your training is over. Especially since you aim to become an Exorcist, not just any priest-

warrior. Exorcists face even more demanding tasks than the rest of us. Keep up your daily training without fail, and always keep your eye on your goals!”

“Yes! Thank you for everything up until now!” Tatsumi said, firmly grasping Ojin’s hand. Behind him, he could hear congratulations from Barse, their peers, and the senior priest-warriors.

As Tatsumi turned to respond, a blur of platinum and white suddenly enveloped him.

“Whoa...?!” he called out. But the blur turned out to be Calsedonia, wrapping her arms around him and burying his head in the plush valley of her bosom.

“Congratulations, Master! I always knew you would pass!”

Tatsumi narrowly avoided suffocating in the embrace of Calsedonia’s chest, a precarious blend of platinum and white. Finally, she eased up, and the two of them were embracing squarely, Tatsumi thankfully still breathing and the surrounding priest-warriors offering both teasing and blessings.

Ojin, too, seemed to be in a forgiving mood today, gazing at the pair with a gentle look in his eyes.

“So, what now...?” Calsedonia asked. Her flushed face was only inches from Tatsumi’s, and yet her eyes held a distance—an aloofness that he wasn’t expecting.

“Th-This is, you know... It’s sort of a celebration, or a blessing, for Master graduating from his apprenticeship,” she went on. She wasn’t looking directly at him anymore, although she still stole occasional glances at his eyes.

“Once again... congratulations...” With a new sense of determination, Calsedonia pressed her body closer to Tatsumi’s than before, raising up on tiptoes to tenderly touch his lips with her dainty ones.

“Cal-Calsedonia...?! Wh-What was that...?!”

“Ehehe. I went for it.” Calsedonia stuck out her tongue playfully. When he grasped what she had done, Tatsumi’s face turned an intense shade of red.

At that moment, the training ground behind them suddenly came alive with exclamations of shock.

“Damn it, you jerk! Don’t show off like that!!”

“I’m not going to comment on your relationship with Lady Calsedonia now, but do that sort of thing where no one can see you!”

“Is this a taunt? Are you making fun of me since I’ve never been in a relationship before?!”

Several of the priest-warriors appeared genuinely close to tears, but those who stood closest to Tatsumi and Calsedonia looked upon them with kindness and pride. Of course, this circle also included Tatsumi’s classmates and friends.

“Ca-Calsedonia... um... if we pass today’s test too... could we get what Tatsumi... No, just a quick peck here would be fine...?!” The three brothers lit up with hope while Niizu pointed at his cheek with a fingertip. Beside him, Barse gave a troubled shrug. And then...

“No, you can’t.” She smiled brightly and firmly. It had only been the faintest of hopes, but being rejected so directly, the Niizu siblings visibly deflated.

“Yeah. I knew it. I knew, but still...”

“Once again... I’m envious of Tatsumi...”

“Um... if a kiss on the cheek is out of the question, then maybe... just stepping on us would be fine...” The last bit wasn’t clearly heard, amidst a somewhat unsettling air.

In any case, it was clear that Tatsumi had taken a step forward toward his goals.

“Hey, Tatsumi, Barse. Today marks the day we officially became Temple Knights. How about we head to the tavern and celebrate in style?”

Niizu made the suggestion on their way out of the Savaiv Temple, heading toward the gate. He, his brothers, and Barse had also passed their “exams” and had been officially recognized as Temple Knights. The idea of going out for a drink in celebration was only natural. However, Tatsumi had to decline.

“Oh, Calsedonia was really looking forward to cooking a special meal tonight to celebrate my passing,” he told Niizu apologetically. “Sorry, but I’ll have to

take a rain check on that.” As he spoke, Tatsumi remembered how delighted Calsedonia had looked when she went home earlier.

“I see, that can’t be helped then.” Barse and the three brothers had also seen Calsedonia’s expression, so they didn’t press the matter.

Niizu watched for a few moments as Tatsumi hurried down the street toward home, then turned to Barse. “How about you?”

“Sorry, I’ve got a prior engagement,” Barse replied with a meaningful grin.

“Don’t tell me, Barse... you’ve got a woman too?!” Niizu asked in surprise, but Barse kept his composed smile.

“Who knows? I’ll leave that to your imagination.”

“Shit, I can’t believe Barse has a woman too...”

“I wish I had a girlfriend who’d step on me every day...” said Sago, sounding genuinely disappointed, while Shiro made a rather masochistic wish with a dreamy expression.

“Shiro’s wish coming true might be a bit... difficult, huh?” Barse commented to no one in particular, his face twitching slightly.

“Don’t get too cocky! It’s not just Tatsumi and Barse who have women waiting at home to make them dinner!” Niizu declared, pointing firmly at Barse. “I have a woman waiting at home for me too, getting a meal ready for me!”

“Oh, is that so? Then you’d better get back to her,” Barse replied.

“Of course, that’s the plan!”

“Well, I’m off then. Niizu, if you’ve got a woman waiting, you should probably head home.” With those parting words to the three brothers, Barse disappeared into the streets of Levantis, waving his hand over his shoulder.

Watching his back, Sago whispered to Niizu, “Bro, don’t you feel a bit empty saying that?”

“I’m not lying!!” Niizu responded defensively. “I mean, our mom *is* waiting for us to come home, isn’t she? You can’t tell me she’s not a woman, and she really is making us dinner.”

Sago's shoulders slumped, and he let out a heavy sigh. What his brother had said was technically true.

Beside him, their other brother was murmuring in a bizarre voice: "Ah, yes, Lady Calsedonia... do you think you could step on me with higher heels? Grind down on me harder..." Shiro's body twisted unnervingly as he spoke.

"Maybe I should head out..." Sago muttered to no one in particular. His words faded away into the approaching dusk.

The five newly advanced priest-warriors had no idea that an elderly man had listened attentively to their entire conversation as he passed by the Savaiv Temple. They also didn't know that when Tatsumi left, the man had fallen into step behind him.

Elsewhere, in an elegantly decorated room, an elderly lady listened closely to a report from her subordinate.

"So? What did you find out from your investigation?" she inquired.

"Yes, my lady. As for Tatsumi Yamagata, there were no concerning rumors," the subordinate reported. "He enjoys a good reputation in his neighborhood, and he and Lady Calsedonia are considered a well-matched couple."

"I see. And what about any suspicious places?" the lady pressed.

"We've looked into that as well, but there's no evidence of Tatsumi frequenting brothels, taverns, or gambling dens. Of course, there are no prostitutes he's involved with," the subordinate added.

This world contained, on the whole, fewer forms of entertainment than modern-day Japan. Occasionally, people enjoyed performances by traveling theater troupes or listened to tales spun by minstrels. However, for the common folk, simply going out for a drink with friends or colleagues after work was one of the greatest pleasures. Those with a little more money to spend, especially adult males, often indulged in heavier drinking, gambling, and buying "services."

Of course, the lady wouldn't fault young Tatsumi for dabbling in these entertainments to a certain extent. However, regular visits to brothels or indulging excessively in alcohol or gambling would be a different matter. She



herself knew far too many examples of men—both commoners and nobles—who had ruined themselves with alcohol, gambling, women, or a combination of the three.

Fortunately, her investigation had revealed that Tatsumi wasn't engaging in any of these activities. He left for the temple at the same time every morning, fulfilled his duties, and then headed straight home. He occasionally shopped in the town's market, and the groceries he bought there were most likely at Calsedonia's request.

"This Tatsumi seems unusually buttoned up and serious for his age," the lady mused. "Do you think he's faking it...?"

Indeed, there was a significant mental difference between the people of this world and those from modern Japan, particularly at Tatsumi's age. To someone who didn't yet understand this disparity, his behavior might indeed seem peculiar.

"No. His friends and his cohorts think of him as a sincere young man," the subordinate reported. He went on to explain that Barse, Niizu, Sago, and Shiro had often invited Tatsumi to the local tavern after their training, yet he had never accepted their invitations.

"Also... and this isn't related to Tatsumi per se," the man began hesitantly, "but it seems someone else is investigating him, too. Someone other than us."

"Oh, and who might be investigating Tatsumi?" she inquired.

"Apparently it's Larlyk Garlathon, the eldest son of Earl Garlathon," the subordinate replied.

"Larlyk... Ah, the man who keeps proposing to Calsedonia and doesn't seem to take no for an answer," the lady recalled. She knew all about Larlyk's relentless pursuit of the Saintess.

"While I have no intention of letting Larlyk marry Calsedonia... could his efforts to investigate Tatsumi be of use to us?" she pondered aloud.

"I understand," her subordinate responded succinctly, quietly exiting the room.

As the door closed softly behind him, the elderly lady—Elysia Quart, the former duchess—gazed out at the cityscape beyond her window.

“He doesn’t seem to be a bad person... Perhaps I should meet him face to face...” Elysia’s words faded into the quiet of the room, unheard by anyone.



## Chapter 10: The Shadows Writhed and Squirmed

**A**s the seasons transitioned, the world around Tatsumi shifted profoundly. He had been summoned during the Ocean Festival, spring, but now they were squarely within the Evening Moon Festival—winter. When he'd arrived, the brick houses of Levantis had presented a uniform reddish-brown appearance. However, now blanketed in snow, the city was transformed into a monotone of white.

The change wasn't limited to the city's appearance. Tatsumi's daily life had also seen significant alterations.

With his official recognition as a Temple Knight, his clerical status had advanced from junior deacon to senior deacon. Junior deacons were a kind of apprentice, so this promotion marked Tatsumi's transition to a fully-fledged deacon, and his robes and holy seal had been updated to reflect this new status. However, opportunities to wear his new deacon robes were few and far between, as Tatsumi typically wore armor within the temple.

The chainmail armor, reinforced at key points and bearing the holy seal of the god Savaiv, denoted his status as a Temple Knight. Plate armor was reserved for squad leaders, meaning the rank-and-file Temple Knights were all equipped similarly to Tatsumi. At his waist, he carried a sword, another symbol of Temple Knighthood. Needless to say, Calsedonia was utterly enchanted by Tatsumi in his new attire, with his armor embossed with the holy seal and the sword at his waist.

The other apprentices who had passed their graduation exam—Barse, Niizu, Sago, and Shiro—were each assigned to one of the five squads. Tatsumi,

however, received no such assignment.

The reason was that Tatsumi would be no ordinary Temple Knight; he was to become an exorcist. That meant he needed to gain experience not only fighting humans but against magical beasts as well. Like any monster hunter, Tatsumi would take on requests to hunt magical beasts either alone or in small groups, facing ever more powerful creatures to build his experience.

This path diverged substantially from that of his friends, but if Tatsumi wanted to become an exorcist, this was the only way. At times, he would continue martial arts training alongside the Temple Knights, and at other times, he would receive magic training from Giuseppe or Calsedonia.

Every evening when he returned home, Calsedonia would greet him with a smile, delighting him with her cooking, after which they would warm up in the bath and then go to bed together. It had been discovered that Calsedonia's sleeping posture improved significantly when Tatsumi hugged her from behind, so he made it a habit to sleep in that position. Now, in the season of falling snow, they found comfort in each other's warmth, sleeping soundly every night.

Tatsumi led a busy yet fulfilling life—but the shadows of those who would ripple through his peaceful days were slowly starting to emerge.

“You’re Tatsumi, aren’t you?”

On his way back from the temple after a day's work, Tatsumi was suddenly approached from behind. Turning reflexively, he found himself facing three large, unsavory-looking men. They looked and acted exactly like the type of people you might call “thugs.”

As the three men approached Tatsumi, they brandished fists as thick as clubs and as large as hammers.

“We need to have a little chat,” one of them announced.

“A chat...? About what? I don’t believe we’ve met before, have we?” Tatsumi asked, eyeing the men warily.

The three men spread out to form a rough circle around Tatsumi, grinning slyly.

“That’s right, we haven’t met... but don’t worry, we won’t keep you long. Just... this isn’t the right place. Come with us for a bit,” one of the men said. Slinging a thick arm over Tatsumi’s shoulder like he was an old friend, he led Tatsumi toward a dimly lit alley.

It was obvious to any passersby that a young man was being hassled by men of ill repute. In fact, a few people did cast curious or concerned glances toward the four of them, but no one intervened, likely picking up on the aura of violence the men exuded.

Had Tatsumi been wearing his Temple Knight’s armor, the men’s approach and the reactions of those around might have been different. However, wearing metal armor outdoors during this season was impractical. Even with undergarments layered beneath, the icy chill of the armor mercilessly leached away one’s body heat.

Thus, for his commutes to and from the temple, Tatsumi opted for thick winter clothing, donning his armor only within the temple’s confines.

Tatsumi was half-walked, half-pushed into the alley. However, this Tatsumi was not the same person as the one Lady Calsedonia had summoned months before. Even as he was forcibly marched further from safety, he calmly observed the men’s movements. For their part, they believed him to be frightened and had completely let their guard down within a few steps.

Seizing a moment of their carelessness, Tatsumi stomped hard on one of the men’s feet. The sudden pain halted the man in his tracks, giving Tatsumi the chance he needed to break away... and he dashed straight into the alley they’d been pushing him toward.

“Hey, wait up, you bastard!!”

“Idiot. He’s run into the alley himself!” Though momentarily flustered by Tatsumi’s escape, the men soon rediscovered their vile smiles, thinking they had him cornered.

But when they entered the alley, Tatsumi was nowhere to be seen.

“Where the hell did he go?!” asked one of the thugs in consternation.

The alley was poorly lit, but it was straight and offered no apparent hiding spots. If Tatsumi had run this way, they should have been able to see his back. Yet, there was no sign of him. Their previous composure evaporating, the men now searched for Tatsumi with growing panic. But he was nowhere to be found.

“Damn it!! Did he run further in?”

“That’s the only explanation!”

“The rat’s got quick feet, that’s for sure!” Muttering curses, the men continued their search, running deeper into the alley.

“What was that all about...” Tatsumi murmured to himself, watching the men scatter from his elevated vantage point. He was on the roof of a building bordering the alley, half-buried in the accumulated snow.

The moment he’d left the men’s line of sight, he had quickly teleported upward. Then, from the air, he’d spotted a roof, relocated there, and lain in wait under the cover of snow to watch the men. This maneuver was possible because the alley’s layout didn’t allow for a view of the rooftops.

Tatsumi racked his brain for any reason the men would have targeted him. Was it a random act of extortion or bullying, and Tatsumi just happened to be their chosen victim? No... they had known his name, so the reason must be more than that.

*Okay, even if I don’t know, it’s probably smart to be cautious for a while. I should tell Calsedonia and Giuseppe about this,* Tatsumi thought. He stayed prone on the roof for several minutes before deciding that the men weren’t coming back.

*I’d better get going... before I freeze to death out here.*

Shivering a little, Tatsumi stood up and brushed the snow off his body before teleporting to another roof that he could see in the distance. Just to be safe, he continued to leap from roof to roof all the way home.

Meanwhile, Giuseppe, Chief Priest of the Savaiv Temple, was paying a visit to someone.

“It’s been a while. I heard from Calsedonia that you were unwell? Are you feeling better now?” Giuseppe was greeted by an old friend in a room kept warm by a fireplace.

“Yes. Thanks to Calsedonia’s magic, I have the pleasure of seeing your aged face once again.”

“What do you mean, aged? We’re both old, aren’t we?”

“Ufufu. You’ve got me there.”

Although they teased each other, it was evident from their expressions that they were enjoying the conversation, and that they’d had many like it before.

“So? What brings you here today? Surely, it’s not just to check on my health?”

“You’re right, Elysia. I have something I need to ask you. I hear you’ve been snooping around lately?”

Giuseppe’s tone had become suddenly sharper, and Elysia matched his intensity. “Well, you have quick ears.”

“I have people who keep me informed. So, what are you planning?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Calsedonia’s like a granddaughter to me. It would be odd if I weren’t interested in the man she’s involved with.”

“Hmm... And? How does Tatsumi seem to you?”

“Well... based on what my trustworthy subordinates have gathered, he seems like a very earnest and sincere person. However, to be frank... it’s precisely his being *too* serious that concerns me.” Elysia went on to share her apprehensions about Tatsumi, and Giuseppe couldn’t deny the accuracy of her information.

He would head to the temple early in the morning and return straight home after his duties, without making any detours. The fact that a young adult male like Tatsumi never once went out drinking with his colleagues after work seemed suspicious to Elysia. Was his excessive seriousness all for show?

When Elysia had finished voicing her concerns, Giuseppe burst into hearty laughter. “Ho ho ho ho ho!! Wait, *that’s* what you were worried about? Well, I guess such a sly thought is fitting for a vixen like yourself.”



“Oh?” Elysia pouted, clearly offended that Giuseppe saw this as a joke. “I’m surprised an old fox like you didn’t think about it.”

“That’s a matter of differing common sense.”

“Differing common sense...?” Elysia echoed, her curiosity piqued as Giuseppe finally managed to control his laughter and nodded emphatically.

“Exactly. Calsedonia has told you about where Tatsumi came from, right?” Giuseppe asked.

Elysia nodded; she knew about Calsedonia’s dream and how she had summoned Tatsumi from another world.

“Tatsumi’s original world... *Japan*, I believe? Over there, Tatsumi is still considered a minor, not yet an adult.”

“Wait a minute!” Elysia said. “Tatsumi is sixteen, isn’t he? Not being considered an adult at sixteen...”

“That’s what I mean by differing common sense.”

“So, we’ve been treating Tatsumi as an adult, but *he* still sees himself as a kid... is that it?”

“It seems he hasn’t completely left behind the customs of his homeland. From what Tatsumi’s told me, back there, alcohol, tobacco, and gambling are basically illegal until you turn eighteen. Of course, there are people who break the law to do those things underage, but most don’t. People Tatsumi’s age in Japan more or less lead their lives like his.”

“So, what looks to us like overly serious behavior is, for him, entirely normal...?” Elysia pondered.

“Even in our world, different countries have different customs. So, it only makes sense that when you’re talking about another world, their idea of common sense might be vastly different from ours.”

Elysia closed her eyes, contemplating Giuseppe’s words for a moment before slowly reopening them. “So, you’re saying... I was overthinking things?”

Giuseppe smiled with satisfaction that she was catching on. “I’m delighted by how much you care about Calsedonia. But... do you think you could try to trust

her a little more? And if you still can't bring yourself to trust Tatsumi... why not meet him in person? I think you'd understand him right away if you did."

"Maybe so... Trying to manipulate situations from behind the scenes might be a bad habit of mine," Elysia admitted with a rueful smile, to which Giuseppe responded with his customary hearty laughter.

"That's inevitable. Nobility tends to operate by influencing others, directly intervening only as a last resort. And when you're always dealing with nobles who can't be taken lightly, it's understandable you'd be cautious."

"Indeed, I should adapt my approach depending on who I'm dealing with. To think I'd forgotten such a thing... perhaps I am getting senile," Elysia reflected.

"Nonsense. Just realizing this is already a great step forward. Those of poor character never come to such a realization until the very end!" Giuseppe's laughter was warm, and Elysia let herself smile gently in response.

Her face soon reverted to a more serious expression. "Speaking of those with bad intentions... it seems there's someone else trying to meddle with Tatsumi besides me."

"Ho-ho? That's news to me. And who might that be?"

"The heir of the Garlathon Earldom... Does that ring any bells?"

"Ah, that persistent idiot who keeps proposing to Calsedonia, who has nothing at all going for him except for his lineage..." Giuseppe was quite familiar with Larlyk Garlathon.

"If I know anything about you, Giuseppe, I presume you've already taken some measures?"

"Yes. I'm using Larlyk as a litmus test to see if Tatsumi is truly the person Calsedonia claims he is."

"Well, then, it might be a good opportunity to teach a certain foolish son a lesson. Poor groom might find it a bit harsh, but if it's for Calsedonia's peace of mind, he'll understand. Hmm, I might even get involved in this a bit myself," Giuseppe said, grinning like a child who's just thought of a deliciously mischievous prank. Elysia, too, smiled, her grin filled with implication.



Around a dozen teleports later, Tatsumi arrived at his own front door. Using a magical phrase to unlock it, he stepped inside to the warmth of the lit fireplace. He shed his cold-weather gear with a sigh of relief as he entered the living room—then was suddenly struck by an impact from behind.

*Could it be an ambush?* Remembering the men from earlier, Tatsumi tensed and turned around, ready for a fight. However, what he saw was the familiar sight of platinum hair fluttering in his view.

“Uh... Calsedonia...?”

“Yes, it’s me! Ufufu. Did I surprise you?” Calsedonia’s face was alive with a bright smile.

Apparently, she’d been hiding behind the living-room door to jump out and surprise Tatsumi. After all, she could sense the magical energy of his teleportation. But...

“Is something wrong?” Sensing something in Tatsumi’s expression, Calsedonia tilted her head in confusion.

By now, Tatsumi had realized that it would be practically impossible for anyone to ambush him in their home. The house’s locks were all magically secured, far beyond the capability of ordinary thieves to open. Moreover, the unlocking passphrase was set in Japanese, meaning only Tatsumi and Calsedonia—who could understand basic conversational Japanese due to her memories as Chiko—had any chance of unlocking them.

Feeling himself relax, Tatsumi began to explain what had happened on his way back from the temple.

Calsedonia looked at him quizzically. “So, someone is targeting you...?”

“I think so. But I can’t think of any reason why someone would be after me...”

Tatsumi didn’t even know that many people in this world; why would anyone have it out for him? Ah, but there was one possibility.

“Could it be those guys are followers of Calsedonia?”

If anyone knew Tatsumi, it was because he lived with Calsedonia. If the men he'd encountered were followers of the "Saintess," it wouldn't be surprising if they'd targeted him out of spite.

"Hmm... if that's the case, what should we do next..." he pondered. "Well, I guess I can always get away from them like that again if I have to."

Thanks to Tatsumi's magical abilities, capturing him would be extremely difficult, unless he was confined in a space devoid of magic or a completely isolated room without windows or doors.

"Let's ask Grandfather about this tomorrow," Calsedonia suggested. "But for now..." She took Tatsumi's arm and led him over to the fireplace. "Your body's gone totally cold."

"Well, that's because I ended up lying on the snow..." Tatsumi admitted with a half-smile.

"You need to warm up fast, or you'll catch a cold... Over there!" Calsedonia exclaimed, giving him a gentle push.

"Whoa!" Tatsumi was taken aback as Calsedonia settled down in front of the fireplace and wrapped her arms around him to share her warmth.

"Is it warm enough for you now?" she asked softly.

"Yeah... it's really warm... Thank you, Calsedonia."

Seeing Tatsumi blush and avert his gaze, Calsedonia chuckled softly and tenderly pressed her cheek against his from behind. For the moment, they were back to their usual, affectionate selves, and they could both forget the shadows that loomed around them.



## Chapter 11: The Garlathon family

The day after Tatsumi's encounter with the thugs in the alley, he and Calsedonia went and saw Giuseppe to recount the incident.

"Ho-ho. They've already made their move," said the old man, his smile oddly gleeful.

"Um, Giuseppe? Is there something you're not telling us?" Tatsumi asked, confused.

"Yes, I do believe I know what's going on, though I only came to hear of it myself yesterday. Now, Calsedonia, are you familiar with someone named Larlyk Garlathon?"

"Larlyk... Garlathon...?" Calsedonia repeated, tilting her head in thought.

Tatsumi, of course, had no idea who Larlyk was, but Calsedonia furrowed her brows as if searching her mind for something just out of reach. "I'm sorry, that name doesn't ring a bell. But you're talking about Earl Garlathon's family, right? Is one of them named Larlyk?"

"You really don't know?" Giuseppe asked incredulously.

"No, I've never heard of anyone named Larlyk in the Garlathon family..."

*She's telling the truth, Giuseppe thought. She really doesn't know.* He looked up at the ceiling and covered his eyes with one hand, overwhelmed. "Never mind whether I like the guy... It's gotten to the point where, in a way, I feel pity for Larlyk. He's stepped way out of line."

Giuseppe knew that Larlyk had proposed to Calsedonia numerous times. And though all of these proposals had been reported to her, it seemed neither his name nor the memory of him had made any lasting impression on her.

*Pitiable*, Giuseppe thought. He couldn't think of any other words to describe Larlyk's situation.

In fact, it was this very Larlyk who had approached Calsedonia in the corridor of the Savaiv Temple on the day she summoned Tatsumi.

Yet, it seemed she had forgotten even that encounter.

"Look, out of the men who have proposed to you, there was the eldest son of the Garlathon family, right? That man is Larlyk," Giuseppe prompted her.

Calsedonia thought for another moment, but this time, recognition dawned on her, and her expression brightened. "Ah, I remember now. So, *that* guy was Larlyk."

As a fellow man, Tatsumi couldn't help feeling a little sorry for the Garlathon heir, whose marriage proposals had obviously left so little impression. But that was beside the point.

"So, Larlyk was behind the men I saw yesterday?" Tatsumi deduced.

"It's highly likely that the men who harassed you were employed by Larlyk," Giuseppe agreed. "And their goal would be..." As he spoke, he was looking not at Tatsumi but at Calsedonia.

"He's harassing me because he was rejected by Calsedonia, and he wants to split us up so he can take my place?" Tatsumi guessed.

"Most likely. The idea is to somehow separate you and Calsedonia, with the aim of taking your place as her suitor."

Even if he and Calsedonia were to break off their engagement, Tatsumi knew Calsedonia, and he could guess that this Larlyk guy had virtually zero chances with her. *So, why would he go to such great lengths to carry out a scheme like this?* Tatsumi couldn't wrap his head around it—but that was because he had never been in a one-sided relationship. In Larlyk's eyes, Calsedonia must love him, simply because he loved her.

In any case, Tatsumi knew, as did Calsedonia and Giuseppe, that they couldn't just leave Larlyk to his devices.

"What should we do now?" Tatsumi wondered aloud. If Giuseppe's suspicions were correct, the incident yesterday wouldn't be the last of his run-ins with Larlyk.

"I have a plan in mind," Giuseppe announced. "Honestly, I've been at my wit's end with Larlyk's continued proposals, despite all the rejections. This is a good opportunity to make him understand clearly. However, I'll need both of your help. Especially Tatsumi; you'll have to put in a bit of effort on this one... Is that all right?"

"Of course, I'll help any way I can... So, what exactly do you need me to do?"

"I'll do anything too!! To think someone would dare threaten my master... Absolutely unforgivable!!" Calsedonia surged with magical power; her entire being exuded an indescribable force that made Tatsumi wince.

"Goodness, you always get so intense when it's about your master," Giuseppe pointed out with a chuckle. "For now, we'll watch their moves and keep them on edge. The more frustrated they become, the more likely Larlyk himself will make a move. Until then, be extra careful for me, all right? Don't give them any openings."

Both Tatsumi and Calsedonia nodded in agreement.

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The day after Giuseppe warned them about Larlyk Garlathon, Tatsumi was walking to the temple when he found his path blocked by six men.

"Finally found you. You slipped away last time, but it won't be as easy today," one of them sneered.

Three of the men were familiar to Tatsumi—they were the same three who had harassed him before. And they'd brought reinforcements, probably hoping to make up for their previous failure.



This time, however, Calsedonia was with him. The man who'd spoken—he must have been their leader—turned his attention to her.

“With a lady by your side, you won't be able to run away like you did before, will you now?”

No matter how fast Tatsumi could run, their reasoning went—because they still thought Tatsumi ran—Calsedonia's presence would inevitably slow him down. If he abandoned her to save himself, they would use that fact to smear his reputation. Of course, their true intent was far more sinister: they also planned to capture the woman, indulge in their vile desires, and then leave her.

The men shared a lecherous gaze as they let their eyes crawl over Calsedonia's form. This was their *modus operandi*: bullying men and violating women at will. Although Levantis was considered safe relative to other parts of this world, it couldn't compare to the safety standards of modern Japan. Just a step into the back alleys could plunge one into a realm of violence and unfairness.

To the men who called this realm home, dealing in violence and taking from others was part of daily life. They had no idea that the woman who stood before them was the true object of their employer's plans. Reveling in their twisted fantasies, they took a step toward Tatsumi and Calsedonia.

Calsedonia, who had been walking closely beside Tatsumi, stepped forward at the same moment.

“Master, close your eyes for a moment, okay?” she whispered into Tatsumi's ear, then stepped away from him. She chanted magic in a whisper, took a few steps forward, and suddenly thrust out her hands.

A dazzling flash of light burst from Calsedonia's palms, blinding all six men. This was Flash, a spell from the Light category that was used to temporarily blind and immobilize one's opponents.

Tatsumi had closed his eyes just in time and was unaffected by the spell. But even through his eyelids, he could see the intense light.

As he slowly opened his eyes, he saw their six attackers stumbling in the middle of the street, hands cast in front of them as if they were in complete

darkness.

“DAMN IT!” one of them yelled. “WHAT HAPPENED?!”

They rubbed their eyes desperately, trying to regain their sight. But by the time the Flash had worn off, it was too late—Tatsumi and Calsedonia had already disappeared.

Utilizing Teleportation multiple times on their way to the Savaiv Temple, the couple made it nearly impossible for the men to track them. If they knew which route they took, the aggressors might lurk in alleys with views of the temple gates, waiting for their return. They would still have to be cautious, Tatsumi knew, but for the moment, they were safe.

When they were within sight of the temple gate, Tatsumi and Calsedonia exchanged relieved smiles.

“That’s all thanks to your quick thinking, Calsedonia, that we got away so smoothly,” Tatsumi praised her.

“No, it’s because you, Master, didn’t hesitate to follow my advice and acted swiftly,” Calsedonia responded.

“Well, when it’s something you’ve said, Calsedonia, of course I’d trust it completely,” Tatsumi affirmed.

“Master...” Calsedonia smiled warmly at his words.

Laughing, Tatsumi continued, “Now, we’d better focus on today’s temple duties.”

“Yeah! Let’s both give it our best!” Calsedonia agreed enthusiastically.

Their roles within the temple differed significantly: Tatsumi, as a senior deacon and Temple Knight, was primarily training in security and combat, while Calsedonia, a priestess, focused on preaching to the congregation and healing the injured and sick.

That meant it was rare for the two to see each other within the temple; most days, they only met for lunch in the courtyard. They both cherished the moments they found themselves together. Tatsumi tightened his grip on

Calsedonia's hand, enveloping it in warmth. They walked hand in hand the rest of the way to the temple, drawing smiles from the visiting faithful.

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“What is the meaning of this?!” Furious, Larlyk Garlathon hurled a glass of fruit wine to the floor. “Why doesn't my plan ever work?!”

The glass shattered, scattering sparkling fragments across the room, and even their glint irritated Larlyk, who was far beyond mere annoyance. His face twisted in anger as he began to crush the broken shards underfoot.

This “plan” was, of course, that of ensnaring Tatsumi. Larlyk had hired several men that should have been more than capable of intimidating Tatsumi, but somehow that idiot always managed to escape. Attempts to trap him using prostitutes and blackmail had fallen flat since Tatsumi didn't indulge in anything like that. Even when people under Larlyk's influence approached Tatsumi directly—keeping their affiliation with the Garlathon family hidden—and offered him a bag of silver coins to leave the Saintess, Tatsumi refused outright. It was like the money was worth nothing to him.

In Larlyk's imagination, this had all gone much easier. Tatsumi, threatened with violence and caught in a scandal, gratefully accepted the money and fled the capital.

Naturally, none of Larlyk's schemes—which were too self-absorbed to even be called “plans”—had succeeded. That was because they were impossible.

“Why?! Why don't things go like I plan?!” Larlyk spluttered, stomping his feet with genuine outrage that reality did not align with his fantasies.

Larlyk was alone; neither his personal subordinates nor the household staff of the Garlathon family dared approach on account of his temper. The furnishings and decor he had destroyed just days ago had already been replaced, restoring the room to its former opulence—only for him to wreck it anew.

As the room lay in semi-ruin, the door suddenly opened, and a man and a woman entered.

“What are you doing, Larlyk! The servants are terrified!!”

“Oh... Larlyk dear, your beautiful room is in such a state again...”

“Father... Mother...” The middle-aged couple who had entered were Earl Armond Garlathon and his wife Xiennacary—Larlyk’s parents. While Armond had a fairly balanced physique and wasn’t particularly tall, Xiennacary was shorter than her husband but significantly more robust, her figure adorned with luxurious jewelry and clothing.

“Mother!! My Calsedonia... Calsedonia...” Larlyk clung to his mother for comfort, his eyes suddenly brimming with tears.

Xiennacary soothed him by gently stroking his head, as if he were a small child who’d just had a nightmare. At first glance, this might seem like a close-knit family moment, but given their ages and status, the scene could only evoke discomfort.

“There, there, don’t cry, Larlyk dear. Your mother is always on your side,” Xiennacary consoled him.

“Yes... yes!! Thank you, Mother!! But... Calsedonia... she won’t marry me... I know she really loves me... she must have been deceived or threatened by that horrible man, Tatsumi...”

“Exactly right. It would be impossible for any woman to not like my Larlyk. It must be just like you say,” Xiennacary reassured her son sweetly.

Armond frowned upon witnessing this interaction between his wife and son, then decided to interject.

“While that may be, Larlyk, I’ve heard that this Tatsumi and Lady Calsedonia are already engaged, and they share a very close bond. What’s more, I’ve been informed that His Eminence Chrysopraxe has fully endorsed their union. To challenge a marriage sanctioned by the Chief Priest of Savaiv, the guardian deity of matrimony, is—”

“Be quiet!!” Xiennacary interrupted vehemently. “Don’t you care about your own son?! Seeing him cry like this... Don’t you feel like doing something about it?!”

“Well, yes... but Larlyk is over twenty now; he’s not a child anymore. Indulging a grown man like this—”

“Enough!! I won’t rely on you!! Really, you might have a talent for making money, but you have a lot to learn when it comes to loving your own son...” Xiennacary stomped her foot in frustration, still holding Larlyk close.

If Tatsumi were in the room, he might have thought Xiennacary’s stomp resembled a sumo wrestler’s.

“Leave everything to me, Larlyk dear,” his mother promised him. “I’ll appeal to His Eminence Chrysoprase myself and request that he grant Calsedonia to you as your bride. Even the Chief Priest can’t ignore the authority of the Garlathons. Your wishes will come true, you can count on it.”

“Yes... Please, Mother!!” Larlyk clung to her, and for another moment the two of them were locked in a tight embrace. Armond quietly sighed to himself, a silent witness to the unfolding drama.

Armond’s father had only been a viscount, as had generations of Garlathons before him. The family might not have held the highest rank in the nobility, but their influence had always been significant within the Largofiery Kingdom—underpinned by several high-quality ore veins in their territory. These resources supported the wealth of not only the Garlathon family but also their lands, largely due to the efforts of the current lord, Armond.

Under his leadership, the ore was transformed into premium weapons, armor, and other essential goods by the family’s skilled craftsmen. Armond’s focus on both ore production and artisan development made metal goods from the Garlathon domain highly valued both within the kingdom and on the export market.

By supplying the kingdom with scores of quality armaments, Armond had greatly contributed to strengthening the nation’s power, earning himself the title of earl.

Meanwhile, Xiennacary’s family, though of higher rank—her father was a marquis, and the family was closely connected to a duchy—was not as fortunate. Rather, it embodied nearly every negative stereotype of nobility—the family worked to enrich itself through exploitation rather than enriching its lands and subjects. This neglect meant the family had no real products or

resources to call its own, eventually earning them the label of “impoverished nobility.”

The alliance between the financially robust but lower-ranking earl’s family and the high-ranking but economically challenged marquise was, in some ways, a calculated and natural outcome.

Xiennacary, accustomed to modest living despite her noble position, had experienced a dramatic lifestyle adjustment upon her marriage. Although she’d initially been reluctant to marry into the Garlathon family due to their lower status, she’d quickly become enamored with the affluent lifestyle they enjoyed.

Their marriage may have been strategic, but Armond had genuinely loved his wife, and he had lavished her with whatever she desired. Only later would Armond realize what a critical error this had been.

Xiennacary was endlessly proud and selfish—traits which had been somewhat restrained by her family’s impoverished state—but marrying into the wealthy Garlathon family had set flame to her haughtiness and excess, and her husband’s indulgence of her only made it worse.

Armond more or less knew this, of course, but he hadn’t done much about it—partly due to his perpetually busy life as a lord and partly because he hoped his wife’s selfishness would be balanced out once they had children. After all, there’s no more demanding tyrant than a newborn.

Unfortunately, the birth of Larlyk completely failed to temper Xiennacary’s self-centeredness. Instead, her lavish affection for their child led to him becoming overly attached to her, growing up to mirror her character traits. In this world, as in ours, children tend to emulate their parents. And so Larlyk Garlathon became even more selfish and spoiled than his mother, no matter how hard Armond tried to instill better values in him.

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The Savaiv Temple was completely enclosed by a wall, with only two points of entry and exit: the main gate, which Tatsumi and Calsedonia used, and the back gate, which was mostly used by merchants delivering supplies like food and

firewood to the temple. The walls weren't particularly high, so anyone with moderate physical ability could easily climb over them. However, people respected the sanctity of the temple too much to ever try something like that, so all visitors entered through the main gate in a dignified manner.

Stepping out from the main gate now, Tatsumi cautiously scanned his surroundings. Ever since the incident, he had been regularly seeing unsavory men, likely sent by Larlyk, surveilling this very gate.

They didn't actually come in the gate; they knew causing trouble inside the temple would provoke a swift response from the temple knights. But Tatsumi knew exactly what they were after. Whenever he spotted them, he would either flee or duck back into the temple and escape through the back gate.

This time, however, a quick scan of the street outside showed the way was clear. Tatsumi turned back toward the gate and called out, "It's okay, Calsedonia. They're not here today."

Calsedonia quickly appeared from the other side and hastened to Tatsumi's side. To guard against ambushes, the pair had been making a point of walking home together each day.

"You don't need to be so careful," Calsedonia told him now. "With me by your side, I won't let anyone lay a finger on you, Master. In fact, if they even show themselves, I could just use magic to... make sure they won't die."

"Come on, let's try to avoid anything extreme. They're just being paid to do a job, after all," Tatsumi replied. He preferred a less confrontational approach.

"Fine... If that's what you want, Master..." But Tatsumi could see the frustration etched on her face. It seemed the accumulated stress of constantly having to evade these men was getting to her.

Still, she quickly followed as Tatsumi started walking. Catching up with long strides, she wrapped his right arm against her chest.

"Huh...? Cal-Calsedonia? What's are you doing?!" Tatsumi asked, startled.

"By keeping our bodies close like this, I'm protecting you, Master!!" she told him with conviction. Then, smiling brightly, she added, "This way, even if we're



suddenly attacked, I can protect you with my own body... And anyway, isn't it warmer this way?"

"Well, I don't think you need to go to those lengths to protect me... But, yeah, it's definitely warmer..." Not entirely displeased, Tatsumi began walking home in Calsedonia's embrace.

The path from the temple to their home was one they had traveled many times before, and since they'd started walking home together each day, they often walked closely like this. Seeing them, shopkeepers along their route and passersby gave them warm, friendly looks.

The affection between the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple and her soon-to-be husband, a young man with black hair and eyes, had become a familiar sight to many residents of Levantis.



## Chapter 12: Encirclement

**A**fter several more days of remaining vigilant against attacks outside the temple while still undergoing rigorous martial and magical training within it, Tatsumi and Calsedonia found themselves called into Giuseppe's office.

"You've done well these past weeks, my son-in-law. It seems everything is now in place," Giuseppe announced. His usual hearty laugh filled the room, yet a serious gleam shone in his eyes. Tatsumi and Calsedonia braced themselves for what was to come; they knew that from today on, it would be their turn to take the initiative.

"We've already sent out notices far and wide," Giuseppe continued. "First, we'll draw out the men who've been pestering you. To do that, I'll need you to act as bait. Can you do that?" His tone was gentle, but his words carried an undeniable force.

Tatsumi had no intention of refusing; he was sick of always being on the run and ready to take action.

"Of course," he said, sharing a knowing smile with Giuseppe. At that moment, the fate of Larlyk Garlathon and his thugs was sealed.

Later that very day, Tatsumi was again surrounded as he walked out of the temple gates. The number of men harassing Tatsumi had grown each time he managed to escape them; today there were around ten. Tatsumi recognized all their faces from previous encounters, but this time, their eyes were filled with a new desperation.

"You're not getting away today! We need to show some results soon, or we'll be in trouble," one of the men barked.

*So Larlyk's getting impatient, Tatsumi thought. No surprise there.*

"That's perfect," he told the man. "You're making our job easier by taking the bait on the first day."

Tatsumi's composure puzzled his attackers, who were much more accustomed to solving problems with brute force than to understanding the subtleties of such situations.

"What? What are you going on about, huh? Just shut up and come over here! If you listen quietly, maybe I'll let you off with just a broken arm or leg," one of the men threatened.

"No, you're the ones who'll be accommodating us," Tatsumi countered. At that moment, several fully armed temple knights burst from the gate behind him.

"What the—?!"

"What are they doing here...?!"

"We haven't done anything to warrant temple knights drawing their weapons on us!"

Yet, as Tatsumi noted, they were indeed about to act. Apparently, the men surrounding Tatsumi in front of the Savaiv Temple—his workplace—was reason enough for the temple knights to intervene.

"Now, gentlemen, how about you drop your weapons? Do that, and we might let you off without a beating," suggested the knight, who must have been their leader. Though he hardly expected compliance, the warning served as a procedural step... and it bought time for his colleagues to surround Tatsumi's assailants.

No matter how skilled these street thugs believed themselves to be, they stood no chance surrounded by fully armed temple knights.

Realizing escape was impossible, the thugs drew knives and other blades in desperate hopes of attacking the temple knights. But in less than a minute, the knights had them subdued and captured.

“Well done, Tatsumi,” their leader praised him. “You’ve had quite the ordeal running around until today.” Privy to Giuseppe’s plan, the man had been eagerly awaiting his role in it.

“Thank you for your help,” Tatsumi replied. “I’m glad we finally got the Chief Priest’s approval.”

“Yeah, we finally got the go-ahead from His Eminence. It was annoying having these guys loitering around the temple, and we were starting to get complaints from visitors. This clears up a lot for us.”

“Much appreciated.”

“Don’t mention it. We all know how hard you’ve been working every day. Sure, there might be some who don’t approve of you and Lady Calsedonia. But at least everyone here supports you both.” The rest of the temple knights gave Tatsumi a thumbs-up in agreement.

“Training with you increases our chances of getting treatment from Lady Calsedonia. That’s what I’m looking forward to,” one knight chimed in.

“Exactly. My real aim is Lady Calsedonia’s Healing Magic, you know? It’s not really for you,” another added playfully.

“You’re one to talk,” countered another of the knights. “Weren’t you the one who got furious when you heard someone was trying to break Calsedonia and Tatsumi up? You were so angry; it was like it was you who was engaged and not them.”

“What?! No, I mean, yeah, but... We’re training together, and we’re both priests of Lord Savaiv. I can’t just stand by and watch a bond forged in unity being torn apart!”

The temple knights shared a friendly laugh among themselves. Touched by the senior knights’ concern for him, Tatsumi bowed deeply in gratitude once more.

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The day after the commotion in front of the temple, Giuseppe found himself dealing with an unexpected visitor... Well, the visitor was expected, but the timing was not. The visitor had come first thing in the morning.

“Welcome to the Savaiv Temple, Countess Garlathon,” Giuseppe greeted, stepping into one of the temple’s reception rooms to welcome his guest.

The countess, standing with attendants who must have been from her household, rose to greet Giuseppe in return. “I want to start by apologizing for bothering you at such an early hour,” she said.

*If you were really sorry, you would have made an appointment or chosen a more reasonable time to visit,* Giuseppe thought to himself, but he just smiled as he offered Xiennacary Garlathon a seat.

“And what brings you here today?” he inquired.

Xiennacary settled her ample figure into the chair. “Well, Your Eminence, I’ve come today to set an official date for the wedding ceremony between your adopted daughter, Lady Calsedonia, and my son Larlyk, the heir to the Garlathon estate.” She smiled, as if this were the most natural request in the world.

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Meanwhile, back at the Garlathon family home, with the lady and her son away at the Savaiv Temple, another unexpected guest had arrived. “I apologize for the sudden visit, Earl Garlathon.”

“Please don’t worry about it. But may I ask what brings you to our home today?” Earl Armond Garlathon nervously dabbed at his sweat while trying to accommodate this surprise visitor of significant importance.

“Actually, I wanted to discuss your wife and eldest son. Could I have a few moments of your time?” asked Elysia Quart, the former duchess, fixing Armond with a cold, stern gaze.

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“Oh? The wedding arrangements for my adopted daughter and your son, you say? This is the first I’m hearing of any marriage between Calsedonia and Larlyk.” Giuseppe’s tone was one of exaggerated cluelessness.

“Is that so? However, I’ve been informed by my son that he and Lady Calsedonia share mutual affection. In the eyes of Savaiv, the guardian deity of marriage, it would only be right for two people in love to be united. Could I persuade you to bless the young couple’s union with your wise judgment? Naturally, the Garlathon family would extend every possible support, not just to the Savaiv Temple but also to you personally... I’ve prepared a suitable token of our gratitude. And besides, allying our two families would certainly not be to your disadvantage, would it?” Xiennacary’s cheeks lifted in what Giuseppe decided to take as a smile.

“Oh, a personal gift for me?” Giuseppe asked, feigning interest.

Xiennacary’s smile widened. “Yes, of course. I’ve arranged an amount befitting your status.” She signaled an attendant behind her, who retrieved a jingling pouch of coins from a bag she carried.

“Please accept this, Your Eminence,” Xiennacary said as the attendant held out the bag to Giuseppe.

Giuseppe gave a smile of delight as he reached out for the bag.

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While his mother was in discussion with Giuseppe, Larlyk had been made to wait in a separate reception room. A young male cleric had served him tea, then left the room silently under Larlyk’s indifferent gaze. Now he sat, impatiently tapping his feet as he awaited his mother’s return.

Unfortunately for him, waiting was not a game Larlyk liked to play. He had just enough sense not to begin destroying this room in a rampage, so he stood and wandered around the reception room, then sat back down, then stood up and wandered...

Suddenly, a voice called from beyond the door, “Excuse me. Is Mr. Larlyk Garlathon there?”

At the sound of that voice, Larlyk's face lit up—it was a voice he'd thought of every day since he first heard it. He hurried to the door and threw it wide open.

"Ah, Lady Calsedonia. It's been a while!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it has been a while, Mr. Larlyk."

"And, what brings Lady Calsedonia here...?" Larlyk asked, trying his best to act nonchalant.

"Well, my grandfather said Mr. Larlyk might be bored, and he suggested I come to keep you company. May I join you?"

"Of course! The room's not much, but... please, come in." Forgetting that he was in the reception room of the temple she had practically spent her life in, an elated Larlyk invited Calsedonia inside.

"Actually, I've baked some sweets for you, Mr. Larlyk. Would you like to try them?"

"Of course! I would be delighted to try Lady Calsedonia's homemade sweets!"

Seeing Larlyk's enthusiastic response, Calsedonia turned and clapped her hands. Three male clerics entered the reception room, one pushing a cart laden with tea and sweets. They arranged everything on a table in front of Calsedonia and Larlyk, then stood against the wall like servants. Larlyk was quite used to people acting this way around him, so he didn't pay them any mind as he began to taste Calsedonia's sweets. He didn't see the meaningful smile playing on her lips.

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Giuseppe took the proffered bag and gave it a casual toss to test its weight. A glance at Xiennacary prompted her to signal another servant, who fetched another bag that clinked with a similar number of coins.

Giuseppe smiled slyly, and Xiennacary, thinking the Chief Priest satisfied, smiled as well. However, Giuseppe then tossed the open bag onto the desk, spilling the silver coins.



Xiennacary seemed completely unconcerned about the spilled coins, but she stared straight at Giuseppe, who was making no effort to hide his displeasure. Frantically, Xiennacary wondered what had irked him. Was the bribe too small, or would he have preferred something other than silver coins? Suddenly she remembered that Giuseppe was renowned as a collector of magical seals... Should she have brought him one?

Just as Xiennacary was about to make the offer, a deep, dignified voice, as if echoing from the depths of the earth, struck Xiennacary's ears.

"Are you mocking me?"

"No, of course not..." Xiennacary responded with a forced smile, but her ears were pierced by another thunderous roar.

"You fool!"

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Larlyk was continuing to savor Calsedonia's sweets and engage in idle chatter when a voice like an earthquake's rumble reached his ears.

"What was that sound...?!"

"It sounds like someone has angered someone they absolutely shouldn't have," Calsedonia pointed out, unfazed as she sipped her fragrant tea.

"Someone you shouldn't anger...? Hmm...?"

Larlyk stood up, then suddenly swayed as if dizzy and collapsed to the floor.

"What's this...?"

"It's a mild paralytic. It's not very strong, so don't worry, the effects will wear off soon," Calsedonia said serenely, then turned to the clerics standing by.

"Barse, Niizu, please proceed as planned."

"Will do, Lady Calsedonia."

"Leave it to us."

The two clerics standing behind Calsedonia took out ropes hidden on the tea cart and began to securely tie up the now-immobilized Larlyk.

“What’s the meaning of this, Calsedonia?! Why would you use drugs on me, your beloved...?”

“You’re right; for a servant of the gods, resorting to drugs isn’t exactly commendable... but using the most effective tool for the job is a gift of human wisdom, isn’t it? Fortunately, you’re not the kind of person who makes my conscience hurt to deal with like this.”

Calsedonia smiled sweetly, yet a dangerous aura subtly peeked through, sending a chill down Larlyk’s spine.

“Oh, and why did I use the drug? Simply because I couldn’t have you causing a scene. I’ve heard about your habit of destroying your furniture in your own room out of frustration. This room is intended for hosting nobility, and a lot of time and expense have gone into furnishing it. I wouldn’t want you to destroy things purchased with the temple’s valuable funds on a whim or out of spite. And then—”

Calsedonia’s eyes narrowed smoothly, carrying a hint of lethal intent.

“—I’ve only ever loved one person. I’ve never loved anyone but him. Would you mind not presuming to tell me my feelings?”

With this cold declaration, Calsedonia flicked her eyes at Niizu, who stuffed a rag into Larlyk’s mouth. For some reason, the young man’s hands were trembling slightly.

Observing this, Calsedonia moved beside the last cleric, who had been standing behind her all along, just in case Larlyk tried to cause trouble.

Nuzzling up to the cleric happily, she declared, “The only one I love... is this person here.”

With a radiantly blooming smile that was nothing like the one she’d shown to Larlyk, Calsedonia gently pressed her cherry-colored lips against the cheek of the cleric standing next to her: Tatsumi.

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the chapter title.

## Chapter 13: Anger and Declaration

**E**arl Armond Garlathon heard the rattle of carriage wheels, but the sound seemed to come from far, far away. Before him stood a person who possessed the influence to potentially crush his entire family if they wished. And the cold gaze directed at him made Armond brace for exactly this outcome.

“The earl is an excellent lord, no doubt, but as a father and a husband, there appear to be some issues,” the person remarked.

“I am utterly disgraced, Duchess Quart.”

“Aren’t you the head of the Garlathon family? Shouldn’t you take a firmer stance with your wife and son?”

“Indeed, you’re correct. However, my wife is from a duchy of higher standing than our Garlathon earldom... When that’s brought into the conversation... my words no longer seem to hold much weight...”

“That’s precisely where you’re mistaken. No matter the stature of her natal family, once married, a wife is to obey her husband. So, it’s only right for you, the husband, to correct your wife’s errors, is it not?”

In the Kingdom of Largofiery, the status of women left much to be desired. It was very uncommon for a woman to inherit the leadership of a noble family; typically, if there was no male heir, a son-in-law would assume control, or a male child would be adopted to carry on the lineage. In situations where a woman must assume leadership, she may declare herself a widow, even if she had never been married, to maintain the pretense of ‘continuing the house in her late husband’s stead.’

“Furthermore, shouldn’t your son be better disciplined? If he resorts to destroying rooms out of frustration whenever something displeases him, he can hardly be considered a proper gentleman.”

“How could the Duchess Quart know of that...?”

Indeed, for an adult man to destroy rooms like a child in a tantrum was far from commendable. For this reason, Larlyk’s particular habit was supposed to be a strictly confidential matter known only to the earl’s household and its associates.

“Such a thing can be investigated easily if one is so inclined. I would appreciate it if you didn’t underestimate me,” Elysia Quart declared sharply.

“I’m terribly sorry... My foolish son... probably because of his mother’s influence... pays no heed to what I tell him.”

“That’s precisely why I’m saying there’s a problem with you as a father!” Elysia snapped, causing Armond to shrink back. “I’ll be speaking with your wife and son shortly... but prepare yourself for the worst-case scenario,” she added, and her statement may as well have been a death sentence.

Armond slumped dejectedly while the carriage, emblazoned with the ducal crest, slowly made its way through the city. Before long, the massive structure of the snow-covered Savaiv Temple came into view.

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The anger emanating from Giuseppe was so intense that the room itself seemed to tremble at his voice. Confronted head-on with such rage, Xiennacary slid off the plush upholstered chaise lounge, her eyes darting in shock.

“Do you think me a man who moves for money?! That I would sell my beloved daughter for gold—you think I’m such a vile person?! Do not lump me, Giuseppe Chrysopraxe, the high priest of the Savaiv Temple, with such petty beings! Enough with your underestimation, you fool!!”

Overwhelmed by the high priest’s anger, Xiennacary’s legs gave way, and she scurried on all fours across the room in a manner most unbecoming of a lady. Her household staff, too, turned pale and shook violently.

Giuseppe cast a look of disdain toward Xiennacary, then addressed someone waiting outside the room. “By now, this pig lady’s idiotic son should have fallen into Calce’s trap. Bring the idiot here now!”

Hearing the affirmative response and the departing footsteps, Giuseppe fixed his gaze on Xiennacary, who was now curled up in a corner of the room. “I truly am sorry for referring to you as ‘pig lady,’” he said, and Xiennacary found herself letting out an involuntary sigh of relief.

“No, no... It’s I who should be apologizing for overstepping my...”

Surprisingly, Giuseppe wasn’t bowing toward Xiennacary in the corner but rather in a completely different direction. “To be associated with such a person would offend the pigs. My apologies to you, pigs. I’m very sorry,” he said to the empty air.

Xiennacary, who had just been ranked lower than a pig, could do nothing but tremble in the corner under an even colder gaze.

Suddenly, the door to the reception room burst open, and a man was thrown inside. He was bound with rope, and his mouth was stuffed with a rag. Seeing this man’s disgraceful tumble onto the floor, Xiennacary suddenly stopped trembling. Her eyes went wide, and she stood up and rushed over to him.

“Larlyk?! Who would do such a terrible thing to my Larlyk?! I... I’ll never forgive them!” Gone was her previously frightened demeanor, replaced by blazing anger as Xiennacary faced the still-open door.

Through that door, a young man and woman appeared—of course, it was Tatsumi and Calsedonia.

Giuseppe, whose face had remained stern until that moment, softened his expression considerably. “Well done, well done. You’ve caused us quite a bit of trouble, indeed. Now then—” His gaze, once again sharp and cold, fell to where Larlyk lay on the floor. The rag had been removed from his mouth, but he was still bound, and Xiennacary knelt beside him, cradling him like a child.

“Not all the players are present, but first, let’s hear what you have to say. Tell me, Larlyk. According to your mother, you and Calsedonia are in love. When did this mutual affection begin? I’m a follower of Savaiv, the god of marriage. I have

no desire to separate two people in love. Let's hear why you believe the two of you are in love." Giuseppe spoke softly, but his words held a heaviness that Tatsumi couldn't miss. He realized anew that the title of Chief Priest was not for show, given the compelling presence Giuseppe wielded.

"With all due respect, Your Excellency Chrysoprase... The love between myself and Lady Calsedonia must surely be acknowledged by the great god Savaiv! My love for her is so great, Lady Calsedonia *must* love me in return... right, Lady Calsedonia...?"

"Yes, of course! With all the love Larlyk has showered upon her, any woman in the world would naturally respond!" said Xiennacary with passion. "Now, Calsedonia, in front of your grandfather... in front of His Excellency Chrysoprase, speak your feelings clearly! Just say you love Larlyk, and we'll welcome you as the bride of our Garlathon family!"

Facing mother and son on the floor, Calsedonia smiled sweetly. "Yes, I am deeply in love."

With Calsedonia's clear admission, a look of joy appeared on both of their faces. But that joy was fleeting.

"However, as I mentioned earlier, the one I love is not Lord Larlyk."

"What are you saying, Calsedonia?! What is it that you dislike about my Larlyk?!" Xiennacary shrieked in disbelief.

Giuseppe rolled his eyes. *I'd be asking whether there's anything to like about him*, he thought to himself.

Ignoring the stunned gaze of Larlyk and the continued shrieks of Xiennacary, Calsedonia went on. "That person... has been by my side since I was much smaller than I am now. He gave me food, provided me with water, and nurtured me with love. There were times when he held me while I choked on an egg and rushed me to the doctor late at night. Since those days when I was a tiny being, up until now... I've always loved him."

"Wha... What? E-Egg...?"

"You... What are you talking about...?"

Calsedonia spoke with her hands clasped in front of her, embodying the very image of a girl lost in a dream. However, Lady Garlathon and her son just stared blankly at her, seemingly unable to comprehend her words.

Tatsumi, the only person who understood exactly what she meant, thought back fondly to those times—though it felt like they came from another life.

He thought of Calsedonia—no, of Chiko the cockatiel—when she'd lived with Tatsumi's family. Late one night, Chiko had suffered from egg binding, leading to a prolapse of the oviduct. Cockatiels are known to become very attached to humans and are generally easy to care for due to their resistance to sickness, making them popular pets. Their weakness, however, is that they're prone to egg binding.

Seeing the egg dangling from Chiko's cloaca, Tatsumi and his family frantically searched the phone book for a veterinarian. However, most of the vets in their neighborhood specialized in dogs and cats, and due to the time, there were none available to treat a cockatiel. After scouring the phone book again, they found a veterinarian a bit further away but willing to accept all kinds of animal emergencies, even late at night. Tatsumi's family rushed Chiko to the vet in his father's car.

Because they had informed the vet of Chiko's condition over the phone, the veterinary staff were ready to welcome them upon arrival. Thankfully, Chiko pulled through. Later, the vet told Tatsumi that if she had been left with the prolapsed oviduct until morning, she would certainly have died.

While Tatsumi was deeply immersed in these memories, Calsedonia continued speaking. "I mentioned this before, didn't I? This man here, Tatsumi Yamagata, is the person I love."

"What are you saying, Calsedonia?! That man is nothing more than a commoner, even if he is a priest! Why would you choose a commoner over me, the rightful heir to the noble Garlathon earldom...?!"

"Yes, exactly!" Xiennacary echoed. "How could a man like that be better than my Larlyk?! Why would you choose him...?!"

Larlyk, whose sedative was beginning to wear off, struggled to push himself to a standing position with his bound hands. From his face, it was clear he agreed

with his mother: he thought himself superior to Tatsumi in every possible way.

“So, it’s like I thought...” he went on. “You’re tricking Calsedonia, aren’t you? Or you’ve found some weakness and you’re blackmailing her? You coward! Release my Calsedonia this instant! I’m even willing to pay you off. Take the money and get out of our sight immediately!!”

“Precisely! That’s exactly what one would expect from someone of dirty foreign descent! Well, fine. We’ll pay you whatever amount you ask. Take the money and leave this city—no, leave this country immediately! That’s an order from Lady Garlathon! A commoner like you wouldn’t dare defy the orders of a noble.”

“That kiss earlier, you must have forced it on Calsedonia! You’re utterly despicable!!”

Mother and son stood triumphant, convinced of their victory.

Tatsumi couldn’t comprehend how they’d arrived at such a conclusion. He shook his head, trying to dislodge the headache he felt coming on.

“I haven’t deceived or threatened Calsedonia,” he told them. “I really, genuinely care for her.”

Standing by his side, Calsedonia beamed at him. Her joyous expression in that moment should have made it clear to anyone in the room that she was not under any duress.

However, it seemed the Garlathon heir and his mother were the exception.

“Hmph, words are cheap!” Larlyk shrugged. “All right. If you insist on staying in this city, then our family will use all our power to eliminate you! Prepare yourself; there’s no longer any place for you in the Kingdom of Largofiery!”

“That’s right!” Xiennacary added. “Defying the Garlathons is tantamount to defying the Kingdom of Largofiery itself. It seems you’re unaware that you’re already committing a crime equivalent to treason against the state?”

As he listened to the two of them talk, Tatsumi realized it was futile. They lived in their own world, believing with all their hearts that everything revolved



around them. No matter how much Tatsumi tried to reason with them, they wouldn't understand... nor did they want to.

Faced with such intractable selfishness, even the mild-mannered Tatsumi began to lose his temper. "Enough, okay?! How can you be so self-centered? How can you continue to only see the world in a way that suits you? Is this what an adult does... what a noble should do? Shouldn't you be setting an example?" His voice was low, but magical energy radiated faintly from his body.

Calsedonia and Giuseppe, who could see the golden aura around Tatsumi, recognized the depth of his anger. The Garlathons, however, unable to perceive magical energy, were simply outraged.

"Well, the audacity of a commoner speaking so rudely to a noble... Chrysoprase, Your Excellency! You heard the insolence from this man, didn't you? A commoner speaking such insolence to a noble is a grave offense, you know that. Now, Your Excellency, please arrest this fool at once!"

"That's right! You've spat in the face of the Garlathon family... no, of the Kingdom of Largofiery! Needless to say, you'll be held accountable for your crimes! This is the end for you!"

Mother and son were triumphant. They knew punishment would come surely and swiftly to Tatsumi.

"So what?" Tatsumi retorted. "Even if my feelings for Chiko are considered a serious crime, I won't back down... Even if I'm going against a noble or against the whole country, I have no intention of giving up these feelings! Treason? Bring it on! Even if I have to face an entire country, I *will* stand by my feelings!!"



Tatsumi's declaration was clear and resolute. Upon hearing this, Giuseppe nodded in satisfaction several times, while Calsedonia, tears brimming in her crimson eyes, blushed with happiness.

Xiennacary and Larlyk, on the other hand, simply stared at Tatsumi with dumbfounded expressions. To them, the idea of a lowborn man like Tatsumi defying the state to uphold his own beliefs was simply beyond comprehension.

Just then, the doors to the reception room burst open, and an elderly woman stepped in, clapping her hands together.



## Chapter 14: The Final Blow

The elegantly dressed woman, who had interrupted with her applause, directed a gentle smile toward Tatsumi. “I’m sorry for barging in like this. But that was a wonderful statement. It’s not easy to say something like that in front of nobility, you know?”

Tatsumi’s face flushed. Only now did he realize the gravity of his own words. In the heat of the moment, he had declared he would stand against the country for his feelings; maybe that had been something of an overstatement.

“I might have gone a bit too far...” he admitted. “But still, I have no intention of letting her go. That much is true.”

“Master...”

Calsey looked at him as if he were the only thing in the universe, utterly enraptured and radiating happiness. The older woman—Elysia Quart, the former duchess—watched her with fond amusement.

“My, my. To see Calsey so utterly enchanted. It seems you’re quite the ladies’ man,” she added, glancing back at Tatsumi.

“Huh? Wh-What?! Me, a ladies’ man?! No, no, no, that’s not it at all!! The only woman I’m close to is Chiko!!”

“Chiko?”

“Um... Chiko is... not exactly Calsey’s previous name, but... uh... how should I put it...” Tatsumi grew more and more flustered as he tried to explain. He decided to change the topic. “And, excuse me, but may I ask who you are...?”

The woman chuckled at Tatsumi's consternation. "Oh dear, how rude of me not to introduce myself. My name is Elysia. I've known Giuseppe and Calsey for quite some time now. I look forward to getting to know you."

"Ah, yes, I'm Tatsumi Yamagata. So, you're friends with Giuseppe and Calsey..." he mused, glancing at them. "Why are you here, Mrs. Elysia?"

Tatsumi hadn't expected family friends to be at this meeting. However, he trusted Giuseppe and Calsey, and he knew they must have had a good reason for inviting her. He glanced back and forth between Giuseppe and Elysia, prompting another amused laugh from Elysia.

"Ufufufufu. Truly, just as Giuseppe said. Meeting you in person, I can see clearly what kind of person you are," she commented.

"Er... what?" Tatsumi tilted his head in confusion.

"Actually, my son-in-law, Elysia has been a big help to us in this situation," Giuseppe explained. "This crafty fox has some skilled spies at her disposal."

"Oh, some old fox cried and begged for my help, so I reluctantly lent my strength," Elysia quipped, and though her tone was sharp, she seemed to be in good spirits as she and Giuseppe bantered. Tatsumi quickly grasped that these two shared a close bond.

"Quart, the former duchess!" Lady Garlathon gasped. She and her son had been silent spectators until now, but she was finally processing everything: Tatsumi's bold declaration to stand against the country for his beliefs, the sudden arrival of such a prominent figure, and the fact that Elysia was treating Tatsumi with such familiarity.

Within seconds, however, Xiennacary had regained her composure. She rushed to Elysia and prostrated herself. "You must have heard, Great Lady! This man has insolently challenged us nobles—no, the Kingdom of Largofiery itself! Even worse, he's tied up my dear son, and he's committed one act of violence after another! Please use your power to punish this fool!"

"Yes, exactly! This man has coerced Calsey—who was supposed to be *my* wife—into all kinds of things and even dares to make her his own wife. It's absolutely reprehensible! Great Lady, I understand that you're close to Calsey,

too. For her sake, I'm asking you to judge this man immediately!!" Still bound, Larlyk crawled to Elysia's feet and lay down next to his mother.

The Great Lady looked down coldly at the two Garlathons. Tatsumi, meanwhile, was surprised to learn that Elysia was a duchess, a position near the pinnacle of nobility.

"Threatening Calsey, you say? Is that true?" Elysia glanced at Tatsumi, and the power of that glance made him involuntarily step back, even as he shook his head.

Still smiling, Calsey stepped in front of Elysia. "As I've told you before, Great Lady, I love my mast—Tatsumi, of my own free will. No one's coercing me at all. On the contrary, I'm finally happy now, especially after Tatsumi made such a clear declaration."

Calsey's smile warmed the hearts of all who saw it, especially as they recalled Tatsumi's bold statement about staying true to his feelings no matter who stood in his way.

"No, I don't believe for a moment that Tatsumi is threatening you," Elysia concurred. "If he were deceiving or threatening you, he wouldn't have been able to say something like that. By the way—"

The elderly woman, who had been gazing at Calsey as one might look at a favorite granddaughter, narrowed her eyes in satisfaction. How this child had grown and how happy she was! Her gaze then sharpened as she looked down at the two groveling at her feet.

"And who was it that *was* threatening... or trying to threaten, I wonder?" Elysia's eyes pierced straight into Larlyk.

"What do you mean...? I've never threatened anyone in my life..." he began, but his words sounded hollow.

"Oh, is that so? By the way... Larlyk, was it? Do you recognize what this is?" Elysia asked as she produced a crystal about the size of an adult's clenched fist. The crystal sparkled brilliantly in Elysia's palm, a pure and colorless sphere.

"Could that be... the Reflection Crystal?"

“Exactly. This is an item a certain old fox collected long ago... It has something interesting recorded on it. Would you like to see?” Elysia waved her hand over the artifact and muttered what sounded like a keyword.

Suddenly, images and sounds began to emerge on the crystal’s surface. The magical Reflection Crystal had the remarkable ability to record and play back both video and audio, much like a video camera.

*“Can’t you hurt that young deacon Tatsumi?! My master is furious. If things keep going this way, who knows what will become of us...”* With these words as a backdrop, the crystal showed thugs attempting to threaten Tatsumi and a person who appeared to be a servant of a wealthy household engaging in a dangerous conversation.

The setting appeared to be a crowded, dingy tavern. The faces of the men were close to the surface of the crystal; it must have been placed close to them to capture their conversation over the general clamor.

The scene then shifted, revealing a room with luxurious furnishings that had been completely wrecked. Two men stood in the room, talking. This footage seemed to have been shot from ceiling level, offering a slightly oblique aerial view. Even so, it was clear that one of the men in the room was the same servant from before.

And the other man was unmistakably Larlyk Garlathon.

*“Damn it!! Haven’t you found a weakness in that deacon yet?! When will the men I hired be able to hurt Tatsumi!!”*

*“Yes... it seems he has an incredible knack for escaping. Even when the men I hired surround him, he slips through their grasp...”*

*“I’m tired of excuses! Show me results soon, or else...”* Larlyk narrowed his eyes menacingly at his subordinate. *“With the power of the Garlathon family, we can easily dispose of someone like you, understood?”*

*“Y-Yes, Lord Larlyk...! I’ll make sure this Tatsumi suffers...!”*

Elysia paused the video. Tatsumi’s evasion of the thugs had been part of a strategy to buy time while her spies, using the magical device borrowed from Giuseppe, recorded unassailable evidence of Larlyk’s actions.

“You said a few minutes ago that you’d ‘never threatened anyone in your life’... or did I mishear?” Elysia questioned.

“I don’t know anything about this video! I have no idea what this is about!!”

“Exactly! This must be a fabrication by that despicable man, Tatsumi, trying to frame my dear Larlyk!!”

“Enough of this nonsense,” Giuseppe said. “Altering a magical device is extremely difficult unless one is an expert in that field. Besides, the thugs you saw in the crystal have already been captured by the temple’s priest-warriors. They attempted violence against one of our priests. Protecting the temple and its followers is our priest-warriors’ duty, so their actions were entirely justified. I’m looking forward to hearing what those thugs have to say.

“You Garlathons truly have no idea what you’ve done,” Elysia continued, sighing in exasperation. “The kingdom and the temple support each other. What you’ve done could jeopardize the trust between the two. I don’t think you realize that.”

Separate as it was from the kingdom, the temple had no obligation to obey any royal decrees, nor did it interfere with the governance of the kingdom. While the two observed various formalities in their dealings with each other, theirs was a deep and lasting friendship. The kingdom provided the temple with protection, and for many citizens, faith in the gods served as a spiritual foundation. A rift between the kingdom and the temple would manifest as unease among the populace regarding their nation.

If the kingdom were to anger the temple, it might close its doors, which would mean more than just depriving the people of a place to pray. The temple also functioned as a medical facility and a training center. It provided care and healing for the injured and sick, and some temples even taught self-defense techniques and basic education like arithmetic.

Should the temple close its doors, the people would lose access to those services, and they would inevitably direct their anger toward the kingdom. A nation that loses the trust of its people cannot hope for a bright future. Thus, the state and the temple strove to maintain a harmonious relationship.



“What you’ve done undermines the efforts of both parties,” Elysia went on. “If you were to seriously anger that old fox—I mean, the Chief Priest, the relationship between the temple and the kingdom would deteriorate, and naturally, the kingdom would hold you accountable. You understand what would happen then, right?”

Only now, as she hinted at the potential dissolution of the earl’s family, did Lady Garlathon and Larlyk begin to realize the seriousness of their situation.

“What you’ve done, which could deeply fracture the relationship between the kingdom and the temple, should ideally be judged by the laws of the kingdom. But we don’t want to escalate this matter further.”

The variety of metal products produced by the Garlathon Earldom had become extremely important to the Kingdom of Largofiery. Not only were they supplied to the nation’s military, but Garlathon goods were also exported as specialty items internationally.

The current Earl Garlathon’s skill in significantly developing this industry was widely recognized, meaning the dissolution of the Garlathon family would be no simple matter. Even if the Garlathon estate were to be dissolved and incorporated directly under the royal domain, there would be no guarantee that the family industry could be developed in the same manner.

“Because of that, the treatment of you all will be left entirely to the head of the Garlathon family, Armond Garlathon. Is that understood?” As Elysia addressed the still-open door, a middle-aged gentleman appeared. Tatsumi surmised that this individual must be Larlyk’s father, the earl.

“Your Grace, I will take full responsibility for punishing them. I’m deeply grateful for your generous decision.” Armond bowed deeply toward Elysia. Then, turning to Giuseppe, he gave another deep bow.

“Your Excellency Chrysoprase, I cannot begin to express my apologies for the trouble we’ve caused you.”

“I’m not interested in apologies. Instead, ensure they’re adequately punished. Don’t let familial affection sway you,” Giuseppe warned.

“Yes! I promise I won’t cause any further displeasure to Your Excellency, Lady Calsey, or her fiancé.”

“However,” Elysia cut in, “I will inform His Majesty the King about this incident. Should there be any decree from His Majesty, you will accept it willingly. Understood?”

“Understood, Great Lady.”

“Now, Earl. How do you intend to judge these individuals?” Giuseppe asked Armond gravely. Gone was his usual affable demeanor, replaced by the full weight of dignity befitting the Chief Priest of the Savaiv Temple.

Armond understood the stakes; showing mercy to his wife and son now would undoubtedly lead to the downfall of his family.

For the first time, the earl turned his gaze toward his wife and son, still prostrated on the floor next to Elysia.

“You... Please... help me...”

“Father... Please, I’m begging you...”

Xiennacary and Larlyk, realizing the direness of their situation, clung to Armond, their husband and father, as their last hope. However, Armond’s gaze upon them was colder than ever.

“Xiennacary, I’m filing for divorce. The Great Lady will speak to your family on my behalf. It’s unlikely they’ll accept you back after this.”

Xiennacary gasped, but Armond ignored her as he turned to his son.

“Larlyk, you are hereby disinherited and disowned from this day onward. You’re no longer a son to me, nor am I a father to you. Go wherever you wish.”

“So, you’re telling Mother and me to die in the streets?!”

“But he’s the heir of the Garlathon family! Disowning your only son, Larlyk?!”

Their protests fell on deaf ears—at least, so it seemed to Xiennacary and Larlyk.

“Don’t worry about the heir,” he said. “I’ll take responsibility and introduce a worthy young man as an adopted son.”

“Anyone would look good compared to that idiotic son, right?” the cunning old duchess said loudly, making Tatsumi flinch a little. She then cast a meaningful smile at Tatsumi.

“Oh, now that you mention it, we do have a promising young man right here. What do you think, Earl Garlathon? How about making this young man, Tatsumi, your heir?”

“Wh-What?! No, please!! I’m not cut out to be a noble!! I’m common folk through and through!! Being the heir of a noble would be absolutely impossible for me!! I can’t do it!!” Tatsumi panicked, shaking his head and hands vigorously—much to the amusement of Giuseppe, Elysia, and Calsey. Armond, however, was staring at Tatsumi with a serious expression, perhaps genuinely considering him as his successor.

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A few days after the commotion caused by the former Lady Garlathon and the former heir, Tatsumi and Calsedonia were called into Giuseppe’s office. It seemed that a provisional conclusion had been reached regarding the recent uproar, and they were about to learn of the outcome. “So, what happened?” Tatsumi asked.

“Hmm. It seems the Garlathon family didn’t face severe punishment. However, they will be subjected to additional taxes for a few years,” Giuseppe explained.

Tatsumi understood. To “dissolve” the Garlathon family would have been easier said than done, largely due to the complexity of displacing those who served it and ensuring the continued management of its estate.

“And what about that woman and her son?” Calsey inquired, to which Giuseppe responded evenly.

“As for those two, divorced and disowned... in the end, since they had nowhere to go, Earl Garlathon provided them with a small house and a plot of land within his domain... where they’ll live as commoners, not nobles.”

“I wonder if those two will be able to manage on their own?”

“Well, I can’t say for sure what will become of them. Even that much is an act of grace from the earl. If they take this opportunity to turn their lives around, good for them; if not, they’ll have nothing but a bleak future ahead. It’s all up to them now.”

The divorce and disownment of Xiennacary and Larlyk meant they were no longer of concern to the Garlathon family. Giving them a house and land was likely Armond’s final act of kindness toward his former family members.

As Tatsumi was mentally concluding the matter, Giuseppe turned back to him with an unexpected question.

“Now, my son-in-law, things like this may well happen again. So, what do you think about making your and Calsey’s positions clear to the public from here on out? I’m considering formalizing your relationship in the eyes of society... What are your thoughts?”



## Chapter 15: Engagement Ceremony

**A**t Giuseppe's words, Tatsumi felt himself flinch. However, he had to admit that the question wasn't a complete surprise. Ever since the incident with the Garlathon family, he'd been thinking a lot about marriage.

"I've asked you before about your thoughts on marriage, and I want to respect your wishes. And Calsey will wait as long as you ask her to," Giuseppe said, glancing at his granddaughter, who smiled softly in response.

Months ago, Tatsumi had told Giuseppe that he wanted to wait to get married until he could support a family. Calsey knew this and appreciated it; to her, it was a sign that Tatsumi would take this commitment, and their life together, seriously.

"Now that you've become a senior deacon and an official priest-warrior, the combined income from those two roles should be higher than the average family here in the city. Of course, I'm well aware that your ultimate goal is to become an exorcist. However, perhaps it's time to formalize your relationship through an engagement, at least. That's what I think... but what about you?"

The idea of becoming officially engaged to Calsey made Tatsumi blush, even though they'd been living together for over half a year.

"Um... I wouldn't mind... actually getting engaged to Calsey... I mean, I understand it would be the right thing to do. But... what exactly would that involve?"

Tatsumi, who had never even dated a girl in his home world, had only a vague notion of what the word *engagement* meant.

“Typically, an engagement ceremony called the Rite of Betrothal is held at the temple,” Giuseppe began, stroking his long white beard. “The ceremony involves just the officiating priest, acting as a witness, and the couple. Before the gods—in front of Savaiv, naturally—you declare your intention to get married and receive divine blessings. In short, that’s what it entails. Oh, and, if you decide to have the ceremony, I’ll serve as the officiating priest.”

Calsey’s eyes widened in surprise. “Is that really okay? The Chief Priest officiating... isn’t that something that normally only happens for royalty or the highest levels of the nobility?”

“You’re right about that,” Giuseppe responded. “However, Tatsumi has been under your care in many ways. As your grandfather... no, as your adoptive father, I’d like to do at least that much.”

Not only had Tatsumi accepted Calsey without any resentment or blame for being abruptly brought into this world, but he had also embraced living together harmoniously. While Tatsumi might have said he was the one taken care of, Giuseppe felt grateful to Tatsumi for looking after his adoptive daughter. Officiating their Rite of Betrothal was his way of expressing his gratitude.

Of course, having Chief Priest Giuseppe as the officiant would also serve as a form of pressure in various circles.

“I think I understand,” Tatsumi said, relieved. “Then, I’ll leave the Rite of Betrothal in your hands, Giuseppe. When will it be held?”

“Hmm... There are several things that have to be done around the temple to get ready. How about ten days from today?” Giuseppe proposed, and Tatsumi readily agreed.

Behind him, Calsey beamed with happiness.

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“Huh? You’re looking for a shop that deals in jewelry?” Barse asked.

It was just after training the next day.

“Yeah, I’ve never been to any shops like that in Levantis,” Tatsumi responded. “If you know a good place that sells quality jewelry, I’d appreciate it if you could tell me.”

“Sure, that’s fine, but why the sudden interest... Ah, I see.” Barse seemed to understand all at once, sporting a sly grin that made Tatsumi feel as if his thoughts were laid bare. He looked away awkwardly.

“In that case, you might want to ask the Niizu brothers. Their family’s shop mainly sells weapons to monster hunters, but it’s an old establishment. They probably know a lot more about the local merchants than I do.”

“Right, I’ll ask them, then.”

“Yeah, do that. And make sure you pick something nice, okay?”

“Shut up!”

Barse watched with a mixture of amusement and exasperation as Tatsumi hurried off, red-faced.

“They’ve been living together for what, six months? And he’s still this shy...” Barse muttered to himself. “Well, I guess that’s just like Tatsumi.”

The ten days flew by in a blur of activity for Tatsumi. For one thing, he visited the jewelry store recommended by Niizu to purchase jewelry for the Rite of Betrothal. It seemed that in this country, earrings and other ear decorations were used as symbols of engagement instead of rings. After consulting with the store’s staff, Tatsumi managed to choose a pair of earrings that he thought suited Calsey perfectly. However, he went slightly over budget and had to borrow the money from Giuseppe—there was no way he could borrow the money for Calsey’s gift from Calsey herself.

Tatsumi had entrusted all his earnings from the temple to Calsey, from which he received an allowance—in other words, a pocket money system. Had his engagement not been so sudden, Tatsumi might have planned his budget more carefully before making any purchases.

In addition to preparing for the engagement, Tatsumi also had meetings with Giuseppe’s family. Giuseppe had three sons, all his biological children, who were all married with children of their own. Considering Giuseppe’s age, this

was no surprise, but it meant that Calsey's brothers were significantly older than her.

Meeting the men who would become his brothers-in-law was a nerve-wracking experience for Tatsumi, but they had already been briefed about him by Giuseppe and Calsey and welcomed him warmly. Still, the men's care for Calsey was evident in the stern gazes they leveled at Tatsumi upon meeting him. After all, given the age difference, she almost could have been their daughter, so they were highly protective of her.

Fortunately, any tension soon eased—especially since Giuseppe's second son held the position of Chief Warrior at the Savaiv Temple, making him Tatsumi's direct superior. Tatsumi was already quite familiar with this man's reputation; however, Giuseppe's family boasted diverse backgrounds: his wife was a dignitary at the Temple of the Sea God, Dragabe, his eldest son a Kingdom Knight, and his youngest son a priest-warrior of the Sun God Grayba.

Adorned in the ceremonial garb and holy seal of a senior deacon, Tatsumi knelt before the grand statue of the great god Savaiv in the temple's chapel. Calsey knelt beside him, also dressed in her ceremonial attire and holy seal. Before the statue of Savaiv stood Giuseppe, resplendent in the ornate attire of the Chief Priest.

"Here and now, these two young souls vow to forge a new bond before the mighty god Savaiv," he announced, his resonant voice filling the spacious chapel. "May this vow remain unbroken, eternally binding them together with an indestructible chain."

Normally bustling with worshippers, the chapel was now occupied only by Tatsumi and his companions. The congregation had been informed in advance about the Rite of Betrothal taking place today and was waiting outside until the ceremony concluded. Among those waiting were several individuals close to Tatsumi and Calsey.

"With the adornment of the vow earrings, this engagement shall be recognized as binding," Giuseppe stated solemnly. He turned back to Tatsumi and Calsey and held out a round tray with the sanctified earrings, previously offered before the statue of the deity for blessing.



At Giuseppe's cue, Tatsumi and Calsey stood. Giuseppe reverently presented the blessed earrings to them. The earrings Tatsumi had chosen featured a design of intricately intertwined thin silver plates, at the center of which was a small but brilliantly transparent crimson gemstone. This exquisite piece was crafted by an artisan of the Ogrus, a demi-human race known for their affinity with fire. Along with their robust, muscular builds and bronze-colored skin, the Ogrus possessed surprisingly dexterous fingers, excelling in fine craftsmanship and blacksmithing skills.

Tatsumi picked up both earrings, handing one to Calsey.

"Sorry, Chiko," he said.

"Huh?" Calsey asked, looking puzzled.

"I mean... we could have gone further than just getting engaged... It's my fault we're stopping here... I'm really sorry."

"No, that's... If anyone's being selfish, it's me... I summoned you to this world just for my own reasons—" Calsey's attempt to continue was gently halted by Tatsumi's finger pressing against her lips.

"That's not true. I'm genuinely happy you summoned me. To be honest, it's not like there's nothing I miss about my life in Japan."

Compared to modern Japan, living in this world presented its own challenges.

Without electricity, the nights were dark, and during the cold winters, the only source of heat was often a fireplace. And there were many other areas where this world fell short next to Japan.

"But still... Chiko is here in this world. I thought I'd lost her forever to death and would never see her again, but now we can live together again. That alone... No, I can't imagine any happiness greater than that."

"Master..." In Calsey's crimson eyes, tears as clear and warm as transparent gemstones formed.

Tatsumi smiled gently at Calsey, lifting her hair to expose her left ear, where he carefully placed the vow earring. "Chiko... Now, it's your turn."

“Yes... Yes...!” Wiping away her tears repeatedly with the back of her hand, Calsey affixed the earring to Tatsumi’s right ear.

In the Kingdom of Largofiery, it was customary for men to wear an earring in the right ear and women in the left as a sign of engagement. When it came to marriage, the ear in which the earring was worn switched between the genders.

“Here and now, the engagement of these two young individuals is established!” As soon as Giuseppe spoke, the temple bells began to chime in celebration.

The sound of the bells spread to every corner of Levantis, celebrating the new bond between the young couple. Holding hands tightly and standing only inches apart, the newly engaged couple gazed deep into each other’s eyes.

Outside the chapel, they knew friends and acquaintances would be waiting to congratulate them. Barse, Niizu, Sargo, Shiro, senior priest-warriors, fellow junior deacons from Tatsumi’s early days, and Calsey’s acquaintances, including priests like Kuri, were all anticipating their exit to offer blessings.

It was even possible that some of their neighbors had come to join in the celebration.

“Come on, Chiko. Let’s go and tell everyone that we’re officially engaged,” Tatsumi suggested.

“Yes, Master!!” Hand in hand, they began walking toward the chapel’s entrance.

But, after only a few steps, Tatsumi suddenly stopped.

“What’s wrong, Master?” Calsey asked.

“Well, about calling me ‘Master’... maybe it’s time to stop?” he proposed.

“Wha...”

“I mean... well... you’re definitely still my Chiko, but you’re not just the pet... the cockatiel Chiko anymore. You’re a human woman now... so I’ll start calling you Calsey... and could you stop calling me Master...?”

Hearing this, Calsey’s eyes widened in surprise, but her shock was fleeting. Soon, she blushed and smiled happily.

“I’m very happy to hear your feelings, Master... But do you think you could maybe keep calling me ‘Chiko’?” She looked up at him shyly, her cheeks flushed. “Chiko is a special name you gave me. I would rather you keep using that name for me, Master... Is that okay?”

It was a small wish, but the name Chiko held a special significance for both of them—and being called Chiko by Tatsumi clearly brought Calsey a lot of happiness. After all, Tatsumi was the only person in this world who had ever called her by that unique name.

Tatsumi turned beet red, but it didn’t take him long to think about her request. “Ah, well, if Chiko insists that much... then, to me, you’ll always be Chiko too.”

“Yes!! Once again, please take care of me, Master!!”

Both were blushing now, yet they smiled happily at each other. Slowly, the distance between Tatsumi’s and Calsey’s lips closed until it vanished. Giuseppe looked on with satisfaction.

After a while, seeing that the two showed no signs of pulling apart, Giuseppe called out to them with a mix of amusement and exasperation. “How long do you plan on keeping this up? Enough already.” His tone was almost serious, but a gentle smile remained on the face of the Chief Priest of Savaiv.



## Chapter 16: The Magic Painting

**S**everal days after Tatsumi and Calsey's formal engagement, on a day like any other, Tatsumi took an unusual detour on his way home from the temple. Perhaps clarifying his relationship with Calsey had given him a newfound sense of leisure.

Tatsumi's destination was the central square of Levantis, where merchants from across the Largofiery Kingdom set up their stalls. The array of goods on display ranged from food and medicinal items to decorative and clothing articles, weapons, armor, and many items whose purposes Tatsumi didn't yet know.

After spending a few minutes wandering aimlessly through the stalls, Tatsumi stopped in front of one that seemed to sell... junk. The items laid out included dubious-looking crystal balls, cracked pots, and more.

"Welcome, young man," a middle-aged man greeted him with a sly grin. "You've got an eye for my goods, I see? You've got quite the discernment."

"Everything here, without exception, is genuine magic-sealed gear. For instance—" The vendor rummaged through his wares and produced an old, worn longsword.

"This was the holy sword once favored by an exorcist known as the Swordsmith. And now, it can be yours for just seventy silver coins. How about it? Quite the bargain, right?"

Every nation on the continent of Zoisalight shared a common currency of silver coins, without specific denominations. Transactions were often described in terms of "how many silver coins."

For perspective, the daily living expenses of an average citizen amounted to around ten silver coins. A longsword like the one Tatsumi now beheld would typically cost between one hundred and two hundred silver coins, although it could be worth much more if it had been crafted by a renowned artisan.

Indeed, seventy silver coins for this longsword was probably quite the bargain.

However, the sword would only be worth considering if it were actually durable enough for practical use.

“Could I take a look at it?” Tatsumi asked.

“Sure, take your time,” the vendor replied, handing over the weapon. Tatsumi attempted to draw it from its sheath, but no matter how hard he pulled, the blade refused to reveal itself.

“Is it rusted shut?” he wondered.

“Nope, that’s not it, young man. Didn’t I tell you? This is a holy sword. It chooses its owner. And apparently, it didn’t choose you. So, what are you going to do? Are you going to buy it?”

*Holy sword, indeed.* The thing emitted a strong smell of rusted iron.

“I don’t need it. What am I supposed to do with a sword that won’t come out?”

“Well, even if it’s not working now, maybe it’ll recognize you as its owner in the future?” The vendor grinned as Tatsumi handed back the sword and turned his attention to other items.

“Hm? Is this actually...” Something else caught Tatsumi’s eye. It was a painting.

“Oh, you’ve got a good eye, young man. It is indeed. That’s a portrait of the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple, famous around these parts. Quite the resemblance, don’t you think?”

“Is that so...?” Tatsumi scrutinized the portrait with furrowed brows. The hair and eye color did indeed resemble Calsey’s, but that was where the similarities ended. The face didn’t look like hers, and the body seemed misshapen. Tatsumi

possessed no expertise in evaluating art, but even he could see that it was the work of a novice—a piece so fundamentally flawed in its draftsmanship that it could hardly be called fine art at all.

It wasn't just Calsey's body that was wrong; in the painting, she was dressed in a flamboyant red dress that Tatsumi couldn't imagine ever seeing her put on in real life. The outfit was provocative, revealing much of the Saintess's chest. But even that aspect couldn't make up for the painting's utter lack of skill.

Unaware of Tatsumi's thoughts, or perhaps indifferent to them, the vendor leaned forward with a sly grin.

"And you know what? The red dress that the Saintess in the painting is wearing," he began, his voice somehow becoming even more sleazy, "becomes transparent at midnight, showing the Saintess completely naked."

"Any man, yourself included, would want to see the famed beauty of the Saintess naked, am I right? Of course, I feel the same. But, let's be honest, who gets the chance to see the Saintess in her bare form?"

Tatsumi had to disagree with the man. In fact, he had once accidentally stripped Calsey of her clothes during an experiment with Instantaneous Teleportation. Furthermore, there were moments, like after a bath, when Calsey's deep cleavage was visible beneath her thin nightwear or when her nightdress rode up during sleep, revealing her white, soft, healthy thighs in the morning light.

Unable to tell the vendor all of this, however, Tatsumi had to listen to the rest of the pitch in silence.

"But you see? If you buy this painting, you can see the Saintess naked, even if it's just in a painting. This is a must-buy for any man, right? Don't you agree?"

Clothing in a painting becoming transparent at midnight... that sounded like magic. But...

*Oh*, Tatsumi realized, *magic exists in this world*. Maybe the painting really did have special powers, like the man suggested.

However, Tatsumi didn't know which type of magic could make such a thing possible.

“Come on, young man. I can tell you’re interested by the way you’re hesitating. Why not just buy it? I’ll give you a discount,” the vendor added with another sly grin.

After a few moments of intense deliberation, Tatsumi came to a decision.

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“And you really bought it? Such a suspicious painting?”

Calsey stood in front of Tatsumi, her face displaying a mixture of astonishment and annoyance.

As Tatsumi had expected, Calsey had seen the painting the moment he arrived home. All he could do was explain honestly how he’d ended up buying it. But he didn’t mind; he had no intention of sneaking it past her—which, given the thing’s size, probably would have been impossible.

They sat at the dining table; a warm flame danced in the fireplace, in cozy contrast to the darkness outside. Yet, between Tatsumi and Calsey, a strange chill had settled. Calsey lowered her head, her shoulders trembling almost imperceptibly.

“Um... Chiko...?” Tatsumi ventured.

She lifted her head, and Tatsumi’s breath caught when he saw tears glistening in her eyes.

“Master... am I... am I not appealing to you as a woman...?”

“Wait, *what?! No!*”

“Because... because it means my actual body is even worse than this terribly drawn picture, right?!” Calsey’s voice was weak and choked with sobs. “You would rather see the naked body in this painting over *my* nudity... that’s it, isn’t it?! It means my body is so pathetic that it’s not even as good as this painting...!!”

At first, Tatsumi had no idea what to say. This was the first time he’d seen Calsey cry so vulnerably. However, he quickly snapped back to reality. He knew that this was *not* the time to say something cliché like “You’re more attractive

than any painting.” So, he decided to tell her the truth about why he’d felt compelled to buy such a poorly executed piece of art.

“So that’s why...” Calsey had been covering her face with both hands while she cried, but she suddenly looked up, turning her wet cheeks to Tatsumi.

“Master... what did you just say...?”

“That’s why I hated it!! Even if it’s just a painting... no matter how bad the artwork is, if by some chance the painting really was enchanted, and the clothes on there did become transparent...” Tatsumi continued, his face flushed red, not daring to meet her gaze directly.

“And if some random man could potentially see it... I just couldn’t stand the thought of it!! Even if it’s just a painting, I don’t want anyone else to see Chiko’s nudity... I want it to be mine alone!!”

“Master...” In an instant, all the sadness in Calsey’s expression gave way to utter bliss.

“I’m sorry!! I... I have my possessiveness too, you know!!” Tatsumi added, throwing the words out in a tone that was almost defiant.

After that, the room fell silent, but it wasn’t an awkward silence; it was a comfortable, contented quiet, filled with happiness.

How long might she have been immersed in such a sea of silence? Suddenly, Calsedonia broke that blissful quiet.

“Then, if it pleases you... do you want... want to see... now?” she stammered.

“Huh?”

“If... if Master wants... and if... if my nudity is acceptable... would you... care to look...? Whenever Master wishes...”

If Calsedonia’s face had been a bit red before, now it was truly flushed. Tatsumi realized he was blushing just as deeply.

He swallowed, and he was sure she could hear it. He was a man, after all. It was natural to be curious about the nakedness of someone he was attracted to.



“No, it’s not that I don’t want to see... I very much do, but... if I actually saw Chiko naked, I’m afraid I... might not be able to stop myself...”

Calsedonia was touched that even in such a moment, Tatsumi was putting concern for her over his own desires. She decided to tell him what she was thinking.

“It’s all right to not hold back... We’re officially engaged now, and you have a steady income... enough to support a family, which is what we were waiting for. So...”

She still wasn’t looking straight at Tatsumi, but she stole another glance at him as she added, “It’s been more than six months since we started living together. I thought maybe it would be all right for me now...”

Hearing this, Tatsumi reached his limit of restraint.

“Is it really okay...? I mean, I *am* a man... If this is what you’re saying, I won’t be able to stop... Even if you change your mind, I’m not sure I could hold back.”

“Yes, it’s fine. After all, I’ve belonged to Master since before I was born. Please... do what you wish with me... make me really yours...”

Their hands slid across the table, gradually moving closer until their fingers entwined. What began as a mere intertwining of fingers soon became hands clasping each other, and without either of them initiating it, they leaned forward over the table to press their lips together. Naturally, it wasn’t just their lips that met; their tongues, too, engaged in a battle as if each was determined to dominate the other. Who emerged victorious from this battle? Whether it was Tatsumi or Calsedonia, it mattered not—all that mattered was that their time together was one of pure bliss.

As for the magic painting, nothing happened. Tatsumi wasn’t even sure if he really had been expecting the clothes it depicted to actually become transparent at midnight. For him and Calsedonia, however, the painting would always be magical, for it served as the catalyst for them to grow even closer, solidifying the enchantment that bound them together.



That night, the bond between Tatsumi and Calsedonia became even deeper than before.



## The Free Knight - A Reminiscence

The jaws snapped shut right in front of him, dripping with venom. The man, who looked to be in his early twenties, dodged the attack with a swift step backward, immediately thrusting his spear forward toward the beast in front of him. Tall yet not rugged, his lean physique gave off an air of refined strength. Clad in armor crafted from the hide of a Fire Bear, a well-known creature in the realm of monster hunting, his appearance spoke of experience.

His flame-red hair and clear auburn eyes, set upon a strikingly handsome face, were complemented by a calm expression, silently declaring that his strengths were not limited to mere physical prowess. The spearhead he wielded found its mark, gouging deeply into the monster's eye.

The beast—a creature known as an Armored Serpent, with a hard outer shell and numerous spider-like legs along its sides—writhed in agony. The man quickly retracted his spear to avoid being dragged by the creature's violent thrashing, then leapt back to ready his weapon once more, even as he began to chant a spell.

As he chanted, five spears of flame materialized before him. Upon the completion of his incantation, the fiery spears soared through the air with a roar. The man charged at the monster as well, spear in hand, as the flaming spears struck the beast one after another, exploding upon impact.

The creature's anguished roars could be heard even amidst the booming explosions.

Aiming for the gaping mouth of the Armored Serpent, now open in a roar, the man thrust his spear with all his might. The spearhead pierced through the roof

of the beast's mouth, driving straight into its brain. The creature shuddered violently before sprawling, limp and lifeless, on the ground.

The man exhaled deeply, withdrawing his cherished spear from the carcass.

"As I recall, I've battled this beast before," the man muttered to no one in particular as he swung his spear, flicking the monster's blood from its tip. "It was back when I was still teamed up with Calsey. Although the Armored Serpent we faced back then was bigger... that was no ordinary monster."

The man, once a priest-warrior of the Savaiv Temple, was now known by the moniker "The Free Knight"—Morganaik Taylor.

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In the depths of a forest that even the hunters of the nearby village seldom dared to approach, two humans stood confronting a gigantic Armored Serpent. The beast bared huge fangs that dripped with venom and charged at the humans before it. But the armor-clad duo skillfully dodged the attack by splitting to either side.

"It's faster than I thought! Be careful, Calsey!"

"Got it, Morga!"

The two quickly readied themselves for a counterattack.

The beast's first target was the female human. While the male was armored in monster hide, the female was not. He wielded a large spear, whereas she held only a twisted staff. And so, the creature—or more accurately, the entity possessing it—made a simple calculation and judged the female to be the easier target.

In fact, the sight of the woman seemed to greatly stimulate the beast's appetite, as a liquid different from venom dripped from its mouth. This desire greatly pleased the entity possessing the monster, which savored the burgeoning lust as if it were a delicacy.

The monster—or rather, the Demon—moved closer to the human female wielding the staff, its long, slender legs rustling and its eyes glowing a fierce red.

It was too taken with its bloodlust to notice the incessant movement of the woman's delicate lips.

The human female—Calsey—unleashed the final word of her chant with a surge of spirit.

In the same instant, a bolt of lightning struck straight through the serpent's elongated body. Called Lightning Strike and infamous for its penetrating power, this spell came from the Lightning system, a higher derivative of the Wind system.

In a flash, the spider-like legs on the creature's side were incinerated. While the magic couldn't burn off all the legs, it did destroy most of those on one side. No longer able to maintain a straight course, the demon slithered past Calsey in a zigzag.

Then, a giant spear of ice flew in from the side, piercing deeply into the flank of the Armored Serpent—if one could call it a flank. The air filled with a foul stench as a large quantity of the beast's blood, which carried a potent poison, splattered across the ground.

At the touch of the toxic blood, the surrounding trees, underbrush, and even the layer of dead leaves on the ground were corroded, the living plants withering and dying.

Calsey took a quick step backward to avoid the poisonous liquid, then shot a sharp look at her companion.

"Be careful, Morga! I was nearly splashed with that poisonous blood!"

"What? I thought that would be easy for you to dodge, Calsey!"

"Maybe, but a little warning would have been nice!"

"I trust you, you know."

"Ugh! Always saying what suits you best!"

Behind their light banter, the two warriors' eyes remained serious and focused, never straying from the Demon. Despite losing most of its legs on one side, the Armored Serpent managed to regain its posture and glared with pure malice at the humans who had wounded it.

“Seems a little angry, doesn’t it?”

“It does. Let’s weaken it a little more... then make our move.”

“Sure.”

Calsey and Morganaik quickly resumed their usual formation: him in front, spear ready, and her behind, preparing to chant her spells. By this point, the entity possessing the Armored Serpent wished to flee, but the serpent’s rage was immense, overpowering the Demon’s control.

The monster again bared its fangs at the humans.

*Well then*, the Demon thought, quickly accepting the situation and reconsidering its strategy.

Anger, too, is a form of desire. Savoring this intense desire, the entity once again fixed its gaze on the humans. It mattered little if the beast’s body was destroyed; it could simply abandon this temporary vessel and flee. Reveling in the rising swell of anger, the Demon smirked with satisfaction.

After a tense standoff, the previously noisy forest was enveloped in silence. It was Morganaik who broke this quiet first. With his beloved spear in hand, he charged at the demon. The spear’s tip was enveloped in blazing flames, thanks to Calsey’s Flame Blade spell cast from behind. Morganaik swung the burning spear upward, slicing off a couple more of the demon’s legs.

Just as Morganaik concluded his attack, the serpent lunged at him. With a deft twist of his spear, the exorcist turned the butt end to deflect the approaching fangs. Venom sprayed from them, adhering to his armor, hissing and emitting a foul odor as it ate away at the metal. At least the poison’s effect stopped there, as the armor blocked the venom from reaching Morganaik’s body. He twirled his spear again, thrusting the tip with all his might into the demon’s belly.

The spearhead sank deep, once again creating a spray of toxic blood. Again, some of it landed on Morganaik, again causing his armor to smoke and emit a disgusting smell. Yet he paid it no mind, pulling out his spear to launch another rapid thrust.

Three, four holes were punctured into the Armored Serpent's body, each eliciting roars of pain from the Demon. Morganaik pressed his advance, readying his spear for another strike. Or, at least, he tried to.

As the knight took a large step forward to unleash a full-powered thrust at the demon, something struck him from the side. Caught in the midst of his attack, Morganaik had no way to react in time. That something—the Demon's tail—struck Morganaik's body powerfully, sending him flying through the air.

"Morga!" Calsey's cry of distress echoed around them.

Morganaik was slammed against a tree behind him, the impact expelling all the air from his lungs in one gust. While he sat coughing in agony, the Armored Serpent seized the opportunity and slithered toward him, mouth wide open, ready to plunge its venomous fangs into the Free Knight.

Just before the serpent could reach him, it found its path blocked by multiple bolts of lightning. Indeed, Calsey had cast Thunderstorm, a spell chosen carefully to hinder the demon's advance. Acting out of reflex, the beast arched its massive body and moved back a bit.

In that moment of respite, Calsey began chanting Minor Healing. Although this spell wouldn't come close to completely healing Morganaik's injuries, its advantage lay in its short chant time, allowing for quick activation. In the heat of battle, the ability to cast spells swiftly can often surpass the effectiveness of more powerful spells that take longer to invoke.

Calsey's quick casting of Minor Healing was just what Morganaik needed, as it gave him the strength to move again. Grasping his spear, he stood up and moved to Calsey's side.

"Thanks, Calsey."

"Stay sharp, Morga. We'll deal with the full treatment after the battle, so hang in there a little longer."

"I will."

Having regained their footing, the two faced the Armored Serpent once again. They were encouraged to see that its body leaked poisonous blood from numerous wounds, and the tip of its tail was still engulfed in flames.



A loud slashing noise echoed through the forest as Morganaik skillfully sliced off one after another of the Armored Serpent's spider legs. Their strategy was to strip the enemy of its mobility, and it was working. The serpent barely had enough legs left to support its body, let alone advance quickly at the two knights.

Twirling his spear overhead, Morganaik precisely targeted and impaled the base of another leg, rendering it useless. The Armored Serpent no longer possessed its initial agility and speed. Its form, dragging slowly across the ground, was large but no longer a threat.

The Free Knight kicked off a nearby tree, leaping high into the air, and descended upon the monster's back, his spear pointed downward. The force of his fall, spearhead first, impaled the demon, pinning the massive body to the ground.

"We've stopped it in its tracks! Now, Calsey!"

Before Morganaik had even finished speaking, Calsey had begun her chant. She was casting Purification, a spell from the Light and Holy systems designed to exorcise the Demon that possessed the creature. As she chanted, the Armored Serpent's body was enveloped in a silver light.

The silver glow had soon penetrated right through the beast, scorching the Demon nesting within its flesh. It attempted to flee by abandoning the serpent's body, but it was too late. The silver light was all encompassing, leaving it no escape.

As the silver light gradually dissolved the entity into nothingness, the fearsome, formless monster had no choice but to vanish within the beast's body.

When the demon's body was completely enveloped in silver, the glow shone brilliantly before gradually dimming. And when the light had fully dissipated, the Armored Serpent lay pinned to the earth, its eyes devoid of the red gleam, revealing their original black hue.

"Morga, the Demon's been eradicated."

“Looks like it,” Morganaik replied tersely, pulling his beloved weapon from the back of the beast. The Armored Serpent lay motionless, the Demon thoroughly purged, but it remained a dangerous creature. Morganaik murmured a prayer to the gods under his breath, then directed the tip of his spear toward the head of the beast and thrust down with all his might. The spearhead shattered the serpent’s skull, instantly halting its vital functions. The serpent gave a final twitch, then moved no more.

“Now it’s over.”

“It is.”

Calsey and Morganaik exchanged glances, then smiled at each other warmly.

“There’s still cleanup to do, but first, we need to take care of your wounds, Morga. They’re pretty bad, aren’t they?”

“Good grief. You see right through me.”

“Of course. I mean, we’ve been working together for so long.”

Even through the armor, the tail strike from the Armored Serpent had inflicted serious injuries on Morganaik. Likely, several of his ribs were broken. Despite these injuries, his continued fight against the beast without showing signs of agony spoke volumes of his mental fortitude, which truly befit the title of Free Knight.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Morganaik began removing his armor, then the gambeson he wore underneath. Calsey lent a hand, assisting him with his gear until his well-muscled upper body was exposed.

Without a hint of embarrassment, Calsey ran her fingers over his skin, checking the extent of his injuries with a professional focus. Her gaze was one of a healer examining Morganaik’s wounds, a task she had undertaken numerous times before.

Being partners in their line of work made such physical examinations inevitable. Almost as often, the roles had been reversed, and Morganaik tended to Calsey’s injuries. The fact that they were of opposite sexes did not warrant modesty in situations where proper treatment could mean the difference between life and death. And this pragmatic approach to treatment was not

unique to them; it was a common practice among monster hunters and exorcists.

“Looks like you have broken ribs,” Calsedonia announced. “I’ll treat them right away.”

Without wasting another word, Calsey began chanting a spell. Silver light emanated from her palm, flowed toward Morganaik, and was absorbed into his body. She repeated the chant several times; each time, a new stream of silver light appeared, then vanished into Morganaik.

The Free Knight gave a long exhale of relief. “Your Healing Magic works wonders as always, Calsey. I feel much better.”

“I think that should do it, but let me know if you still feel any pain,” she replied.

With a nod, Morganaik began to re-dress in his armor and stood up. “Now, we should try to dissect the beast as much as we can before sunset.”

“Yeah, we should make the most of the monster we’ve worked so hard to defeat. Let’s collect whatever materials we can.”

The pair had ventured into the forest on a mission from the temple to eliminate the demon-possessed Armored Serpent.

Exorcising wild animals or beasts possessed by Demons was a task virtually impossible for ordinary monster hunters. To purge and annihilate a Demon, the magic of Exorcism was essential. However, magicians capable of casting Exorcism were exceedingly rare, and almost all of them were affiliated with one temple or another. As such, the task of exterminating demonic creatures effectively fell under the jurisdiction of the temples.

For this particular mission of demon extermination, Calsey and Morganaik were to receive a substantial reward from the temple. Yet, it went without saying among hunters that the materials from the defeated beast belonged to those who vanquished it. Given that the Armored Serpent was a monster, Calsey and Morganaik, as temple-affiliated monster hunters, had every right to claim the materials from it.

Working efficiently, Calsey and Morganaik began to dissect the beast. Even with both of them working together, completely dissecting the massive Armored Serpent in a short time was impossible. Therefore, they selectively harvested only the most valuable parts.

“We should stop here,” Morganaik suggested after an hour or so. “I know we’ll be wasting some, but it’s getting late, and if we stay here too long, other monsters or wild animals might start smelling the blood and get curious.”

“You’re right,” Calsey agreed. “We’ve gotten most of the rare and valuable parts, and I hate leaving the rest, too, but hunting this thing wasn’t our primary objective. Better we leave before it gets dark.”

The two quickly finished their tasks and started looking for a good place to camp within the forest.

Before long, the two were sitting in front of a crackling campfire, eating a simple dinner.

“Nice campsite,” Calsey commented. “Especially with that little stream over there.”

“Yeah, it felt great to wash the sweat off after such a long time.”

The Kingdom of Largofiery had a well-established culture of bathing. Every major town boasted a public bathhouse; however, on the road, opportunities to cleanse oneself were understandably limited. This time, fortunately, they’d found a small stream deep enough to take a dip in, and Calsey and Morganaik had taken turns washing off the sweat from their battle with the monster.

After rinsing off, they engaged in lively conversation by the red glow of the campfire. Well, to be more accurate, Calsey was the one doing most of the talking, with Morganaik mostly listening.

“—and then, he gently patted my head,” Calsey recounted.

“Come on, Calsey. I’ve heard that story plenty of times already,” Morganaik chuckled as he ate.

They had camped like this many times before, and each time, Calsey would tell the story of the “boy of her dreams,” gushing with admiration.

Despite his rueful smile, Morganaik truly engaged listening to Calsey's stories—probably because of his own affection for her. Of course, he wasn't thrilled to hear the woman he cared about speak of another man, even if that man was just a figment of her dreams. Yet, considering the rival was merely a dream, Morganaik didn't take his jealousy too seriously.

Little did Morganaik know, the "boy of her dreams" would soon become a real presence in their lives.

"Ah, have I mentioned it that often...?" Calsey asked, touching her cheek and tilting her head endearingly.

Morganaik stirred the campfire with a stick. "You must be tired today, Calsey. I'll take first watch, so you go ahead and sleep."

"Really? Well, I'll take you up on that offer, then."

Calsey quickly cleaned up the dishes from their meal and began getting ready for bed. She wrapped her cloak tightly around herself, covered up with a blanket, and arranged her backpack under her head as a pillow before lying down on the ground.

Soon, she was breathing rhythmically in sleep.

Morganaik kept vigil until morning, squinting affectionately at her peacefully resting face.

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"I wonder if Calsey could sleep so vulnerably in front of me because she never saw me as a man...?" Indeed, Morganaik had been a colleague and a dear friend to Calsey. However, not even once had Calsey regarded Morganaik as a man. To her, the "boy of her dreams" was the only man who mattered.

The young man tilted his head in slight melancholy before the defeated Armored Serpent as he thought back on that day.

The massive beast lay powerless on the ground. Morganaik looked down at the giant monster he had slain. *Dissecting this thing by myself will be tough*, he

thought. The Armored Serpent he had defeated wasn't the largest of its kind, but there was no denying it was massive.

*I might need to go back to Gargas Town to hire some help. Luckily, it's not too far from here. I should be back within two days...*

Given the size of the beast, leaving it in the forest was unlikely to attract significant attention from other monsters or wildlife. Moreover, the dangerous, toxic blood of the Armored Serpent would deter most creatures from attempting to feast on its corpse.

Still, there were always scavengers out there that might become interested in the carcass, so if Morganaik planned to hire help, it would be wise to do so quickly.

Morganaik began his journey toward the nearby town, marking trees along the way as landmarks to guide his return.

Gargas was a small inn town located at the intersection of two highways, bustling with activity. The town saw a variety of visitors: travelers, merchants, mercenaries looking for work, porters, and monster hunters like Morganaik.

Once there, Morganaik headed for a tavern and inn called the Sweet Fruit Winery, a popular base for monster hunters. Walking purposefully through the town's streets, he soon reached the Sweet Fruit Winery and pushed open the creaking door to enter.

Immediately, he found himself enveloped by the scents of alcohol and food, along with the noise of the patrons. If he hadn't been to this particular inn so many times, he would have felt right at home; taverns catering to monster hunters tended to share a similar lively ambiance.

Feeling occasional glances in his direction, Morganaik made his way straight to the counter.

"Welcome—oh, it's you. How'd it go? Were you able to hunt down the Armored Serpent?" the balding middle-aged man behind the counter greeted him with a grin.

"Yep, got it. But the creature was pretty big. Too much for me to dismantle on my own, so I'm looking to hire a few hands."

“What... You’re serious? You took down an Armored Serpent by yourself?” The innkeeper’s face filled with astonishment. He knew Armored Serpents were no joke; one didn’t usually hunt them alone.

Recently, there had been multiple sightings of an Armored Serpent in the nearby forests, and the mayor feared the decrease in travelers passing through the highways—which, he knew, would quickly affect the town’s livelihood. Because of this, the mayor had posted hunting requests for the Armored Serpent in every local inn where monster hunters stayed. However, the Armored Serpent was a formidable foe—it would usually take a group of seasoned hunters to defeat it, often with the understanding that there might be casualties.

Naturally, no monster hunters stepped forward to take on the job. Despite its bustling nature, Gargas was not a large town, and there was simply no one capable of taking on an Armored Serpent currently staying there.

While the town’s leadership tried to figure out what to do, who should appear in Gargas but Morganaik. The innkeeper of the Sweet Fruit Winery internally rejoiced when he saw the Free Knight, considering it a stroke of divine providence. He had known of Morganaik and the Saintess for some time and was well aware that when these two teamed up, their combined strength exceeded that of any ordinary monster hunters.

Rumors had been circulating recently that the Free Knight and the Saintess were no longer working together, and indeed, here was Morganaik, alone. The innkeeper thought that, even for the formidable Free Knight, defeating the Armored Serpent solo might be impossible, but with no other options, he proposed the hunt to Morganaik. And so, the Free Knight accepted the request and managed to defeat the Armored Serpent single-handedly.

“Remarkable, truly remarkable. You really are the Free Knight, aren’t you—doing a job like that even without the Saintess! Here, this is your reward for the job, and a bonus to celebrate your success. Of course, the celebration is on me!” The innkeeper placed a leather pouch filled with silver coins and a wooden mug brimming with ale on the counter with a thud.

Smiling, Morganaik tucked the leather pouch away and took the mug, draining its contents in one go.

The innkeeper grinned, casting a glance at the empty mug. “Hahaha, you sure can drink! All right, I’ll gather some folks for you. Leave at first light tomorrow, okay?”

“Yeah, that works. I’ll pay each person fifty silver coins, half upfront. Five should be enough. We can substitute some of the monster’s materials for their payment if they want to.”

“Got it. I’ll find people under those conditions. And what about you? What’s next?”

“I’m pretty tired now; I think I’ll just relax for the rest of the night. Can you have my meal brought to my room? And I’ll take another drink with it.”

“Sure. Your room’s at the very end of the third floor. Here, this is the key.”

Key in hand, Morganaik left the counter and climbed the stairs to the guest rooms.

Entering the room he’d rented, Morganaik set down his luggage and began to unpack. The room was intended for two, so it contained two beds, a table, and two chairs, with a lantern on the table—a simple setup.

Looking around the room, Morganaik felt a powerful sense of déjà vu.

“So, this is the room... the one I rented with Calsey that time...”

Back when he and Calsey were still teaming up, they had visited Gargas several times, always staying at the Sweet Fruit Winery. That was why, this time, Morganaik had come straight here. And it was here that the innkeeper—who knew him well—had offered him the task of hunting the Armored Serpent.

Morganaik and Calsey’s visits to this town had all been either during a mission from the temple or on their way back after completing one. *Come to think of it... the last time we stayed in this room too...*

Morganaik found himself reminiscing again.

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Upon entering the room and unpacking their travel gear, Calsey and Morganaik exhaled a sigh of relief. It was hard to get a good night's sleep while camping out. Now that they had completed the exorcism mission the temple had sent them on, they could finally rest easy.

The inn had been more crowded than usual that day, so while they would have preferred separate rooms, they had to share a two-person room. Of course, this wasn't unusual for Calsey and Morganaik, nor was it for other travelers or mercenaries. The nobility would have always insisted on separate accommodations when traveling, but for the common folk, mixed-gender room sharing was no big deal. Sometimes, they even shared larger rooms with others, changing clothes and performing other private tasks together.

"We can finally relax."

"Indeed. It's hard to let your guard down fully when you're camping or on the road."

After changing into more comfortable attire, they settled down on the beds and chairs.

"There's a public bath in this town. Want to go?"

"The baths here are separated by gender, aren't they? I'll go later."

In smaller towns, mixed-gender public baths were more common, but larger towns often had separate facilities for men and women. This town's bathhouse was one of the latter.

"Are you going to go, Morga?"

"No, I have somewhere else I'd like to go... You go ahead, Calsey."

The reason Morganaik was vague was because he intended to visit a brothel.

Despite his clerical status, Morganaik was not a saint. Like any man, he sometimes felt the urge to indulge his desires. God Savaiv, protector of marriage, forbade infidelity—but did not expressly forbid "a love of just one night." Furthermore, Morganaik was constantly in the company of Calsey, the object of his affection, which only served to bolster his desires over time. In a

way, not acting on these impulses around Calsey might even have earned Morganaik the label of a “saint.”

For her part, Calsey knew full well where Morga was going. But he was simply a colleague and a good friend, so it didn’t bother her in the slightest that he was going to a brothel; she even thought, *Well, he’s a man; these things happen.*

For Calsey, the only object of her affection was the boy of her dreams. Anyone else was merely a friend, never a potential romantic partner.

Unaware of Calsey’s indifference, Morganaik discreetly made his way to the brothel. If only he knew that his attempt at discretion was entirely unnecessary.





“No, Calsey never saw me as a ‘man’... just a ‘good friend,’” Morganaik muttered, hit anew by the painful realization. Now, he understood that Calsey must have been aware of his visits to the brothel. The lingering scents of perfume used by the prostitutes, or the smell of alcohol he shared with them, would have been telltale signs. Calsey must surely have noticed these remnants, yet she never commented—further proof that Morganaik had been of absolutely zero romantic interest to her.

*Well... Calsey’s beloved “boy of her dreams” seems to be a promising man. I bet he’ll make her very happy,* Morganaik thought, recalling the black-haired young man who, despite his naive fighting style, had managed to defeat him.

*He smiled, thinking of the man Calsey had summoned to her. If he’s the one Calsey brought from another world... then there’s no way he’ll let her down.*

The sincere gaze and straightforward approach of the boy from another world—though not exactly a boy by age—convinced Morganaik he wouldn’t betray Calsey. There was something about him that assured Morganaik of his integrity.

When he sat down and closed his eyes, Morganaik could still see Calsey there behind his eyelids, clear as day. However, he knew he must eventually let go of her image—if not immediately, then in the near future. With that thought, he slowly submerged his feelings for her deep into his heart, preparing to leave them in the past.

The next morning, when Morganaik descended to the tavern below, he found the five individuals the innkeeper had recruited for him already gathered.

“Hey, you’re the Free Knight, right?”

“That’s me. The innkeeper told you about the job?”

The one who approached him looked like a monster hunter with a fair amount of skill. The rest were clearly novices, which was no surprise for more physical jobs like this one.

“It seems you’re a bit different from the rest. You understand you’re here to just do manual labor, right?”

“Yeah, I’m not in it for the pay this time; I was actually hoping to establish a connection with you.”

The monster hunter stated this boldly, without a hint of embarrassment. Making acquaintances with renowned monster hunters was never a bad idea. It could lead to being chosen as a partner for future jobs, and working with a famous hunter could add prestige to one’s name. Nameless hunters were eager to promote themselves.

Already judging the man to be a decent individual, Morganaik offered a smile and extended his hand.

“I’m Morganaik. I’m counting on you today.”

“You can count on me. The name’s Giel; I’m sort of the leader for these young ones here. If you ever need anything else, don’t hesitate to call on me.” Giel returned Morganaik’s handshake with a grin reminiscent of a mischievous boy.

“Let’s get some food in us before we head out.”

“For sure. By the way... does that meal come out of our pay?”

*This one’s pretty shrewd,* Morganaik thought.

“All right, I’ll cover breakfast,” he said with a wry smile. “Can’t have anyone abandoning the job halfway through because they’re hungry.”

Giel and the young monster hunters behind him cheered. “So, the Free Knight really is as generous as the rumors say,” Giel said. “That’s quite the spirit you’ve got there.”

Then his gaze wandered across the room, as if he were searching for someone. “Isn’t the Saintess with you today? I was really looking forward to meeting her... They say she’s a great beauty.”

Morganaik’s expression visibly soured at Giel’s words. Anyone would feel the same, having to revisit thoughts they were trying to put behind them.

Of course, Giel probably meant no harm by his inquiry. Knowing this, Morganaik still couldn’t resist giving Giel a hearty kick in the rear. As Giel’s cries

of surprise echoed through the tavern, Morganaik, still frowning, flagged down the innkeeper to order breakfast for the group.



It's been a while. I sincerely thank you for picking up the second volume of *My Pet Is a Saintess*. It's only been a little over two months since the release of the first volume, and it makes me happy to be able to publish this second volume so swiftly. This achievement is all thanks to the various forms of support from you all, especially those who have been with us since the web version, for which I'm incredibly grateful. Please allow me to express my gratitude once again here.

Now, moving on from the formalities *laughs*.

By the time you're holding this book, about a month will have already passed since the new year began. This period is always a busy season for my main job, and I imagine I'll be spending my days working hard, writing web novels, and playing with my children on the weekends. Even though it comes every year, I always find myself eagerly awaiting spring during this time. The busy period typically lasts until the cherry blossoms bloom, marking the end of it with their flowering.

Incidentally, I'm not particularly averse to the cold. In fact, I find the cooler seasons more comfortable to live in. On the other hand, I can't stand the summer. The heat really takes its toll on me. While I loved summer more as a child, now I definitely prefer winter over summer. In that sense, the arrival of spring is a bit bittersweet for me.

Finally, I want to conclude by expressing my gratitude to the publishing team that turned this into a book, to Akira Caskabe for the beautiful illustrations, and most importantly, to all of you readers who have stayed with us to the end.

Thank you very much to everyone.

Please, continue to support us in the future.

*Muku-Buncho*



## Back Matter

### **Author: Muku-Buncho**

A Nagoya citizen born in Seto. Currently experiencing the truth of “you never know what will happen in life.” The cockatiel that served as the model for Chiko has already passed away. Who knows, maybe it’s been reincarnated as a saintess in another world *laughs*. Currently, three Java sparrows—two sakura and one silver—and one cockatiel—normal variety—are part of my family.

[←1]

About one hour.

[←2]

From Bruce Lee's movie "Enter the Dragon" (1973)



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