



I'm a  
**Noble** on the Brink of Ruin,  
So I Might as Well Try **Mastering**  
**MAGIC**

author  
**Nazuna Miki**  
illustrator  
**Kabotya**



4

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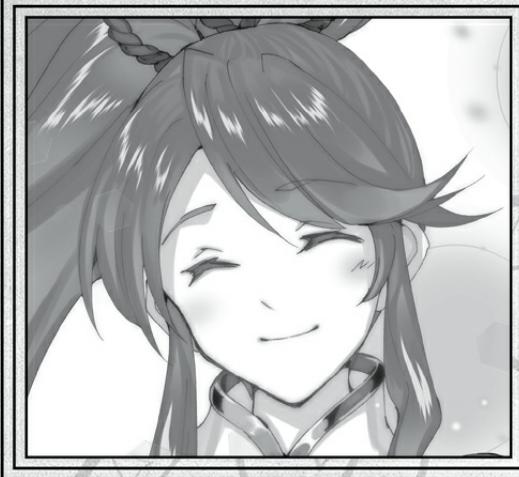




## Character

# Liam

Count Hamilton's fifth son who is actually a transmigrator from another world. He adores magic and spends all his time mastering it.



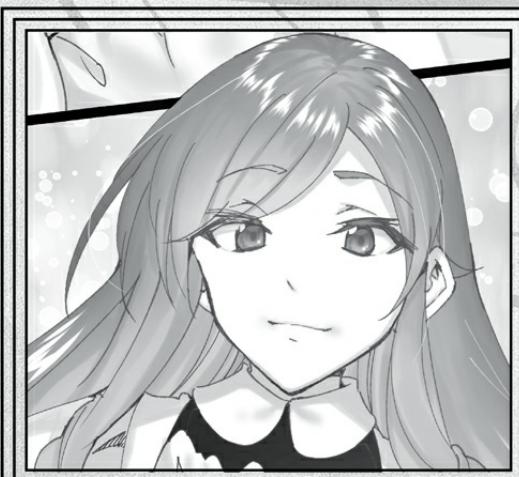
## Asura

A bright and energetic hunter. She got prettier after becoming Liam's familiar.



## Jodie

A motherly hunter who regained her youth after becoming Liam's familiar. She is now a member of his party.



## Scarlet

The first princess of Jamille Kingdom. She saw promise in Liam, made him a baron, and made a certain request of him.

# Table of Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Color Illustrations](#)
3. [Character Profiles](#)
4. [I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic: Volume 4](#)
5. [Network](#)
6. [Afterword](#)
7. [Bonus High-Resolution Illustrations](#)
8. [About J-Novel Club](#)
9. [Copyright](#)

## .129

“Hmmm... This is...” Inside the Infracore room, I furrowed my brows as I stared at the message—or rather, the “book”—Reina sent me while she was on patrol. It was a drawing of a very grand and saintly looking procession. “Do you know these people, Lardon?”

*“I am not omniscient. How could I know humans of the present when I have been sealed all this while?”*

“Right...” I chuckled at my own idiocy. Lardon might know a lot about the world, but she obviously wouldn’t know people she’d never had anything to do with. “Guess I’ll try my luck with Scarlet, then,” I said with a nod. At times like these when I wanted an immediate response, it was best to use Telephone instead of the Net.

“*You called, Master?*”

“I’m at the Infracore right now. Can you come here?”

“*Right away,*” she replied, and not even three minutes later... “I apologize for making you wait.”

“That was quick!”

“But of course. You summoned me, Master,” Scarlet said with a straight face.

“Okay... Um, take a look at this.” I showed her Reina’s message I got through the Net.

“This is...a drawing? It looks far too realistic, though...”

“It’s through Eagle Eye, a new spell I added to the Net. It copies the scene you see with your eyes onto one of these books.”

“Copies the scene...?” Scarlet parroted, stunned. Maybe such a magic was new to her. “Goodness... I have never heard of such a thing.”

“Has this kind of magic never been made before?”

“Not as far as I am aware, no.”

“I see. Anyway, I call this a photograph—a drawing made with light.”

“Aha. Brilliant as always, Master.”

“More importantly, do you know these people?”

“Hmmm...” Scarlet took a closer look at the photograph and gasped. When she lifted her gaze to meet mine, her expression was stiff. “This person...is Archbishop Kardinal.”

“Archbishop? The one in the middle?” The photograph Reina had taken depicted a group of people approaching our border, all dressed like clergymen. The elderly man in the middle—the one Scarlet called Archbishop Kardinal—had a particularly striking presence. “What kind of person is he?”

“He is the second most prominent figure in the church and the highest rank the public can actually meet.”

“Whoa! What a big shot!” I could hardly believe what I was seeing. *Why would such a prominent figure come here...?*

Just then, someone contacted me through Telephone. *“Master, can you hear me? This is Reina.”*

“I hear you. What’s up?”

*“I am currently at the border. The person in the photograph is officially seeking an audience with you.”*

“Officially?”

“Yes.” I could imagine her nodding on the other end.

I thought about it for a moment. “Well, we can’t ignore an official request. Escort them to the reception hall.”

“Understood,” Reina replied and disconnected.

*Archbishop Kardinal...* He was undoubtedly the most influential figure to have visited our city thus far. I clenched my fists, the nerves instantly washing over me.

I welcomed Archbishop Kardinal in the reception hall's parlor room. A pair of eleven maids primly opened the double doors into it, allowing the archbishop and his entourage in. At the head of the group was the dignified elderly man I saw in the photograph, Archbishop Kardinal. Behind him were ten men, ranging from young to middle-aged, in priest robes.

"It is an honor to meet you. I am Olde Kardinal."

"Oh, um... I'm Liam Hamilton. Please, come in."

"Thank you kindly." Kardinal gave a slight bow. Not too pompous nor too humble, he exuded a gentle air of dignity around him, which he upheld even as he approached the couch in the parlor room. His entourage followed silently—but for one, that is.

The middle-aged priest who stayed behind leveled me a sharp glare. "Liam Hamilton," he spat. "Are you not being rude?"

"Huh?"

"We, and even His Eminence the Archbishop, have come here in full dress, while you greet us in such lacking attire. Is this not disrespectful to you?"

"What?" *R-Really?* I looked down at my clothes—the same type of formal attire I'd been wearing since becoming a young nobleman. My wardrobe was filled with several sets of similar clothing. If you asked me, they were all perfectly good formal wear, but...

"I suppose we mustn't expect much from a king of *monsters*."

"He's still just a kid after all."

Following the first snide remark, one criticism after another began pouring from the clergymen's mouths. The sudden verbal onslaught left me baffled.

*"I see priests have not changed. Still as rotten as ever."* Lardon chuckled in my mind, but her voice had a cold and scornful undertone to it.

Her reaction only further reinforced to me that, to the clergymen, I wasn't very well-dressed. Lardon said they hadn't changed—that must mean this was a tradition of theirs, and I knew that such traditions (whatever they were) were important when meeting an archbishop. *Wh-What do I do?*

“How rude.”

Just as panic began brewing within me, the archbishop’s quiet voice cut sharply through the air, suppressing the clergymen’s boisterous complaints. After sweeping his gaze over his now silent subordinates, Kardinal bowed to me. “We have done nothing but commit transgressions from the start. I apologize.”

“From the start...?”

“First, we come here without prior notice, and now here are my subordinates being rude. I sincerely apologize for this courtesy.”

“Your Eminence—” The middle-aged priest who’d started the wave of criticisms tried to protest, yet he faltered under Kardinal’s glare... No, actually, all Kardinal did was *look* at the man, and he snapped his mouth shut and gulped.

Kardinal returned his gaze to me. “I ask for your forgiveness.”

“Oh, no... I’m sorry too. Should I change?”

“Fret not. Clothes are mere tools for asserting authority; such pretenses are unneeded between us today.”

“*Oh?*” Lardon sounded the slightest bit impressed.

I urged Kardinal to take a seat once more, and this time, all his priests gathered behind him, if dejectedly. We started over when I was settled in again.

“Once again,” the archbishop began, “it is an honor to be in your presence, Your Majesty King Liam.”

“Oh. Um, same here?”

“Upon the request of Jamille Kingdom, the church has been tasked with serving as witness for the establishment of your treaty of friendship. I have come here today to personally speak with you on this matter.”

“Ah, I see...” *So that’s what this sudden visit’s all about.* “What’s there to talk about?”

“Frankly, not much anymore, as opposed to my initial plans,” Kardinal said

softly. When I gave him a curious look, he explained, “You see, my rude subordinates here are mostly military men.”

I trailed my gaze over his entourage. “Military...”

“Indeed, hence their rough demeanor. I brought them along, for I’d been told this country was populated by monsters. I was expecting it to be a much drearier place.”

“Ah...” I chuckled dryly. *Yeah, I can’t blame you there.* Like Kardinal, I would’ve prepared for the worst and taken my most capable escorts with me if I was told to go to a “nation of monsters.” I wholly understood his cautiousness.

“However, all my concerns pertaining to this ‘nation of monsters’ are now inapplicable.” Kardinal looked out the window. “This city, this country... Its citizens are full of life and joy, living no less vibrantly than those in the kingdom’s capital. They do not seem to be monsters at all.”

“Everyone’s just enjoying themselves.”

“The sight of them has erased my doubts. As such, we will gladly serve as witness to your treaty.”

“Thank you very much. I suppose everyone can finally take a good rest now that the war’s over.” I laid my hands on my knees and deeply bowed, breathing a furtive sigh of relief. When I raised my face, Kardinal was giving me a rather conflicted expression. “What’s the matter?”

“Regardless of how you appear,” he mumbled, “you are certainly a king.”

I frowned slightly. *What’s he saying?*

“*Look behind him,*” Lardon said.

*Behind him? The priests?* I turned my gaze and found the men with stiff expressions and flushed faces.

*The archbishop was scolding his subordinates for their lack of insight and for looking only at the surface.*”

*I see...*

*He is quite the human to be able to see through your true worth.*” Lardon

huffed, complimenting another human for once.

## .130

Come evening, Kardinal and his entourage stepped out of the reception hall. I was escorting them to the lodging we provided important visitors, up until their steps halted right as we stepped out of the gate.

“What’s the matter?” I asked curiously, tilting my head.

They were all speechless and agape. Kardinal was no exception, but he recovered quicker than his fellows. “King Liam... What are those lights...?”

I followed his gaze. “Oh, those?”

As night fell, magical lights were sprouting one after the other from every nook and cranny of the city. For the residents, it was a familiar sight, and it was all thanks to our magic infrastructure.

“It’s magic,” I answered.

“Magic...?”

“Well, it’s through something like a grimoire that’s connected to all the houses. Here, everyone can freely use light and water magic for their daily lives.”

Kardinal stared at me blankly. “It’s...connected to the houses?”

“Let me show you. Gnome,” I chanted while crouching down. Kardinal and his entourage gasped at the sight of the earth spirit. “Peel off part of this road.” The earth spirit easily did as ordered, revealing a small portion of the high mithril silver buried underneath.

“Th-That’s...!”

“Right. It’s high mithril silver. Using this, I made Ancient Memoria—it’s something like a grimoire—and had it run under everyone’s houses.”

“E-Every house...?” Kardinal grew more stunned by the second, his eyes shakily sweeping over the city as the murmuring of the priests behind him grew increasingly frantic.

“High mithril silver...? Isn’t that a really rare magical material?”

“But he laid it out all over the city?”

“No way... There’s just no way.”

Their disbelief was evident, but the high mithril silver and the intensifying glow of the city that pushed back against the darkness of night—all of it was right there for them to see. They couldn’t believe it, but they *had* to, and their contorted faces proved what a struggle it was. *Hmmm... Maybe I shouldn’t have told them.*

*“Indeed, you shouldn’t have. I ought to have cautioned you beforehand.”*

*Huh? What do you mean?*

*“You mentioned everything without much thought—that is, with little more than the intention of showing off the magic that you invented, correct?”* Lardon chuckled.

*Urgh... You, er, might be right... She hit me where it hurt. As someone who loved magic more than anything, I couldn’t deny how much I wanted to show off this whole system I put in place for the city. Having Lardon point that out to me so accurately was just embarrassing.*

*“But it need not be. You are fine as you are.”*

*Huh? What do you mean...?*

*“Leave the cunning to others. That is all I mean.”*

I cocked my head. *What cunning? What’s she saying now?* I’d been having a hard time following her thought process for a while now. I wish she just explained things clearly, like when she pointed out how I was showing off. *I’d pick up on it easily if it was about magic...*

“Pardon me. I lost my composure.” Kardinal cleared his throat. He was the first to regain his wits, and the priests behind him soon followed suit and smoothed their expressions. “Simply astounding, King Liam. Truly befitting a city of monsters... Ah, I mean no ill by this.”

“Huh? What—”

*“Just nod here.”*

“Um... Right. Exactly.” Again, Lardon had lost me, but I swallowed my words and heeded her advice. Experience had built up my trust in her; nothing could go wrong if I just followed her when it came to anything outside of magic.

“Is there anything else?” Kardinal asked.

“Um...”

*“You may tell him about Telephone.”*

“Yes. We also have this spell...” As instructed, I demonstrated Telephone for him by calling one of my familiars. I decided Reina was the safest choice.

*“You called, Master?”*

The priests broke into another round of murmurs when they heard Reina’s voice. Incidentally, I modified this spell not long ago. Based on experience, I realized there might be times when the voices should be heard by even those who weren’t my contracted familiars, so I revised it to allow the caller to simply will the voices audible to others.

“Reina, are our guests’ rooms ready?”

*“Yes. The elven maids are all awaiting their arrival.”*

“They’ll be there soon. Tell them to stand by.”

*“Understood.”*

I ended the not-so-necessary call and turned to Kardinal. “This spell is called Telephone. It lets us communicate from a distance.”

“I-I’m afraid I’ve never heard of such a spell before...”

“I made it.”

“Wh-What?!” Kardinal’s eyes grew wide, while the priests paled and turned stiff as a board.

*No, hang on... They’re afraid? But why?*

“You made it?” Kardinal asked. “Do you mean you invented this spell?”

*“Tell him how many spells you’ve created,” Lardon instructed.*

*Why...?* I wondered but followed anyway. “I did. Um... I’ve made around ten so far.”

“T-Ten?!”

“That many? Impossible!”

“E-Even a legendary mage could never...”

“He must be bluffing!”

“But I’ve certainly never seen such a spell before...”

Their stunned murmurs grew in volume. For reasons I couldn’t comprehend, they were all looking at me in fear.

*“This is what I meant by ‘cunning.’ A most rudimentary way to gain the advantage.”*

*I see... Well, not really, but it seemed Lardon got what she wanted.*

*“With this, you have simply gotten what you deserve.”*

*I cocked my head again. Yep. I still don’t get what she’s talking about. Oh well.*

## .131

After bringing Kardinal and his entourage to their lodging and instructing the elven maids to serve them well, I returned to my house in Another World. I made sure to open up the door to it right beside the VIP lodging so I'd be nearby in case anything happened.

I entered the small living room, sank into a seat, and let out a big sigh. "With this, we no longer need to worry about getting tangled up with Jamille."

Now that I thought about it, ever since Scarlet asked me to make a country in this promised land, we'd found ourselves pitted against our three neighboring nations nonstop. At long last, it seemed like things were finally calming down. I didn't know about the rest of the church, but at least Kardinal looked sincere about mediating for us.

I sank deeper into my seat, relieved. There was nothing left to do. Although, if this was before I became Liam, this would be the part where I send a small token of appreciation to my new business partner—except the partner was the archbishop of the church, whose organization even kings bowed their heads to. No ordinary token could possibly do the trick.

"Hm? Do humans like receiving such tokens?"

"Oh, Lardon."

A familiar young girl appeared before me, clad in the dignity of an elder. She'd been materializing more frequently of late, in places like this where others couldn't enter.

"I am not very familiar with human etiquette. Are such gifts so effective?"

"Well, it's definitely better than nothing," I said, recalling my past. Even a simple box of fruits could make a significant impact. Often, it spelled the difference between being turned down at the door or being welcomed in to at least hold a discussion.

"Is that so?"

“You don’t know?”

“No.” Lardon sneered. “The only humans I have ever found around me were the brutal kind.”

“Brutal...?”

“It was a time of war and chaos.”

“Ah... The Tri-Draconic War, right? Were humans involved in that?”

“Do you plan to send a gift?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah.” *She just blatantly changed the topic...* There wasn’t a single change in Lardon’s expression or tone, but there was no way I’d miss that. This might have been the first time she had ever dropped a topic so abruptly. *How curious...*

“It might be a little different from what you have in mind, but I do have a suggestion.”

“What is it?”

Lardon smirked like a mischievous child. “Make a spell.”

“A spell?”

“Indeed. A *new* spell. Then, place it into a grimoire and send it to Jamille as a gift for your newly established relations.”

“A grimoire, huh...? That’d definitely be a top-tier gift.”

“And make sure the monsters here cannot use that grimoire, and tell them as such too.”

“Huh? Why?”

“To boost its rarity.”

“Ah, I see.” Naturally, they wouldn’t be very happy with just another everyday magic from our country. A unique grimoire that cannot be used by anyone besides the creator was definitely worth more. “Guess I’ll get to it, then. I wonder what kind of spell would be good...”

“Would weather magic not suffice?” Lardon suggested.

“Weather magic, hm...”

“Still, it would be pointless if nobody could use it. Let’s see... How about a small-scale spell that can make it rain within a radius of a hundred meters?”

I stroked my chin and mulled it over. “I see... That sounds doable.”

Thanks to Lardon wording it so clearly, I could visualize the spell really well. I further enhanced that image by thinking about the “showers” that were exclusive to noble mansions—they were a really convenient bathroom device that could drizzle warm water from overhead. Next, I amplified it, visualizing rain pouring from a shower head high up in the sky at a hundred-meter radius. I had my fair share of experience making salt water and fresh water before, so it was easy for me to grasp the sensation of producing water.

I nodded. “Good.”

I stepped out of my house and into the open space. With my mana’s growth, Another World had expanded to just about the right size for this new spell, so I gave it a try here. Instantly, a downpour blanketed this space.

I rushed back into the house and asked, “Will this do?”

“Yes. Now, you simply need to compile it into a grimoire and hand it over to Jamille.”

“Okay.” I immediately went to it. After installing a huge network of Ancient Memoria all over the city, making a single grimoire with this new weather magic was a walk in the park.

I had been so focused on my work that I never noticed the mischievous smile stretching over Lardon’s face.

Once I completed the grimoire as per Lardon’s advice, I sent it to Jamille as a token of our newly established relations. However, this simple gesture birthed unexpected effects: the Duchy of Parta and Quistador Kingdom secretly probing the possibility of forging an alliance with our country.

## .132

While in Another World, I received messages from Gai and Chris through the Liamnet. Inside their books were photographs of letters delivered by envoys from Parta and Quistador, sent to me ahead of the actual letters. I stared at them, bewildered; both were implicitly sounding out the possibility of an alliance. “But why so suddenly...?”

Lardon chuckled. “Those humans moved faster than expected.”

“Lardon! Do you know what this is all about?”

“Yes. It is the effect of your gift.”

“My gift? But I haven’t sent anything to them...” I scratched my head. I sifted through my memories in case I’d just forgotten but came up short. I really hadn’t sent anything to Parta or Quistador.

“You sent one to Jamille, did you not?”

“Yeah.”

“That is the one I refer to.”

“Huuuh?” I tilted my head left and right, only more confused than before. Why would sending a gift to Jamille affect Parta and Quistador?

“Not just anyone can use weather magic, much less make it.”

“Is that so...?” I hummed as I mulled over her words.

She might be right. At the very least, weather magic was on the harder side of spells. If I were to rank the different kinds of magic on a scale of one to ten, then weather magic would be second or third from the top.

“I have a question for you,” said Lardon, “one you may answer based on your intuition. What proportion of the population do you think would have the aptitude for weather magic?”

“Well...” I pondered for a moment. In the very beginning, Bruno had told me

that one in a hundred people could use flame magic, while one in a thousand could use frost. From there, a spell that could fit into second or third place and summon rain within a radius of a hundred meters would be... “Around...one in a million?”

Lardon nodded. “Indeed. I agree.”

I sighed in relief. As confident as I’d become with magic, Lardon’s approval still felt good to receive. No matter how clueless I might be with anything else, it gave me a measure of joy to know I at least had my magic going for me.

“Jamille must be quite pleased to have received such a rare and valuable grimoire. I wouldn’t know, but magic that can make rain must be rather useful for droughts, no?”

“Aha!” I snapped my fingers. “Yeah, you’re probably right.” Even I could understand that.

Droughts happened every few years—Scarlet’s territory of Izie suffered from one just a while back, in fact—causing crop failures, water shortages, and casualties in droves. Humans wouldn’t die even without food for a week, but the same couldn’t be said for water—and droughts took *both* away. Moreover, lack of water could lead to sanitary problems and spread all sorts of diseases.

The trickiest part of it all was that transporting water cost tens of times more than transporting other goods. It was so bad that it was much easier to just evacuate the citizens to another land.

Now, say a spell that could make rain came into the picture. It’d cost mana, but now they just had to head to the land suffering from drought and summon the rain right there, saving countless lives. If I were Jamille, I’d be terribly grateful and start looking for a suitable talent to learn the spell, and perhaps even elevate them to nobility. That was just how vital water was to humans and why rain was called a blessing of nature.

“Huh?” I suddenly realized—no, *remembered* something. What Lardon just said was absolutely, undoubtedly, and irrefutably correct. But it was also... “We’re...talking about Jamille, right?”

“Indeed.”

“So what does that have to do with the other two countries?”

“Try placing yourself in Parta’s and Quistador’s shoes.”

“Ummm...” *Place myself in their shoes...?*

“Jamille was given such a valuable grimoire simply for forging good relations—just what more could they gain down the line? Parta and Quistador would think this way.”

“Oh... Right.” I thought back to one of my own experiences. “Gifts are just common courtesy, so you’d usually think of preparing one not just once but whenever you visit someone.”

“Hence their panic. Should they antagonize you, Jamille will be monopolizing the benefits thereafter.”

“Ohhh... I get it now.” After all this explaining, I was finally starting to get the picture. Honestly, I’d probably be racking my brain over this for ages had she not laid it all out for me. “Wow. Things fell together really neatly, huh? Should I do something while we have this chance?”

Lardon stared at me blankly, mouth agape.

“Huh? Why’re you looking at me like that?”

“Have you not realized yet?”

“Realized what?”

“Why did you send a grimoire as a gift?”

“Well, because you...told me to...?” *Wait... That’s right.* This whole thing—making a grimoire as a gift and even the magic it should have—all of it had come straight from Lardon to begin with. I narrowed my eyes at her. “So... You knew things would turn out this way?”

“Indeed. I was going to apologize for deceiving you...” She raised a brow. “But you failed to notice until the very last moment.”

“Oh... That’s why you were staring at me like that.” No wonder.

Lardon nodded. “As you said, I intended for this to happen. There were two necessary components to this plan.”

“What were they?”

“The first was to deceive you. Well, this part went so smoothly, even I could hardly believe it.”

“Aha ha...” I chuckled bitterly. Oh well. What could I do? I didn’t know much outside of magic. “And the other?” I asked before I could forget. I felt like it might slip my mind if the conversation derailed.

Lardon seemed to understand what I was thinking, as she laughed. “The second is also quite simple. You needed to create a strong, unknown, and unowned spell. Thus, I led our conversation toward the topic of weather magic—the relatively simpler kind, in particular.”

“Oh, I get *that* part.”

“Which part?”

“The fact that the spell I made is relatively easy. On a scale of ten, a spell that just makes rain would fall into second or third from the top, right? Adding in winds and lightning will bring it up, and something that can shift day to night will fit into the upper echelon of the second rank.”

Lardon chuckled.

“What’s so funny?”

“You never realized you had been deceived until I told you, yet your analysis when it comes to magic is so unfailingly precise.” She chuckled again when I gave her a blank stare. “In any case, you are indeed correct. Moreover...”

“Moreover...?”

“It is commendable that you speak with such certainty. A man should hold at least that much confidence in his expertise—as well as honestly admit to what he does not know.”

“Yeah. I’ll do that.” *A compliment and advice at the same time?* As I took her words to heart, I urged her to continue.

“We’ve derailed quite a bit. Let us return to the topic at hand.” Lardon cleared her throat. “The effects of your gift are immense. All three nations must have their hair standing on end.”

“You think so?”

“Yes, because you created *and* gave away weather magic so easily.”

“All for that?”

“What kind of fool would hand all their wealth over as a gift?”

“Oh...” I see. The fact that I could hand a grimoire that was tantamount to an entire fortune over as a gift showed how little significance it held for me, and consequently, just how powerful I was.

“Thus, they quickly jumped to sounding out a possible alliance. Considering humans’ speed of travel, I would say someone in power made a swift decision.”

“Is that so?”

Lardon huffed. “In any case, I would wager Jamille is suffering the most fright right now.”

“Why? ’Cause they actually got the grimoire?”

“No. Because they are the ones who are most aware of my existence within you—that you have a strategist with you.”

“Oh, you’ve mentioned that before...”

“Indeed. Think of this as a continuation of that—we are reminding them that you are both strong and have the magnanimity to heed proposals.”

“I see... We reaped so many benefits from just a single action—and you thought of all that? Wow.”

“I merely imitated humans. I also enjoyed myself.” Lardon smiled, looking genuinely pleased.

“Why?”

“There is no point in weaving a scheme if the pawns are too weak to execute it. It was an enjoyable experience to formulate a strategy with the strongest pawn.”

“Oh... That’s good.” *The strongest pawn... She’s talking about me, huh?* I scratched my cheek, a little embarrassed.

Inside my house in Another World, I sat in front of a table with a single sheet of paper lying flat on top. Reaching out to it, I chanted the new spell I'd just crafted: "Instaphoto."

A magic circle expanded and a drawing—a photograph—appeared on the paper. It was of my house's interior as I was seeing it now, recaptured down to the last detail. I took the photograph in my hands and compared it with the room around me. Satisfied with the result, I then sealed the spell into the grimoire I prepared beforehand—an orthodox book-shaped grimoire, not high mithril silver.

"What is that?" Lardon asked. She'd been watching me from her seat this whole time.

"A new spell," I answered. "So far, photographs could only be produced through the Liamnet. I tried making it into its own spell, one that instantly imprints it onto paper."

"Oh? Interesting." Lardon shuffled closer to me. Seeing the curious glint in her eyes, I handed over the paper for her to study. "Hm. You are getting much quicker at crafting spells."



“Well, the basis for this one’s already been tried and tested through the Liamnet, so...”

“Even so,” she insisted. “Humans normally cannot simply craft spells left and right as you do.”

“I guess so.”

“However...” Lardon looked back down at the photograph. “You made this spell because you plan to hand this over to the humans, yes?”

“Yep.” I nodded firmly, and Lardon simply hummed in return. *She read me like a book, but that’s Lardon for you.*

The Liamnet was still exclusive to my familiars, so there was no need to place photographs on paper within the city. In other words, this spell wasn’t meant for them; I made it into a stand-alone spell so humans without access to the Net could use it too. This spell was basically a downgrade—the closest we could give them of this city’s exclusive assets.

“This one will go to either Parta or Quistador,” I continued. “I’ll have to craft a second one, also a stand-alone version of one of the Net’s features. Maybe something that can remotely revise selected bulletin boards...”

I was reminded of how national notices were usually circulated: they were relayed, passed on from one place to the next. However, by the time news reached, say, a distant agricultural village, it might have already been twisted in some way. Hence this spell that could rewrite the contents of specific bulletin boards all at once—kind of like the “books” in our Net, which would always have the same content no matter who read it and from where. It’d still be a downgrade though, just like Instaphoto.

“You should wait,” Lardon suddenly interjected, her voice dispersing my forming mental image.

“Huh...? You don’t think I should make this?”

“If you so wish, then by all means. I find it quite enjoyable watching you invent a variety of new spells. Make as many as you’d like.”

“Then... Why should I wait?”

“I meant that you should wait a while before handing it over to Parta and Quistador.”

“But why? Isn’t this why they want to form an alliance? So wouldn’t it be better for me to send these to them?”

“You mustn’t sell yourself for cheap.”

“For cheap...?”

“Indeed. I do not know much about humans, but...” The look on Lardon’s face changed instantly; her youthful features twisted into something caught between wrath and disdain. “They have been nothing but foul and treacherous to you—yet now they wish to hold hands? They must take you for a fool.”

“Uh...”

Lardon sighed. “Myself aside, nobody would blame you for getting angry at this point, not after everything they’ve done.”

“I... I guess so.” It was true that the three nations had acted nastily this whole time. If it were anybody else, they’d already be tearing their hair out and screaming at the top of their lungs.

“Therefore, you mustn’t start cozying up to them and offering spells on a silver platter, simply because they hinted at the slightest chance of an alliance,” she explained. “You have already given one to Jamille—that will suffice. Now they will think that the sooner they ally with you, the better. Let them come rushing, throwing themselves at your feet.”

That sounded very plausible. *Well, not like I’d know any better...* “All right. I’ll do as you say.”

“Obedient as always.”

“Well, I don’t really know much outside of magic. Besides, I’ve never gone wrong following your advice.”

Lardon chuckled. “Then discard those two spells posthaste.”

“Discard them? But why?”

“A downgraded spell is utterly banal. If you must craft a new spell, then an

upgrade would be far more interesting.”

“I see.” As usual, she said the most sensible things. I burned the incomplete Instaphoto grimoire with flame magic as I pondered on how I could upgrade one of the Net’s features. Not long after, I nodded to myself. “How about...”

“Oh? An idea already?”

“Yep. The photographs gave me an idea.” I looked at Lardon up and down. “Could you help me test it out?”

“Very well.”

I closed my eyes and visualized improving a certain spell. Thanks to Lardon standing, talking, and holding a photograph right in front of me, the image came to me right away. “Telephone,” I chanted. It had the same name, but the effects were a bit different.

Lardon and I were standing facing each other, and between us were mirrored projections of our faces, like what we’d see if we opened a book from the Net. Lardon’s face was displayed in front of me, and mine in hers.

“Oh? What is this?” she asked.

“I made it so Telephone could convey not just voices but also show faces. Isn’t this pretty helpful for communication?”

“I see.” Lardon nodded and chuckled. “You thought of this in that short moment? Not bad.”

Like always, I was thrilled to hear her praise for my new spell.

## .134

Magic City Liam was normally filled with lively bustle, but today, its citizens were orderly and hushed. Crowds of monsters flanked the main street from the city's entrance while leaving the road itself perfectly clear and unobstructed, like onlookers awaiting a parade.

Soon, a group of humans entered, led by a young nobleman on a splendid white horse. Dashing, dignified, and sat astride such a rare steed, he was the very embodiment of noble elegance. Completing the dazzling picture was a unit of royal guards in resplendent ceremonial armor, escorting him from behind with calm and leisurely steps.

To human onlookers, they would be a brilliant sight, met with no shortage of adoring sighs and shrill cheers—but not in this magic city.

The monsters here had been saved by Liam, adored him dearly, and devoted themselves to him as his familiars. In their eyes was no more than a group of haughty humans who, quite literally, hadn't gotten off their high horses.

“Who’s that cocky human?”

“I heard he’s Jamille’s third prince.”

“He’s here to sign the peace treaty, apparently.”

“I can’t see. Is he young?”

“He’s supposedly pretty good looking for a human.”

The citizens began gossiping in hushed whispers as they cast the young nobleman’s group curious glances. Meanwhile, I was watching them from somewhere afar.

“Now. *Do it.*”

“Okay.” I nodded at Lardon’s signal and cast a spell.

Floating frames appeared in the sky, and contained within were not mere paintings but instead depictions of the prince’s procession in real time—in

other words, they were *moving*. Thanks to that, the citizens at the very back of the crowd and even those who'd remained in their houses could watch the procession as it happened.

"That's... Ah! It must be Lord Liam's magic."

"That's Lord Liam for you. He made a way for us to watch with magic!"

"Wow, this is awesome... Hey, couldn't this be used to show plays and stuff too?"

The monsters knew me well and were also accustomed to this city's magic infrastructure, so my new spell hardly surprised them. In complete contrast, the prince and his escorts could only stare dumbly at the moving pictures—the videos—in the sky.

Lardon chuckled. "*It's working.*"

"Working?" I looked at the prince. *Well, it sure is, but...* "Is this really okay?"

"Yes. *What is so wrong with showing the citizens the envoys' gallant figures?*" Lardon smirked, sounding oddly mischievous again. "*No harm was done—they will understand that soon.*"

Recently, Lardon had taken to messing with the other nations through my magic, and I was certain she was doing it again this time. Judging from her playful tone, she must have some other reason for this aside from just "showing their gallant figures."

Well, that was fine. I was pretty used to it already, and besides, Lardon would explain herself once she succeeded. What I was concerned about wasn't that—it was this spell.

"More importantly, did I get the spell right?" I asked.

"Yes. *You did well applying my suggestions to Telephone.*"

"Well, it was just a matter of using more mana to increase the number of screens..." When Lardon chuckled, I raised a brow. "What is it?"

"*No, nothing. You are not wrong. Not at all...*" She chuckled again.

I cocked my head. She definitely left something unsaid after that.

Sensing my curiosity, Lardon explained, “*In such cases, using more mana is indeed all that needs to be done. However, that increase is exponential, no?*”

“Expo-what?”

“*It means that to make ten screens, you need not ten but a hundred times more mana.*”

“Oh, right.” I nodded. She was correct, and that was actually something I’d been thinking of recently. “Normally, you’d only need twice as much mana for two screens, ten times for ten screens, and a hundred for a hundred screens...”

That was how a proper and refined spell would work. However, as Lardon pointed out, I needed a hundred times more mana to make just ten screens. It wasn’t very cost efficient, so I had to figure out a remedy soon. Unfortunately, I couldn’t decrease the mana cost just by visualizing it. It was relatively easy to visualize the *effect*, but the mana consumption often ended up on the costly side no matter the spell. *Reducing the mana cost... It’s really tough.*

Lardon chuckled. “*Normally, hm?*”

“Huh?”

“*No. Nothing.*”

I frowned. Was it so weird for me to call it normal? *Does she mean it’s not normal to use ten times for ten screens? There’s no way, right? Well... Whatever.* “I need to think on this later...”

“*I concur. It should prove interesting once you succeed.*”

“Why?”

“*I heard the monsters mention that you could use this spell to show plays and the like in each house.*”

“Oh... You’re right. That sounds interesting.” I did hear someone mention that earlier. I didn’t pay much attention, but it seemed to have caught Lardon’s interest.

*Now that I think about it, it does sound neat. It could even show more than just plays. Before I became Liam, I enjoyed going to taverns and watching performances with a drink in hand. I’d be able to do so again from the comfort*

of my own home with this spell. I got a bit excited just imagining it.

As the prince and his escorts resumed their march, my mind began to fill with new images and ideas.

## .135

I was sitting face-to-face with the prince in the reception hall, with ten of his royal guards standing behind his back and ten elves including Reina behind mine.

I had the other executives sit out this meeting. Having other humans here might cause problems, while Gai and Chris went without saying—the two were always raring for a fight—which led me to the exceedingly prudent Reina and the gorgeous elves. Their presence opened the meeting to a fairly peaceful air.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m Liam Hamilton.”

“David Matthew Jamille, third prince of Jamille Kingdom,” he replied curtly.

I held my hand out, but the prince, David, showed no signs of reciprocating the gesture. He remained on his seat, slightly leaning back as if looking down on me—*judging* me. I quickly understood why.

“You’re the fifth son of Hamilton?” he drawled.

“Um... Yes. I am.” I nodded, a wry smile tugging on my lips. *The fifth son of Hamilton... Right. I guess that’s how the prince would see me.* It kind of reminded me of the time I first met Scarlet; that felt like so long ago already. *Well, now I get why he’s looking down on me like that.*

“Hmph. You must be pleased with how cleverly you saved yourself.”

“Saved myself...?” *What’s he talking about?*

*“He must be referring to your house’s circumstances,” Lardon chimed in. “He is insinuating you used the monsters to save yourself from falling to peasantry.”*

*Oh... Was that what it looked like to him? Hm... Yeah, I don’t like that at all.*

“More importantly...” David huffed. “Hey, you.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“Are those behind you monsters?”

“Yes, well... They mostly look human, but they are a race of monsters called elves.”

“Hmph. I do fancy rare delicacies sometimes. Bring a few to my room.”

I arched a brow. “Pardon?” *Bring a few to his room...? What does he mean? Could it be... No, no. There's no way, right?* I shook the absurd thought from my head.

“Are you deaf? I said bring a few to my room.”

“Um... What do you mean by that?”

“I guess a brat like you can't understand. I'm telling you to hand me the women.”

My mouth snapped shut. *So I was right...* I'd heard people talk like this in taverns and other such places. Alcohol, tobacco, women—these three were practically a set. Still, I never thought I'd hear it from a *prince*, of all people, and so bluntly at that.

David scowled, misunderstanding my stunned silence. “What? Still don't get it? Do I need to explain it like you're a five-year-old?”

“Oh, no. No need.” He was really starting to get on my nerves. I cast a glance over my shoulder and saw some rather scary expressions on the elves' faces too.

Lardon chuckled. “*Quite fortunate that Gai and Chris are not here.*”

*You said it.* Those two would be beating the living daylights out of David by now.

“Master...” Irritation marred Reina's face, but she was still calm enough to look my way instead of acting out.

I raised my hand to stop her and faced David. “Sorry. No can do.”

His brow twitched. “What?”

*What a nasty face... You'd think he's some alleyway thug, not a prince.* “I won't stop you or say anything if you earn their consent, but I definitely can't, well, 'offer' them to you myself.”

David's face contorted devilishly. "Brat... Do you realize who you're talking to?"

However, that didn't faze me. I'd seen my fair share of thugs in taverns, and even among them, David felt no more threatening than a third-rate thug. "I'd answer the same way no matter who asked."

"You...!"

Reina frowned. "Master, there is no need for you to—"

"No," I said clearly. "This isn't negotiable."

"It isn't...?"

"Yeah. Aren't you all contracted to me through Familia? You can't resist my orders because of the rule of absolute subservience, so I decided never to force any of you against your will. I'm sure it's a principle I've upheld even now."

I looked back on my days with my familiars. I'd assigned them all sorts of tasks out of necessity, but I knew well that not once had I given them any orders against their will.

"Oh..." Reina gasped.

"Master..." The elves behind her all looked teary-eyed.

*Hm? What's up with them?*

Lardon chuckled. *"Alas. What a sinful man."*

## .136

“Hah? You messin’ with me?!” David growled as he roughly kicked the table. An alleyway thug, through and through.

“Y-Your Highness!” One of the guards spoke up in a flurry, but David instantly shut him down with a glare.

The prince then swiveled his head back and glared at me. “Are you looking down on me? Flirting right in my face? Huh?”

“Uh, no...” *That wasn’t my intention... Uh-oh. He’s totally flipped. How do I defuse this situation?*

“Damn brat. Getting carried away just ’cause I’ve been nice to you...”

“No, I said I’m—” I drew in a sharp breath. A wave of bloodlust suddenly rose behind me, emanating from every single elf that stood at my back.

“Your Highness,” said Reina. Her voice was so startlingly flat and emotionless, I felt a chill run down my spine.

The prince clicked his tongue. “What?”

“Do you know why our master ordered our presence in this meeting?”

“Hmph. Obviously ’cause you’re women.”

“No. You are wrong.”

The sound of cloth fluttering echoed in the room. Behind me, ten skirts flapped up in unison, but unfortunately for David, it wasn’t the sight he wished to behold. The elven maids drew out short bows from beneath their skirts, aimed, and fired all at once. *Thud! Thud! Thud!* More than ten arrows flew sharply through the air, tracing David’s figure and pinning him to the couch by his clothes. The accuracy was chilling, landing but a hair’s breadth away from the target, as if to form a perfect mold.

“We are here because we can stay calm and rational,” Reina finished.

“Y-You...!”

“I suggest you stay put. The arrowheads are smeared in poison.”

David froze, his face still contorted in anger. His guards also stopped in their tracks from where they were reaching out to help him.

“We lodged the arrows just a whit from your skin. Of course, if you get yourself cut by making the slightest twitch...” Reina’s voice fell low and threatening. “We will not take any responsibility.”

Being suppressed only served to enrage David even more. Like a volcano finally erupting, he screamed, “How dare you! You damn wenches licking this cocky brat’s boots!”

I gasped and quickly raised my right hand. “Power Missile!” Before David could leap out, a single power missile smashed right into his face, contorting it and knocking him out in one hit.



*Whew... That was a close one. He almost died right there.* The moment he bad-mouthing me, the elves' bloodlust instantly flared up. I'd originally brought Reina and the elves here because they didn't snap easily like Gai and Chris—which still wasn't wrong, but now I could only think about how it was always the calm ones who snapped most explosively. The intense bloodlust I felt from Reina and the elves was just *different* from what I usually felt from Gai and Chris. They definitely would've killed David had I not stepped in and knocked him out first.

I glanced over my shoulder and said, "I'll handle this. Got it?"

"Understood," they all responded. Their hostility gradually receded.

*Whew. Looks like I can still hold them back.* It would've been bad if they'd been too mad to even listen to me. *Well... I guess we've avoided the worst-case scenario, at least.*

The guards rushed over to the unconscious prince. "D-Do you have any idea what you've just done?" one asked, shooting me a critical look. However, from the faint tremble in his voice, it sounded like he knew they were also at fault; they simply had a duty to side with the prince.

The elves could probably sense that too, so they didn't show any particular reaction. Well, that, or they just didn't care as long as they weren't bad-mouthing me.

In any case, I turned to the glaring guards and pondered for a moment. "About this... Could we just forget this ever happened? It's not exactly the kinda thing we want to announce to the public, right?"

"W-We cannot accept that. After treating the prince so rudely—"

"Then maybe I should show this to everyone?" I waved my hand and cast a spell, summoning a large "painting" in the air between us.

The royal guards flinched, eyes wide in recognition. "Th-That's..."

It was the same spell they had seen while entering the city earlier. Their faces paled as they watched my conversation with David play out on the screen, from the moment he demanded I hand him the elves up to when I subdued him with

a power missle. They probably didn't know what kind of spell this was, but nobody could deny what it was showing. The guards visibly shrunk back, no longer able to speak.

*Time for the finishing blow. "Should I show this to the king of Jamille—"*

*"To the church."*

“—to the church and have it judged?” I swiftly followed Lardon’s correction. Nothing could go wrong by following Lardon in how I made use of my magic.

As it turned out, it was quite an effective finishing blow. The royal guards looked ready to drop where they stood, almost as if they’d been told the world was about to end. “N-No, please...”

“Then how about we just drop this here?”

They gulped. “O-Okay,” one said, face still drenched in fear.

I stood and approached David. The guards instantly tensed, afraid I’d do something, but I placated them by reaching out and healing David, restoring his battered face in an instant. “This should do. Doesn’t look like we can have a talk today though.” I turned around. “Reina, escort the prince and his guards to their lodging.”

“Understood. Girls?” Reina turned and looked at the elves.

The elves put away their bows and began moving. In no time at all, David and the royal guards were taken out of the room, leaving me and Reina alone.

“Splendidly done, Master,” she said.

“He didn’t look very well-versed in combat. I don’t think it’s that impressive that I landed a hit.”

“No, not that... Although that *was* also very cool.” Reina’s cheeks turned red. “But more impressive, Master, was that you had gotten ahold of a means to suppress them.”

“Oh, this?” I replayed the footage of David’s rampage.

“You see...” Reina’s lips curled into an eerie smile. “*That* is far more effective than a hundred physical hits.”

"R-Right..." Perhaps my biggest gain today was that I learned Reina was pretty scary when she was mad—in a different, more ominous way from Gai and Chris.

## .137

David, his royal guards, and the elven maids left the room. With this little incident now settled, I was ready to return to Another World when Lardon suddenly stopped me.

*“You should prepare while you can.”*

I paused. “Prepare? Prepare what?”

*“The groundwork.”*

“For what...?”

*“Let me make a prediction,”* she said. *“Once that man regains consciousness, he will immediately set out to slander you. Let’s see... I believe he will start with that man from the church who came here the other day.”*

“From the church... You mean Kardinal?”

*“Indeed. He is part of the group who will come here to mediate, yes?”*

“That’s what he said in his letter.”

*“Then that boy will go crying straight to him.”*

“Will he?” That was a little hard to believe... Would the prince really go around talking about what happened?

*“Undoubtedly,”* Lardon answered. *“He will embellish—no, he will thoroughly fabricate a ludicrous tale making you out as the villain. So lay out the groundwork before then. Falling behind in these situations will make it much harder for you later on.”*

“Hm... Okay.” I nodded and teleported to the city outskirts.

Following Lardon’s advice, I found myself by Liam-Lardon’s national border. Dubbed the Red Wall, it was the red magic barrier which visibly highlighted the bounds of our nation’s territory.

I stood waiting on the main road for about an hour until a procession of clergymen arrived, including Kardinal whom I'd met before. On this open road, we spotted one another right away, though they clearly weren't expecting to see me here.

I approached them first and politely bowed. "I have been eagerly awaiting your arrival, Archbishop Kardinal."

"Your Majesty, King Liam. It is such an honor to have you welcome us personally," he replied.

"Truth be told, there's something I wish to show you... Could we talk in private?"

"Hm... Very well." Kardinal glanced at the other clergymen.

That glance was all it took for them to scatter and form a ten-meter-wide circle around us. *They probably won't hear us from that far... No, I should be extra careful here.* I came up with a way only a moment later: setting up video screens around us.

"What is this?" asked Kardinal.

"I used my magic to manipulate how we're viewed from outside. Try taking a few steps back to see."

Kardinal complied, and upon crossing the threshold, his eyes widened in shock. "I...cannot see you...?"

I nodded. This was sort of like a mirror. Place a mirror on one wall of a narrow room, and it would look twice as big. In a similar manner, these screens displayed the scenery around us. They captured the view around me and were strategically set up to make it seem like I was invisible. There was nothing to see —just empty scenery. I was perfectly hidden.

"I-I see..." Kardinal's expression smoothed over as he regained his composure. "I've never seen such magic... I would expect no less of you, Your Majesty." He cleared his throat. "Now then, what was it you wished to show me...?"

"Here." I played the video of David's misconduct. As per Lardon's advice, I showed him the whole thing, from his horrible behavior up to my power

missile.

Kardinal watched with pursed lips. “How terrible,” he muttered as the video ended. “To think the prince would display such conduct here...”

“Is he usually not the type to?”

Kardinal took a moment. “No,” he said heavily in the end. “I have heard—only through rumors, mind you—that he has always been this kind of person.”

“Wow...” I said blandly.

“Even so, he was at least responsible and civil in his political and diplomatic duties, so what could...” Kardinal trailed off for a moment. “Ah...”

“Hm?” I frowned.

Kardinal glanced around us, then watched my expression for a while before meekly admitting, “I believe he is making light of you, Your Majesty.”

“Making light of me... You mean he’s looking down on me?”

Kardinal nodded. “A nation of monsters ruled by a child... He must feel no need to treat you with due respect.”

“I see...” *Well, I can’t say I’m surprised.* I’d already gotten that feeling from him. I sighed and shook my head. “Anyway, about this... If I’m correct, His Highness will probably come tattling to you.”

Kardinal frowned. “Yes...”

“So—”

“I understand,” he cut in. “I will handle this accordingly.”

“Um... Is it okay?”

“I will make sure to privately convey to His Highness how inappropriate his behavior has been.”

Lardon chuckled. *“What a roundabout way of saying he will lecture the boy.”*

*Oh, he’s gonna lecture him, huh? That’s good. But... David’s matter was now settled, but Kardinal was still giving me a rather pained expression. No, it looks more like he’s...afraid?*

*“But of course,”* Lardon said. Kardinal was still in front of us, so I inwardly asked her for an explanation. *“Truth is the natural enemy of the religious.”*

*Their enemy...?*

*“To recruit believers, they must preach of god and miracles—even prove their veracity. The very antithesis of spreading the truth, no?”*

*Oh... Yeah, that sounds about right.* Most of the miracles that clergymen preached do seem dubious.

*“They fear the truth, and so they are wary of your magic, for it conveys the truth as it is. It is akin to a predator to them.”*

Considering that, I thought long and hard about what Lardon would do in this kind of situation. I faced Kardinal and said, “Please, rest easy.”

“What?”

“I will not use this against the church, nor will I distribute this spell.”

Kardinal stared at me agape for a second before recollecting himself. “I thank you kindly for your deep understanding,” he said, his gaze shifting to one of relief and gratitude.

Lardon chuckled. *“Well done. Very nicely handled.”*

She praised me, so this must’ve been the right move. *Nice. Now that’s all settled—*

*Clop, clop, clop...* The sound of horse hooves cut into our conversation. I turned and saw a single horse dashing our way from the city. The clergymen in our perimeter attempted to stop the rider, but he—*David*—got off the horse and shoved them away, yelling something. The rest of the clergymen began gathering in an effort to hold him back.

Soon, one clergymen broke away and approached us. He seemed bewildered, likely because he still couldn’t see us from where he’d halted his steps. *“Your Eminence, the prince wishes to speak with you.”*

“Very well. I will meet him.” Kardinal turned to me. *“I shall handle this appropriately. Please rest assured.”*

“O-Okay.”

Kardinal spun on his heel and headed toward his escorts. They were too far for me to hear, but I didn’t need to; I could see David’s face turn as red as a tomato from all the way over here, making it clear how badly he was being scolded.

*“That will be quite effective,” Lardon mused. “A spoiled prince such as him has likely never received a proper scolding all his life.”*

“Huh... Sounds tough.”

As Lardon predicted, David’s shoulders only trembled more violently, and his face turned into an even uglier shade of red as time went on. Helpless against Kardinal’s relentless lecture, David ultimately returned to the city with a gloomy cloud hanging over his head.

## .138

David and I sat with a large table between us and our respective subordinates to our backs. Understandably, Reina and the elven maids had their displeasure on full display, while the royal guards were clearly on their toes, worried David might pull something again. Finally, between us were Kardinal and the clergymen of the church.

We were currently back in the reception hall to sign our friendship treaty, in the presence of Archbishop Kardinal. Once we finished signing the identical documents, the clergymen gathered the papers and handed them to Kardinal.

The archbishop carefully looked them over. “Very good. Now the documents shall be exchanged and signed once more.”

The clergymen returned the papers to us. I received the treaty that David had signed, added my own signature, and waited for the clergymen to deliver it back to Kardinal.

“Good. Henceforth, I declare that Jamille Kingdom and Liam-Lardon have officially established a treaty of friendship.”

“Tsk!” David stood from his chair so quickly that it toppled over as he stomped toward the door.

The prince’s sudden courtesy left his guards frazzled, their eyes frantically darting between David, me, and Kardinal. I also looked to Kardinal, who simply responded with a small nod.

“Where are you going, Your Highness?” he asked the prince.

“The signing’s done, right? I’m leaving.”

“Your Highness, that is quite—”

“What else is there? I already signed the papers,” David spat and left the room without a second glance. It seemed he wanted to make his exit with an angry door slam, but the royal guards read him quite well and grabbed the door

before it could make any noise.

Kardinal and I were left in the room with our subordinates. The archbishop sighed. "My sincerest apologies, Your Majesty."

"No, there's nothing you need to apologize for, Archbishop Kardinal. There's...no stopping *that*." They hardly bore any outward resemblance, but somehow, Albrevit, the Hamilton house's eldest, came to mind. He was my older brother and heir to the county, but he caused all sorts of problems without a shred of remorse. David reminded me of him.

"The signing is over now," Kardinal said, "but I still have a proposal to make, Your Majesty."

"What is it?"

"Would you be inclined to visit our headquarters, the Holy Land of Urdau, in the near future?"

"Holy Land...?"

"*It is like their capital*," Lardon supplied.

*I see... Their headquarters, huh? But why's he inviting me there?*

Seeing the confusion on my face, Kardinal chuckled and explained, "We plan to invite the king of Jamille, the archduke of Parta, and the king of Quistador as well—to host an assembly of monarchs."

"Uh... I see." Wow. Sounds huge. It was probably some important event—even I could tell. For the heads of state to gather in one place and hold discussion was meaningful in itself—as long as it didn't end with someone storming out like David, of course. I doubted that would happen though, since Archbishop Kardinal himself was inviting them to the very headquarters of the church.

Suddenly, Lardon chuckled.

*What's so funny?*

*"I doubt that is all."*

"Uh..." I cocked my head in confusion. I could ask Lardon what she meant, but

I directed it to Kardinal, who brought up the proposal to begin with, instead. “Why the invitation?”

Kardinal nodded. “It is for you to become a king, Your Majesty.”

“Become a king? Uh...” *What does he mean?* I’d never intended for it, and it kinda felt like it just turned out that way, but everyone around me was already holding me up as king. *So what else...?*

“While this may sound rude, the three nations largely do not acknowledge you, the ruler of a nation of mere monsters, as a king,” he explained. I didn’t disagree. “Thus, inviting you along with the other monarchs would be tantamount to the church’s official acknowledgment of your status.”

“I see...” They were essentially granting me power.

“Despite our brief acquaintance, it is clear to me that you are a man of peace.”

“I guess so.” I’d never wanted to start a fight, much less a war.

“Therefore, we would be happy to officially acknowledge you as king—for the greater peace of this land.”

“I understand,” I said immediately. “I have no reason to refuse.”

“Oh...!” Kardinal beamed. “Thank you kindly!”

Things went according to Kardinal’s plan. Although the assembly itself had yet to be held, when the church announced the Four Monarchs’ Assembly and its participants, Jamille, Parta, and Quistador all recognized Liam-Lardon as a country.

A state was made of four elements: population, territory, autonomy, and lastly, the capacity to interact with other states as equals. With the final piece now in place, Liam-Lardon was finally kicking off as an official country.

## .139

At the very center of Magic City Liam stood a glorious palace. Now that we'd been officially acknowledged as a country, the monsters fervently rushed to build "a palace worthy of their king," or so they'd cheered. They built it in a flash, complete with a resplendent audience hall and a throne.

I was currently sitting on that throne and racking my brain. Standing before me was a harpy, a monster with the head and body of a human, the legs of a bird, and wings instead of arms.

"Let's see..." After groaning for a while, I finally made up my mind and cast *Familia*. "Lilim."

Enveloped in the spell's light, the harpy evolved. What used to be just feathery wings grew hands, extending into more distinctly shaped arms. The harpy, now a harpyia, studied her new figure with wide and sparkling eyes.

Ever since the church's official acknowledgment, Liam-Lardon was seeing a stream of new monsters. They used to be scattered across the land, content in simply watching us from a distance. However, the church's actions assured that the monsters of this nation were proper citizens and needn't fear being hunted by humans, so now they were flocking in droves.

I saw no issue with this, though. I accepted them all, casting *Familia* and naming them as per usual.

"Are you the last one? Hm... Lilith." With that, I was finished naming and evolving today's nearly one hundred harpies. "Reina?"

"Yes, Master."

"I leave the briefing and housing distribution to you."

"Understood."

Now that my part was done and I'd left the rest to Reina, I exited the audience hall and walked down the corridor leading back to my room.

For the castle of a monster nation, I had initially imagined a more eerie interior, but the reality before my eyes was a palace no less lavish than a human castle, each room made to look visually pleasing with a ceiling twice as high as usual, with plush red carpets lining every corridor. All this was thanks to Scarlet's and Jodie's advice, as well as Bruno, whom we sold manastones to for funding the actual construction and purchased the high-quality materials and furniture for us.

As I strode on the carpets of this splendid palace, I fell into thought. "If only I could have made this myself..."

All sorts of spells I had learned and invented had been to vastly improve the citizens' standard of living. Even the humans—Scarlet, Flora, Asuna, and Jodie—all asserted that life here was worlds more pleasant and convenient than in human cities. Scarlet especially emphasized that human technology would need a century to catch up to our magic infrastructure, so long as I didn't disseminate it outside.

However, with the construction of this palace, one huge weakness in my magic came to my attention: all my spells produced certain *effects*, while hardly any could *make* things. Thinking back, that might've been due to my own inclinations. Right around when I successfully made charcoal and instant noodles, I hit a wall in trying to make fresh water. I'd invented all sorts of spells since then, but because of that wall, very few were spells that made anything. *I need to do something about that...*

Finally, I reached my room. I'd been out for a while, so the air was a bit chilly and even the bed felt somewhat cool, but I plopped right down and buried my face in the sheets without a care. My head, heated from all my racing thoughts, gradually cooled down. *Making something with magic... I wonder...* My mind began racing with possibilities.

But before I could grasp even one, my thoughts were interrupted by two gentle knocks. "My apologies for the delay, Master," said an elven maid as she entered the room, carrying some firewood in her arms.

"Hm? Oh, the fireplace..."

The maid approached the fireplace by the wall, swiftly set the firewood in

place, and lit them with a spell provided by our magic infrastructure. The room gradually warmed as crisp crackles tickled the air, but some of the smoke strayed into the room instead of the chimney and prompted me to cough.

“Oh! My apologies, Master...”

“No, it’s no big deal. Don’t worry.”

“I truly apologize... I will be sure to start the fire more skillfully next time!” The maid bowed and left the room.

My thoughts continued to swirl as I stared at the crackling fire, and before long, I was crouched right in front of it. My front was now warm and cozy, but my back still felt a bit chilly, so I spun on my heel and returned to bed. My whole body cooled down again.

*I guess the fireplace would slowly warm the room, just not evenly.*

The temperature difference near the fire and the rest of the room was clear. When I shuffled over to the corner, I found it was noticeably chilly—especially near the floor. Sweat was already beading on my forehead, yet my feet were stiff and cold. That was natural, however; warm air always gathered upward, hence why smoke rose out the chimney. As per Scarlet’s plan, the rooms were all designed with high ceilings for the visual appeal, but this left a huge temperature difference between the floor and the ceiling.

“If only we could set a fireplace in the floor... No, the room would just fill with smoke.” I chuckled dryly. This was what they meant when they say “it’s hard to tell a poor thinker from a sleeping one.”

“*Why not tackle this with magic?*”

“Huh?” I blinked, startled by Lardon’s sudden interjection. “What do you mean?”

*“You are good at magic, no? You find yourself stumped because you are fixated on the fireplace itself. Try thinking of how you would fix this problem with magic.”*

“With magic...” I followed Lardon’s advice and started over. *Forget the fireplace. How can I make the room warm from the bottom?* “Oh... This might

work."

Lardon chuckled. "*Then try.*"

"Okay." I nodded and began visualizing.

To make it easier on myself, I decided to limit the space I'd be working with. I summoned my item box, took out four wooden planks all one meter in length, and arranged them into the edges of a square on the floor. It was effective; staring hard at that small space, I swiftly formed an image in my mind to put to the test.

"Warm Floor," I chanted.

The enclosed space flashed for a moment, after which I stepped right in. "Oh! It's warm." A gentle heat rose from the ground and permeated my feet. If the fireplace couldn't warm our feet, then I just had to make the floor itself warm—hence this spell, Warm Floor.

Lardon chuckled. "*Not bad. As I thought, you are better off fixing things with magic than racking your brain over orthodox solutions.*"

"But I can't install this into our magic infrastructure..." For the same reason this room uses a fireplace: mana was needed to cast magic.

Currently on my agenda was figuring out how to make spells more cost efficient, or rather, *mana* efficient. A fire-lighting spell was included in our infrastructure, but to use it solely to warm an entire room called for constant mana consumption. Warm Floor presented a similar issue: it would warm bodies but deplete energy. Not everyone was like me; giants, for example, had very little mana and wouldn't be able to make use of this spell.

*Guess I have to come up with something tangible after all... "I'm shelving this spell for now. I need to think of something better."*

Lardon chuckled. "*Then I shall help you—with a nonmagic hint.*"

"What do you mean?"

"*Your hint,*" she said, "*is a horizontal chimney.*"

*Hm?* I tilted my head, puzzled.

## .140

“A horizontal chimney...? What’ll that do?”

“*It would probably be faster for you to try it yourself.*”

“Ah, that’s true.” She was absolutely right. This wasn’t magic, after all, and my head never works well when it came to anything else. Trying it out myself would be better.

“*Find an open plot of land.*”

“Okay.” The promised land contained just one city with a population of twenty thousand, while the rest had yet to be reclaimed from nature. I picked a random spot and teleported outside. “Will this place do?”

“*Yes. Now, first...*” Lardon hummed. “*Make a square foundation three meters wide and with a deep ditch along the middle.*”

I nodded. “Gnome!” I summoned an earth spirit and conveyed Lardon’s instructions. The foundation and ditch were prepared in a flash. “How’s this?”

“*Good. Next, seal the top of the ditch.*”

“Gnome, seal the top of the ditch.”

“*Now form a chimney on one side’s opening.*”

“Form a chimney on one side’s opening.”

I conveyed Lardon’s instructions one after the other. Reliable as ever, the spirit molded the earth like it was child’s play. The product was a covered ditch—practically a small tunnel—with openings on either side, one of which protruded into a standard vertical chimney. It was, overall, an L-shaped “chimney” that passed beneath a square platform.

“Will this do?” I asked.

“*Well done. Lastly, place a fire in front of this normal opening. You may start it with magic, but use ordinary firewood so you can see how it normally works.*”

“Okay.” I nodded, took out some lumber from my item box, cut it into firewood, and lit a fire in front of the opening. My spell caught on the firewood and spread into a decent campfire. Then... “Huh? The fire... It’s getting sucked into the tunnel?!”

“*Look at the other end.*”

“You mean the chimney...? Oh! The smoke is rising from the other side...”

“*Indeed.*”

“But why’s the fire getting sucked into the opening *beside* it?” I knew how fire worked—I’d seen it all my life—and normally, it’d be going *up*.

“*It is not only fire,*” Lardon said. “*Warm air always goes up, hence why chimneys are designed the way they are.*”

“Uh-huh...” I cocked my head, urging her on.

“*At first, just a bit of the warm air from the fire slips into the hole. Once it passes through the tunnel and exits through the chimney, the tunnel would be left with no air—so the closest thing, the fire, is pulled in to fill the gap.*”

“Ohhh...”

“*Try standing on top of the tunnel.*”

“Oh! It’s warm...” I stepped on the platform, as instructed, and felt the warmth in my feet.

“*In its path upward, the hot air here travels underground—through the tunnel—to exit from the other side. The smoke goes as well, thus leaving you a room without fumes.*”

“Ohhh... So this is what you meant by a horizontal chimney.”

“*Indeed.*”

“Wow... You’re amazing.” I was genuinely impressed. I had no idea this was possible.

“*I realize once more that such matters are not your strong suit... I did not think I would need to explain from start to finish and provide you with a practical example too.*”

“Sorry... I know I can’t just stay this way, but...” One could never have too much knowledge in stock. Still, unlike magic, I just had no idea where to even begin learning, and honestly, these kinds of stuff did impress me, but that was all—I never felt any burning desire to learn more. *Yep. I really do just like magic.* As I was lost in thought, the warmth at my feet began to dwindle.

“*The fire is dying,*” Lardon explained. “*It burns out faster with a chimney.*”

“Oh...” I stared at the dying flame and blinked. Something just came to mind.

“*What is it?*”

“Well... I feel like I’ve heard something similar...” I mumbled. “Something about a flame dying or running out...”

“*Hm? Are you speaking of a candle?*”

“A candle... Right, a candle!” I gasped. The vague recollection took a clearer shape in my mind.

“*What is it?*”

“Hang on a second.” I began visualizing. “Yeah... This is doable.”

“*Oh? Very well. Show me.*” Lardon chuckled. She shouldn’t know what my idea even was, but she encouraged me anyway.

I readily complied and continued visualizing the new spell. It was a simple one, really, so I was done right away. “As for the efficiency... This should do,” I mumbled, finishing it off.

Next, I teleported to the city—to the entrance of our quarry, guarded by several giants. They noticed my arrival and approached me with friendly smiles.

“Oh! Our king!”

“What brings you here, King Liam?”

I looked up at them and said, “Could you bring me a manastone? Just one will do—the size of a fist, if possible.”

The giants nodded, and nearly half of them rushed off as if racing against one another.

This quarry was where we mined manastones, also known as bloodsouls, that

naturally formed within this magic city. They were valuable resources and served as an important source of income for this country, so I entrusted its protection to the giants.

Less than a minute later, they returned. “Will this do?” One offered me exactly what I’d asked for: a manastone the size of a fist—a giant’s fist, though.

Well, bigger wasn’t a problem, so I accepted it with a nod. “Looks good. Thanks.”

After that, it was back to the open space. I put out the dwindling flame with my shoes, cleared out the fireplace, and set the manastone down. Finally, I cast my new spell on it. The manastone lit ablaze, slowly crackling and swaying just like a typical fire. Its flames then got drawn into the horizontal chimney.

“Oh?”

“Sheila said so before,” I told Lardon. “Manastones are like candle wax—what remains after the candle burns.”

“*That lass did use such an analogy, yes.*”

“So if manastones are the residue of casting magic, then couldn’t they be used to *Maintain* magic too?”

“*Theoretically, yes.*” I already confirmed it myself, but Lardon’s stamp of approval was always welcome. “*So? What was this for? To decrease the smoke?*”

I couldn’t blame Lardon for thinking that way. Although the manastone’s flame was being sucked into the tunnel the same way as the ordinary flame earlier, there was no longer any smoke coming out the other end—only a slight heat haze from the warm air.

“No, that’s not it,” I said.

“*Oh? Then what?*”

“Look.” I closed my eyes. “*Amelia Emilia Claudia.*” I amplified my mana and cast a spell—but nothing happened.

“*Hm? What did you do?*”

“You taught me how to efficiently cast magic before, didn’t you?”

“I did.”

“Well, I just did the opposite. I cast a spell at zero percent efficiency.”

“Zero percent? Why would you— Hm?”

Lardon’s question was cut short by the sudden manifestation of countless specks of light, the product of all my aria-amplified mana being used to cast a weather-changing spell at zero percent efficiency. As a result, every last bit had become “candle wax,” stuck to the manastone, and immediately turned into fuel for the magical flames.

“I see...” Lardon mumbled. *“The flames can then be maintained somewhat automatically.”*

“Yep.” I nodded. Magic was always being cast in our city, but ordinary monsters never strove for more efficiency, producing all the excess mana that piled up and became manastones. “If I set up this spell where the manastones form and run this tunnel under the city, then we could automatically maintain this heating everywhere. Oh, maybe we could call it floor heating?”

Lardon chuckled. *“Amazing.”*

“Huh?”

*“This truly is your strong suit,”* she said, praising me with words completely opposite to what she said earlier.

## .141

Lining the table in the palace's dining hall were numerous bowls of noodles and soup, and before all of it was Bruno. With utmost concentration, he carefully sampled each one, savoring the scent and the flavor and evaluating them. Once he finished going through everything, I awaited his verdict.

"How is it?" I asked.

"Hm... Among these, only numbers six, eleven, and thirty-five can be commodified right away."

"Just three, huh?"

"The others do not differ much from our current flavors, while some are simply too bizarre to promote for regular consumption," he explained. "Of course, I am rather ashamed to say this after so much has been prepared..."

"No, don't worry about it. We're doing business here. I appreciate you saying these things outright."

"Thank you very much." Bruno bowed.

Seeing promise in our now fully-fledged, church-approved nation, merchants from other countries were starting to surge in—with their goods in tow, of course. They came bringing all sorts of goods catered to monsters. As expected of merchants, their eyes were sharp and they were quick on their feet.

That was all well and good, yet it introduced another problem: as things stood, our import prices would flare up, leaving us with a huge trade deficit. We were still trading our manastones, but only royalty and wealthy nobles could really afford it, so it didn't serve as a very significant source of income. What we needed, I realized, was more exports—which was when my instant noodles and white charcoal came to mind.

These were items I made before I came to this promised land. I couldn't openly sell them back then, held back by my position as the fifth son of the Hamilton house, but I was pretty much in charge now. Freed of that obstacle, I

decided to produce them in large quantities and turn them into our country's specialty goods with Bruno's help.

"Goodness, I am impressed," said Bruno. "Preserved noodles that can be eaten just by pouring some hot water... I've heard about this, but it's such a fascinating product."

"I came up with the idea, but all these flavors here are thanks to the elves' hard work."

"The elves?"

"Yeah. Those girls are very dexterous and apparently enjoy cooking quite a bit. When I mentioned introducing instant noodles as our specialty goods, they were all gung ho about coming up with new flavors."

"I see!" Bruno's eyes glinted. "Then I suppose I can have high hopes for additions to the lineup hereafter?"

"Yep. I'd still need you to check them over like you did today, but with the elves all fired up, we'll be getting more flavors before long."

"Understood. In that case, I will include that in our promotions."

"Thanks."

"Not at all. Also, I would like to ask you a favor, Your Majesty."

I blinked. "What is it?" It was pretty rare for Bruno to ask me for help.

"About the other product you presented—the white charcoal," he said. "I believe it would be best to give it a brand name, to increase its value."

"Oh... Like Suncoal?"

"Precisely." Bruno nodded.

"Sure, I'm up for that. What name would be good?"

"I have a suggestion."

"Already...?" I signaled for him to go on. The name itself must've been Bruno's actual goal here. Seeing how serious he looked, it must be pretty important.

“Dragonstone,” he said. “What do you think?”

“Dragonstone...? As in, a dragon’s stone?”

“Yes.” Bruno firmly held his gaze on mine. “This nation, Liam-Lardon, bears the name of the divine dragon—or the evil dragon, as the populace more commonly know. I believe it is only fitting to use the word ‘dragon’ in the name.”

“I see...” Well, if we were going with that, then it was best to see what the dragon herself thought. “What do you think, Lardon?”

*“Do as you please. It matters not to me,”* came her aloof response.

*If you say so...* “Sounds good,” I told Bruno.

“Thank you very much.” He bowed deeply.

With that, we resumed our business talks until the sun had set and darkness washed over the city. On cue, one light after the next sprang to life, pushing against the darkness. The phenomena immediately drew Bruno’s attention, and he stared out the window, wide-eyed.

“That’s...”

“What’s up?” I looked out too and saw Liam-Lardon illuminated in its entirety, courtesy of the streetlights in every corner of the city. “Oh, that? Right... The last time you came here, only the houses had lighting, huh?”

“Yes... May I ask who lit all those streetlights?”

“Nobody,” I answered. “They automatically light up.”

“A-Automatically?”

“Yep. I made it so they activate when night comes.”

Bruno blinked owlishly. “B-But magic can only be cast with the caster’s mana...”

“This particular mana comes from manastones,” I answered coolly. “Manastones are formed from the mana left over when everyone casts a spell, but we’ve already got too many to sell, don’t we? So I just use them to light up the streets every night.”

For a moment, Bruno was too stunned for words. “I-Impressive as always, Your Majesty...”

“Hm?”

“Crafting such a high-quality spell goes without saying, but to even use precious manastones so generously... You truly are a wise king beyond compare.” Bruno bowed his head, overwhelmed by admiration.

*I just made use of our spare manastones... Is it such a big deal?*

A red barrier loomed tall and wide, a stark and constant reminder of where Liam-Lardon's national border lay.

I came here now to see Bruno off, though he was terribly reluctant about making me come all this way. I was on foot, so to compensate, he dismounted his horse and led it by its reins to walk beside me, engaging in some small talk along the way. If you asked me, he was still my brother and didn't need to be so humble, but I knew his position was a difficult one.

As we drew closer to the edges, Bruno lifted his head and breathed out in wonder. "I've seen it several times, but it never fails to impress. This wall, I mean."

"Oh." I followed his gaze and looked up at the red barrier.

"Recently, people have taken to calling this the Redline."

"The Redline?"

"Because it is like a red deadline," he explained.

"I see..." I nodded. It was a fitting name, considering any enemy stepping past this line would be shown no mercy. "In actuality, it's nothing so scary. It's basically just a warning."

"In that case, what are your thoughts on putting together a sightseeing tour?"

"A tour?"

"Yes. I'm certain there are those with peculiar preferences who would seek out extraordinary sights in the wild such as this."

"Ah... I get that." Among travel hobbyists, some particularly enjoyed exploring the unexplored and challenging the most precarious locations. Once again, I looked up at the red barrier—the Redline. *Yep. Seems like just the place for those daredevils.* "All right, go ahead. You think they'd enjoy crossing the barrier too?"

“I’d wager they would.”

“Then I guess we’ll have to set up a checkpoint or something later on. Having to go through some paperwork and procedures would probably add to the atmosphere.”

“A brilliant idea.” Bruno lowered his head. “Perhaps we could also make them sign a waiver declaring their safety and lives are not guaranteed.”

“Ooh, nice. Well, anyway, I’ll leave all the details to you.”

“Gladly!” Bruno bowed again.

After each visit, he always took some new business proposal home with him. I never heard the details, but he must be making a fortune dishing these ideas out one after the other. I’d gotten all sorts of advice from Bruno ever since I took over, or rather, reincarnated into this body. I hoped this would be enough to repay him for all his help.

Over the course of our conversation, we arrived right at the foot of the barrier. Bruno hurried to the other side, then swiveled to face me. “Thank you for bringing me this far, Your Majesty.”

“Sure thing. Drop by again soon.”

“It would be my honor,” he replied—then stayed in place. Bruno’s gaze lingered on me for a while.

“What’s the matter? Anything else?” I asked.

“Yes...” he answered reluctantly. “I wasn’t certain whether I should mention this, but I believe it would be best for you to know.”

“Hm?”

“It’s about Charles Hamilton.”

I blinked, face blank. It took me five seconds before I finally recalled the owner of that name: Charles Hamilton, our father and the current head of the Hamilton house. I hadn’t heard of him recently, swamped as I was in the development of this promised land, so I’d completely forgotten. If he was my real father, I never would have, but, well, it hadn’t been long since I took over Liam’s body. I might address him as “father,” but I hardly saw him as one.

I turned my attention back to Bruno. “Father? What about him?”

“He has been especially distressed recently,” he replied.

“Distressed?”

“Yes. He has been seeking to wed his daughter to the king, but it has been a surprisingly difficult task.”

“Oh...” I hummed. “Basically, he’s panicking because his nobility might not get, uh, renewed, was it?”

“An astute deduction.” It was hardly a deduction, given he’d provided me all the details—but anyway, Bruno humbly lowered his head. “He may have been too proud to reach out to you until now, but I sense that may soon change.”

“So, I might expect a visit from him soon?”

Bruno nodded grimly, his lips pursed.

“All right. Thanks for the heads-up.”

“My pleasure.” Bruno bowed once more before finally turning around and leaving. He continued guiding his horse along by its reins and only mounted once he’d become nothing but a dot in the distance.

I remained planted on the spot, thinking. *Hm... Father...*

Lardon chuckled. *“Human conceit... What a meaningless thing.”*

“What do you mean?”

*“If only your father abandoned his pride much sooner, then he could have mediated between you and Jamille.”*

“Oh!” I snapped my fingers, recalling the peace talks with Jamille. We’d gotten into a few fights and even nearly warred with... Well, I guess the war did actually start. Had father intervened and served as a bridge between us back then, it could’ve easily been the achievement he needed to renew his nobility license. But he didn’t make a move—because he was too proud to, according to Bruno. He’d essentially let go of a perfectly good chance for his ego. No wonder Lardon sneered at him.

*“In that sense, you are commendable.”*

“Huh?”

“*You have no useless pride.*”

“I’m a man too. I have my pride.”

“*I said useless pride. I certainly wouldn’t praise a spineless fool.*”

“Oh...” I nodded.

Lardon chuckled again. “*Now then, onto your next task, no?*”

“Hm?”

Before I could ask what she was talking about, the answer revealed itself. Three men emerged from behind some rocks beyond the Redline, all of them stepping through the barrier like it was no big deal.

One of them licked his lips and snickered. “They say good things come to those who wait,” he drawled, looking me up and down.

*He’s...a hunter? He looks used to being out in the wild. “Who’re you guys?”*

I only got sneers and smirks in return.

“Who’re we? You don’t need to know that, kid.”

“Uh-huh. All you need to do is sit tight and get beaten up.”

“But hey, don’t cry. We do need ya alive, after all.”

I frowned. “Um... Is this a kidnapping? Are you sure you’ve got the right person?”

“Yeah. We’re after you, the king of monsters.”

*The king of monsters... Yep. That’s me, all right. “But why...?”*

“We’ve been waiting, you brat—until you’re all alone.”

“Too bad your monster bodyguards aren’t here, huh?”

*Um, basically...*

“*They think you are being protected by the monsters,*” Lardon supplied.

“R-Right.” I smiled bitterly. “Um... Haven’t you heard the rumors about me?”

One of the hunters scoffed. “Like hell we’d trust those. You’re nothin’ but a

kid."

"Word about you obviously just blew up, probably 'cause of all those giants and wolfmen sticking to you."

"What's so scary about a single puny brat?"

"Ah... Right." *I guess I can't blame them for thinking that way... Maybe?*

"Anyway, don't resist unless you wanna get hurt." One of the hunters approached me, rope in hand, probably to tie me up with.

*"Don't kill them,"* Lardon said. *"They will be your carrier pigeons, spreading a message of fear."*

"Got it." I took a deep breath and raised my hand. "Power Missile—sixty-seven rounds!"

The mana arrows, formed without an aria, battered the three men. Unable to defend or dodge, they were sent flying and reduced to tattered rags.

I approached them and confirmed that they were, at least, still breathing. I reached out to them and chanted, "Regeneration." It was a healing spell I didn't often use since, unlike Heal, it recovered wounds slowly. But for them, this was enough. The longer they felt the pain, the greater their fear.

*"Well done. As always, you use your magic well."*

Lardon's praise lifted my spirits back up.

In the palace, our nation's seven leading figures were gathered at a round table for a meeting: Asuna, Jodie, and Scarlet for the humans, and Gai, Chris, Reina, and Alucard for the monsters. Reina progressed the meeting by sharing her reports.

"Dragonstone and the various flavors of instant noodles have begun stable production. We will regularly hand the goods to Master's brother and receive the earnings in return." She looked to me for approval before moving on. "Incidentally, we've heard that salt is a valuable commodity for humans. Master, could you make it so we can produce salt?"

"Salt, huh? Okay, I'll craft a spell. It shouldn't be that hard."

Asuna raised her hand. "Salt's nice, but what'll you make it from?"

"Well... Seawater, I guess." I shrugged. "I'll just make a quick trip over then come right back—it'll be quick and easy with my item box and clone."

"But shouldn't we keep this task off your plate?" Asuna replied.

Jodie nodded. "I agree with Asuna. Liam, it would be better if you don't play a hand in the citizens' livelihood. Wouldn't it be strange for a king to dabble in every little matter?"

"Oh..." She had a point. I mean, I'd never seen such a thing myself. *A king who helps the citizens with their work would be a pretty strange sight, yeah.* "I got it. Then I'll come up with a way to procure salt water with magic."

Just then, Scarlet spoke up. "If I may pose a question to the divine dragon?"

"What?" Lardon's tone was dry, a far cry from how she sounded whenever speaking with me.

It wasn't anything new. Once, I'd asked the reason for her apathy, and she answered that she simply "had no interest in humans aside from you." It was that particular interest that led her to possess me right when we met too.

After I passed Lardon's short reply, Scarlet asked, "In this promised land, is there anywhere we can find a salt lake or perhaps an abundance of rock salt?"

Lardon hummed, her tone softening a bit. "*Perhaps southwest of this city.*"

"You're not sure?" I asked.

"*I simply recalled that cows and sheep would gather around that area.*"

"Huh? Cows and sheep gathered there?" *What does that have to do with it?*

"Ah, I see." Despite only hearing my side of the conversation, Scarlet nodded decisively. "Then the likelihood is high."

"What do you mean, Scarlet?"

"Cows and sheep enjoy licking rock salt. It is said that cows can even produce milk when provided with just rock salt and water."

"Ohhh..."

Lardon chuckled pleasantly. "*It seems you still have much more to learn.*"

"O divine dragon," Scarlet called. "Could I ask you for its location? I would like to investigate this matter further."

"*Very well. I shall send it to you through the Liamnet later,*" came Lardon's reply, which I passed on to Scarlet again.

"Thank you very much." Scarlet bowed to me—and to Lardon dwelling within me. She was the one who'd first brought me to this land, who always referred to Lardon as the divine dragon. Out of everyone in this country, she held the most respect for Lardon.

The rest of the meeting proceeded without a hitch. Reports were given and discussions were held, but much of it was taken off my plate and into the hands of all the skilled leaders present. With hardly any place for me to chime in, my mind soon wandered from the meeting and toward visualizing a new spell.

Although this might turn out to be in vain if we manage to find some rock salt, I tried to come up with a way for my familiars to magically extract salt from salt water. I had two options: to boil the salt water, or to simply split the salt from the water with magic. The former was far easier, while the latter called for

much finesse. When I first started learning magic, I found out even a low-rank water spirit wasn't up to the task. I doubted my familiars could best it in that regard.

*That said, I don't know if boiling it would be any better... The salt would surely end up burnt, then we wouldn't be able to sell it. Should I make it so they can adjust the level of fire? But then the process would rely on the person's experience and skill. Hmm, what to do...?*

"What about wind?" Lardon chimed in.

"Wind?"

Everyone's gazes gathered on me, but when I waved my hand, they figured I was talking with Lardon and resumed their meeting.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

*"Have you never seen water evaporating due to wind?"*

"Oh... Actually, I have." *Right. Wind. That could work... "Ah!"*

"What is it?"

Instead of answering, I gathered my mana and materialized it into a thin, transparent sheet over the table. I pinched some salt from my item box and sprinkled it on top. After seeing the salt adhere to the mana sheet, I dispelled it with ease—undoing it like this was a simpler task than giving it shape—and the salt fell to the table.

"Good."

*"I see. So you will place seawater above that, wait for the wind to dry it, then disperse your mana."*

"Yep."

*"Quite the novel idea."*

"I was just reminded of when I was a kid. Back then, I often fell into muddy puddles while playing outside. I couldn't do anything about that mud while it was all wet, but it always came off easily when it dried."

Lardon chuckled. *"So you applied that to magic. Interesting as always."*

In any case, this should do for the overall framework. All that was left was to actually test it out with some seawater and work out the kinks. *Hm, what kind of adjustments could I make...?*

“Excuse me, Master.”

“Hm? What’s up, Reina?”

“I’ve forgotten to ask you regarding one matter,” she said. “It is about the sales distribution and taxes of Dragonstone and instant noodles.”

“Taxes...?”

“How much shall we collect?”

I thought about it for a moment. “Do we need to?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, it doesn’t cost anything to manage this country. We’ve got enough from the manastones, so there’s no need to impose taxes, is there?”

“So, shall we set it at zero? Are you certain?”

“Yeah.” I nodded firmly. *No need to take what doesn’t need to be taken.*

I’d shrugged it off as just that, but Scarlet looked at me in awe. “Truly astounding, Master.”

“Hm?”

“In all of history, there has only been one taxless country, and it existed millennia ago. To be able to recreate that... You are truly extraordinary.”

*“She speaks of Zaram,”* Lardon said. *“A small nation that had no need for tax yields due to its abundant mineral resources.”*

“Ohhh...” I didn’t know about that.

“Simply amazing!” Scarlet crowed. The others around the meeting table held similar sparkling gazes.

## .144

Once the meeting ended, the leaders slowly vacated the room. Asuna remained on her seat, however, sighing wistfully. “If only we had a sea, huh?”

I frowned. “A sea?”

“That problem earlier—wouldn’t it be solved if we had a sea?”

“Oh... That’s right.” She was talking about the salt issue. *Hm... She’s not wrong.*

We wouldn’t be racking our brains to come up with a way to transport salt water had this country bordered the sea. This promised land we’d settled into was landlocked, surrounded on all sides by Jamille, Parta, and Quistador. Forget a sea—we didn’t even have a single large lake.

Scarlet, who knew this the best, naturally slid into our conversation. “There is no sea on this land due to the divine dragon’s power.”

“What? What’s that mean?” Asuna asked.

“Legend has it that long ago,” she began, “this land was connected to the sea. However, during the Tri-Draconic War, the divine dragon dropped a large piece of land next to where the Duchy of Parta stands today, cutting the promised land off from the sea and turning it to landlocked territory.”

“Yeah... That’s made up,” Asuna drawled, unimpressed. Scarlet didn’t even get mad.

*I mean, “dropped a large piece of land”? Who’d buy a tall tale like that? “Did you really do that, Lardon?”*

“Of course not.”

“She said she didn’t,” I relayed.

Asuna shrugged as if to say, “*What did I tell ya?*” while Scarlet looked disappointed but unsurprised. However...

*“I simply kicked it away since it was coming toward me.”*

My jaw dropped in shock. “You mean *another dragon* threw it?!”

Asuna blinked. “Huh? What?”

“Lardon said that another dragon sent it flying to her, and she just kicked it away...”

“For real?!” she shrieked.

“Goodness!” Scarlet exclaimed, nearly moved to tears. “So it *was* the divine dragon’s power!”

“Uh, just to be sure... Did that *really* happen...?” I asked again.

Lardon huffed. “*It was but a pebble. I hardly felt it on my hind leg.*”

I sighed. “I don’t think a pebble can change a region’s topography...”

*“Until then, a sea was nearby—which is likely why rock salt could be found in this land.”*

When I relayed her words again, Scarlet gasped and clapped her hands together. “Some scholars claim that lands abundant in rock salt were once seas. It seems they were correct!”

I groaned. “Flying land and disappearing seas... I just can’t wrap my head around all this.”

“But it’s too bad,” said Asuna. “All our problems would go *poof* if only that sea was still around now.”

“Well, things don’t always work out so perfectly,” I told her.

“Eh. True.” Asuna shrugged in resignation, bringing our idle postmeeting chat to an end.

“Ugh, it’s no use...”

That night, I sat in my room—not in Another World, but in my private sleeping quarters in the palace—muttering under my breath. Alone in the dark, I racked my brain, but to no avail.

“What troubles you?” In the blink of an eye, a young girl appeared before me. Despite her youthful appearance, she had the air of a wise elder. The blue moonlight gave her an almost majestic and ethereal air.

“Lardon...” The sight captivated me for a moment, before I caught myself and cleared my throat. “I’m talking about what Asuna said earlier.”

“About how she wished there was a sea in this land?”

“Yeah.”

“Did you fail to come up with a solution with magic?”

“I did, actually. Very easily at that. I just...don’t have enough mana to execute it.” Lardon arched a brow, so I elaborated. “I came up with a spell that could change terrain on a large scale, but to cast it I’d probably need a hundred times more mana than my current capacity.”

“A hundred times?” Lardon chuckled. “That is certainly no human feat.”

“Tell me about it...” I also laughed dryly and shrugged. “It makes me realize all over again just how absurd you and those two other dragons are. Changing the terrain just like that...”

“We never intended to,” she pointed out.

“Even crazier, then. You just kicked it away since it came flying at you, right?”

Lardon huffed. The emotions behind that little breath were as inscrutable as ever. Beneath the dim moonlight, her expression was even harder to read.

“Making a sea, hm... Would you like to give it a try?”

“Huh? Will you help?”

“No, I will not. I refrain from interfering with the human world to such an extent. Should things turn for the worse, I may inadvertently restart our scuffle from several centuries ago.”

“Scuffle,” I parroted with a wry smile. The Tri-Draconic War had sent continents flying and erased oceans from existence, but she called it a “scuffle.” How else was I supposed to react?

“Not me,” Lardon said. “You will do it.”

“Me?”

“Indeed. You already have the spell in your head, no?”

“I mean, yeah... I have about five ideas in mind, but I don’t have the mana for any of them. I’d be able to with your help, but you’re not lending a hand, right?”

“You are forgetting something.”

“What is it?”

“This city contains vast amounts of mana.”

“Vast amounts...?” I cocked my head. *What does she mean by that?* Well, *she* was here in the city, but I doubt she meant it that way. I tried to think of what else she could be referring to. “Hm... The manastones?”

“Correct.”

“But I can’t use those.”

“Use them preemptively.”

“Preemptively...?”

“Those stones are coagulations of excess mana, no?”

“So...you’re saying I should use them *before* they turn into manastones?”

“Precisely.”

With that new possibility in mind, I revised the plans in my head. “Hm, I can’t just use the mana as is... I’ll need to convert it. No, if I set a limitation that only I can use my familiars’ mana, then maybe...” The new spell began to take shape amid my mumblings.

Of course, this was uncharted territory for me. Gathering and utilizing the vast amounts of excess mana produced by this magic city was such a huge undertaking that it would take quite some time to consolidate everything. Still, magic was my expertise; as always, inspiration burst forth like a spring, and I’d mostly formulated the spell within an hour’s time.

“All right.” I clenched my fists in success before getting on my feet and heading outside.

The next morning, several kilometers from the city, Asuna and Scarlet stood speechless, their jaws dropped.

Spanning boundlessly before them was *a sea*. The waves pushed and pulled rhythmically against the shore, playing a tranquil tune as the salty sea breeze carried across the water's surface.

"L-Liam..." Asuna sputtered. "What is this...?"

"A sea."

"A sea...?"

"I made it overnight."

"Overnight?! No, wait—you *made* this?!" Asuna gaped.

Beside her, Scarlet's slack expression was soon overcome with emotion. "I would expect no less of you, Master!" she praised me, not even questioning a thing.

This sea I'd made was a great help to our country, but more than that, I also learned that once every month, I could use the immense amounts of mana in this magic city to cast magic at Lardon's level.

Yet another card was added to my deck of magic prowess.

## .145

Asuna scooped up some water and licked it. “It’s salty... It really is a sea...” she marveled. “Did you also make this salt water with your magic?”

“No, I brought it over from a real sea.”

“Huh... Oh, but if you brought it over and made it artificially, then won’t it dry up eventually?” she pointed out, and rightfully so.

However, Scarlet shook her head, not an ounce of doubt in her eyes. “Master would never make such a paltry mistake. He must have put in measures to avoid that.”

Asuna turned to me. “Did you, Liam?”

I nodded. “Yeah. You know my item box, right? Well, I used a new version of it to keep that sea connected to this one.”

“They’re connected?”

“Yep.”

Asuna hummed. “So as we use up the salt water here, it’ll keep getting replenished.”

“That’s how it is.”

“Oh, but... What if someone infiltrates us through that connection?” she asked next.

“I’ve got that covered too. Living things can’t enter my item box, remember? Well, this channel works the same way.”

“Wow...” Asuna gave a low whistle. “It’s perfect.”

“Yeah. Even if someone tries sabotaging us with poison, well, this side and that side are both entire seas.” Though ours here was more inland. “Why would anyone ever try poisoning an entire *sea*?”

“As expected of you, Master!” Scarlet gushed. “The more I hear about it, the

more perfect it sounds!"



However, in contrast to Scarlet's enthusiastic praise, Asuna simply stared at the sea with pursed lips.

"What's wrong?" I asked her. "Anything else bothering you?"

"Well, now that we have a sea here, aren't there other ways we can make use of it?"

"Other ways? Like what?" I cocked my head. Although I'd filled in whatever gaps I could see, if Asuna—with her keen eye for detail—noticed something that I failed to, then I ought to hear her out and make whatever adjustments necessary.

However, her answer wasn't quite what I was expecting.

"Like swimming."

I blinked. "Huh?"

"We've got ourselves a perfectly good sea," she said. "And the weather's nice too. How 'bout we bring everyone for a swim?"

"Uh... S-Swim?" I stuttered, still caught off guard by her answer.

Scarlet frowned and stepped in. "Asuna, this is the sacred sea that Master spent an entire night making, so you—"

"C'mere," Asuna interrupted, tugging Scarlet away and whispering something in her ear. Whatever she said cleanly wiped the grimace off Scarlet's face and replaced it with an unmistakable flush on her cheeks. "Well?"

"Y-Yes... I suppose it won't do any harm."

"Uh?" I nearly doubted my ears. *Did Scarlet just agree with this whole swimming idea?*

While I was still reeling from disbelief, Scarlet came back and suddenly knelt on the ground. "Master, please grant us permission to swim in this sea."

"W-Well, I don't mind..." They didn't need my permission just for that.

"All right! I'll call everyone over!" Asuna ran off, swift as the wind.

*Wait, what on earth just happened?*

What was once a barren shoreline had transformed into a vibrant beachfront teeming with bare skin. To the right side were the elves while to the left were the wolfmen, and they occupied the place as far as the eye could see. Throngs of female humanoid monsters had gathered on this sandy beach—and in a wide array of swimsuits, no less.

I gaped at the baffling scene. “What is this...?”

“Do you not like swimsuits, Liam?”

“Hm? Ms. Jodie— Whoa!” I turned around and sucked in a breath. Before me was Jodie, a black bikini supporting her swaying breasts. It felt like the dazzling sea had gotten even brighter right before my eyes.

Jodie tittered. “Oh my, it seems you can’t take your eyes off. I’m glad you like it so much.”

“Ah! S-Sorry!” Flustered, I whipped my head away from her revealing swimsuit, only for my sight to be filled with another swimsuit—Reina’s.

“Master, what do you think of mine?” Hers had lots of frills, a design that was an unbelievable mix of pure and sexy all at once.

My gaze wandered past her and to several elves wearing swimsuits leaning closer to the “pure” variety. Still, their bouncing waves of breasts were so overwhelming, I found myself pressing down on my nose. “I-It’s nice... Really nice,” I managed.

“Really?! Thank you so much, Master!” Reina preened.

“Masteeeer!” This time, Chris showed up. Her cheery voice reached my ears right as I felt an impact on my side and got tackled down.

“Whoa!” I yelped as I hit the ground, straddled between a pair of legs. “Owww... Huh?!” I saw stars for a second, but when my vision returned, I was convinced they were playing tricks on me.

“Well? Is my swimsuit cool too?” Her swimsuit was... It was practically just a string—an incredibly revealing swimsuit that just barely covered up the important parts.

“Wh-Why did you choose that...?”

“This was the easiest to move in.”

“Your standards are way off!” I snapped.

After that, Asuna, Scarlet, Flora, and everyone else appeared in their own swimsuits, seeking my opinion and grinning when I complimented them. It seemed they'd only worn them to show me. Some were sexy, some were cute, and others were just outright risqué. All the same, the swimsuits fitted each and every one of them very well. I struggled on where to lay my gaze, but honestly...

*“You are actually enjoying it, no?”*

I gulped. “N-No comment.”

Lardon could tell that I was practicing much self-restraint through it all.

## .146

I was in my room honing my mana efficiency when Chris came for a visit. She was one of the top fighters of our country alongside Gai, so I thought she had another battle-hungry idea in store for me. What she actually brought up caught me off guard.

“Fish?” I repeated.

“Uh-huh. Seas have lots of fishes, don’t they?”

“Well, not ours—”

*“It would be best for you to add some,” Lardon suddenly suggested. “Just as an abandoned house quickly crumbles, a lifeless sea ‘rots.’”*

*I see... That makes sense.* Although I had very limited knowledge on aquatic life, what I knew about mountains and forests told me that a lack of wildlife certainly wasn’t good. Allowing marine life through the seawater gate wouldn’t be a big change, so I easily came up with two possible ways. *I’ll get right to it later.*

In any case, I directed my attention back to Chris. “I guess seas *are* filled with fishes, yes.”

“More than rivers?”

“More than rivers,” I affirmed. “There are a lot more, and the bigger ones live there too.”

“I knew it! I wanna catch those!”

“Oh...” I could see where this was going now. The new hunting grounds must have gotten her wolfman blood boiling. “All right. Catch all you want.”

“Thank you, Master!” Chris cheered. I thought she’d dash right out the door in excitement, but she remained in place, staring at me.

“What is it? Anything else?”

“How do you catch fish?”

“You don’t know?” I blinked, then nearly slapped myself on the head for asking such an obvious question. “Right... I guess you wouldn’t.” I chuckled. Wolfmen—or werewolves, as they were before they evolved—were wolveen monsters that lived on land. They might have caught small fish at shallow streams like bears do, but the sea was an entirely different story.

I stared thoughtfully at her.

“What is it, Master? What’s with the staring?”

“Oh, nothing... I’m just intrigued that you’re interested in fishing.”

Chris cocked her head in confusion.

*“It must be due to their evolution,” Lardon supplied. “Their views have expanded, and so have their possibilities.”*

I nodded in agreement.

“Master?”

“Oh, my bad. You asked how to catch fish, right?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Let’s see...” I furrowed my brows. “The most orthodox method would be using a net.”

“A net?”

“Yep. Toss a net into the sea and haul the fish up.”

“A net... Okay! Got it!” Chris nodded and burst out of the room.

“Will she be okay...?” I just couldn’t help but worry.

After parting with Chris, I came by the seaside and made adjustments to the spell so that the “life” needed in the sea—fish, seaweed, and whatnot—could pass through. Just as I was sure that fishes were starting to swim in, a boat filled with wolfmen approached from offshore.

Chris hopped off and came running to me. “We couldn’t catch any fish,

Master!" The others followed behind her as they lugged their net with dampened spirits.

"Oh. Well, I just made the adjustments, so maybe the fish are still—"

"Look!" Chris cut in. "It's all just pieces of wood and trash!" Her fellow wolfmen held their net up—filled with all sorts of junk, as Chris had said. These must have flowed in when inorganic substances were still permitted to pass through the seawater gate. Once again, I realized the importance of Lardon's advice.

"Hm..." Something else occurred to me as I looked down at the net. "Ah, right. This happens."

Fish weren't the only things that got caught on nets. I'd heard from fishermen that they would catch other things as frequently as they caught fish, and that segregating them after pulling the net out was pretty tough work.

I held my chin. "What if..."

"Master?"

"Sorry. Hang on a sec." I put Chris on hold as I considered my options.

Our sea hardly had any fish in it yet, but more should be coming in from now on. However, no amount of fish would stop trash from catching on our nets; it was simply the inherent weakness of using one. *If I could just remedy that...*

A solution came to me instantly.

*"That was much faster than usual,"* Lardon said, impressed.

"Well, I was halfway there already. That's why it was quick." I could hear Lardon's interest, so I moved things along. "Chris!"

"Hm? Yeah?"

"Fetch me some high mithril silver. I'll weave some magic into them for you to load into the boat."

"Okay! Coco, Sibyl! Come with me." Chris took two wolfmen with her and ran off like the wind.

About ten minutes later, the goods I'd ordered arrived from the city. I worked

on the pieces of high mithril silver on the spot and turned them into Ancient Memoria, then I infused it with the magic I'd invented just moments ago, one which manifested a net made of magic light. "Yep. Looks good."

"A magic net? What does it do, Master?" asked Chris.

"Try putting trash in here."

"Okay..." Chris nodded and tossed some trash in. The piece of wood phased through the net and plopped right down on the sand. "Oh! It slipped through."

"Now try touching it."

She reached out. "My hand... It's not going through!"

"And there you have it. Living things can't pass through this net, while nonliving things can. With this, you can catch all fish and no trash, right?"

"Oh, wow! I knew I could count on you, Master!" Chris cheered. The other wolfmen followed after her.

"Thank you, Master!"

"We love you!"

I nodded. "Go on. Give it another try." Plenty of fish should have crossed through by now.

"Okay!" Chris nodded vigorously and took her pack out to sea again.

*"I see. So you used your old idea for transporting seawater on this, hm?"*

"Exactly."

*"Your mind always works quickly when it comes to magic."*

Lardon rewarded me with mirthful praise as I watched Chris and the others sail out again.

I stood on the palace's terrace, gazing upon the city of Liam-Lardon as night descended on it. Spanning out before me was a sight of peace and prosperity, built upon mana and magic, where each face illuminated by the streetlights was bright and cheerful. More lights flickered in the distance—probably some monsters doing something by the sea.

It was a magnificent sight I could watch all day long, but my quiet contemplation was interrupted by the soft sound of boots against the floor. A young girl in frilly clothes who exuded the air of an elder came up beside me, nonchalantly offering me a pack of instant noodles.

“Care for some?” Lardon asked. She was already nibbling on one herself, from a pack she held on her other hand.

After I’d left the instant noodles endeavor to Bruno, one of the new developments was a simple salty variety that could be eaten without placing it in hot water. It had received some really good reviews and was thus launched as a product.

What Lardon just offered me was a pack of that new variety. I accepted it, but I didn’t partake. My gaze remained far off.

“Your mind is not here,” she noted. “What are you thinking of?”

“My mana...” I mumbled. “I’m wondering how I can increase my mana.”

Lardon hummed. “This seems a bit different than usual.”

I nodded quietly. Thinking about magic was nothing new for me. I’d adored it even in my previous life, before I took over Liam’s body, and more than half the time I was awake was spent pondering how to learn, improve, and make new magic. It was as natural to me as breathing.

My concerns were just a little different this time. “Thanks to you, I’m now able to cast incredibly large-scale spells once a month within this city, right?”

Lardon chuckled. “Thanks to me, hm?”

“Am I wrong?”

“Not at all. I was just thinking it is very like you to be so modest.”

I cocked my head, a bit lost, but she didn’t look like she was going to elaborate. No amount of thinking would give me an answer here, so I decided to brush it off.

“So?” she urged. “What about it?”

“Well, that’s basically just me borrowing mana to cast magic, right?”

“Yes.”

“But I want to increase my own mana, not just borrow from others. Of course, I’ll keep working on my mana efficiency, but there are a ton of things I need more mana to get done. No matter how efficiently I use a well, it’ll never match up to a sea.” I could almost hear the waves from our newly made waters.

“I see...” Lardon chuckled. “That is very like you.”

“If only there was something...”

Lardon looked pensive for a moment. “There is.” She took a breath, stepped forward, and faced me. “Hold out your hand.”

“Like this?” I did as I was told, and Lardon followed. Our hands touched—hers felt small and soft.

The next moment, a light shock ran through my hand. “Hngh?” It wasn’t a spell—just pure mana, running through my palm. I knew Lardon wouldn’t harm me, so I took the mana in freely and focused on the sensation instead. What did it feel like? How was it moving? To better understand, I couldn’t inhibit it.

“As always, you pick things up quickly when it comes to magic...”

I heard Lardon chuckle, but her words eluded me as I sank further into focus. At times like these, a single experience was worlds more valuable than a hundred words. The mana traversed my body and passed down to my feet.

“Do you understand?” Lardon asked.

“Yeah. It’s flowing.”

“Then...” She gently jumped back to five meters away and aimed her hand at me. A mana arrow—a power missile—launched from her palm and closed in on me.

I flinched. *Should I dodge? Parry? Or counter with another attack?* My options flitted through my mind, but as always, my sharp instincts with magic came through. I recalled what Lardon was doing right before, and with that in mind, I chose the fourth option: to take it in.

I held my hand out and caught the power missile. The lump of pure mana passed through my hand, into my body, to my feet, and into the ground. “Oh...”

“Digesting mana,” Lardon said. “That is, allowing the mana to flow through you and releasing it—it is something between a spell and a simple technique. It has no effect on phenomena brought about by magic, but for magic missiles, power missiles, and other such attacks of pure mana, it could be far more effective than putting up a shield.”

“Huh, I see... The earth *is* a vessel of infinite capacity.”

Lardon chuckled. “You picked up on that as well?”

“I wouldn’t have been able to do this if I hadn’t.” I smiled wryly.

The point of this technique that Lardon taught me was letting mana flow to the earth. I felt it earlier, how the earth was akin to a huge sponge, and the power missile a mere teaspoon of water. Even if I used a month’s worth of mana for a single power missile, the earth could probably take it—that was just how huge its capacity was.

*If only I could also take on as much mana as the earth...*

Suddenly, I froze, struck by a flash of inspiration. Before the sand could slip between my fingers, I desperately grabbed it and gave it shape.

At first, I thought about taking the mana attack then storing it inside me, but that would just be me storing other people’s mana—not much different from what I could already currently do once a month. What I wanted now, my goal, was not that. It was to increase *my* mana.

Lardon returned to my side and to her instant noodle snack. It was crisp and

crunchy, if her chewing was anything to go by. Apparently, those who liked it also said it was quick to eat and...filled you with energy?

*Wait.* I looked at Lardon, but she ignored me and just kept chewing on her snack—her snack that filled her with energy and sustained her body. *Eating...?* *Maybe... No, but...*

“This is quite delicious,” Lardon remarked. “If I must point out one flaw, it is rather bad for digestion. Indeed, there is nothing quite as good as meat for me.”

*Bad for digestion...?* The perfectly timed comment swiftly steered my thought process in a new direction. “Reina...” I mumbled. “Reina, can you hear me?”

“Yes, Master. Is something the matter?”

“I need your help for a bit. Are you free now?”

“Of course!”

With Reina’s consent, I summoned her with magic. She appeared before me in a neat and cute set of pajamas. “Oh, my bad. Were you about to sleep?”

“It’s okay! More importantly, what do you need me for?”

“You can just stand right there. You might get a little tired though.”

“Understood.” Reina nodded and obediently stood in place.

Then, I reached out to her chest, placing my hand between her breasts.

“Eek!” Reina’s face flushed and her legs shook like a newborn deer.



In a mere ten seconds, I absorbed my familiar's unused mana and *digested* it within me, visualizing and simulating how I digested food. "Good." I clenched my fist triumphantly.

Now somewhat weary, Reina commendably managed to stay on her feet and looked at me in confusion. "Wh-What was that...?"

"My mana just increased."

"Huh?"

"I absorbed your mana and made it mine. It's now raised my mana capacity —*permanently*."

"I-Is that possible?!" Reina gaped. "Wow. That's amazing, Master!" For some reason, that was enough to cheer her right up.

Lardon chuckled. "It seems this is the best path forward for you after all," she mumbled to herself.

"So that *was* a hint. I knew it." I chuckled. "Does that mean this spell already exists?"

"Indeed, though humans have long lost any knowledge of it."

"I see... By the way, what do you mean, the best path?"

"It simply made me more certain," she explained, grinning. "This would be unimaginable for anyone else...but for *you*, it is far more effective to guide you to discovering and inventing magic rather than simply handing you a grimoire."

Lardon looked terribly pleased.

## .148

At noon the next day, I sat in my room with my arms folded and groaned.

“What is it this time?” As usual, since we were alone, Lardon suddenly appeared in her human form before me.

“Well, this morning, I talked with Chris and absorbed her mana, right?”

“Yes. The little whelp was quite happy.”

“Don’t call her a whelp...” I chuckled dryly.

Lardon shrugged. “So? What about it?”

“Well, it’s really hard to digest...”

“Is it now?”

“Yeah... Wait, you don’t know?” I tilted my head. I did develop this spell, but Lardon had essentially guided me to it, so I thought she’d be expecting this already. Since it seemed we weren’t exactly on the same page here, I decided to explain from the top. “With this spell, I absorb mana and make it my own—not to store then use later, but in a way that actually raises my maximum mana capacity.”

“Indeed.”

“But that absorption—let’s just call it ‘digestion’—is really hard to do. Well, I guess humans were never meant to ‘digest’ mana to begin with...”

Lardon hummed. “Aha. I see now. So humans cannot digest mana.” She looked like she’d genuinely just realized that—which brought about a realization of my own.

“Did you make this spell?”

“Indeed. I’m impressed you could tell. As always, you are sharp when it comes to magic.”

“Thanks. Anyway, that’s why... Huh.”

“What?”

“Humans can’t digest mana... That’s it!” The reason we were on different pages was because dragons and humans digested different things—a difference that now guided me to the solution I needed.

I immediately left my room and went to an untouched forest on the city outskirts. I wandered around for a while, just until I ran into a bear.

“Lucky me!” I thanked my good fortune and defeated the bear with a power missile. It collapsed with a *thud*, breathing its last as it ceased moving.

“*What do you need the bear for?*” asked Lardon.

“Well, any big animal would’ve done the trick.”

“*I see. So? What will you do?*”

“Watch.” I approached the dead bear and crouched down. Quietly placing my hand on its thick forelimb, I cast a spell and watched as the bear’s limb gradually shriveled up. In no time at all, the thick arm was reduced to mere hide and bones. “Good.”

“*Did you turn it into mana?*”

“Yeah. Unlike mana, meat is easy to digest.”

“*Hm. I see.*”

My breakthrough this time around stemmed from a simple fact. It was hard to digest mana because humans were creatures that couldn’t feed on mana to begin with. So, I just thought to absorb something we *were* meant to digest—meat. The result was a success... “Well, it *is* a success, but...”

Lardon chuckled. “*Terribly inefficient, isn’t it?*”

“Yeah... It gets me less than a tenth compared to absorbing mana.”

“*I thought so.*”

“Then what about this?” I touched the bear’s other arm and absorbed it. Nothing changed outwardly, but a moment later, the thick arm caved into itself.

“*You tried the bone?*”

“Yeah.”

“*And the efficiency?*”

“Not much different from the meat.” I smiled wryly. Instead of the meat, I tried “eating” the bone. I was able to digest it too, but the efficiency was just as bad as absorbing the meat. “Well, I guess this is to be expected.”

I fell into thought. From how things were looking, I doubted there’d be much difference even if I tried other foods that humans could digest. *Oh, well. Not everything in the world goes so well.*

Just as I was wrapping up my thoughts, Lardon’s hum caught my attention. “What is it?” I asked.

“*Do you not feel guilt?*”

“Guilt?”

“*About how you created a spell that can suck flesh and blood for mana.*”

I looked down at the bear’s corpse. “Oh, that? Well, it’s not much different from just eating them anyway.”

“*But you can use that on humans too.*”

“Ah, so that’s what you meant.” I finally understood what she was getting at. “Well then, I just have to not use it on humans. Besides, it’s terribly inefficient, so there’s no need for me to use it at all. Magic is just a tool. There’s no problem as long as I use it properly.”

“Hm...”

“Also, this might help in the future.”

“*In the future?*”

“Right. Don’t you remember? I thought of this spell from that mana-absorbing spell.”

“*Indeed.*”

“Going further back, I made that spell while utilizing Familia. So in that same way, *this* spell might lead me to something else in the future.”

“Ha ha...” Quiet laughter slowly and mirthfully bubbled up from Lardon. “Ha ha... Ha ha ha! Good. Very good.”

“I-Is it...?”

“Yes. *It is very good that you can think that far. You never disappoint,*” she said. Then, she manifested before me as a young girl. “As a reward, I will teach you something special this spell can lead you to.”

“Something special?” I blinked for a moment, then the excitement welled up within me. *Magic that Lardon would call special... Just what could it be?* I gulped, feeling restless on my feet.

## .149

“I shall teach you using, shall we say, a ‘grimoire.’”

“A grimoire?” I blinked, caught off guard. “But why?”

This was completely different from what Lardon usually did. She herself said recently that it was faster to guide me toward crafting the spell myself, especially since I was good at it. She seemed really fond of this method too, so there shouldn’t be any need for a grimoire at this point.

*Could it be...? “Oh!”*

Lardon chuckled. “You realized so quickly. As astute in magic as always, I see.”

“This must be a really crazy spell...”

“Indeed. You must learn it without an inch of deviation. After all, this is an incredibly intricate spell that I painstakingly crafted over decades.”

“I knew it...”

“And one more thing,” she added, bringing me to attention. “The grimoires you have used until now have never posed any penalty upon failure. This one is different.”

I tilted my head. “How so?”

“If you fail...you will die.”

I drew a sharp breath. From her tone, that was neither a hyperbole nor a threat—I might really die if I fail to learn it. *A spell so great it calls for such a risk...* I looked down and gulped.

Lardon chuckled. “You look like an excited little child.”

Anyone else would’ve quipped, “*That’s because he is.*” Unfortunately, between the both of us, Lardon already knew what was up, while I was too caught up in the moment to care.

“Now then,” she continued. “Have you steeled yourself?”

“Yeah. What should I do?”

“I will cast the spell. Afterward, you must devour my flesh and mana.”

“*Yours?*” By “devour,” she was referring to my latest spells, Material Taker and Mana Taker, the ones she had said could lead me to this new spell. “But why?”

“You must sense the mana I use and the changes it will cause to my flesh. I never planned to teach this to anyone, so we are left with this method.”

“Ah... So you didn’t even make a grimoire for it.”

“Correct. So now, I shall serve as the grimoire myself.”

“But still... Devouring you...?” I hesitated, finding it a bit questionable in more ways than one—or specifically, just two: Lardon was someone important to me, and she also looked like a little girl even younger than me. I couldn’t help but wince at the thought of “devouring” her.

“You fool. What are you faltering for? Do you not want to learn this spell?”

“Of course I do...”

“With such a naive mindset, you will surely lose your life.” Despite the ominous threat coming out her mouth, her lips twisted into a smirk. “A dragon’s flesh is difficult to digest, you know?”

Her teasing lifted a weight off my shoulders. *That’s right. Lardon’s a dragon.* She wasn’t a young girl like she looked, nor was she even human—hers was an extraordinary existence, exalted as a divine dragon. I couldn’t be so rude as to hesitate now, especially after she went out of her way to offer this to me.

I set my lips and nodded. “Okay.”

“I see you’ve found your resolve.”

“Yeah. I’m ready whenever.”

Lardon mutely crouched down and placed her hand on the bear’s carcass. She lopped off its paw with a swift chop, then took it in her hand as she stood back up. *What’s she gonna do with that?* I stared intently at her every move, not missing a single thing.

Then, Lardon abruptly tossed the paw aside. I cocked my head. *What is she...?*

“Now.”

“Huh?”

“Devour my mana.”

“Hold on, did you do something already? I didn’t see anything. I didn’t even feel the mana or—”

“It’s fine. Just do it already.”

“O-Okay.” I reluctantly grabbed her arm, the same one she used to sever and hold the paw. Maybe that whole show had been just to ease me into the process.

*Ba-dump!* The moment I cast Mana Taker, a huge wave of mana surged into me. My heart thumped so loudly as if it wanted to leap out my ribs, and the veins all over my body, down to the tips of my fingers, felt like they were going to burst. I was a balloon, swelling with air and ready to pop at any moment.

“Next, my flesh.”

“O-Okay...” I gritted my teeth and cast the next spell, Material Taker, and a different kind of pain instantly overwhelmed my body. Earlier, I’d felt like I was going to swell and burst, but now waves of scorching heat and biting cold were clashing within me. This was torture like nothing I’d ever experienced before, but—

“Focus! You must not...”

—letting go was not an option. I dug my fingers deeper.

“Hah. Well, well...”

With Lardon going this far to help, I couldn’t afford to waste it. I turned my mind away from the agonizing onslaught and searched for traces of magic from both the mana and flesh I absorbed. My eyes turned bloodshot. I couldn’t let even a single thing, not even the slightest sensation, slip through my fingers. I gripped Lardon’s slender arm like a vise in my desperation.

Time passed like a dream, vivid yet distant. I felt like I’d grasped something,

but also not. Still, proving that my efforts were not in vain was a vague sense of understanding, a picture that I was gradually putting together. Eventually...

“I see...”

“Did you succeed?”

“Yeah... Probably.”

“In just forty hours? That was quick.”

My jaw dropped. “It’s already been that long?” I wondered if this was the longest I’d ever taken to grasp and understand a spell.

“Indeed.”

“Now then, show me,” Lardon urged me. “Knowing you, you must have already tried casting it in the process of grasping the sensation, no?”

“Yeah... Then I’ll give it a go.” By my feet, the bear’s paw had shriveled up in the forty hours that felt like mere minutes in my mind. I crouched down and set fire to it with Fireball, burning it until nothing but ashes were left. Then, I cast the spell: “Time Shift!”

The next moment, the ashes reverted itself into a severed, decomposing paw. Time had been rewound by three seconds.

“What are you waiting for?” Lardon asked.

“Yes!” I clenched my fists. Her question was enough for me to know that my time-rewinding spell totally succeeded.

## .150

Lardon, clever as ever, caught on quickly.

“It seems you’ve succeeded,” she noted. While she didn’t witness me cast the spell, she knew I had simply from my reaction.

“Yeah. I went back three seconds.”

“I see. Then try it once more.”

“Okay.” I nodded and incinerated the bear’s paw with another fireball. Then, I eagerly cast Time Shift again—and wilted. The paw remained a pile of ashes. It didn’t work. “What the...? What’s going on? I cast it properly just a moment ago.”

“Hm. An understandable outcome,” said Lardon.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“The amount of time that can be rewound is directly proportional to the mana you’ve consumed.”

“Directly proportional...?” I parroted blankly.

“I mean that you can only rewind three seconds with your mana as it is now, and those seconds have cost you most of your mana.”

“I see...”

I held out my hand and summoned my item box—to my relief, I still had enough mana for this and a fireball—and reached in for some lekukro crystals. Whenever I found some spare time, I’d make and stock up on these mana-recovering crystals in bulk. Now, I used a whole bunch of them to replenish my mana all at once.

With the bear’s paw in cinders, I tore its ear off and ignited that instead. Finally, I cast Time Shift again, and this time, it worked. “I get it...”

“Yes. That is how it works,” Lardon said. Once again, she deduced my success

with nothing more than my reaction.

“So if I want to rewind more time, I’ll need to increase my mana first, right?”

“Correct. But it is also not that simple.”

“What do you mean?”

“The farther back you rewind, the more rapidly the mana cost grows.”

“Rapidly... *How* rapidly, though?”

“You can now use much larger-scale magic once a month, yes?”

“Oh... By using the city’s accumulated mana, you mean?”

“Indeed.” Lardon nodded. “With that mana, you will be able to rewind approximately ten seconds.”

“What?!” My jaw dropped. The city’s collective mana I could use once a month to cast what I called cityspace magic was *immense*. My mana paled in comparison—yet there was only an eight-second difference? “That’s just... Wow.”

“Such is the nature of space-time magic. It is powerful but not omnipotent.”

“Right... Even if I increase my mana, I’d say my limit’s around five seconds.”

“That sounds about right, for a human.”

“Well, it’s not like this is the sort of thing I’d use just every other day. Maybe if someone’s suddenly killed right before my eyes? Then three seconds would suffice.”

“Indeed.”

Thinking of it that way, I didn’t especially feel the need to rush my mana training just to earn a few more seconds. It was probably better to hone my reflexes or reaction time or whatever else would be useful in making the most out of those three seconds I did have. “Thanks for teaching me this, Lardon.”

“Not at all. If anything, I must certainly praise you. In truth, I figured your odds of learning this spell was fifty-fifty.”

“Really?”

“Indeed. I am quite pleased you succeeded.” True to her words, Lardon grinned brightly, like a teacher looking at her promising pupil. I felt a bit pleased myself. “Now then, shall we head back?”

“Sure.” I nodded, but before she could undo her human form, I froze and blinked. “Wait...”

“Hm? What is it?”

I fell silent. Something just flitted past my mind—an epiphany that I usually get when making magic—and I was desperately trying to claw it back. It was an idea far more difficult than anything I’d ever devised.

“Wait, you...” Lardon narrowed her eyes. “What are you thinking?”

She seemed shaken, but I paid her no mind and kept chasing after that thought, like catching water in my hands—and finally, everything clicked into place. “Yes!” I summoned my item box again and fully replenished my mana with some lekukro crystals. “And now...”

“No, you couldn’t possibly be...” Lardon’s gaze hardened. “That is impossible. It was too complex that even I—”

“Time Stop.”

With my mana at full capacity, I cast my new spell—and instantly, the world *froze*. The swaying grass, the flying birds, the lurking beasts, the passing breeze, and even the pouring sunlight—all of it came to a standstill. Of course, Lardon wasn’t exempt; her expression remained stiff, mouth open, still trying to dissuade me.

Time Stop, derived from Time Shift, was a spell that stopped the world’s time.

“Whoops. I’m out of time.” With my mana, I could probably only use this for three seconds at most, just like Time Shift. I hurriedly circled behind Lardon.



Then, time flowed once more.

“—failed to...huh?” Lardon blinked, stunned by my sudden disappearance. She slowly turned around and found me smiling behind her. “Impossible... Did you succeed?”

“Yep.” I nodded.

Lardon’s expression shifted to pure astonishment. This was a feat that passed in a literal blink of an eye, and for the first time, I had a feeling that I’d surpassed Lardon.

## .151

The next day in the early afternoon, Gai, Chris, and Reina faced me in the palace's courtyard.

"I am ready," said Gai.

"I'm not gonna hold back!" Chris crowed.

"Nor I," added Reina.

All at once, the trio readied their stances. Their mana billowed in the air like a storm, strong enough to send a small child flying. The force further intensified when they equipped their enchanted armor—the original version, crafted with high mithril silver.

Gai and Chris darted forward at the same time, but Chris, blessed by her race's innate speed, charged far ahead and reached me first. The armor over her arms took the form of clawed bracers, scorching red after being endowed with her power. As she closed the distance, she crossed her arms and swung them at me.

I kicked the ground back a few steps to dodge. "Whoa..." The heated claws hadn't so much as touched me, but I could still feel the hairs on my body tingling from the heat wave they'd left right in front of my face.

*Let's fight fire—with ice!* I jumped back and aimed a hand at Chris. "Ice Needle, forty-onefold!"

"This is nothing!" Chris grinned at the raining icicles and swept it all away with her claws. However, the clash between her heated claws and my hail of ice created a burst of steam she took face first. "Ack!" She coughed a few times while shielding herself.

"Such a hopeless boar woman!"

"Ugh... Shut up, meathead!"

Gai, draped in vivid red enchanted armor, came charging through the wall of

steam. In his right hand was a single-edged longsword, its blade comparable in size to the three-meter-tall giant. Despite the heavy-looking weapon, Gai wielded it with ease.

“Absolute Force Shield, forty-one layers!”

I was no match for him physically, so I put up an antiphysical barrier. Each layer could perfectly defend against physical attacks once—Gai’s fervent charge was no exception. The force of his attacks shook the air as he desperately peeled away at the layers. His momentum was so great, he would need no more than five seconds to clear it all away.

“Starmine!” I unleashed my new spell, one I’d crafted in the process of developing automatic magic using manastones.

An explosion rattled Gai’s surroundings—but it wasn’t very impressive in scale. “Hardly an obstacle!” he huffed, and sure enough, he paid the small blast no mind and continued swinging his sword against the barriers. However...

*BOOM!*

That wasn’t the end. The moment Gai smashed his hefty sword against the barrier, an equally hefty blast assaulted him point-blank.

“Urgh! Not yet!” Still unhindered, Gai pressed on. Each time he shattered a barrier, another explosion welcomed him, almost as if his own blows were being reflected. In the end, Gai failed to break through all the barriers and staggered back. “What is this magic...?”

“It’s my new spell that causes explosions using leftover mana in the air.”

“Hah! I do not understand at all!” Gai planted his feet on the ground, steadyng his stance once more. He’d been on the receiving end of a chain of explosions, but he looked nearly unscathed. Was his enchanted armor that robust? Or was it his innate toughness? Perhaps both.

Chris scoffed. “You talked so big but just charged in head first. Who’s the boar here?”

“What are you saying? I made milord use two spells, while you were repelled by just one.”

“Argh! Quality over quantity, damn it!”

“Even then, I still emerge victorious. Milord had to use his absolute defense and a new spell against me.”

“AAAGH!”

It seemed Gai was the victor for this particular argument. Chris’s power swelled, enraged by Gai’s mockery. Not one to lose, the air around Gai seemingly trembled under his immense fighting spirit. No matter how much they bickered, these two rivals always pushed each other to break through their limits.

“I’m going at you for real, Master.”

“I, too, have no intentions of holding back.”

Our country’s top two combatants charged in at full strength. Even I couldn’t escape unscathed with both of them charging right at me. *Well then...*

“Time Stop!” I pulled out the new ace up my sleeve. At the cost of nearly ninety percent of my mana, the world came to a halt. Still, I couldn’t dillydally—it’d last only for three seconds—so I used the opportunity to unleash another magic to maximum effect.

“*Amelia Emilia Claudia.* Release Arrow, a hundred and one shots.”

In every angle around Gai and Chris manifested arrows of light. Suspended in the air, they surrounded the duo completely with not a gap left unfilled. Then, my three seconds were up, and time flowed once more.

“Whoa!”

“Since when...?!”

From their perspective, the light arrows appeared before them in the blink of an eye. Even then, they managed to react. Chris swung her claws and Gai his longsword, but it was too difficult to completely defend against more than fifty arrows at point-blank. Several found their mark.

“Huh? Nothing happened.”

“Was it a misfi— Urgh!”

A few seconds after the impact, their enchanted armor suddenly dispelled.

“Aw, man... Guess we lost.”

“Indeed. We’ve been disarmed. We must admit our loss here.”

Chris and Gai readily accepted the outcome, not just because of how things turned out but probably because I was their opponent. Had they been sparring against one another or fighting an actual enemy, they would’ve hung on more persistently.

*And speaking of persistence...*

“You good, Reina? You were waiting for an opening the whole time...” I turned to Reina, still equipped with her enchanted armor.

She never charged in while Gai and Chris were fighting. Instead, she remained just barely within range, vigilantly waiting for a chance to strike as Gai and Chris pressed me.

“Yes. You showed no such openings, Master. I watched closely for even the slightest chance to assist, but to no avail.” She swiftly undid her enchanted armor as if to wave a white flag.

Gai and Chris charged in with heated vigor, but Reina sent shivers down my spine in a different way. Her strategy was sound; even while fighting Gai and Chris, I remained wary of Reina’s movements in the back, keeping her in check with my gaze and mana. So, she wasn’t wrong to say I showed no opening...but it was frightening to think she could make such a judgment and hold on so patiently until the end.

Just like the duo, Reina also evolved through her contract with me. Turning from a pixie to an elf, she’d become significantly stronger than an ordinary monster. Despite that, she could so readily take a step back. That made her more terrifying than Gai and Chris.

“More importantly, Master, what was that thing you did in the end?” Chris asked.

“Indeed, I would like to know as well. I thought we finally cornered you, yet it turned out we were cornered instead—almost as if I’d climbed some stairs only

to find myself back at the bottom!"

"Hmmm..." *Should I tell them?* I was a bit reluctant. "I wouldn't mind telling *Reina*..."

"Goodness!"

"What?! But why not us, Master?"

"Well, I mean..." My lips twisted awkwardly. "You two would start bragging about it once you know, right?"

"Urgh!" Gai's face contorted as if I'd hit the bull's-eye.

Meanwhile, Chris gaped in shock. "Can't we?!"

"Sorry, but I'd rather you not."

Gai and Chris pouted in discontent, but I couldn't tell them or anyone about Time Stop—this was Lardon's advice for me, bordering on a strict order. Space-time magic could cause a stir and draw in unnecessary enemies among the humans if its existence was discovered. Well, she was actually saying this about Time Shift, but it applied to Time Stop too.

"Awww..."

"Th-This cannot be..."

As Chris and Gai whined, Reina simply smiled. "I understand."

"Oh?" I gave her a surprised look. "You do?"

"I am certain you've invented yet another spell, Master—one so spectacular, no one could possibly mimic it. Therefore, it is beneficial to keep it a secret in order to use it as a trump card."

With Reina's startlingly precise deduction, Chris and Gai instantly lit up, eyes sparkling.

"Ohhh! As expected of Master!"

"Indeed! Astounding as always!"

I was glad they were finally content, but in my eyes, Reina was far more impressive.

## .152

Monsters loved parties. The ones I knew would jump at every chance to hold one, so the plaza in front of the palace would become the venue for such lively feasts at least twice or thrice a month.

Today in Magic City Liam, yet another party was being held under the vibrant night sky. Monsters gathered, frolicking and chattering as always. Such a scene had already become a staple around here, but the way they enjoyed their drinks was still quite peculiar.

“Cheers to our bright city nights!”

“Cheers!”

“Cheers to our delicious alcohol!”

“Cheers!”

“Cheers to the crescent moon in the sky!”

“Cheers!”

Whenever someone raised their glass and cheered to whatever came to mind, the rest would respond in kind and empty their mugs. With no limit set on what they could cheer to, the drinks naturally cleared out at breakneck speed. At some point, they'd labeled this little drinking game “Extreme Cheering.”

Of course, that was all well and good. I wasn't one to butt in if they were all enjoying themselves, nor was there any problem with a silly little drinking game. But...

“Cheers to Lord Liam's magic!”

“Cheers!”

*Aaand there they go again.*

“Cheers to Lord Liam's eyes!”

“Cheers!”

“Cheers to Lord Liam’s pinky finger!”

“Cheers!”

The moment my name came up, the game instantly changed to “A Hundred and One Ways to Praise Lord Liam.” This happened *every single time*. At first, they cheered to my magic, mana, or this magic city, but as the Extreme Cheering went on, the things they cheered for got more and more absurd.

“Cheers to the air Lord Liam breathes!”

“CHEERS!!!”

With each drink came a cheer to the most nonsensical things about me. As I lamented this ridiculous development, I heard Lardon chuckle in my mind.

*“They are all rather fond of you, hm?”*

“I’m not sure I feel flattered, though...”

*“Why not? Silly as they sound, their cheers come from the heart.”*

“Well, sure, but it’s still embarrassing...”

*“In fact, I believe you must rejoice.”*

“What? Why?”

*“A man can conquer the entire world so long as he has ten subordinates willing to throw their lives for you.”*

“The entire world...?” I chuckled dryly. She was blowing things way out of proportion.

*“I am certain you have more than ten among those cheering now.”*

“Well... Do I?” I couldn’t agree. It’d be arrogant of me, nor did I like the thought of them throwing their lives away for me. So all I could do was brush it off with a wry smile.

Praises for me filled the air as the Extreme Cheering continued on. I sat quietly in place, enjoying the lively ambience—when suddenly, I snapped my eyes wide open and jumped to my feet. I stared intently at the distant night sky.

*“So you sensed it.”*

“Yeah... What in the world is that mana?” I gulped down my brewing anxiety. A huge cluster of mana was approaching us from a distance at unbelievable speed. It wasn’t a spell, no—it was some terribly powerful being.

Before I could even react, that cluster of mana flew in and landed right in the middle of the plaza, kicking up a cloud of dust just big enough to conceal one person.

“Wh-What?!”

“Something just came flying in!”

“Is it an enemy?!”

The monsters’ drinking game came to an end as they stood on high alert. The stronger ones tensed, readying their stances and bracing for combat any second. Soon, the dust cleared up.

“Huh?”

Murmurs rose from the crowd of monsters like a wave. Within the dissipating cloud of dust stood a peppy-looking young girl.

“Who’re you?” asked a nearby giant.

The girl cast the giant a glance but soon looked away in disinterest, going on to sweep her gaze across the entire crowd surrounding her. Her eyes were impassive, as if merely parsing goods in a store.

The giant gritted his teeth and took a step forward. “Why, you! Didn’t you hear what I—”

“Stop!” I yelled.

Instantly, the monsters’ gazes gathered onto me—as did the girl’s. “Oh! There you are.” Her figure blurred and reappeared right before me.

I reeled back. “Whoa! So fast!”

“It’s you,” she said. “You’re Lardon’s little pet.”

I arched my brow. “You know Lardon?”

“Of course. She’s my nemesis-cum-friend, my lifelong rival.”

“Really?” I asked inwardly.

Lardon sighed. “*Unfortunately so,*” she begrudgingly admitted.

It was rare for Lardon to show such an evident reaction to someone. A *nemesis and a lifelong rival...* “The Tri-Draconic War,” I muttered.

A short distance away, I heard Scarlet draw in a sharp breath.

Meanwhile, an innocent smile bloomed on the girl’s face. “Yeah, I’ve heard you humans call it that.” She shrugged. “I’m Dyphon, one of the dragons of old.”

“Dyphon...” Her name was subtly similar to Lardon’s... No, that didn’t matter now. This immense mana leaking from her body was undeniably on par with Lardon’s. Just that was enough to lend credibility to her claim. I pursed my lips and braced myself.

“You are being terribly rude to milord.”

“Back off, pip-squeak.”

Just then, Gai and Chris, irked at the girl’s seemingly condescending attitude, sprang forward like flashes of light and charged at Dyphon.

“Hmph. The pet’s pets are barking so loud.” Dyphon breezily swung her right arm—and lopped their heads off!

I gasped. “Time Shift!” I instantaneously used up all my mana to cast the spell. Time rewinded by three seconds, back to when Gai and Chris were just about to leap out. “Don’t move, you two!” I screamed desperately.

Gai and Chris flinched, feet rooted on the spot, their deaths undone and avoided. I sighed in relief.

“You’re pretty smart. Those two’d be dead by now had they come for me,” Dyphon said indifferently.



Most people only said such things as a threat, but Dyphon was serious. I definitely saw them die.

Just then, Dyphon frowned. “Hm?” She leaned in closer, peeking right up at my face. “Hmmm?”

“Wh-What is it?”

“Your mana just dropped out of nowhere... Oh! Have you learned Lardon’s Time Shift?”

I flinched. She was right on the mark.

“Mm-hmm. I see, I see. So those two did die, huh?”

I kept mum, lost for words now that Time Shift had been exposed.

Indifferent to my swirling panic, Dyphon hummed with a hint of amusement. “Wow. So a human learned that spell. Now that’s a first. I guess your mana’s the strongest among the humans of this era?”

“M-More importantly—”

“Hey,” she said, completely cutting off my attempt to change the topic and effectively grabbing the initiative in this conversation. “What’s your name?”

I gulped. “Liam Hamilton.”

“Liam... Okay, Liam. How ‘bout you ditch Lardon and become *my* pet?”

I blinked. “Huh?” *What’s this girl saying?*

“It’s been a thousand years since I made this kind of offer, you know?”

“A thousand years...” I mumbled.

“I’ve taken a liking to you, to say the least. How about it?”

Strangely, the abrupt offer quickly helped settle my nerves. The answer came to me in no time. “Sorry. No can do,” I said firmly.

“Oh?” The girl grinned, only looking even more intrigued than before.

“You’ll tell me why, right?”

“Right now, everyone’s lives are in my hands.”

I swept my gaze over the monsters around us—every last one of them were my familiars. Maybe knights and warriors would give their lives to protect their masters they’d sworn their blades to, but my familiars were different. A single order from me was all it took for them to be reduced to sacrificial pawns.

I didn’t know what being her “pet” entailed, but chances were she’d want me to obey her every command. If I complied, then everyone’s lives would fall into her hands as well. The sight of Gai’s and Chris’s death was still seared on the back of my eyelids. I absolutely could not become Dyphon’s pet, whatever she meant by it.

“Psh. Lame,” she spat.

“Is it?”

“Uh-huh.”

I kept my lips pursed, left with nothing to say in the face of this insurmountable trench between us—our difference in values.

Dyphon folded her arms and cocked her head. Outwardly, she really looked no more than a cute girl. Lardon also took the form of a young girl, but she always carried an air of dignity and wisdom about her, so staunchly that the incongruity was always in the back of my mind. Unlike Lardon, however, Dyphon was like an actual young girl, both in appearance and in her selfish and capricious demeanor. *They’re both ancient dragons. How can they be so different?*

“She must have reverted to childhood,” Lardon supplied, piquing my interest. “We dragons of old have no lifespan. When the time comes, we simply revert to our youth. We undergo self-reincarnation, so to speak.”

“Self-reincarnation...” I blankly parroted the alien term.

“*Humans perish when they die, whereas we revert into dragon cubs.*”

“And that’s why she’s so childish now...?”

“Indeed.”

“Huh...” This was the first I’d heard of this characteristic of dragons, so I was a little intrigued.

In the meantime, Dyphon was tilting her head left and right, humming and grumbling as she pondered. Suddenly, her face lit up, and she clapped her hand as if she’d come upon a brilliant idea. “I know! I just need to get rid of all these guys!”

“Huh?”

“Come out, my offspring!” At a snap of her fingers, Dyphon distorted space, manifesting a small dragon clad in flames at its vortex. Its face was twisted into an atrocious snarl, jarring with its puppylike size.

“Go on. Eat them all.”

The small dragon opened its jaws and pounced toward the closest monster—Gai.

“No!” I whipped out my hand and put up both a magic and physical barrier in front of him.

The dragon charged so swiftly that Gai could hardly react on time, and the physical barrier hindered it for only a moment. I added forty-seven more layers, but the tiny dragon simply plowed right through them.

Gai gritted his teeth. “Th-This is nothing!” he bellowed, then moved to counterattack.

“Stop!” I yelled.

He flinched and held his place. His death at Dyphon’s hand was still too fresh in my mind—I just had to stop him. But more importantly, I sensed that the tiny dragon was stronger than him. It did just destroy forty-seven shields in a flash.

*If I can’t stop it, then...!* I pulled out one of the spells from my teacher’s

magicpedia. “Tractor Beam!”

A magic circle spread out at the tiny dragon’s feet and shifted its trajectory by ninety degrees, sending it from a straight charge and up into the air. I kicked off the ground and went after it.

“Power Missile!” I chanted, barraging the tiny dragon with forty-seven projectiles. The missiles struck the dragon, stirring up huge explosions in the air like fireworks. Before the smoke even cleared, however, I was already charging in.

I could just feel it—those attacks barely worked. As I suspected, the tiny dragon emerged from the dust cloud practically unscathed.

“Damn it! Celsius!” This time, I summoned forty-seven mid-rank water spirits and gave them their orders. The spirits swarmed in together to engage. Water and fire clashed, but to little effect—the dragon cracked open its mouth and spewed out a surge of hellfire, instantly evaporating the water spirits.

*Well, if conventional attacks won’t work...* I teleported behind the dragon and gathered my mana for another spell. When I was ready, I set a hand on the tiny dragon and muttered, “Dimension Cutter.”

A spatial rift formed inside its body.

This original offensive spell was derived from other space-time magic spells like Another World, Item Box, and Dust Box. It split solid objects between reality and an alternate dimension—exceedingly simple when compared to Another World, but its effects were tremendous: the tiny dragon was ripped in two, perishing with half its body stripped to another dimension and the remaining half falling lifelessly before my eyes.

Moments later, I landed back on the ground. “Phew...” That was a terribly close call. Only now did I notice my back was drenched in sweat. *What the heck...? Why do they have to be so strong?*

Lardon chuckled. “*You’ve grown.*”

“Huh?”

*“I nearly cannot believe you’re the same boy who struggled against my*

*offspring.”*

“Ah!” I recalled the time I fought the Lardon Juniors because of Albrevit’s mistake. Back then, I stood absolutely no chance. “So... That little dragon was...?”

*“Indeed. That was Dyphon’s offspring, likely equal in strength to my own. A victory well-earned,”* Lardon said in praise.

I fell speechless. If that was a Dyphon Junior, then it made sense it was that strong, but even more shocking was the fact that I managed to win against one alone.

As it turned out, Lardon wasn’t the only one who was eager to praise me—Dyphon was now looking at me with sparkling eyes. “Wow! This is the first time in the past few millennia a human’s managed to beat my offspring!”

I gave her a helpless stare. *And you’re okay with that...?*

## .154

Eyes still sparkling, Dyphon skipped over to me. I tensed up, but she just innocently wrapped her arms around mine without the slightest sign of hostility. It was so unexpected, it put me at a loss. “Um...?”

“Say, what’s your name?”

“My name?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I already...” *I already told you, didn’t I? Shouldn’t you already know?* I decided to answer anyway. “Liam Hamilton.”

“Okay. Liam, right? So, Liam, what kind of girls do you like?”

“Huh?”

“Could you tell me?”

“Uh, well...”

Her abrupt change in attitude left me utterly speechless. The intense battlefield from a moment ago was gone like the wind, replaced with a sweet and sparkly atmosphere, all because Dyphon was no longer unleashing her bloodlust. Now, she was simply batting her eyelashes, looking no more than an innocent young girl. I just couldn’t figure out what she was getting at.

“Oh, it’s fine if you don’t wanna say. I’ll work it out.”

“You will?”

“Uh-huh. You see, I can change my form to match the race of whoever I wanna have kids with. I can even accommodate their preferences.” She flashed me a smug and toothy grin.

“You can do that?”

“Of course. I can adjust my gender too, so I can even be a man if they’re female. Well, you’re a guy, so this time I’m fine as is.”

“Wow...” *Transforming to match the race, preference, and even gender of the person she likes?* It was hard to believe right off the bat, but it was probably true considering Lardon wasn’t piping in.

“Okay! I’ll get right to it.” Arms still circled around mine, Dyphon closed her eyes and chanted under her breath. Light wrapped around her body then dispersed, revealing—

She blinked widely. “Huh?”

I frowned, just as confused; her appearance hadn’t changed at all. I sensed it was some sort of transformation spell, although I didn’t know how it worked exactly. I’d held my breath in excitement only to be completely let down.

“Wh-Why?!” she shrieked.

This time, my body was enveloped in light, and out came Lardon in her human form, roaring in laughter.

“Argh! What’re you coming out for?!” Dyphon scowled, baring her teeth.

“I thought I would kindly offer you an explanation.”

“What explanation?”

“You see, this man’s head”—Lardon patted my arm. Would she have patted my head if she could?—“contains not even a smidge of interest in women.”

“No way!” Dyphon vehemently rejected. “There’s no male human out there *not* interested in boobs, butts, and thighs!”

“There is one right here,” Lardon retorted. “Do you know why I emerged from within him? Because he’s interesting.”

Dyphon reeled. She couldn’t at all accept what Lardon had said earlier, but this one statement seemed to convince her. The fact that Lardon had “possessed” me seemed to carry much weight, one that only a fellow dragon would understand better than anyone.

“R-Really?”

“What would I gain from lying to you?”

Dyphon trembled. “N-No way! There’s no way! No, no, no!”

Seeing such a small girl throw a tantrum almost made me want to pat her head to comfort her.

“I’ll reveal your true colors!” She took a step back from me and was enveloped in light once again.

“Wh-What?” I blinked.

Lardon sighed. “It appears she is going to transform of her own volition.”

“She can do that...?”

“Of course.”

When the light subsided, we were greeted by the sight of a glamorous woman, with all the extravagant curves of a voluptuous figure. Dyphon had transformed into a sexy woman like no other.

“Well? Got your heart racing yet?” She posed seductively, casting me a sidelong glance beneath fluttering eyelashes. “No need to hold back—push me down, right here, right now, if you want.”

I stared intently at her.

“Oh? L-Looks like it’s working, hm?”

Actually, I was staring at the process of her transformation and was currently turning it over in my head.

“Hah. Fool,” Lardon mocked.

“What did you say?”

Casting magic was a far simpler process for dragons compared to humans, making it just as easy to analyze. Having witnessed it myself, the image in my mind was as clear as day. I closed my eyes, focusing on solidifying my visualization, then I gathered my mana and cast the spell. Light embraced my body, and soon...

“HUH?!” I heard Dyphon exclaim.

From her reaction alone, I could safely assume I succeeded. Opening my eyes and looking down at myself gave the same answer. “Yep. It worked.” My young body had grown into the size of an adult, and with the deeper voice to match. It

was all thanks to Dyphon's demonstration.

"D-Did you just *make* that spell?" she sputtered out.

Lardon chuckled. "This is why I stay with him."

"This...is more impressive than I thought..."

Dyphon's gaze turned more heated than ever.

## .155

“Master!” Scarlet barged into the reception hall like a storm and loomed over me with bloodshot eyes and ragged breaths, her typical calm demeanor nowhere to be found. She looked every bit a crazed woman as she demanded, “Is it true that another divine dragon has appeared?!”

I shrunk back into my seat. “C-Calm down.”

“Ah! M-My apologies...” Her shoulders slumped as she took a few steps back, though her passion for the divine dragons remained ablaze in her eyes. “M-Master,” she called again. “Is it true that a divine dragon has appeared?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Ooh! M-May I ask where she is?”

“Here.”

“Huh?”

“Here,” I repeated, pointing to my side. Dyphon was seated with me on the expensive couch, clinging to my arm. Unlike the baffled Scarlet, her face was bright and smitten as she pressed her body against mine.

“Th-This girl—”

“—is the divine dragon, yes.”

“Huh?”

“Ever heard of the name Dyphon?”

“D-Dyphon the Hellblaze?!”

“Is that her nickname? Do you know about it, Dyphon?”

She shrugged. “Eh. The humans came up with it.”

The awkwardness of this situation made me chuckle. She was just like Lardon in this sense. When we first met... Well, it wasn’t like she’d changed now—but anyway, Lardon also had no interest in humans. Although it wasn’t a significant

trait, I realized they really were the same.

I turned back to Scarlet with a smile. “I guarantee she’s Dyphon.”

“O-Oh... Understood...” Scarlet stared in bewilderment, seemingly still in disbelief.

“Why the face? Is it because of how she looks? Lardon takes the form of a young girl too, doesn’t she?” If anything, she barely appeared as a dragon ever since merging with me. All the monsters of this country knew her human form, and the executives like Scarlet often ran into her too. *So why...?*

“W-Well... She truly looks like a young girl and nothing more.”

“And Lardon doesn’t?”

“The divine dragon appears as a young girl, but she carries the air of a greater being.”

“Oh...” I nodded. It seemed Scarlet and I were of the same mind.

“I-Is she truly a dragon?”

“Yes, she is.”

Scarlet gulped. “I-I see.” Her disbelief was still evident, but it seemed my guarantee had her exerting effort to believe it anyway.

It was then Dyphon suddenly cut in. “Hey, where’s your bed?”

“My bed?”

“Uh-huh! Don’t humans make babies on their beds? Come on, let’s go!”

“M-Make babies?!” Scarlet sputtered, baffled by Dyphon’s outlandish demand.

“We’re not making babies,” I said.

“Huh? But why?” Dyphon whined.

“Uh, I’m still a kid...” Or rather, *Liam Hamilton* was. I was physically twelve years old. I thought that’d suffice as a shield, but...

“It’s okay! Your soul is all grown up!”

“Urgh.” I was stumped by her instant retort. She figured it out as quickly as

Lardon had back when we first met. So *Dyphon* can also sense my “soul,” huh? Well, I guess I should’ve expected that...

“Come on! Let’s go!”

Lardon chuckled. “*You seem to be struggling.*”

“Save me, Lardon...”

“*Impossible,*” she said without missing a beat.

“Whaaat?!”

“*Our kind, when charmed, is very single-minded. Once ignited, the desire to birth the individual’s offspring does not disappear. That is how we are.*”

“Are you serious?!” *That’s...not good.* “Um... Dyphon.”

“Uh-huh? What is it, darling?”

“D-Darling...?” I cleared my throat. “Do you *really* want to have a baby with me?”

“Yeah! I definitely want to have your baby, darling!”

“Right now?”

“I’d like to... Can’t I?” Dyphon looked up at me, tears glistening in her eyes. I felt a prickle of guilt in my heart.

Lardon chuckled. “*Need help?*”

*Lardon, please!* I nodded vigorously. This wasn’t magic—I was basically useless here. Based on experience, it was best for me to heed her advice at times like these.

“*Then repeat after me...*” Lardon uttered a few lines in my mind.

I grimaced at what she said, but I tossed any thoughts aside and repeated her words as is. “Give me your hand, Dyphon.”

“Like this?”

Our palms overlapped, and I directed my mana into her. Reflexively, she pushed back with hers and sent me flying like a leaf in the wind.

“Ack! Are you okay, darling?!”

I fixed my stance in midair and landed smoothly. “As you can see, my mana is still very weak.”

“W-Well, I—”

“Don’t worry,” I said gently. “If you and I made a baby, that child would inherit our mana.”

“Uh-huh! I can’t wait!”

“So I want that child to inherit my mana not now, but after I’ve gotten stronger.”

“Stronger...” she mumbled in a daze.

“You’re also still going to get stronger now that you’ve been reborn, right?”

“Yeah!”

“So let’s wait a bit more, okay?”

Dyphon clamped her mouth shut, her gaze locked on mine. My heart was pounding. *Will this work?*

“*Fret not. It will work on her,*” Lardon assured.

The next moment, Dyphon beamed. “Okay! I’ll wait! I’ll wait by your side no matter how long it takes!” She sprang forward and clung to my arm, but now she looked more like a happy little kid than a woman trying to earn a man’s attention.



*Whew... Guess I'm safe for now.*

"Wow..." Scarlet gaped, eyes welling up with emotion. "A divine dragon has fallen head over heels for Master... Goodness..."

## .156

Come morning, five full servings of a variety of dishes lined the large table in the palace's dining hall, and I was there, shoving meal after meal down my throat. Meat, fish, vegetables, grain—anything and everything set on this table soon disappeared into my stomach.

Ever since I crafted the spell that could convert anything digestible into mana, I'd taken to eating these large servings, consisting of my usual meal plus the excess that all became mana. This spell also meant I no longer gained weight no matter how much I ate, a constitution many in this world would envy to tears. Well, I guess it was more an ability than a constitution.

Regardless, the key here was *digestion*. In other words, everything would remain in my stomach until it was magically digested, meaning I couldn't just endlessly stuff food into my mouth. Five servings was what I could just barely fit into my stomach without making it burst.

All my meals were served by an elven maid named Sicily. When I finished licking the plates clean just like I did every morning, I caught her staring at me with flushed cheeks and a sigh spilling from her lips.

“What’s wrong, Sicily?”

“I was just enamored by you, Master.”

“Me?”

“Yes! I love people who eat well. That’s why I volunteered to serve you during mealtime.”

“Ah... But isn’t it disturbing to watch me wolf down all this food?”

“Not at all!” Sicily bristled, pushing her face closer with great vigor. “Master, you ate your food so splendidly from start to finish! You chewed so quietly, and not once did the food get on your face. Such a captivating sight!”

“Really? Not once? Oh...” I never noticed. I dabbed a napkin around my

mouth, and as Sicily said, it was completely clean.

“I am so blessed to serve your meals...” Sicily gazed at me dreamily, like she was at the height of bliss.

“Thanks for the food,” I said, pulling her back down. “I’m looking forward to lunch.”

“Yes!”

I rose from my seat, plans of strolling around the city already forming in my mind, when I noticed a commotion outside—or rather, approaching the room. The door slammed open with a loud *bang*, and three girls came marching in.

“I said it doesn’t suit me at all! Hey, are you listening?!”

“Nuh-uh. You look really cute in it.”

“Don’t tease me! I’ll kill you!”

“Now, now, that’s not very nice. Oh, Liam!” One of the girls, Asuna, turned to me and smiled.

The other girl was Dyphon, wearing a girly dress full of frills and laces. “D-Darling...” When our eyes met, hers trembled and immediately darted away. She was red-faced and fidgeting.

“What in the world is going on?” I asked Asuna.

“You see, we got Dyphon here to change her clothes,” she explained. “I mean, just look—isn’t she so adorable? But her clothes were so plain! So, we got her to try *these* on.”

“Ohhh... Who made this outfit?”

“I did,” answered Jodie, stepping out from behind the two.

*As expected of our resident mother fig—*

“Liam, I advise you not to think whatever you’re thinking now.”

“O-Okay...” I hurriedly nodded. *I can’t believe she read my mind. Scary.* “M-More importantly, I didn’t know you could make clothes, Ms. Jodie.”

“I can. I’m also teaching others how to.”

“You are?”

“Many of this city’s residents are so eye-catching, yet their clothes are all so dull.”

“Oh...” Now that she mentioned it, the wolfmen and elves were really pretty, but monsters had neither sense nor interest for fashion. “You couldn’t stand to see that any longer, huh?”

“Yes.”

“So... You got her to try it out?” Having finally pieced together the whole picture, my gaze shifted back to Dyphon, who’d been shuffling her feet all the while. *What’s there to be so nervous about? It looks really good on her—really cute.*

“Go on, tell her she’s cute,” Asuna urged.

“Huh? Oh...” I faced the fidgeting girl. “Dyphon.”

“Wh-What? I get it, okay? These kinds of clothes just don’t suit—”

“You look cute.”

“—me... Huh?” Dyphon blinked owlishly. “Wh-What did you just say?”

“I said you look cute.”

“Huh...? D-Do you...mean that?”

“Yeah.” I nodded firmly. I already thought so; Asuna just told me to say it out loud.

Dyphon’s face grew redder by the second, and her fidgeting got even more restless.

Asuna grinned. “See? What’d I tell ya? You’re absolutely adorable!”

“It’s true,” Jodie agreed. “You should have more confidence, dear.”

“Hngh...” Under their combined shower of praise, Dyphon nervously nodded. “D-Darling, does it make you happy if I dress like this?”

“Well, seeing cute things *does* make me happy.”

“Really...” she mumbled bashfully, looking every bit the innocent maiden.

Seeing her overjoyed with my compliment had me feeling a little bashful too, but...

“You did hear Asuna *tell me* to say that, right...?” It seemed she hadn’t at all and was simply relishing in my compliment. *Well, whatever. No need to drag her mood down when she looks so happy.*

“Come on, Dyphon. Let’s try a bunch more outfits,” Asuna said.

“O-Okay... I wonder if anything else will look good on me...”

“Of course! Actually, it’d be harder to find something that *doesn’t*.”

“Indeed,” Jodie agreed. “But some outfits will highlight your charm better than the rest, so let’s pick them out carefully, shall we?”

“O-Okay... I’ll do it.” Dyphon nodded, now completely going with their flow.

Well, they did pick out a really nice outfit for her. No harm done to anyone—it was best to let them do as they pleased.

Just then, heavy footsteps rattled the corridor outside, almost like an approaching earthquake. Gai entered the room. “Milord! I have found you!” he called, his voice as tremendous as his footsteps. He paused when he noticed Dyphon and the girls. “Hmmm? Why... Could you be the lady dragon?”

“Huh? Yeah.” Dyphon arched a brow, indifference painting her face.

His eyes blew wide. “Heavens, I nearly failed to recognize you in those clothes.”

In a complete change from earlier, Dyphon just half-heartedly hummed in response.

*Is she not happy with anyone else’s compliment?* As my mind wandered, the situation was progressing rapidly.

“There is a saying for such situations... Aha!” Gai snapped his fingers and beamed. “Indeed, even a packhorse driver can look good with the right—”

Dyphon disappeared in a flash, followed with the sounds of countless rapid strikes. By the time I realized it, Gai had already sunk and was convulsing over the floor, tattered as a rag. Beside his body was Dyphon, looking down at him

coldly as if he were a bug.

“Hmph.” She turned away with a scowl and left.

Asuna clicked her tongue. “Jeez! What a doofus!”

“Stay there and reflect on your mistake,” Jodie said, equally as cold, as she followed Asuna and Dyphon out the room.

I watched their backs with a sigh before crouching down and chiding Gai. “You were totally asking for that.” There was just no siding with him on this. Who even made such a crude saying in the first place?

I shook my head in dismay as I spared the poor guy a healing spell.

## .157

“Um... Is this really acceptable, Master?”

Inside the palace’s meeting room, Reina and I sat on our designated seats at the round table. For once, her expression was marred with discontent as she looked at me—or rather, at Dyphon nuzzling against me like a cat.

This round table was the highest decision-making body of Liam-Lardon. We never meant it to be, but nonetheless, the humans and monsters who regularly gathered here had come to feel the weight of their responsibilities.

“Ehe he he...” Now here was Dyphon, in such a significant meeting room, acting like she was cuddling with her beloved in the bedroom.

I could understand Reina’s dissatisfaction. Really, I could. Unfortunately, I already reached the point of resignation when it came to Dyphon. “Don’t mind her. Proceed with your report.”

Reina pursed her lips for one moment and impressively smoothed her expression the next—I could always count on her for such professional behavior I’d never see from Chris or Gai. “We have received a message from the archbishop. As planned, he has departed today and will be arriving tomorrow.”

“Okay. Did he say what this visit’s for?”

“A courtesy call, it seems. He also asked if it would be possible to show the VIPs around the city.”

“Do we just have to give them a tour? Could you handle that, Reina?”

“Of course. However...”

“What is it?”

Reina flipped through the documents in her hands. “I’ve received reports that a storm is likely to come tomorrow.”

“A storm? Is that true?”

“It is not certain, but very likely so.”

“Hm... Sylph,” I chanted, summoning a cute low-rank wind spirit. “Can you tell if a storm is coming?”

The wind spirit floated in front of me and bobbed its head. Low-rank spirits couldn’t use speech, but they could still communicate with me in other ways while they were summoned.

“So it’s true...” There was no doubting a wind spirit here. I mulled it over a while longer before facing Reina again. “All right. You can leave that to me.”

“Understood.” Reina stood from her seat and left the round table.

Dyphon stood along with me, still latched onto my arm. *She’s like those women in the red-light district...* I sighed and stepped out to the yard. “Could you let go for a bit? I’m gonna fly.”

“You’re gonna fly?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow...” Dyphon stared at me with starry eyes. “I didn’t know you could do that. Sure, go ahead!” She held on even tighter—not listening, as usual.

I gave up and cast flight magic, taking her to the sky with me. Once we ascended high enough that everyone down below looked no more than dots, I turned my eyes to the horizon. Far off in the distance, I could see dark rain clouds and, just barely, a ravaging storm beneath it.

“Sylph, is that it?” The wind spirit I’d brought along nodded. “I see...”

Seeing my pensiveness, Dyphon asked, “What will you do?”

“Well, I want to get rid of it if I can. I don’t want the weather, of all things, to disrupt the archbishop’s VIPs.”

Now it was Dyphon who turned serious. As I was pondering over what to do, she nodded to herself and suddenly let go of my arm. The air around her instantly changed. Flying beside me, she stood tall like a gallant warrior. “Oh well. I’ll lend you a hand. I just need to blow that thing away, yeah?”

“Blow it away? Hm... Blow it away...” I turned her words over in my head.

“Right. I can try that.”

“Huh? Try what?”

“Blowing it away.”

“Huuuh? Don’t force yourself. A human’s mana can’t possibly—”

I tuned her out; I was already right at work. A magic circle expanded under my feet—I was flying, so it probably looked like it was floating in the air—then I compressed my mana, took aim, and released it.

The torrent of mana flew straight for the distant storm, distorting the air as it passed, before violently colliding into it. Mana and wind clashed—even from afar, it looked like I’d caused some sort of cataclysm in the skies. In a mere ten minutes, however, the storm disappeared, blown away like it never existed.

“Nice.” *It worked!* The cityspace mana I could use only once a month had swept the storm aside. “Now that that’s settled— Whoa!” An impact hit my side. Looking down, I saw Dyphon; she had tackled me and was clinging to my waist. “Owww... What is it, Dyphon?”

“That was awesome! Where’d you get all that mana?!”

“Huh? Oh... I guess this was your first time seeing it. I can use the mana that’s accumulated in this city to cast large-scale magic just once a month.”

Dyphon’s surprise gradually shifted into admiration. “You turned the city’s mana into yours? Wooow...” She looked up at me, her eyes as bright as the sky I’d cleared up in the distance.

## .158

With no particular plans the next day, I spent the morning in my own room conducting my daily mana training.

Mana and magic were fundamentally similar—the more you trained, the stronger it got. Skip a day, and you'd need another two or three to regain your progress. Persistence was key here, which was why I never skipped a single day of training. On free days like these, I even took care to spend more time on it.

This was my everyday routine, a typical part of my day—but this time, there was something new in the mix: Dyphon sat with me in the room, doing nothing but stare at me.

"I'll be doing this all day as long as nothing comes up," I told her while keeping my mana flow consistent.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Isn't it boring to just watch? If you have anything else you wanna do—"

"It's fine! I'm not bored!" she exclaimed.

"Y-You sure?"

"Uh-huh! Just watching you makes me happy."

"Even though I'm just honing my mana?"

"Yep!"

*Is she serious?*

*"Our kind is not charmed easily," Lardon piped in, catching me off guard. She didn't normally speak up for conversations like this. "However, we are single-minded when we find a favored partner. Remodeling one's flesh and appearance to match them is the prime example of that."*

"I see..."

*“I suppose it may also be because she’s reverted to her youth. She is more susceptible to acting on her instincts. What I mean,”* she added after noticing my confusion, *“is that the girl has fallen so madly in love, nothing else can enter her sights.”*

“Oh...” That made sense. Adolescent girls do tend to be easily convinced of true love. Well, I wasn’t about to deny it to her, and it was pretty endearing to see acting like this. No wonder she was so happy just watching me.

*So Dyphon’s kinda like that now, huh? All right. I’ll keep my mouth shut, then.*

With that decided, I returned all my attention to my training.

However, not a single uneventful day had passed ever since I became the king of this nation. Even days where I had nothing planned would be interrupted by one thing or another, and today was apparently no exception. Not even twenty minutes since I started my training, loud knocks pounded the door.

“Who is it?”

“Excuse me!” The door opened to reveal an elven maid—a new one. They seemed to have some sort of arrangement among themselves and regularly swapped out as maids. This one had just taken over her colleague’s spot yesterday. “My apologies for disturbing your rest, Master. You have a guest.”

“A guest? Where?”

“I have guided him to the parlor. He was able to pass through your barrier, so I believe he is not an enemy.”

“Yeah, good job. Thanks.”

“Ehe he...” The young maid’s cheeks flushed at my praise.

“Good for her...” Dyphon muttered, lip stuck out in a pout.

“Was he alone?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Got it. The parlor, right? Prepare some tea and snacks—for two, since I’ll also be having some.”

“Understood.” The maid nodded and left the room to fulfill my orders.

“Guess I better get going.” I cut my training short and headed for the door, but halted when I noticed Dyphon quietly tagging along.

She looked up at me, head tilted. “What is it?”

“Well, I’m on the way to meet a guest now...”

“Uh-huh.”

“Uh... Are you coming too?”

“Can’t I?”

“It’s not that you can’t...” I scratched my cheek. “But your presence there might hinder or, well, derail our discussion...”

“Really...?”

“Yeah. I’d appreciate it if you could sit this one out.”

“Hm... Okay, I get it. I’ll wait right here.”

“Thank you.”

“He he... You’re very welcome.” Dyphon grinned proudly.

I left my room and made my way to the parlor. When I opened its doors, I nearly stumbled back from shock—seated on the couch was the man who’d gone completely MIA since we parted ways that day in the woods.

“Teacher!?”

“Yo! Looks like you’ve been doing well, Liam.”

Before I even realized it, I was rushing over to him. “Is it really you!?”

My teacher stood from the couch and welcomed me with a bright laugh. “Do I look like anyone else?”

“I... I really wanted to see you.” My honest feelings spilled from my lips.

The man before my eyes was the person I met in the woods behind the Hamilton manor and taught me the basics of magic. Not only that, he even gave me his precious magicpedia that contained a hundred kinds of magic. Lardon had taught me a whole lot more in terms of variety, but my teacher here had formed my very *foundation*. I could say that he’s had much more influence,

both on me and my path to learning magic.

“I’ve heard the rumors,” he said. “You sure are living your best life, huh, Liam?”

“Where have you been all this time, Teacher?”

“Well, the thing is...” He trailed off and plopped back down—I took that to mean this talk would take a while. “I’m being chased,” he answered once I’d also taken my seat. “I had to keep myself hidden.”

“Chased? By whom?”

“You haven’t heard anything?”

“N-No.”

“Oh yeah? Well, you *were* just a kid back then, I suppose.”

“I’m still a kid, though...”

“But not *just* a kid, right? You’re the king of this country now. Had you had this status back then, the news would’ve reached you too.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Did you do something?” He was being chased, and it was the kind of news that would reach a king’s ears... Even I could tell it was no ordinary circumstance.

“Yep. I stole something from Jamille... Well, I guess it’s more like I just snatched it and ran.”

“Huh?!” I couldn’t believe my ears. “What do you mean?”

“I took a treasure of theirs and made a run for it.”

“HUUUH?!”

“Here, look.” Teacher placed something on the table—a jewelry box. He lifted the lid, revealing a shining droplet-shaped gem inside.

“What’s this?”

“It’s called the Eternal Droplet.”

“The Eternal Droplet...”

“It’s like the magicpedia I handed to you.”

“You mean it’s Ancient Memoria?”

“Exactly. Wow, you know about that? Impressive.”

I looked down at the gem once more. “So it’s magic...”

“Try holding it.”

“Huh? C-Can I?”

“Sure.” Teacher nodded firmly.

I gulped and reluctantly reached out to the Eternal Droplet. The moment it fell into my hand, however, my brows furrowed.

“Huh.”

Teacher tilted his head. “What is it? You understand the magic in it already?”

“Yeah. Oh, but... No, this won’t work as is. Its contents are slightly off.”

“Off?”

“Yep. Let me fix it up a bit.” I closed my eyes and visualized the spell in this gem and its effect. That effect, I was leaving untouched; my aim was to just repair the steps that would take me there. I finished in no time, thanks to all my experience crafting and revising all sorts of spells.

“All right. I’m casting it.” I gathered my mana and chanted, “Total Eclipse!”

Instantly, our surroundings dimmed. Shortly after, I could hear a rising commotion coming from outside.

“Wh-What happened?”

“The sun! The sun was devoured!”

“Somebody inform Lord Liam!”

Their panicked voices told me it was a success. I nodded in satisfaction and turned back to my teacher— “Uh, Teacher?”

—only to find him staring at me wide-eyed and agape.

## .159

“M-Master!” An elven maid barged into the room, her face pale as a sheet and shoulders heaving. “The sun! It’s—”

“Oh, it’s all right,” I said quickly. “I just cast a spell.”

“Huh?”

“I just erased—I mean—made it invisible with my magic.” They might panic even more if I said I “erased” the sun, so I hurriedly corrected myself. “Don’t worry. Oh, tell everyone not to panic too.”

“That’s your magic?!”

“Yep.”

“I see now! Amazing as always, Master!” The elven maid was easily convinced. She lost all trace of panic on her face and began beaming with excitement. “I understand. I will inform everyone!” She left the room in a flurry, not even bothering to close the door.

“Guys! It’s just Lord Liam’s magic!” I heard her yell.

“Really?! Wow! So Master can even do something like this!”

“Of course he can! This is Master’s magic we’re talking about!”

From the sound of things, everyone would soon calm down. I quietly shut the door and returned to my teacher.

“You’re just...amazing,” he muttered.



“Am I?”

“Yeah. You’re hardly the little boy I taught magic to back then anymore. I never thought you’d grow so much.” As the sun, hidden by magic, gradually reverted back to normal, my teacher watched me with fascination. “You cast a highest-class forbidden magic spell so casually. Before that, you even *fixed* it.”

“Forbidden magic?”

He nodded. “Some also call this spell as that which heralds the battle’s end.”

I frowned in confusion. “What does that mean?” Did just hiding the sun warrant such a grandiose label?

“The sun and the moon,” said my teacher, “are the origin of all magic. When both disappear, humans lose the ability to convert their mana into magic.”

“Huh?!”

“Basically, Total Eclipse is an ultra-wide-range magic-nullifying spell.”

“W-Wow...” If that was true, then it was especially fatal to me. *That’s crazy...*

“It’s true. In the last great war, Jamille crafted this spell and used it as the decisive blow that led to their victory.”

“The last great war...?”

*“He speaks of me,”* Lardon suddenly answered. *“Under that spell, I lost my ability to cast magic. That moment of agitation led to my defeat and sealing.”*

*Oh, so that was how Lardon ended up sealed... Hm? But that means... Could it be... Did an ancestor of the Hamilton house craft this magic?”*

“Spot on,” my teacher said with a grin. “That’s why I fled to the Hamilton territory after stealing it. They’d never think I’d be hiding *there*, right?”

“I see now...” That explained why he’d been in the territory and why the Hamilton house seemed to be frantically chasing someone back then.

“All righty, then. Guess I’d better head off now.”

“Huh? Already?”

“I got a real nice treat, seeing forbidden magic with my own eyes. But that

just raised another question for me, so I gotta go investigate some more.”

Teacher’s face was set into a serious expression.

I nodded quietly. I had a feeling it was best for me not to stick my neck into this matter. “Okay. Let me know anytime if there’s anything magic-related I can help you with.”

Teacher smiled. “Sure thing.”

And just like that, we parted ways once again.

After my teacher left, Dyphon came in to fill his place, wasting no time leaning over me with sparkling eyes. “Hey! That thing—that was what I think it is, isn’t it?!”

“That thing?”

“That magic you cast! That thing the humans used to finish her off!”

“Oh...” As I recalled, Dyphon fought Lardon in the Tri-Draconic War. She must’ve been one of those who exploited that fatal opening Lardon alluded to. Of course she’d know about it.

The Tri-Draconic War was a huge battle involving three great dragons and even human forces that ultimately led to Lardon being sealed off as an evil dragon. Though it was a matter I’d pushed to the back of my mind, once again, the legend proved to be not as simple and clear cut as it sounded.

“What’s with that face?” Dyphon asked.

Lardon chose to appear right then. “He was just thinking that there must be more to that story.”

“Ohhh...” Instantly, Dyphon’s eyes lit up as she turned to me. “Say, do you wanna know? Should I tell you the truth about that war?”

“Well...” I thought it over. “Nah, I’m good.”

“Huh? You sure?”

“Rather than the truth, I’d prefer to know about the kinds of magic used back then but are no longer seen today.”

Dyphon's jaw dropped, drawing a laugh from Lardon. "I never would have expected any other answer from you," she said.

"Really?"

"Indeed. That single-minded devotion and insatiable curiosity toward anything and everything magic..." She chuckled. "Even if I told you the world could have very well been destroyed back then, you wouldn't change your mind, would you?"

"Nope, not at all." Nothing would change even if I learned about that. Learning magic was much more important.

"I never thought a human could be like this..." Dyphon muttered, dazed.

"He does not dwell on worldly matters. Truly the genius of the century."

Two dragons gazed at me, one with admiration and the other with pride.

## .160

While I was practicing magic in my room, Reina suddenly barged in and yelled, “Master, it’s an emergency!”

“Emergency? What is it?”

“I’m afraid Gai and Chris might run wild!”

“Those two? Why? Are they fighting again?”

“No, that’s not it. In any case, please come—I believe only you can stop them!”

“Okay.” I didn’t get what was happening, but I followed anyway. It looked like Reina didn’t have the time to give me the details.

We dashed down the corridors and out the front door. Sprinting through the city, we arrived at one of Liam-Lardon’s four cardinal entrances—specifically the southern gate. There, a whole crowd of monsters had formed around Gai, Chris, and a group of humans, who were all currently in a staredown. Even from afar, I could tell the two were mere moments from snapping and ripping those guys to shreds.

“Gai, Chris! Stop right there!” While I had no idea who the humans were, I knew it wouldn’t end in just a small incident if I let these two be while they were clearly out for blood.

“Milord...”

“Boo...”

The pair immediately turned toward me, both pouting in discontent at my orders. Still, they finally withdrew their bloodlust.

I hurried over to their side. “What happened? This doesn’t look like some ordinary argument.”

“Well...” Chris spoke up in an attempt to give an explanation (or excuse) for their actions, when somebody from the human group cut in.

"Hmph. It's about time you came out, Liam."

*Hm? Is it someone who knows me?* I looked past Chris and Gai, toward the humans, and my eyes widened in shock. "Albrevit... I mean, brother."

Standing there was Albrevit Hamilton, the eldest son of the Hamilton house, looking down at me with a scowl. The group he led seemed to be composed of like-minded individuals, as the rest were sneering at me much in the same way.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"You should make sure to put a leash on your pets. Well, I guess a kid like you wouldn't know that."

Gai and Chris bristled more ferociously than before, and I immediately figured out what was going on here. As our country's top two combatants, Gai and Chris were as fiercely loyal as they were strong, to the point that they nearly worshiped me too. They probably couldn't stand the way Albrevit looked down on me, and knowing him, he likely did something to that effect while I wasn't here.

I glanced at Reina. She nodded, affirming my suspicions.

"Gai, Chris."

"Y-Yeah?"

"Wh-What is it, milord?"

"Leave this to me. Go back and do your jobs."

"But...!"

"That man insulted you, milord!"

"I'll handle this," I said firmly.

The two begrudgingly stepped back and walked away dejectedly, but not without glancing back to glare at Albrevit a few times.

"Hey. Liam."

"Huh?"

"How long are you gonna keep me waiting?"

“Huh? Oh, right...” I turned to the most composed of my three monster executives. “Reina.”

“Yes,” she replied calmly.

“Prepare the reception hall.”

“Understood. Shall I serve some drinks as well?”

“Hm? Yeah. As usual.”

Reina paused for a moment. “Very well.” She bowed and took her leave.

I stared at her back. *Huh? What'd she ask that for?* Drinks were always prepared for guests I welcomed in the reception hall—she didn't have to check with me.

*“That lass must be irked too. She is loath to treat him as a guest,”* Lardon explained.

*Oh, I see... Wait, even Reina's mad? That's...actually impressive.*

“Hey!” Albrevit snapped, arms folded and foot tapping impatiently on the ground.

“R-Right. Follow me.”

If even Reina was mad, I couldn't afford to give this task to anyone else. I escorted our visitors to the reception hall myself, letting his subordinates into one room and guiding Albrevit to a separate parlor.

Before I could say anything, he briskly strode into the room and pompously plopped down on the chief seat. Soon, the elven maids led by Reina came in and prepared the usual tea and snacks we served guests.

I breathed a sigh of relief at the sight. Mad or not, Reina still did her job. Still, I couldn't let my guard down. I whispered to her, “You can step back now. Serve something to my brother's subordinates in the other room too. Also, call Scarlet for me. I might need her advice later on.”

“Understood.”

I managed to come up with an excuse to send her away. I wasn't lying about possibly needing Scarlet though.

Now, it was just me and my brother.

“Hmph. How crude.”

“Huh?” I blinked, realizing he was talking about this reception hall. “Ah, is it...?” I couldn’t really tell, so I offered a halfhearted response in the meantime. “In any case, what brings you here today?”

“What brings me here, you ask?” Albrevit glared at me.

Frankly, he was hardly any more menacing than a grumpy little dog, so I didn’t even bat an eye. I did, however, cock my head in confusion.

“I sent someone before, did I not?”

“Hm?”

“I told you to come give me your greetings when you first made your town.”

I blankly stared at him for a good few seconds before finally recalling. “Ohhh.”

*That did happen, didn’t it? Yeah, I remember now.* He’d sent a message that said, *“I heard you’ve made a town. Come see me,”* or something along those lines. And...I didn’t go. I’m pretty sure I didn’t. *Uh, how did I handle it again? Hmm... Nope. Can’t remember.*

Lardon chuckled. *“You truly have no interest in anything but magic.”*

“Cocky kid,” Albrevit went on. “Know your place.”

“Huh?”

“You didn’t come to give your greetings, didn’t even send a single reply. Just what in the world are you thinking?”

“Hm... I wonder.”

“Hah?!” Albrevit slammed his fist on the table.

*Whoops. He got mad.* I just answered honestly since I really couldn’t remember... I probably shouldn’t have said that. “Sorry. I didn’t mean it that way.”

“You cocky little...”

“Uh, yeah. My bad,” I apologized again. “So why are you here? If you just

wanted me to greet you, then you could have just sent another message, right?"

Albrevit grimaced, then scoffed and sat back down. "I'll let you trade with us."

"Huh?" *Trade?*

"My town is soon going to stand as its own country. So I will let you trade with us. Well? Not a bad offer, hm?"

I...couldn't understand a single thing he was saying. I repeated his words in my head to try and make sense of them, but it was pointless. *Am I just dumb? How do those statements come together?* I frowned, utterly lost.

"What?" he snarled.

"Well, uh... Your town standing as its own country... Is that possible?"

"Hmph. A brat like you could do it. Of course I can too."

"Then how's your military strength? And your political power?" Those were important.

"I've hired good men with my wealth. Did you see those people I brought earlier? They are the elite of my troops."

"Oh..." *Huh? Those guys? But they didn't look all that strong to me.* Was he really sure about all this?

"As for political power, well, if a brat like you could do it, then so can I."

"Right..." He sure loved using that logic, or dare I say, lack thereof.

"There you have it. By the way, you produce manastones here, no? I'll buy them, so hand them over."

"I can't do that," I said immediately.

Albrevit narrowed his eyes into a glare. "What did you say?"

He must be trying to intimidate me, but unfortunately for him, it didn't work. I explained calmly, "Manastones are an important resource that supports this country's livelihood. I can't use them just like that."

"Hmph... I see now."

“Huh?”

“I always found it odd that you became king. You’re saying you cannot easily use those resources—then you must be no more than a puppet, yes?”

“Huh? Uh, no...” How did he come to that conclusion? Much as I wanted to, I decided not to ask. I had a feeling it wasn’t going to lead me anywhere.

“Hmph. What a waste of time. Who is the true ruler of this country? Take me to them. I’ll grace them with my presence.”

“True ruler...?” I was stumped. Was this what it felt like to talk to a wall? How in the world do I communicate with this guy?

As I was racking my brain, the door slammed open and in came Scarlet, her face pale as a sheet. “Master!”

“Scarlet? What’s wrong?”

“There’s trouble with Reina and the other elves!”

“What? Where?!” I bolted up from my seat and followed Scarlet out the room.

She led me to the room where I left Albrevit’s subordinates. Inside, all the men were sprawled out on the floor, writhing in agony under the elves’ resentful glares.

“Uh... What’s...”

“Master...” Reina muttered.

Following her gaze, the other elves saw me and began awkwardly averting their gazes.

“Oh no... Um, you see...”

“What do we do...?”

“Th-They started it...”

I stepped in and asked, “What’s going on here?”

“My apologies, Master,” said Reina. “These men were demanding sexual services from us while also speaking vulgarly of you...”

It took a moment for her words to sink in, but eventually, it did. I could just imagine how that went.

*“Hey, come on. Just a bit won’t hurt, yeah?”*

*“We’ll show you pleasure you can’t taste from a kid’s \*\*\*\*. How ‘bout it?”*

Probably something like that. So Reina and the elves snapped, which was very... “Very valid,” I said, nodding. But still, what should I do now?

“Wh-What is this...?” When I turned around, I found Albrevit, who’d followed after us, speechless. “What did you do to them? What cheap trick did you use?!”

“Huh? Um...” Oh, I see. He said he hired these guys with a lot of money, so he must have been confident in their strength. “Well, actually... Brother.”

“What?!”

“You’d better not be thinking of making a country if these are your strongest guys.”

“What did you say?”

“They’re too weak. Heck, even if they got ten times stronger... They’re nowhere near enough.”

“You’re just a cocky kid! Shut your mouth!” Albrevit snapped.

*Ugh, it’s no use. This guy isn’t listening at all. Should I just drop this for today?*

Suddenly, Scarlet stepped forward. “I am not a kid. Would you perhaps find more value in *my* words? Hm, Albrevit Hamilton?”

“Huh? Y-Your Highness the Princess... It’s really you.” Albrevit paled.

*That seems about right. After all, the Hamilton house was lower in standing than Scarlet, a princess.*

“I have witnessed your unseemly behavior in its entirety,” she continued.

“N-No, I—”

“I have committed it all to memory. You would do well to keep this in mind.”

Albrevit fell silent, his face losing any remaining color as if to resemble a

corpse. Lardon chuckled at the sight.

*What's with you?* I asked inwardly.

*"It seems you haven't noticed,"* she began, *"so allow me to tell you: This, too, is a form of political power—your political power."*

*Really?*

*"And now, he will snap back at you."*

*"Liam... How dare you..."*

*Huh, Lardon was right... Why, though?*

*"I won't forget this,"* he growled, turned on his heel, and left—without his subordinates to boot.

Seriously, what was going on?

*"In both military strength and political power..."* Lardon chuckled. *"He was beaten thoroughly in both aspects by a 'cocky kid' like you. He must be exceedingly vexed."*

*Ohhh, was that why? Uh, well... Whatever, I guess.* This had nothing to do with magic, so I didn't really care.

## .161

The next day, as I was leisurely strolling around the city, I came across a crowd of monsters cheering and hooting in one area. I approached, wondering what had them so pumped, and found Gai and Chris at the center of the roaring praises. They looked rather smug.

“Looks like you’re all having a blast here,” I said. “What’s going on?”

Everyone’s cheerful eyes focused on me. Chris and Gai looked especially excited.

“Ah! Master!”

“Are you out on a patrol, milord?”

“No, just a walk,” I said. “Anyway, you two seem to be getting along today. How unusual.”

Chris snickered. “Well, you know, even I’d admit he did something praiseworthy this time around.”

“Indeed. I suppose even a boar woman can do well sometimes.”

“Huh? Watch your tone, meathead.”

“I could say the same to you. Who are you to bequeath me praise?”

“What did you say?!”

“So you wish to face my fists, I see!”

*Oh, for the love of...* They were doing so well too. Ah, well. I guess they wouldn’t be Gai and Chris otherwise. In any case... “Okay, okay, that’s enough,” I said, stepping in between them.

“Ugh...” Chris grumbled.

“I heed your orders, milord,” said Gai.

I sighed. “More importantly, what exactly were you two so smug about?”

“Ah, yes. Listen, milord!”

“The meathead and I annihilated the cheeky shithead’s town!”

“The...cheeky shithead?” *Who?* I cocked my head.

“Your brother,” Gai answered.

“Albrevit?”

Chris bobbed her head. “Uh-huh! That guy’s town.”

“But why...?”

“Cause he was so rude to you!”

“He even dared to threaten you before leaving,” Gai added.

“Oh...” *He did, didn’t he?*

“There is no need to leave potential enemy forces be. It is always best to crush them before they can seek out their revenge.”

Chris nodded vigorously. “So I ran over to that cheeky shithead’s town, and whaddya know? I ran into this meathead at the entrance!”

“The boar woman and I were of the same mind, so we annihilated the town together.”

“Oh, please...” I cradled my head. They were talking like they just ran into each other on their stroll, but wasn’t this a pretty big deal? “What exactly do you mean by annihilation?”

“Don’t worry! The meathead was talking about annihilating them for real, but I stopped him—we only beat the hunters and combatants.”

“While I was loath to concede to the boar woman, I agreed that you would have issued similar orders had you been there, milord. Therefore, we only intimidated the women and children.”

“Ah... Okay.” *You’re calling that ‘only’? Seriously?*

“While I was at it, I also scattered some salt around afterward,” said Chris.

“Salt? Why?”

“Reina told me that towns die out if you throw lots of salt around!”

I cocked my head again. *What's she talking about?*

*"Salt damage,"* Lardon answered. *"Scattering salt over land will leave it barren and infertile for years."*

"Oh, I see... Wait." My lips twisted into an awkward smile. As scary as Gai and Chris were for chasing after Albrevit and annihilating his town, the insidiousness of Reina's advice was something else. *She's just way more terrifying than these two, isn't she?*

*"Their personalities show,"* Lardon mused, sounding oddly impressed for once.

In any case, I got the whole picture now. "So you guys just got back and were bragging to everyone else," I concluded.

"Exactly," Chris preened.

"Everyone was displeased by that man's show of disrespect. Hence, we felt it right to share the news of his downfall."

"I see..." These guys never changed. "Actually, since you destroyed an entire town, wouldn't your bounties go up again?"

"Huh? Oh, you're right!"

"Ohhh... How exciting."

"I wonder how much it'll jump..."

"I defeated far more than you, so I suggest you not raise your hopes, boar woman."

"Psh. Naaah. I hunted down more of the stronger guys, so sorry in advance!"

"Even the stronger ones were mere small fry who pitifully turned tail and ran."

"Well, the ones *you* beat were so weak, you mowed down a whole bunch of them with just a single blow. They don't even count for anything."

"How dare you!"

"You wanna go?!"

*Yep. Same old, same old.* Such good friends, these two. There was no point in stopping them anymore, so I let them be.

“Hmph! We’ll settle this when our bounties are out.”

“Quite! I cannot wait for the day.”

I hummed. “Can’t wait, huh...?”

A few days later, I sent for Bruno to meet me in my office in the palace. He arrived at once, standing before me with his head lowered humbly, as usual.  
“You called, Your Majesty?”

“Yeah. I have a request for you.” I handed him a finger-sized crystal. “Here.”

“What is this?” he asked.

“A single-use magic item I made,” I answered. “It’ll disappear once the spell is cast.”

“I see... What spell, if I may ask?”

“Do you know the Liamnet?”

“Yes. I know it is a spectacular magic you have crafted with... Well...” He eventually shook his head. “It bears so many profound features, I cannot possibly explain it in simple terms.”

“Hmmm. So that’s how you see it.” My lips quirked into an awkward smile. Bruno wasn’t wrong; I’d added so many features to the Liamnet that it would be hard to list them all down in just one breath. In fact... “This is an expansion of the Liamnet’s features.”

“Aha. Is that so?” His eyes widened in astonishment, and he gave me a deep bow of respect. “I am deeply moved, Your Majesty, that you constantly seek to improve a spell already so impressive.”

I shrugged. “Well, I needed to.”

“So, how shall I use this?”

“Ah, right. Could you use it on some hunter guild’s bulletin board—the one where they post up the bounties? I made this spell so the updated bounties can

be viewed on the Liamnet in real time.”

“Is that possible?”

“Well, it’s always best to receive proper reports for more detailed matters, but for just a name and their bounty? I figured a single spell would do. Could I ask this of you, Bruno?”

“Of course. Please rest assured.” Bruno nodded firmly and accepted.

Another few days passed. In the palace’s large hall, furnished with a round table for our meetings, I stepped in to find Gai and Chris already present.

“Heh. Guess it’s my win, huh?” Chris preened.

“Hrghhh...” Gai gnashed his teeth.

“What’s up, guys?”

“Oh, Master!” Chris crowed. “You made it so we could check our bounties on the Net, right? Thank you, thank you!”

“Ah, so you’ve seen it? How was it?”

“My bounty’s now three hundred gold coins!”

“It went up,” I noted. “And Gai?”

“Eleven...” he mumbled.

“Oh...” With something as clear-cut as monetary value, Chris’s victory for this round became all the more evident. I could see why Gai was so sullen.

“Ah, well. I’d say you did pretty well for a meathead, you know? Look on the bright side—your bounty’s finally in gold units! Just *barely*, with how small the number is... Oh, whoops! Forget I said that! Tee hee!”

“Grrr...!”

“Well, just keep at it. You never know as long as you keep trying, right? But I’ll keep getting stronger too, so I guess you’ll never catch up anyway!”

“Arghhh! I cannot take this anymore! Step outside, boar woman! I shall show you that bounty is not everything!”

“Oh yeah? Give it your best shot, meathead! It’s time you realize I’m better than you in bounty *and* power!”

Gai and Chris were riled up again, so much so that their battle began before they even made it outside. The door was spared from their fierce competition, although the same couldn’t be said for the poor window they’d chosen to crash through instead.

“Ah, such good friends, those two...” I muttered wistfully as I stared at their brawl outside the ruined window.

# Network

One early afternoon, I secluded myself in my study with my nose buried deep into a grimoire. I almost felt like some important figure, sitting between a large chair and a grand desk, but my mind was focused entirely on the rows upon rows of text in my hands.

Three hours had passed since I began reading, and I had yet to cast the spell.

*“I see you are taking your time today,”* noted a familiar voice in my head.

“Yeah. The contents are pretty complex,” I replied.

*“Oh? Even for you? How unusual. So there exists a spell in this world that escapes the understanding of even a magic genius such as yourself.”*

“Stop teasing me...”

*“I am not,”* Lardon said firmly. *“You are a human like no other. Your talent for magic is, I would say, one in ten million.”*

“Ten million...?”

*“Simply put, you are a genius among geniuses.”*

“Am I now?” I felt a little giddy from the praise, especially coming from such a powerful dragon. It made me excited for what lay in store for the future.

*“So? What kind of spell is troubling our magic genius, hm?”*

“Well... I’m not sure.” I tossed the grimoire on the desk and sighed with a bitter smile. “I just have a feeling I won’t be able to successfully cast the spell if I follow the grimoire’s instructions.”

“Oh?”

“This grimoire is the genuine article, though. It’s made the same way as my magicpedia or any other Ancient Memoria.”

*“So you are saying the grimoire is not fake, yet its contents are off,”* Lardon summarized.

“Yeah... Odd, isn’t it? Why am I getting this feeling?”

“No. It is not odd at all.”

“Huh?” I blinked and looked down. It always felt like Lardon was lodged in my heart, so I would reflexively look at my chest whenever I thought to turn my gaze to her.

From within, Lardon answered, *“Such is often the case, be it a magic spell or mere human creations. Take for example... An engineer could look at the blueprint of a bridge and think, ‘This thing won’t even last a day before it crumbles under its own weight!”*

“Is that so...?”

Lardon chuckled. *“As always, you’ve not a single thought for nonmagic matters.”*

“Well, it is outside my expertise.”

*“Shall I provide a simpler example? Hm... It would be akin to reading a cake recipe that does not include sugar.”*

“That’s it!” I shot up and dramatically pointed a finger at Lardon—or I would have, were she in front of me. That was just the perfect analogy. “That’s exactly it—it’s a cake recipe, yet there’s no sugar!”

I once again took the grimoire and read from the beginning, my hand freezing at the part where the “sugar” should have been. I pored over it more intently than ever until I pinpointed what was missing. Then, drawing from my accumulated knowledge, I filled in the gap.

“Yeah... This’ll do.”

“Can you do it now?”

“Probably.”

Lardon chuckled. “Good.”

I gathered all my mana, kneading it into multiple instances of the spell—my most recent go-to method that brought me to mastery in one fell swoop. It took me some time since it was my first try, but as always, I persisted, and once I had

twenty-nine instances of the spell ready, I let it all loose.

“Camion!”

The moment the chant left my lips, several horseless iron vehicles manifested and came charging right for me—all twenty-nine of them. These odd vehicles rushed me from all sides, leaving me no time or space to dodge, and sent me *flying* through the air.

“Where am I...?”

The scenery before my eyes changed drastically. As if, in an instant, I got launched from my familiar study and landed smack-dab in the middle of an unfamiliar town.

“Oh, more importantly!” I looked over my body. “I’m...not hurt?”

There was hardly anything to check—I was clearly unscathed, not a single aching bone to be felt. I could still recall twenty-nine vehicles crashing into me, the first alone enough to send me hurtling. From there, I was probably bounced to-and-fro by the remaining vehicles. Yet here I was, totally unhurt.

*What the heck was that, then?*

“Lardon, do you know anything?”

No response came. Lardon spent more time in my body silent than speaking, but she generally answered whenever I called. Not this time.

“She’s...not here?”

Even with their eyes shut, one could still sense the “presence” of other people, from factors like the sound of breathing or body temperature. In a similar manner, I could tell that Lardon wasn’t keeping mum; she was simply not within me right now—completely absent and missing.

Confusion swelled in my mind, but my first order of business was to get back to my house. “Teleport,” I chanted—and nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. This spell could instantly bring me to any place I’d been to, and it was one I used very frequently. But now, I failed to cast it.

*No, it’s not just Teleport. “Fireball! Ice Needle! Magic Missile!!!” I tried many*

more spells, but not a single one succeeded.

I stared at the air, stupefied. *What in the world is going on?*

“Ack!” A small impact sent me stumbling for a moment before I caught my balance.

“Stop standing around in the middle of the sidewalk!”

I flinched and turned toward the angry voice. “S-Sorry... Huh?”

The man who yelled at me was riding a strange two-wheeled vehicle. Already racing off into the distance, he was turning a pair of small waterwheel-like components with his feet, smoothly propelling his vehicle forward.

*What is that? I've never seen such a vehicle before...*

“Hang on...” I took stock of my surroundings, which were no less odd than that vehicle.

A city like nothing I'd ever seen spread out before my eyes. Buildings towered to the skies, easily reaching past twenty stories judging from the height and the number of windows. Four-wheeled iron vehicles were driving through the streets, despite the absence of any leading horses or cows.

“Oh...” I found one that looked just like the odd vehicle that had crashed into me in my study—then another, and another. The thing that sent me to this place seemed to be commonplace in this city.

Curiosity piqued, I called out to a passing young man. “Um, excuse me...”

He was wearing some sort of earplugs, but he took them out and halted when he noticed me. “What?”

“Um, that vehicle,” I said, gesturing with uncertainty. “What is it?”

“Vehicle? You mean the truck?”

“It's called a truck?”

“Huh?” The man eyed me dubiously, his gaze slowly growing warier. Soon, with a look that seemed to conclude I was a madman on the loose, he plugged his ears again and scampered away.

“Ah, wait—” I reached my hand out, but the man didn't look back.

*Ugh... Was that a weird thing to ask? Oh, well. At least I'd gotten my answer: the iron vehicle that sent me here, summoned by the spell named Camion, was called a "truck."*

I took some time to stroll around this city filled with new and mysterious things. However, the more time I spent walking, the more a certain question started nagging at me: why wasn't anybody staring at me?

A bit of observation told me that my clothes didn't exactly fit in with what this city's residents usually wore. Typically in such a large city, even a countryside bumpkin would garner a few stares here and there, yet nobody was so much as casting me a glance.

I was pondering on whether I should ask somebody again, but it seemed there was no need—two men soon called out to me. "Excuse me," said one of them. "Could we speak to you for a second?"

Both were dressed the same way—perhaps a uniform of some sort. *No, hang on...* They had hats on their heads and some sort of pole by their waists. Could they be the soldiers or guards of this place?

"Thank you for your time. We're officers on patrol for the \*\*\*\* Police Station." They looked me over. "From how you're dressed, could you be on your way home from an event?"

It seemed I was right on the mark, and I actually felt a bit relieved. I was starting to wonder if I was losing it, from the utter lack of reaction anyone else spared my difference in fashion. "Um, why does no one else think I look strange?" I asked outright.

The two guards blinked and looked at one another. They probably weren't expecting me to answer with my own question.

"Well, I guess it's because cosplay isn't that unusual these days?" one offered. "You might've gotten plenty of looks long ago though," the other added. "Cosplay...?" I cocked my head at the unfamiliar word. "More importantly, do you have any form of identification on you?"

“Identification... Well, uh...” I fished through my pockets but came up short. I had nothing to prove my identity, nor had I ever been demanded such a thing since becoming Liam. Most people could recognize me as either the fifth son of the Hamilton house or the king of monsters. *I’ve never had to prove my identity with something tangible...* “I’m sorry. I don’t have anything.”

“Really? Not even a license or an insurance card?”

“License? Insurance card?” I parroted, cocking my head the other way.

“Hm... Looks like he’s got nothing,” one of the guards said, looking me up and down.

I was in a tough spot—I just knew it. They were suspicious of me since I didn’t have any means to prove my identity. “If only I could use magic now...” I mumbled, made painfully aware of just how much I’d been relying on magic since becoming Liam.

The pair of guards seemed to have heard me. They turned to stare at one another and, after a brief silence, let out an awkward laugh.

“That’s some impressive immersion,” one mused.

“Oh, well. It’s fine,” the other said, shrugging.

I blinked. “Huh? Really?”

“My friend’s a cosplayer too. He’s told me it’s hard to carry things around while in costume, and it’s also just etiquette or whatever to stay in-character.”

“Right...” They mentioned that cosplay thing again. *Seriously, what is that?*

“Next time, please bring a jacket to keep your wallet and ID in, okay?”

With that, the two guards turned and left. They came in with suspicions and then cleared those suspicions themselves. Throughout it all, passersby kept walking past as if nothing were happening. *I guess this so-called ‘cosplay’ is an intimate part of people’s lives here...?*

“Oh! Wait...”

*I’m suddenly in a strange city and can’t use magic... I remember! Something like this has happened before—it’s a dream!*

I nodded to myself, certain of my hypothesis. I was surrounded by familiar things that had been warped in odd ways. The iron vehicles were neither drawn by animals nor operated on mana, yet drove smoothly with passengers inside. The twenty-story towers were made of so much glass yet stood firm, towering to the sky. Everyone around me was even dressed in high-quality clothes only nobles could have afforded. All this would make sense if this was a dream!

“I get it now... Camion is a spell that shows a dream.” I nodded again, fully convinced. Now that I was certain this wasn’t real, I felt like I could be a bit bolder.

A woman passed by in the midst of my revelation. She was holding a small slab by her ear and talking, as if she were conversing with someone.

“Excuse me,” I called.

“Huh? What?” She frowned.

“What are you doing? You’re walking alone but talking with someone?”

“Huh? I’m just on a call with my boyfriend.”

“On a call...?” I stroked my chin. “Do you mean you’re talking with your boyfriend from a distance?”

“What are you even saying?” The girl frowned, then leaned her ear against the slab. “No, I’m talking to someone else. Some weirdo’s messing with me.” Then, she continued on her way with brisk steps.

Only then did I notice a man’s voice coming quietly from the slab. *I see... She’s putting it close to her ear so she can hear it better. This dream sure makes sense in the weirdest places.*

I set off once more, looking left and right as I walked through the city. I seemed to be in a shopping street; restaurants were lined up one after the other, all serving foods I’d never seen before.

“Ohhh!” I found a bookstore with a glass front, allowing me sight of the huge stock of books inside. I stepped inside, scouring every nook and cranny of every shelf for grimoires...but unfortunately turned up empty-handed.

“Excuse me, do you have a manga called ‘Noble on the Brink of Ruin’?”

“My apologies. It sold out on release date. Shall we have one ordered?”

I heard voices a short distance from me, both belonging to men in their thirties. It sounded like a customer was asking an employee for some book, although I couldn’t quite catch the title. The customer simply shrugged it off and went on his way.

I approached the employee. “Excuse me.”

“Hello. How may I help you?”

“Do you have grimoires here?”

“Huh?”

“Grimoires,” I repeated.

“Um... Could I have the full title, please? Is it an isekai?”

“No, I’m talking about books that teach magic.”

The employee’s expression scrunched up as he slowly and cautiously answered, “My apologies... Our store doesn’t sell such wares.”

*No grimoires, huh? I hoped to find some since this was a dream anyway... Too bad.* I thanked the employee and left the bookstore.

My strange adventure continued until my feet stopped in front of another store. Lined up on display were several slabs I’d seen before—they looked just like the one that girl was using to “call” her boyfriend earlier. I’d been assuming it was an item that allowed conversation with individuals from a distance, but others seemed to be using it to play music and view pictures—some were even moving! The slab seemed packed with utility.

I stepped into the slab-selling store and looked around.

“Oh, I get it. These are grimoires, huh?” Lardon once told me that dreams were recollections of one’s personal experiences, warped and portrayed in bizarre ways. In which case, this all made sense now. Grimoires, the source of my magic, manifested in my dream in the form of this odd little slab.

“Welcome,” said an employee. “What are you looking for?”

“Oh, this—”

"Ah. This is the latest smartphone model just released today. Of course, it supports 5G."

"I see." I actually didn't, but I was starting to get used to all this dream's nonsense. I could just respond to anything incomprehensible with a noncommittal "*I see,*" and that was that. "Can you do a 'call' with this?"

"Huh? Well, um... Yes, you can..." the employee answered slowly, perplexed.

"What else can it do? Oh, can this show pictures?"

"Yes, of course... You can take and view photos." The employee slid her finger over the slab, its display shifting in tandem with the movement.

*Ohhh...* The people here always held these slabs to their faces so I didn't see it at first, but it turned out you could operate it just by moving your finger.

"This is the camera app. This model's main feature is its one hundred megapixel camera—the first phone in the world to be equipped with one, as it happens. As such..." The employee held the slab up facing the store's interior and poked it with her finger, triggering a refreshing *snap*. "You can take these kinds of high-quality photos."

"Is this...the store's interior?"

"Huh? Um, yes..."

"I see... So it can record the surrounding scenery..." I stared intently at the slab, oblivious to the employee's exhausted gaze.

*I've never heard of such magic before... I can replicate this, can't I?* Landscape paintings could take as long as a few hours to a few days to complete, but it should be made possible instantly with magic. Such a spell didn't exist, in which case, I just had to make it myself.

"What else can it do?"

"W-Well, you can watch videos in 5K, and it can run games very smoothly too. Um... Shall I...explain the internet too?" the employee asked, looking almost afraid.

This was just a dream anyway, so I paid it no mind and nodded firmly. "Sure. Tell me everything you can."

After listening to the employee's explanations, I left the store and pondered deeply on all I'd just learned.

*That slab—a “smartphone” is what she called it? It had all sorts of features to it, most of which I could probably replicate through magic. I'll get right to that as soon as I wake up.*

“It's still too bad I can't use magic in this dream,” I muttered to myself, suddenly feeling a wave of anxiety. “I've heard dreams sometimes serve as premonitions... This couldn't possibly mean I'll lose my ability to cast magic soon, could it?”

Voicing it out only exacerbated my anxiety. I adored magic with all my heart and put so much effort into it. What would I do if I lost my ability to use it at this point...? Or could it be that this isn't just a dream—that it was some strange country, and I actually already lost my magic...?

I stopped in my tracks and vehemently shook my head, shaking the bad thoughts away. *Nope. There's no way I'll lose my magic after coming this far. Impossible.*

“AAAAAH!!!”

“WATCH OUT!”

Panicked voices reached my ears, followed by a shrill screech. Before I could even figure out what was going on, I saw a vehicle racing toward me.

“Camion?! No, that's—!”

A *truck* crashed right into me.

I awoke with a startled gasp. Eyes blown wide, I looked around in a panic. Around me was a very familiar bedroom. “I'm in...my room,” I mumbled in a daze. “Whew... Thank goodness.” I swiped the back of my hand across my sweaty forehead.

“Hm? What's wrong?”

I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard Lardon's voice.

“Nothing. I just had a bad dream.”

“Oh? What sort?”

“Uh...” I tried to recall what the dream had been about, but much like any other, it quickly slipped right between my fingers like flowing water. “I can’t really remember...but I recall not being able to use magic.”

Lardon chuckled. *“Your worst nightmare indeed. That would explain why you were groaning in your sleep.”*

“Ugh, tell me about it. But now...” I cast a simple spell—a small candlelight flickered on my finger. “Yep. I can use it.” I placed a hand on my chest, breathing the biggest sigh of relief at the assurance that magic was still within my grasp.

The contents of my “dream” rapidly slipped from my mind. Come night of that very day, I’d completely forgotten I even dreamed at all. In that sense, it was a dream just like any other. However, what I’d once seen in that “dream” remained burrowed in my subconscious.

“All right! I’ve completed Network!”

My new spell, as well as all the other developments and features that came after it, were reflections of that “dream” long forgotten.

# Afterword

Light novels are written by humans to depict human lives.

Hello, everyone! It's nice to meet you, or maybe it's "long time no see" for some? I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novel author. I sincerely thank you for picking up a copy of *I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic Volume 4*.

We were able to publish this fourth volume thanks to all your support. For this book, I bring to you the same concept as the first three volumes: the reincarnated protagonist loves magic and gives his all to learn new magic, cast new spells, and use everything he's learned to solve all sorts of problems and learn some more magic! This novel is essentially that cycle on repeat, and since our protagonist has come to understand magic a bit better now, he's also trying his hand at crafting his own spells. This fourth volume does not stray from our usual concept, so you can rest assured and give this book a try too.

Moreover, the first volume of the manga has also come out. Our staple concept has been adapted into manga form by the wonderful Rio Akisaki and her amazing art. It'll surely be an engaging read, so please do give it a try sometime.

Finally, some words of thanks:

To Kabotya, the illustrator, thank you once again. Lardon and Dyphon placed side by side are double the cuteness! We've got another one like them coming in the story, so I'll give it my best until you get to draw her as well!

To my editor and TO Books, thank you very much for publishing this fourth volume. I truly cannot thank you enough.

And to the readers who picked up a copy, I offer you my most heartfelt thanks.

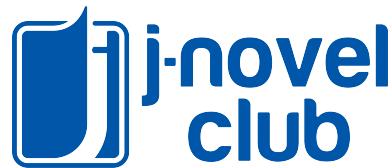
I now set my pen down while praying that this volume will sell well so I can bring you the next one too.

Sincerely,

Nazuna, September 2020







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I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic:  
Volume 4

by Nazuna Miki

Translated by Joey Antonio Edited by Christian Jay Aniz

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