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NOVEL
1
THE VILLAINESS AND THE DEMON KNIGHT

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Seven Seas Entertainment

Akuyakureijo to kichikukishi VOL. 1
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Chapter One

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'VE BEEN REINCARNATED AS THE villainess in an otome game. I could just cry!

Why would someone like me be reincarnated as a villainess? Me, an ordinary college girl who went to school, worked part-time, and never stuck her nose in anyone's business. What did the gods want from me, anyway? I played this otome game *obsessively,* yet they stuck me here, at the end of it, without even a chance to show off my knowledge. I guess that meant my role in the game was over. Like I said, I could just cry.

But crying wouldn't change the fact that my engagement was broken off and my family disowned me. And what was the point in me regaining memories of my past life if they only returned right on the eve of the graduation party?

All right, it *was* true that I harassed the heroine, excluded her from tea parties, abused my influence as the prince's fiancée to create the academy's largest clique just to have it ostracize her, and, well, I could go on.

In my defense, the heroine had committed a *major* faux pas making a pass at an engaged man, and since the academy was like a mini society of its own, I couldn't just let her actions go unpunished. I mean, it would've damaged my reputation to *not* put her in her place.

Unfortunately, that caused my now ex-fiancé, the second prince, who apparently adored the heroine, to hate my guts. I had a sinking feeling he was going to publicly condemn me at the graduation party, and I was right.

Even *more* unfortunate was that what I'd thought would be the worst-case scenario—being sent off to the nunnery—wasn't remotely close to the worst thing ever.

After all, even if he disgraced me, he still had to keep up appearances in this corrupt, convoluted society. He was a prince; I was a marquis's daughter. He'd

come up with some pretext to break things off, I'd be considered damaged goods, and my prospects for marriage would take a nosedive—but I figured that would be the extent of it.

But, as it turned out, the second prince was a total sleaze. Having removed me from the running for princess consort, he schemed to exploit my disinheritance and my lack of marriage prospects to coerce me into being his mistress. What an absolute *slime.*

Sure, I had a body that far outclassed the heroine's childish figure, but to make your ex-fiancée your *mistress*? Had the blood completely drained from his head? Or did he *enjoy* the thought of being in the middle of some messy love triangle?

Before he could act on his little scheme, though, the heroine caught wind of it and went crying to her groupies, and I ended up carted off to a brothel. Since the whole plan was orchestrated without the prince or my family finding out, I suspect she turned to the prime minister's son, who was quite experienced in such underhanded matters.

And so that was how I was on track to becoming a nun…but ended up a prostitute instead!

The heroine really had the absolute worst personality.

I mean, who cares if I was the villainess? She could've been a little bit nicer to me.

So anyway, here I was, a prostitute, with my first—and I mean *very* first—customer standing in front of me.

He had deep blue hair, the color of daybreak, and golden, honey-colored eyes. His charcoal grey suit had a tight collar and fit him like a glove. A slight, serene smile adorned the face of this exquisite beauty—er, I mean—handsome man. And in his hand, quite out of place in a brothel, was a gigantic sword.

I hope my smile looks welcoming enough right now… But why, oh why did my

first customer have to be this brute of a secret unlockable character who's absolutely merciless toward all of the heroine's enemies?!

The man in question was Lucas Herbst, the second son of a duke and vice-captain of the Imperial Order, which guarded the royal family. And since he was a secret unlockable character, he was so super elite that his mere existence in and of itself was practically cheating.

His mother was the king's younger sister. Although he was in the line of succession, he was but a second-born son, and so he decided to become a knight. He entered the academy and joined the knights when he was fifteen, which was absolutely unheard of. The entrance exam was purely based on merit, but he passed it faster than anyone would've thought possible, and from there just kept racking up achievements. At eighteen, he joined the Imperial Order, an ultra-elite group charged with the protection of the royal family. I'd also heard from ladies who gushed over him at tea parties that he was a genius who rose to the position of vice-captain within a year. He must've done something amazing to earn that achievement, since promotions within the Imperial Order were also merit-based.

There were a few times, before I regained my past life's memories, that he was assigned to guard me, seeing as I was the second prince's fiancée. I'd appreciated his calm demeanor and the gentle smile he always wore back then.

But now I saw the truth: his constant smile never reached his eyes. Those cold, glinting eyes, whose narrow gaze hid the truth.

At the graduation party, I noticed him standing behind the second prince and the heroine with a troubled expression on his face. But when his gaze turned toward me, it was so dark I could only describe it as murderous. His eyes, dilated in the darkness, fixed me with a stare so intense that all light seemed to vanish into it, and my legs trembled within my dress. The prince, thinking it was his castigation that had me shaken, gave me a smug look. But it was Lucas's gaze that terrified me, and if our eyes had met, I just might have collapsed.

As if my life weren't bad enough already, they had to throw this brute into the mix.

In the normal course of the game, Lucas acted as a romantic rival. He played the role for all five main love interests, no doubt so the developers could spare themselves the effort of designing another character. Because of that, once the heroine chose which character to pursue and made enough headway with him, Lucas would appear.

The heroine was the daughter of a count, which was a higher status than most otome game protagonists had. Thanks to her status, she and Lucas had been playmates since childhood. There were no sparks between them, but since they'd grown up like siblings, he cared for her and protected her, sometimes to the point of practically stalking her. He showed up so much that I had to wonder if he was actually a romanceable character.

I mean, when you think about it, he was just as smart and handsome as any of the love interests. Put a sword in his hand, and he was in a whole other league from them. That's why I thought, *"Hey, why isn't he romanceable?!"* but it turned out he was a secret character.

Anyway, since he was a brotherly figure whom the heroine trusted implicitly, his budding feelings for her added some spicy intrigue to an otherwise straightforward romance—in the normal course of the game, anyway….

So why did I think this perfect, superhuman character was a brute?

Because of his monstrous treatment of the heroine's enemies, that's why.

The heroine was kidnapped when she was a little girl. It was Lucas who saved her, and although he was just a child, he displayed his exceptional talents by beating the three kidnappers half to death with a stick he found lying around. Supposedly, he damaged their tendons and shattered their bones so severely he made sure they'd never kidnap anyone again.

Another example happened at a soiree. A certain marquis's son said vulgar things to the heroine and then touched her. He was tied up naked in a resting

room after the party. His tongue had been burned with a cigar, all the joints in his fingers were dislocated, and he was a frightened, trembling mess. The incident had so completely broken him that he couldn't say a single word as to the culprit. But rumors spread about the bizarre way he acted whenever he saw someone in a knight's uniform…

Now, the first incident was technically self-defense, and the second one was unproven hearsay, but the real issue was his involvement in the sort of event that would only occur in an otome game: the daughter of a marquis, who was engaged to one of the heroine's admirers, splashed wine on her in a fit of jealous rage.

The wine, red as blood, completely ruined the heroine's dress, and she was reduced to a crying mess. The marquis's daughter joined her friends, who all mocked the heroine together. The heroine was alone at the time, so she reportedly had to endure this humiliation until one of the love interests came to her rescue.

One day, those ladies were out shopping in town when they were set upon by a thug. They were nearly dragged into a back alley, but Lucas just happened to be walking by and saved them.

Before the thug could even turn to face him, Lucas beheaded him with a single stroke of his sword. The girls had collapsed with fright, and the disembodied head rolled right over to their feet as fresh blood splattered all over them. Lucas grabbed the culprit's body as it fell, then turned toward the trembling ladies with his usual calm smile and extended a bloody hand.

The girls suffered a mental breakdown due to the shock of the attack and were never seen in high society again.

He was terrifying. Terrifyingly brutal and beyond chilling. Why was such a dangerous man allowed to roam free? Well, probably because no crimes had actually been pinned on him, but also because he was in line for the throne.

Still, he was a brute. A total monster.

And some of you may have already guessed, but…yes! I, the villainess, had supposedly orchestrated the red wine incident!

In truth, however, I was feeling under the weather that day, so I decided not to attend the party. Besides, I disliked such crude behavior. Splashing wine on someone? Please! Talk about ruining your reputation. I was in line to become the princess consort, after all. I would never do anything so unseemly. That's right, and I was truly glad I didn't!

Ugh, I must really be flustered right now. Why else would I be thinking about such nonsense in a situation like this? Is this what it means when they say your life flashes before your eyes?

Anyway, I'd heard this brothel was famous for its noble customers, but I certainly never expected the so-called Knight of the Blue Rose would be one of them. If he was popular enough to earn such a dashing nickname, why would he even have the need to visit a place like this?

I heard there was a long line of noblewomen and widows dying to make love to him. I didn't know if that was true, though.

It's no use. I just can't think straight! Um, let's see… No matter how much Lucas cares for the heroine, surely I haven't done anything to warrant retribution… I haven't, but he's standing right in front of me all the same. Why is *he standing in front of me?! Okay, let's think this through. Come to think of it, wasn't there something way off in what he just said?*

"Welcome, Lord Lucas Herbst," I said. "I was wondering what brings you to a place like this, but did you say something just now? I'm sorry, but I must've misheard you."

"You heard right, Cecilia. I've come…to buy you…for a night."

I could almost *hear* his smile.

The way he paused to emphasize his words underscored just how wretched he was, but as the most gorgeous man in the kingdom stood there smiling at

me, I was almost ready to brush it off.

He really did have the most beautiful, handsome face. I was the former daughter of a marquis, and I was often told I was beautiful, but I had a feeling I couldn't hold a candle to him. But what did that say about me as a woman?

Ahh, no! Wait! Wait just a minute! Did he just say he came to buy *me?! For a whole night?!*

"Lord Herbst? This brothel is hourly, so we don't offer nightly rates."

Oho ho! Oh no. You poor thing, you didn't know the rules. The door's over there! I thought as I gestured toward it with a trembling hand.

I'm not just trembling—I'm trembling with fear! *That's what this is!*

Thanks to my noble upbringing, I managed to maintain my smile, but I had no doubt it was trembling too. But could you blame me?! There was no way I could have expected this sort of payback. I was on the brink of tears, here!

You could have the biggest brothel in town, but you wouldn't be in business for long if you let a man as improbably virile as this one have his way with your wenches till they were run ragged. So naturally, the brothel enforced a three-hour time limit per customer, and any customers who acted violently would be blacklisted. After all, this was a high-class brothel in the royal capital, which catered to the nobility. I may have been reduced to a prostitute, but I was at least condemned to an establishment befitting my noble status.

There was absolutely no way they'd consign me to an entire night with this big, burly knight.

They wouldn't. Right? Tell me I'm right!

"Yes, I know that. I negotiated with the owner, and I bought an entire night."

What? You can do that?! That's not fair. What's the point of having rules in the first place?!

"I've never been to a brothel before, but certain circumstances have forced my hand, so here I am. And thanks to my title and my family's influence, I was

able to cut a deal.”

He closed the gap between us in a matter of steps and grabbed my chin. His golden eyes narrowed, glinting with an alluring light. “And that,” he said with a chuckle, “is why I’m going to spend the night with you.”

You definitely shouldn’t use your authority to buy a prostitute! I retorted in my mind, but if he’d already paid for me then I had no choice but to do my job.

No matter how much I screamed or cried he was the son of a duke—no one was going to come to my rescue. In fact, there was no way he’d come here by himself, so his attendants were no doubt waiting on the other side of the door. Even if I tried to escape, I’d struggle to even get it open.

That meant I just had to face the facts and do my job. And I would!

This was a high-class brothel, so “doing my job” meant delivering the usual “Would you like a meal? Or a bath? Or…me?” But it didn’t seem like he’d stopped by on the way home from work, so he might’ve already had a meal and a bath.

I still didn’t want to accept that he’d bought an entire night with me, but whether I did or not he was going to be here until the sun came up. It was seven in the evening now, and the brothel closed at seven in the morning, so…

What? Twelve whole hours?!

I was born into a noble family, the picture of beauty and grace, carefully groomed to be the future queen! How could my delicate feminine body possibly withstand the appetite of this hulking rogue for an entire night?! Wouldn’t that be…death by intercourse?!

Nooo! I’ve already had my engagement broken off and been forced into prostitution, but that’s too dishonorable to bear! There’s absolutely no *way I’m dying in the saddle!*

There had to be some way for me to stall him.

“Excuse me, but would you like something to eat? If you’re hungry perhaps I could fetch you something…”

Yes, that's perfect. Feed him just a little bit, then order a bunch of alcohol to get him so drunk he passes out.

"Thank you for the offer, but I already ate at home. We only have one night together, so I'd like to make the most of it."

Smile.

He gave me that too-beautiful smile and caressed my cheek with his callused palm.

I'm sure every other girl in the world would blush and return his gaze with hearts in their eyes, but I was pretty sure I'd gone pale as a ghost with the eyes of a dead fish. The only thing I might have had in common with those girls was the way my hands were clasped before me, as if in prayer…though I doubt their hands would be trembling.

We only have one night, he said.

But what did he mean *only* one night? In my previous life, going at it for an entire night would have been absurd, but was that a regular thing in this world? Maybe the real reason brothels charged in hourly timeslots was to make more profit out of each night?

I wondered if I'd get a straight answer if I just asked someone. When the owner called me for my first job, she'd given me this pitying look before saying, "This is your first time, huh…" I need her to come in here right now and explain!

"Cecilia. Oh—is it all right if I call you Cecilia?"

"Y-yes…"

He exhaled audibly against my ear, snapping me back to reality.

Ahh, but how I wish I could stay in la-la land!

His low, deep voice seemed to vibrate through my eardrum all the way to my brain. Shivers like I'd never felt before raced up my spine and my shoulders began to tremble. I managed to answer with a scratchy whisper. "Call me whatever you like."

He chuckled lightly in my ear. “Cecilia, don’t worry. You can relax. I promise to be gentle with you. I won’t be rough…until you get used to it.”

How is that supposed to make me relax? What happens after I get used to it?! Are things going to get really bad once I get used to it?!

Lucas smiled, almost as if he could hear my internal screaming, and said, “I promise I won’t hurt you. …Well, aside from the first time, that is.”

I’d heard your first time hurts, and apparently it was true. And when a man said that, it was almost like he was *trying* to scare you. If it was the first time, shouldn’t he say he’d do anything he could to *not* hurt you?

“…So the first time *does* hurt…” It was my fault for sounding so resigned when I said it.

“Hmm… I’ve heard that it does, generally. We could use some medicine so it doesn’t hurt as much, though.” As he spoke, he gently slipped an arm around my shoulders and smiled as he led me over to the bed. As beautiful as he was, I couldn’t help but regard him anxiously.

Medicine? Is he talking about an aphrodisiac? Well, if it makes it so it doesn’t hurt, maybe I should ask for some?

While I was lost in my thoughts, Lucas guided me to the bedside. He slowly lifted up my left hand. My fear must have been transparent in the desperate gaze I fixed on him. “But,” he said, with a mirthless chuckle, “since I’m taking your virginity, I want to make my mark on you, so I’m going to make it hurt.”

There wasn’t a trace of guilt in his wry smile. I stared blankly at him, unable to grasp the intent behind his words, until the fog fled my brain in a harsh exhalation.

“…Huh? Ouch!”

The sudden pain startled me, and I looked down at my hand to discover he’d bitten my ring finger, sinking his teeth into the base of it. As if that weren’t enough, he changed positions and bit me several times to ensure he made a

mark.

I stared listlessly at the marks his teeth had left in a ring around my finger, and as I did, he planted a kiss on it.

“Ahh… You’re going to be mine at last, Cecilia… At long last.”

His mouth made a cute little smooching noise before he pulled away from my hand. A tantalizing smile lingered on his face, his golden eyes large and shimmering, like those of a beast stalking its prey.

Eyes that left me frozen in fear as that beast devoured my lips.

“Nngh…!”

Lucas kissed me deeply over and over again, changing angles as his tongue lapped and slurped, slipping between my teeth to tease the tender tissues in my mouth. He kissed me relentlessly, without even pausing to let me wipe the dripping saliva off my face.

Unable to breathe, I pushed against him, struggling to peel him off me. His grip on the back of my head eased slightly, but then his other arm, still holding his sword in its fist, tightened around my waist.

What’s going on? Is he locking me in his embrace?

Every time I heard the quiet clinking of his sword around my waist, I couldn’t help but gasp in fear, which invariably led to me kissing him back. *Well, I can’t help it! That’s the only thing that makes him relax his grip a little!*

“Mmph! Nnn, mm, nnpaaah!”

I struggled desperately to draw breath amid his relentless kisses, but eventually I was out of air, so I tapped wildly on his shoulder and he finally let me go.

As I panted for breath, I looked up at him through tearful eyes, and watched as he licked up the threads of saliva that ran from my mouth to his. My mouth

was soaked with spit—whose, I didn't even know at this point—and he wiped it away with his long fingers.

He traced his thumb over my lips, swollen from being kissed so roughly, then lowered his face once more toward mine.

Hang on! I haven't even caught my breath yet!

"W-wait!" I pleaded. "Please let me rest a minute. I-it was so rough I couldn't breathe…!"

I hastily took his face in my hands while I turned my own face, burning red with shame, away from him to guard my lips. He buried his face into my shoulder and murmured, "Mm, I can't hold back…"

What's with this guy, anyway? I'm over here panting like a dog and he's completely calm and collected. I thought kissing was just pressing your lips against each other. I had no idea it was so exhausting and so obscene!

My first kiss had been so wildly different from how I'd ever imagined it. I was bewildered. I hid my throbbing lips with a trembling hand. Meanwhile, Lucas stirred by my shoulder and looked at me, his eyes dark.

Hm? I've got a bad feeling about this. What happened? Did I somehow push his buttons without realizing it? And it's kind of scary that he's still holding onto his sword. I wish he'd do something about that…

I was withering under his piercing gaze, but still somehow forced some words out of my mouth. "U-um… Th-that was my first kiss, so I'm sorry if I—eek?!"

"What? That was your first kiss too? Really? Do you swear to God? Do you swear it on the Cline family name?!"

"Eek—ohh—haah!"

His warm, wet tongue lapped suddenly against my neck, coaxing a spattering of strange noises from me. Goosebumps broke out all over my body, and I clung tight to his expensive-looking suit in spite of myself.

Wait, what was that he said? Swear on the Cline family name… Swear it on my

family?

"U-um, L-Lord Herbst… Uh, what exactly do you mean by swearing…?"

"Can you swear it on your family?"

My family…? Huh? Does he mean the aristocratic oath? The one which, if broken, would warrant your whole family's execution?

I felt the blood drain from my face. His eyes bore into me with such fervor I dared not tear my gaze away from them.

None of this makes any sense. Neither swearing such a sacred oath in a brothel where I'm prostituting myself, nor the absolute nonsense he's asking me to swear! Why should I have to swear that that kiss was my first?!

In any case, I wasn't actually a member of the Cline family anymore since I'd been disowned, so technically, any oath I made wouldn't hold any weight. But this wasn't the time to say that. And if I just casually said, "Sure, I'll swear it!" and it somehow turned out to be a lie, then the entire Cline family would be murdered!

"Um…"

"Oh, that reminds me. Call me Lucas, Cecilia. Or you could even call me Lukie if you want."

Here I was, trembling with fear, and Lucas was cheerily changing the subject like he hadn't just implied he'd execute my entire family.

The abruptness left me dumbfounded.

"And I'll call you Cece," he said with a sparkling smile in an upbeat tone. Meanwhile, he stroked the back of my neck with his huge palm…as his hard, calloused thumb slid around my throat. Not squeezing, just holding my neck lightly in his grasp.

But all he had to do was close his fingers, and I'd go bye-bye in a flash.

But why? I stared at him, and he tipped his head slightly to one side with a

bitter smile.

His beautiful face regarded me as it might a naughty child, and a shiver ran through my body. And every time I shivered, the rough surface of his fingers grazed my skin and sent fear tremoring through me all over again.

“Ah…”

“Say my name, Cece. You can do it, can’t you?” he entreated me sweetly, this demon in human skin. There was no way out but for me to respond.

“L-Lord…Lucas…er…Lukie…”

My tongue was so stiff I couldn’t move it properly, so my voice sounded like a child’s. But as soon as I managed to say his nickname, Lucas gave me a devilish grin.

I made the right decision! I’m so glad I called him Lord Lukie. I saved my own life!

Choking back tears, I struck a victory pose in my mind, like a baseball player the moment he won the high school championship. That’s how moved I was!

My lifeline was frayed but firmly in my grasp. Or so I thought until I realized I’d overlooked one crucial matter—that the Cline family was on the verge of being wiped out.

“Heh heh. Oh my beautiful, adorable Cece. So beautiful, and yet the prince never made a move?”

Eek, there was more! I wasn’t holding onto the lifeline at all!

At this point I would have to answer, so I rallied fragile, fragmented thoughts in spite of the fear that gripped me. But that fear still had a grip on my tongue, so I stumbled over my words.

“Hey, Cece? Was our kiss really your first?”

“Mm, nn… Y-yesh, Lord…Lukie…”

“I see. And is this the first time anyone’s teased your earlobe?”

“Eek! Y-yes, it…is…”

Excuse me, but could you please stop asking me about every single thing you do to me? I’m so embarrassed I could explode!

“Well…did the prince ever touch your breasts?”

“Wha—?! A-absolutely not!”

Oh no, I was so aghast that he asked a lady that question that I talked back! Well…I may be a prostitute now, but I kind of just *became one! And since I’m still a virgin, surely I can still reasonably call myself a lady.*

In noble society, such lewd conduct was absolutely prohibited. And for unmarried ladies, it would be an utter scandal. Even if the man in question was your fiancé, you could expect cruel whispers and upturned noses. That was why generally, once two families had agreed to an engagement, they would marry off the betrothed as quickly as possible. For all those reasons, the prince had been very careful about not touching me; after all, he was in no hurry to end his days of fooling around.

Now, if the man in question was someone *other* than your betrothed, your engagement would immediately be broken off, and you’d either be forced to return to your domain or sent off to some far-flung nunnery—and those weren’t much different from prisons, really.

I would’ve been in dire straits had the heroine pulled that move on me. Such indiscretions would’ve been a huge scandal for the royal family too, however, so I’d always been tightly guarded to ensure nothing like that occurred.

I digress, but that was why it was so shocking that he would pose such an audacious question to a woman who’d been positioned as the next princess consort.

“Aw, don’t be angry with me, Cece. I just wanted to be sure no one had ever touched you before.”

“I’m not swearing anything to you, but y-you’re the first person who’s ever

kissed me, or touched me…and you'll be the first person to do everything beyond that too! I promise!"

Just saying that was mortifying, and tears of frustration welled up behind my eyes.

…Huh? I was glaring at him, so why did he have a huge grin on his face?

His eyes gleamed with a sparkle I'd never seen before. I didn't even know he was capable of making such a face. His skin was slightly flushed too… *D-damn, that's kind of sexy…*

"Ahh, Cece…" he crooned.

Wait, why is this guy so sexy?! "Y-you get it, then?"

"Yes. Thank you for making that oath, Cecilia." He kissed the bite marks around my left ring finger again. He was fast. Literally. I hadn't even noticed him taking my hand in his. *Wait, I accidentally swore to him! I've made a terrible mistake…*

Well, I suppose it wasn't a problem since the prince really hadn't made any advances on me. Although when I thought about how many people were in my family and how I was holding their lives in my hands… Well, that didn't make me feel great about swearing at all, regardless of if we'd actually done anything or not.

"But I need to confirm one more thing."

There's more?!

"Did Lord Thomas Mueller of the prime minister's family give you this dress?"

"Huh? Yes… Why do you…?"

I heard a sudden ripping sound and then felt the instant chill of the air on my back. It all happened so fast I couldn't even finish my sentence.

"Wha…?!"

I stood there, transfixed by the line traced by Lucas's arm to the gleaming

knife he held to my back. My heartbeat thundered in my eardrums.

The knife moved slowly toward my chest, and even as its tip dug into the fabric, still I could do nothing but watch. There was another brief ripping noise, then a line slit soundlessly through my dress from the bust all the way to the hem at my feet.

The knife I'd been staring at vanished with a *whoosh,* and then its owner slowly turned his gaze upon me. His face reminded me of the beautiful goddess statues we had in church, with a smile just as beautiful. But his pupils were still wide open, and despite the curve of his mouth, his eyes were not smiling. Even though just moments ago his golden eyes had been filled with happiness, there was no longer a hint of light in them. They just stared at me, thick and unwavering.

Ahh, I can't stop shaking. My legs were frozen, my throat constricted, and I struggled to breathe. I didn't know what I'd done wrong, so I didn't know how to get him to have mercy on me.

We stared at each other, unblinking, until at last—"Take it off," he said. "I'll get you another dress to replace it, so take that one off right now."

"Uh, okay."

I nodded again and again like a broken puppet. I forgot my shame, embarrassment, and everything else as I tugged at the slit of my dress, which only hung on by my arms.

Was it normal for a knight to just slash a dress open with his knife if he wanted you to take it off? If the Knight of the Blue Rose sent me a dress here, would it inspire such envy someone would send an assassin to kill me? I probably would have collapsed on the spot if my mind hadn't been occupied with those ridiculous thoughts.

Once I finished frantically disrobing, Lucas violently yanked the dress out of my hands, produced the knife again out of thin air, and used it to pin the dress to the wall. I saw all this out of the corner of my eye, and trembled even more

as the silver edge pierced the dress that had just moments ago been on me.

What…is going on? I don't understand! He already ripped the dress apart, why pin it to the wall? Wait, he's still holding a knife. Just how many knives does he have?! You don't need to use a knife for any of this, do you? And he stabbed it so deeply! Half the blade is stuck in the wall. Does he have some kind of grudge against that dress?!

My brain was so overloaded that I couldn't even direct my stream of consciousness—but could you blame me?

I shrank back from Lucas cautiously, so intent on following his movements and those of the knife in his hand that I forgot I was completely naked. Terrified and cold, I wrapped my arms around my shivering body in a feeble attempt at protection.

"You're naked… Where are your undergarments…?" Lucas's cheeks reddened slightly, his gaze faltering for a bewildered moment.

Oh, so now *the demon becomes a human again!*

Catching a glimpse of his humanity eased my fear a tiny bit, but I wanted to keep him in this position, so I found myself blurting out the answer. I told him I hadn't been given undergarments, either because this was a brothel or because Thomas Mueller, the sadistic bastard who brought me here, wanted to harass me even further.

"So that," I said, "is why I look…like this. Huh? Wait…I'm naked!"

Only as I explained it to him did I realize…that I was stark naked.

Not even in my past life had anyone seen me completely naked!

And yet here I was, naked as the day I was born, standing in front of a man and enthusiastically explaining *why* I was buck naked. It was absolutely unthinkable behavior for a young lady like myself. Waves of shame and fear washed over me, and as my body flushed bright red, I scrambled to cover my breasts and private parts with my hands. I tried, but then I remembered the

gleaming knife. I was afraid if I hid myself the demon might make a reappearance, so I unconsciously looked up at Lucas…only to explode in embarrassment.

His golden eyes stared intently at my naked body. As usual, his pupils were dilated, but his rapt gaze was filled with an undeniable, unabashed desire that seemed to scorch my skin.

“White…soft…sparse…the same color as your hair.”

“Wha—?! Don’t say that out lo—waah!”

His hand traveled from my collarbone to my breasts, then glided down along my hips until it reached a very sensitive spot. His fingers traced the curve of me and then fondled the pubic hair that peeked out from beneath my hand, which desperately tried to hide it.

Whether he intended it or not, his words only made me feel more embarrassed and heat rushed to my face.

“Oh, Cece… Cecilia…you’re so beautiful, I simply can’t believe it…”

The excitement in his husky voice was obvious, but this was no time for that.

“L-L-Lord Lukie?!”

I’d like you all to praise me for not letting out a scream.

Because suddenly, Lucas knelt in front of me, firmly grabbed me by the hips, and pressed that beautiful face of his against the hand I was using to cover that most intimate spot…and then kissed it.

Locked right onto the bite marks around my ring finger, of course.

He must really love tooth-mark rings! But again, I didn’t have time to think about such things. He was furiously, relentlessly planting kisses on me, his head constantly changing angles. And since his target was my most private area, I was so embarrassed that I suddenly broke out into a sweat.

“L-Lord Lukie…”

I frantically called his name, and he exhaled a hot breath onto my pubic hair, then flicked his golden gaze upward at me.

I honestly could not comprehend this situation—this beautiful, statuesque man currently had his face buried in my most intimate place, and he was *kissing* it.

My face was boiling with shame. I shook my head in desperate protest, but this only spurred him to take one of my fingers into his mouth and wrap his tongue around it!

“Eeeek! L-L-Lord L-L-Lukieeee!”

I couldn’t take it anymore and took my hand off my breast, moving it downward to help defend my dignity. I pushed it against Lucas’s forehead, repeating his name in desperate pleas, as he pressed feverishly into me.

He looked up slightly to meet my gaze, narrowed his eyes, then took his tongue and placed it right along my exposed slit…and slurped all the way up.

“Ahh!”

My knees nearly bucked at the unbelievable sight I was witnessing, and I had no choice but to place both my hands on his shoulders to steady myself. With the last obstacles cleared from his path, he seized his chance to spread my legs and plant his pretty little face right between my thighs!

Once again, he tilted his head this way and that as his thick tongue lapped at me, and shivers rolled like waves throughout my body, probing into that part of me that more than anything should have been closed to him. As he licked me up and down with relentless determination, suddenly his tongue touched a certain spot and my body jolted with a will of its own.

“…Ah? Oh-ohh, ahh!”

I couldn’t stop moaning as all my blood seemed to rush to that impossibly sensitive nub. He sucked it, prodded it with his tongue, licked it over and over, and my body jerked with every touch. Heat gathered around my hips. My

private parts began to throb and a tingling sensation stirred deep in my belly.

“Ah-ahh! Ee, nngh! Ahh, no! No, no, nooo! Don’t li—annghh?!”

This is pleasure, I thought in the back of my mind. But having never before known such stimulation, all I could do was loose a wordless cry as I clung to Lucas’s suit.

My first climax in either lifetime left me stunned, and Lucas began rubbing my hips as if to soothe me. I’m sure he had good intentions, but since I’d just cum my body was all too sensitive, and even that touch was too much.

Panting heavily, I tried to stop his hands from stroking my trembling body. I scolded myself softly as my hips jerked involuntarily at his touch.

“Whaa… Ahh, n-no… No, no way…!”

A thick liquid dripped down my thighs and I shook my head in disbelief.

“Aww, look at all that honey dripping down you…”

The demon didn’t even bother to wipe his drool-soaked mouth as he looked up at me and gleefully narrated my shameful behavior.

I was still reeling from learning just how naughty my own body was, and it didn’t help when he said, “You get wet easily, don’t you, Cece?” I wished I could just cover my face with my hands!

Don’t say another word! I clung onto Lucas’s neck with tears streaming down my face, which was burning with embarrassment.

“I-I can’t… L-Lord Lukie, p-please don’t say such things…”

It was *really* not nice to launch such a verbal assault on a beginner like me. I pressed my face against his shoulder, crying my eyes out into his suit, never mind how expensive it was.

“Cecilia…” He let out a deep voice that sounded more like a groan, then I felt my body floating before he pushed me down onto the bed.

Once Lucas had me on the bed, he sat at my feet and then began to take off

his suit with such fervor I thought he might rip it to pieces. He pulled off his shirt so forcefully the buttons flew off, and I heard the terrible sound of the silk fabric splitting apart. And to top it all off, he tore his belt right apart.

Huh? Isn't that belt made of leather? And he just ripped it apart with his bare hands?! I was so shocked I had to sit up to get a better look at it.

He'd stripped himself half-naked in no time flat, then flung his shirt and belt across the room. He looked right at me as he started to caress my legs.

I'd thought at first that Lucas was quite slender for a knight, but now that I saw him with his clothes off, I discovered that he sported finely toned muscles just as beautiful as his face. His shoulders and chest were quite broad, his neck sturdy, collarbones sharp, abs traced with bold cuts. And the way his pants hung loosely from his hips, having been freed from his belt—totally sexy, right down to his toes.

Oh my god, I feel like such a slut! Take your eyes off him right now, Cecilia!

I was so embarrassed I'd been staring at his gorgeous, chiseled body that I blushed and averted my gaze downward, but he still didn't stop caressing me. His touch was soft, the barest brush against my skin…but since I'd just orgasmed, my entire body was so sensitive that was all it took to make me tremble.

The way his gentle hands moved upon my skin felt so good…and that scared me. This was the first time that I'd ever seen a man naked, and the fact that I liked it so much overwhelmed me with embarrassment. I pulled my legs away from him to try to protect myself, but when I did that, his golden eyes grew dark and piercing as he narrowed them at me.

"…Cece."

He was only calling my name, but it still felt like he had his hands around my neck, like he wouldn't take no for an answer.

I knew I needed to put my legs back out, but I was too frozen with fear to

move. Lucas tipped his head slightly to the side, and I could hardly believe what he said next.

"I take it you want me to tie you up so that you can't move?"

"…What?"

"You want me to tie you up, don't you?"

"N-no."

Huh? This is weird. It's weird, right?! Why would he ask if I wanted him to tie me up? Who in their right mind would ever say yes to that question?! Don't tell me he thought he was doing me a favor asking me that?!

I was completely baffled. Meanwhile, Lucas put his hands on both my knees, then slowly started tracing little circles all the way up to my thigh while looking at me to gauge my response. I gave up on gritting my teeth and told myself to relax my legs. Once I did that, Lucas planted a single kiss on my knee, and for some reason my legs just fell effortlessly open before him.

After being licked and drenched with my own cum, my sticky pussy was now exposed to the cool air. Watching a man look at it, something no one else had ever seen before, made me clench up reflexively, but that only made it start throbbing and I felt myself twitching deep inside again.

Even that subtle twitch didn't evade his notice, though. "Does being watched turn you on, Cece?"

"N-no…Eek!"

Lucas slipped his long fingers between my lips with a wet smacking noise. He pushed in with some force, then began rubbing me, and in no time at all my wetness began pouring out from my slit.

"You're even wetter than before, Cece. Your adorable little pussy loves it so much when I look at it and touch it; it's simply gushing. Can you hear how naughty it sounds?"

"Nngh, noo!"

That is just way too obscene! He's taking all that's precious in me as a lady and leaving it in tatters. Is that what normal people do in moments like this?!

Amid panting breaths, I frantically tried to hide both my embarrassment and my pleasure, but the wicked knight Lucas was using his entire palm to make lewd noises as he toyed with my wetness. Then all of a sudden, he said, "Oh, that's right!" as if he'd just had a wonderful idea.

I've got a bad feeling about this…

He used his soaking wet fingers to smooth down my pubic hair, which had been disheveled by his teasing, then placed his hands on the soft, comfortable bed and began moving his muscular upper body.

His sexiness factor shot through the roof as he climbed on top of me, and I couldn't tear my gaze away. All I could do was watch, transfixed, as he brought his mouth down to my breast.

"H-huh? E-eek!"

He furiously suckled on my breast, pulling it into his mouth, stretching and squishing it into all kinds of shapes with his tugging.

This is weird. This is weird, right?! C-can breasts really fit into someone's mouth that deeply?!

I'd had next to zero experience with men in my previous life, so I had nothing to compare it to, but as I watched him pull not only my nipple but also the soft flesh around it into his mouth, sucking and slurping the whole time, I couldn't help but wonder if that was even normal. Also, I learned that breasts weren't just soft mounds of flesh…they were actually quite sensitive!

"Ahh, ahh…nngh… Nyah?! No, not both! You can't!" I moaned loudly. My hips bucked wildly as he sucked hard on my breast, and then took his hand and began rubbing me between my legs.

"Your breasts are so soft…but your nipples, engorged like this, are hard as rocks. Your tits are quite sensitive, aren't they, Cece?"

Can we please, please *stop narrating this, Lucas?!*

"All the blood's rushed between your legs and now your clit feels like a hard little bean, Cece. It feels good, doesn't it? I rub it with my thumb and all that sticky honey starts flowing out of your precious little hole. Mm, I love the way your honey smells, Cece. Nngh, I can't stand it…"

"Nngh, ahh! No, no, no, you can't! Don't rub it! Not there! Ahh, mmah!"

Ahh, somebody clamp this guy's mouth shut!!

My mind yelled in protest even as my voice screamed with pleasure. Then I felt his rough, callused finger push inside of me, and for a moment I went rigid with pain and fear.

"Oh, god…so this…this is what you feel like inside, Cece…"

"No, it hurts… Eek?!"

For some reason, he sounded profoundly moved, but I didn't have time to worry about that—I panted frantically, trying to make it through the pain. But he was a merciless devil, and once he'd gotten one finger into my tight hole, he twisted another one in to join it—just what a demon would do!

How dare he do this to a virgin?! Half of my brain was screaming and crying out, but the other half observed the situation rationally: *Hmm, well he* did *say it was going to hurt…*

He *did.* He *did* say that, but…

I imagined myself soothing the part of me that was moaning, and took repeated, shallow breaths to work through the pain. It felt so good a few moments ago I couldn't believe all I felt now was pain. And if this hurt so much, I couldn't imagine what it would feel like when I lost my virginity.

I was so overwhelmed I let out a tiny voice and said, "Help!"

His golden eyes that had been staring at me became chillingly dark, and I realized I'd made another mistake.

I can't help it! The average person can't tell where the off switch is for the demon in this guy!!

The entire room seemed to freeze, and all I could hear was my thundering heartbeat.

"…Help?" The sound of the word seemed to crawl out of his mouth and drift up toward my ears like a thick smoke. The moment I sensed hostility, all the warning bells rang loudly and all the red lights blinked furiously in my mind.

I screwed up. I really screwed it all up!

I heard the bed make a creaking noise, but it sounded more like the gates of Hell itself opening up to me. Trembling uncontrollably, I stared at Lucas's expression, now void of restraint. Suddenly, he flashed me a sinister grin, revealing a twisted ferocity I had never seen before.

This is bad. This is very, very bad! God, why do you let demons walk the earth? Hurry up and get him outta here!

But of course, my prayers went unanswered, and the demon chuckled lightly. He grabbed the back of my neck and pulled me so close to his face our lips almost touched.

"Cece? Did you just say something?"

"Eep…"

"Did I hear wrong? Because I could've sworn you said…'help.'"

"N-no, I…"

"Hey, now. Just who were you saying that to?"

Who? Well, I didn't say it to anyone! Yeah, who are you*, after all? You're acting like a wild animal all of a sudden, but shouldn't going feral in a scene like this be totally off-limits for a character like you?! You're acting like a sadist, and once they get to this point it only gets worse! Ahh, I can't take it!*

"I-I was talking t-to you, L-Lord Lukie…"

You're the only person who can help me now! Please understand that!

"Pfft, aha ha! Right. Of course. Obviously, I'm the one you'd ask for help. Sorry, I was just feeling a little insecure there for a second. I thought maybe you were thinking about another man even though I'm the one who's going to make love to you."

"And once you said his name, I was thinking of killing him." Smile.

Yeah, sorry…not even I can smile in response to that!

The muscles in my cheeks were so tense my teeth started chattering. The mood had become so terrifying that it didn't even feel like a sex scene anymore—more like a battlefield, which felt even stranger since I was currently stark naked in the arms of a gorgeous man who only had half his clothes on himself…

And my tattered dress pinned to the wall with a knife just added to the horror movie atmosphere. Having to die in a place like this would be torture. Was this really just your average night in a brothel?!

For now, his tone of voice seemed normal, despite the heinous contents of his words. *Yeah, he's definitely the one who almost killed those guys in the capital!* And he had been *veeery* close to killing one of my acquaintances, friends, or family members.

I wanted to cry and ask him how many people's lives I had to save. *Oh, wait. I already cried over that. Ugh.*

"Ah, I apologize for scaring you, Cece. The knights often tell me to be careful because my hostility has caused people to faint on occasion. Though there haven't been any casualties lately, so I really thought I had it under control… But I guess I just can't control myself when it comes to you. I didn't intend to scare you at all. I just get anxious, you know."

Okay, there's a whole list of words in that speech that need way more context. What do you mean, "casualties"? That sounds a bit more serious than someone merely fainting! And he's blaming me *for making* him *feel anxious?! It almost*

sounded like he was saying "Don't make me feel so anxious," but isn't that normally something the girl would say? And now it feels like I need to be the one reassuring him?!

Did I do something so terrible to the heroine it made him unable to control himself? I really, really doubted that, but at the same time I was too scared to ask…

"Um, L-Lord Lukie… I-I'm sorry I made you feel…anxious…?"

Ahh, please forgive me for making that last part sound like a question! I'm really not sure if I was making the right decision by apologizing. I really don't want someone to lose their lives over this! Please be nice to me!

"Oh, Cece. You're so sweet. Would you mind if I indulged in that sweetness for a bit?"

Huh? So you won't return my kindness?

Now it just felt like I was the only one apologizing here. Why was my vision blurry all of a sudden…?

"Um, how?"

"You don't have to do a thing, Cece. It's just that I have this uncontrollable possessiveness when it comes to you. I just want to make a little mark on you proving that you belong to me."

I had a feeling his idea of a "little mark" and my idea of a "little mark" were wildly different, and I hated myself for being too timid to clarify.

Lucas reached out and touched my breasts as if looking for a place to put his mark, so I pushed them together with my arms and looked up at him expectantly as if to say, "Go ahead." His golden eyes narrowed with delight. I could see the reflection in his eyes of a coquettish young girl offering her body up to him, tears shining in her long, fluttering eyelashes.

Lust burned in his eyes as he unabashedly pressed a light kiss on my lips. He lapped at my mouth, then ran his tongue along my neck, my collarbones, and

my soft breasts, planting little pecks along the way.

He started sucking on me harder, inclining his head slightly to admire the pink marks he left behind. Then he brought his mouth back to my flesh and bit me. He bit my breast so hard he broke the skin and blood beaded on the surface.

"O-owww! N-no, oww! That hurts!"

Bite. Bite. He bit me again and again. It was painful, and I tried to push against his shoulders to get him away from me…but then he started caressing me between my legs gently, like he was trying to overwrite the pain his fingers caused me earlier.

Lucas flicked his thumbnail against my sensitive, hard nub while the pads of his fingers pressed firmly against my lower belly. My hips trembled and my vision flashed white.

I arched my back, unable to bear the stimulation, causing my breasts to bounce and jiggle right in front of Lucas's face. Now that his target had been sighted, he latched onto my sensitive nipple with his teeth.

"Nngh, ahhh!"

Even though it hurt, the stimulation pushed me over the edge. Exhausted, the last thing I remembered before passing out was Lucas holding me tightly and calling my name with sweet satisfaction.

Wow, great job passing out, Cecilia.

"Cece… Oh, Cece, please hurry and wake up."

The pleasure of Lucas's warm palm rubbing against me and his frantic, beautiful voice brought me back to consciousness. I opened my eyes to see the most beautiful man in the world staring at me with a pained expression on his face.

"Huh? What did I…"

“Nngh, Cece! You’re awake! Do you need some water?”

I nodded listlessly and Lucas filled a glass of water from the pitcher on the nightstand.

There was something off about him. He was frowning, as if in some kind of pain. I wondered if something happened while I was unconscious.

“Lord Lukie…? Oww!”

“Tch… Cece, don’t sit up. I’ll give you your water.”

I tried to sit up, but he stopped me. My breasts and vagina were throbbing but particularly my vagina. It was pulsing with pain to the point that it felt like he still had his fingers inside me. I didn’t understand why I was in pain, or why he looked like he was in pain. *At any rate, just give me the water!*

“Nngh, phew…”

“Haah… Do you want more?”

Sigh. Of course he was making me drink the water from his mouth. Well, I supposed that was the easiest way to do it since my body was too weak to sit up. And considering he was the one who’d left me so weakened to begin with his kindness was a bit surprising.

Even though he pressed his mouth on mine with the intention of giving me the water, his tongue intertwined and lapped at mine. It felt so good… *Ugh, you’re going to bring back the aftershocks of my orgasm… Still, why is Lucas so freakin’ sexy? And he’s panting really hard. Seriously, what happened to him?*

“Mm, Lord Lukie… Eek! Ah, no!”

“See, your nipples get rock hard just from kissing, and your pussy’s soaking wet. You love it when I make you feel good, don’t you Cece? I want to feel good too. I’ve been holding back so much this whole time. Can I?”

How was anything he’s done to me “holding back”? And can he do what, exactly?

A jolt of pain raced through my nipple as he bit and flicked it with his tongue, but when he softly nipped at my breasts and began to roughly fondle them, shivers raced up through my hips to my spine.

His gaze was filled with lust and dripping with sex appeal. When I remembered the inescapable pleasure and pain he'd given me, I felt my wetness spill out from me…and then I noticed something odd.

There was something between my legs. No…right at my entrance.

"Huh? Ah-ahh!"

"Ha ha, it took you long enough, Cece. You're so tight… Are you trying to push me out? Heh heh, that's so hot… I wonder how you'll moan when I push myself inside of you. I really couldn't decide if I should ease it in slowly or just thrust it all in with one stroke. But since this is your first time, I want to savor it. And I want you to hold on tight to me while I fuck you, so I decided to take it slow. I think it'll probably hurt a lot, but only this first time, so just try to bear it, okay?"

"Wha—no! Oww!"

He pinned my hips down forcefully with his strong hands and started moving his hips as he spoke, sounding truly delighted despite the scary things he said. It hurt as it pushed against my opening, but that very pain seemed to make my juices flow freely…and noisily…

"Mm, there's your hymen. I decided I was only going to break it while you were awake, so it was excruciating being able to only go so far inside of you. You should praise me for showing such restraint."

I really don't understand what there is to praise about that! I'm telling you, ordinary people really can't comprehend the things demons say! Putting the tip of yourself inside an unconscious woman isn't something to brag about under normal circumstances, anyway! Or wait—maybe it is in the demon world…?

Well, this isn't *a demon world, this is a brothel!*

But even though this was a brothel, I was in a tough spot given that I didn't know just how rough he was allowed to be, or whether I'd be punished for voicing my disapproval. It was even more frustrating that he didn't just ignore my vocal discomfort but seemed to actually enjoy it. It didn't seem like expressing my pain to him was an option, and if I tried to refuse it would probably just get worse—I definitely wanted to avoid that at all costs!

Still, only the tip of him is inside of me and the pressure I feel is so intense. I-if he puts that thick cock all the way inside of me, he'll split me open! I-I have to just relax!

"Cece… Don't squeeze around me like that. It feels too good. Haah… I want to savor the feeling of your pussy spreading open for me as you moan."

"Nngh, ahhh! It hurts…!"

How am I supposed to relax in this situation?

The pain in my vagina drove all other thoughts from my mind. A dull thumping seemed to resound in my head. I realized it was the sound of his cock pounding against my hymen, trying to force it open, and all of a sudden, I relaxed. The moment the pressure went away, I let out a deep sigh and then I felt him pounding against my hymen again.

"Haah!"

My vision flickered from the pain. I aimlessly reached out to grasp the sheets, and I found it ironic that the man who was so wickedly tormenting me guided my hands into his own, entwining his fingers gently in mine.

Then it seemed he would break through my hymen, and the pain was so intense my breath caught in my throat. At that, he withdrew his dick just a little, the pain abated, and I began panting again.

And then he began his assault anew.

I let out such a high-pitched shriek I couldn't believe it was coming from my

own mouth. It hurt so bad I thought I was going to pass out again, but then Lucas started to kiss me, gently pulling me back to reality.

"Mm, nngh… Haah?!"

"Ahh, Cece! Cece, Cece, Cece! Oh gods, thank you for letting me hold her in my arms. Thank you for letting me fuck a girl like her… Thank you for letting me fill her belly with my seed!"

And thank you for… He said something else with an ecstatic expression on his face, but I was screaming too loud to hear it.

The word "contraception" flashed through my mind at the same I heard him say the word "seed," but that thought soon disintegrated amid the pain from the relentless pounding of his dick.

"Ow, it hurts! No!" I cried and moaned.

He pinned down my bucking hips so I couldn't escape and called my name.

I pleaded with him in a hoarse voice, barely above a whisper, to please be done already. Finally, his thrusting slowed, and he let out a giant sigh. I stopped panting, my trembling legs weakly splayed out on the bed.

I was so wracked with pain, so drained from crying, that I was only about half-conscious. His hands caressed my body, which was slick with sweat, before traveling to my breasts. He scooped them up, kneading them, and I moaned softly with pleasure.

With all the terror and pain I'd just experienced, I couldn't believe that I was still able to feel pleasure.

"No… Wait… Please…!"

He was still inside of me, and I still felt a dull throb of pain. My nipples were so sensitive, and I was afraid he'd be rough with them, so I shrank back. But to my surprise, he very lightly rubbed the tip of my nipple, then softly traced the outline of my areola. Pleasure spread through my body, and a heat rose to my breasts that seemed to welcome his touch.

Lucas scooped up my breasts again and massaged them while lapping up the thin layer of sweat that had accumulated beneath them. He kissed my flesh right on top of my thundering heartbeat and sucked hard, leaving a mark. His tongue licked the wet ridges of my ribs, then traveled all the way up to lick my armpit, which startled me so much I let out a shriek.

Oh, god. That voice. It was supposed to be a shriek, but instead it came out sounding unbelievably tender. Only then did I realize the noises I was making had completely transformed into instinctive moans arising from his touch that no longer brought pain but pleasure.

"Haah, nngh, n-no…!"

I frantically tried to stop myself from making such pleading noises, so I shoved my hand between his mouth and my body to try and stem the tide of pleasure.

"Please…stop…licking…"

"Heh heh. So my tongue makes you feel good, Cece? It sounds like you're enjoying yourself. *Let me hear you some more."* His glowing golden eyes narrowed happily. The beautiful demon smiled as he flicked his tongue over my hand.

He's licking me. Lucas is licking *me. Licking my* hand! *Oh my god, he just put my fingers in his mouth!*

"Eek! N-no, Lord Lukie! Please stop…!"

"Mm, your fingers are so little and slender. What's wrong, Cece? Does it feel good when I lick your fingers?"

"O-of course not!"

"Then it shouldn't matter if I lick them or not, right?"

I felt his hot breath on my skin as he took two of my fingers into his mouth at once. He flashed me an amused look, then began to move his tongue noisily and lewdly along my skin. His touch elicited a sort of throbbing sensation, which sent thrills up my arm, mixed with fear at what I was feeling.

Why do fingers have erogenous zones?! What could possibly be the purpose? I don't need them! I don't! At this point Lucas is going to exploit every erogenous zone I have!

"I-it feels good, okay?! It feels good when you lick me, Lord Lukie! I-it feels *too* good so pl-please, let me go!"

This is so odd. Just a bit ago I was known for being a lady of manners and grace! What happened to me?! I just became a prostitute today, and I was still a virgin, so why am I so weak against pleasure?! How can I go on like this? Is this just how it's gonna be now that I'm a prostitute? Ugh, I can't handle that…

In the midst of my private laments, I heard Lucas chuckling.

"Wh-what are you laughing about? Th-this is all your fault, Lord Lukie!" Seeing him laugh at me made me angry. I glared at him through my tears and spoke to him defiantly, but then I realized what I'd done and my breath caught in my throat.

"Heh heh. I'm sorry, you're just so cute when you're writhing in ecstasy. I love how embarrassed you look when I lick you, though your feelings are written plain on your body. Even the way you're blushing and telling me it's my fault is adorable."

He raked a hand through his hair, which was damp and slightly curled from sweat, tucking it out of his way. He planted a kiss on my fingers and then gave me a big smile.

"Cece…" he called me affectionately, like how one would call their lover.

"Y-yes?" I replied hesitantly.

This time he happily planted a kiss on my palm. He caressed my cheek so incredibly gently, like he was handling something fragile, lovingly taking my chin in his hand. Lucas then kissed me softly on the lips, as if to convey through it some emotion of incredible importance.

My heart skipped a beat.

I was a prostitute and he was my customer. He'd bought me for the night. I had his handsome, statuesque body and his beautiful smile all to myself. And I had his golden eyes which simmered with pleasure, and his ferocious sexiness too. But the only reason we were in this situation, the only reason he was doing this, was to trick me and save the heroine. This was *all* for her sake.

The moment that thought crossed my mind, the pain and all the intense emotions which had been boiling up inside of me suddenly burst forth and I kissed Lucas on the lips.

Why am I kissing him? Is it because I'm so upset that he's only doing this for the heroine that I can't stand it? But why? Well, considering he's here to make love to me, it'd only be natural to feel upset if this were all for another woman, right? It's not strange to want him to focus solely on me…right?

As I questioned my own actions, I timidly looked at Lucas and was surprised at what I saw. For some reason, his cheeks were flushed and he was frozen. My heart swelled.

Not only had he enjoyed the kiss, but it looked like I'd actively turned him on. That fact thrilled me so much that I gave into the emotion, flinging my arms around him and kissing him even more deeply. Lucas's body began to tremble and his eyes widened with surprise.

Seeing him flustered like that excited me, and I wanted to tease him more, so I kissed him the way he'd kissed me before, tilting my head slightly here and there. Next, I ran my tongue over his thin lips and tried pushing it inside his mouth.

I immediately ran up against his thick tongue. For a second, I wondered what I should do, but I imitated what he'd done before and pushed my tongue roughly against his.

"Haah… Nngh… Cece… Cecilia…!"

"Nngh, mm… Haah… Lord Lukie… Nngh, yes… Lord Lukie…!"

We called each other's names, kissing each other so deeply and passionately, as if it would kill us to part our mouths even for a second. Immersed in the kiss, it felt as though we were lovers—a thought that tightened my chest. But we were only being swept up in the moment, I told myself. There was nothing more to it.

I dismissed the painful throbbing of my heart as a figment of my imagination and lost myself in kissing Lucas. My vagina had been so painful earlier, but the pain had softened to a moist ache. It hurt, but it felt good. It hurt, but I throbbed deep inside. I didn't want to just kiss.

Kissing wasn't enough.

Holding him wasn't enough.

Hearing him call my name wasn't enough.

I wanted him to fill me up with everything—I wanted him to fill me up with all of himself.

Driven by this lustful impulse, I hesitantly tried to move my aching hips despite the pain. As I expected, my opening stung a little, but I could feel myself getting wetter and wetter inside every time I felt his thick cock twitch. My body was so transparent with its cravings that I felt deeply ashamed; I wished I could crawl into a hole somewhere.

But most of all…I felt happy, because Lucas was responding to me.

"Nngh! C-Cece?!"

"Mm, mm…yes… Lukie… Lord Lukie… Does that feel good?"

I took a peek at his face in between kisses. His pupils were blown and he was frowning as if in pain.

Hmm, was I hurting him? I only asked because I lacked the experience to tell on my own, but all he said in response was, "Destructive…"

What did that mean? What was destructive? Maybe it really did hurt? Or

should I have just been happy that he responded to me at all?

I tried my best, but I had neither the necessary experience nor stamina to continue, so I concentrated all of my efforts into kissing. Lucas's attention must've shifted there as well, because although his tongue was deep in my mouth, he was very gently and attentively probing me. This kiss felt better than any of them so far, and for some reason my heart began to ache again.

I gulped down the spit we exchanged and reluctantly pulled away, caressing his beautiful face with both of my hands.

Damn, he's so gorgeous. He really is as handsome as a statue. And that pure face of his is soaked with lust. And I'm the only one he's looking at. I'm the only one he's thinking about!

An uncontrollable sensation of joy welled up inside of me and I blurted out, "Lord Lukie…please give me more? I'm aching for you deep inside. It hurts, but I want more. Please, Lord Lukie…I…"

Before I could even finish my sentence with "I want you," he let out a guttural noise and I felt an incredible impact deep inside of me, turning my sigh into a gasp.

It hurts. It's so hot. It hurts. It hurts. It hurts! *It's so hot.*

My eyes flew open with shock, releasing tears that poured down my cheeks.

I heard a rough panting noise, but couldn't believe it was coming from my own mouth. My belly was throbbing so intensely it was like I could feel my heartbeat down there. I briefly tensed up my body to try to bear the pain.

Luckily, he held me tightly and stilled inside of me, so the pain didn't grow any worse. I started taking long, deep breaths in an attempt to overcome the pain and it eased a little, so I was able to return my focus to Lucas, who was holding me close.

Why isn't he moving? What happened?

His face was buried against my shoulder. Unable to see his expression, I

started to feel nervous.

Um, what should I do?

I put my hand on his shoulder to make sure he was still alive, and he twitched and finally lifted up his face.

“Lord Lukie, wha—huh?”

His brow was furrowed and he gritted his teeth. He looked completely out of control.

“Wh-what? Lord Lukie?! A-are you okay?!”

I was so surprised I forgot about my pain for a moment, overcome with concern for him.

Lucas panted, “Cece…don’t…move…” and held me tightly as he lay there frozen.

The look on his beautiful face was positively obscene…but why did he look like he was in so much pain?! I’d heard in my previous life that it could be hard for a man to take someone’s virginity too, but was that because it was painful? Since I didn’t know what could make it painful, I had no idea what was going on. Either way, it was definitely my fault, right?

What should I do? Now what? It hurts, and he’s hugging me so tightly I can’t move. So if neither of us can move, what’s going to happen?

As I lay there panicking, all of a sudden Lucas groaned. Why was he groaning?!

“Ahh, I can’t, Cece! Ahh, shit!”

“Nngh? Mm! Nn-maah! Ahh, eek! No, not like that!”

All of a sudden Lucas roughly shoved his tongue against mine in frustration. He grabbed the back of my knees and pushed them up, spreading my legs wide. He pinned me down like that and started thrusting in and out of me.

He’d folded me up so my knees were next to my face. The sight of this

gorgeous man on top of me, pounding his monstrous cock into me over and over again, was unbelievable.

“Eek! It’s…too big! Nngh, no! I can’t!”

“Haah… You’re tight, but…I can…push all the way in… Mm, see?”

“Oooooh!”

When he pulled his dick all the way out, my pussy, which had only just now been spread wide, tried to close up again. But then he shoved his scorching erection back inside, forcing it open. It was so hot and there was so much of it that all I could do was scream and writhe in ecstasy.

I felt a dull, throbbing pain as he went as deep as he could, but then he pulled it all the way out again. Now that I was finally free of the pressure of my hymen, I let out a deep sigh, only to be filled all the way to the brim again.

He did this over and over again, and although it still stung a bit, it didn’t really hurt anymore. He did it slowly, so now my attention went to his cock which was buried deep in my belly. Since the pain was almost gone, it was like I could fully feel his presence inside of me for the first time.

When I felt his raging hot tip poke softly at my depths, it felt just like the kiss we’d shared before. And the moment I felt like I couldn’t take it anymore, there was a sensation like all the blood rushed to my pussy. My juices gushed out while my inner walls started trembling.

“Nngh!”

“Aah! O-Ohh, nngh!”

The trembling sensation swiftly raced from my belly all the way up to my head. My hips began to spasm out of control, but Lucas pressed down firmly on them, holding them in place. He kissed me, absorbing my moans of pleasure, as he delivered small, intense thrusts.

Next thing I knew, a warm sensation spread through my belly. It felt so good that my pussy began to quiver as if overjoyed. I clung to his neck as I trembled.

His brow was still furrowed, but all of a sudden, his body relaxed, and he pulled away from our kisses.

Both of us looked into each other's eyes, panting and out of breath.

He frowned again and then…he blushed.

Huh?

Yes, Lucas. *That* Lucas, whose pupils were perpetually dilated with devilish glee…was blushing. And he wasn't just a little pink around his eyes, he was flushed such a deep red it was obvious he was embarrassed.

Embarrassed! Lucas! Huh? Why? Oh my god, how precious!

Unusually for him, and probably because I was staring at him with wide eyes, he averted his gaze.

That just excited me more, so he pouted and said in a brusque tone of voice, "What?!" For a split second, I saw a flashback of light brown hair, but then I was immediately consumed by a whirlpool of excitement.

"What? I mean, you're embarrassed! So why?"

He's really, really embarrassed! His whole face is bright red! It's so sexy! But also…kind of cute?!

I reached out toward the dark blue bangs hanging messily across his eyes so I could get a better look at his face, but he just glared at me.

"Well, I can't help it! It felt too good and I couldn't hold back! Ahh, damn it!" he said. Another wave of embarrassment must've hit him again because he squeezed me and hid his gorgeous face against my shoulder.

I thought I heard him muttering something that sounded like, "My dignity…" but I didn't have time to worry about that right now.

I was much too overwhelmed by the jarring contradiction of the blushing, beautiful man who shyly hid his face against me and his terrifying demon knight persona.

Lucas… I turned Lucas on just as much as he did to me. He said it felt too good and he couldn't hold back anymore… *Ahh, you can't get too happy! Uh-oh, I can feel my pulse throbbing in my belly again… No, Cecilia! Calm down!*

My hard work was not in vain; not only was my heart clenching with happiness, but my *other* most intimate part was too.

"Oh!"

"…Hn?!"

All of a sudden, Lucas's head whipped up to look at me.

And since we were still connected, I could tell that I'd stimulated him.

"Wh-what, Lord Lukie?"

"…Heh heh."

I-I should brush it off! That's a very important skill in high society! Even if something was plain for all to see, you were expected to demur and say, "Oh, nothing…" with a practiced poker face. *Come on, if there was any time to use my skills as a noble, it's now! And what does he mean by "Heh heh"?!*

Although his gaze was stronger than before, the heat had already subsided from his cheeks and he was back to his cool, statuesque self.

And now it was my time to blush.

Lucas grinned at me as I frantically tried to keep my cool. A beautiful, perfect grin. But his golden eyes were glinting with lust. *I've got a very bad feeling about this!*

Then he devoured me. I cried and moaned for him to help. At the very end he whispered something to me, and I desperately tried to reply amidst my sparkling vision…but then my consciousness faded.

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I looked down at her sleeping face.

Her bright green eyes were closed and she looked so peaceful, but one glance

at her wet, flushed cheeks and it was obvious she'd been crying. Her body was slick with sweat, her limbs splayed out so limply across the bed it almost looked like she was dead—that's how still she was.

But if I stayed very still and watched her carefully, I could see her chest rising and falling: proof of life.

My beloved was finally mine. It had taken so long. I'd endured so much.

Her dignified figure and her serene, cheerful smile attracted the attention of everyone around her, and I'd suppressed the urge for so long to just shout that she was mine. But it was the second prince who was blessed to have her return his gaze. It was he who'd strutted shamelessly by her side while I, who'd been charged with his protection, wrestled against the urge to inflict violence upon him.

But I had patiently endured it all for this very moment.

It had been worth it because now Cecilia was mine.

Ever since I could remember, I'd realized there was something odd about me. Although I could express the full range of emotions—joy, anger, sadness, happiness—not one of them seemed to resonate inside of me. I could laugh and I could weep, but my heart was never moved, empty of the emotions that should accompany those actions. Despite this peculiarity, my parents, siblings, and even my servants showered me with affection. It never sat easy with me, but I never wanted to burden them, so I carefully cultivated the skills required of a duke's son to the best of my abilities.

Yet I came to realize something even stranger about myself.

When I was five, I was given a sword. And as I strapped its sheath to my left hip, my unbalanced body, which had always leaned to the right, straightened itself and I stood perfectly upright. I could still vividly remember that peculiar sensation.

I excelled in my studies, but my abilities for martial arts seemed limitless.

My rapid progress left my instructors filled with trepidation, resulting in a revolving door of new teachers appearing and exiting every other week. When I was ten, my father, upon my request, asked Andreas Weber, a renowned swordsman and the vice-captain of the Imperial Order at the time, to take me on as an apprentice.

Simply put, Andreas was a demon. No matter how exceptional a ten-year-old I was, training with the knights of the Imperial Order was absolute hell. But if it weren't for that experience, I would've never met her.

I was thirteen when my body finally grew accustomed to the training, and began sparring regularly with the knights. It happened during one of these bouts. Having pondered tactic after tactic in my head, I identified a gap in my opponent's defense and decided to take him out with a sweep into that spot. I put my full force into the strike, yet my foe somehow deflected it so decisively that the sword flew from my quivering hand. It sounded like the blow had rattled my opponent as well, but all I could do was stare down at my hand, bleeding from a ruptured callus.

Even though my opponent was an adult and I was just a child, and despite the overwhelming difference in strength and stamina…if I couldn't even keep my sword in my hand, only one outcome awaited me: death. *I need more training,* I thought as I flexed my numb hand. Then, as I looked up to search for the sword that had been flung from my hand, I saw her standing next to Andreas.

The second prince had just been betrothed, and Andreas had brought Cecilia, who was eleven at the time, to the training grounds. Being the prince's fiancée meant she would one day become a member of the royal family. He brought her there to introduce her to the members of the Imperial Order.

It was embarrassing to think back on that moment now. How long had she been watching me?

Andreas called me over, so I approached them. The girl leaned out from behind the fence. Her big, bright green eyes were filled with tears and her face

was awash with concern. With her lavender dress and light amber hair done in elegant braids, she looked like a beautiful spring fairy.

I felt ashamed that this beautiful girl close to my own age had seen me in such a bad light. I was embarrassed when she asked if I was okay and ended up giving her a curt reply. In response, Andreas was quick to drive his knuckles into my head. I was still clutching the spot in pain when he told me to pull myself together, then picked me up by the collar as if I were a kitten. It irked me that he was treating me like a child in front of her, but then he patted me on the shoulder and made matters even worse.

"He's been bullied by the knights since he was ten years old, so this is barely a scratch to him. He may look like this now, but one day he will surpass me and become the greatest knight in the kingdom. He might even be your bodyguard in the not-so-distant future, Lady Cline."

Hey, hey, don't just go and decide my future for me! I turned to them, ready to protest.

"Goodness! He must be quite a hard worker. I've been so anxious lately about whether or not I can be a princess consort… But I suppose you never know unless you put in the hard work first. I know! I'm going to try to be the best princess ever so that you can become my protector! I'm looking forward to seeing you again soon!"

The way the anxiety left her face, which flushed with determination, and her fists clenched tight as her eyes sparkled… I couldn't help but be captivated by her faint pink lips as they uttered that promise. All I could do was nod in response, unable to manage a single word.

I don't remember what we talked about afterward or how we said goodbye. I never would have imagined that I could fall so head over heels in love with someone at first sight despite my emotional deficiencies. Yet that childish promise had sealed my fate.

From that day, I swung my sword relentlessly, driven by impulses I'd never

felt before. I wanted to see her. I wanted to be by her side, even if just for a moment. I wanted to become her protector.

Cecilia visited the palace three times a week for tutelage in her eventual role as princess consort. I would go by the fountain where I could see the hallway she passed through, which was my only means of catching a glimpse of her face.

I couldn't count how many times I'd gritted my teeth at how far apart we were in status.

So I focused on my training, and once I was knocking my foes down more often than they were downing me, my instructor gave me a wry chuckle and admonished me.

"Hey, hey. Getting knocked down never bothered you before, but suddenly it frustrates you because it happened in front of Lady Cline? Best set your sights elsewhere, Lukie. She's a princess consort candidate. Even though you're the son of a duke and in line for succession, she's out of your league."

He warned me to control myself. Then, in a softer voice, he told me to give up on dreams that could never come true, that I would only be hurting myself and Cecilia.

Like I needed him to tell me what I already knew. She was in line to become the princess consort, and I was just in line for succession.

But so what?

She was mine. I wouldn't give her to the second prince, Felix, or anyone else. If the only thing keeping me from her was my place in the line of succession, then all I had to do was become the prince, right?

And then Cecilia would become mine.

A few months after I started training in earnest, Mia, the daughter of Count Meyer, was almost kidnapped. I had been friends with her older brother Adolf

since I was a child, and we often played together. We were at a park when someone tried to force me and Mia into their carriage.

By that time, I'd already received training from the knights. I was able to fend off the attackers, so they threw me out of the carriage and tried to take Mia alone. Mia, like the noble girl she was, fainted immediately, allowing them to easily pull her into the carriage. Since I was only thirteen, there was no way I could carry an eleven-year-old girl on my back and still outrun them, so I decided to call out for the knights on patrol. However, the moment I opened my mouth to yell, I heard the kidnappers talking.

"Tch! You misjudged because of the lighting! This girl's blonde! We were supposed to get a girl with amber hair! Damn it… What are we gonna do with this one?"

"I'm sorry, all right? But who cares? She'll fetch a good price too. There's no shortage of perverts out there who'll pay a pretty penny to make a noble girl their pet."

The moment I heard "amber hair," I thought of the way Cecilia looked as she turned and walked down the hallway on her way out of the palace, with her glossy amber hair spilling down her back.

A shiver ran down my spine.

I froze and grabbed the thickest tree branch I could find, then hurled it with both hands toward the carriage wheel that was just about to start moving. I grabbed and threw another one, then sprang at a kidnapper standing by the carriage door, punching him in the gut before he could swing it shut. He groaned faintly, then tumbled to the ground.

I stepped over him and swung another stick at the person who sat in the driver's seat. I heard a voice plead, "N-no, wait!" but I wasn't going to risk them escaping, so I swung with all the force I could muster, fully intent on killing him.

The branch broke with a *crack* over his head, and he fell limp. Since that makeshift club was now too short, I picked up the branch I'd thrown into the

wheel before peering into the carriage, where I saw the final kidnapper pointing a dagger at Mia with a trembling hand.

I advanced into the carriage, and the man's teeth chattered as he spoke. He told me their target wasn't Mia, but a girl with amber hair. He said he would release Mia unharmed if I just stepped away from the carriage.

He seemed to think that I would agree to this exchange. It was absolutely ridiculous to think that I'd overlook a kidnapper whose real target was a girl with amber hair.

I sneered at the sheer scope of his misjudgment, but I decided to momentarily step away from the carriage because Mia's presence would be a hindrance. I waited, keeping an eye on the man as he cautiously exited the carriage. I quickly employed a body-strengthening technique I'd recently learned from my master while I waited.

My plan, going into it, was to strike him the moment he sat in the driver's seat. But then I saw the sunlight shining on Mia's hair, the man's knife still trained on her. In the sunlight, her hair sparkled with amber. My thoughts went immediately to Cecilia, and then my head was filled with rage.

I can't recall what exactly happened after that point. All I can remember is wanting to thoroughly crush his limbs so that he'd never even think of kidnapping someone ever again.

Casting a sidelong glance at the unconscious kidnappers on the ground, I gathered Mia into my arms. We were about to leave when a patrol knight rushed over. I assumed Adolf had called him. We were both in such a dire state that he brought us back to the guard post.

The knights ended up taking my statement. Apparently, the kidnappers were rather well-connected criminals, so they had no charges pressed against them. For some reason, when Master Andreas came to pick me up from the guard station, he told me I'd gone too far and punched me.

A week later, he trained me so hard I thought I was going to die. I vowed that from then on, I'd have a cooler head about me, and that if I was going to bring someone to death's door, I'd make sure no one found out about it.

I learned a lot from that experience.

There weren't many idiots who would try to mess with the future princess consort, but that didn't mean they didn't exist. Men of a certain social status with modest titles and decent appearances often made the mistake of thinking every woman was crazy about them and would be naturally drawn to them.

And it was one such man who made a move.

He was always surrounded by young ladies at social gatherings in the capital, and it seemed he was on good terms with a widow famous for her beauty. That must've given him the boost of confidence he needed to approach Cecilia, a candidate for princess consort.

All the princess consort candidates were expected to attend the soirees held by the royal family at the palace. On that day, I'd used my contacts within the Imperial Order to make sure I was tasked with security for the soiree, where I could keep a close watch over Cecilia and her surroundings. I watched as the man spoke to her in a gentle voice, as his eyes lingered on her body suggestively, as he attempted to touch her without permission.

I'm going to erase him.

I slipped the dagger from my cuff into my palm and was about to take a step forward when Cecilia smacked the man's hand away with her fan. She glared at the dumbfounded man, then turned her disgusted gaze to the fan she held and handed it to the waiter who stood beside her. She let out a loud sigh and told her bodyguard she was leaving, then made good on that statement without - another word.

The encounter must have put the nobleman in a bad mood. Perhaps to soothe his wounded ego, he then made a move on Mia, who was about Cecilia's age and attending the soiree with her father, Count Meyer. It would've been

better for him to simply swallow his pride, yet he'd made a grave mistake.

The thought of him getting away clean from this only to eventually make another pass at Cecilia was too much to bear, so I chased him into the restroom. I was careful not to get caught that time. I tied him up so he wouldn't resist and blindfolded him so he wouldn't be able to identify me. Then I used a bit of gentle coercion on him.

I dislocated all the joints in his knuckles so he wouldn't touch her again, and when I asked him to confirm he would never go near her again, he nodded repeatedly, covered in tears and drool.

I was about to turn around and leave, but then he grumbled, "Why are you doing this? She's just a candidate for princess consort, isn't she?"

Cecilia? *Just* a princess consort candidate? *My* Cecilia?

I whirled around, forced the man's mouth open, and stubbed out the cigar he'd been smoking in the party onto his tongue.

Ignoring his muffled scream, I asked, "Do you want to die?"

The man pissed himself and passed out. He didn't wake up even when I slapped him across the face, so I could do nothing but leave him there. For some reason, my master summoned me a few days later and told me what happened next.

Apparently, that man had put hands on quite a number of unmarried girls, including one he got pregnant. He hired thugs to blackmail her into aborting the baby. He'd left a swath of trouble in his wake, my Master said, so the knights discreetly took the matter into their own hands.

Once he relayed the story to me, all I could say in return was, "I see." But then Master dragged me to the training grounds with a grin on his face, and once again worked me until I thought I was going to die.

I realized it was too difficult to deceive my master, so I decided to ask Finn to help me from then on. Still, thanks to me keeping a close eye on Cecilia's

surroundings, I was able to get rid of one man who'd made a move on her.

However, she only grew more beautiful and alluring by the day, so it was almost inevitable that Felix's gaze began to turn toward her, his eyes glimmering with desire. It was definitely a cause for concern.

Given their incompatible natures, the two barely managed any meaningful conversations. Felix had always preferred more sensual forms of interaction, however, and so her abundant curves no doubt had him raring for her company.

I was in quite a predicament. Desperate to divert his attention away from Cecilia, I worked secretly behind the scenes to find other women he might like. There was a real possibility that Felix might make a move on her, and if he succeeded, I would never have a chance with her again. I was nearly beside myself with anxiety, right until the moment Mia approached Felix.

Every time Mia attended the parties of the elite, she captured the attention of many a young nobleman. The most influential of her admirers were Thomas Mueller, the son of the prime minister, Maximillian Wagner, the son of the captain of the Imperial Order, and Mihael Howser, the son of a prominent church cardinal. They avidly supported Mia and used their wealth and power for her benefit. Tugging deftly on their strings, Mia managed to arrange a private meeting with Felix.

At first, her parents and even her brother Adolf scolded her for it. Both Thomas and Maximillian were engaged, and Felix's betrothal had been arranged by the royal family in coordination with Marquis Cline. So for Mia, the daughter of a mere count, to insinuate herself into the situation and speak with Felix in private would invariably invite criticism and censure.

As such, the reputation of the count's family was tarnished, and invitations to tea parties and soirees from nobles of higher rank than that of a marquis dwindled to a halt. And if Mia was barred from social functions, both the family's reputation and finances were also doomed to suffer.

Since she was Adolf's sister, I tried to advise Mia as a concerned friend, but my warnings were all but ignored. To make matters worse, she mistook my concern for jealousy over her feelings.

"Of course I care about you, Lord Lucas, but as one cares for a brother. I love Felix, and he loves me too. He even said that I'm lovelier than Lady Cecilia. Please, I've finally gotten the chance to speak with him—don't interfere. Just watch over us fondly, won't you? Oh, Mihael is here to pick me up! We're going for a stroll by the lake with the rest. I have to go now!"

Mia left me and Adolf in such haste you'd hardly believe she was a lady. Her incredulous response had left me unbalanced, but something about it, about going down by the lake, nonetheless sent a chill down my spine.

Adolf must've noticed as well. "Lucas…" he said hesitantly, turning to me. "Mia said that they'd be going with *the rest*. Does that mean…?"

Given that the count's family was no longer invited to social events, Mia should have been effectively confined to her home. Looking into the matter, it turned out Thomas and Felix had each sought to take Mia along as their partner. Both had brought their requests before Count Meyer—regardless of their standing, it was proper to go through a titled noble rather than directly to his daughter—but the count had politely declined them, hoping to wait the scandal out. But then Mihael, who was not engaged as he planned to take holy orders, took the chance to visit and invite Mia out.

At first, the count avoided the invitations by lying and saying Mia was ill, but apparently the staff tipped her off before one of Mihael's visits, so the ruse was thwarted. From then on, Mihael began to invite Mia out more often, even as more and more people noted her presence in the second prince's coterie.

Had Mia simply been out with her own entourage, the situation might have been salvageable. With the second prince involved, however, the rumors grew too large to contain. Stories of Felix's infidelity and Mia's brazen misconduct as a noble maiden dominated the daily chatter of high society.

Adolf let out a heavy sigh. Although it would be pretty convenient for me if Mia ended up with Felix, this turn of events was nothing short of disastrous for Adolf's family.

Were the count's family to challenge Felix and Cecilia's betrothal, it would no doubt trouble the royal family. And since Marquis Cline boasted power equal to a duke's, the royal family could hardly afford to slight them either. They were the ones who'd proposed the engagement with his daughter in the first place, so to disregard her in favor of an uncultured slattern would be a slap in the face.

The marquis cherished his daughter Cecilia, so there was no way he would abide such disrespect to her honor nor his family's good name. Under the ire of both the royal family and the marquis's family, the fate of Count Meyer's household hung by a thread.

I'd been close to Adolf since childhood, and seeing him so distressed, I decided to involve him in my plan. Clearly, Mia would never listen to reason, and with her becoming a pariah even among nobles below the rank of count, there was no salvaging her reputation. I explained my plans in light of this, and what Adolf and Count Meyer would have to do. Choking back tears, they agreed: they would cut ties with Mia.

Next, I went to talk to the crown prince, Leon, about the future. He told me the royal family had been troubled by Felix's actions and was already considering his punishment, which was a more convenient situation for me than I'd imagined. After Leon explained the current situation, he stared at me silently. I silently met his gaze, and he gave me a sad smile.

"I knew you were tenacious," he said, "but I didn't expect you to push Felix out of the picture."

I shrugged, finding his tone harsher than I anticipated. "I'm not the one pushing him out."

"Well, that's true. I've heard about this foolish girl named Mia getting too

close to Felix of her own accord. Felix has brought this upon himself, but as his brother, I'm left in a difficult position. Forgive me, I'm just venting now." He turned his gaze away, as if resigning himself, and stared off into the distance.

A brief silence hung in the air as I waited for him to say something. Finally, he turned to me with a determined expression and a faint sigh.

"Felix's engagement with Lady Cline will be called off. This decision cannot be reversed, even if Felix changes his mind in the future. It is well known that the royal family approached the Clines with this proposal, and since they are so influential we cannot afford to ruin their reputation. Cecilia may feel affronted, but her social prospects won't be harmed. A young lady groomed for the role of princess consort is quite a rarity, after all."

He observed my reaction as he spoke and, seeing my lips curl ever so slightly toward a smile, shook his head in feigned exasperation.

"Honestly, you never cease to amaze me. Given your claim to succession, it wouldn't be unheard of for suspicions of rebellion to arise. After all, you're trying to become a prince without having royal blood. Why don't you wait a little longer to inherit the Hero's Crest along with Marshal Webber's sword? After all, there's only one person who can wield Eckesachs. You'd be in a good position to bargain with the kingdom. Why not ask for her as a grant or a reward when the time comes?"

"A *grant*?"

"It's a possibility, Lucas! Why are you always so angry?"

"Because you said the word *grant*. I won't allow anyone to refer to her as an object, even in a joking manner."

"All right, all right! Stop staring at me with those murderous eyes already! I'm cooperating with you, aren't I? You should show a little courtesy."

Why should I offer that to anyone other than Cecilia or my family?

Not that Leon wouldn't benefit from this as well. Felix had been nothing but

trouble for them, but from now on I would be fulfilling his official duties in his place. The important thing was that I was making things easier for the royal family.

I stared at Leon silently and he let out a loud sigh. “I suppose this means from now on, you’ll be my little brother,” he grumbled. “Poor me…”

But since our discussion was over, I just said, “See you at the party,” and turned around. Leon shouted something after me, but I ignored it and excused myself.

As I walked down the hallway, I let out a sigh of relief. Finally, I’d gotten to this point. Felix would no doubt call off the engagement at the graduation party. I just had to keep an eye on the prime minister’s son, Thomas Mueller, who was always in Mia’s orbit. He wasn’t stupid, but there was no telling what he might do to Cecilia after Felix broke off their engagement.

Should I use Mia? I could have her go crying to Thomas, I thought as I went over my plans on my way out of the palace.

I never dreamed, however, that Mia would arrange to have Cecilia sent to a brothel. *You can’t judge a woman by her appearance,* I thought to myself as I caressed a certain spot of Cecilia’s pale skin.

Moments ago, the Promise Mark had glowed with light, but now it was just red and swollen. I realized I’d used too much force when I branded her with it, so I gently applied some healing power while caressing Cecilia’s lower belly. Then, after a moment’s thought, I decided to apply it to her entire body. I had, I realized, pushed her too far.

The color returned to her pale face and lips, drawing me in. I pressed a kiss to her mouth, letting out a rueful chuckle at my inability to resist touching her.

I reflected on how ashamed she looked when I made her tell me what felt good. The way she shyly glared at me with tear-filled eyes turned me on more

than I could bear. And when I said, “You don’t want it to hurt, do you? It’ll be easier for you if it feels good,” she surrendered her body to me, even as she shook her head vehemently.

I wanted her to want me, so I kept teasing her until she got close and then stopping, repeating the cycle until finally she couldn’t bear it anymore and moaned, “You’re…such…a bully…Lord Lukie!” and began bucking her hips against mine. That’s when I couldn’t take it anymore…

I gripped her soft, feminine rump as I thrust into her from below and she came almost instantly. She screamed in ecstasy, dug her fingernails into my back. Even her restraint, careful not to hurt me with her movements, turned me on, so I pounded her relentlessly while she came. That only made her big, bright green eyes widen even more and she shook her head over and over again.

“N-no, stop, not now!” she shrieked as her body convulsed around me. It was adorable and unbelievably sexy. I’d craved her for so long my heart screamed to make her mine. That emotion drove me to thrust even harder, spilling my seed into her over and over as she cried out with pleasure, “I can’t!” and “You’re going to rip me open!”

She came so many times, so sensitive her body was, and clung to me, wailing, “Help me, Lord Lukie!”

So I murmured: “I want you to swear that you’re mine. I want to hear you say it, then I’ll stop.”

“Lord Lukie, Lord Lukie, I, Cece, swear that I belong…to…Lord Lukie…!” She was so desperate for my help that I couldn’t help but chuckle. The moment she came, I engraved the Promise Mark of Lucas Herbst on her lower stomach.

Some of her hair had stuck to her cheek as she slept. I brushed it away and kissed her slightly parted lips again, but she still didn’t move. I figured it would be a while until she woke up, so I unwound my nerves with a deep sigh.

It took all my restraint not to reach out and touch her again as I looked at her, asleep and heedless of the cloudy liquid which seeped out from between her

legs. I somehow managed to pull myself together and wiped her gently with a warm cloth, then wrapped her in clean sheets. Just then, there was a knock at the door. *Good timing.*

"Lord Lucas, I've brought a change of clothes."

"Mm. Just set them over there."

"Yes, my lord," Finn said as he quietly entered the room.

I detected a hint of anger in his voice, so I pushed back the canopy and stepped back out into the dimly lit room. Finn silently handed me the change of clothes.

I glanced at him while I changed and asked, "What is it, Finn?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're angry."

Finn ignored me as he picked up the tattered clothes which lay on the floor. He shrugged nonchalantly as I put on my jacket and then turned around.

"Is that a knife…and a dress?" he said suddenly.

"He's not talking about *that* dress, is he…?" I muttered to myself, when suddenly he pulled the dagger from where it was embedded and tossed it at me without even turning around. I caught it on a finger before it found my throat. "Sorry," I said when I noticed the blade was bent.

"Why in the world would you ruin the blade of a brand-new, top-notch, highly durable knife?! We didn't buy it so you could pin dresses to the wall! And you've even ruined your new suit! What in the world did you come to this brothel to do?!" he yelled at me.

I had no adequate response to his incensed outburst, considering why I'd ruined the suit and knife in the first place. I simply raised both hands in surrender and said, "I'm really sorry."

Finn let out a heavy sigh in response. "So? Did everything go according to

plan?”

“Yes. Where are Hannah and the others?”

“They arrived at the front of the brothel a while ago. They’ve already finished speaking with the owner and should be waiting at the entrance.”

Finn handed me a woman’s nightgown and dress. “I’ll be waiting downstairs. Please come down quickly. And Lord Lucas,” he warned, “make sure not to make any further mistakes.” He closed the door softly behind him.

I smiled wryly and then glanced over at Cecilia, who was still sound asleep inside the canopied bed. I gently unwrapped the sheets from around her, revealing her round breasts. There was a twinge between my legs, but I gritted my teeth.

Even though I’d cum in her over and over, I already wanted her again. I chastised myself for being so lustful and took several deep breaths, then picked her up so I could dress her.

I’d thought this when we made love, but she was too light, too slender. Her body felt fragile in my grasp, and already I worried about the unseen future and the possibility of her carrying a child one day.

Just the thought of possibly losing Cecilia unconsciously made me tighten my grip on her and I nuzzled my face against her breasts. Although her eyes were closed, she frowned slightly. I softly called her name, and a relieved smile appeared on her lips as she surrendered her body to me. Affection swelled inside of me as I held this precious woman in my arms.

Although I was worried about how delicate she seemed, at the same time I knew I wouldn’t be able to stop making love to her, so before I’d even descended the stairs to the ground floor, my mind was already awhirl with plans for building up her stamina.

Chapter Two

I WAS TEN YEARS OLD WHEN THE ROYAL FAMILY approached us with the offer of engagement to the second prince, Felix. At first, my father turned down the king's offer for a smattering of reasons such as if I left home, he'd have to adopt a child from a branch family, or that it might be better for me to marry someone younger. Those sorts of reasons.

But the king was insistent in his pleas, and my father finally relented just before my eleventh birthday. My father seemed somewhat annoyed the day we called upon His Majesty and Prince Felix at the palace. Upon arriving, we were left to ourselves and I was at a loss as to what I should do.

I remember how Felix's arrogance and insolence worried me when I first witnessed it, and how I wondered if I could convince Father to call the whole engagement off once we got home. I'd followed him to the east gazebo where I could admire the blooming flowers, but he neither escorted me there nor offered me a seat. He merely slouched lazily against his chair, a petulant look on his face, ignoring my attempt to introduce myself as I knelt in front of him.

"You'd think since I'm royalty they'd put some stock in what I want in a woman, but no!" He whined. "You've got a decent face, but you're plain, and look like an old-fashioned prude. Your mother had a more feminine figure. I guess this is all I can expect from an eleven-year-old. Just make sure not to get in my way too much."

I commended myself for maintaining my composure behind a ladylike smile.

Letting out a tiny sigh, I lowered my head and said, "I shall do my best to take your words to heart."

My manners, impeccable for a girl of my age, earned approval from the onlooking ladies and knights of the court. That was to be expected: I was a duke's daughter, whom the royal family themselves had sought to betroth to their son, yet here was my fiancé, mocking me. Despite all that, I neither cried

nor raged, but remained poised and polite to the end. The only one the prince shamed with his disgraceful behavior was himself.

But I understood after meeting him that I'd been chosen *because* of his wretched attitude. They didn't want me to earn his favor, but to instead support him, sometimes admonish him, and support the crown prince from my position as his brother's princess consort. I was expected to compensate for all that was lacking in Felix. That was the role I was to play as his fiancée and the future second princess.

From that day on, my world seemed to have lost all its color and it felt like I had shackles on my legs that were too heavy to bear.

Sometime later I was told that since I had become the prince's fiancée, I would be assigned a bodyguard from the Imperial Order whom I would meet soon. I wondered if this news came because they could see that, after only just a few classes, I was already quailing at the breadth and intensity of what I had to learn as a princess consort candidate. Or perhaps it was just a coincidence?

At any rate, Andreas Webber, the vice-captain of the Imperial Order, arrived just before the end of one class. He smiled cheerfully and told me he'd already received permission from His Majesty and my father to introduce me to my future bodyguard. I followed Vice-Captain Webber, and there I saw him.

He stuck out like a sore thumb amongst the tall knights. His limbs were scrawny and slender, and he seemed so small a stiff breeze might blow him over. Even the wooden sword he held was much thinner than those of the other knights.

But he moved as if he were flying.

My eyes were glued to the boy as he sparred with the elites of the Imperial Order, known to be even stronger than the Black Knights, a small order who were considered peerless in hand-to-hand combat. However many times he was knocked down, he kept standing back up and facing his opponent. Once he lost a match, he took a brief moment to move his sword as if to review what he

did wrong. He never outwardly lamented or complained about the overwhelming difference in strength, but instead seemed to be pondering how to maneuver with his agile body and the techniques available to him. After his moment of reflection, he stepped forward again. My chest tightened when I saw his bravery, devoid of any fear or hesitation.

The match between him and the knight dragged on, and I felt my hands growing sweaty. Unfortunately, strength *did* matter. This young boy unleashed a swift strike, probably trying to exploit the knight's blind spot, but faced with the full force of the knight's counterattack, he lost his hold on his wooden sword, which flew from his hand.

"Damn it!" It was the knight who groaned, but what caught my attention was how the boy briefly bowed his head and pressed his palm, as if in pain. I watched him with teary eyes as he balled it up into a fist—he seemed to be checking something.

I wondered if his hand got injured. Once I realized he needed treatment, I couldn't help but feel a pang of regret, remembering I couldn't use healing magic myself. If only I could learn the techniques to heal injuries, I could be of some help.

If only I could become someone who could heal him and others who are injured…

The desire that welled up inside of me would eventually lead to a hobby of mine in the not-so-distant future.

He casually scanned his surroundings and then looked in my direction. At the same time, Vice-Captain Webber raised a hand. The boy had a reluctant expression as he walked toward us.

My heart fluttered as I watched him pick up his sword. Our gazes met in the bright sunshine, which made his golden eyes sparkle. I felt my breath catch in my throat for a split second.

Golden eyes, the color of the royal family… *Who is he?* I wondered as he came

even closer. I took a better look at him. He had an ordinary face and light brown hair. And now I saw that his eyes were also a light brown, like those of many boys from the kingdom of Bern.

I tried to tell myself it must've just been a trick of the light that made his eyes appear golden, but for some reason it bothered me. I wished for him to look my way again, but then Vice-Captain Webber intervened, introducing him as if throwing me a lifeline.

"Lady Cecilia, this is Lukie," he said. "Due to various circumstances, I've been tasked with training him as a knight. Lukie, this is Cecilia Cline, daughter of Marquis Cline. She's the second prince Felix's fiancée, and has come to visit the Imperial Knights."

The boy called Lukie reluctantly gave me a silent salute, then immediately averted his gaze. For some reason that made my heart ache, and I couldn't help but speak up.

"Um, is your…hand all right?"

"Huh?"

"Just now, during the duel…"

"I'm fine."

"Lukie! That's no way to speak to a lady!" Vice-Captain Webber struck his fist upon Lukie's head with a crack, leaving me frozen in shock.

"Owww…"

"You're in the presence of the future princess consort! Act more like a knight, would ya?"

Even though that strike looked incredibly painful, Lukie's expression didn't change. Surely that bone-crushing fist upon his head had to hurt more than a little. Was it really just a light reprimand? *Wow, Vice-Captain Webber must be incredibly strong! He's lifting Lukie off the ground by his collar!*

I was both slightly confused and awed as I watched.

“I apologize for surprising you, my lady. He’s been bullied by the knights since he was ten years old, so this is barely a scratch to him. He may look like this now, but one day he will surpass me and become the greatest knight in the kingdom. He might even be your bodyguard in the not-so-distant future, Lady Cline.”

He suddenly released Lukie and whacked him on the shoulder. *Um, he doesn’t look too happy about this, Vice-Captain Webber…*

Pushing down that thought, my mouth opened instinctively, expressing what my heart was feeling instead.

“Goodness! He must be quite a hard worker. I’ve been so anxious lately about whether or not I can be a princess consort… But I suppose you never know unless you put in the hard work first. I know! I’m going to try to be the best princess ever so that you can become my protector! I’m looking forward to seeing you again soon, Lord Lukie!”

That’s right: one day I would become a fine princess consort who would have knights like him to protect me. And if I didn’t put my heart into my tutelage, nothing would happen. I couldn’t complain without even trying to study. Sulking over the first obstacle that came my way would be an insult to those who had supported me thus far. I wanted to become someone who could stand proudly before him in the near future—I would strive to learn more than just etiquette and comportment.

I’ll ask Father to let me study healing magic. I don’t want the power to fight, but the power to heal those who fight for me. Surely then I’ll be able to help him.

I remembered the faintest blush on his face as he slowly but willingly nodded in response to my one-sided promise. His disheveled hair was covered with dust, his face and body smeared with sweat and dirt. He had visible bruises on most of his exposed skin, and there was a bit of blood at the corner of his mouth. Despite his worn appearance, he was…the most handsome boy I’d ever seen.

When I recalled the moment he glanced at me, a hint of embarrassment as he nodded his head and a splash of gold in his eyes, I felt my heartbeat quicken inexplicably, and it was like all the vivid colors returned to the faded, colorless world around me.

I began to immerse myself in my princess education, and soon my days passed like a whirlwind. Father agreed to hire a healing magic instructor so long as it didn't interfere with my education, and I diligently completed my assignments at home while I studied magic. Meanwhile, I had to attend tea parties with Prince Felix and other daughters of nobility, which added to my busy routine. Although my hard work paid off in my studies, interactions between myself and Prince Felix were less fruitful.

Honestly, having a conversation with him was like torture, nothing but criticism and denigration directed toward me. But once I grew past the age of fifteen, I began to notice a change in Felix's gaze toward me—and that change filled me with fear.

I couldn't tell if my efforts had finally borne fruit or whether it was simply a result of genetics, but as I grew older, I found myself becoming more and more like my mother, who'd been known as the flower of high society.

I made sure to stay out of the sun as much as possible, so my skin was fair and soft. My hair was a rare amber color inherited from my father, and I cared for it meticulously every day so that it shone brightly. My body, which Prince Felix once reviled, had become curvier and more alluring, although I still had slender arms and legs.

I considered myself close to the ideal lady even among girls my age, but that only meant I attracted more attention.

As princess consort candidate, I had to converse with many people at the evening parties. If asked to dance, I had to accept no matter who he was. If I needed information, I had to approach someone and gain it myself.

But what education trained you to avoid the leering gazes of men or their

lecherous hands? I'd cried to Mother before, saying I never thought being called beautiful could be so uncomfortable. I had to be very careful about my behavior since I was the second prince's fiancée.

Fortunately, I was still considered a child as I hadn't yet made my social debut, plus I had the teachings of my mother to rely on. I also had my truly close friends and the knights who served as my bodyguards.

I remember feeling very nervous the night of my formal debut before society when I was sixteen. From then on, I would no longer be considered a child. That meant I not only had to be even more careful in my interactions with others, especially men, but I would also have to be more attentive to Prince Felix, who often disappeared at the sight of a beautiful woman. Keeping him in check was more challenging than my studies, so it was no wonder that I felt like the royal family had saddled me with a burden…

However, contrary to my expectations, my debut went smoothly without even a single incident.

The palace guard mainly consisted of the Azure Knights, so under normal circumstances, they would be the ones standing guard at soirees. On that day, however, the Imperial Order was stationed at strategic points on the palace grounds for some reason. Prince Felix and I were both surprised when four members of the Imperial Order were assigned to us.

The knights' incredibly dashing formal attire, which was usually only worn at ceremonies, was put to good use. Their presence not only added to the splendor and atmosphere of the party, but subtly deterred any nobleman with ulterior motives, leaving them no choice but to engage in innocent conversation. I had to admit, acting as they were under the king's name, the Imperial Order was quite the impressive deterrent.

On the other hand, the handsome knight elites had clearly caught the eyes of the other noblewomen around my age, who flocked to us, eager for a chance to

converse with the knights—or even entice them toward marriage. Prince Felix loved attention and flattery, so he was in good spirits and didn't stray from my side.

And so, my debut concluded quite smoothly.

As I was leaving the party, I was surprised to find an overwhelmingly beautiful knight named Lucas standing by the exit. I remember feeling quite overshadowed by his looks as he opened the door for me.

I found it odd that one corner of the party seemed strangely deserted, but now it made sense knowing he'd been there. Having someone so handsome nearby would have stolen the spotlight from my debut, and I was supposed to be the center of everyone's attention that night. It had me thinking that perhaps being too beautiful was pitiful in its own way.

As those thoughts ran through my mind, I glanced briefly at the knight's uniform, wondering if the rumors were true that he had become the youngest knight ever to join the Imperial Order. For a split second, our gazes met. My breath caught in my throat when he stared at me at those golden eyes of his.

The slight embarrassment in his eyes, tinted golden by the reflection of the chandelier overhead, and the graceful bent of his bow—it wasn't mere déjà vu. I'd actually seen him before.

He lowered his head, and the moment his expression was hidden from view, I felt my throat tighten. The strange sensation lingered even after we parted ways and Felix led me away from the party.

From that day on, a member of the Imperial Order was always by my side wherever I went. As a result, there were fewer men who dared turn a lascivious gaze at me, and none so brazen as to make advances. The only one I had to worry about was Felix, which eased my mind considerably.

At the same time, since I had fewer restrictions as an adult, I decided to make more visits to orphanages and churches for charitable purposes. Although I felt sorry for the knights having to accompany me on these outings, I believed that

making use of the healing powers I had acquired would not only be beneficial, but would also boost the royal family's reputation. After all, Felix's reputation was somewhat lacking, so I knew I would have to work hard.

I'm sure escorting me was no simple task. The sort of places I visited, like churches and clinics, had throngs of people coming and going, demanding constant vigilance from the Imperial Order. But they never once looked displeased and truly did a wonderful job.

There was one particular occasion that stood out in my memory. It was when I was on my way back from a visit to a church which served as an orphanage on the outskirts of the capital.

I was just about to board the carriage when I heard commotion behind me. When I turned around to see what was going on, the blood drained from my face, and I froze in fear.

Just beyond Bern's capital lay the expansive border forest. Defensive walls had been built there to keep large and powerful magical beasts from entering, but smaller ones could slip through the cracks. Although it was extremely rare, these cracks meant that monsters sometimes appeared on the outskirts of the capital.

I never thought I'd encounter them myself, but there they were—a pack of demon foxes.

Though usually solitary creatures, these magical beasts had mysteriously appeared in a pack, with one clearly leading the others. Though the Order's knights were superior to any human foe, they did not specialize in battling magical beasts. This meant that the few who had accompanied me, outnumbered as they were, wouldn't be able to defeat the demon foxes while also protecting me.

As the specter of death crossed my mind, I bit my lip hard to keep from crying out while supporting the trembling maid who clung to me. Then someone pushed me hard from behind, forcing us into the carriage. Before I could even

ask what had just happened, the carriage suddenly lurched, and a high-density defensive barrier appeared around us, trapping us inside.

I was stunned to see the barrier was just as strong as ones you might find in the most important of locations, like in a royal throne room. That was when I saw a knight with hair the color of lapis lazuli, his right hand gripping a longsword and his left a dagger, step forward to confront the leader of the demon foxes.

That hair color… As I leaned against the window to peer outside, the lead demon fox let out a terrifying growl and the pack surged forward.

“Here they come, Lucas!” I heard someone shout.

I held my breath as I watched. Lucas stepped forward without a hint of fear or hesitation. He effortlessly cut down several demon foxes that leapt toward him, then swiftly approached the leader and impaled it with his dagger, pinning it to the ground.

For a moment, the scene was filled with utter silence from the overwhelming difference in power.

Lucas ignored the attention of the onlookers and calmly swung his sword at the demon foxes as they continued to struggle, growling in desperate defiance. They attempted to flee after their leader’s defeat, but the Imperial Order, having finally regrouped, ran them down to the last.

From within the carriage, I stared in awe at the knight’s back as he shook the blood off his sword and sheathed it. The air was tense, and I couldn’t tear my gaze away from him as he spoke with the other knights.

It happened again. It wasn’t just déjà vu. *I know him. I recognize his profile. The way he fearlessly stepped forward.*

But Lord Webber had called him “Lukie.” Plus, his hair hadn’t been a deep blue, and his eyes weren’t golden. Most of all, he hadn’t been this handsome. He had a plain, completely ordinary face back then.

I gripped the windowsill so tightly my knuckles turned white. That was when he turned his golden eyes on me. My breath caught in my throat when our eyes met, and I felt my lips trembling.

Lucas's eyes widened, but then he quickly looked away. I only glimpsed his expression for an instant, but for some reason I couldn't bear the sight of it. My heart ached and tears began to quietly stream down my face.

The carriage began to move. I felt bad for only being able to half-heartedly reassure my worried handmaid, but my emotions were a complete mess—I was beside myself.

I thought about it again and again—the bashful smile on Lucas's face and the way his golden eyes narrowed just before he looked away from me. I didn't think it could possibly be true, but I wanted to believe that he'd honored our promise.

I pressed a hand over my dress, felt my thundering heartbeat, and forced myself to breathe, slow and deep. It was beyond foolish to suddenly be so self-conscious of Lucas just because he happened to slightly resemble someone I had admired. They were two completely different people.

Uh-oh. This must be like how victims of a crime make up stories to protect themselves. No, no—that's totally different. This is all just because of a misunderstanding. That's why I feel this way even though it's not the case. It can't be!

I desperately searched for a way to justify the pounding of my heart. Seeing my distress, my handmaid said, "Lady Cecilia, you've been looking pale. Witnessing the magical beasts must've taken a toll on you. Please rest as soon as we get home."

"Yes, you're right—I'll do that," I replied softly, seizing on this quite plausible reason for my pounding heartbeat.

It's just because I was in a life-or-death situation! Besides, isn't it normal for a woman to get excited when she sees a superstrong knight with a face as

statuesque as a god's?!

I realized I was being superficial. But I returned home safely, and my thoughts turned to the future of my charity work. However, the number of knights of the Imperial Order in my guard remained the same, in addition to several members of the Black and White Knights who were assigned to accompany us when we traveled near the border forest. For some reason, which I found quite curious, the Black and White Knights didn't join us when Lucas was on guard duty.

This time I won't stare at Lucas the whole time! I scolded myself with a strange stubbornness. At this rate, I was no better than the heroine, who was making a pass at Felix…

I felt something cold on my forehead.

The sensation roused me from my slumber, and I realized I no longer felt the gentle, warm arms whose embrace had enveloped me like silk.

Those sure were some nostalgic dreams just now… My throat was dry, and my head and body felt incredibly heavy.

"Mmm, ahh?"

"Oh, you're awake! Please don't try to get up." The voice sounded gentle and womanly. "You overexerted yourself and developed a fever, Lady Cecilia. You need to rest for a while. Here's some water."

A fever? Now that she mentioned it, my body did feel hot and painful. In fact, my entire body hurt. It had been a long time since I last had a fever.

Did that really mean I'd overexerted myself *that* much? Surely not… Right?

But being a prostitute required a lot of physical stamina. I needed to build up my strength. I couldn't go getting fevers every day.

Ugh, I'm so hot… But is it really all right if I take time off work? Speaking of that, where the heck am I?

“Where a—Ahem! Koff!”

“Ah, please take it easy! First drink some water. Come on, then.”

I tried to sit up and ask the woman, but my throat was so dry the words turned into more coughing.

The kind looking woman, who looked to be in her forties, gently rubbed my back. I took a sip out of the cup she gave me, which turned out to be fruit water. Delicious, and pleasantly cool. I let out a sigh and the woman took the cup from me with a tender smile.

Encouraged by her kindness, I said, “Thank you. My name is Cecilia, um, as you clearly know. But who are you?”

Unfortunately, I wasn’t used to calling myself a prostitute, so I hesitated.

She seemed to be a lady of manners, and the room I was in was nicely decorated, and the bed incredibly fluffy. I had to guess I was in an aristocrat’s house. *Ah, oh no!* Here I was, raised as a noble’s daughter and introduced myself before even finding out her social standing!

Now what should I do? It’s clear she’s a servant from a high-ranking aristocratic family. It would be incredibly disrespectful for a mere prostitute to introduce herself first!

I felt the blood draining from my face, but the lady answered with a smile. “My name is Hannah, and I am the head maid in this mansion. I’ve been ordered to take care of you, Lady Cecilia, as have Anna, Kate, and Elsa, who are waiting over there. They will be your personal maids and bodyguards, so please don’t hesitate to ask for anything.”

Once Hannah had introduced them, three young maids who had been waiting nearby smiled and said in unison, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Judging by their graceful bows, it was clear that they’d been thoroughly educated in etiquette and manners.

They probably served someone of the rank of count or higher. And such top-

class maids also served as bodyguards? How could girls so cute and beautiful also serve as guards?

That's pretty amazing. But what does she mean, they're my personal maids and bodyguards? Why would I, a prostitute, have either of those things?

I smiled automatically and nodded back at them, but then I chastised myself. I couldn't let the friendly atmosphere distract me. My mind was foggy, but I needed to remember what happened to me.

All right, let's see… I remember being fucked for a really long time, and I also feel like he came inside of me a bunch. Judging by my memories from my past life, that must mean he's got the stamina of a god. I remember he made me a sticky mess full of his cum, then he'd ask me a question and I'd answer and he'd make me cum again… And that's all I can recall.

The pleasure was so intense I thought my brain might explode, or I might even die, so I probably passed out as a defense mechanism. Good job, survival instincts! You avoided being fucked to death!

And since I didn't remember anything after that, someone must've brought me here while I was unconscious.

…Hang on. Wait a second.

"This is the Herbst estate in the royal capital. You fell asleep, so Lord Lucas brought you here. I know it's rude to not have you in a guest room, but for security purposes, Lord Lucas insisted you stay in his own chambers as it was the safest option…"

No way!

You didn't do a good job at all, survival instincts! Why did you let me pass out?! If I'm here at the duke's house, no one's going to know if he buries me in the middle of the night! If I have to choose between dying and being a prostitute, I'm going to choose being a prostitute! At least a prostitute has some hope for the future… But if I die, it's game over!

I was only seventeen. I hadn't even done that many bad things to the heroine yet, so this was too sad.

"Cece, you're awake."

"Lord Lucas! A gentleman never enters a sleeping lady's room without knocking first!"

I wondered when he'd silently snuck in. The maids were quite shocked as well.

It's no wonder… The ladies were waiting against the wall by the door, yet he made it halfway across the room before any of us realized.

He might be a pretty good assassin. Or do knights learn stealth techniques too? The Imperial Order protects the royal family, so I suppose it would be a necessary skill. But what if he sneaks in while I'm changing or something? Yikes!

Those ridiculous thoughts ran through my half-addled mind while Lucas drew near and kissed the top of my hand.

"I was so thrilled that you were finally mine that I got carried away and was too hard on you for your first time. I'm so sorry. I heard you had a fever, but how are you feeling now?"

Maybe it was because I was seeing him in full light rather than some dimly lit room, but the way his handsome smile sparkled was almost unbearable. My heart was pounding so hard I thought it might explode. *This is only going to make my fever spike! He doesn't waste any time, does he?*

"I-I'm fine… Thank you for your concern."

Please forgive me for sounding like an idiot, but why would you bring up how hard you went on my first time in front of other people?! Hearing about last night is just too embarrassing! And why do I suddenly feel sympathy coming from Hannah and the other maids? Is it because he said he was too hard on me? Or is there something else?

"I'm so glad, Cece…"

“U-um, Lord Herbst…”

“Cece. That’s not what you call me, remember?”

He’s glaring!

“L-Lord Lukie.”

“Yes. What is it, Cece?”

Ugh, please do something about that incredibly sexy, gorgeous face of yours. It’s first thing in the morning, after all! And can you stop caressing the back of my neck? That’s way too naughty! Did I become this insatiable after just one night?! I-it’s frustrating that I can’t completely resist it…

“Nngh…”

“Are you trying to turn me on, Cecilia…?”

“L-Lord Lukie—mmm!”

He took my chin firmly in hand and pressed his lips to mine, forcing my mouth open with his tongue. When I felt his tongue pressing against mine, pleasure simmered in my body anew, but suddenly Hannah’s angry voice filled the room.

“Lord Lucas, please restrain yourself!”

At her stern command, Lucas reluctantly pulled away. I thought I heard my sighs echoing through the room.

Why am I just letting him do this? I wish I could pass out again. I clung to Lucas’s clothing, though whether out of shame or guilt, I wasn’t sure.

“U-um, I’m sorry…”

“You have nothing to apologize for, Cece. Well, I guess that’s not true. You should apologize for being so cute and naughty…”

“What?! H-hey, w-wait, Lord Lukie…!”

The gall! Not only was I being blamed for this, but I was accused of being naughty too. That didn’t seem to bother Lucas in the slightest, however, as he

grabbed my chin and tried to turn it to make me look at him.

I am not *naughty! I am absolutely not naughty! And stop bringing your face close to mine!* I cast a desperate look at Hannah for help, but she just had a smile on her face so tense her veins were bulging out.

"Lord Lucas? Please restrain yourself. Lady Cecilia's already feeling unwell, and if you insist upon forcing her, I will use all my strength to put you in place!"

"…Fine." Lucas heaved a reluctant sigh.

I gaped at him, unable to believe he'd actually relented. He was the son of a duke, and although Hannah was a lady's maid she was still a servant. *Just who is this Hannah, anyway?!*

She answered my bewildered stare with a kind smile, then explained. "I'm so sorry to startle you. I was Lord Lucas's wet nurse, and the duke has given me permission to keep his behavior in check in this manner. So please, Lady Cecilia, do let me know if Lord Lucas tries to force you into anything like he did last night, and I shall respond accordingly."

Smile.

Contrary to her gentle demeanor, the way she looked at Lucas was incredibly intimidating. I had a feeling I'd really be able to count on her.

Come to think of it, the way she smiled really resembled Lucas, especially in the fear it inspired. Although that was rude to Hannah… *She's not a demon too, is she? Hm? Wait a minute.*

"What do you mean, 'like last night'?" I muttered, and Hannah and the other three maids casually averted their gazes. The maids were blushing. *Huh? I have a really bad feeling about this…*

Since the women had turned their eyes away, I fearfully looked over at Lucas, who gave me a beautiful smile and then tapped on my chest with his fingers. I followed his gaze downward.

Yes, those are my breasts, plump as ever—no, wait! I'm wearing a nightgown

I've never seen before! Huh?! It looks really expensive and feels incredibly soft. This isn't something that rat bastard Thomas Mueller left me with. Come to think of it, I passed out completely naked and there's no way the brothel had clothes like these…which means I must've been dressed in this after I came here…

My thoughts got that far before I started blushing.

"Eeek!"

They saw. They saw the marks on my chest. And not subtle marks—they were very clear and obvious bite marks.

The three maids were still looking down, their faces beet red. That was the correct etiquette of course, and I was grateful for that. If they made eye contact with me right now, I might die from embarrassment. But the way they were avoiding eye contact made it clear they were well aware of what we did, which made the whole thing even more embarrassing…

Why couldn't I pass out at moments like these? Had the rigors of princess consort training made me too resilient? Perhaps I should've learned how to pass out on command instead…

But just then, Lucas caressed my cheek, and reality closed back in around me, without any hope for escape. "I'm sorry. I went too far," he said.

That was when I lost it.

Don't you think it's a little late?! Apologizing now just pisses me off even more! Plus, that smile tells me you don't feel sorry at all! You want me to punch that ridiculously handsome face of yours?! You should be ashamed of yourself!

I'd just say the fever had made me unhinged—as if I needed an excuse.

At this point, even the facts of the matter—like him being the son of a duke who'd bought me, a prostitute, for that very express purpose—slipped my mind. Knowing that other people now knew the unthinkable acts I had done the night before filled me with such shame and anger I couldn't keep from blurting

out how I truly felt.

“Ughh! Lord Lukie, you idiot! Don’t touch me anymore!” I shouted more loudly than I thought possible and smacked his hand away from my cheek.

Tears started streaming endlessly down my face. I didn’t even know *why* was crying, but that didn’t stop the waterworks. Between my shuddering sobs, I could hear hushed voices. “Yikes…” and “Lord Lucas…” and “I feel sorry for you…” drifted from the spot near the wall.

And then Hannah’s exasperated tone: “Now see what you’ve done? Serves you right!”

Then a bewildered, somewhat pathetic voice said, “C-Cece…?”

I cried and howled, half-heartedly daring him to say something back to me. “If you’re—*sob*—going to apologize—*hiccup*—you shouldn’t have done it—*sniffle*—in the first place!”

“Lady Cecilia, please don’t worry,” Hannah said. “I promise to teach Lord Lucas a lesson for this. Please just lie back and rest. Everything will be fine.”

She gently rubbed my back, and I could feel her healing me with magic. In that moment, I would have sworn her a goddess. The other three maids, who’d been frozen by the door, slipped quietly into action. They wiped my face with a warm cloth, gave me some medicine with honey in it, and then Hannah said, “Now get some rest,” as she cast a sleeping spell on me. I gave in to the spell and closed my eyes.

Lucas’s bewildered face lingered in my vision as my consciousness faded. Then, before I drifted off entirely, a man I didn’t recognize appeared by the door.

“I’ve come to pick you up, Lord Lucas. Hm? What happened? You’ve gone and done it again haven’t you, you fool? Come on. Lady Cecilia is asleep now, so you can apologize after you’ve slain the demon wolves! You better hope she doesn’t hate you by the time you get back!” he said with a hint of laughter in his voice.

Hearing even his closest attendants badmouthing him, I couldn't help but think, *"That's what you get!"*

I mean, could you blame me?

All of a sudden, my eyes flew open.

I must've slept long and well because my body felt light and my fever was gone. My mind felt much clearer as I sat up. The curtains were drawn around the canopied bed, encasing me in darkness. I couldn't tell whether it was morning or night, so I hesitated for a moment before I slid my bare feet off from the bed.

The moment I pushed aside the curtains and looked around, there was a knock at the door. "Lady Cecilia? If you're awake, may I come in?" said a voice.

Huh? How did they know I was awake?

I was surprised but straightened my posture and sat on the bed. "Yes, I'm awake. Come in." I tried as best I could to embody my former standing as a marquis's daughter. Then I remembered they'd seen the bite marks riddling my body, and I hung my head, my face flushed red.

I'm pathetic. I'm the most pathetic person ever and I'm so embarrassed. Why am I pretending to be a lady? I'm sure they think I'm a total creep. It would be one thing if they were hickeys, but three or four bite marks and I probably look like a masochist! I want to tell them I'm not like that! I didn't ask him to do that to me! I want to tell them that's his fetish, not mine!

As I slumped in bed, the three maids from before entered the room. They quietly carried over a towel, a fresh change of clothes, and makeup. They bowed in perfect, graceful unison.

"Good morning, Lady Cecilia. As we said yesterday, we are Anna, Kate, and Elsa," the one called Anna said, indicating her companions in turn. "From now on, the three of us will be your personal handmaids and bodyguards. Please

don’t hesitate to call upon us if you need anything.”

“I’m Cecilia… I apologize for the inconvenience…and th-thank you…”

My voice is so quiet! So quiet even I was keenly aware how quiet it was.

Seriously, though—prostitutes don’t have handmaids. Now, if I were still the daughter of a marquis, that would be a given, but I’m just a prostitute Lucas bought. I’m sure the servants in Duke Herbst’s household think of me as nothing more than a nuisance. I need to make sure to cause as little trouble for them as possible.

It was still accurate to call myself a prostitute, right? Or had my position been elevated to mistress? Either way, I failed to see how I would get servants and bodyguards out of the bargain. Well, I might get handmaids, but certainly not bodyguards. Or maybe these veteran maids were keeping watch over me to ensure I didn’t escape? That was just what a demon like him would do.

Still, I’d never heard of letting a mistress sleep in their lover’s personal chambers in the family estate; that would be an outright scandal. While I was sorting through these thoughts, Anna, who seemed to be the leader of the group, approached me with a smile.

“Lady Cecilia, how are you feeling?”

“Oh, I’m fine. I think my fever’s gone, and my body feels much lighter now.”

“That’s wonderful. You were soaked in sweat from your fever, and I’m sure that was unpleasant, so you should change out of that nightgown. I’ve prepared a bath for you. Let’s hurry and get you cleaned up.”

Those words were so daunting that I couldn’t respond right away.

A bath? Like in a tub? Only the ritziest bathrooms were equipped with bathtubs. Why would they let a mere prostitute use such a thing? Well, I mean we had a nice bathtub back at home, but my private bathroom only had a shower! Dukes are on another level!

Before I knew what was happening, Anna took me by the hand. “Come on

now," she said as she led me to a changing room. Then, as she reached toward my nightgown and pulled my thoughts back to my own body, "Pardon me."

"W-wait, please wait!"

"What's the matter? Are you uncomfortable?" Anna sounded puzzled, but I couldn't bring myself to make eye contact with her. I crossed my arms over my unbuttoned nightgown and looked down, my face a deep shade of scarlet.

"U-um, I-I can do it by myself, so…"

Again, I was the former daughter of a marquis. When I still lived at home, it was only natural that the maids prepared my bath and waited on me hand and foot. I was never embarrassed to be naked in front of them; that was their job, after all. If anything, it would be rude to let my shame interfere with their duties…but now I just wanted to completely refuse!

I mean, he bit me! Let's step back a minute here. If I'd been bitten by a wild animal or something as a noble's daughter, there'd be an uproar. But a human *bite is obviously different and I'm not about to let anyone see mine!*

Not only that, I have hickeys all over me too! Even in places I told him to absolutely not leave hickeys! No matter how sheltered of an upbringing someone has, one look at those marks is all you'd need to know just what happened! Argh, I'm so embarrassed I just want to huddle in a corner…

"Lady Cecilia…"

"I-I'm sorry, but…I-I don't want anyone to see me…"

A lady's maid shouldn't be able to do anything without her consent. I told them my reason for being so embarrassed, and the three maids quietly said, "Very well." They sounded troubled, but I just couldn't agree to this. I wondered if that meant they would let me bathe alone, so I looked up hopefully…but instead saw all three of them smiling—*smiling!*—at me.

Huh? Why is it that when everyone in this house smiles, the smile doesn't reach their eyes? Do they train them like this at the duke's house? I have to

admit, it's quite intimidating.

As I stared dumbfounded at their smiles, Kate let out a sigh.

"Honestly, what are we going to do with Lord Lucas? No matter how much Lady Cecilia accepted it, he went too far!"

"You can say that again. If she's so precious to him, how dare he treat her like this? Making her feel so ashamed. Although Lady Cecilia is so incredibly adorable when she's embarrassed!"

"Elsa, watch your mouth. I'm sure the same thing will happen again in the future, so let's go report this to Mistress Hannah," Anna said, and then the three of them bowed in unison.

"Huh…?"

"Lady Cecilia, we deeply apologize for our shortcomings in failing to consider your feelings. However, you're too much of an important person to Lord Lucas for us to leave you unattended in the bath, especially when you've been sick. Please understand." The way she spoke, it was clear Anna chose her words with care. She was earnest but would brook no more refusals. And now since she brought up Lord Lucas's name, I couldn't be selfish—I certainly didn't want my willfulness to result in them being punished.

I was about to apologize for my unreasonable request when Kate and Elsa smiled, then continued. "But please rest assured that, due to our professional training, it's possible for us to fulfill our duties even when our vision is obstructed."

"Yes, we would gladly remain blindfolded while bathing you so as not to disturb your peace of mind. Please go ahead and enter the bath whenever you're ready."

I was speechless. I was intrigued by so many things; I didn't even know where to start. What kind of training would a maid get that would require her to be blindfolded?! That certainly wasn't any ordinary kind of work a maid did. Was it

because they were bodyguards as well that they had to learn such things?

Amid my confusion, the three maids said, “Pardon me,” then pulled out thin strips of cloth and tied them around their eyes.

I had to commend myself for resisting the urge to blurt out “Huh? For real?” That would have been quite unladylike.

I felt both humbled and grateful when the maids employed their expertise to help me bathe even while they were blindfolded. But as they helped me into a simple dress afterward, I resolved to figure out this situation.

Because while I was in the bath, I noticed something very, *very* concerning.

“…Why do I have a Promise Mark on me?” I muttered.

I couldn’t keep the words in, and no wonder. Besides, it wasn’t just an ordinary Promise Mark: the part representing the name was written in ancient characters. They weren’t totally legible to me, but I could pick out enough characters to infer that it was probably a personal name.

They were the characters of the name Herbst, which belonged to a house connected to the royal family. I’d seen it many times in my ancient language studies during my princess consort education. And the fact that those familiar letters were now engraved on my lower abdomen… Well, I could only think of one person who would do such a thing. I just didn’t understand the meaning—or rather the reason—behind it.

Personal name Promise Marks were primarily contracts made between lovers, engaged couples, or married couples. It was a difficult spell that had strict requirements and could not be established without mutual consent. An archaic technique, which could only be performed by men on women.

It was originally established with the intention of a woman pledging chastity to her partner. That was because after receiving the Promise Mark, a woman basically couldn’t touch a man other than her partner for the rest of her life.

Naturally, the spell had fallen out of use. The Promise Mark repelled any men with impure intentions who approached within a one-meter radius of the woman's lower abdomen.

In other words, it made socialization impossible.

Of course, there were occasionally men who invited women to dance or chat without ulterior motives, but the whole point of those soirees were the dresses that exposed shoulders, corsets that boasted their wearer's cleavage, and so on. I could hardly think of a man who wouldn't react to that…

Anyway, if the spell detected even a hint of impure intentions, it would repel the person a full meter, regardless of their standing in society. Of course, no man would want that kind of embarrassment, so women with such Promise Marks were given a wide berth.

But if a woman couldn't socialize, she couldn't build trust with others, which ultimately affected the survival of the family. I could see why it fell out of use. I remember when I first learned about the Promise Mark in class. *"Who in the world would come up with such a spell?"* I thought, grateful that I would never be marked with such a thing because I wasn't close to Felix at all. Sure, that might seem odd to say, since he *was* my fiancé, but I honestly didn't even like him. The way he took every opportunity to flaunt his power as the prince, all while being a total layabout, made him seem such a petty man.

At any rate, when the Promise Mark spell was cast the woman unilaterally pledged chastity to her partner, but the man casting the spell also took on a corresponding risk. If the woman rejected him even slightly during the process the caster's magical energy would rebound onto him, leaving lasting effects. Specifically…he would become impotent.

So that fact that the Promise Mark was engraved on my abdomen meant that he probably wasn't impotent. *Ahh, he doesn't have to be impotent, but couldn't his stamina have at least decreased a little…?*

My mind was lingering on those foolish thoughts when Anna tentatively spoke up. “Lady Cecilia, Lord Lucas told us about the Promise Mark. Um, it wouldn’t have been engraved without your consent, and we don’t really know the circumstances at the time, but…”

Uh-oh, I just dug my own grave! The circumstances at the time! It was during a very intimate moment! Cece, you idiot!

It was a total mistake to ask Anna and the others why I had a Promise Mark. In fact, asking the question at all would be incredibly strange. Even though I didn’t remember it in the least, I must’ve given my complete consent or else I wouldn’t have it in the first place.

Well, I wouldn’t find out unless I asked the demon himself. No, if I asked it might lead to something bad. Best to just stop asking people things altogether.

Even though it was my fault, Anna and the others apologized, showing genuine concern. All I could do was mutter “I’m sorry” in a tiny voice. *And I’m truly, deeply sorry,* I thought as I recovered my composure.

Anyway, since Lucas had engraved a Promise Mark with his personal name on me, that meant no man besides him could touch me. In other words, my career as a prostitute was over.

So did that mean he’d bought me out of my prostitution to make a private lover of me after all? I decided to ask the ladies about it and all three of them cried out in horror.

“P-prostitution?! Ah, pardon me for raising my voice. He would never do such a thing to insult you, Lady Cecilia. Excuse me for asking, but who on earth said such a thing to you?”

“Well, if he didn’t pay off my bondage…am I his mistress now?”

The maids’ reaction had left me confused as well, which only served to further befuddle the veteran maid trio. But as the seconds ticked by while they remained utterly still, I realized just how terribly mistaken I was.

Luckily, Anna and the others seemed to realize that I was completely clueless as to what was going on.

“Mistress! Why, Lady Cecilia would never be subjected to such a shameful thing! We’ve heard that you are Lord Lucas’s fiancée! That was why we are allowed to be your handmaids, since we’re also trained bodyguards. We beg of you, Lady Cecilia, please stop saying such distressing things *at once*!”

Anna emphasized the *at once* part so firmly, all I could do was nod over and over again.

According to them, I had never actually become a prostitute. I’d been taken to the brothel for safekeeping in order to protect me from danger. The reason why I never had to take any customers before Lucas, and the reason why I never received the training an ordinary prostitute would, was apparently due to the influence of Duke Herbst’s family. Not only that, but my parents had also been informed of these arrangements. And since the duke insisted his family would take care of everything, all they could do was wait and watch.

I was so shocked that the whole issue of the Promise Mark just slipped my mind.

I hadn’t been disowned by my family, and I wasn’t a prostitute. Not only that, but for some reason I was now Lucas Herbst’s fiancée.

Uh-oh! Despite still being a lady, my mouth hung wide open with surprise. And so, with that knowledge, I spent the rest of the day in total confusion at the duke’s estate.

Shortly after breakfast the next morning, the maids informed me that Lucas’s older sister Lady Anika, who married into the Marquis Montak’s family, was coming to visit.

“Good morning, Lady Cecilia. I’m Lucas’s sister, Anika Montak. Thank you so much for having me over today.”

Anika was a stunningly beautiful woman with a dazzling smile. So dazzling, in fact, that it seemed to blind me. No question that she was related to Lucas.

Ducal blood was just too amazing. There were many beautiful nobles, of course, but the Herbst family was on a whole other level. How could people be that beautiful? They were a feast for the eyes.

“It’s such an honor to meet you, Lady Anika. My name is Cecilia Cline. Please, have a seat.”

Anika smiled gently when I hesitated, just for a moment, to offer her a seat. “Excuse me,” she said, and sat down on the sofa across from me.

Anna and the other maids quickly began preparing the tea. I cast a sidelong glance at them and let out an inward sigh.

Meeting my fiancé’s sister in my fiancé’s room was unsettling on so many levels, and I honestly didn’t know what to do with myself…

When I was informed of her visit that morning, I asked Elsa where I should meet her. Lucas’s office, I was told. I couldn’t help but be surprised. After all, I hadn’t taken one step out of Lucas’s living quarters. I slept in Lucas’s bedroom, ate in his living room, bathed in his bathroom, and now I would be meeting guests in his study.

I was so surprised, in fact, that I asked Elsa once more to confirm, and she told me that Lucas had set up a protective barrier in his room. Apparently, although the entire manor had such protective barriers, the one Lucas set up in his room had multiple layers, probably even stronger than the barrier protecting the royal palace itself…

Talk about the ultimate waste of power…

Elsa said it was necessary for security reasons, but I had to wonder why they needed to fortify the room of a noble lady disgraced by her broken engagement to the second prince…

Anyway, that was why I didn’t need to leave Lucas’s room at all. Although it

may be accurate to say I couldn't *physically* leave it, but it did no good for my mental health to dwell on that at the moment…

"Lady Cecilia, I'm so terribly sorry for my foolish brother's reckless actions. Are you feeling better now?" Anika asked as I took a sip of the delicious tea Anna served.

I almost spat out the tea in surprise, but I somehow managed to keep hold of my ladylike composure. Strangled gulping noises were within acceptable limits of ladylike, after all. *More importantly, how does Anika know Lucas's "reckless actions" caused me to fall ill?*

I couldn't stop my face from flushing bright red.

Although I averted my gaze, I could still feel Anika's eyes on me. My heart pounded at the sight of those golden eyes that looked so reminiscent of Lucas's. I felt blood rushing through my entire body and I desperately tried to stop myself from writhing in shame.

"Oh, dear!" Anika exclaimed in surprise. "To think I've flustered Lady Cecilia, who's known to be the epitome of a lady! I wonder just how reckless Lucas was. Hannah, do you know?"

"I have no idea. However, I wish you could've seen how overjoyed he was in front of Lady Cecilia, Lady Anika."

"Is that so? And Lucas is usually so calm and composed… Oh ho ho! I'm going to tease him the next time I see him," she said ominously. She turned to face me. "I apologize, Lady Cecilia. Once I heard that Lucas's long-cherished dream had come true, I just couldn't contain my happiness. Since you haven't heard the details from my brother yet, allow me to explain. This might be a long story, so I want to let you know beforehand. I'd never hear the end of it if Lucas thought I pushed you too much, after all! I have no ulterior motives, of course."

When she said it with such a gentle smile, all I could say was "That's fine…"

Her gaze is more gracious than I can handle…

“Well, now. Where should I start? Lady Cecilia, are you aware that you are now Lucas’s fiancée?”

“Yes, I’ve been told that.”

“And do you know the reason? Has he told you what drove him to use everything at his disposal as a duke’s heir to, in effect, marry you the day he met you?”

“I-I haven’t heard that. Do you know why, Anika?”

I thought maybe he intended to steal my body, cutting off any hope of me returning to my old life. It was pretty hard to believe that he did it so he could be engaged to me.

Why *did* he make me his fiancée? I wanted to know. I *needed* to know.

I looked at Anika questioningly and she said, “Oh, dear!” then gave me a coquettish giggle, covering her mouth with her hand.

“Oh ho ho! It seems Lukie hasn’t told you any of the important details. Well, perhaps he got carried away by his emotions. Still, that’s quite a glaring mistake on his part. I can’t tell you the reason, Lady Cecilia, but I can talk about other matters.”

She gave a conspiratorial laugh and then told me things that left me positively stunned.

Apparently, before the incident at the graduation party, the royal family had been considering punishing Prince Felix. Then, due to the scandal involving him and the heroine Lady Mia at the academy, our engagement was called off. After that, Felix fabricated an unthinkable—not to mention baseless!—crime of which to accuse me so that I would fall out of favor within our circles.

But given the power of my father, Marquis Cline, this slight couldn’t go unpunished. Thus, by ruining the desired engagement of the royal family, Felix lost his position as second prince along with his right to the throne. As a consequence, there was a change in the line of royal succession, and Lucas

Herbst was promoted to the second prince—in other words, he was now second in line to the throne.

"Lucas was fourth in line for the throne, but my oldest brother—he used to be third in line—is the legitimate heir of our ducal family. That left him unable to perform the obligations of the second prince, which included official duties as the crown prince's reserve. That left none other than my other brother, and so Lucas was promoted to second prince."

Can such a brusque man really handle being the second prince? I thought, but Lady Anika gave me such an enchanting smile I couldn't find it in me to say it.

Felix isn't the second prince anymore because he broke off our engagement? And Lucas filled the position he'd left vacant? Oh, and Lucas and I are engaged right now, so…

"I'm terribly sorry for the confusion, Lady Cecilia. And I also feel truly sorry that you were involved in this scandal surrounding the royal family. But it's also true that since you've already received the necessary tutelage to become the princess consort, there is no one more suitable to be the second prince's fiancée. Also, Lucas himself wished for this. Marquis Cline has already received the royal decree and given his consent."

"Royal decree… Father's already consented…"

The story was all too shocking for me to comprehend. Even though I knew it was impolite, I found myself staring at Lady Anika with my mouth wide open.

She was like a teacher explaining something to a child. "That's right, Lady Cecilia. You are the fiancée of my younger brother Lucas, who has become the second prince."

Oh, now I understand why I have such elite attendants! I thought in the back of my mind. But before I could even recover from my shock, Lady Anika went on.

"Well, although he's become second prince, his hands are still tied with things

only he can do, so I doubt he'll be spending too much time on his duties as prince. And since you've already completed your education as princess consort, you should have no difficulties assuming your position."

"Excuse me, Lady Anika. But what do you mean by 'things only he can do'?"

"Hm? Don't tell me Lucas left without even telling you that? Oh, goodness… What a negligent brother I have…"

I may have been his fiancée, but so much had been concealed from me that the role hardly seemed mine…

Heat flooded my cheeks as the extent of my ignorance dawned on me.

"I'm sorry… I think Lord Lucas went out when I was sick, and beforehand we had a bit of a…disagreement…" I struggled to explain, but thankfully, Hannah came to my rescue.

"Lady Cecilia did nothing wrong, of course. It was Lord Lucas's own fault for failing to take her well-being into account."

"That's rather harsh, Hannah. What happened? Did Lucas do something *that* bad?" Lady Anika's voice sounded oddly chipper.

I just want this conversation to be over already!

But my wishes were in vain, because Hannah fell silent for some reason, and so Lady Anika shifted her gaze toward Anna and the others.

"Well? What happened? Anna, Kate, Elsa?"

"…We have nothing to say about Lord Lucas's actions."

"Is that so? Did your…special skills come in handy?"

"Yes! Our difficult training was rewarded because we assisted Lady Cecilia in her bath while blindfolded!" As Elsa spoke, Kate swiftly smacked her upside the head… At least I think she did. All I saw was a blur before Elsa was flat on the floor, twitching. Not that it seemed to bother anyone. What a terrifying household.

Now it's obvious! There's only one reason why a lady would want her maids to be blindfolded—so they wouldn't see her body!

Either way, they could hardly blame me, right? But Anika's bewitching gaze never faltered. I wanted to cry.

My cheeks burned all the way up to my ears as I dropped my gaze to the floor, then I heard a soft knock at the door.

Elsa responded to the person outside—a man, it seemed—and to my surprise, Hannah asked me if it was all right to let him in.

This was Lucas's room after all, and even though he wasn't here right now, I didn't think I had the authority to decide whether or not someone could enter. Wasn't it usually up to Lady Anika, since this was her family home? I glanced at her, but she continued calmly sipping her tea. Her composure was impressive; I could learn a lot from her.

Seeing me hesitate, Hannah admonished me. "Lady Cecilia, you are Lord Lucas's fiancée, so it's up to you to decide."

Well, if that's the case… I nodded and a tall, handsome young man with a clean-cut face entered the room. He introduced himself with a genteel bow as Finn, Lucas's attendant.

"I apologize for interrupting your conversation, but my master asked me to deliver this to you immediately. Consider it a heartfelt gift from Lord Lucas to the both of you."

And with that, he presented each of us with a single, unbelievably beautiful rose. Anna accepted them and handed one each to me and Lady Anika.

The freshly picked rose was red, adorned with a deep blue ribbon delicately embroidered in gold. *Lucas's color,* I thought, and at the same time Lady Anika burst into laughter, seeming genuinely amused.

"Ah ha ha! How absurd! Lucas, putting his own color on your ribbon! So possessive. So obstinate. And not even giving me a ribbon is practically a

punishment! Say, Finn, where is your master? If you're here, he must be home, right?"

Although it was common to use your color for gifts you sent, such as dresses or jewelry, it was quite unheard of to use it in even the ribbon you wrapped the present with.

"He's in the guest room in the west wing. The battle against the demon wolves went well, with Master dispatching their leader in their first clash. As such, there was no issue with him returning home immediately. I must say, seeing Lord Lucas following Marshal Webber's instructions so obediently was quite an amusing sight! His beloved's rejection must have been quite effective, seeing how docile he's suddenly become."

Finn's refreshing response reminded me of Hannah somehow. It was baffling how he spoke of Lucas so casually that they might have been siblings themselves. Fortunately, Anna filled me in. Apparently, Finn was Hannah's son, and so they had both been nursed by her. That definitely explained the resemblance.

That's not important right now, though.

"The guest room in the west wing? Um, will Lord Lucas not return to these quarters anymore?"

We were newly engaged and I felt guilty for occupying his room, especially if he was tired from work. Not only that, but there were many things I wanted to ask him. Since he hadn't returned to his room, I had to wonder if he was avoiding me.

Hm? Lucas, avoiding me? The thought made my chest feel tight and uneasy. *But why? Could I still be tired? Am I still sick?*

As I picked at these misgivings, Finn's cheerful look turned puzzled.

"Oh? This sure isn't what I expected. I thought Master was the only one who…"

“Finn, that’s enough. Let them talk it out among themselves.”

“Yes, Lady Cecilia’s youth was spent preparing for her role as princess consort, so such matters are unfamiliar to her. We need to offer her our heartfelt support since this is their first time.”

Different from what he expected? Why did that sound so scary? What if his impression of me as a princess consort was different from what he’d expected? Ugh, what if it was a bad impression?

Neither Finn, Hannah, nor Lady Anika seemed to want to tell me any details. So basically, they were saying I should just talk to Lucas?

“I guess there’s no other choice. It’s unusual to see Master feeling so down, and letting him stew in his stress till it turns to bloodlust would be trouble… And would mean more work for me… But even an assassin would have trouble catching him while he’s vulnerable. If Lady Cecilia tried it now, he’d just escape through the window! What should we do?”

I supposed I should expect nothing less from the vice-captain of the Imperial Order. He could even sense the presence of assassins and escape through windows. That meant it would probably be impossible for me to go see him.

While I wondered what I should do next, Elsa casually dropped a bombshell—er, I mean, made a suggestion.

“Why not have a conversation with him in a place where escape is impossible?”

The others were quick to build on her idea. I began to tremble in fear at how powerful the servants of a ducal family were… I had to make sure to never make enemies out of them…

I could hear the sound of rushing water beyond the door to the bathhouse.

I stood in front of the door labeled “Large Bathhouse,” dressed in nothing but a towel just long enough to keep my butt from showing when I bent over a bit. I

looked at Anna and the others with pleading eyes, begging for some alternative that didn't need me to do this, but all I got were their self-satisfied smiles and a round of thumbs-ups.

They'd executed their plan with terrifying speed.

First, Anna and the maids kidnapped me and made me take a bath. They thoroughly scrubbed me from head to toe and neatly groomed my hair with scented oil before tying it in a neat braid.

"Watch the stray hairs! Stray hairs are extremely important!" Elsa chided from the side, earning her another smack from Kate.

When I emerged from the bath, wrapped in a large towel, Hannah and (for some reason) Lady Anika were there, and they began discussing what I should wear. I decided to get dressed while they were hashing it out, but the discussion suddenly came to a halt. Just when I thought they'd finally decided on an outfit, I realized all their eyes were fixed on the towel.

When at last she spoke, Lady Anika's expression was terrifying. "Let's go with that…"

Meanwhile, Finn had come up with some excuse to take Lucas to the bathhouse.

That's where I was headed too, but just to be safe, Hannah, Anna, and Kate all cast a joint transformation spell on me. Although my appearance didn't change at all, it did alter my presence, scent, and various other things to match Hannah's so he wouldn't suspect anyone else was here. Apparently, they *could* change my appearance if necessary, though.

I was in awe of their thoroughness. Plus, the fact that servants of a ducal family were skilled enough to use magic like the court mages was terrifying enough, but to go to such lengths for me to go undetected by Lucas seemed like an abuse of their powers. As if all that wasn't overwhelming enough, it turned out the mansion sported a bathhouse that far surpassed anything I'd seen in the private chambers.

I hesitated before the door, but I felt the maids staring at me, so I knew there was no turning back. I took a deep breath while gently pressing the towel tied with a cute ribbon at my chest, then pushed open the door. I'd come this far; I wouldn't leave without having the conversation I'd come for.

There was a *whoosh* of steam that obscured my vision for a moment. I heard a splashing sound and turned to face it. An incredibly handsome figure stepped out of the bath, water droplets running down his stunning body as he raked a hand through his wet locks.

"Hannah, what—huh?" he spoke, thinking it was Hannah, but then his golden eyes widened in surprise.

I summoned every bit of courage I had as I hesitantly stepped toward the frozen Lucas, snapping him back to reality.

"What the—damn it, they tricked me!" He cursed under his breath and quickly grabbed a towel, then glanced at the door behind me. I thought he might try to run away, so I panicked and blocked the door with outstretched arms.

"Cece, what are you…?"

"I-I came to talk! I wanted to talk to you, so I asked Hannah and the others for help…"

"But why did it have to be here?"

"Because you didn't come back to your room! I was waiting for you. You just sent the flower, but didn't show your face. And Finn said even if I went to see you, you'd probably run away, so…"

Even though I hadn't come here to argue, I was so overwhelmed with embarrassment and anxiety that my words came out with a harsh edge.

Tears welled up in my eyes while I glared at him, and for some reason he blushed slightly and awkwardly looked away. That only made me even more nervous. Even though I'd gotten roped into Lady Anika and Hannah's plan, I

knew I was behaving in a manner very unbefitting of a young lady. When I thought of how I might be disappointing him, my chest tightened.

But then I realized he'd come closer and extended his hand.

"…May I touch you? Are you still angry, Cece?"

"What? Angry?" I gave him a confused look.

Isn't he the one avoiding me? Why would I be angry? I didn't fully understand, but I instinctively grabbed his large hand that had paused in midair and guided it toward my cheek. His warm touch flooded me with relief, and I let out a sigh.

So he hadn't rejected me.

Lucas gently caressed my cheek. I looked up and saw his heated golden eyes.

"Can I interpret that to mean…it's okay to touch you?"

I found myself nodding absentmindedly, not thinking much about the meaning behind the words he spoke in a strained voice. I felt relieved that we could finally talk about things, but then Lucas's hand dropped from my cheek to smoothly trace my neck and down to my shoulder.

"You're cold. Let's warm up before we talk."

"Oh, um… Lord Lucas? I can wait outside, so just…"

"This bathhouse is larger and more comfortable than the tub in my quarters. There's plenty of room for two people. Don't be shy."

That's true, but that's not the point! I'm not being shy because of that… No, don't touch the ribbon!

"I-I can manage on my own, Lord Lucas. Please go ahead and get in first."

"You want me to get in first?"

I nodded quickly and he let go of the towel around his waist, then stepped into the bathtub.

"Come on, Cece." He reached a hand out toward me. My face turned red and

then pale and then red again. I had to take off the towel in front of him…

“Could you turn around, Lord Lucas?”

“I can’t do that. It’s slippery in here. It would too dangerous not to watch over you.”

He’s refusing! Of all times to be a gentleman…in his own messed up way? That’s not necessary though, thank you!

He extended his hand with a sparkling smile and that irresistible handsome face of his, but I wouldn’t give in that easily, so I suggested another way.

“Then, um…could you close your eyes, please? It should be fine if you can’t see, right?”

“Ha ha. Who am I, one of your maids? Fine, go ahead.”

He gave in so quickly it caught me off guard a little, but I slowly removed my towel and walked over to him.

The moment I placed my hand in his, he tightly gripped it and pulled me into the tub, causing a splash of water as I fell against his broad chest.

I was so surprised I opened my mouth to let out a protest, but he quickly pushed his tongue inside. *No! I’m against doing naughty things in the bathtub!* I cried out inwardly, but he had one hand firmly placed against the back of my head and the other on my hip, so I had no choice but to accept his kiss.

Gradually, the weight of his tongue against mine began to feel good. As my nipples grazed against his chest, I could feel them growing hard.

Lucas must have realized it too, because he pulled me slightly closer. The pressure of my breasts pushed up against him and the pleasure that bloomed within them sent a tremor through my hips. I felt his hand glide down toward my slit.

“Nngh, haah! L-Lord Lukie! We need to ta—eek!”

He nipped sweetly at my earlobe, and at the same time I felt his long fingers,

which had easily reached that spot between my legs, slip into my closed slit. His palm rubbed against my mound, making my already wet pussy even wetter. I put my arms around Lucas's shoulders and clung to him. He squeezed me tightly once and then slowly sat down in the bathtub.

The water feels so good… And before I knew it, he started kissing me again.

Lucas lifted my ass and sat me down on his lap so that I was straddling him. I felt the curve of his cock along the entire length of my wet pussy.

It was so sensual that I gasped and moaned between kisses, and then I felt his fingers spread my opening. At that exact moment, my juices began gushing out of me. He rubbed his shaft against my mound as if to check to see how wet I was, so I clung to his shoulders and glared at him. His eyes were closed, but he was smiling.

What? He hasn't opened his eyes yet?! How can you do such naughty things with your eyes closed?!

"Lord Lukie…?"

"What is it, Cece?"

His eyes were still closed, and surely no one would blame me for being entranced by the way water droplets clung to his beautiful face.

Whoa, his eyelashes are so long! And when he has his eyes closed, he looks so boyish. But when he has his wet hair slicked back like this, he looks so manly… The juxtaposition between the two is oddly sexy…

As if drawn by some invisible force, I gently ran my fingertips from his forehead to the corner of his eyes, then down to his cheeks. Even though he still hadn't opened his eyes, and he showed no signs of resistance, my heart pounded as I tentatively placed my hand over his eyes and blurted out, "I-I said we should talk first, remember? And are you really unable to see anything right now?"

"Mm, well if I said I couldn't see *anything* like this it would be a lie. I can sense

the mana flowing around a person's body, so I can see the shape they create. Your mana is always a beautiful rainbow color, Cece. I never tire of looking at it. And when you feel pleasure, your magical energy expands oh so gently."

So it doesn't matter if his eyes are open or closed? And when I'm feeling pleasure, my mana tells him about it?! Hey! Mana! Just what do you think you're doing to me?!

I reddened with embarrassment.

"For example…" he said, then put his hand through a series of strange movements.

"Lord Lucas, you don't need to give an exam—ooh!"

I let out a startled cry and the suggestive noise echoed throughout the spacious bathhouse.

Oh nooo! My voice is echoing!

Heat gathered in my face, and I covered my mouth with my palm. Lucas's long fingers reached out to pinch my nipple. He started massaging my breast, enjoying its softness. He rubbed my nipple to stiffen it, then cupped my breast from below to lift it to his mouth. His tongue toying with my nipple in the hot confines of his mouth was more stimulation than I could bear. I tried to push away, but that just made his long cock rub against my pussy, arousing me even further.

The sensation made even more wetness pour out from inside of me. Lucas firmly gripped my waist to pull me back, once again making me brush against his hardness. My body writhed to escape the stimulation, causing my nipple to scrape against his teeth. He immediately nipped at it softly, coaxing even more of my wetness out onto his massive dick. With every movement, the hand he still had within me took its chance to stir me up even more. There was no escaping this vicious cycle. *Ahh, he can see my mana…*

By the time he released my nipple from his mouth with a hot sigh, my hips

were spasming and I was panting. My dripping wet pussy ached and twitched in want. I'm sure my desire was written all over my face.

All I could think of was shame for feeling this way.

I came here to talk, but my body was so weak against pleasure that in no time at all, Lucas had me in the palm of his hand. I couldn't deny it, and that made me feel even more ashamed.

The way he touched me felt so good, but I was mortified by how I lost myself in the pleasure. I might have been his fiancée, but that was in name alone—I was still nothing more than a prostitute.

My body felt weak, and I was so embarrassed and ashamed that all I could do was cling to him. On the brink of tears, I buried my face against his shoulder and mustered up the angriest voice I could.

"A-are you just after my body?"

Voicing my frustrations only made me more keenly aware of them—and of how pathetic I was. I started sobbing, squeezing his shoulder as I cried. But Lucas was stronger than me, and effortlessly peeled my body away from him.

I glared at him with a mixture of anger and surprise, but then my entire body was covered in goosebumps when I felt that hostility coming from him again.

His eyes were closed, his head tipped slightly to the side. How was it possible for him, a human, to have such a menacing aura?

The warm bath should have been comforting, but now it felt as cold as ice, causing my body to shiver uncontrollably. As I trembled, the demon knight stroked my quivering body. His expression changed, then he whispered "Cece, can I open my eyes now? I want to talk." There was something flippant and suffocating in his voice and I struggled to breathe.

"Y-yes," I replied. I couldn't help but think it was ridiculous for him to ask that question at this point. Though the unseriousness of it all at least helped me hold onto my sanity.

His long eyelashes flicked away droplets of water as they opened, revealing golden eyes shrouded in murky darkness. I stared at him while tears streamed down my face. Seeing his widened pupils made my teeth chatter. Suddenly, he blurted out, “Who told you such a thing?”

I blinked with confusion.

He asked me again, “Who told you that all I wanted was your body?”

Told me? The tone of his voice was so gentle, I lost it all over again “No! You… Lord Lukie, I-I came here to talk! But then you went and had your way with me! I-I know it’s my fault because it feels so good! But you’re the one who made me feel this way!” My words tumbled out tremulously through my tears, and as they did, I felt his hostility dissipate.

He was clearly shaken. As I wiped my tears I said, “A-aren’t you just after my body, Lord Lukie? Isn’t that why you gave me the Promise Mark? And why you made me your fiancée?”

“Why would you think I was only after your body, Cece?”

Would he really do something as risky as engraving a Promise Mark just because of lust? I pondered this in the back of my mind while I waited for him to answer. I wanted him to deny it. I stared at him intently.

Lucas looked away for a moment, lost in thought, and then reached up to press a hand against his head and muttered, “Don’t tell me…”

“Don’t tell you…what?” Before I could puzzle out what he meant, he lifted me out of the bath and wrapped me in a towel. He carried me away and the next thing I knew, I was lying in bed. I looked around, trying to orient myself, when I felt a weight fall upon me.

Lucas’s eyes glowed with heat and his skin was tinged red. This gorgeous man called my name, “Cece…”

What’s going on with him, anyway? I thought, but he was so sexy I was completely overwhelmed. Then suddenly he gave me the lightest, softest kiss,

as if I might fall apart in his embrace.

His kisses came on, tender and gentle and rich with some meaning he yearned to convey. His arms were firmly planted on either side of me, holding me in place, and I found myself wrapping my own arms around his back.

He would pull away, then kiss me, then pull away, and kiss me all over again. *So this wasn't just because he wanted my body? Or merely to torment me?* My turbulent heart calmed just a little.

Lucas let out a little sigh and pressed his forehead against mine, then fixed me with a desperate, gold-hued gaze. "I love you, Cecilia," he said.

The words didn't quite register and all I could do was mumble, "You what?"

"Lady Cecilia Cline, I love you. I've been in love with you for a very long time. I honed my skills with a sword and joined the Imperial Order to protect you…and to make you mine."

He closed his mouth for a moment. I thought I saw heavy sadness reflected in his pleading eyes, but he kissed me again as if to keep me from seeing, so it remained a mystery.

But more importantly, I was completely stunned by the words that were coming out of his mouth.

"Love…? Who?"

"I, Lucas Herbst, love you, Cecilia Cline."

"You're…lying."

"I'm not lying! I would never lie about such a thing. I love you, Cece. I love you and only you! Now that I finally have the right to stand by your side, I couldn't bear the thought of anyone else touching you. I didn't want anyone else to take you away from me. I wanted you to be mine for life, so I bared your body, waited until your reason had melted away, and then engraved the Promise Mark on you. Even if it failed, it would have been no loss, for I have no intention of ever being with a woman other than you. Impotence would have only spared

me their bothersome affections. And besides, our duties as prince and princess involve little more than diplomacy, so they don't need to have any deeper ties than that. Other countries still use Promise Marks, so there shouldn't be a problem."

That's what he thought when he engraved the Mark… He spoke so unabashedly I had to assume he was being sincere, yet he seemed completely without remorse. I was stunned—and could you blame me? *It wouldn't hurt for him to at least* look *sorry!*

So that messy, sticky-sweet act was all premeditated? It was true that my sense of reason melted away with all the pain and pleasure… *But was that all some kind of conditioning?! Eek! I knew he was a demon, but I had no idea he was into yandere territory! Talk about scary!*

My mind went off on a tangent while he continued. "The Promise Mark won't succeed if there's even a hint of rejection in the woman's heart—and my name is undoubtedly engraved upon your lower abdomen. That's proof that you willingly opened your body and heart to me, accepting me. Am I right, Cece?"

Lucas sat up and affectionally stroked the Promise Mark on my lower abdomen.

Ah, stop saying such embarrassing things while you touch me in such an embarrassing place! And that seductive smile, too! There's no way I agreed! No way! It was definitely some kind of mind trick to break me!

"A-are you…?"

"Yes, I am."

I'm not fully convinced, to be honest…

But when his divine face looked at me with a radiant smile, my heart raced and my face flushed with heat. *This is just hot guy magic! That's what it is! He's whispering, "I love you," but actually casting some kind of curse on me! Otherwise why would I have agreed?*

Hold it right there, Cece. Take a deep breath and think about this. It seems like Lucas might actually love me. But how do I feel?

The Promise Mark was on my body because I'd wholeheartedly accepted him.

It was true that no matter what Lucas did, I never felt like I disliked it and, strangely enough, I'd completely accepted him. But I didn't know if that was because I had romantic feelings for him or not.

As princess consort, my activities had been strictly managed to minimize involvement with the opposite sex so I wouldn't fall in love with anyone other than Prince Felix; I was conditioned to accept no one but him as a potential partner.

So had I accepted Lucas because I had feelings for him? I wasn't forced to accept him. *But can you really start to love someone after they inflict pain on you and take your virginity like that?*

I couldn't find the answer no matter how much I thought about it. I felt lost and didn't understand my own feelings; I was frustrated that I couldn't respond to Lucas. My emotions must've shown on my face because he smiled awkwardly at me.

"Do you doubt my feelings? Or are you perhaps not convinced of your own?"

"I-I don't doubt your feelings, Lord Lucas."

"Hm, I see. Then this is about what's in your heart."

"You seem quite calm, considering I might not feel the same way." I bit my lip, and he took me by the chin and showered me with kisses. And when I parted my lips, he plunged his tongue in deeply.

Lucas's kisses felt so good it was hard to pull away. As I desperately tried to respond to his kiss, he suddenly withdrew. I felt a little sad to see his tongue go. Lucas lapped up the trail of spit that connected our mouths, the corners of his mouth twisting into a smirk.

"I'm the only one who will ever be able to kiss you like this, Cece."

"I'm your fiancée. I have no intention of kissing anyone else."

"I see… Well, despite what you think, men don't feel the same way. When they see a beautiful flower blooming, they feel an irresistible urge to pluck it. Although, your Promise Mark won't let them do that anyway," he murmured with a faint chuckle, caressing the symbol on my abdomen.

So the reason he can remain calm is because the mark he placed on me will keep me from consorting with other men? But that doesn't mean I can't fall in love with anyone else.

However, there were some details I couldn't overlook.

“And what about you?” I asked.

“What about me?”

“Will you be with anyone else? Plucking any other flower that catches your eye?”

I regretted those words the moment they left my mouth and his eyes widened with surprise.

How can you be so possessive when you don’t even understand your own feelings?! I was disgusted with my own selfishness and turned to lie face down, trying to escape his gaze.

“Cece.”

“P-please forget what I just said.”

“Would you be upset if I was with another woman?”

I tried to say I wouldn’t but just ended up shaking my head, determined to keep my mouth shut.

“I thought that I was making you happy. Maybe I need to make you understand a bit more.” There was a disappointment in his voice. His ominous words made me shiver, and I cautiously glanced behind me.

“Cece, you underestimate my feelings.”

Um, excuse me?! But the god of sex appeal is talking to me right now!

It seemed I had once again hit the wrong button. I timidly backed away from his mocking grin, holding the sash of my dress up as if to ward him off, but to no avail. He effortlessly caught me while saying, “I’m going to have to engrave my love on your body to make sure you never doubt my feelings again. So you never think I’d look at another woman.”

As he spoke, he tied my hands in front of me with the sash. Even as I blushed, it felt like my blood had begun to run cold.

I promise I won’t say it anymore!

“I love you, Cecilia.” Before I could say a word, he lifted my foot and reverently kissed my toe. He went on, slowly licking each digit in turn as he whispered more sweet nothings…

By the time he pulled his mouth away, my heart was pounding wildly. My hands were still bound and my pussy was throbbing, seeping little drops of wetness…

“Noo! Eek, ahh! Ohh, not there…!”

“You’re such a liar, Cece. You want me so bad you’re sucking my fingers in and squeezing them. Doesn’t it feel so good?”

“Ahh! Ah, ah, ah! Not again! Nngh!”

Just as I was about to reach my climax, Lucas suddenly pulled his fingers out. He did this over and over again, teasing me until I was on the brink, sending shockwaves through my feverish, sensitive body.

At first, I tried to untie the sash with my teeth, but I’d abandoned that, biting down on it instead to brace myself against the surging pleasure.

Tears and spittle soaked the sheets as I pushed my face into it. I couldn’t bear the shame of being on all fours so I tried to lower my trembling hips, but Lucas wouldn’t allow it. He grabbed me by the ass and lifted my hips.

“Eek! N-no, please forgive me!”

“What do you want me to forgive, Cecilia? We’re only doing things that feel good, aren’t we? Mm, doesn’t it feel good to have my fingers inside of you? Or would you rather have my tongue instead?”

“No, no! Ahh, no! Don’t lick me!”

Lucas isn’t listening at all!

He forced my hips up higher. The mere fact that I was in such a shameful position, exposing every part of me that was never meant to be seen by anyone —let alone this gorgeous man—was already unbearable. But now I felt Lucas shoving his tongue inside my sopping, sticky honey pot. I was so mortified, it

felt like my entire body was blushing.

"Haah, Cece… You're burning up inside…"

"Noo!"

Please do not take my temperature with your tongue!!

The feeling of his thick tongue slipping in and out of my pussy, savoring me from the inside out was so embarrassing. I tried to inch my body forward, but he wouldn't let me. Instead, he held my waist in place, lifting me up in front of him. Then I felt him spread open my twitching opening.

"Eep!"

"Amazing… Your tiny pink hole is fluttering, and I can see your little clit so clearly from here. Mm, you must be feeling good because it's a little swollen."

"No, no! Don't open me up like that! Eek! Nooo! Ahh, no, not there! Don't lick me there! Nngaah!"

He lewdly lapped at my exposed clitoris, sending waves of pleasure shooting from my waist all the way up my spine. I clamped my teeth on the knotted sash that bound my wrists together. I couldn't take it!

Just the feeling of him licking me multiplied my pleasure, but that wasn't enough. It was frustrating that I couldn't cum, but I wasn't about to plead with him to *let* me cum, and so I grit my teeth tighter. Then he poked the tip of his tongue against my clit, and my desire spilled out in scandalous moans.

I was so mortified, all I could do was rub my face against the sheets saying, "No, no!"

But that only delighted Lucas, who said, "Cece, you're so adorable. I want you to feel even more."

I can't even communicate properly with this sadistic demon anymore! I lamented inwardly.

All he did was lick me. The knot of desire tightened in my belly and my hips

bucked desperately. But Lucas grabbed me and held me still, denying any other stimulation—and any hope of finding release.

I bit down on the sash as I tried to endure the tantalizing torment. Even when I gripped at the sheets with my fingers, my clit was so sensitive that a single flick from his tongue tore a decadent moan from my throat. I had no idea how to escape this conundrum.

As a final resort, I called Lucas's name.

"L-Lord Lukie… Lord Lukie…! It hurts… It hurts!"

"Hm? It hurts? Ha ha. Is my love painful?"

Huh?! Did I make the wrong choice again?!

"N-no, ahh! It feels…too good… Lord Lukieee!"

The whirlwind of sensations felt so good it hurt. I called Lucas's name over and over until suddenly, he yanked my body upward.

Giving me no chance to respond, he turned my face to the side and plunged me into a deep kiss as I tottered unsteadily on my knees. Desperately, I tried to respond to his kisses, but then he spread my pussy open with his fingers and started stroking it from behind with his long, hard cock.

My eyes opened wide, startled by the hard, hot sensation that moved back and forth, coating itself in my wetness. His golden eyes stared at me, narrowing as if in pain. Emotions swirled within them. Not just desire, I realized, and the feelings in my heart overflowed into words.

"Only me…?"

"Nngh, Cecilia! Yes, I love you, and only you!" His voice was like a growl, and all of a sudden, he slammed his cock into my depths so hard and fast it took my breath away.

At last, I found the release I'd been waiting for, and I came dizzyingly fast.

"Tssss!"

The pleasure was too much for me to scream out loud, so instead I threw my head back and gasped… Meanwhile, the sadistic demon Lucas showed his true colors.

“Ahh? N-no, w-wait! Ohhh!”

He thrust gently, as if to savor my pulsing pussy, but even so, the sensation was terrifyingly intense. My vision flickered again, unable to fully return from the world of overwhelming pleasure.

“Ahh, no! I’m gonna cum again! Nngh!”

“Yes, Cece! All I need is you…!”

“Ahh, gaah!”

I get it already, I promise! I screamed in my mind, but unfortunately, all that came out were screams of pleasure and sweet, whimpering moans.

He grabbed at my breasts with one hand, running it roughly over the hardened tips of my nipples. Meanwhile, his other hand pressed down on my lower abdomen. The whole time, he pounded me hard from behind. His actions, though forceful, were carefully attuned to my pleasure. I thought I couldn’t take it anymore, so I tried to escape, but he only tightened his hold while sucking the exposed skin on my nape.

“Don’t run away, Cecilia.”

“Ahh, eek! Not there!”

The moment he held me in his muscular embrace, his erection grazed against a place it had never touched before. Pleasure unlike any I’d felt before raced through my body in wild tremors. My pussy constricted around him, so there was no doubt he also felt its intensity.

Tears streamed down my face as he kissed my neck again and again, nipping sweetly at my earlobe while he moaned with delight in my ear.

“You like it when I touch you here, don’t you, Cece? I’m going to give so much love to this spot…”

“Ahhh!”

I’ll pass! I wanted to scream, but I could only let out a hoarse, scratchy noise from the depths of my throat.

True to his word, I felt his cock rub me there hard, and my eyes jolted open from the unbelievable pleasure. He rubbed me there again and again, and my vision went white every time he pulled out. I came so much I could barely think straight, could barely catch a breath.

I turned to him, tongue out and panting between sobs, but all he said was, “Look at that naughty face. Are you trying to turn me on?” Talk about ominous.

“Eek! Ahh, nghh!”

He tweaked my nipple with one hand while he rubbed my clit with other, and suddenly I felt a sensation like something was going to squirt out of me.

And then, for what seemed like the millionth time, I came, collapsing into a quaking, shivering mess.

Lucas caressed my abdomen just below my belly. “Who’s inside of you now?”

I trembled in pleasure as he whispered in my ear.

“Answer me,” he growled in a deep voice.

I forced my voice out, panting my answer breathlessly. “L-Lord Lukie.”

“That’s right. I’m the one fucking you right now. It feels good, doesn’t it?” he urged gently, applying pressure to my lower belly with his palm—I couldn’t help but feel his hard cock inside of me right on the other side of his hand. Part of me quailed at the situation. The cock inside me felt so huge I feared it would split me open. Yet another part of me, deep inside, seemed to welcome it, driving my sticky walls to squeeze around him.

Lucas narrowed his eyes. “I love you Cecilia,” he whispered, then covered me with kisses.

I frantically kissed him back, then all of a sudden, he started pounding into me

roughly.

"Who's…fucking you right now…? I want you to burn that in your mind," he whispered in a deep voice.

He flicked my clit with the edge of his nail while he hit the deepest part of me. Heat spread through my belly. I let out a high-pitched shriek, but for some reason my voice sounded far away. Finally, I couldn't bear it, and let myself go as my world was swallowed in a tide of white.

The last thing I remembered was being held in a firm yet warm embrace, and the gentle weight of a kiss alighting upon my eyelids.

I'll never say he's going to look at another woman again…! The love of this demon knight is waaay too intense!

I awoke slowly from my comfortable slumber.

Feeling a little chilly, I shivered, and a firm hand drew me in. I felt a warmth on my cheek, and it felt so good I nuzzled against it… Then my eyes flew open.

Lucas's gorgeous face was right in front of me, his eyes regarding me dreamily.

My face began to heat up before I was even conscious of it.

Lucas pulled me even closer. With a smile so sinfully beautiful it could blind me, he greeted me in a sweet voice. "Good morning, Cece. I love you." So sweet, in fact, that I had to wonder if I was dreaming.

"U-um, good morning…" Despite my less than confident reply, Lucas smiled happily and traced my spine with his finger as he sat up, then placed his hands on either side of me.

I'm totally defenseless right now!

I searched for something to cover up with, but the blanket was down around Lucas's waist, out of my reach. And if I looked down any farther… *Waaah!*

I was so flustered I pulled down the fluffy pillow under my head to try to hide my naked body, but Lucas just chuckled and brought his face closer to mine. I squeezed my eyes shut with embarrassment, which only grew worse when I heard the sounds of kissing so close to my ear.

There's no girl in the world who wouldn't turn bright red waking up to a kiss on the shoulder from gorgeous stud like this first thing in the morning! Especially the morning after*!*

"You're bright red. Ahh, you're so cute—so cute I could eat you up. Cece, may I kiss you good morning?"

"Um… Yes."

That doesn't sound so bad now, does it? Putting my internal monologue on pause for a moment, I lifted my cheek up for Lucas. He smiled happily…and went right for my mouth.

"Mm?! Nngh, mmph, aah!"

"Mm, your pillow's in the way."

Nooo, not my self-defense pillow!

All the strength left my body once Lucas's tongue invaded my mouth. He yanked the pillow away from me and I reached out in vain to get it back, only for him to catch my wrist and pin it to the sheets.

My body writhed with embarrassment, but since he had my hands pinned down, all I could do was twitch my shoulders, which made my breasts bounce and jiggle in full view of his golden eyes.

"Ahhh…"

The light was at his back, casting his face in shadows that lent his smile an even more devilish edge. He held my gaze as he leaned in close and whispered, "Is it carved?"

"What? Is wha… Huh?"

“How much I love you. Is it carved into your heart and soul now?”

“Oh, um… Yes… That’s enough…” We exchanged words with our lips a hair’s breadth apart. Memories of the night before flooded back, and I averted my eyes in abashment.

“Are you sure?”

“Eeek! Wait! L-Lord Lukie!”

“Can I check?”

Wait, wait! Why are you pulling my knees apart?! How exactly are you going to check?! Eek, he’s rubbing me there!

“Ah, stop! H-huh? Something’s dripping out…?”

“Yes… It looks like my seed is dripping out of you. What a waste.”

Nooo! That feeling of it coming out of me…! And what do you mean, it’s a waste?! It’s not a waste to me!

I tried to tense up my languid body to resist, but this only served to squeeze more of his semen out of me. The feeling of it dripping out from my hole tickled my lower belly and, in a chain reaction I was powerless to stop, my walls contracted, pushing even more of his seed out of me.

Stop staring at that cloudy liquid pouring out of me there! I’m going to die! I’m going to die of embarrassment!

“D-don’t look! No, Lord Lukie! Please don’t look…!”

“How can you be this cute and naughty, Cece? I love you so much… Can I do it?”

“N-naughty?! Eek, stop! Don’t do it! Don’t lick my breasts! Ehhnn!”

Just because you love me doesn’t mean you have to give in to your desires first thing in the morning! Plus, “naughty” is not a compliment! It’s insulting, and that doesn’t change no matter how gorgeous the person saying it! I-I won’t be fooled!

As usual, my protests dissipated somewhere between my mind and my mouth, and all I uttered were gentle moans, which answered him each time he squeezed my breasts or sucked on my nipples. He lewdly lapped at my areolas and then nibbled on the tips. I let out a puppylike whimper at the jolt of pain and pleasure.

Writhing and twisting, I tried desperately to suppress the pleasure beginning to flood me, but my movements only made my breasts jiggle temptingly before him.

“You’re trying to turn me on, aren’t you, Cece?”

I wanted to deny it, but once he spread my legs, memories of the previous night’s pleasure took over, and my body immediately gave in. I was starting to worry that he might be right about me being naughty, and all the devilish things he whispered to me definitely didn’t help.

“Hey, Cece. Remember how I said you’re the only woman for me? You’re the only one who can turn me on. You’re the only one who can soothe me.”

“Nngh…”

The “only you” is really unfair! Though it did please me hear him put his lustful devotion into words.

I’d already let him do everything to me—what girl would reject a guy who said he loved her, that she was the only one for him, that he yearned for her so passionately?

“Hey… Will you put me inside of you, Cece?” he begged, firmly pressing against my clit. My body finally caved in.

Answering verbally was too embarrassing, so instead, I opened my legs in front of him and scooted my hips down until the tip of his cock pressed against my honey pot. That exact moment, I felt his body stiffen faintly and a gasp escaped his lips.

“Cece…?”

“Um… Just don’t be too rough, okay?”

The fact that I’d just spread my legs in front of him had me blushing an inferno, but I did want to at least make that request; there was no way I could stay lucid if he was rough with me again. I wanted him to be gentle this time. I was about to ask for my self-defense pillow back, to hide my embarrassment even a little, when I noticed he was covering his face with his hands.

“Ahhh, this is insane.”

Insane? Why?

“I’m so happy I think I could fuck you to death…”

“Wha—?! No! Never mind, I take it back!” Lucas’s ominous exclamation sent a shiver down my spine. I tried to crawl out from under his larger body, scolding my limbs for their reticence.

I absolutely do not want to be fucked to death!

“I’m only joking,” Lucas said. “Don’t worry. I’ll be gentle.” He impatiently pressed down on my waist, but then suddenly froze as if he’d sensed something amiss.

His sudden stillness had begun to worry me when at last he sighed heavily, then drew me into a tight embrace.

There was a knock at the door.

I startled, but he patted me on the back, lifted me up, and the next thing I knew he had me dressed again. *Where’d he get that dress from? Was it a magic trick?*

I looked at him in surprise, but he merely wrapped a towel around his waist like nothing had happened. He shifted languidly into a cross-legged position on the bed and pulled me onto his lap. Then he called out angrily, “What is it this time?”

Not “What is it?” but “What is it this time*?” But why?* I wondered.

A familiar voice beyond the door said, “Salamanders, this time.”

*Um, being left out of this conversation is kind of frustrating, especially when I’m sitting on Lucas’s lap with just a towel on… Wait, salamanders? Like…*that *kind of salamander? A Class A magical beast with a difficulty rating of S to defeat? Aren’t those dangerous?*

I went stock still, but Lucas dismissed the news, casually ordering, “Go tell Leon the knights can handle it.”

The familiar name filled me with confusion.

Leon? A knight named Leon?? There is a Leon who’s the captain of the Chivalric Order… Does he mean that Leon? Please tell me he’s not addressing the crown prince by only his first name!

I stared at Lucas with wide eyes. The conversation beyond the door continued.

“You’re about the only one who’d say that about salamanders, Master.” Finn’s voice carried easily through the door. “Taking on Class A magical beasts would be a challenge, even for a fighter as seasoned as Prince Leon, leader of the Black and White Knights. Numbers aren’t on our side either. It seems like quite a few magical beasts have gathered. If you don’t go, we could suffer great casualties.”

Why would Lucas be called for such a difficult task when the Black Knights were trained specifically to kill monsters and the White Knights were unmatched in magic? After all, Lucas was a member of the Imperial Order, right? It would be another thing if we were talking about Marshal Webber, who wielded Eckesachs, but…

All sorts of questions crowded my mind. Lucas sensed my anxiety as I nestled against his body, and he pulled me closer. He raked his hand through his hair, visibly vexed, and said, “Tell Leon’s messenger to wait another hour,” before casually kissing me.

Wait a minute, what is he thinking? He's not seriously brushing off the crown prince's messenger about something as serious as salamanders, is he? And telling the prince to wait another hour?! …Wait, why does he want another hour…?

"L-Lord Lukie…"

"Shh, Finn has good ears; he might overhear."

"Huh?! Ahh!"

Eek! Don't lift up my hips! Hey! Don't slip your hand down my dress!

He buried his face against my cleavage and dotted kisses over it while I grabbed his shoulders, frantically trying to stop him. That was when Finn gave us a surprise.

"The letter bears the crown prince's crest. It seems urgent, and the vice-captains of both the Black and White Knights are here as messengers."

A letter with the crown prince's crest?!

Most people would go their whole lives without seeing that crest. Why would the prince use it to summon Lucas? And he'd sent the knights' vice-captains as messengers too.

Being a royal sure sounds luxurious! But why go to such lengths for Lucas? Is it because he's the second prince? But princes don't need to be on the frontlines, fighting campaigns against magical beasts; Felix certainly never did such a thing. Well, he never really did much of anything. None of the knights really like him, either… Prince Leon, on the other hand, is the captain of the Chivalric Order, thanks to the royal family's magical cheat codes.

Then again, Lucas is so overpowered, his mere existence is basically cheating, so it would make sense to summon him. Among the current candidates for the throne, he's probably the most capable in terms of magic. But I've heard that salamanders can only be defeated with physical attacks…

As I pondered this, Lucas pressed his face against my chest and muttered

angrily, “Damn it. I’m going to punch Leon for this.”

“P-punch?! N-no, Lord Lukie! You mustn’t!”

Why threaten such ominous things, like punching the crown prince, right into my cleavage?!

“…Why are you defending Leon, Cece?”

Huh? Is he angry or something? Still, I have to say something. I can’t let that one slide!

“Why would you want to punch the crown prince, Lord Lukie? Think of the consequences! You’re not just a knight anymore, you’re a prince. Would you signal to other nations that there’s conflict between the crown prince and the second prince? The commoners will bear the consequences of your actions. We just got engaged… Are you planning to leave me all alone, Lord Lukie?”

This really isn’t something to say with my breasts on full display like this, I thought in the back of my mind, and for some reason he gazed at me with heat in his eyes. *Why? Why are you looking at me like that?!*

“Ugh… Cece, you really are the best.”

“That’s right. Keep telling him that, Lady Cecilia.”

I don’t understand! And why are you chiming in, Finn?!

“Ahh, fine. Since Cece insists, I suppose I’ll go help Leon. Casualties among the knights just means more trouble for me later. I don’t want to force my fiancée to use her healing magic on any other men, after all,” Lucas muttered as I widened my eyes.

“You know about that?”

“Of course I do. I was paying close attention to make sure no one suspicious approached you. You use your extraordinary healing magic to help those in need, regardless of their status—from orphans to knights, and even priests in the church. You’ve earned a lot of people’s admiration through your actions, which was a bit rough on me…”

I was astonished by what Lucas was saying as he climbed off the bed.

Besides charitable visits as the princess consort candidate, I also paid private visits to orphanages and churches, helping heal knights and mercenaries who were injured during campaigns. Although I wasn't allowed to go out much until two or three years ago, I did what I could. It had been about a year since I was relatively free to visit orphanages in the capital, though. Suddenly, I realized something.

"Wait a minute… A year ago, that was you…!"

"I didn't do anything special. Everyone adored you as the princess consort, even the Azure Knights. And thanks to that, I was left feeling jealous!" he laughed as he left the bedroom.

Before I knew it, I found myself once more in the care of my three exceptional maids. They bathed me, again while they were blindfolded, before helping me into a high-collared dress.

My muscles were so sore they screamed, and I needed Anna and Kate's support on both sides anywhere I went, which led to numerous embarrassing situations. I finally settled in a sunny spot in Lucas's room on the sofa.

"So many things happened today I feel exhausted," I said as I leaned back and sipped some delicious tea Anna had brewed. Then I realized something.

"Oh, no! What should I do?! I forgot to say goodbye!"

"Oh… That's right," Anna said.

"We also completely forgot, with Lady Cecilia's well-being foremost in our minds and all," Kate added.

Whaat? I wasn't sure what to say in response to them.

"If you have something to tell him, shall I deliver a message?" Elsa suggested.

I couldn't believe I was here, at my fiancé's house, and hadn't even seen him

off. Then again, the stuff he'd said had left me reeling, and I could barely move after the wringer he'd put me through. Even so, that hardly excused me.

"Could I ask you to do that? Oh, but he's already left the capital, hasn't he?" I asked, looking at the clock. It was already past noon, so I doubted any message would get to him in time, even if sent by horse.

"Don't worry. Elsa can use long-range transmission magic to get a message to Lord Lucas."

"Please, leave it to me! I can send it right now!"

"Wait!" Anna cut in. "Um, it might be dangerous at the moment. What if he's still riding his horse? Let's wait to send the message until he's settled at camp!"

Duke Herbst's servants are something else! I've never heard of a servant who could use long-range transmission magic before! Such a person would usually just become a high-ranking mage. I'm going to need to check the qualifications necessary to be a servant in this household…

As my mind once again wandered to trivial things, I decided to go with Anna's suggestion to wait until evening.

That evening, Elsa helped me send a message, thus bringing the tumultuous day to a close.

She told me that Lucas had responded, saying that my message had given him renewed motivation for the campaign and added, after an unusual pause, "I shall return to Cecilia's side without fail."

After hearing that, I secretly writhed in bed every time I remembered it.

***

My noble-hearted woman was beautiful, inside and out.

When she used her healing magic, rainbow-colored mana sparkled around her, so she gradually came to be called the Rainbow Maiden. Despite being the second prince's candidate for princess consort, her healing skills were so renowned that the church tried to bring her into the clergy. Yet she never grew

arrogant, and her attitude of offering aid to all, regardless of status, earned her admiration far and wide.

It warmed my heart to see her smile like a flower in bloom when she helped others. Yet some part of me, at odds with that joy, yearned to keep her locked away from the world, like a bird in a cage. That was why I provided as much assistance as I could as the vice-captain of the Imperial Order.

When I saw her expression soften with joy when she said, “Wait a minute… A year ago, that was you…!” I couldn’t help but feel a twinge knowing I wouldn’t be able to keep her confined forever.

I couldn’t stop smiling when I received Cece’s message, not even when Carl, my reluctant companion, barged into my tent.

“Hey Lukie, about the magical beasts… Huh? Why are you still transformed? Aren’t you using Eckesachs today?”

“Shut up. Don’t ask me about that. I don’t want to stand out, so I always change to ‘Lukie’ during missions, don’t I?”

“Jeez, what’s with the cold reaction? Are you going through a rebellious phase or something? And who were you talking to via long-distance transmission with that sappy look on your face? Oh, right. Must’ve been from your beloved fiancée, huh? You sneaky bastard. Is everything going well?”

Is he picking up on it because I’ve let my guard down so much? I tried to pull myself together as I cut the signal. Just then, another person entered the tent.

“Carl, will you stop pestering Lukie?” Alphonse said. Then he turned to me with a wry look on his handsome face. “I’m sorry. He seems to be worried that you and your fiancée aren’t getting along.”

“Well, it’s just that, you know…your fiancée didn’t even see you off,” Carl said, referring to our departure that morning. “We’re on a mission to slay a Class A magical beast, right? You could *die*, you know! It’s only natural for me to worry about your relationship.”

“I guess that’s true.”

I couldn’t hide my displeasure at his concern.

They thought that Cecilia might not have the best impression of me as the new second prince given her long engagement to Felix. His behavior had been terrible after all, in spite of his royal upbringing, and Cecilia was always cleaning up his messes. They figured she’d had her fill of royals after that.

The people around me also urged me to choose someone other than Cecilia to be my bride as well, also citing her long engagement. This came with the vexing implication she might have still been his mistress. But anyone who dared to speak such things was promptly removed from my presence.

“So what’s the real story?”

“Stop it, Carl. You provoke a horse too much and you’ll get kicked right in the mouth.”

Prince Leon arrived just then, and Alphonse turned to him.

“Prince Leon! How did it go? Will the barrier hold until morning?”

Leon ignored his question and turned his gaze to me. “It’s about time, little brother. You’re late, you know. We were overwhelmed in battle while you were having a good time with your fiancée.”

“It would have been a good time, if you hadn’t interfered.”

“Hm? Didn’t I give you leave to return yesterday? Shouldn’t one night be enough?”

“One night is never enough. You sent Carl and Al as messengers with a letter bearing your crest, specifically asking for my return. I think I might punch you after all…”

I recalled this morning with Cece and directed my anger toward Leon. She had finally started to accept me, but because of *this guy…*

“Wait, wait, wait! What’s this all about?! You’re saying…I interfered? Well,

excuse me. A thousand pardons! But I was in a tight spot too!”

“Oh, you were in a *tight spot,* so you interfered when I was almost in a *tight spot*? All right, then. Accept your punishment and bear it with a smile.”

“Wait! Carl, stop laughing and come help me already!”

“Ha ha ha! See? Alphonse, can you believe it? Can you believe this is *Lukie*?!”

Seeing Carl clearly enjoying himself, I shot him a puzzled look. Even Alphonse was grinning.

“Indeed. I’ve never seen Lukie so emotional or expressive before. Glad to see that things seem to be going well with her.”

“Well, if one night wasn’t enough, no wonder she couldn’t come see you off…”

I contemplated throwing the dagger tucked in my sleeve at Carl, but Finn bade me, “Please don’t throw it, Lord Lucas. It would be such a waste if it got dirty with Carl’s blood.”

I shrugged my shoulders at Finn. He was like a brother to me and always seemed to read my mind.

Meanwhile, Carl had stepped behind Leon, all the color drained from his face.

“Y-you wouldn’t really throw a dagger at your friend, would you?”

“And you shouldn’t use your crown prince as a shield!” Leon retorted. “That’s treason! Plus, it’s not like a shield would even work against him!”

“True…” Alphonse said. “With his aim, he could pierce straight through Prince Leon and right into Carl.”

“It would be better to have more than one shield,” Finn answered flatly, causing Carl, Leon, and Alphonse to fall silent.

“Um… So, Prince Leon, how’s the barrier?” Alphonse said, bringing the discussion back to the campaign as he scooted away from Carl and Leon.

Pouncing on the opportunity, Leon raised his voice. “That’s right! The barrier

is…well, honestly, it's not great. The leader-class salamander is extremely powerful. Even though we put up a triple-layer defense barrier the inner layer is already cracked, and the second layer is showing signs of breaking as well."

"Uh-oh. That doesn't sound good."

"So we can't keep it in check, even with Your Highness's barrier…?"

Leon sighed heavily and looked at me. "There are five of them now. We've already slain one, but the moment we started salvaging it for materials, four more appeared. Their numbers aren't the main problem—it's their leader."

"Three of the salamanders are quite unremarkable in size and other aspects. We can use the defense wall to block their breath, and ice magic has been effective, to an extent. The fourth one, however… It seems to be evolving into an ancient dragon."

"An ancient dragon?!" Finn burst out.

I didn't blame him for being alarmed at the mention of an ancient dragon, but I kept my attention on Leon. "It hasn't fully evolved yet," he continued, "But if left alone, it definitely will. There's a crimson crystal starting to protrude from its forehead. Rather than a salamander, it's as good as a firedrake already, and its size compared to the other three attests to that."

"Alphonse tried to use his strongest binding magic on its feet. Mark and I, along with three other knights, focused our assault there, but it was no use. My sword broke first, which is frustrating because I just had it sharpened…" Carl lamented.

Finn gave me a deliberate look, but I ignored him. He was probably still hung up on me bending my dagger out of shape at the brothel.

"We didn't bring a large contingent to begin with, considering the rigors of this campaign. Besides, there's a Class S tagging along with the three Class A magical beasts. Frankly, both the Black and White Knights are at a complete loss."

Carl shrugged his shoulders and raised his hands.

Alphonse frowned, saying “I hate to admit it, but…”

“I see,” I said, nodding slightly. “So that’s why you interrupted me.”

“Nobody likes a stubborn man, you know.”

“It doesn’t matter if you don’t like me. My fiancée does, and that’s all that matters.”

There was no way I’d ever do something Cece didn’t like. I paid close attention, observing her reactions. Although she was confused at times, she never outright rejected me.

I glared coldly at Leon, who was giving me a sour look, when…

“Huh?”

“What?”

“For real?”

Leon, Carl and Alphonse suddenly gaped at me as if they’d seen something terrifying.

Why are they all looking at me like that?

“…What is it?”

“It seems the three of them are impressed by your attitude, Master,” Finn said.

“Ah, I see.” I regarded them, somewhat taken aback by Finn’s revelation. “What, don’t you three dote on your wives or fiancées? You wouldn’t want them to resent you.”

“Hang on, did he really just say that about his fiancée?!”

“Ahh, I must be tired. I’m starting to hear things.”

“Calm down, Alphonse! It’s not a hallucination! Lukie, *our* Lukie is…! Ugh, I can’t believe it!”

The three of them were so stunned they wavered on their feet.

Finn quietly piped up. “I understand that you’re all shocked, but perhaps we should focus on the battle at hand?”

The moment he said that, a roar tore through the air and the ground quaked. Tension immediately gripped the tent.

I pushed aside the tent flap and stepped outside to find the White Knights reinforcing the last remaining portion of the defense wall with a mesh-like magical barrier.

Peering at the wall, I could see a dragon on the other side. It had vibrant, glistening scales and a yellow-green glare fixed on us. The other salamanders around it cowered in fear at its roar.

“Tch, just one piece left! They shattered our entire defense barrier like it was nothing!”

“Can you handle it, Lukie?”

“It’s definitely big and seems to be evolving into a firedrake… Leon, are you sure you paid attention during magic class? If you can’t capture something like this, you must have been slacking off during training recently.”

“Lukie, that’s not very…”

Ignoring Carl’s anxious voice, I fixed my attention on the firedrake. I released a bit of mana to test its reaction. Its evolution must have refined its sensitivity to mana because it immediately reacted to our stark power difference.

The dragon trembled with fear in the face of the sheer power of my mana and lowered its head. This caused a stir among the knights who’d been working to reinforce the defense barrier. Perhaps sensing the others’ fear, the dragon mustered its resolve and roared again, trying to intimidate them.

I realized now that it was still quite young, likely in the earliest stages of its transformation into a firedrake—nowhere near an ancient dragon. In that case, there was no need for Eckesachs, I thought, looking at Finn.

“No,” he said.

“I haven’t even said anything yet.”

“I don’t need you to say it. How many years do you think I’ve been by your side?”

“Then hand it over.”

“That’s precisely why I won’t! Every time we go to battle, you break the swords I’ve prepared for you! You’ve already broken three of them, and I’ll have you know, I’ve reported it to Madam!”

“…I’m the one who paid for them,” I said softly when I heard he’d told Mother about it.

Leon, Carl, and even Alphonse all avoided eye contact, a sign of just how terrifying Mother could be.

My mother was the king’s sister, and she had been raised to take very good care of things, probably because her lifestyle was funded by the taxpayers. She didn’t get angry if something important broke while being put to good use, but if it were broken recklessly, her anger would be terrifying. My own father, often called “the King of Destruction” at home, was a regular target of my mother’s wrath.

“I want you to understand the effort I put into preparing durable swords for you! Just so you know, even if you control your power, you can break most swords in just three strikes or so! And how much effort do you think it takes to find a sword that can handle your mana?”

“I do appreciate it, but I don’t think you have to go and tell Mother about this…”

Bang!

As I argued with Finn, the firedrake began to thrash its tail against the defense barrier, probably frustrated that it remained standing despite its efforts. The impact blew back several of the White Knights who had been reinforcing it. At

the same time, the mesh-like magical barrier grew thinner and started to crack.

“Hey, Lucas! Stop arguing and manifest Eckesachs! The barrier won’t hold for much longer!”

“Hey, the lot of you! Draw Prince Leon back to safety!”

“Please make haste to the tent, Your Highness! We’ve set up the maximum defense formation around it.”

Carl and Alphonse held Leon back while calling out instructions to the other knights.

I looked at the firedrake, which continued to slam against the barrier with wild abandon, and sighed. What a hassle.

“I don’t think we need Eckesachs.”

Although Leon urged me to manifest it, it always led to a painful agitation that persisted long after the battle ended.

Finn sighed in exasperation. “All right. I thought I’d tell you after the campaign, but I suppose you need an extra boost of motivation. Did you get Elsa’s message?”

“Yes.”

“Didn’t she say she was waiting for you?”

“…She did.” I narrowed my eyes, wondering how Finn knew.

He continued, unbothered by my gaze. “I also received a message from Anna before they contacted you. Before contacting you, Elsa said a little too much to Lady Cecilia: she explained why some knights don’t go straight home after campaigns.”

“Don’t tell me…”

Recalling her words, I instinctively covered my mouth. Just before she awkwardly ended the conversation, I remembered how she shyly said to me, “Um, we’re waiting for your safe return, so um…please come back to me

safely…to *me*…”

So that was the meaning behind her bashful whisper.

My feelings had clearly gotten through to her. Her veiled command that I keep away from brothels—from other women—made my heart skip a beat for the first time in nineteen years.

As those emotions filled my heart, the voices of Leon and the others brought me back to reality.

“Oh, that’s…”

“Shh, Carl. Keep your mouth shut.”

“I want to hear the rest too, but the defense barrier is about to…”

“Oh, Your Highness! I apologize for interrupting, but the defense barrier is close to breaking!” Mark’s voice rang out, interrupting Leon’s tired voice.

Suddenly there was a sharp crack, a resounding roar, and once again tension filled the air. As everyone held their breath in the face of the roaring dragon, I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Come forth, Eckesachs!” I said under my breath, and the familiar weight of it appeared in my right hand. At the same time, the transformation spell I used was released and absorbed into the sword, lending it a brilliant glow.

I gripped my weapon tightly and heard Finn’s exasperated voice wishing me luck before I kicked off the ground.

I split the crystal on the dragon’s forehead with a loud crack and the knights stood frozen in awe.

“Do you have any use for this?” I asked Alphonse, “What about the core? Should we take it?”

“Um, yes. I’ll take it…”

“Got it.”

I handed the crystal to a nearby Black Knight. I decreased my power and

swung Eckesachs, cutting the dragon's massive body in two and releasing a beautiful red core from within it. I picked it up and threw it to Carl.

"Hey, Lukie! Can you at least give me a heads-up before throwing things at me? What if I dropped and broke it?"

"Then that'd be your fault."

"If I broke a core that big, I'd have to retire from being a knight!"

"At least thank me for my help."

"I'm asking you to help me out *here*!"

I ignored Carl, who was making a fuss, and channeled mana into the sword, which devoured it happily before disappearing with satisfaction. As I walked back to the tent, I noticed my cloak was soaked with the magical beast's blood, and the stench rankled me.

I turned to Finn. "I have a spare cloak," he offered, so I immediately took mine off and handed it to him.

"I'd appreciate it if you could manage just dirtying the cloak and nothing else…" he said sarcastically, but I ignored him. "Honestly… I've prepared some tea in the tent. Come along."

We headed for the tent and found Leon standing there with a somewhat exasperated expression on his face. I gave him a puzzled look and he sighed.

"Lord Lucas Theoderic, please allow me to express gratitude on behalf of the Bern Kingdom for your assistance in slaying the magical beast. Praise be to the hero, Lucas Theoderic!" He bowed and placed a hand across his chest as he spoke.

Carl, Alphonse, and the knights all knelt in unison.

"Can I go home yet?"

"I told you, no. We've received urgent word from the palace to remain on

standby since there was a firedrake present. Can you imagine the rumors that might spread if the hero snuck off into the night amid such circumstances?"

"I'll transform."

"That's exactly why it's not allowed! Even if you transform into your ordinary 'Lukie' appearance, news has already spread that 'Lucas' slew the dragon, so there's no point. Give it up and have a few drinks with us tonight! This is the perfect time to tell us about your beloved fiancée!" Carl was now drunk and very irritating. He kept persisting in his request, which I angrily denied yet again.

"Finn, I'm going to sleep. Throw this guy out."

"As you wish, Master. Carl, please leave."

"He—wait, wait, wait! Finn, you're going to draw your sword against me?! I've been thinking this for a while, but are you taking out your pent-up frustrations from Lukie's abusive language on me? Ow!"

Carl narrowly avoided Finn's sword and quickly drew his own to confront him.

"No, Carl. Surely you don't think I'd do something like that to the vice-captain of the Black Knights! I'm merely following my master's orders. I don't *want* to draw my sword against you."

"What?! You liar! Someone who was doing something against his will wouldn't throw a hidden dagger at my throat or between my eyebrows!" As Carl struggled to dodge Finn's weapons, I lay down and watched.

As I'd heard the palace wanted us on standby, I released a small amount of mana to search the surroundings, but as I expected, there was no trace of any magical beasts remaining. Leon had inferred that the other beasts would retreat deeper into the forest due to the firedrake's appearance, and this seemed to support his theory. As night fell, not a single animal was found near the campsite.

Since I couldn't return home to where Cece was waiting for me, I tried to go to sleep off my irritation instead. But then Leon, Carl, and Alphonse came into

my tent and started drinking, leading to my current situation.

“The combination of that master and this servant is deadly.”

“Leon, instead of just nodding like you’ve said something clever, help me!”

“Carl, if you keep glancing away, you’ll die.”

“Damn it! Whoa! Alphonse, you too! Stop enjoying the spectacle while you’re half-drunk! Get Finn to stop! Please! Seriously, stop him!”

“The vice-captain of the Black Knights is quite stubborn.”

Finn seemed to be enjoying himself, getting rather serious. But dealing with a drunk Carl was quite a handful, even for him.

Carl had his sleeve cut, and I thought it would be out of the question to have Cece perform healing magic on him. That meant either Alphonse or I would have to cast the spell. I couldn’t help but cringe in disgust when I imagined casting healing magic on that guy.

Noticing my expression, Leon said, “What’s wrong, Hero? Are you tired?”

“Not at all. And I haven’t officially inherited the title of hero yet, remember?” I felt uneasy being addressed by my master’s title, so I protested on reflex, but Leon was quick to admonish me.

“Well, even though it hasn’t been officially announced yet, Eckesachs has already chosen you to for the next generation. And with today’s report, there’s no need to hide the fact that you’re strong enough to slay a firedrake with one blow, even if it wasn’t an ancient dragon yet. Not only that, but to half of the people here today you’re an enigma. Power is everything to a knight, and after what they saw of yours, of course they’d get fired up. I know you’re hesitant to claim the title out of respect for Marshal Webber, but someone has to inherit the sacred sword and the title of hero. And if you do, that doesn’t mean word will spread among the knights sullying the marshal’s name. Heck, even if they did, they’d have to respect your qualities as a hero. Faced with that, even the most foolish of nobles will have to hold their tongues.”

Recently, nasty rumors were spreading that Master Andreas, the current hero, was getting too old to wield Eckesachs. The sword consumed mana in order to maximize its power, so it wasn't easy to use if your mana capacity was merely average. But most importantly, the sword chose its wielder.

The sword had a fondness for hunting magical beasts, disdained orthodox sword skills, and had never allowed itself to be so much as touched by anyone who didn't know how to fight unarmed. I realized that was why my master taught me hand-to-hand combat alongside sword fighting when I was first given Eckesachs. It was more of a bitter memory than a nostalgic one, however.

But the biggest obstacle to taking up the legendary blade once wielded by the giant Ecke was that it was heavy by any measure of the word. And I mean absurdly heavy. It's said that Eckesachs will adapt to its bearer and lighten its load somewhat once manifested, but it's still heavy enough to make one's feet sink slightly into the earth.

Due to its extreme weight, it took till I was well past eighteen before I could swing it one-handed without first amplifying my strength. Wielding Eckesachs required exceptional martial arts skills and the training to support them, which was why foolish nobles had begun to whisper that my master was "too old."

Although sometimes I forgot how much help I'd received and felt miserable having to lend my aid to those rotten people who belittled his efforts and honor, I found solace in Leon's consideration. But then Finn had to go and speak out of turn.

"Your Highness, Master shouldn't be tired from something like that. If anything, he always holds back his strength too much. If he doesn't get serious about wielding Eckesachs in this campaign against the magical beasts, he'll only earn disappointment."

That Finn…is he planning on tattling to Cece that I'm hesitant to use Eckesachs for battle? I was about to retort, "I only did as I was told," but then it suddenly dawned on me.

“What’s wrong, Lukie?”

“What’s the matter? You just froze. Did you just think of something bad?”

I answered Alphonse and Carl with silence.

“Could it be, Lord Lucas, that you forgot to inform her that you would be participating in the battle as the wielder of Eckesachs?” Finn smiled at me, and I averted my gaze, then heard a cold, piercing voice.

“What are you doing? We went through all that trouble setting up a chance for you to talk things out, but you haven’t even told her about Lukie at all, have you? You had an entire night, and you didn’t even tell her anything important!”

“Why should I have to tell her that? Besides, I already told her I love her, so she’ll understand.”

“That’s something you should say when you get engaged… Wait, don’t tell me you even forgot to tell her about *that*, did you?”

No comment.

“…Seriously?”

“Lukie, that’s really…”

“Please don’t anger Marquis Cline any further…”

As the four of them glared at me, I maintained my silence, so Finn heaved a dramatic sigh.

“Well, it should be fine as long as the Promise Mark is engraved, but Anna was angry because you pushed her too far. You should use more restraint when with a noble lady considering you have the strength of a giant, you know.”

“Wait,” Leon said sharply in response to Finn’s exasperated words.

I turned to meet his gaze but saw that Alphonse also looked shocked as he stared at me.

“What’s wrong with Leon and Alphonse?” Carl asked, but the two of them ignored him and continued staring at me.

“Finn, did you just say…Promise Mark?”

“I did.”

“Oh, so I wasn’t hearing things after all. Surely you don’t mean…that? The technique all but forbidden for fear of what it does?”

Why were both of them looking at me when they were talking to Finn?

Seeing the horrified looks on Leon and Alphonse’s faces, Carl spoke up, seeming totally lost. “What’s this Promise Mark thing you’re talking about?”

“Oh, you don’t know, Carl? It’s contractual magic, mostly used among lovers and married couples. It was pretty popular about a decade ago when people made a big fuss over chastity. The potency depends on the inscription, but if you cast that spell on a woman, she won’t be able to touch any man other than her partner. It’s an outdated spell nowadays, though.”

“What’s it for? Preventing infidelity?”

“It’s a spell that can only be performed with mutual consent, so it’s a bit different. The man is the one who faces all the risks…” Leon trailed off and Carl frowned.

Alphonse took over the conversation with a sigh. “It’s like mutual love. If the woman even slightly rejects it, the spell rebounds upon the caster.”

“What happens when it rebounds?”

“He becomes impotent.”

“Huh?”

“That’s a terrible expression you’re making, Carl.”

“Shut up, Finn. Leon, what did you just say?”

“I said, he will become impotent.”

Everyone in the room fell silent, and the sound of Finn brewing another pot of tea filled the tent. I was just about to close my eyes to finally get some sleep when…

“Lukie! What the—?! You—?! Impote—?!”

“That’s enough. Carl, if you utter another insulting word to my master, I’ll kill you,” Finn whispered as he pressed a double-edged sword against Carl’s mouth.

Leon and Alphonse seemed taken aback by Finn’s actions and scooted away from Carl. The color drained from Carl’s face, so I decided to at least explain a little.

“It’s just as Finn said, Carl. I engraved a Mark on her, and since she accepted me under the contract with her consent, I haven’t become impotent.”

I decided to skip the part where I’d melted her reason away, and simply stated the outcome, but I couldn’t keep my lips from pulling up.

“Lucas…you’re smirking…” Leon tiredly remarked. “You… Seriously, give me a break. If the newly appointed second prince were to become impotent, I, the crown prince, would take the heat! Please make sure to report these sorts of things to me first!”

“If I told you first, you would’ve said no.”

“Whoa. What are you, Lukie, a criminal?”

“That’s exactly what you’d expect from Lukie. His audacity is so impressively terrifying. But it’s incredible that he managed to succeed with that spell. Congratulations, Lukie!”

“Thanks.” I nodded in response to Alphonse.

Leon and Carl sighed heavily while muttering, “Congratulations, huh?” and “Alphonse has always been so soft on Lukie…”

Chapter Three

THE DAY AFTER LUCAS WAS CALLED TO DO BATTLE against magical beasts for some mysterious reason, I was leisurely having tea with Lady Anika, completely oblivious to the fact that a firedrake had appeared in the kingdom.

“I wonder if Lucas has disposed of the beasts by now.”

Lady Anika looked radiant as she tipped her head to the side, her glossy hair silken against her flawless skin. She’d been visiting the duke’s manor quite frequently lately, probably for my sake as I still hadn’t been allowed to leave Lucas’s quarters.

When I heard she was coming again today, Elsa cheerfully chimed in with, “I’ll show her in!” before I could even ask.

Kate apologized sheepishly. “We’re just following Lord Lucas’s orders…” she said, but I couldn’t help but feel a little apologetic myself.

Honestly, if they’d asked if I wanted to leave Lucas’s quarters, I’d have to say I didn’t really want to. I was comfortable here. It almost felt like I’d been living here all along, and I pretended not to notice how the rooms were being adjusted to my preferences day by day. There was no denying that the place seemed a lot cozier now.

And well, there was also an embarrassingly specific reason that I could barely move, and that was because I had nearly been ravished to death by Lucas.

While munching on a fruit tart that Lady Anika brought from the capital, I decided to voice something that had been on my mind. “Lady Anika, I’d like to ask you something about Lukie—I mean…Lord Lucas.”

“Oh, my! What is it?” She assured me she’d answer anything I asked, but her dazzling smile made me a bit nervous…

I felt like I wouldn’t live up to her expectations and might end up disappointing her.

“Why was Lord Lucas called to assist with the campaign? He belongs to the Imperial Order, after all. He doesn’t specialize in slaying magical beasts, and salamanders are notoriously difficult foes, so why did the crown prince need him on board?” I didn’t think I was feeling anxious, but as soon as the question left my lips, my heart began to race.

I couldn’t imagine anything bad had happened to him. After all, he was an overpowered character, plus he was the second prince. Given his status, if things took a turn for the worse, protecting him would be a top priority.

The White and Black Knight orders were specifically created by the crown prince to slay magical beasts. They were known troublemakers, but also the strongest knights in the land, charged with protecting the kingdom from the beasts of the border forest.

The Black Knights were a group of knights who specialized in offense, and the White Knights were magicians versed in offensive, defensive, and healing magic, led by the crown prince Leon, who was able to cast triple defense magic that only the royal family could use. When they joined forces, it was said they were able to slay most magical beasts.

Even if a problem had arisen during the campaign against the salamander, I couldn’t think of a reason why Lucas, now a member of the royal family, would be summoned. And so, the question *“Why Lucas?”* rang in my mind again and again.

I stared vacantly at my tea, lost in thought. Then I heard Lady Anika’s astonished voice. “Goodness, Lucas is something else, isn’t he?! He must’ve gotten quite carried away!”

“Huh? Um…?”

Lady Anika put a hand over her mouth and widened her eyes, leaving me unable to reply.

“Hannah, is that boy all right? They say love is blind, but don’t you think this is a bit too much? After all, he didn’t even tell her the reason behind the

engagement, did he?”

I asked about that, but…but…

As soon as the memory of Lucas’s sweet, low voice resounded in my mind, my cheeks flushed.

My hand trembled as I held my teacup, so I put it back on its saucer as gently as I could—though still with an obvious clatter, which wasn’t very ladylike of me. Lady Anika glanced at me in surprise, but I couldn’t bring myself to meet her gaze.

“Oh, dear. Lady Cecilia?” she called.

I replied quietly, “Y-yes…I heard…”

“Ooh, tell me! Was it yesterday when you were alone together?” she asked excitedly.

“Y-yes, that’s right…” was all I could manage in reply.

Lady Anika continued mercilessly. “Oh my, Lucas finally confessed his love to you! I was so anxious yesterday. I felt a wave of hostility emanating from the bathhouse all of a sudden, which had me worried, but then all of a sudden, he rushed into the rest area and didn’t come out at all. I was so worried that I came here today!”

Wait, was she eavesdropping on us?! My hands were sweating…

“So, Lady Cecilia. Do you have any objections to becoming his fiancée?”

Is this really her place to ask that? I tipped my head but of course couldn’t ask that out loud.

Dealing with someone that beautiful was really tough. And it was frustrating that she was smiling so sweetly. It was almost cunning. She really was too much of a feast for the eyes, and I found myself blurting out things I shouldn’t have. That might be a universal feeling.

But still, objections? Well, considering it was already a done deal, that

shouldn't even matter anymore. If anything, I still slightly doubted whether I could even become Lucas's fiancée after all the accusations Lady Mia had laid at my feet, to say nothing of her carting me off to a brothel.

"I don't sense that you have any objections, but is there something troubling you?"

"…I think among the nobles…there were rumors that Felix took me to bed. And they might say that Lord Lucas shouldn't be engaged to someone like me. Other people might tell him that, and it's distressing to think I might be causing him trouble."

He'd probably been protecting me this whole time, letting me do what I wanted. Not only did he pick me up after Felix had slandered me and abandoned me to prostitution, but he'd also solidified my position as his fiancée.

It was scary, painful, and terrible all around. Maybe there had been no reason to make a physical connection after all. But even so, considering the fact that I was now under his protection, I could hardly object. I was more worried that I had nothing to give him in return and that I was causing him trouble.

But Lady Anika laughed, brushing off my worries. "Oh dear. Lady Cecilia, you're just so cute! Don't worry. Lucas will never break off your engagement. Isn't that right, Hannah?"

"Yes, he would never," Hannah agreed. "And if anything like that were to happen, it would mean the destruction of this kingdom, so the king and the crown prince would never do anything to upset Lord Lucas."

"Knowing Lord Lucas, if any gossips started any such talk, he'd probably just make them disappear!"

"Yes! Just as Anna says, he'd probably do it!"

Hm? Why were they talking about my fiancé like he was some kind of monster? It was true that he was like a demon when angry, and just the

thought of it made me tremble. But what did they mean, it would be the destruction of this kingdom?

It would take someone like the hero who wielded Eckesachs for that. Wait…a hero?

"Slaying magical beasts…a salamander…Could it be?"

As it finally dawned on me, Lady Anika nodded and replied, "He hasn't inherited the title yet, though."

My eyes grew wide. "Eckesachs?!"

He can wield it? The legendary sword? The one they say is so heavy only a giant can swing it, and even then, it's extremely picky with its wielders?! With the power of not just a thousand, but ten thousand *knights?! I knew he was overpowered, but I didn't think a secret unlockable character could be* this *powerful! I'm so shocked my jaw won't close!!*

"Well, for the past couple of years Lucas has been entrusted with slaying magical beasts, so it seems he's already inherited the title for all intents and purposes. Marshal Webber has been in high spirits these past few days, and I heard everything's already been arranged. Now it's just a matter of when they'll hold the inheritance ceremony. Perhaps it will be held in conjunction with the engagement ceremony?"

"The second prince…and the next hero…" In the kingdom of Bern, a hero held absolute power. The kingdom revered them as an embodiment of its duty to guard all within it, and their authority was rivaled only by the king's.

And that made sense, since the hero was the physically strongest one in the kingdom. Depending on the situation, even the king might have to bow down to them. That was just the way it was.

Lucas is really… Is it even possible? Wait, no way. No way… Am I really safe being the fiancée of the second prince and *the hero?! What if someone makes an attempt on my life?!*

“And now you see that if anything were to happen to you, the hero would be very displeased. So please take good care of yourself.”

“Of course…”

In other words, that’s why I can’t leave this room! Got it—I don’t want to die either!

Lady Anika’s barrage of questions left me sweating buckets…

“Lady Cecilia, do you think you can accept Lukie’s feelings?” That was the first strike. I didn’t know how to answer, so she kept going, asking questions like, “So do you like him or not? Do you think Lukie’s dashing? What do you like about him?”

What kind of humiliation torture is this?! Please let it end already! I wished I could cast aside all my decorum as a lady and scream at her.

“Well, I should probably be going soon,” she said, her expression still brightly beneficent. By that time, I was barely holding on by a thread…

I was just about to stand up to bid her goodbye when suddenly I felt murderous intent from Elsa.

“Anna, Kate, deploy the defense formation! Lady Cecilia, Lady Anika, please remain seated and stay still!” Hannah said.

At this, she, Anna, and Kate all enacted high-mana density defense magic that enveloped me and Lady Anika. Then they cast barriers on the door and windows with such thoroughness my hands began to tremble in my lap. Lady Anika gently put a hand over mine.

I had no idea what was going on, only that this was clearly some kind of emergency. Elsa had positioned herself by the door, enveloped in mana and weapon at the ready, though I had no idea where she’d pulled it from. I tried to maintain my composure, as befitted the prince’s consort-to-be, watching the door intently despite my anxiety.

Elsa looked just like the knights I'd seen training at the royal palace, and I couldn't help but feel in awe of my amazing maid-slash-bodyguard.

It wasn't long before I heard loud voices from the corridor. I trembled when I recognized one of them.

"Lady Cecilia…"

"I'm…okay…" It took all the nerve I had to even respond to Lady Anika's concerned voice. My heart pounded and cold sweat traced my face, now pallid with fright.

Memories of the abuse I'd endured at the ball flashed through my mind.

The commotion was drawing nearer, and as I stared at the door…

"Cecilia! Cecilia Cline! I know you're in there! Come out this instant!"

I froze.

"It's all right. Don't worry."

Images of Felix pushing me aside and insulting me even when I'd done nothing wrong flashed through my mind, and my heart clenched with fear and worry. Lady Anika clutched my trembling hand and I instinctively clung onto her as if I might collapse if I didn't.

Felix continued to shout loudly outside the door, and then, impatient as ever, began rattling the doorknob in an attempt to open it. Although I could hear the duke's servants admonishing him, there was another voice—probably Thomas Mueller, his lackey—warning them that it was treason to talk back to royalty.

Even if Felix was the one at fault, it was unacceptable for a servant to defy royalty. I couldn't bear it if anything happened to them, and so took two deep breaths before fixing my gaze on the door.

Lady Anika and Hannah glanced at me with concern, but since I was the only one here who could rebuke Felix, I raised my voice.

"It's impolite to call on someone without prior notice or an invitation, Lord

Felix.” I was relieved that my voice came out steadier than I expected.

“Hmph. You’re as stubborn as ever, Cecilia! Spare me the lectures and open this door! I have important matters to discuss.”

“I have nothing to discuss with you. Besides, this room belongs to the second prince, Lucas. None can enter without permission.” That was a bit of a bluff; I actually didn’t know what kind of defensive magic the girls were using, but I assumed it was on a permission basis.

I had a feeling the current permissions were set by Lucas and me, but there was no reason for me to tell him that, especially in light of the important revelations I’d received just moments ago. Safety came first.

But apparently, my words struck a nerve with Felix.

“Don’t be ridiculous! *I* am the second prince! And if you don’t want to be punished for treason, open this door right now! Then kneel before me and beg for forgiveness!”

The sound of him banging against the door (probably swinging his sword against it) reverberated inside of the room.

I watched the door with apprehension, but luckily it seemed that the protective spells wrought by Lucas’ absurd power and intricate technique—along with my maids’ own precise enchantments—were impervious to Felix’s swordplay (if you could even call it that).

Heaving a sigh of relief, I stared at the unmoving door, managing not to tremble. But suddenly the atmosphere inside the room began to feel strange.

“Elsa, keep your malice in check,” Hannah chided. “You’re feeling more threatening than him.”

That’s exactly right, Hannah! Elsa’s hostility is overwhelming! Hm? She’s a maid, right? She said she was, but she seemed different somehow. Is she an assassin or something? Her terrifyingly belligerent aura begged the question.

Anna and Kate whispered in turn: “She’s like a magical beast!” “Shall we tell

Prince Leon?”

Don’t tell me you’re going to try to slay Elsa! I wonder what’s going on with this ducal family, but I’m scared to ask… There are some matters one just shouldn’t pry into. If I don’t turn a blind eye to it, I won’t last long as a noblewoman!

“I’m sorry, I just couldn’t stand that idiot blabbering about being the second prince.”

“I can understand losing your temper when Lucas is being slandered, Elsa, but you’re scaring Lady Cecilia…”

“Oh! S-sorry!” Elsa was flustered by Lady Anika’s words. She bowed her head and her weapon disappeared. Her ankle-length skirt swayed gently.

Um, what happened to her cute maid’s outfit? Wait, did she just call Felix an idiot? I definitely think he’s an idiot too, but isn’t it dangerous to say that out loud, no matter how softly? After all, he’s still royalty!

But at that point, I felt like a fool for being so afraid of Felix. I released the breath I’d been holding and tried to relax my tense shoulders. Then, in as cold a voice as I could evoke, I addressed the two fools rattling their sabers out in the hallway.

“That’s absurd. Lord Lucas is the second prince. There was a royal decree from His Majesty enacting a change in the order of succession. I’m sorry, but even Felix cannot go against His Majesty’s wishes. You could be punished for treason.”

“Shut up, you cunning little minx! You’re the one who framed me! Did you tattle to Father about me breaking off the engagement?! You went so far as to reclaim your position to become Lucas’s fiancée! You’re a greedy woman, just like Mia said!”

“Tattling to your father wouldn’t be enough to change the order of succession. It would take evidence of appropriate crimes in order to do that.”

It's because of your own behavior! Of course I couldn't say that, so I replied to his snide remarks with grace, which only fueled Felix's rage and spurred him into flooding the corridor with mana.

"Huh?!"

For a moment it looked like the door was warping. I was so surprised I leaned back against the sofa, but realized the sensation wasn't from a dizzy spell.

"Anna! Kate! Don't let it break!" Lady Anika instructed.

"He may be a lout, but he's still royalty! How dare he be able to shake our defensive formation without any actual skills…"

Hannah's anxious voice and Lady Anika's uneasy words made me turn and look at the door again. Then I saw some kind of fire magic flickering through the gaps in the doorframe, reaching into the room while Anna and the others repelled it.

I wondered if the warping sensation I saw a few moments ago was Felix's mana trying to break through the defensive formation, but neither Lucas's defense magic nor the maids' seemed to be wavering now. We could probably weather it if we stayed in this room, but what about the servants outside? Was I putting Lucas and his household at risk by staying here?

Just as my heart began to fill with anxiety, Felix screamed an accusation that pierced right into it. "Don't play dumb! A greedy woman like you is only interested in self-preservation! Lucas will abandon you one day too!"

Abandon…

"I don't even want to see your face!" he said.

"Always trying to be clever but never supporting a man! Currying the favor of commoners and knights with healing magic. It must be hard to protect your position. You claim you're doing it for me, but I know this is all for your own sake." The words Felix had spoken to me before echoed through my mind.

Would Lucas say that to me next? And then would he choose another

woman?

The thought made my body tremble uncontrollably. Even though I was sitting down, I felt incredibly weak and gripped the armrest with shaking hands. I could hear Lady Anika's voice, but it sounded distant. My throat felt tight, making it hard to breathe, and I couldn't reply. It felt like my heart was being squeezed in an agonizing grip.

As tears streamed down my face and I remained silent, I heard Felix's triumphant voice.

"I'm saying I'll take you in again. You may not be fit to be my legitimate wife, but I'll accept you as a concubine. One of my favorites, too, as befits your pedigree. So tell Marquis Cline to extend his guardianship."

Guardianship from my father? Felix wants to return to his position as the second prince?

"What would you do with that guardianship?"

"Regain my position as second prince, obviously. If I can obtain Marquis Cline's guardianship, Father will surely forgive me. Lucas is nothing more than a faux-prince and a member of the Imperial Order who engages in barbaric pursuits like fighting magical beasts. Having someone like him as second prince is as good as dragging our kingdom's history through the mud."

Barbaric? Dragging through the mud?

Those words pierced through my troubled thoughts, and I spoke before I could even think.

"No. I refuse."

"What did you say?"

"I will never become your concubine, even if Lucas abandons me!"

No. Absolutely not.

When I blurted that out, Felix once again became enraged. "You…!"

“Even if Lucas were to abandon me, I would never become your concubine!”

I would never join forces with those who sought to overthrow Lucas. He’d worked hard to become vice-captain of the Imperial Order and trained relentlessly to earn the privilege of being Eckesachs’s chosen bearer.

The Imperial Order also recognized his abilities. It wasn’t because he was a ducal heir; he wasn’t the type to flaunt such power. In fact, he was the type who silenced others with his abilities—and he did a very good job at that. *Also, he seems quite skilled at scheming…*

Anyway, Felix never makes any effort at all, and all he wants to do is brag about being the second prince. He has absolutely no right to ridicule Lucas. So absolutely not. I won’t even ask Father for help. Not even if it costs me my life. But most of all, I refuse to be fucked by Felix!

“It seems you’re raring to be punished for treason, Cecilia Cline, is that right?” I felt Felix’s mana expand again. Anna and the others dug back in, but just then —

“Goodness, it’s quite noisy in the hallway. What sort of dangerous discussion have I stepped into?”

I heard a calm male voice, one I wasn’t familiar with, and Felix’s mana instantly dissipated.

I stared at the door in surprise and heard Felix answer in a somewhat flustered voice, “Dirk!”

I’ve heard that name somewhere before, but who is it again? I thought to myself. Lady Anika sighed with relief and said, “Thank goodness, it’s Brother! What perfect timing.”

Brother…? Lady Anika’s brother… The future duke, Lord Dirk Herbst?!

He’s beautiful, but this is so awkward…

Now I’m having a tea party with my fiancé’s brother and sister in my fiancé’s

quarters? What kind of situation is this, anyway? I was in breach of basically all the noble moors surrounding such situations. And yet the people of the household didn't seem to mind at all.

Lord Dirk had been quick in dispatching Felix. "Long time no see, Felix. By the way, what are you doing, raising a ruckus in my hallway?"

"Dirk, I'm talking to Cecilia Cline right now. Don't interfere."

"Talking? I heard quite ominous words before; you call that just talking? Are you sure you weren't venting your mana in anger and trying to break through my brother's defensive formation? Even you should know better than to behave like that in a ducal household, putting aside the fact that you'd never break Lucas's formation anyway…"

Lord Dirk had quite the sarcastic streak behind his easygoing banter, I thought, if rather rudely.

Lady Anika whispered with exasperation, "Brother is *always* like this."

Always like this? Meaning, he's always sarcastic?

That was the type of person Felix hated the most. *You go, Lord Dirk! Get him!* I inwardly cheered him on.

"Be quiet! You always talk too much, Dirk! I swear, everyone around here dares to talk back to me, even the lousiest of quasi-royals!"

"Hm, I'm not sure I appreciate you talking to me like that. Do you know who you're talking to?" It seemed like the air froze after Lord Dirk said that.

Lord Dirk was so overwhelmingly intimidating that Felix's voice barely rose above a whisper. "You always…!"

Yeah, Felix definitely can't stand Lord Dirk.

"You might have royal blood," Lord Dirk said, "but now you're just a useless spare without any succession rights. And in terms of the bloodline, I may be a quasi-royal, but I am now third in line to the throne. Even a monkey could tell who's the superior one here, don't you think?"

Felix could say nothing in response.

His intimidating mana increased even more! And his sarcasm is off the charts!

I heard a thud as something fell.

I wonder what that was. Not that I have the guts to check. I just hope the servants out there are okay in the face of Lord Dirk's intimidation… But anyway, it seems like freezing the atmosphere and intimidating people must be a specialty of this ducal family. He's the older brother of that savage, Lucas, after all. But it's strange, even though it seems he's on my side, he still chills me to the bone…

At any rate, Lord Dirk chased away Felix. The thud was apparently Thomas Mueller falling to the floor, but he was safely placed in a carriage and sent home.

I breathed a sigh of relief and expressed my gratitude to Lord Dirk. I realized I hadn't even greeted him properly despite his help and the fact that I lived here, so I felt awkward about it and invited him for tea. Lady Anika decided to stay and join us.

There's a reason why I can't greet you properly, but I hope you understand…

I glanced at the person sitting in front of me, and when our eyes met, I felt a little flustered.

He smiled at me, and I blushed. Could you blame me? He was a total hottie!

As they were brothers, it was only natural that Lord Dirk and Lucas resembled each other. I could see Lucas in Lord Dirk's face and mannerisms, but his eyes weren't as sharp as his younger brother's. Lucas had more of a masculine image, likely because he was a knight. His body was also more muscular than Lord Dirk's, probably thanks to his training, and his voice was deeper. Lord Dirk gave off a milder vibe. He looked like an older version of Lucas, overflowing with mature charm.

I couldn't help but wonder if there was truth to the rumors about Lord Dirk's

soirees being avoided by recently debuted noblewomen. If a beautiful man like Lord Dirk were to smile at them, those sheltered girls would come undone in an instant—not to mention it would interfere with their marriage prospects…

His charm was just too overwhelming, which didn't exactly make for a relaxed teatime.

I wish he would stop. It's too hard to drink tea! The polite thing would be to stop being so openly sexy with a face that looks just like Lucas's!

I wasn't even sure where to look or what to do.

"Brother, please refrain from trying to seduce Lady Cecilia. Can't you see that she's uncomfortable?"

"Haha. I'm sorry. It's just too amusing."

"Using your charm to seduce your brother's fiancée is in poor taste."

Huh?! Seduce me?! I was shocked.

Lord Dirk chuckled. "She's as lovely as the rumors say. How about it? Would you like to become a duchess instead of a princess consort?"

Did he really just say something that outrageous?! What are you saying?!

"N-no thank you." I didn't mean to stutter, but I was shocked. My face turned even redder, so I gave him as stern a look as I could manage.

But he merely replied, "Why not?" with the same audacity.

Why not?! I want to ask why this conversation went in this direction in the first place!

"B-because I'm engaged to Lord Lukie."

"Oh, that's right. And you have the Promise Mark too."

How does he know that?!

My entire face burned scarlet, and my breath caught in my throat.

"But you could still become a duchess even if you have a Promise Mark. As

long as I don't have any ulterior motives, I could touch you. And if Anika gets pregnant, we could just adopt her child," he said, apparently enjoying himself.

The casual way he said this left me speechless, but Lady Anika was quicker with her words. "I won't easily hand over my child to you! Besides, wasn't there a royal decree?"

Right, the royal decree. That's why I won't become a duchess. I was about to say that out loud, but Lord Dirk still had audacity to spare.

"I'm sure a royal decree can be revoked."

"What?"

"It's a decree from His Majesty, right? Despite my appearance, I'm next in line to inherit the royal shield. If I call in a favor or two, His Majesty might even annul Lucas's engagement. Why not put your worries to rest and become my duchess?" The playfulness with which he broached the option was simply terrifying.

I've never heard of revoking a royal decree! That's impossible! This is not okay! Besides, if he had it revoked for such a petty reason, the king and queen might collapse! This ducal family is way too intense if they think they can just boss around the king…

"Hehe. Well, that's why you don't need to be so stubborn about marrying Lucas."

I was speechless.

Stubborn? Am I being stubborn about it?

As Lord Dirk's words echoed in my mind, my heart began to pound, and my breath grew short.

If, by some chance, the royal decree really could be revoked, then my engagement to Lucas could be called off and our future thrown into uncertainty. My heart began to ache at the thought. I vaguely remembered feeling this pain before when I thought of him.

Struggling to hold back the mysterious sense of dread, I forced myself to look Lord Dirk in the eyes. Like every other person in this family, his smile didn't reach his eyes. I clenched my hands in my lap.

Does Lord Dirk not approve of my engagement with Lucas?

I shouldn't be fooled by his kind expression. I let down my guard in front of him since he had gotten through Lucas's defensive magic with no trouble, but maybe he wasn't actually on my side.

I was so nervous my throat went dry all of a sudden and I realized my hand was trembling too violently to hold my teacup. If I picked it up now, I'd spill it all over myself. I swallowed reluctantly and straightened my posture. Then I clasped my shaking hands and steadied my gaze.

That only made Lord Dirk smile more.

He's terrifying! Truly terrifying! Why is he smiling like that? It must be his influence that made a monster of Lucas! You idiot, Lucas! Why did you follow his example?!

Lord Dirk took no pity on me as I trembled before him.

"You must be afraid of Felix and his lackeys, right? First you had your engagement broken, then you were sent to a brothel, and now Felix is saying he's going to make you his mistress. Well, the Promise Mark will protect you from becoming his concubine, but it doesn't change the danger you're in right now, does it?" he asked.

I couldn't respond. Because I was afraid of Felix. I was afraid of Thomas Mueller and his cronies. And I was afraid of the heroine, Lady Mia.

My life in this world was real, and just because my engagement was over didn't mean my life was over. I had to accept it, no matter how painful or scary, and move forward.

"After all that, wouldn't you want someone who can protect you? Are you fixated on Lucas because you think he'll be the one to keep you safe? I can

protect you from Felix too, you know.”

Lucas had lifted me up when I’d been publicly degraded, cast aside by my fiancé, and carted off to a brothel. He told me he deeply loved me and would protect me, and I’d accepted it unquestioningly.

The truth of the matter was, the one I wanted to protect me was *Lucas*. Realizing what that meant, I blurted out impulsively, “I-I don’t want to marry Lucas just to be protected! I’ve been educated as a princess consort candidate for a long time. I can also use healing magic. I’m sure I’ll be able to support Lord Lukie while he serves as prince and hero!”

Wait, why am I acting so desperate? I’d been surprisingly hostile to Lord Dirk’s suggestion.

He chuckled at my desperation as if listening to a child throw a tantrum.

“Haha, I see. Yet even without revoking the royal decree, something can be arranged. I know that you’ve received extensive tutelage as the candidate for princess consort. It’s said you can speak several foreign languages, but interpreters could be easily hired. And any high-ranking noble’s daughter could easily pick up the etiquette and manners as princess consort, so it’s not impossible to appoint another woman. Besides, there are plenty of people who can use healing magic, like the White Knights.”

The implication was clear: *It doesn’t have to be you.*

It was as if he was sneering at me, dismissing my efforts, implying that just about anyone else could stand by Lucas’s side. I gripped my dress tightly to avoid crying.

What he said was true; I had no rational arguments to refute it.

I bit my lip in frustration and mustered all of my courage, then looked him straight in the eyes and voiced the feelings in my heart.

“Even so, I want to marry Lord Lucas.”

I absolutely refused to call off the engagement. I had to get Lord Dirk to

accept that, or my future would be in jeopardy.

“So then why do you want to marry Lucas? Because he’s the hero of the next generation? Or perhaps his looks? If that’s the case, I should suffice since we’re brothers—people often say we look alike.”

“I’m saying I won’t marry anyone else but Lord Lukie!”

I was angry hearing him only praise Lucas’s appearance, but at the same time I was shocked at the words I’d blurted out so quickly. I covered my mouth with my hand and looked at Lord Dirk, whose eyes were also wide with surprise.

Blood rushed to my head. My throat tightened and everything became clear.

I don’t want to marry anyone but Lucas.

When I thought about the words that impulsively came from my mouth, I realized it was an expression of the most shocking feeling of all…

“Lady Cecilia…?”

Although I could hear Lady Anika’s worried voice, I was frantically trying to digest the swirling emotions inside of me, but my brain was at its limit, unable to respond.

Digest, digest.

And I was shocked for the millionth time today by the feeling that settled deeply into my heart.

“Um, I…”

Huh? I love…Lucas?

The moment that unmistakable emotion struck me, my brain overloaded, and I started crying. “No!”

“Huh? What? Lady Cecilia?” Concern colored Lady Anika’s voice. “Are you all right?!”

“…Did I go too far?” Lord Dirk said, his composure beginning to fray.

“Young Master, you really should do something about your impatience…” Hannah said, clearly exasperated and a little angry.

Wait. Wait, wait, wait! Huh? I love that demon? The person who used such terrifying means to take away my virginity? I really love him?! Like, seriously?! For real?!

It felt like multiple versions of myself had been summoned to my mind for an emergency meeting. *It’s kind of sad that they’re all skeptical… No! That’s not the point right now!*

“I’m in love with him.” I said it almost as if to make sure, and tears flowed down my cheeks again from the warm yet raging feelings spreading inside of my heart.

Anna and Kate fretted over me, patting my back and wiping my tears with handkerchiefs, but I was too overwhelmed to even thank them. *I’m so sorry for being such a burden.*

But when I looked up at Lord Dirk, his eyes had softened. He looked genuinely happy—his smile even reached his eyes. It was then that I realized he’d done all this on purpose.

“I’m glad you finally realized because, up until now, I’ve just looked like the villain here,” he said with a mischievous wink, but I couldn’t even smile in response.

“You seem sadder about it than I expected,” I heard Lady Anika murmur to herself. I was stunned at my own selfishness.

Lord Dirk had said I was fixated on Lucas because I wanted him to protect me. Maybe I had been using him to such ends. It would be convenient, after all, to take advantage of his love and, by betrothing myself to him, keep away any other men who might harm me.

Was I aggrieving them by exploiting Lucas’s devotion?

Just today, Felix had come and thrown their household into disarray because

I'd hidden myself away in their home. Maybe it would be better to simply pretend there was no engagement and enter a convent instead?

But now that I realized I was in love with Lucas, my selfish, ugly feelings from the past came to light, and I felt ashamed.

I love him. I don't want to be apart from him. I want to stay by his side, but I might continue to cause him trouble. What if he starts hating me? Should I just stay away? But I don't want to be away from him… My body began to falter, no longer able to withstand my turbulent emotions.

Anna rushed to support me. "Lady Cecilia! Please calm down and take a deep breath!"

I realized I'd been holding my breath and desperately struggled to breathe.

No matter how much I thought about it, I still didn't want to part from him, because I loved him. Lady Anika drew closer to me, and I turned to her imploringly. "A-are you sure it's all right for me to stay by Lord Lukie's side? Should I…enter a convent instead?"

"What?!" she exclaimed, wide-eyed. "A convent?! You both love each other, so why would you do such a thing?!"

"Lady Cecilia?!" Even Hannah, normally so composed, was startled.

"Wait, wait," Lord Dirk interjected. "How did you come to that conclusion, Cecilia?"

As tears continued to stream down my face, I looked at the three of them. That was when Elsa nonchalantly threw us for a loop.

"I'm terribly sorry for interrupting, Lord Dirk. But the master is approaching here at furious speed, and it seems he is extremely angry."

"What?! Oh, no… Anika!"

Lord Dirk glanced out the window and then looked pleadingly at Lady Anika, who responded indifferently.

“Sorry, but there’s nothing I can do. There’s only one of us who can stop Lucas, and look at the state you put her in. This is all your own fault.”

“This is bad!” Lord Dirk paled and worked swiftly to deploy defensive magic.

I stared at the scene, dumbfounded, while Lady Anika covered her face with a fan and said with exasperation, “You’re an idiot, Brother. You should’ve just helped her, but you just *had* to meddle.”

Just then, the burst open and was blown away…and Lucas appeared, looking unusually tense.

A wave of splintered wood crashed upon the magical barrier, before falling to the floor.

Kate muttered, “Great, now we have to clean that up later…”

But then Lucas’s golden eyes met mine and all my emotions overflowed again, tears flooding down my cheeks.

“Cece?” he called, causing my cheeks to burn. I quickly averted my gaze, and then Lucas let out a growling voice. “…Dirk…!”

“Oh! Welcome back, little bro! Looks like you’ve successfully completed your mission. Congrats!”

“What is the meaning of this?”

“Well, I can explain…”

“Why is she…crying?”

Lady Anika, Hannah, and Lord Dirk all went pale.

Suddenly the room surged with hostility imbued with incredible mana. It might have suffocated us, if not for Lord Dirk’s triple defense barrier. We might have even passed out on the spot.

Wait a minute, a triple defense barrier? Lord Dirk can use magic only royalty should be able to use. Amazing…

This stray thought passed through my mind as I trembled violently.

“Brother did it!”

“Anika…!!” Lord Dirk cried out, keeping his eyes pinned on Lucas.

In fact, all of our eyes were on Lucas.

Because in his hand was the legendary sword, Eckesachs.

“…Dirk.”

Amid the terrifying silence, Elsa murmured, “Is the ducal line going to end today…?”

Lady Anika and the others held their breath. Lord Dirk tried to put up another defense barrier, but Lucas dispelled it with the barest flourish of his sword. I kept an eye on this while I grasped for words.

“N-no, Lord Dirk saved me from Felix and…”

“Why would you be crying if he helped you?”

“Well, um, we were just talking and…” I blushed furiously when I remembered how I realized my true feelings for Lucas, and now that the target of my love was right in front of me, I was so flustered I had to look away.

That must’ve been the wrong choice, because Lucas’s hostility surged again.

“You talked, hm? And what exactly did you talk about, Brother?”

“Ah, um, er… What was it, again?”

Lucas narrowed his eyes and tightened his grip on his sword when he saw Dirk trying to evade the question. “Dirk.”

“I was just trying to confirm Lady Cecilia’s feelings!”

No, Dirk! Don’t say anything more!

Crumbling under the pressure of seeing Lucas wielding Eckesachs, it seemed like Dirk was about to start running his mouth. So I panicked and shouted, “Lord Dirk, please don’t say anything!”

“Cece…?” Lucas sounded shocked, but I was too embarrassed and flustered to do anything but plead with Dirk.

I don’t want him to hear it from anyone else, no matter what!

“P-please, Lord Dirk. Don’t say anything yet…” I pleaded with my hands clasped in front of my chest.

“Um, all right, but… I might die though…” he said. Then, after a quick glance at Lucas, he added, “Yup, I’m dead.”

“N-no! Stop! Lady Cecilia, Lucas is getting the wrong idea!” Lady Anika exclaimed, trembling tearfully. Anna and Kate also nodded with mournful expressions.

Misunderstanding? As I glanced at Lucas, with my cheeks now scarlet, I saw…a demon.

I was so shocked my tears dried up instantly. My fear drained all the color from my face. I didn’t want to admit it, but now I understood what Dirk meant when he muttered about dying.

Father, Mother, your dear Cece has been visiting Hell often lately. I’m not really sure why, but it seems I’ve accidentally opened up some kind of forbidden door and I don’t know what I should do…

Heh heh heh…

I stared absently into nothingness, trying to escape from reality, but was suddenly brought back to my senses when Lady Anika and the others begged, “Lady Cecilia… Please save my brother…” and my soul flew back into my body.

Honestly, I didn't want to come back because this was such a mess, but I knew the demon standing there menacingly, his cape flapping with overflowing mana (or malice, I guess) was undoubtedly my fiancé…

I felt truly desperate, afraid that this might be the end of Dirk's life. I frantically tried to remember what I could do to turn him back into a human again. As I thought and thought, I recalled the shredded dress incident…

So…staring at my naked body did it? But is using a honey trap really something a proper lady would do?

As I pondered this, Dirk once again deployed his triple defense barrier, only to have it destroyed by Lucas with a single sweep. They repeated this cycle until Dirk was backed up against the wall.

"W-wait! Hold on, Lukie!"

"Dirk… I took my eyes off you for one second, and you've become so close to Cece that she calls you by name—and even cutely asked you to save her?!"

"Huh?! N-no, wait! Wh-whaa?!"

"Not only that, but you were captivated by her, weren't you?"

"I-I can't help it! Sh-she had a captivating expression on her face! Eek, sorry, sorry!"

Lucas's sword clinked faintly as he pointed it at Dirk. Lady Anika and Hannah screamed.

"Brother!"

"Young Master!"

Anna and Kate were sobbing on the sofa where I'd been sitting. As for Elsa, well she was an exception. I had no idea why her fighting spirit was so strong in this situation…

The room had changed into a hellscape, and, in a voice so deep it could shake the earth, Lucas gave Dirk one last warning. "Shall I let Eckesachs taste your

blood?”

This is bad! He might kill Dirk! I don’t care anymore!

I impulsively reached out and hugged Lucas from behind.

Silence fell over the room.

Since Dirk was on the other side of Lucas’s broad back, I couldn’t see what happened to him. Was he okay? I was in a state of extreme agitation, but my mind felt like it had come out on the other side of fear, and I found the courage to address the demon.

I tightened my arms around him. Then I leaned against him, pressed my ample breasts against his back and whispered so only he could hear, “Welcome home, Lord Lukie.” I felt him stiffen and then the mana he released began to dissipate.

Even though I heard Lady Anika and the others murmur in awe things like, “Amazing! Lady Cecilia is like a goddess!” I ignored them—otherwise I would’ve collapsed from humiliation.

Lucas was still holding Eckesachs, so I couldn’t relax just yet. Trying to get him to turn around, I called out in a trembling voice, “L-Lord Lukie, would you please look at me?”

I was going with pleading. Since he’d just complained to Dirk, I thought it might work… I clung onto that last bit of hope.

And it did! Without a hitch!

Lucas spun around so suddenly it startled me, and I could feel a gush of wind on my cheeks. He grabbed me and pulled me closer with one hand on my waist. The touch snapped me back to reality, and I checked Lucas’s hand before lifting my gaze. Yes, the sword was still there. I had to get rid of it, or we’d still be in danger.

I cleared my throat nervously, then gently met Lucas’s gaze.

“I-I, um… I’ve been waiting for your safe return…”

“Cece…”

I felt my face flush with embarrassment. *Because I’m in love with him, right? And he’s calling me by that nickname. And he has his hand on my waist!*

Everyone in the room was watching us, frozen. It was so embarrassing I could die.

That’s strange… Just a moment ago, I was tearfully debating whether or not I should leave his side. But for the moment, I have to get rid of Eckesachs somehow.

After I let my gaze wander with shame for a moment, I looked up at Lucas again.

When I saw the warmth in his golden eyes and felt the heat behind them, I encouraged myself to push a little further.

“L-Lord Lukie, could you lean toward me a bit?”

“Hm?” He gave me a confused look but obediently bent down, and I gently placed his hand on my cheek.

I was the one who had wished that he would come back to me, so despite being nervous, I whispered, “I-I missed you,” and brought my lips closer to his cheek.

This is my best attempt at seduction! Turn back into a human, you demon! I buried my face against Lucas’s chest and waited for a moment… *There! That’s all I have in me!*

Suddenly, a dazzling light filled the room, and something absorbed all of Lucas’s magical energy. The air felt lighter, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I was about to look around the room to check on everything, but then he hugged me tightly.

He whispered in a deep voice in my ear, “I’m home, Cece,” and it was like a shockwave raced through me.

Welcome back, I'm home… It's like we're newlyweds, even though we're still just engaged!

My head, awhirl with love, started cheering with joy and I didn't know what to do. My face felt like it was boiling, and Lucas looked extraordinarily handsome. I mean, he was *always* that handsome.

It doesn't have anything to do with seeing him through love-filtered glasses! Still, as a lady, this is very frustrating and confusing…

As my emotions settled slightly, he gently stroked my cheek. I looked up at his transcendent beauty and at those golden eyes, which were narrowed sweetly.

Ahh, he's more beautiful than I am, after all, I thought, but then he brushed my hair away from my face and kissed my forehead. Instantly, any lingering doubts disappeared. *So this is what people mean when they talk about being a sucker for love! But I don't mind!*

Embarrassed but happy, I placed my hand over his. He spoke in a tired voice and told me about Felix.

"I sensed Felix's magic from the defensive barrier, so I hurried back. He didn't do anything to you, did he?"

"I'm fine. Hannah and the others protected me while Lord Dirk sent him away."

He can even identify people through his defensive barrier? Talk about overpowered! I remarked in the back of my mind, but at fore of my thoughts was the sheer joy of him worrying about me.

Joy surged inside of me as tears welled up in my eyes again. "Thanks for rushing back home."

"I'm so glad you're safe," he said with relief while brushing away my tears. Then he embraced me again, causing my heart to ache once more.

I felt so relieved wrapped in his warm, strong arms, and before I knew it, my tears had returned.

Ahh, I really do love Lucas. I felt truly moved by the first realizations of this new emotion settling in me. Then, Lucas called out to Dirk in a low voice, “Brother, I’ll forgive you this time since you helped, but there won’t be a next.”

“U-uh, yes, sorry…”

The sight of the future duke, who was the talk of high society, bowing to his younger brother was surreal.

But my sense of awe dissipated as quickly as it came. The way Lucas talked down to him even after acknowledging his help was awe-inspiring. The relationship between these siblings was like a reign of terror! Or maybe…

“Lord Dirk, did you come all the way here just to help?”

“Yes, that’s true, but you’re the one who ended up helping me instead…”

“It’s your own fault, Brother, for meddling needlessly…”

“Anikaaaaa! Well, we’re in the way, so let’s just leave right now!”

Dirk swiftly ushered Lady Anika out of the room. Right before he left, he hastily fitted the broken door back in place and added, “Oh, by the way—Felix has a mind to make her his concubine, so be careful,” and then disappeared.

All the commotion had made me completely forget about the whole business with Felix, but at Dirk’s warning, I glanced over at Lucas.

“…Concubine?”

That’s odd…I thought he turned back into a human… But why are his pupils dilated again? What happened to all my efforts and fleeting embarrassment?! I was just starting to feel like things were getting sweet here!

Lucas’s eyes were clouded with anger. The corners of his mouth raised slightly, and I gulped. “L-Lord Lukie…”

“Cece. Did Felix say that to you?”

“W-well, um, yes…” I spoke honestly out of fear.

“I should’ve just killed him,” Lucas grumbled.

Felix, run away! Run away quickly! If Lucas, the hero, gets involved there won't even be a trace of you left! Not even your bones! That'll be the start of The Case of the Missing Former Second Prince*!*

As panic welled up within me, Lucas smiled softly at me and said, "Wait here for a moment," then turned toward the door.

Uh-oh, this can't be good. This is definitely bad!

I reached out and grabbed his knight's uniform in a panic, prepared to use the excuse of proper etiquette of changing clothes once you get home to distract him.

"L-Lord Lukie! Let's forget about Felix. You must be tired, right? Let's get you changed."

"…All right."

"I'll help you!"

There was a suspicious pause, but then he nodded, so I began to help him take off his clothes. Lucas wasn't wearing the typical dark red of the Imperial Order today. Instead, he was clad in the same black uniform as the Black Knights of the Chivalric Order's magical beast slaying squad. This uniform was simple and unembellished, offering a stark view of Lucas's beauty.

Ugh, he's dashing. Like, super *dashing. I already knew all this, but the fact that my fingers are trembling as I undress him just goes to show how incredibly dashing he is!*

Steadying myself in spite of my nerves, I hung his knight's uniform on a hook. I reflexively checked for frays, tears, or blood stains before breathing a sigh of relief. Just then, Lucas's rough fingers grazed my ear, making my shoulders quiver.

I was about to turn around when he pushed my hair to one side, his lips brushing against my exposed ear.

"Cece… You look so good dressed in my colors."

I couldn’t say a word.

His breath grazed against my ear, and I felt my neck flushing with heat. He wrapped one arm around the fine fabric of the dress and slipped his finger into the hooks at the back of my neck. The feeling of his fingertips against my skin made me gasp.

“The sight of your skin peeking through the lace is irresistible,” he whispered softly as he nibbled on my earlobe.

I hadn’t been here at the duke’s mansion long, but every outfit given to me had been tailored to fit me like a glove. Since I had large breasts, the wrong type of dress would make me look chubby, so I was picky about my clothes. I preferred dresses that were elegant yet cute, which didn’t make me look overweight. It was amazing how all the dresses provided for me here were exactly to my taste. The staff of a ducal mansion were truly remarkable.

The dress I wore today had an elegant design with a hint of sweetness. It was an A-line dress of deep lapis lazuli, with bright yellow floral embroidery on the neckline and hem. Cream-colored lace adorned it from the neck to the chest, lending a touch of elegance appropriate for receiving guests. Well, it usually didn’t matter how much skin you showed whether you were married or unmarried, but I had a different reason for wanting to not show my chest and neck…

I noticed all the colors of my new clothing somehow resembled Lucas’s colors, but I didn’t mind because he was my fiancé. Besides, I loved the designs.

But now that I realized my true feelings for him, it was incredibly embarrassing to hear him comment on them!

It’s like he’s saying I belong to him!

As if reading my thoughts, Lucas murmured, “You’re mine… I’ll never let Felix near you again.”

Suddenly, I sensed a hint of insecurity in his voice, which made me feel an

irresistible affection for him. I placed my trembling hand on his waist as he gave me a hug that felt like he was holding on for dear life. The desperation in his touch made my heart ache.

My Promise Mark would remain effective until Lucas died. I would be bound by the Mark for life, but Lucas didn't have those same constraints. He could court other women, dance with them, and even…engage in certain acts with them.

Just thinking about it made me feel uncomfortable. But… *I don't think he'll love anyone else but me. He can't.* For some reason, I felt oddly convinced of that.

After all, that was why he engraved me with the Promise Mark. Even if I were to develop feelings for someone else, I would never be able to be intimate with them. And as long as the Promise Mark remained on me, I could never push him out of my heart. Even if I thought of other men, the Promise Mark engraved upon my body would ensure Lucas was never far from my mind.

I could never love someone else, because a love shrouded in such guilt could never continue. In other words, it wasn't only my body that belonged to Lucas. My heart would be his for the rest of my life as well.

I let out a heavy sigh as I felt the gravity of the Promise Mark and his confession that he'd rather be hated than unwanted. I pursed my lips as he embraced me tighter.

But what does that even mean?

Nobody knew the future, so in the end the Promise Mark was basically an insurance policy. It didn't mean I couldn't be possessive too. I wouldn't be able to forgive him if his hands were to someday touch another the way they were touching me at this moment.

Lady Mia—or any other lady for that matter—bring it on! I'll show you all what I'm made of! Well, actually, the demon who will appear if you harm me is more of a danger to you… I'd really prefer if you just stay away from me… That's

right! If you value your life, you'll steer clear! Anyway, here's to reciprocated love! May this be my first and last love of this lifetime!

"I'm yours and yours alone, until death do us part…right?" I said as I turned around to gaze at his face. His eyes opened wide in surprise.

I tipped my head to the side and waited for a response. He covered his face with one hand and looked up toward the ceiling.

"Lord Lukie?"

"Cece…what am I going to do with you?"

"Huh?"

Why such a heavy sigh? Isn't that a bit rude? I thought I just said something really nice. Why ruin the moment with a sigh like that?

I pouted and tried to glare at him, saying, "What?" but then a shiver ran down my spine. He pulled his hand away from his face and I couldn't take my eyes off him. *It's not because I love him or anything!* His pupils weren't dilated, but…I couldn't stop shivering.

My knees trembled beneath my dress, and Lucas chuckled softly.

"So I heard you know why a knight returning from a campaign doesn't go straight home. Is that right?"

Um, isn't this getting a bit wild?! I nodded timidly and suddenly I felt myself floating as he lifted me up in his arms.

"Eek! L-Lord Lukie?!"

"Using Eckesachs always excites me. But since I have you, Cece, I can't control myself now. I thought I'd get myself off first and have to wait another night before I saw you, though," he said without a hint of embarrassment, and I couldn't stop myself from gawking in disbelief.

Run away! I screamed internally. *No, if I run away, it'll be even worse!* I

sobbed internally. *I don't want to hear anymore!*

It seemed that lately I often used mental escapism to avoid reality I didn't want to face.

What should I do… What should I do?!

I trembled with fear and then Lucas kicked open the door to his bedroom.

He kicked it! This guy kicked open the door! Even though he's a duke's son, he's got terrible manners… Wait, now he kicked it shut behind him?! Eep! A door with triple barrier defense magic?!

Now it's locked…

My tear-filled eyes darted back and forth between Lucas and the door. He lowered me gently, and just as I felt a rush of relief that he wouldn't be too rough on me, he pushed me back onto the bed, where I landed with a thump.

I sat up, startled, and the bed creaked as Lucas climbed onto it. A strange sensation in my uterus sent tremors running through my body.

"Hmm…"

When my handsome knight saw me instinctively close my knees tightly, his golden eyes narrowed, and he smiled sweetly. When he spoke, his voice was even sweeter, but his words were ominous. "I won't stop even if you cry and scream. Are you prepared for that?"

The demon licked his lips and met my eyes with a gaze that could kill.

This love of my life is going to be really rough…

Lucas embraced me tightly as he pressed his lips against mine. He gently stimulated me with soft touches on my earlobe. He kissed me from every angle, I found myself drifting off in a blissful kind of pleasure.

Hm? I was expecting something wilder, but he's being much gentler than I anticipated.

The gap between my expectations and reality was getting so vast I couldn't

help my excitement at this newfound tender intimacy. He reached behind and deftly unfastened the hooks of my dress.

Well, he's still quick when it comes to undressing me. It was much better than having my dress torn wildly apart with a dagger, or having the hooks torn off, which had been a bit traumatic. Once my dress was unhooked, he pulled the collar down to my chest.

"Eek! Mmph!" Startled, I let out an involuntary squeal, but it was soon muffled.

His palm grazed my breasts, barely touching me. I could feel my nipples hardening through the delicate lace of the dress.

I blushed when I realized how little stood between us right now. Typically, noblewomen wore a sturdy bustier underneath their dress to push up and support their breasts, but my dress had the bustier built in, so I wasn't wearing one beneath it.

Well, to be precise, it was less a bustier, more a strapless bra that offered support without putting pressure on the ribs. But once you unhooked it, surprise! Nothing underneath it but silky-smooth skin, impeccably cared for. *Quite a drastic transformation don't you think?*

I initially thought it was considerate of the servants to provide such a comfortable dress, but now I realized I was wrong. Dead wrong!

Elsa had seemed oddly persistent when she kept saying, "Let's go with this dress today! Okay? Okay?" and I thought it was suspicious. But when I glanced over at Anna and Kate, they both gave me picture-perfect smiles and said, "That dress looks very comfortable," and "It covers your neckline nicely, so you can even wear it to entertain guests!"

To think I believed them!

I never thought Anna and Kate would collude with Elsa! *Oh wait, but they were totally colluding during the bathhouse incident! I'm such an idiot!*

I felt both embarrassed and horrified at the situation since I was wearing a dress that seemed to say “Come and get me, I’m ripe for the picking!” because I’d been tricked yet again by those three maids.

Then I saw Lucas glance downward.

Well, I can’t blame him. Anyone would be surprised to see bare skin underneath a dress!

I tried to escape into denial, but before I could, he squeezed my breasts—almost like he was confirming it was really my skin he was feeling—and I let out another squeak.

Why do I keep squeaking?! I’m not some two-dimensional girl! Wait, technically I am a two-dimensional game character, but that’s not the point!

The sound of my moans was too embarrassing to bear, so my brain had spiraled into internal escape mode again.

And then for some reason…Lucas gasped. No, he gulped. And our kiss grew even deeper.

“Cece… Haah, Cece!”

“Mm, nngh, aah, haa!”

His eyes glowed hot as he gazed at me from close up. *Why won’t he close his eyes?*

Locking eyes while we kissed was way too intense for me, so I squeezed mine shut, but that only made me more keenly aware of the movement of his tongue. It wasn’t painful, but slow and deliberate; swirling inside of my mouth and melting me with pleasure.

Struggling to breathe through my nose, I welcomed Lucas’s tongue as it entwined with mine, then pushed it upward. My eyes flew open in surprise, not expecting my tongue to be licked on the underside. From there, his tongue glided to the tip of mine, sending a shockwave through my whole body.

“Mm, aah! Nngh, haah!”

I felt tears form in my eyes at the sensation, and then…I felt my pussy get wet.

The feeling was very similar to when he'd licked me down there, making me shudder at the memory of the pleasure he'd given me. And to make matters worse, Lucas began to focus on stimulating my tongue. I tried to shake my head no, but he pinned me down from above. If I tried to push against his body, then he'd flick my hardened nipples through the lace. That only sent shocks through my body, so all I could do was desperately cling onto his shirt.

As he teased my tongue all over, I frantically tried to push back against his. Meanwhile, he massaged my breasts and rubbed my areolas with an exquisite touch. His stimulation of my mouth and breasts was relentless, and I could feel my nipples thrusting upward toward the fabric. It was pleasant, yet frustrating, and the tension seemed to heighten my sensitivity.

I wasn't sure how long he kept that up, but then, without warning, he sucked hard on my tongue at the exact same time as he flicked and rubbed my nipples.

"Nngh, haaah!"

That was the stimulation I'd been waiting for…for such a long time. The pleasure that had been building up within me finally burst forth. My back arched against the bed and my legs went rigid. The shuddering, shaky breaths that escaped from my parted lips left me stunned.

No way…it can't be…

I couldn't believe my own body. And when I looked up at the source of all evil (and arousal), I saw Lucas panting as he licked the drool from around his mouth.

"Ahh, nngh!" I shook my head in disbelief.

Lucas tipped his head to the side, his golden eyes dark and inquisitive. His lips slowly curled up into a smile and he said, "Hey, Cece. Did you just cum a little?"

"N-no!"

Even though it was a question, it sounded more like a statement I urgently had to deny.

This is bad! I'm in danger unless I say no!

"Ahh! No! I said no! Eek, don't!"

Before I knew it, Lucas had shoved a hand up my dress and ran it up one of my legs, right to the border of my stockings. I tried to grab his arm from through my dress to stop him, but I wasn't quick enough. So as a last resort, I clamped my legs shut. Lucas let out a sigh.

"You're really worked up, aren't you? Cece, if you didn't cum, then you wouldn't be wet."

"No, no! Eek, not your fingers!"

Uh-oh, here comes his sadistic streak! Being wild and sadistic is too cliché! Get that tired trope out of here!

I frantically shook my head as I raised my voice in protest, yet Lucas groaned as he slipped his fingers into the side of my panties and spread my wet lips open before boldly pushing inside of me. He stroked my insides all over, pulled out his finger, then plunged it back in even deeper. The fact that they slipped in so effortlessly this time filled me with shame and bewilderment.

"Nngh, ahh!"

"You're so wet, Cece."

He moved his fingers around in a deliberately noisy way, forcing me to hear how wet I was. As I shook my head back and forth, I heard his deep voice say, "What a naughty girl you are, cumming when all I did was touch your tits and kiss you."

He called me naughty again! Just because you say it with your sexy voice doesn't make it a compliment! Despite my internal protests, my body surrendered to him without a fight.

He pushed his fingers deep inside and made a beckoning gesture toward my stomach. Lights sparkled behind my eyes.

“Here’s a reward for being so naughty and cute, Cece.”

“Eek! No, aah, no, no! Not there!”

I don’t need a reward! I screamed silently, but I felt myself helplessly building up toward a climax.

It’s frustrating that I can’t even deny that I’m naughty…

I moaned and struggled to catch hold of my breath, but suddenly he lifted my legs up and I fell flat onto the bed.

“Eek! Huh?”

Something rubbed between my legs. I peered up and my eyes widened when I saw just what it was. I felt the blood drain from my face.

Huh? There’s no way something like that can fit inside of me! The only reason a woman’s body is designed to give birth is because the pelvis opens because of contractions! If you put a deadly weapon like that inside me before I’m ready, it’ll break me in two, won’t it? I screamed, but only within the chambers of my pounding heart. On the outside, I was sobbing in fear, but Lucas just smiled warmly at me.

Huh? He’s smiling? I have a bad feeling about this!

“Eep!”

“Cece, remember what I said before?”

What did he say? I have a feeling I shouldn’t ask him to repeat himself. Mini Cece, my sixth sense, says there’s danger on the horizon! But I couldn’t move, except for my mouth, which quivered haplessly.

All the Ceces inside of me seemed to let out sighs of despair at how useless the main Cece was.

I looked pleadingly at his handsome face, which was filled with lust, but that only made him smile even more. Strong arms pushed my hips up and Lucas pulled aside my moist panties before pressing himself against my honeypot.

His eyes glowed with excitement and his breathing grew labored. He licked at his lips, like a slavering predator.

“I told you, even if you scream and cry, I won’t be able to stop, so be prepared…and cry as loud as you can,” he whispered.

No, no, no! I’m pretty sure that last part is new!

“Ahh, eek! Ugh, nngh!”

He slowly, slowly pushed in, then out, then in again.

He was gentler and slower than I anticipated, but at the same time I thought, *He’s being gentle?* But then the impact grew more intense and quickly dashed those hopes away.

The pressure of his huge cock inside of me made my mouth fly open as I moaned. He held me down firmly and I was unable to escape. I opened my legs and tried to adjust myself, desperately trying to get oxygen into my shuddering body as it was twisted and split open.

My legs can’t spread any further, and even though I’m fully aware of how shameful this position is right now, I can’t stop thinking that I kind of look like a frog that’s been flipped over before dissection! But that’s not the problem right now! I feel like if I don’t spread my legs for him, I’ll simply die!

“I-it’s too big… I can’t… Wait…”

“Cece…”

It felt like I was being impaled. I shook my head violently as the horrific sensation in my belly brought tears to my eyes. Lucas looked slightly perturbed, but didn’t ease up on my screaming hips.

“Eek! Wh-why… Huh?!”

“Haah, Cece… You’re so adorable…”

The pressure in my lower abdomen increased, and as I looked up at Lucas, crying and panting, I saw his brow was furrowed and he had a happy smile on

his beautiful face.

I don't understand… I'm crying! I'm crying because I'm scared! How do you think that's cute? Why did that make you get harder? And why are you smiling so happily?

I stared hard at Lucas with such fear and bewilderment my tear ducts felt like they were going to burst.

His golden eyes softened alluringly, and he caressed my tear-stained cheek with his palm while showering me with kisses.

"Ahh, I can't bear your crying face, it's so cute. It's even better that it's all my fault. Ahh, it's so cute… I'm so happy… I love you." His voice was like a sigh filled with emotions and I found myself frozen.

Because he swelled even bigger, and even harder.

Huh? My crying face is cute? No, no, no. That's not the problem right now. Well, it is *a problem, and that whole thing just now was rather perverted and just a bit creepy. But that's not the issue here!*

Lucas is fucking me right now. Yeah. And he's happy. And he…loves me. That's all true, right? I checked in with myself for another emergency call, feeling slightly embarrassed again. *Okay, okay…*

"Ah?!"

Love?! N-no, I just realized my feelings. So being told that while he's having sex is just a little too much for a beginner like me! S-stop it! Stop giving me that sweet, dreamy smile!

"Mm?!"

While I was still reeling from Lucas's words, he pushed his slippery tongue into my mouth. No sooner had I snapped back to reality did I regret it…

"Cece…," Lucas whispered in a dangerously sweet voice, brimming with comeliness and desire—a voice that wiped out any last traces of reason left in my brain.

Lucas should come with a warning that says "Danger: Do not stare directly at this person."

My heart pounded out of control, annoyingly loud and *not* cute at all. Lucas parted my lips and explored my mouth with his tongue. The motions seemed deliberately lewd, and a faint shiver rattled my spine. I felt his cock throbbing inside of me and suddenly, as if he'd been waiting for just the right moment, he pinned me down with a rough kiss. I welcomed it in desperation.

"Mm, nngh? Ah, Lord Lukie! Mmn, aah!"

His deep, tender kiss seemed to seek some answer from my body, and his rough hands moved with purpose. All of a sudden, I felt a rush of pleasure sweep through every inch of my flesh.

Wait, wait, wait! First, let me talk! Let me finish a sentence! Can you please stop stimulating all the erogenous zones in my mouth while you fondle my nipples and caress my inner thighs?!

I couldn't tear my gaze away from his honey-colored eyes. Pleasure seized my body as he mercilessly buried his giant cock inside of me.

"Eek, ahh!"

"Cece… You're burning hot inside…" He panted and sighed with his brow furrowed and his face full of ecstasy as he continued to thrust his hips. My belly tensed up as he reached deeper and deeper. He kissed my neck and groaned with pleasure. "You're so tight…tight and hot and you feel incredible…"

He really sounded like he was the happiest man in the world. But once I realized what exactly he said, my body suddenly felt feverish and sweat slicked my skin.

Incredible?! Incredible?! What does he mean, incredible?!

I won't be fooled by that dreamy look of ecstasy on your face! Not when mine is full of agony! And I'm probably bright red!

Both my mind and body were at the mercy of his every word and movement. I

felt embarrassed and frustrated as I glared blearily at him.

It felt like there was a scorching knot of heat deep inside my belly, shaking my brain.

“Ahhh!”

“Nngh, you’re…pulling me in…so deep, Cece!”

A terrifying sensation ran through me making my back arch. Lucas kept a vice grip on my hips as he pounded me again and again, as if to say he wouldn’t let me go.

“Ahh! No, wait!”

“I can’t!”

I gazed up at his large body as it pressed closer to mine, and desperately shook my head, silently pleading with him not to stimulate me any further. Lucas had a blissful smile on his face, but didn’t give in. *Huh? Isn’t that strange? His words and expression don’t seem to match. If he was a true knight, shouldn’t he tell his lady, “Of course I’ll wait,” or something equally gentle?*

I watched incredulously as he narrowed his eyes while giving me a mischievous kiss before whispering in a low voice, “There’s no way I can wait, right?”

Just as his breath grazed my lips, he began to move his hips slowly. As he ramped up the pressure, my fingers clawed at the sheets.

“Ahh! Ahh, h-huh? Please!”

It wasn’t rough at all. In fact, his movements were achingly tender. There was still pressure, but no pain. Yet by deliberately targeting my most sensitive spots, he still brought me to tears.

My body instinctively welcomed these sensations. *I want to escape but the fact that I can’t makes me cry!*

I couldn’t believe he’d been able to fit his huge, pale penis inside of my body,

and not only did it not hurt…it felt *amazing.*

At that size it should hurt, so why does it feel so good?! I was a virgin just the other day! Has this demon made a masochist of me already?!

“Noo! Ahh, no, no! I-I’m going to cum!”

“Oh, Cece…”

After just two times in bed with him, he’d remade me into a submissive woman, obedient to his will despite all my lamentations and struggles.

His movements were very gentle compared to our previous night together, and in the blink of an eye, I reached heights I’d never attained before. I held my breath as waves of pleasure washed over me, and as our fingers intertwined, I squeezed his hand as if it were all that kept my mind anchored to this world.

I spasmed on the sheets like a fish that had washed ashore.

The sound of air leaving my mouth reached my ears, and then my body suddenly relaxed, my back arching as I fell upon the sheets while my body still shuddered helplessly from the aftershocks of my orgasm. Lucas stroked my side so exquisitely I first thought he was trying to ease my sensitive body, but I soon realized he was teasing me… Even the slightest touch from him felt so good I couldn’t help but weep.

I was so embarrassed I just let out a sweet moan like, “Nngh, mm!” I tried to form words to stop him and looked at him pleadingly through my tears. He stared at me and raked a hand through his hair, stuck to his forehead with sweat, before heaving a beastly, shuddering sigh.

W-wait, why isn’t he satisfied? Then he grabbed me again, pushing his tongue into my mouth, swirling around all the saliva I couldn’t swallow. It spilled out from my mouth, and he lapped it up greedily as he began to thrust inside me again, the sound of it exactly the same as the wet noises coming from the inside of my mouth.

I was all too aware of how wet I was, and my body flushed with shame.

“Haah, no… L-Lord Lukie…”

“Haah… You’re soaking wet.”

“No, please don’t say it!”

Now he’s going to seduce me with words?! Absolutely not! I panicked and tried to cover his mouth with my hand, but that just made him laugh with amusement.

That youthful chuckle was so shocking that time seemed to stand still for a moment. Perhaps my dumbfounded expression amused him too, because he rumbled with even more laughter before planting a kiss on my palm.

Startled back to reality, I let out a high-pitched scream in response to the abrupt stimulation.

But that handsome pervert seemed to thoroughly enjoy how his movements inside me made my back arch. As he thrust into me again and again, the squelching sounds made me moan even more, only fueling his lustful delight, which in turn infuriated me.

My hips jerked from the inescapable pleasure, while the frustration of being so roughly handled caused me to grit my teeth and whimper feebly as I glared at him with tear-rimmed eyes.

Lucas licked his lower lip and said, “If you’re this wet, a little more won’t hurt.” Once my brain comprehended what he said, I froze again.

“…Huh?”

In response to my question, little more than a gasp, Lucas gave me a lazy smile that belied the intensity of his gaze and said, with all the voracity of a prayer before meals, “I can’t wait to dig in. It’s time for the main event now, Cece. Go ahead and moan all you want.”

Hearing his low, sweet voice speak those words felt like a death sentence… and then the demon folded up my body.

You mean the main event hasn’t even happened yet?!

“I love you. I love you. I love you.

I want to be gentle. I want to cherish you. I want to spoil you.

I want to see you smile. I want to be someone you can rely on, someone you can depend on.

I want to be important to you.

Ahhh, but at the same time…

I want to make you cry. I want to hurt you badly. I want to destroy you.

I want to tear apart your soft limbs, devour every drop of your flesh and blood. And your eyes! Any time they reflect anyone but me, I want to chain you up so they never look at anyone else again.

I love you. I love you. I won’t let you go. I’ll never let you go. I’ll never let anyone else have you. Ever.

You are mine.”

Rather than being held, I felt like I was being clutched. My heart trembled with joy as he whispered into my ear. Soft healing magic washed over me as he whispered, and I realized I had lost consciousness again.

But the warm sensation of magic spreading throughout my body was so comforting that I breathed a sigh of relief. Then he kissed me gently.

I turned toward him, and the first thing I saw through my blurred vision was the beautiful face of that night-hued beast as it moved away from me, its golden eyes melting with affection for me more intensely than I could ever express with my whole body.

The beast whispered words of love to me and knew my body better than I did.

My insides had been trained and shaped by Lucas’s touch to convert every sensation he elicited in me into pleasure that manifested as multiple orgasms.

Even when my knight, who possessed more physical strength than anyone else, thrusted into me, I felt no pain at all. Instead, the more he thrusted, the higher I would ascend, surpassing myself to reach new heights.

I don't need it; I really don't need to exceed myself in that…

It was unbearable, whether I was being pleasured or penetrated or being pulled out of. Because everything felt so incredibly good, I remained in a perpetual state of climax through it all.

I came for a really long time, and even when we would take a little break it still felt like a little death, and then he'd tease me again until I came for what seemed like forever. It was a rather terrifying chain combo, which I finished with one of two ending moves: moaning, *"It feels so good!"* or screaming, *"I'm cumming!"*

The endless training session could have only two outcomes: either I'd cum to death or my masochistic tendencies would fully blossom under these relentless attacks.

By the way, anytime it became more than I could bear and I ended up fainting, he'd use some overpowered healing spell to revitalize me, only to plunge me back into the hellish cycle of lust and desire again.

This is wrong, isn't it? It must be wrong, right? There's no way this is right! It's wrong to use healing magic just to give someone endless stamina for sex, isn't it?

As I wrestled with these thoughts, Lucas casually stroked my hair. I absentmindedly turned to look at him. His brow was furrowed slightly, and his gaze wavered.

If he's so anxious, maybe he shouldn't torment me so.

Lucas carefully smoothed back my sweaty, disheveled hair so our eyes could meet.

What does he want from me? Does he want to spoil me, torment me, or be

gentle with me? Does he want to make me cry? If pressed for an answer, I'd have to pick the latter. And I don't think it's just my imagination. While I'm here enduring a living hell, barely able to move a finger, he's only slightly out of breath. How infuriating!

But every time he spoke, I was reminded of how his touch became more and more passionate.

My heart ached despite myself when he conveyed his feelings, and I swallowed the complaints I'd been ready to voice.

He sure said some mind-boggling things. They were adorable and heavy and ominous. All sorts of spine-chilling content.

No, that's not good. It's absolutely not good at all and I will refuse and firmly decline to encourage such things! But surely he didn't mean it literally—it was just an expression of his affection, right?

As his large, warm hand cupped my cheek, I raised a trembling arm to place my hand over his.

I felt somewhat relieved and smiled at Lucas, who narrowed his eyes slightly.

We probably should talk more.

Our relationship was so shallow at this point that we couldn't even be called acquaintances, yet now we were suddenly engaged. We needed to get to know each other better to build real trust. I knew he didn't just want me for my body, but I was still anxious about it.

I didn't know Lucas's hobbies or what he liked or disliked. Well, I had a feeling he disliked Felix. And there were probably many other people he didn't care for.

And…I was scared, but I wanted to know how he felt about Lady Mia. *I feel like I can ask him about her calmly now.*

Being engaged meant we were to be married, and that was something that couldn't be changed, no matter what. Our greatest enemy was Lord Dirk, who could potentially rescind the decree. It was a relief knowing who the enemy

was, at least. *I'll do my best, I promise.*

And since we were going to spend our lives together, it was important not to keep our feelings and thoughts bottled up, but to foster the sort of relationship in which we could express ourselves freely to each other. After all, he was the handsome second prince and the hero of the next generation. It wouldn't be easy to stand by his side for the rest of his life if I never made it past the crushing stage. *That would be sad, mostly for me.*

I would have to avoid the envy of other nobles and their daughters, withstand their pressures and foil their schemes.

I'll be even busier than I was with Felix, especially since I'll have to be more worried about myself. If my crying is enough to send him into such a state, imagine what would happen if I was physically hurt. Eckesachs would be out at full power! I could become a villainess whose infamy endured for generations!

No, that won't do. I need to find a way to make Lucas's intense, cruel love a bit more manageable. Hm? I feel like this is really important. It could affect our future, right? If we manage to marry without any problems, we can live in the palace, but if people find out that this perfect specimen of a man is actually a sadistic yandere, both Lucas's position and mine might be in danger…

I have to reform him! I have to reform him immediately! But how?

As I pondered that, I reviewed the current situation and how it kept ending up like this, and then I glanced down at the skin on my breasts, which still stung.

No, you've got to be kidding me. Surely, I'm mistaken!

Nope…there they are. Plain as day… Jeez, I'll have to ask for a blindfolded bath again! This is unbearable!

Although he was much gentler this time, I really wish he wouldn't have bitten me.

Every woman wants to dress up, after all, but at this rate I'll end up not being able to wear any of my dresses and they'll just sit in the closet gathering dust.

What a waste. Both the dresses *and* my sense of style would be for nothing.

And then…

Laying there, unable to move on the dry sheets which touched every part of my skin, I felt like crying.

The thought that I might not be able to handle social events as the prince's fiancée filled me with anxiety. If I couldn't manage even that, the royal family might cut me off—the duke's too. If I remained a pariah at parties… Imagining a future as an outcast filled me with dread.

Is that really why knights don't come home afterward? They use brothels for the sake of their wives and fiancées?

But still, I didn't want him to go to a brothel for any reason. I couldn't bear the thought of him touching another woman.

In that case, I'll just have to accept it. Maybe I should start by building up my stamina?

Lucas looked at me quizzically as I silently weighed my options.

"Cece?"

"Ahh…" I coughed.

Startled back to reality, I tried to speak but my dry throat demanded liquid, causing me to cough uncontrollably.

"Oh, hang on a second." Lucas grabbed the pitcher of water off the nightstand and took a sip. He slowly sat me up and held the back of my head, kissing me.

"Mm…"

The lukewarm water flowed into my dry mouth.

I wanted more, so I sucked on his tongue, and I heard him let out a throaty chuckle. He took another drink and kissed me again. I received the water from him, cupping my hands around his face and gulping like a baby thirsty for milk. He gave me mouthful after mouthful of water like this until he finally pulled

away with a gasp. His face was close to mine, and I watched as his eyes narrowed.

Desire flickered deep inside me again and, out of habit, I shook my head just a little to clear it. But then Lucas lapped up the water that dripped from the corner of my mouth, making my skin tingle. Just as I tried to pull my head away, he grabbed me forcefully, silencing my protests before they could leave my throat.

Whether he was forceful or gentle, kissing Lucas felt incredible, and it was like my mind instinctively understood how vital it was to me.

I knew it was lewd, but I obediently received his tongue. I thought I should stop, but I swallowed his saliva that trickled into my mouth. I felt like I should let go, but when he sucked lightly on my tongue, I reciprocated.

“Nngh, haah, mm!”

And then my body started reacting.

A tingling sensation began to collect around my hips as my body remembered the pleasure from mere moments ago. Lucas pulled me into his arms again, and before I could object, he sucked my tongue into his mouth, which made me reflexively tighten on him. He held me firmly by my ass while slowly massaging it.

“Nngh! Mmm!”

Eek, no! Don’t massage my ass anymore! Don’t split me apart! Don’t force such wet noises out of me while we’re all tangled up!

He must’ve been pleased by my reactions to his passionate caresses, because he ignored my protests and slid his hands to my crack, his fingers creeping along it until they began to fondle my slit. Sticky liquid, overflowing from inside me, clung to his fingers, and he smeared it over my ass until it was wet and sticky too.

Eek, what are you doing, you pervert?!

I blushed, went pale, and blushed again, but he went on without hesitation.

He teased me with his fingers, paused, then slowly slid his wet fingers from my labia to my crack…

“Nn! Mmngh?!”

H-hey! Your finger is going back a little too far! That’s not the right hole!

I felt my blood drain from his unexpected behavior. Tears sprang to my eyes, and I heard my pulse pounding in my eardrums, out of control. I had heard about it before, of course, that sometimes deviant men liked to use that hole, and I also knew that was how men made love to each other, but…

I never thought anyone would do it to me!

“Nngh, mm!”

He rubbed circles around my asshole, tugging slightly to smooth out the puckered skin. My body tensed up with fear and shame, but once I felt his hot dick buried deep inside of me, my insides clenched around him.

“Mmm?!”

Suddenly he thrust hard and deep inside of me. Lights danced before my eyes, and my body obediently responded to Lucas, climbing toward climax like a conditioned reflex.

The air in the room grew thick, pierced by the creaking of bedsprings and the nasty squelching of that sticky liquid that churned in me with each thrust. Lucas kissed me deeply as he deftly moved his hips, pounding me as deep and as hard as he possibly could.

How can he do that with his legs crossed?! How can he maneuver his mouth to kiss me while moving his hands and *hips? How can he keep fucking me when he’s cum so much already?*

Once again, my mind obsessed over these pointless tangents as it skirted the brink of ecstasy.

I tried desperately to think about anything else. Lucas must've sensed that, because he pulled me back to reality. He gently pressed the pad of his finger against my asshole, making it impossible not to focus on the spasms deep in my belly.

"Haah, Cece…"

"Nngh! Haah, L-Lord Lukie, mm!"

No! I don't want to cum like this! I don't want to cum with his finger there! No, no!

I couldn't bear the waves that began to crash down upon me…and then I bit down hard.

"Tss!"

Huh? Wait, what?

Lucas was silent.

"I-I'm so sorry!"

Eep! I've really gone and done it now! I bit Lucas's tongue!

Oh, god. What should I do? There's blood on his thumb! Oh no, it looks painful! Wait a second, the blood on his finger is strangely erotic, but also the way his eyes are so wide is super cute. Ah, my heart's all aflutter… No, no! What am I thinking?! For crying out loud, calm down, Cece!

Anyway, I need to check to see if he's okay.

…Of course he's not okay! That had to hurt! Wh-what if he's mad? I was flustered, but I somehow managed to look at him hesitantly… *I really wish I hadn't done that!*

Lucas made a show of slowly licking the blood off his finger and spreading it across his lips.

My breath caught in my throat.

The corners of his lips lifted at my gasp. His golden eyes narrowed and,

honestly, he'd never looked sexier. The sight sent blood surging through me and my whole body trembled.

Lucas, his lips red with blood, kissed me…then pushed his finger into my asshole.

"Ahh, nngh!"

"…!"

That stinging stimulation was all it took to push me over the edge.

He supported my body as I went completely limp, gasping frantically for air.

Lucas gave a few short pumps and then his tense body also relaxed completely. The hot liquid filling up my belly told me that he'd cum too.

He leaned over, exhaled a hot breath close to my face, and caressed my sweaty back. But his gentle touch only made my body heat rise again. I didn't want him to see the pathetic look on my face, so I covered my mouth with my hands and averted my gaze.

Ahhh! I can't believe I came with his finger in my ass!

And the fact that Lucas didn't say anything about it made it even more embarrassing… I could just die. *Come on, read the room! Say something like, "We both came together, huh?" and act cheerful about it!*

Oh! This would be a really good time for me to faint. I really should just check out right now.

Although my entire body was flushed and trembling, Lucas showed no mercy. He reached out to gently touch my face, but then jerked it up, forcing me to meet his gaze.

He rubbed his blood-stained thumb against my lower lip, tipping his head to the side with blood still smeared on his upper lip. I couldn't help but admire his inhuman beauty. Then, in a sexy voice, he whispered sweetly into my ear. I didn't think there was a girl in the world who could remain calm at a moment like this.

“…Cece?”

“Um, I couldn’t help it! I was…scared of your finger, but…it felt good and…”

“I couldn’t take it anymore”—I was so embarrassed to finish my sentence I mumbled the rest.

I’m counting on you, Lucas. Now’s your time to read the room!

“……”

What’s with this silence? I can’t take it anymore!

Why did he just freeze? Why isn’t he saying anything?! Wouldn’t anybody be afraid to have a finger in their ass for the first time? It’s only natural to resist, right?! I mean, I admit I was wrong for biting his tongue so hard I drew blood, but still… He did something way worse! And I was really, really scared!

But…but…what if he starts hating me?

All of a sudden, the blood drained from my face and my vision clouded with tears.

I’m afraid. I’m afraid, really afraid!

I’m terrified of him hating me. So much that it makes my heart ache! Just imagining it makes me tremble.

It was like I’d been hit with frost magic—I could feel my insides turning to ice. It felt like my ears had cotton in them and I couldn’t hear his voice anymore.

Don’t hate me. Don’t abandon me. Don’t leave me. No. No. Because I…

“…I love you,” I blurted out.

“…Huh?” His question sounded more like a sigh.

“I-I love you, Lord Lukie…!”

I was so scared I was a total mess. All I could think of was trying to find a way to get through to his heart.

“I-I was scared of your finger and…I didn’t like it… B-but that doesn’t mean I

don’t like you! M-maybe I’ll like it once I get used to it more…so I’ll try to do better next time! P-please don’t hate me, Lord Lukie!”

My wails echoed in the quiet room.

Lucas gently gathered me in his arms, as delicately as if I were a glass figurine. For some reason, the way he touched me felt unsteady. He combed his fingers through my hair but didn’t say a word.

I don’t know how long I cried, but I calmed down after a while. Tears still streamed down my face, but now my flushed body was trembling.

Ugh, why am I such a crybaby? The only difference from earlier is that now my body is bright red. I was worried I might blurt out some other absurd nonsense, so I kept my mouth firmly shut.

Oh no, I said it out loud, didn’t I?! It just slipped out! I can’t believe I confessed! Why now?! There were other things to say, weren’t there?! What were you thinking, Cece?!

The words of the panicked voices inside of my head stabbed at my chest. Because… *Ahh, he still hasn't pulled out of me yet!*

Although I felt like a weight had been lifted from my heart, my mind was now anchored to that unmistakable presence.

That's weird…we just came together, right? But also, I'm a bit concerned since Lucas hasn't moved a muscle… What should I do? What's a girl to do in this situation?!

At any rate, I figured the first thing I should do was pull away from him, so I twisted my body…

"Ahh, mm!"

The tender moan that came out of my mouth sounded like it was from someone else.

Argh! Why is my body so needlessly sensitive?! I covered my mouth with my hand and tried to stifle another moan, but then for some reason he lifted me up with tremendous strength.

"Huh?!"

He pulled himself out of me swiftly and plopped me down right onto his lap, hugging me tightly.

Hey, hey! I can't breathe! My bones are creaking!

"L-Lord Lukie, that hurts…!"

I'm tapping out!

He had my arms pinned, but I struggled to move and desperately thumped his side. Suddenly he parted from me with such force I fell backward from the recoil.

"Eek!" I cried out in surprise as he swiftly threw his arms around my waist.

I couldn't help but feel uneasy when I saw Lucas acting so unusually, burying his face in my shoulder, then staying completely still. Anxious as I was, I couldn't

keep the words from tumbling out. “D-did you not like my confession…?”

I knew it had been impulsive. There were probably better times to say it. Maybe I should’ve set the mood more.

But it was true. I really feel that way. I was desperate! I don’t want to think that I should’ve kept it to myself. I really don’t, but…

I was so nervous I started gasping and my chest tightened. I trailed off and tried to suppress my tears, my face screwing up with tension.

As tears trickled down my face, Lucas suddenly lifted his head. “Huh?”

I was breathless at the sight. There was shock, confusion, pain…and joy all mingled together on his face. The beautiful, pearl-like tears that trickled from his golden eyes reminded me of the full moon.

There was absolutely no sound. No sobs. Just quiet, quiet tears.

How beautiful!

They were so beautiful I reached out to gently touch his cheek. His skin was wet, but the tears were merely droplets. If these were real pearls, they might disappear at my touch. Deep down, I was relieved they weren’t.

I got up on my knees and gently cupped his face. He looked scared, so I wanted him to feel reassured and to believe my feelings, so I kissed away the tears from his wet eyes. I showered his whole face with little kisses. Then I brought my lips close to his, and like I was making some sort of sacred vow…

“I love you,” I said as I pressed my trembling lips onto his.

The next day, after we slept in each other’s arms…

A gentle voice pulled me out of my slumber. My blurred vision gradually grew clearer, and I felt a rush of emotions—and shyness—wash over me as I made eye contact with Lucas.

I thought my heart stopped for a moment…

Here was a figure perfected by God. His skin was so soft, his voice so sweet, his sensuality so overflowing it was like he was trying to seduce every woman in the world. And all that seemed to gather in his golden eyes.

And this divine masterpiece—I mean Lucas—kissed me good morning.

Wait—this is Lucas, right? I'm not mistaken? I can't be sure, he's so gorgeous it's making me dizzy. The sunlight streaming through the window only added to his otherworldly aura.

Could anyone blame me for being a little overwhelmed by a kiss from such an incomparable beauty?

I rubbed my sleepy eyes and focused on my fiancé's face, which had already caused quite a stir inside of me first thing in the morning.

"Good morning, Lord Lukie…" I said with a shy smile, but for some reason the ethereal beauty remained frozen with a smile on his face. "L-Lord Lukie?"

"…!"

Oh, his shoulder jerked. But as soon as I noticed that, he turned his gaze away and…

Huh? Why is he covering his mouth with his hand? And why are his ears so red?

"Ahh, I can't," he said.

Can't? Can't wait?

Before I could ask, he pulled me into his embrace and buried his face into my shoulder, making me flinch at how warm his breath was.

Wait! No. No way!

"Hold on… This is embarrassing…"

"Mm…"

No, no! Not yet! I'm the one who needs to wait!

Clutching onto me and making those noises with even his ears bright red was totally unfair. *Oh, so now he acts like this?! What happened to that suave aura from before, like he was some sort of expert at unsettling people with his charm?!*

No, no, no! I refuse to succumb! It's contagious!

"W-Word Wukie…"

Oh, no! I got too flustered by the sheer contrast in his behavior and ended up stumbling over my words!

He stared at me in silence.

I could only do the same.

That's enough silence! Stop being quiet! Laugh or joke or do something!

As I sat there, speechless, memories of the night before flooded back. I still couldn't believe I confessed my love at such an awkward time. Our feelings are mutual and now here I was, skin bare and hair a mess, tangled up in the sheets while Lucas was already dressed in his knight's uniform, looking too magnificent for words! Just a moment ago he was so shy he hid his face against my shoulder, but now he mustered up the courage to kiss my neck…

Where had this boldness come from?!

Mayday, mayday! My system is overheating! I urgently need assistance!

My brain scrambled to call an emergency meeting, but I could spare it no attention as Lucas breathed deep and then called my name.

"Cece… Cecilia…"

"Y-yesh?"

Yesh?! Calm down, Cece! We're trying to be serious here! Ugh, I'm so nervous my heart feels like it's going to come out of my mouth and I'm sure my whole body is red, not just my face, and I can't stop shaking and I don't know what to do anymore!

Why had Lucas recovered so quickly? What kind of technology allowed a person to regain their composure with just one breath? How do you do it?! *Just a moment ago you were totally embarrassed!*

"About yesterday…"

"…!"

He's just making sure. It's only natural, right?

"I-it wasn't a dream, right?" He furrowed his brow a little, and the way his golden eyes wavered took my breath away.

The light in his eyes was a spectrum. I saw anxiety, fear, anticipation, hope, pleading. And melting into it: love and devotion.

He reached out to me and laced his fingers through mine, seeking an answer. His large hand trembled slightly in mine.

I stared at him unblinking, refusing to miss even the slightest flicker of emotions, and moved my quivering lips to reassure him.

"It…wasn't a dream."

Please get through to him. Trust me. Don't feel insecure.

"I-I love you, Lord Lukie…"

These words may not be enough to answer all the feelings you've given me, but I'm going to try to reciprocate. I love gazing at your profile. I love the quiet look in your eyes when you swing your sword. I love the way your big hands gently hold me like I'm something fragile. I love the way you soften your eyes when we look at each other. I love your deep voice whispering your love to me. I love your intense possessiveness of me. I love all of you.

I adore all of you.

I squeezed his hand in return and poured out everything from my overflowing heart into the look I gave him.

He gasped, and his beautiful face contorted. "Really…?" he murmured, and I

longed for him to believe me.

“I love you,” I said as I squeezed his hand with both of mine, then kissed them.

Lucas grinned and then gave me a rough, nibbling kiss.

“Haah, nngh…”

“C-Cece, Cecilia…!”

I love you. I love you!

He squeezed me tightly as his tongue pressed sweet nothings right into mine, and I frantically tried to respond.

“I love you, Cecilia! Love you!”

“Yes, Lord Lukie! I love you too!”

He sucked on my tongue as if savoring it, and I watched closely as the silver threads that connected our tongues thinned and disappeared. Lucas licked the corner of my mouth and tipped my chin up so I would swallow down the saliva we exchanged.

Giving in to his coaxing, I swallowed. I couldn’t say I was keen to taste his spit, but he looked so expectant that I did it anyway.

And it was like honey, like a sweet poison that burned my throat.

At the same time, such bliss burned in my heart that it was like it was on fire, and tears began streaming down my face. I’m sure that it wasn’t my imagination that his golden eyes were wet too.

His tears were so beautiful, I wanted to see them again. I took a deep breath and gently reached out to Lucas as he stroked my hair. His golden eyes were shrouded behind his dark blue locks, which shone azure in the sunlight. He reached out and grabbed my hand.

Is it just me, or did the atmosphere suddenly change? Before I could think about it, he kissed my fingertips and then my palm. He dug his teeth lightly into

my wrist, and I was so surprised I tried to jerk my arm away.

Heat rose in my cheeks, just as his lips climbed up my arm, so I called out to him. He inclined his head and peered at me from beneath his long lashes, then whispered, “You don’t want to, Cece?”

“I-I didn’t say that…”

I-I won’t protest if you lightly nip me or bite me. And the fact that I think that now is scary! Wait, that’s not important right now! I feel like my seductiveness is rising to the surface… Hold on, those moist eyes of his don’t mean he’s hot and bothered, right? Right?!

Hey, why is he pushing me down on the bed? What’s he up to… Don’t be so rough!

Even though the room was filled with bright sunshine, a carnal hunger seemed to cloud the air, and Lucas’s eroticism was cranked up to the max. I immediately broke out into a bashful sweat.

“Can I?” Lucas rumbled.

“C-can you…what?”

He climbed on top of me, his whisper in such a deep voice that it seemed to shake the room. I couldn’t take my eyes off of him.

He pinned one of my hands above my head, and a shiver ran through my hips as he licked my vulnerable underarm.

“Mmph!” I suppressed the moan that almost leaked out with the back of my hand and Lucas chuckled. He kept nibbling at me, poking me with his tongue, and sucking on my skin, tracing the arch from my arm to my side.

Since I couldn’t move my arm, it felt strangely sensitive, and I felt my nipples harden and poke against the sheets.

And if I knew it, then Lucas definitely knew it.

“Does that mean I have permission, then?”

Smile.

Is it really my fault that my eyes flew open like saucers when I saw him beam so radiantly at me?

I mean, that wasn't permission or anything! I just reacted a little bit! Could you please stop acting like I gave the thumbs-up sign here?!

"Wa—eek!"

"Your body is so honest and adorable."

He pinned me with his gaze, then suddenly flicked my nipples through the sheets, eliciting a high-pitched moan from me. I turned bright red and screamed, "And whose fault do you think that is?!"

The look on his face when he heard that… His eyes narrowed and his mouth quirked up into a smirk.

Uh-oh, I've really done it now. Don't take it to heart! I felt like Mini Cece was patting me on the back encouragingly.

Eeeek! I clamped my hand over my mouth as my eyes filled with tears.

"Mine, obviously," Lucas said with a smug laugh. "That's why I have to take responsibility for it, right?"

I couldn't help but shudder at his criminal behavior. He started teasing my body, gradually stoking its heat, so I frantically said, "What about work?!"

And then, with perfect timing, Finn called to Lucas from the other side of the door.

"Finn, today I'm… I'm going to be a little late today," Lucas said in response.

"I've already contacted them. We can postpone it until noon," came the somewhat amused response.

"Fiiiiiinn!" I screamed, and who could blame me? It was only natural!

For some reason, Lucas looked at me with wide pupils and said, "…Cece? Did you just call another man's name in my bed? Are you trying to make me even

more jealous?” with an evil smile on his face.

“N-no?!”

I didn’t mean it to sound like a question, but an assertion! I shook my head in denial, but Lucas suddenly clamped his hand down on my mouth and began to peel off my sheet as drool spilled onto his fingers.

The obscene vision of this divine beauty with saliva drippling all over his fingers had me aghast, but at the same time my heart was pounding as if thrilled by it!

No more! I can’t do it anymore, but if I resist, I know that it’ll be even worse!

As if sensing my resignation, Lucas handed down my death sentence.

“Cece, spread your legs.”

I know that if I don’t, it’ll just get worse! I have no choice!

“……”

I closed my eyes and gritted my teeth. I held my breath and slowly spread my legs.

“Mmm!”

He slipped his fingers into me and rubbed me on the inside while he stroked my sensitive nub with his thumb. My weak body shuddered from the stimulation, and my will could only cry, “Good luck!” inside of my mind to lift my spirits.

“Nngh, mmph! Mmmph!”

“I’m sorry. But I just can’t let anyone else hear your adorable, naughty moans.”

“Haah, haah, mmph! Mmph, mmph! Nnngph!”

I needed to endure it until he couldn’t sense the maids’ presence outside of the room. Lucas apologized without a hint of remorse, and since he’d silenced me, I couldn’t even utter a complaint.

I moaned and gasped, heaving ragged breaths against his palm, lamenting this mystifying situation as he made me cum over and over again.

I heard the maids' excited conversation as they departed: "Woo-hoo, it's roast goose tonight!"

"Elsa, no running in the hallway… Hey Anna, do you remember where the crackers are?"

"Oh, Finn made them last night. Right, we need to set up some snacks, a pitcher of water, a basin, and towels in front of the bedroom."

"Think twenty crackers should be enough? I'll see if I can adjust the master's departure time a bit more."

Meanwhile, I couldn't help but shed a tear at the peculiarly high quality of the duke's household staff.

Chapter Four

I WASN'T ABLE TO EAT ROAST GOOSE—AND IT WAS ALL because I hadn't seen Lucas since that morning.

Having been literally fucked into unconsciousness, I slept like a log and woke up to find out that two days had passed. When I finally woke up, my eyes were swollen, and I was greeted by a torrent of apologies from my three flustered maids. They waited on me hand and foot, which left me a little confused. On top of that, the unnerving way Hannah kept watch over the three, with a suspicious aura about her, made me feel ill at ease.

"Lady Cecilia, are you feeling unwell at all?"

"We tried healing you every few hours, but you didn't wake up. We were so worried, especially imagining what would happen if… I mean, we were truly concerned…"

"Roast goose…"

"We can make roast goose next time. We truly, truly apologize for everything…!"

"We never expected Lord Lucas to be so reckless…"

"Indeed, no one can break through Lord Lucas's triple defense barrier, so we had no choice but to give up immediately. We're so sorry!"

Yes, there are plenty of things to nitpick about this. But what really caught my attention was how casually they treated me. And what was the fuss over the roast goose?

I could tell they cared for Lord Lucas, and I was grateful for how much they were rooting for us, but were they *that* hung up on serving roast goose? And weren't they worried about their own portion? And wasn't Elsa being a bit too candid?!

I understood why they couldn't break through Lucas's defenses, but it's not okay to apologize to someone without a hint of remorse. They said it was unacceptable, but even if it was a lie, they should've tried a little harder to hide it…

"Lord Lucas, and Finn, and I have given these three a thorough tongue-lashing. Lady Cecilia, I must implore you once again to not abandon Lord Lucas!" Hannah seemed sad for some reason, but my eyes were glued to her hands.

Why does she have that huge sword with her? No doubt about it, you were the one who raised Lucas…

While I contemplated Hannah's new, or rather unbelievable side, she explained what had happened. Apparently, several events had escalated and come to a head. According to her, Lucas had been sent on a mission by Prince Leon, which had kept him swamped long after work hours, and he ended up having to stay overnight at the palace.

Administrative duties kept Lucas busy before campaigns, and when he returned, they occupied him until he was summoned again. With all that on his plate, he'd had no time to return to the ducal household. Or rather, he'd been detained by the vice-captains of the Black and White Knights, who, along with the Imperial Order, were under strict orders from Prince Leon to not let him go home.

Still, she told me that when Lucas heard I'd woken up, he managed to incapacitate his minders before attempting to escape through a window to briefly return home. But once Prince Leon found out, he summoned all the members of the Imperial and Chivalric Orders. Following the commotion, rumors spread around the palace like wildfire, speculating on what could possibly have required experts in both hand-to-hand and magical combat to gather together.

Thank goodness rumors didn't spread about Prince Leon's attempt to capture the second prince, who had fled from a fourth-floor window. That could've

been truly unfortunate…

Not only that, but apparently, Felix had been placed under house arrest at the royal villa. After he'd so openly defied His Majesty's decree, it was decided the former second prince couldn't be allowed to roam freely. Supposedly, he would be released once deemed to be reformed. In addition, unbeknownst to him, Felix had been subjected to castration magic to prevent any chance of offspring with Lady Mia.

Lady Mia had received permission to marry Felix, but afterward, for some reason, she tried approaching Lucas and then later wound up making love to the son of the Azure Knights captain. Faced with charges of treason against both the former and current second princes, she narrowly avoided imprisonment by fleeing to the royal villa, where she begged Felix for forgiveness and escaped unscathed.

I don't think I have to explain just what I thought about Lady Mia in light of all this, but was Felix really okay with that? Apparently, I wasn't the only person raising an eyebrow at the news, because more and more Azure Knights were protesting their assignment at the royal villa.

Anna and the others also apologized for failing to deal with Mia and her foolish heroine complex, but honestly, I was scared of her!

Just drop it! I don't need to see the dark side of the ducal household!

Still, I couldn't help but heave a sigh. Lady Mia really didn't know when to give up. It seemed that she still believed she was the heroine according to the game's script, and her behavior was so out of this world that she might never again find a place in noble society.

And if we were going by the game's script, she'd already condemned me and ended up with Felix, so it was only natural that the conventions of reality would apply from now on. Speaking of which, how dare she try to get with Lucas? That was totally unforgivable.

I'm sure she probably thinks, "Lucas is my childhood friend, so he cherishes me

above all. All I have to do is ask for him to choose me instead and he will!"

But wasn't it extremely disrespectful to Lucas to use him as a rebound after Felix? She had been using Lucas this whole time, and then chose Felix!

I'm Lucas's fiancée! You don't get those privileges just because you're his childhood friend! It's not that I don't trust Lucas, but we should put an end to that childhood sweetheart relationship. Who even came up with such a backstory? Get down on your knees right now and apologize to the villainess (me)!

Seriously, I wanted to crush Lady Mia the next time I saw her, so utterly that she'd never be able to come crawling back. I was ready to use all my power to ensure she never dared lay a hand on Lucas again—preferably without him finding out. Just the thought of him hating me if he knew sent shivers down my spine. Love truly was complicated!

Eek, I feel like I can play the role of the villainess even better now than compared to when I was with Felix.

Still though, I felt so lonely.

It's been five days already since I've seen Lucas.

Since I could get up on my own, Hannah and the others had been updating me on the current situation. As news of the decree spread, letters began arriving from friends of mine, and Mother came to the ducal mansion to bring my belongings, such as dresses and jewelry, which I would need when attending the royal palace's soirees that would be held soon. Lady Anika, of course, still visited as usual.

Although my days were relatively peaceful, I lay alone in bed every night. As Lucas's scent gradually faded away, I couldn't help but yearn for his embrace.

I want to see his gentle smile. I want to see his softened, golden eyes. I want to hear his deep, soothing voice. I want him to kiss me, to hold me tight. All the marks he imprinted on me are fading, so I want him to make new ones. I want

him to fuck me so good that I can't think of anything else but him, to the point where I… W-wait, what am I thinking?!

What's happening? Why did I just think that?!

"N-no, it wasn't me! This is all Lucas's fault! It's his fault since he hasn't come back yet!"

I felt my cheeks burn with embarrassment for entertaining such improper thoughts. I punched the pillows with my fists while I continued to blame Lucas.

"Excuse me, but I've brought your nightgown. Are you all right, Lady Cecilia? What's this about something being Lord Lucas's fault?"

"Oh, Anna," Kate said, "Lady Cecilia is just feeling lonely. That's only understandable since Lord Lucas been away at the palace for five days now."

"I heard Lord Lucas is growing more and more frustrated by the day, and so tensions are constantly rising among the Imperial Order. But we're so glad you love each oth—argh!" Elsa suddenly flopped onto the floor and twitched.

As she mentioned "loving each other," heat rushed to my cheeks and I averted my gaze from Anna's tender eyes and Kate, who had just lowered her hand after striking Elsa.

"W-well, it's not like that. I-I was just wondering about Lord Lukie…" I said, making excuses.

"I'm sure Lord Lucas is feeling lonely too, Lady Cecilia," Anna said.

"Yes, indeed. But you'll surely see him at tomorrow's soiree. Let's dress you up so beautifully you captivate Lord Lucas more than anyone else!"

"That's right. This is our chance to flaunt that sexy body in a pure, enchanting w—oof!"

"Watch where you're stepping, Kate."

"I know, Anna."

Elsa just went "Oof!" …Is she okay? She'd taken a swift kick from Kate, whose

strength was on par with any soldier's. *Oh, she's still twitching, so she's not dead yet. That's a relief. I won't go so far as to tell her she had it coming, but that line about my sexy body was uncalled for, so she was kinda asking for it.*

To be fair, the neckline of the evening gown did feel a bit tight around my breasts, but that was it.

As Anna helped me change, I glanced at my body and couldn't help but consider the shape of the dress when I saw the faint remnants of the marks Lucas had left. "I wonder if they'll be visible in that dress?" I wondered out loud.

The soiree was a celebration of the firedrake's defeat, and would serve to mark Lucas's ascension to the position of second prince. And since I was his future princess consort, my attendance was, naturally, mandatory. Still, I didn't want to appear overly presumptuous in my role as fiancée, so I chose a dress with an elegant, yet modest design.

Since the dress's neckline would make it challenging to conceal the marks Lucas had left, I thought something with more coverage would be better. I glanced at Anna with that thought on my mind.

"Don't worry, Lady Cecilia. They're so faint now that we can easily use makeup to conceal them. Also, classic dresses are preferred at royal soirees, so this one is the best option."

"Not only that, but the color will remind everyone of Lord Lucas, so that'll keep other men around you in check. But most importantly, he'll be delighted!"

"I see…"

Many of the dresses they'd prepared were flashy, but I noticed this one, with its subdued two-tone color scheme of a cream for the bodice and lapis lazuli for the skirt, because it reminded me of Lucas.

When I tried it on, the color matched my skin tone perfectly, and it fit me like a glove. I couldn't help but think this dress would be perfect for my first time attending a party with Lucas—and for our first dance together.

I found myself aching to see Lucas when suddenly Anna's urgent voice reached my ears.

"Lady Cecilia, could you please tell me what you're thinking right now?"

"Um, well…"

"You're not aware of the expression on your face, are you?"

"Expression…?" I gave her a look of confusion and Anna opened her mouth as if to say *"You're gonna be trouble!"*

"Lady Cecilia, your current expression could bewitch absolutely anyone. But it's not just that; it's so powerful that it might make someone surrender their sense and let instinct take over."

"Ah, I see…"

"It's possible—well, certain—that countless men will fall head over heels for you…"

Please don't call it powerful, like my face is some sort of weapon!

Though how did Elsa recover so easily?

"Um, what kind of expression did I have on my face?"

"The cutest, loveliest blushing face, just dripping with sensuality!"

"Elsa, your voice is too loud! Though I must admit, that's an apt description."

The maids gave a thumbs-up to each other, but I couldn't help but voice my confusion.

"S-sensuality?!" I was shocked. Was I sensual? Had Lucas's excess sex appeal rubbed off on me? I began to worry what might unfold the day after next, but Elsa's voice cut through my train of thought.

"For sure! You're positively oozing sensuality right now! A demure beauty with flushed cheeks and a troubled sigh always makes the men go—argh!"

"Why do you always take it too far, Elsa…"

A hint of terror gripped me as Kate pulled up the hem of her skirt and assumed a fighting stance. I averted my eyes, saving me from seeing what she did next…

I wasn't exactly sure what happened, but next thing I knew, Elsa was blown away somewhere. But she had to still be alive, right? I had to wonder what kind of training the servants here had to endure.

"In any case, you must get that expression off your face or the soiree will turn into a bloodbath instead."

"Agreed. Normally, Lord Lucas might approve of your beauty being appreciated, but he will decidedly *not* be normal tomorrow…"

Wait, why does that sound so extreme?! If Lucas isn't going to be himself, does that mean there really will be a massacre?

"The jealousy of the hero will be terrifying indeed." Elsa seemed to be satisfied, as if she'd said something really clever. But, wait, how exactly had she recovered again *already?!* It was so irritating!

"But if she isn't aware of it, there's nothing we can do, Anna."

"That's true. It's quite troublesome."

Anna and Kate commiserated together while I felt so guilty I ended up blurting out my true feelings, which ended up making me want to lecture the Cece who was in charge of my body…

"Um, I just felt lonely and wanted to see him… I'm sure everything will be fine once I see him tomorrow."

"You're lonely?"

"You wanted to see him?"

"Oh, that's so sweet!"

"Shut up."

"Sorry."

Anna seems like a different person now. No, it must be my imagination. I must be tired. I should go to bed soon.

"Lady Cecilia?" Anna said.

"Oh!"

"In other words," Kate added, "you're desperate to see Lord Lucas, aren't you?"

"Ugh…"

"Which means you're going through Lord Lucas withdrawal?" Elsa chimed in.

"Oof…"

The maids are really getting to me! I'm so embarrassed I don't even know where to look!

As the maids pressured me with their smiles, tears welled up in my eyes and I trembled.

"Well, have I got just the thing for you!" Elsa declared. "Ta-daaa! It's Lord Lucas's shirt!"

She fluttered a familiar white shirt in the air, and, for a moment, the room fell silent.

Where did she get that? She pulled it out of nowhere! And why is this a good thing? I had so many questions, but before I could say anything, she draped the shirt around my shoulders, and I was transfixed by its faint scent…

"Oh, is that what that was?" Anna said.

"Now I understand why Finn came rushing back," Kate said.

"Haha! It's straight from the master's body… Okay that's not entirely true, but if you wear this when you go to sleep, I guarantee you'll have sweet dreams, Lady Cecilia! Then you won't be so lonely anymore!"

I wished I could silence Elsa's cheerful voice, but I could only blush and clutch the shirt tightly.

Grinning, the three maids quickly replaced my nightgown with Lucas's shirt and then decided to throw me for a loop by telling me, "It seems Lord Lucas also has one of your nightgowns, so perhaps wearing his shirt will let you meet him in your dreams."

Why'd they have to go and say that?! Now I'll have trouble sleeping!

Since I was the future princess consort, I attended the soiree at the palace as a member of the royal family. Furthermore, it seemed there was an emphasis this time on showing off my role as Lucas's fiancée, so I entered alongside Prince Leon through the doorway reserved for royalty.

"It's nice to see you again, Prince Leon. I hope we have a pleasant evening."

"It has been a while indeed, Lady Cline. But…I'm astonished. You are as beautiful as an ethereal, moonlit iris tonight."

"Goodness, thank you for the lovely compliment, Your Highness. I must say, however, you are far more beautiful than I."

We exchanged the usual pleasantries, my hand in his, while we waited to make our entrance. The royal family were indeed a group of beauties. They had a different kind of beauty from Lucas, each exuding elegance in their elaborate attire. Prince Leon had his short golden hair neatly combed back today, and his cool golden eyes sparkled under the light of the chandelier. I meant it when I said he looked more beautiful than me.

"As modest as ever, Lady Cline. I only dressed up like this because I'm obliged to, as royalty, and I can't stand to be ignored by the young ladies. However, tonight you seem to be a flower blooming only for Lucas. Well, uh…"

"What's the matter?"

"Er, um… Perhaps you should take a deep breath, Lady Cline. It's not a good idea for us to enter like this."

"Hm? Is there something wrong?"

I'd already double-checked with Anna and the others in the dressing room. Anxious, I inadvertently reached for the necklace Lucas gave me. It was a citrine pendant that was the same color as Lucas's eyes and it hung from a chain of pearls, serving as my good luck charm for tonight.

Prince Leon glanced behind himself looking troubled, and I followed his gaze to see Anna and Kate wearing the palace's servant's attire.

"There's no problem at all, Lady Cecilia," Anna assured me. "Prince Leon, please take care of our lady until Lord Lucas arrives."

"What do you mean?"

"The Promise Mark's protection is very effective, considering its overwhelming destructive power…" Anna explained. "But if spears start flying, the soiree could end in disaster."

Kate chimed in next. "We've already made improvements, but it seems you react instinctively when Lord Lucas is mentioned…"

Wasn't this a soiree? What was with thus sudden talk of "spears" and "destructive power"?… *Oh.*

"Um…I'm sorry? …Ah, yeah. This is bad."

"Now do you understand?" Anna asked.

"It's the powers of sweetness and softness that make one instinctively want to reach out and pluck a rose despite the thorns that protect it," Kate said.

"That's a pretty impressive analogy," Prince Leon said. "But sorry, I don't think I can handle this one alone."

Um, Prince? The way you're talking about me is a bit rough…

"We'll be by your side as well," Anna said. "And Lord Alphonse and Lady Anika will be coming soon, so I think it'll probably be all right."

"I understand we're in a state of high alert, but couldn't you have done something else, like tone down her hairstyle or dress a bit more?"

Prince Leon sounded like he was blaming them, and Anna and Kate returned his gaze unflinchingly.

“The spirit of the maids has been ignited…”

“Excuse me,” Kate huffed, “but every detail, from her stray wisps of hair, down to the extent of her decolletage, was meticulously calculated in this masterpiece of an ensemble!”

“The servants from the ducal family are truly incorrigible!”

Uh-oh, even Prince Leon has a sharp tongue… Even someone as level-headed as him has a tough time dealing with them, huh? Somehow, it feels like we could really commiserate together about this.

“But Prince Leon was praising Lady Cecilia, wasn’t he?” Anna said.

“Yes, aren’t you tempted to just reach out to her, Your Highness?” Kate added.

At their words, Prince Leon looked at me.

“…Ow!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, my.”

“Goodness!”

“Your Highness! I’m deeply sorry!”

Eek! I accidentally repelled the crown prince with my Promise Mark! I hope I don’t end up getting charged with treason for this!

“Even the crown prince can’t let his guard down, it seems…”

“I’d expect nothing less from the Promise Mark, a truly audacious spell…”

“You’re the ones who are all so audacious!” Prince Leon shot back. “Well then, Lady Cline, would you allow me the honor of escorting you for a bit tonight?”

“Yes, I’d love to. Prince, I’m terribly sorry for the trouble…”

Being a princess consort candidate with a Promise Mark is very challenging…

I apologized because I didn't want to be separated from Lucas, and I noticed the prince had a slight smirk on his face as he pretended to kiss the back of my hand.

"It's not a problem. I'm the one who forced him into the campaign this morning. Fortunately, he seems to have already returned, and I'm sure he'll come out as soon as he's ready. I wonder how he'll react when he sees you in that dress. I'm looking forward to it."

Wow, Prince Leon is wonderful. Is it because he's the crown prince, or is it his mature demeanor? Either way, I can't help but be captivated by his confident smile.

Lucas seemed to have an otherworldly beauty that caused a stir, but Prince Leon was more dignified and quite popular as well. I heard there were still young ladies vying for him. That princess of the neighboring kingdom he was betrothed to must've been quite worried.

While shifting through these thoughts while waiting for the doors to open, I suddenly heard chilling warnings from the maids standing behind us.

"Indeed, Your Highness. It's admirable how quickly you recovered. However, if you do anything untoward to Lady Cecilia, even if you accidentally reach out to her, we shall report it to Lord Lucas right away."

"If you don't want to be the first victim, keep an appropriate distance."

Prince Leon shrugged his shoulders and glanced at me. "Threatening the crown prince? House Herbst's maids truly are outrageous," he muttered softly.

I'm truly sorry about all this…

Anyway, it'd been a long time since my graduation party, so I had to do my best at this soiree, among all these with nobles dressed in their finest.

The soiree began with pleasantries, and after the obligatory pleasantries with several nobles, I took a quick break before it was time to dance. His Majesty and

the queen had already left, as if to say they were above dancing, and technically, as a member of the royal family, I was expected to be one of the first to dance.

"Lady Cline, I'd like to ask you to dance with me, but that wouldn't be fair to Lucas. Moreover, I can't ask you to dance when you have such a sad look on your face."

Prince Leon shrugged with a teasing look on his face, surprising me.

"Um, what do you mean…?"

"You truly are clueless, aren't you? I do believe you're the only woman in this room who would look sad when the crown prince asked them to dance. You only want to dance with Lucas, isn't that right?" he laughed.

My cheeks instantly flushed at his teasing, and I was mortified at how transparent my emotions were, despite my training to remain gracious and composed as a marquis's daughter. To think I'd been so obviously uninterested in dancing with anyone but Lucas! I tried to calm my flustered heart by touching the citrine necklace and offering the prince my best smile.

"Oh, no… That won't do, Lady Cline. Hey! Has anyone seen Lucas yet?"

"Lady Cecilia, please turn your body slowly toward Prince Leon so others won't see your expression," Anna advised.

"I think he'll be here soon, but this is getting risky," Kate said. "Several people have started to come this way."

I was so confused by the sudden tension in the air that I could only do what I was told. *Why is everyone acting like this is such a big deal? If the prince didn't invite me to dance, wouldn't that discourage other men from trying to do so? And I don't think a little chitchat would make Lucas turn the soiree into a bloodbath…*

But being told "That won't do" by someone as handsome as Prince Leon when I was about to smile at him honestly hurts a bit. It makes me afraid Lucas might

say the same thing to me.

I heaved a sigh, as if all the sadness in my heart might be flushed out with it.

"See, that's why it's no good, Lady Cline," Prince Leon said. "It's gotten even more powerful! What are you going to do about this?!"

"We can't help it. After all, she's clueless!" Anna said.

"Just one sigh and the number of people on their way over here has doubled! Look at the ones who are blushing and remember their faces," Kate instructed.

Once again, he says I'm no good, and "it" is getting powerful! Why is the prince being so harsh? And how does he still manage to look so cheerful even when he's clearly agitated? How does he manage that?

Kate's comment is troubling too. Why would she need to remember faces? What does she intend on doing with that information? I'm afraid I might've touched on yet another dark secret of the ducal family…

"I don't know what you're thinking, Lady Cecilia," Anna said, "but please cease looking up at the prince from beneath your lashes with your head titled up like that. It could endanger the survival of the entire royal family."

"…Hey, wait! I don't want to die from something like this!" the prince cried out in protest.

"As you said that your face grew a little pink, Your Highness. And now more and more people are gathered…"

"Don't be ridiculous. Say, Lady Cline. What's going on between you and Lucas? You seem different from before."

Hm, the prince's expression has changed a bit. His cheeks seem flushed… Wouldn't the color drain from your face if you were afraid to die? And how does he know that…that something happened with Lucas? Am I that different now?

Lucas's position is the same as Felix's was; the only difference is that I have feelings for Lucas. What if it has to do with that incident?! I'm not really oozing sexuality right now, am I? Could I even manage a thing?! There are so many

things I don't understand because I'm a novice in love… Someone please tell me!

"Women change because of love, Your Highness," A familiar voice intoned. Then turning to me, Lady Anika said, "Good evening, Lady Cecilia."

Oh, the radiant goddess of the night has descended. You're as beautiful as ever. Truly a feast for the eyes.

A man was gently escorting Lady Anika, and I suddenly remembered who he was.

"Good evening, Lady Anika." The man stood placidly by her side, apparently an escort, and I suddenly remembered who he was. "It's been a while since we've seen each other, Marquis Montak."

"Just Alphonse is fine, Lady Cline. I apologize that we couldn't greet you sooner. You're shining so brightly tonight; it was quite a struggle to get to you."

"Heh heh. It was fun watching Leon flail about and panic."

"And I was watching Anika watching him."

"Oh, Al! You're so funny!"

"…Anika, I see you're as catty as usual," Leon said. "And Alphonse, stop gushing over your wife so. It's annoying."

Hm, I could say a thing or two on that topic, but Prince Leon seems to have a handle on things. All these people are so unique…

"Lady Cline, do stop tilting your head like that. Alphonse, stand a little closer this way to hide her."

"Yes, yes. Leon, you're not very reliable."

"Hey, I'm doing my best here."

From the way Alphonse was teasing Prince Leon, they seemed to be quite close. It was a little heartwarming.

"Isn't Lucas digging his own grave by not keeping an eye on her? Uh-oh, there's someone troublesome here." Alphonse glanced off somewhere.

“Troublesome?” Leon said.

“The one I heard rumors about?” Lady Anika added.

Alphonse sighed, and Prince Leon grimaced.

“It’s him,” Alphonse confirmed. “Ugh, he’s already on his way over. Look but don’t look. He’s the tall man with the gray hair in front of the terrace.”

How do you look at someone without looking at them?

“Oh, he’s pretty handsome,” Anika said.

“Anika, no cheating,” Alphonse warned.

“Good luck, Lady Cecilia.”

“Don’t push yourself too hard, Lady Cecilia.”

“Sorry to interrupt,” Prince Leon said, “but I don’t think Lady Cline can even see him from this angle.”

“What?”

I can’t?! Well, Alphonse said to look without looking, so I tried to casually catch him in the corner of my eye, but where was he?!

“Sorry. It’s my fault, so can you please stop making that expression?”

“You’re really gritting your teeth, Prince Leon.”

“Nothing would shame me more than if I got repulsed by the Promise Mark again.”

“Goodness, are you and the second prince in a battle for Lady Cecilia’s affections? Sounds like that could get dirty. And kind of fun too!” Anika teased.

“Anika, will you knock it off? You know if that really happened it wouldn’t be fun at all. It would be a tragedy! The prince would become a corpse!”

I was so embarrassed that I glared at the prince a little and he ended up apologizing to *me.* That wasn’t the sort of thing that happened to someone twice, so I felt a little superior…or not. *Wait a second, a corpse? That’s too*

scary!

Just as the conversation was taking this dark turn, Lady Anika intervened. “So, Alphonse, why is that man so troublesome?”

“He covets what belongs to others, especially if he thinks they are on his level and they’re especially possessive. He’s been at the root of several arguments between the knights.”

“Ah, that ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’ mindset…” Kate muttered.

“If only it could just end at *looking* at the grass on the other side,” Alphonse replied with a wry smile on his handsome face.

“He’s the second son of a fairly famous marquis, but he’s quite a good swordsman—not to mention quite dashing—so he always seems to get away with things somehow. Whether it’s because of his conceit or the fact that Marshal Webber praised his swordplay during the last training drills, he seems strangely hostile toward Lukie in particular. He confided to someone close to him that if he had been trained by the marshal this whole time, perhaps he would’ve become the hero instead.”

“He’s really reading too much into the marshal’s compliments, huh?”

“Don’t you know about how he trained a ten-year-old boy for the Imperial Order, grinning the entire time? Despite his gentle appearance, he’s a demon on the inside.”

“Shall we pick a fight over it?”

“I’ll knock him out.”

“Oh, calm down, both of you. Lady Cecilia? What’s the matter?” Lady Anika asked with a smile, and I turned my gaze toward her absentmindedly.

There were many things I found intriguing about this conversation: How people who coveted what others had reminded me of the heroine, Mia. How resenting Lucas seemed quite presumptuous. How maids were quick to quarrel

amongst themselves, yet just as quick to unite against anyone who threatened their family, which was really quite intriguing. And what did they mean, that Marshal Webber was a demon on the inside? There were really so many points that caught my interest, but…

Thinking of people coveting others' possessions reminded me of the heroine, Mia. The fact that he harbored animosity toward Lucas seemed honestly presumptuous. What did it mean, that Marshal Webber is a demon on the inside? The fact that the maids were quick to quarrel and their loyalty was frightening when it comes to their family was also intriguing to me.

"Did Marshal Webber really start training Lord Lukie when he was ten years old?"

Lady Anika's words triggered a sort of flashback for me.

At the same time, something clicked—like a puzzle piece fitting perfectly into place—and then I was certain. I looked at Lady Anika questioningly, but she muttered, "Oh no, that was a slip of the tongue."

"Lady Anika."

"I'm sorry, but I can't answer you. You'll have to ask Lucas that question."

Lady Anika smiled as if she were troubled, covering her mouth with a fan to clearly show that she didn't wish to speak any further. Alphonse hugged her and smiled, and Prince Leon, Anna, and Kate smiled as well.

No one will say it, but I feel like that's my answer… I'm so happy, my vision is all blurry… I blinked, causing the tears to fall down my cheeks.

The suppressed emotions in my heart welled up to the surface, and I frantically tried to stop it, but I couldn't keep my cheeks from flushing or my mouth from trembling. I touched my citrine pendant and looked down…

"Wait, wait. How can it keep getting more and more powerful?!"

"Anika…"

"I'm sorry, Al, but she's even more powerful than I expected. I'm a woman,

and even I'm captivated!"

"Lady Cecilia, please use your fan."

"No, not like that! Hold it up to your mouth and don't sigh."

For some reason Prince Leon and the others started to fuss over me again, pulling me back to my senses.

No matter how excited and happy I felt, I couldn't forget that I was attending the soiree as the future princess consort of the second prince. Any mistakes I made could come back to haunt me, so I needed to stand tall, elegant, and refined… All to make myself worthy of standing by Lucas's side.

With that in mind, I turned toward the party and lifted my face, unintentionally smiling at someone up ahead.

That *someone* widened his eyes.

"…Hey, he's coming this way."

"It's a total misunderstanding. But then again, I can't blame him…"

"Here he comes. Excuse us, Lady Cline." With that, Alphonse raised his hand as the gray-haired man, Lord Rolfe Kummetz, addressed us.

He was definitely a troublesome man, just as Alphonse had said. The moment he turned toward us, everyone nearby stared unabashedly.

The maids murmured among themselves.

"The men appear hostile toward him, and the knights are on alert…"

"The women are giving him quite heated gazes… Although, there seems to be someone with a sad expression among them."

Lady Anika muttered quietly, "Have people looked the other way just because of his family name?" There was a chill in her voice that gave me goosebumps.

The prince seemed slightly taken aback as well. Alphonse blushed, his eyes sparkling when he looked at Lady Anika.

Ahh, I see. Alphonse likes that side of Lady Anika. Honestly, I wasn't expecting her to be his type… So, he likes his women brazen and unconventional!

As those thoughts ran through my head, the man's footsteps quietly approached. He stood before us and gave a knight's salute, then bowed. Alphonse was the first to address him.

"You're a member of the Azure Knights, yes? Lord Kummetz, correct? You're not here on security detail tonight, are you?"

"Vice-Captain Montak, I'm honored you remember me. Today is my day off, but I just had to come and greet Lady Cline and Prince Leon."

"I was just about to ask her for a dance," Alphonse answered. "Prince Leon, Lady Cline, please allow me to introduce you to Lord Rolfe Kummetz, who serves in the Azure Knights."

"I'm Rolfe Kummetz. It's a pleasure to meet you," he said with a smile.

His eyes didn't seem like they were observing me so much as *assessing* me, so I could tell that he was going to be a trouble. He coveted other people's things… and since Lucas was his rival and I was Lucas's fiancée, was I his target as well? He'd probably come over here to gauge his chances with me, but wasn't it a bit too risky of him to even try? After all, I was the future princess consort, a step away from royalty.

And although everyone knew but dared not say it, he should also know that I had a broken engagement with Felix. If my engagement with Lucas were also to be broken, it would be disastrous. So it was only natural for me and those by my side to be cautious of anyone who approached me.

Plus, if he thinks he can win me over, he's got quite the ego!

I already had a very bad first impression of him, but I couldn't let it show on my face. I glanced sideways to see Prince Leon nodding approvingly, then straightened my posture and lifted my chin. Finally, displaying my elegance, I curtsied with a gracious smile.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m Cecilia Cline. Are you the younger brother of Marquis Kummetz?”

“Yes, do you know my brother?”

“His reputation precedes him. I’ve heard he’s a wonderful person who’s established several orphanages in your family’s domain.”

“Well, I’m honored to hear that you are acquainted with his work.”

I was trying to imply that I didn’t know anything about you*!* I let out an inward sigh. It was tough to have an aristocratic opponent who didn’t show any emotion on his face or in his voice.

Naturally, he ignored my feelings and continued.

“In fact, this isn’t the first time we’ve met, Lady Cline. When I was injured during a security operation in the capital, I was taken to the temple where you treated my wounds. I’ve been wanting to thank you for quite some time but hadn’t had the chance to meet you on account of you being the second prince’s fiancée.”

His eyes looked quite sincere, and I couldn’t help but feel a bit impressed.

Whether it was true or not didn’t matter at this point. That he could so casually bring up a past meeting and an earnest desire to thank me was quite impressive.

Could I use this social skill once I become princess consort? It’s fine as long as no one figures it out, right? It could be a good conversation starter. As such trivial thoughts went through my head, I gave a curt reply. “I’m sorry, I don’t remember that. Besides, there’s no need to thank me. It’s only natural to use healing magic when someone is injured.”

I tried to dismiss him with the implication that I neither remembered him nor cared to get further acquainted. Besides, healing people was more like a hobby of mine. And if one were to follow his example, wouldn’t the knights have to go around thanking healers every time they got injured?

If that's all you came for, can we be done now? I opened my fan and smiled, trying to let him know I was done with him, but that only made him smile more deeply.

Oh, I know you. People who react like that at times like this are so persistent!

"I admire your attitude. It must be hard to find time for charity between your obligations as the daughter of a marquis and the future princess consort to the second prince. But it's important for you to enjoy your leisure time as a noblewoman from time to time too."

Leisure time. It's been a while since I've heard that phrase.

As I chewed on that thought, the maids behind me muttered, "In other words, he's asking her out on a date. Uh-oh, someone's getting ahead of himself. Is that the assassination signal, Kate?"

"I think so, Anna. But please refuse, Lady Cecilia. I'll kill him while he's dejected."

I felt myself unintentionally tightening my grip on the fan…

I think there's an assassin dressed in maid's clothing behind me, but is that really okay? The maids might turn this place into a bloodbath before Lucas can! I felt the color drain from my face and hid behind the fan, which I still clutched tightly.

"Would you like to go out with me sometime, Lady Cecilia?" Lady Anika suggested.

Jumping on the chance, I couldn't help but blush and reply, "Of course!"

I wasn't sure if Lucas would let me out of the room, but going out with her sounded fun. Moreover, Lady Anika's interjection was a refreshing breeze amid this burdensome knight's stale blather. Unfortunately, he ignored the hidden rebuke, twisting it into a truly grotesque suggestion.

"Then may I join you as well? Please allow me to escort the two of you lovely ladies."

What is with this guy? Even Lady Anika raised her eyebrow slightly, and I nearly did the same. Meanwhile Alphonse's eyes sparkled same as ever. *Well, that's because they're absorbed with Lady Anika…*

Also, the assassins behind me are nothing but trouble! I heard a veeeery faint "Heehee!" Uh-oh, even Lady Anika seems to be quite incensed, and she was supposed to be my backup… What about Prince Leon?

I was about to ask for help, but ended up clenching the fan again, this time for an entirely different reason.

It seemed like Prince Leon was completely surrounded by women, but when had that happened? *I need a hand, but now he's too busy fending off women? I give him credit for turning them down with that sparkling smile, but that smile is what got him in trouble in the first place!*

I couldn't help feeling a bit irritated with Prince Leon. Then Lady Anika gave the knight her signature smile—the one that didn't reach her eyes.

"Heh heh, Lord Rolfe. My brother Lucas will take care of such things, so there's no need for you to worry about that."

"But I heard that Vice-Captain Herbst had to go on a sudden campaign today. He's the second prince and future hero, so he doesn't have much spare time. Aren't you lonely without him, Lady Cline?"

"…He's not that busy. Right, Prince Leon?"

"Um, yes. It's fine. It's not a problem." Prince Leon looked pale under Lady Anika's cold scrutiny…and desperate to boot.

Was it really accurate to say it wasn't a problem, though? Because the reason Lucas hadn't come back was that Prince Leon had given him too much work. And my cadre of lurking assassins were muttering among themselves things like, "We got you on record," and "It's great that he'll be returning home tonight." If the job is truly overwhelming, I suppose there's no helping it, but still.

After all, Felix never did any work, so Prince Leon had a lot of slack to pick up. It was natural for him to want to rely on Lucas now as he was more competent. I tried to think about this rationally, but the word “lonely” had quickly permeated into my brain and transformed into “longing.”

Then all the emotions I was trying to suppress surged within me.

The other night when I wore Lucas’s shirt with his scent on it, I was embarrassed at first, but happy. I eagerly got into bed and writhed all over like an idiot, entangling myself in his oversized shirt. But then loneliness washed over me and my heart ached. Lucas’s skin always felt moist, so when I wore his cool, dry shirt, it was like evidence that I was all alone.

And I *was* all alone, in that spacious bed in the silent room, with no sign of Lucas. There were no arms to hold me, no deep kisses that took my breath away, no golden eyes filled with madness.

Nothing, nowhere.

All I had was a shirt that faintly smelled of him. I thought, *“If I go to sleep, I’ll wake up and I’ll see him soon.”* But when I woke up, he was still not next to me.

It suddenly felt like the strength from my hand holding the fan had suddenly drained out of me. Then, as the voices of Lady Anika and the others reached my ears, I came to my senses.

“But you’ll need an escort…”

“Lord Kummetz, Lady Cline is the future princess consort and fiancée of the second prince. The Imperial Order will handle the escort detail when she goes out. You don’t need to worry about anything.”

“Lord Rolfe, being kind to women is a virtue, but so is moderation.”

Alphonse suddenly appeared in front of me to hide me from Lord Kummetz. Lady Anika put her hand on my arm and whispered softly, “Hang in there, Lady Cecilia.”

Hang in there? I glanced around cautiously and swallowed hard.

I'd never had so many men staring at me in my life. *Is this what being popular feels like? I don't really know, but am I emanating some kind of charming aura? From where? Where is it coming from?*

I tried to escape from reality, but the assassins behind me were whispering mercilessly.

"Lady Cecilia, just glance to the side and we'll begin the slaughter."

"Yes, Lady Cecilia. Lord Lucas will really kill them. Remember how he didn't even show mercy to his own brother!"

"He would destroy the kingdom for Lady Cecilia's sake!" they murmured, and my heart pounded with fear.

Thanks for the not-so-reassuring advice, assassins! If the newly ascended second prince were to manifest Eckesachs, how grave of an issue would that be? Or rather, could we possibly shrug it off?! If it can be contained to just a scandal within the royal family, that would be a relief, right?! But the thought of the kingdom crumbling due to a scandalous love affair…the responsibility is so heavy; I feel like crying! Any romance this might've had has been drained by the fear!

With teary eyes, my inner self gave a little fist-pump to psyche myself up, but then I heard another terrifying warning from behind that only made me want to cower again.

"Lady Cecilia, even your tears could turn this place into a blood-soaked battleground."

Seriously?! Okay, at times like these, you just have to take a deep breath. Wait, no…there are too many spectators. I can't just suddenly start taking deep breaths. I'm the future princess consort!

Um, um, I need to calm down! Isn't counting sheep supposed to help you do that? Well, I'll try anything at this point. One sheep, two sheep, three sheep…

As I counted sheep to calm my calamitous mind, I tried lifting my face, which

was on the verge of twitching.

My face was probably looking rather pale, and my eyes were filled with tears, but I couldn't worry about that now. I just had to keep up appearances. As long as I didn't cry, it would be okay. Because even if it was because of Lucas that I was crying…what would happen? Would there be a massacre no matter what?!

Completely lost in confusion, I accidentally lifted my gaze once again—and then I held my breath.

Oh no, Lord Kummetz… Why are you looking at me like that?! Wasn't it enough for you to assess me so coldly earlier? Bring it on! Scrutinize me! I'd rather you scrutinize me! Please just scrutinize me like that!

However, Lord Kummetz murmured, "Lady Cline…" in a feverish tone.

Eep! I thought.

"…He fell for it."

"He's a goner, huh?"

"He fell hard. That stare is intense."

"I'd expect nothing less from Lady Cecilia. Even a playboy's powers are nullified when in close range of her. It seems only heartbreak and execution await those who underestimate her."

"Oh sorry, but please take care of things so that no bodies are found. The Azure Knights can handle it as long as it's classified as a disappearance."

I couldn't bear to hear Prince Leon and Lady Anika whisper to each other like that. And something strange was going on with Kate and Alphonse! *What do they mean, only execution awaits? Don't give Lucas even more work! And the fact that even Kate is agreeing is too terrifying!*

This is not *the time for heated gazes, Lord Kummetz! Your life is in danger!*

I desperately tried to dissuade him with my eyes, but then I felt the atmosphere inside the party shift very abruptly. The unusual tension in the air

gradually subsided and I lifted my head to follow everyone's gazes.

There he was, tall and gorgeous, perfectly proportioned, clad in royal attire… and heading straight for me. My heart nearly burst from my chest.

Just five days—five long days—had nurtured the longing for Lucas that now moved my body on its own. Without even thinking, I closed my fan, handed it to Anna, and took a step forward.

I heard Prince Leon's harried voice. "He's glaring at me, but I did what I could, right?"

"Heh heh. He seems quite out of control," Lady Anika said, sounding bemused.

Alphonse sounded somewhat exasperated as he said, "He forgot to smile, despite being the second prince…"

Meanwhile, the maids put in their two cents.

"It's amazing how the crowd parts for him. Look how grim he looks, coming over here. It's causing quite the commotion!"

"Everyone seems to have gotten the wrong idea. Though I guess that would happen with how beautiful Lady Cecilia is and that stare of his."

"I can't wait to see what happens next."

"I'm looking forward to it!"

I heard Lord Kummetz's breath catch in his throat once he followed my gaze.

But it was all just background noise to me.

Alphonse bowed and took a step back. A hand stretched toward me, and I took it without hesitation. The moment Lucas took my hand, I saw his golden eyes, which I had dreamed of for so long, soften. I couldn't help but blush. I knew that such closeness was improper, even if he was my fiancé, but I couldn't resist the urge to gaze back at him.

He kissed the top of my hand and said my name in his low, deep voice.

“Cecilia…I apologize for being late.”

I mustered all my composure to maintain a demure smile.

You can do it, Cece! Even though you’re sweating and trembling for some weird reason, you mustn’t show it! Those years of harsh, strict etiquette training in your youth, they were all for this moment!

No matter how wonderful Lucas is, no matter how handsome and dashing he looks in his formal attire… Even though I’m so happy to be back in his arms after so long. I must never, ever let go of my pride as a noblewoman and the second prince’s fiancée! I mustn’t blush and tremble! Eek, he’s too handsome!

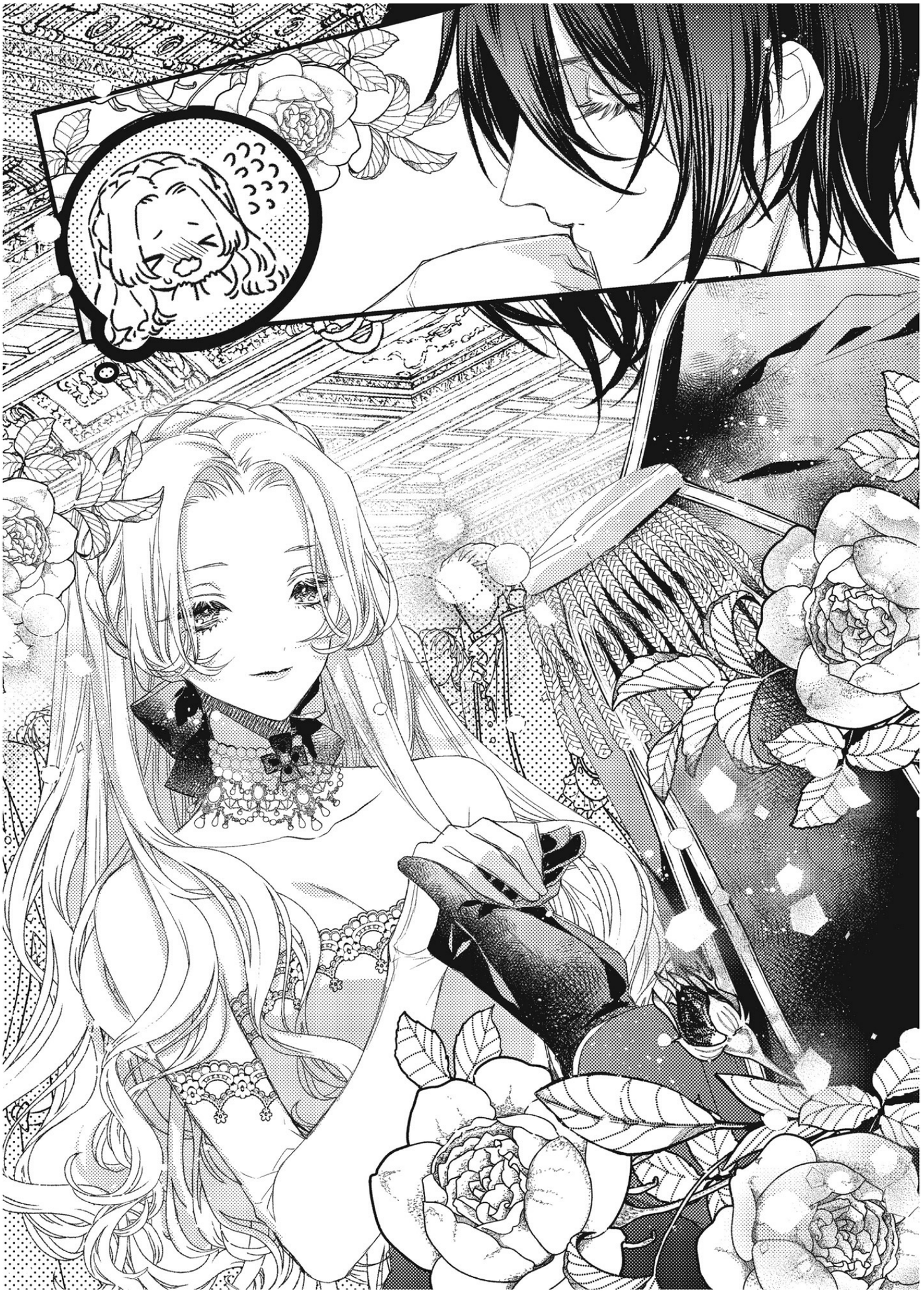
He wore the same formal attire Felix always had, so why did it look so different? It’s the same, right? I recognized the navy jacket and golden embroidery, somewhat resembling a knight’s uniform, but its impact was completely different. Was it a custom-tailored outfit?

Although Felix was probably handsome and dashing when he dressed up too, I couldn’t remember at all because Lucas was so gorgeous I was in a state of shock. *I was engaged to you for six whole years, but sorry about that, Felix!*

Was his gorgeousness so powerful that I was entranced? As a lady, I definitely wanted to avoid that!

You can do it! Don’t let Lucas beat you! As I listened to Mini Cece cheering me on in my mind, I smiled graciously and replied, “Not at all. I’m just relieved that you’re back safely, Lord Lucas.” I sounded a bit clumsy, but who could blame me? No one, that’s who!

It seemed like everyone was watching us with bated breath. Lucas’s lips remained glued to the back of my hand, and then he gently stroked it with his thumb. *Stop that!*



He ignored my bewilderment and anxiousness and wrapped his arms around my waist in an astonishingly natural fashion while he murmured with a sigh, “Ah, I can’t believe it. You’re always beautiful, but tonight you’re *so* beautiful that it’s as if the goddess Freya herself has descended. Cecilia, will you forgive me for being so captivated that I had to reach out and touch you?”

“Goodness…”

It’s a trap! A dangerously handsome trap! An utterly perfect trap! Mini Cece began to panic, and Lucas only added fuel to the fire.

“I’m already dedicated to you and only you,” he said, “so why must you be so cruel as to make me fall even more deeply for you?”

Who is this person? It’s Lucas, right? There’s no way it could be someone else, right? He was the only one I knew with such otherworldly beauty, with hair as dark as night and golden eyes like the dawn. *It must be Lucas, right?*

He should be behaving more like the perfect knight in public, but when I recalled our encounter after our engagement, this was how he acted then too. *Oh, is this him in normal mode? This is how he’s going to act the whole party?*

Ahh, there’s that weird sweat running down my back again! Not to mention my hands. I may be wearing gloves, but even so, that’s too much kissing. Let go of my hand already! Things are really getting heated up around us, so you’re going way too far!

I was frozen with a smile on my face, but Lucas was completely unfazed.

“It seems your beauty drew a few pests to you as well,” he said. Then, in the quietest of voices, he muttered, “I wonder if I should show them the marks that say you’re mine?”

I shivered, keenly aware of his hand hovering at my waist, right at the hem of my backless dress. I lifted up my gaze to him.

And gasped at the sight.

That’s unmistakably Lucas, was the silly thought that came to mind as I held

my breath in front of my own fiancé.

Why are his pupils dilated? Isn't this a bit strange? Shouldn't he have a more tender aura, meeting his fiancée after so long? I mean, I was totally thrilled the moment I saw him earlier!

So why does he have that look of wide-eyed longing on his face? And that smile makes it even scarier! This isn't the reunion I wished for. I know that look; it's just like the first time we met…

My throat tightened as I gazed at his perfect face and his golden eyes, which only made Lucas smile more.

"Cecilia?" he said softly, almost like a sigh. He gently lifted my chin, making my heart flutter with excitement.

W-w-w-w-wait! Could it be that he's asking me for a kiss right here, in this moment?!

He gently caressed my frozen lips with his thumb while stroking my back. I felt him tugging at the strings of my dress, as if demanding something from me.

I could hear the gasps from Prince Leon and the others, the sound cooling my boiling head instantly.

Six years… For six years I've fought on the battlefields of soirees and balls as the second prince's fiancée.

And thanks to that, I knew firsthand that I would be looked down upon at the slightest misstep. Well, I'd been entrapped by Felix and Mia for no real reason. Lucas was clearly attempting a breach of social etiquette, and no matter which option I chose, our future together would likely be bleak.

This is no joke. If I want to stand by his side from now on, I have to handle this situation gracefully, even if the instigator happens to be the fiendish and possessive Lucas!

Smile, Cece. Gracefully and beautifully!

According to Anna and Kate, today I had so much power I was capable of

captivating even the tormented Lucas. And fortunately, he was my beloved fiancé; it was only natural to look at him affectionately. For now, I'd put aside any embarrassment. A woman must be brave, after all! I just had to pull myself together!

"Well, it looks like my efforts to captivate you paid off, Lord Lucas. Would you like to invite me to dance?"

I love you. Only you. I've been waiting for you. I've been patient this whole time. So at our first soiree together, I want to dance with you. You understand, don't you?

I tipped my head slightly and gazed intently up at him.

Violating etiquette at a soiree would get us shunned from high society. Even a kiss on the cheek was not permitted unless you were related, so there was no way I could kiss him as he asked.

And it's out of the question to show the bite mark on my back! I absolutely refuse! I won't show such a mark to anyone other than Lucas! In fact, if someone were to try, even I, a very tolerant person, would slap them away!

Hey. You and I are going to be together forever. So let's be happy, okay? I infused those sentiments into a soft smile, which seemed to take Lucas aback.

He narrowed his golden eyes and let me go from his embrace before respectfully placing a hand over his chest. "May I have this dance, my beloved fiancée?" he asked in a deep, gentle voice.

Although he seemed a bit sheepish, the affection in his sparkling, his golden eyes undimmed.

Oh god, that expression. My heart swelled, confirming that he was indeed Lord Lukie.

"With pleasure," I replied with a smile brimming with emotion and. Then I ever so softly whispered, "I missed you, Lord Lukie." His breath caught for the briefest moment, but even this was a triumph worth celebrating.

We gazed at each other while we danced, and honestly, I think it was the best I'd ever danced.

He truly was a duke's son. Even his dancing seemed overpowered. I was dancing so lightly I felt wings had sprouted from my back. And strangely, I didn't feel tired at all…

As we finished the dance and bowed, I couldn't help but flinch at the applause. Lucas gave me a sweet smile and chuckled, making me feel incredibly frustrated like he was teasing me.

We walked back over to Prince Leon and the others and then went through another round of pleasantries.

Lucas smiled with princely serenity as he held me close with his arm around my waist, making Prince Leon sigh and Lady Anika grin. Anna and the others stood quietly nearby. Every so often they would put a round crystal in one pocket, then take one out from another pocket. I was wondering what they were doing, but once the crowd cleared, Prince Leon asked, which spared me the trouble of doing so.

"Hey, I've been wondering, but is that…a recording crystal?"

A recording crystal… Wasn't that a magical tool that recorded the user's field of vision?

"Oh, I haven't heard that term in a while. Were they always that small?"

"Yes, but this is the new and improved version," Alphonse explained. "It was worth all the effort."

"Thank you for your assistance, Alphonse."

"As you can see, it's super lightweight and compact, yet can record the same amount of data as before. With this, we were able to capture your first dance perfectly."

What amazing technology! Before, it used to be the size of a child's head. I wanted to express my genuine admiration, but there was a troubling word that

caught my attention.

Why would they use such a cutting-edge magical tool to record my dance with Lucas? And they've been fiddling with them for some time now… Were they recording our interactions too? No way… What if the others found out I'd secretly been fawning over him this whole time?!

My cheeks blazed at the thought and Lucas said, "Have you been recording since the beginning of the party?"

"Yes, that's right. We also recorded the faces of the people who were captivated by Lady Cecilia."

"We also recorded those pests who were particularly annoying, so we can report to Finn later." Alphonse smiled.

Lucas nodded in satisfaction and Prince Leon raised his voice in protest. "Wait a moment! That's not acceptable! You shouldn't hunt down people like that!"

"He doesn't need your permission, Leon."

"Shut up, Alphonse! It was just a figure of speech! Anyway, it's really not okay. The Kummetz family is quite powerful, and the current head of the house is no fool. We have the engagement ceremony in a month. Until then, you should avoid any further scandals at all costs."

"Well, Leon's right. Any further scandals would significantly diminish the royal family's influence," Alphonse agreed with a frown.

I looked at Lucas, who was pouting adorably. *Whoops, I slipped up.* My lovesick brain almost led me to dismiss Kate's remark as nonsense. I glanced at Lady Anika, thinking I should be careful.

Ah, just as I thought. Making a thumbs-up sign behind the fan is a little irritating, Lady Anika. Ugh, I'm going to have to do the begging thing again. Despite my embarrassment, I called out to Lucas.

"Lord Lukie, thanks to Lord Kummetz, I realized something. I have a small request for you…"

“What is it, Cecilia?”

Ooh, his eyes, his voice, his expression, they’re all so sweet! My heart is pounding out of control…

“Well, um, since we haven’t gone out together since our engagement, I’d like to go somewhere with you, Lord Lukie. I understand if you’re busy, or if you don’t have time for it. But um, I’d also like to have an outing with Lady Anika, so I’d be really thrilled if we could go together… Please?” I asked with flushed cheeks and a beautiful smile.

Lucas whispered in an ominously low voice, “Leon, can I go home right now?” and then he pulled me closer with one arm, lifting me right off the ground!

Wait! I’m floating! Ahh! His hand is moving so lewdly along my back!

“Alphonse,” Prince Leon said.

“It’s fine. Lady Anika and I are hiding them from view of the party guests.”

“All right,” Prince Leon turned to his brother. “Calm down, Lucas. I told you, you are not allowed to create a scandal.”

“Ha ha ha. Lady Cecilia’s pleading is so effective against Lucas it’s hilarious,” Lady Anika continued to laugh.

“Anika! Why are you enjoying this? He’s your brother! Stop it!” Leon scolded.

“Leon, as I told my brother, only she can stop Lukie. Just as it was before, it is now. Since she offered her assistance to that scumbag, you should be kind to her.”

Prince Leon was speechless at Lady Anika’s statement. But hearing her say the word “scumbag” was kind of incredible. It was honestly baffling to see Alphonse looking so besotted with her after that… *It’s nice that they love each other so much, but I won’t think too deeply about it…*

And my feet are still floating… I shifted my gaze from Lady Anika to Prince Leon.

"…I thought it can't be true, but can it? Lady Cline?!" Leon was so unusually agitated that I held my breath.

What can't be? That *can't be? I mean, who can blame him for being so shocked…*

I softly averted my gaze and said, "U-um, y-yes."

"Seriously? So that's why you looked like a different person…" Prince Leon sounded stunned, making me feel a bit of shame and guilt.

I'm really sorry… Even though I was with Felix for six years, I feel so bashful that I fell for Lucas in less than a month! Whoever said love happens suddenly was spot on. Truly a genius!

Maybe it would be better to learn how to blush on command? I strongly agreed with Mini Cece's advice, but then Lucas delivered another blow…

"Oh, Cece. Don't make that face. I'm happy, but if I see that look on your face, I won't be able to stop myself from kissing you right here and now. Or perhaps even…"

N-no! No, no! No "perhaps even" anything!

Lucas really had no self-control! And there weren't many people who could get in his way here, which actually might make him more troublesome than Felix!

"Lord Lukie. Please refrain from joking around too much and keep your playful antics to a minimum."

Put me down! Just put me down! And let go of my chin! Yes! Maid over there! Enough of that sympathetic look!

I glared discreetly at those around me and pushed against Lucas's chest to protest. With a dramatic sigh, he reluctantly let go, putting me back down on the ground. I let out a sigh of relief (with a bit of sadness) and inched away. Lucas tipped his head with amusement, sending me back into a maelstrom of mortification.

“Well then, will you reward me later for my efforts to come see you, my beloved fiancée?”

“…!”

Seeing the flames swirling in his golden eyes, I desperately lifted the corners of my mouth to keep them from trembling.

Anna’s voice bore a hint of amazement. “Lord Lucas, you never learn…”

Kate’s, though, was filled with fear. “I’m almost impressed, after what happened with Hannah.”

Lady Anika’s chimed in cheerfully, “Oh, dear. Look at that expression on Lukie’s face. What a sight to behold! I’m going to tell my older brother and make him jealous!”

And Alphonse sounded thrilled as he said, “Roast goose tomorrow, Anika?”

Wait a second. Now why is Alphonse looking forward to roast goose?!

Lady Anika said “Oh, good idea! In that case, why don’t we all eat together? Anna, can I come over?” *The way she just made plans like that is unbelievable!*

Anna gave a thumbs up and said, “Of course. It would be my pleasure.”

I need allies… I looked around and Prince Leon muttered a resigned smile, “I wonder if I can come eat roast goose too…”

Why did that sound so patronizing, Your Highness?!

I slowly sank into the warm water, melting away my exhaustion from wearing such a heavy dress all evening. I let out a contented sigh as my long hair was dried with a towel and lightly scented with floral oil.

The maids meticulously applied various skincare concoctions to my face and body to moisturize my skin. I was enjoying the way they massaged my arms and legs when I was interrupted by a concerned voice.

“It’s a shame that Lord Lucas won’t be returning home again tonight, Lady

Cecilia.”

“Let’s show Finn the recording crystal so he can blackmail Prince Leon. We captured the moment when the Promise Mark went off, along with everything he said to her. That should be enough to persuade him to give Lord Lucas a few days off.”

“I was diligently patrolling the perimeter of the soiree, unable to see or touch Lady Cecilia’s splendid figure. I shall never forgive the royal family or those pests!”

There was a word there that caught my attention, but I wasn’t sure if I should ask about it. Perhaps it was safer for my mental health not to inquire.

Besides, I was tired, so I decided to ignore it. Nitpicking only brought me pointless information, anyway. As I pondered this, Anna and Kate glanced over at Elsa with mischievous grins.

“Remember how Lady Cecilia looked standing under the lights of the chandeliers with that melancholic on her face? She was so lovely… More people were drawn to her than to Prince Leon, men and women alike!”

“Oof!”

“I already thought she was a perfect example of a lady, but then she effortlessly rebuked that pest with a flawless smile. She’s the epitome of dignity and grace!”

“Guh!”

Dignity…

For some reason, that felt like a compliment that wasn’t really a compliment. But seeing Elsa with tears in her eyes was quite something.

“If Lady Anika, with her deep blue hair and golden eyes, is the goddess of the night, then Lady Cecilia, with her amber-colored hair and forest green eyes, is like the goddess of flowers! When the two of them stand together, it’s just…”

“Most noblewomen pale in comparison to Lady Anika’s beauty, but not Lady

Cecilia. I'd expect nothing less from the woman Lord Lucas chose! Not only is she too radiant to be overshadowed, but she also exudes an irresistible allure while maintaining purity…"

"Ahh, it's not fair! I wanted to see Lady Anika and Lady Cecilia together! I wanted to see it so bad!"

"She was stunningly elegant, and radiant, and incredible. Right, Kate?"

"Right?!"

"Ahhh!"

Hm, Elsa started sobbing and flailing on the floor, but what's with the sound she's making? Is she punching through the floorboards?

And the grins on Anna and Kate's faces as they watched Elsa cry were merciless. Both of them being such beauties, the overall effect was beyond imagination…

Also, I had no idea what Anna's last sentence meant. She said, "Right, Kate?" and Kate just said, "Right?" and agreed with her. How did they know what the other was talking about? ESP?

Well, the servants' conversations were just too mysterious. Such silly nonsense went through my head as their lively banter faded into the background of this relaxed atmosphere.

Then, Elsa abruptly raised her tear-and snot-stained face and shouted. "I'll be the one to serve by Lady Cecilia's side next time! Anna or Kate should take over the patrol duty!"

"You can say that all you want, but Lord Lucas specifically requested you be on patrol. After all, you have the sharpest senses of us all, and there's no one better for patrolling a party than you."

"That's why Lord Lucas relied on you. What if something happened at a party where Lady Cecilia was in attendance, and he had to manifest Eckesachs? That would be terrifying."

“But, but…” Elsa’s sorrowful sobbing made me feel a pang of sympathy. But also, the sound of her banging on the floorboards was getting on my nerves, and I wanted her to cut it out. With that in mind, I gently offered her a handkerchief.

“Did you patrol around the party all night, Elsa? The ballroom in the palace is so vast. You must be tired. Are you feeling all right?”

She may have just been doing her job, but it was always nice to be recognized for one’s efforts. Though, her reaction threw me for a loop, and I couldn’t help but go “Huh?!”

It’s a waterfall! Her tears are like a waterfall! What a sight!

“Wow…”

“Whoa…”

“Lady Cecilia, you’re the beeeeeeeeeeest!”

“Calm down. Are you hurt anywhere?” I asked. They always helped me, so the least I could do was heal her. I drew a circle with my fingers and cast a spell on Elsa.

“Eeeek! I’m switching from being Lord Lucas’s servant to Lady Cecilia’s! It’s so warm! I’m so glad I worked so haaaaard!”

Elsa carried on weeping like a child, which was a bit bewildering, but I wiped her tears away with a handkerchief—or, I was about to until I heard the other maids mutter, “That’s not fair,” causing my shoulders to tremble.

“U-um, what’s wrong with you two?”

Uh-oh, the two beautiful maids are speaking through gritted teeth! This is all so weird I think I might start crying too!

“I’m tired too! I’m so tired I feel like I’m about to collapse, Lady Cecilia!”

“Hey, don’t get ahead of me, Anna! Lady Cecilia! I’m incredibly, incredibly tired too! My legs are trembling like a newborn fawn!”

The two of them started shouting and I was so desperate to calm the chaos that I said, “Oh, right away!” just as a lady should.

“Ahh, so warm! This is the best…”

I was wary of how things might turn out, so I cast healing spells on the other two and sent a sidelong glance at Elsa in her wobbly state.

“I can’t believe this…”

“I’d heard rumors, but…”

“I feel like I could run all the way to the palace and assassinate Prince Leon right now,” one said in a shocked voice while the other let out a maniacal laugh “Heh heh heh!” Surrounded by both assassins with glinting eyes, in addition to the maid who wept and wobbled like a child, the room descended into madness…

I only intended to use a simple healing spell. Did I draw the circle wrong? Did I accidentally transmute them into some kind of dangerous creature…? Could it be their brains? Did I affect them somehow? Fear and apprehension took hold of me.

“Um, thank you for everything, as always. I really can’t thank you three enough. But the princes both have their duties to attend to, so it’s understandable if Lord Lukie can’t come home yet. So let’s stop this talk of assassinating the prince, okay?” I tried to reassure them, my cheeks twitching as I attempted to smile.

In the end, Lucas hadn’t come home after the soiree.

A powerful magical beast appeared near the border forest during the campaign sometime beforehand, and although Lucas quickly dispatched it with Eckesachs, Vice-Captain Carl of the Black Knights had to stay behind to clean up the aftermath.

Just before the end of the soiree, they received word of his return. After

hearing various reports and details, a bitter expression formed on Prince Leon's face and he apologized, saying that he'd have to keep Lucas from returning that night.

Of course, I was sad, but it was work, so it couldn't be helped. I mustered a smile and said, "Prince Leon, you have nothing to apologize for. I know you're tired too, so please take care of yourself."

I placed my hand on Lucas's arm since he was staring at Prince Leon with lethal intent, and said, "Please take care of yourself too," and then cast a healing spell.

His golden eyes wavered as he gently took my chin. He gazed at me intently, and brushed his thumb lightly over my lower lip, causing my heart to flutter.

Even though we were in a private room reserved for royal family members and their close associates, Prince Leon, Alphonse, and Carl's presence meant that kissing me here would cause irreparable damage to my standing as a lady. *No way, that's unacceptable!*

But wait… Lucas is the one I've been waiting for. Don't I want to be kissed? That's what it looks like he wants, after all. Nah, I'm sure he'll just end up smirking at you.

That's what Mini Cece whispered, like a devil on my shoulder tempting me. *What should I do? No! I can't succumb to temptation! I must stay strong!*

I wavered between reason and temptation. I must've furrowed my brow and even teared up a little, because Lucas let out a big sigh, and rubbed my lower lip with regret. Then he let go and kissed my hair with a whispered, "I'll come home as soon as I can, so think about where you want to go."

There was nothing I could do, so I said, "Yes, I'll be waiting for your return."

"Anyway." Anna's voice snapped me back to reality, and I turned toward her. "Hasn't Lucas been away on beast-slaying campaigns more often lately? Did

they discover something deep in the forest, perhaps?”

“Yeah, the bigger, powerful magical beasts usually stick to their territories near the depths and don’t usually appear in the forests near the capital, so it’s weird.”

“Well, there’s no beast Lord Lucas can’t handle, but still. The firedrake he faced the other day hardly used any magic. I wonder if Lord Lucas has ever really shown his true powers. I wish I could spar against him…” Elsa was still limp.

Just how overpowered is he? I wondered absently. But despite knowing his power, I couldn’t stop looking over at Anna and the others anxiously.

“Don’t worry, Lady Cecilia. Just trust Lord Lucas.”

“That’s right. Even if you look back through history, there’s no one as skilled with Eckesachs as Lord Lucas. Marshal Webber is still active, so even if an ancient dragon were to appear, Bern Kingdom would have two heroes to defend it. We’ll be fine!”

They smiled reassuringly, dispelling my fears. “That’s right. It’s Lord Lukie after all!”

Elsa murmured softly, “If anything were to happen to Lady Cecilia, it would be the downfall of Bern Kingdom… More likely it would become a battle between Lord Lucas and the kingdom itself.”

And with that, my reassurance dissipated.

Isn’t that too large-scale of a battle?! I’d be forever marked as a villainess! If such a thing were to happen, would I change from a villainess to a full-fledged evil queen?! Impressive as that sounds, that’s not for me!

I was lost in those thoughts when suddenly Elsa flew before me in a blur. She crashed loudly into the wall, and then lay on the floor with her limbs outstretched, stunned.

“How many times do I have to tell you, Elsa? You talk too much. When will

you learn how to read the room?”

Anna, the beautiful assassin, her voice as low and ominous as swirling smoke, stood there with a whip in her hand and a smirk on her face. My attention jumped from Kate’s exasperated expression to Anna’s maniacal “Heh heh heh” and back again.

So hitting Elsa isn’t exclusively Kate’s job… Wait! Oh, dear, I’m feeling quite shaken. Anna’s resemblance to Hannah is seriously alarming! And this may just be a hunch, but Anna seems even more powerful than Kate!

“Anna, you went too far,” Kate said dispassionately as she cast a healing spell on Elsa’s motionless frame.

Elsa jolted up so fast that I half jumped as well. “Anna, that’s cruel!” she exclaimed. “I almost saw a field of flowers!”

It was unbelievable that Anna’s attack was powerful enough to make Elsa see a field of flowers, but equally shocking that Elsa was fully healed with just one spell! The servants of this ducal household were truly unfathomable beings…

“Stop complaining and take it out. You did bring it, right?”

“Sniffle…”

“Take it out!”

“Fine…”

“……”

I trembled in fear of my own maids’ terrifying behavior. Meanwhile, Elsa somehow managed to produce a white shirt, sniveling the entire time.

Could it be? Anna turned to me with a smile. “Lady Cecilia, here’s Lord Lucas’s shirt for today. It’s the one he wore to the soiree tonight. What will you do with it?”

Her smile was almost sickeningly sweet.

“……”

Even though I was aware my face was changing from pale to red at the sight of it, I knew the shirt would only make me feel lonelier. Even so, I couldn't help but clutch onto the garment because I longed for Lucas so much. I let Kate undress me and change my clothes.

"We'll contact Finn at the palace tomorrow and confirm when Lord Lucas will be home. So, please just be patient for just a bit longer."

The maids gave me warm gazes and gentle reassurances while I blushed shyly. I felt weak and pathetic for agreeing to this.

Not to mention, Elsa's thumbs-up as she left infuriated me.

I can't sleep.

My own sighs as I tossed and turned felt deafening in the quiet room. I closed my eyes and couldn't help but smell Lucas's scent lingering on his shirt collar, calling to mind the way he'd looked at me and sighed as we parted.

The warmth of his touch, his sweet whispers, and his kiss on my hair vividly sprang to mind, and I was gripped with a restlessness that rose out of my chest to my throat. I frantically tried to suppress it, covering my mouth with the sleeve of his shirt. Engulfed in Lucas's scent, I burned for him all over again.

I repeated this foolish cycle over and over, losing track of time. Desire and longing for him kept building up inside of me, and before long, my body felt hot. Remembering Lucas's thumb touching me, I found myself inadvertently caressing my lips with my own fingers.

Suddenly a surge of desire rushed over me, my skin prickling and throbbing with anticipation. At the same time, I felt something close to anger well up inside of me and I started biting down on Lucas's shirt.

Even though he'd gazed longingly at me and teased me by tipping up my chin, he only let out a sigh, not even kissing or embracing me. I was left with nothing but a single kiss on my hair.

And his holding back had driven me to the brink, making me desperate to see him. Even so, I tried to deny the desire inside that longed to be satiated by him, which only made me angrier. I grit my teeth.

It wasn't because I was a bad girl; it's just that he was always so uninhibited around me, but then stopped himself at touching my hair… And just a tiny, tiny bit of me wanted more.

I raved and ranted in my mind, but all that escaped from my lips was a sigh.

"I'm such an idiot… So pathetic…" I scolded myself, covering my face with a pillow.

Pull yourself together, Cecilia. Letting your emotions be swayed by romance won't lead to anything good. Remember Felix and Mia? You don't want to end up like them! If you fall too deep, you'll ruin yourself. You have to stay calm at all times unless you want the rug pulled out from under you.

But it's too late. Lucas already did that! The enemy was closer than it appeared! And it was an incredible deception! I was almost deceived by that divine face! Well…okay, I was totally deceived!

I spewed sarcasm in my head, stoking my own anger toward Lucas.

"I wasn't deceived. If anything, I accepted Lucas. He said he loved me. And I don't know for how long, but he said he's loved me for a looong time. Ha ha, serves you right! And what's with Lucas showing off the bite marks at the soiree? Is he an idiot?! Is he really that much of a pervert?! Lucas's brain is even more lovesick than mine! Which probably means he's suffering from longing right now too…"

I covered my mouth with a pillow to make sure no one could hear me from outside. "Ugh." Having my own embarrassment laid bare was pitiful.

What is my problem? Is it normal to have these drawn-out monologues and such intense ups and downs when you're in love? Does everyone get like this when they're smitten?! What a terrifying thing!

It was no use. Sitting up just got me even more worked up. I needed to force myself to sleep…

With that in mind, I sighed deeply into my pillow and rolled roughly on the bed. A button popped off the shirt as I twisted and rolled around, exposing my shoulder. I reluctantly sat up to fix the shirt when I caught sight of the faint bite marks, visible under the loose fabric, and remembered how hard Lucas sucked on my flesh to inscribe his jealousy on me.

He'd made love to me here in this bed many times.

As long as the memories of Lucas lingered on my body, I wouldn't be able to forget him. It was frustrating because it almost felt like I was the only one longing for him… But at the same time, I loved him, which made it even worse.

"What should I do…"

My emotions felt like they were boiling over the rim and spilling out of my mind, but then the good girl inside of me whispered, "Just be satisfied with what you have at the moment."

I know.

"When he praised your beauty and admired you, weren't you truly happy?"

I know!

"He danced with you, didn't he?"

I know, already! Just be quiet!

"He loves you, so what more can you ask for? He's the second prince, the hero, he's not only *your* Lucas."

"Haah…"

It felt like ugly emotions were taking over me, and laughter escaped my mouth almost like a sigh. I bit my lip, rolled over onto my back, covered my eyes, and muttered self-deprecatingly, "I can't believe this."

Despite having it drilled into me during my princess consort training that the

kingdom and its people came first, here I was, in the throes of obsession, years of training undone by love for just one man. And to think I wanted Lucas to be mine alone…to love someone this much…

"Lord Lukie…" I murmured softly. His name disappeared into the canopy, absorbed by the silk. It sounded frighteningly sweet and longing, making me reflexively cover my mouth with my sleeve. And now not only my mouth, but my nostrils, my throat, and even my brain were filled with Lucas's scent till I couldn't breathe.

And because of that, I felt a little twinge deep in my belly. I felt a throbbing in my pussy, and I reflexively rubbed my knees together, my body trembling as I felt my panties cling to my skin. My pulse quickened, and I felt an odd sense of nervousness race through my body.

Even though my breaths were shallow, I frantically tried to calm my heart down by pressing my hand against the shirt…but all I could do was picture Lucas's hard cock fucking me. *Uh-oh, this isn't good…*

"……"

No, I shouldn't. This is bad. Really bad. I can't believe I'm doing this. Calm down… But…my hand crept down my body seemingly of its own accord.

"Haah…"

And then my fingertips reached my wet panties.

"L-Lord Lukie…" I called his name out just as I was about to press harder with my fingertips, but…

"What is it, Cece?"

Suddenly a deep voice filled the room. And my body literally—and I mean *literally*—froze.

My breath caught in my throat.

Huh? What was that? Am I hearing things? I have to be, right?

What in the world? I miss him so much now I'm hallucinating? And this time the hallucination was actually responding to me? Still, that snapped me back to reality. What in the world was I doing? Oh my god, I've really lost it now, mwahaha…

"Cecilia? You're awake, aren't you?"

I heard a voice murmur and then the clear sound of fabric rustling along and the clacking of shoes against the floor. My entire body started trembling.

Ahhh no you've got to be kidding meeee! I was screaming inside my heart at the top of my lungs while my pulse pounded like a hammer.

This is bad, this is bad, this is very very B-A-D! Hand! Get away from there right now! Pretend like you weren't doing anything! Count sheep! You can do this! Let's see all the results from your education! Mini Cece screamed inside my brain, and I shook my head, but my body just would not obey.

My breaths became shallow, tears filled my eyes, and a cold sweat began to run down my back. "Cece? What are you doing?" A terrifyingly gentle and sweet voice whispered above my head. I forced my stiff neck to move and looked up tearfully to see Lucas's golden eyes glowing down at me.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and said, "I'm home, Cecilia," in the most incredibly tender voice I'd ever heard.

Say something! Answer him, you idiot! He already knows you're awake! Lift up your cheeks! Turn that frown upside down! You can do it, princess! Don't give up, princess! You can do it, Cece! Mini Cece admonished me with great fervor, so I frantically lifted up the corners of my mouth.

"W-welcome home Lord Lukie… When did you come back? What about work?" I asked, and then slowly, slooooooowly tried to pull my hand up when *GRAB!* another hand appeared and grabbed my arm?! *Eeek, I can't move! Wait, wait, he's pushing my hand down…down there!*

"I just got here. I'd finished my work and wanted a reward from you. You'll

give me one since I worked so hard, right?" His flickering golden eyes narrowed as he smiled, and I mean *really* smiled. I was still unable to move my arm and had a really bad feeling about this as I frantically tried to change the subject.

"Um, well, it's the middle of the night, so…aren't you tired?"

"Don't worry. All my fatigue fled the moment I saw your face. Plus, Alphonse cast a healing spell on me. There's no problem at all," he said with that same smile.

Um, well I have a big problem with it!

But his body was healed and his stamina recovered… *Yeah, I'm just gonna have to give up. After all, I wanted to see him.* Mini Cece patted me on the back, and I sprinted through myriad emotions. *If I give up now, it's game over! It's true that I wanted to see him and have him fill me up. I admit it! I'll admit it! I did think that, but why nowwwwww?!*

Even though I inwardly screamed, I managed to clumsily say out loud, "Oh. I. See. I'm glad. To hear. That," which just caused Lucas to give me an odd look.

"By the way, Cece. Your cheeks are flushed, and you look like you have a fever. Are you sick?" he asked, wrapping one hand around the arm he'd restrained, while the other gently stroked my cheek, then my neck.

How big is your palm that you can hold me down with one hand?! Wait, that's not important! Now is not the time to be impressed with how big his hands are! Eek, eek! He's unbuttoning my shirt!

"L-Lord Lukie! Don't take it off…!" I half shouted, but he brazenly ignored me, slipping his hand through my open shirt. He scooped my left breast up and flicked my nipple with his finger. At the familiar sensation of his hand, sweat oozed from my pores and my face burned a bright red.

"…!"

"Your heart's racing, your skin is sweaty, and your eyes are moist. Did you have a bad dream? Or did something happen?" His voice was filled with

concern as he leaned his face close to mine. But he didn't let up pressure on the arm that was pinning me down.

My heartbeat thundered inside my ears, but strangely his kind voice seemed to resonate through my entire body. "*Or did something happen?" Did something happen? He knows, he knoooooows!*

"I-I had a dream…!" I immediately clung to the other alternative Lucas presented, and the grin on his beautiful face deepened.

"Ha ha. A dream, huh?" he murmured, then gave me a reassuring kiss, which really did calm me down.

"I-it's embarrassing, so please don't laugh at me…" I breathed, but then he gently took me by surprise.

"I'm sorry. But…it must've been a very embarrassing, naughty dream, Cece. Naughty enough to make you so wet you wanted to touch yourself and call my name."

The moment he said that, he peeled the blankets off me, revealing my hand touching my pussy and my wet fingertips. My eyes flew open, and I froze in shock, but he sweetly narrowed his eyes and said something even more ominous.

"It smells naughty, Cece. I tried my best so I could get a reward from you, but I never expected it would be this…"

"W-wa—!"

Lucas grabbed my hand and brought it close to his beautiful face, smelling my wetness. My face turned bright red from humiliation. He seemed to be enjoying this, because he gave me a penetrating stare. Although the gold in his eyes was barely perceptible in the darkness, a shiver raced up my spine when I glimpsed it. I inadvertently shook my head as I was caught up in his gaze. He narrowed his eyes and slowly pressed his lips against mine.

"Haa, mm, nngh, ahh, ohh!"

“I can feel how wet you are even through your panties after kissing you. Hey, did you just touch it? Or did you put your fingers inside?”

He pulled me into his arms as I tried desperately to keep up. He rubbed me through my panties, teasing my body that so honestly and obediently responded to his kisses. I couldn’t bear it anymore, so I clung to his arm and pushed my tongue against his.

“Eek! Mm, ngh! Haah!”

Suddenly he pushed his hand inside my panties and spread my wetness around with the pads of his fingers, then quickly thrust them inside of me.

“Haah…so sticky and tight… You didn’t put your fingers in, did you?”

“Nngh! N-no, Lord Lukie! N-not there!”

Why is he asking me this?! He started rubbing my sensitive nub with his wet fingertips, making me arch my back against the sheets. “Ohh, right here,” Lucas whispered in my ear.

My eyes filled with tears of shame, and I glared at him.

“Don’t be mad at me, Cece. Hm, maybe it’ll be easier if you cum once?”

And then, taking a turn for the uncanny, in a way that nonetheless somehow made sense to me, he suddenly slipped more fingers inside me and started thrusting them!

I grit my teeth from the pleasure Lucas gave me, as well as my frustration at giving into him so easily. My body twitched and flailed helplessly upon the sheets as I came, then he happily caressed me and gave me a kiss.

“Do you like what my fingers do to you? Your pussy clenches them so good,” he murmured as he nipped tenderly at my earlobe. Hearing that voice I’d been craving so bad say all those naughty things pushed my desire over the top. A knot tightened deep in my belly…and, just as he said, my pussy clenched around his fingers.

Saying no wouldn’t do a thing in this situation, so I decided to just completely

surrender myself to Lucas.

Lucas accepted my reaction as if it were the most natural thing in the world and started pumping his fingers in and out of me. The stimulation was unbearable. I ached for more.

“L-Lord Lukieee… Aaah!”

“You’re so greedy today, Cece.”

I helplessly clenched at his arm while he chuckled and put another finger in me, making me arch my back again and let go of his arm.

“Ahh?! Ahh, no!”

I tried to savor the sensations he was stirring in me, but before I could cum again, he pulled his fingers out, and my mouth trembled from the feeling of loss.

When I reached out to cling to his hand, he grabbed my wrist and pulled my still-wet fingers into his mouth and licked them all over. Then he moved my fingers, glistening with his saliva, back down to my pussy. His golden eyes were dark with lust, urging my heart to beat faster and faster, louder than ever.

No way.

“Go on, Cece.”

No. Way.

“Do it just like I showed you.”

“…!”

He gave me gentle kisses of encouragement while he spoke such audacities…

“No way,” I breathed in disbelief, and he gave me a puzzled look. “Hm?”

“It’s been a while,” he said, “so I might not be able to control myself, but since you already started it, why don’t you keep going and let me watch? I’ll touch myself while I watch you.” Unimaginable, unbelievable words issued from his beautiful face. I was stunned speechless, but he kissed me and then unbuckled

his belt to loosen it.

What? What? Whaaat? What is he saying?!

"Lord Lukie?" I called out in confusion, and that beautiful man gave me a pleasant smile in return, but I was still at a loss. He slowly pulled down his underwear to reveal his already *very* hard cock.

It was so shocking to me my body began to tremble, and I started scooting away until I hit the cushioned headboard, shaking my head all the while.

"I-I can't."

There's no way I can do that in front of Lucas!

"Just do what you were doing before. You were thinking about how bad you wanted me, right? You missed me so much you couldn't bear it. If we do it right now, I'll fuck you so hard you'll run a fever, but then it'd be a while till I could see you again."

"But…"

Why can't he see me if he fucks me too hard?! Because Hannah and Prince Leon are in cahoots?! My mind once more picked at random details, running with them to the most absurd of conclusions.

"The last time still feels like a dream to me, so I want to make sure you really love me. I don't want to be too rough on you. So please, give me my reward?" he pleaded with that perfect, gorgeous face.

A feeling that made me want to scream raced through my entire body!

He's using the begging tactic! With puppy dog eyes! That's cheating! Why is he so damn good at everything?! Oh, he missed you so much he couldn't stand it? And he wants to make sure I love him? Hooray! So c'mon, just open up to him! You missed him so much you couldn't stand it either, right? You've been longing for Lucas, and here he is. Just reach out and touch him! Right now, Lucas is all yours. He belongs to you only. Just try a little harder and you can get everything your heart desires! The voice whispering inside of my heart made my

already fragile sense of reason crumble in the face of Lucas.

The bed creaked as he slowly drew nearer. A burning desire quaked within me, rising up to my throat, and I surrendered myself to it.

I turned my face away, closed my eyes, pulled my panties down all the way… and I gently pressed my hand between my legs.

"Haah, mm, nngh, no…!"

It feels good…but it's so bad.

I rubbed my fingers against my pussy, frantically trying to imitate how Lucas did it. I could feel the pleasure building up, but I couldn't get over the edge, so it felt like the ecstasy was dammed up inside me. My body became more and more sensitive under the gaze of those golden eyes, all lit up with pent-up pleasure and lust… But no matter how much pleasure they clawed out of me, my fingers couldn't bring me release.

My mind and body screamed that I wanted Lucas, not myself, and I finally begged him even though my face was bright red.

"I-I want you to do it to me, Lord Lukie…"

"Ahh, it's like a dream come true seeing you look at me with those eyes, Cece. But no, not yet. Keep at it a little more, okay?"

He deliberately licked my breast just off to the side of my rigid nipple. I grabbed his head and moaned, "Nooo, please! Lord Lukie, I want youuu!" I cast aside all my shame and begged him, tears streaming down my face. *I begged him to the very best of my abilities!*

Lucas showed restraint in the strangest situations. At that moment, he smiled happily, pressed up against my breasts, and declared, "You're so cute when you beg. It's worth being patient."

No, no! It's not the same! You don't have to be patient when it comes to that! Read the room! That's not the situation right now! Why didn't you show restraint at the soiree?! I screamed at myself, witnessing the disastrous failure

of my own begging counter-tactics and the doom they'd brought upon me.

"Hey, Cece…will you spread your legs more for me? Otherwise, I can't see you play with yourself. Ahh, amazing… You're soaked…"

"Eek, L-Lord Lukie!"

He let me go only to reposition, grabbing the back of my knees and prying my legs apart to watch as I played with my wet pussy. I was so embarrassed I squeezed my eyes shut and shook my head no, trying to hide my face with my free hand, but he pinned the wrist of my hand that was down at pussy, keeping me from pulling it away.

"No, Cece… I haven't cum yet…"

His breathing was ragged as he pressed his own finger on top of mine and forced them both inside of me at once.

Feeling his rough, knobby finger rub me on the inside and thrust noisily in and out was exquisite. The pleasure and stimulation from his long-awaited touch were so amazing I screamed.

"Ahh, ahh! Lord Lukie, Lord Lukie! N-no! Mmm, haah!"

But he pulled his finger out right before I came and silenced my protesting voice with a deep kiss.

"Haah, you're so sexy… That naughty look on your face drives me crazy, Cece. Hey…were you going to cum on my finger?"

"Ahh, w-well, I…!"

"Hmm… But you can't come by yourself, right? Mm, look at that swollen pink pussy dripping with honey…"

Lucas grinned as he palmed my wet pussy and rubbed it all over, then took my juices and smeared it all over his cock…

"…?!"

"Haah…"

I heard wet squelching sounds as he rubbed his dick, and the sight was so incredibly naughty and erotic my mouth hung open helplessly and my entire body turned bright red. He furrowed his brow, gazing at me with the sexiest look on his face I'd ever seen, and then licked the corner of his mouth.

"…!"

Ahhhh he's doing this on purpose!! What in the world?! What kind of pervert is he?! I'm so pissed right now! Pissed that he's so hot! The way he just licked his lips was so wild and sexy and oh my goooooood!!

My brain was totally overloaded. *Wait, hang on a second. Wait, wait, wait. This isn't right. My life's been way too unhinged lately! I used to be a completely normal, ordinary person, and suddenly I'm crazy head over heels in love with this incorrigible deviant, Lucas! Isn't this like what that famous guy once said? "Whoever falls in first love loses"?! Ah, but Lucas fell in love with me first, so why am I losing?! Because I love him too much?! Does that mean he really has fooled me?! Damn you, lovesick braaaaain!*

I quailed at the murky depths I was sinking into, but that changed nothing about my situation. Heedless of my misgivings, Lucas teased my fingertips with kisses, leaving me panting and half-crazed as I glared at him.

He answered my glare with a smile, albeit a somewhat unsettled one.

"Almost… I'm almost there… Come on, Cece… Do it again." He frowned as he pumped his dick over and over while kissing me.

Why?

I could tell by the heat of his skin and the insistence of his tongue that he really was holding back.

He slipped his fingers through mine, called my name, and gently caressed my cheek, all the while kissing me deeply. But when I said I wanted more he would just smile and say no, giving me nothing else. And there was a tiny hint of what looked like fear wavering in his eyes.

A few moments after we kissed, he hesitated and then pulled away. Even though his lips drifted down to my breasts and my stomach, I could feel that he was gritting his teeth, and he squeezed my hand so hard it almost hurt. He wouldn't even put his arms around me.

He didn't whisper that he loved me, didn't mark me with bites, didn't hug me. My irritation mounted until I was cursing him in my mind…and then things veered way off my expectations.

Even in my previous life, I had very little sexual knowledge or experience with men. Lucas was the first time in either of my lives that having sex was such a happy and pleasurable thing.

However, while he always told me what he wanted to do, I never told him. In fact, I was at his mercy every day, so I never had the time to think about what I wanted. But right now, Lucas wasn't initiating like he usually did, so the pent-up desire inside of me began to warp into something strange and new.

Well, if that's the way he feels… I deliberately softened my gaze and called his name.

"Lord Lukie?"

"What is it, Cece?"

He really is holding back. He reached out for my breasts but stopped himself. I immediately reached out and grabbed his hand. Even though he was strong and pretended to pull away for a moment, he let out a little sigh and kissed my hand…but that was all. My mind exploded with memories from the soiree.

Why? Why are you holding back now, when no one is watching? Why are your eyes wavering like that? If you don't tell me what's going on, we can't understand each other. I'm your fiancée, aren't I?!

My boiling emotions coalesced into a smile. I tightened my grip on his hand and, as his muscles tensed on reflex, pulled myself to my knees. Then, I gradually leaned my weight against him.

“Cece?! What are you…”

“I love you, Lord Lukie.”

“…!”

Lucas, you didn’t even budge despite the pressure I put on you, and you’re so tall I won’t be able to reach you for a kiss unless you kneel down, I whispered sweetly, secretly seething with anger.

Then to my surprise, Lucas gulped audibly and tensed up. I took that opportunity to reel him in further.

“I’m sorry for being so naughty, but I want you to touch me so bad I can’t stand it anymore. So please don’t get mad at me and please don’t say no.”

“Ugh, I won’t get mad… Wait, Cece…”

“Good. Then touch me, Lord Lukie?”

Lucas was struck silent.

He reached out to stop me, but I grabbed his hand and guided it to my cheek, tipping my head to the side and pleading with my eyes. He frowned, and I saw pink spread across his face as he let out a muffled groan.

The sight of him clenching his teeth with that pained expression on his face, his golden eyes darkening with lust, made my heart skip a beat and emboldened me even more.

Okay, let’s do it! You can do it! Unleash your hidden potential! Encouraged by the excitement and thrill of it all, I gently stroked Lucas’s bare chest and beautiful abs.

I put my hands on his shoulders as he trembled from arousal, then straddled him as I kissed him. As I leaned in closer, my breasts spilled out of my open shirt, and I pressed them against his bare chest.

“W-wait, Cece. What’s going on with you tonight?” he asked, sounding frustrated.

“I can’t help it. I want a reward too. You asked for one, so it’s only fair if I get one too, right?” I said, giving him a sharp-edged look before pressing before pushing my body even harder against his to make him topple down onto the bed.

“No, but… Oh, no… Wait, Cece!”

You’re way too strong, just like a knight should be.

He was calmly supporting himself, and my weight on him, with just one elbow, using his other hand to try to gently but firmly peel me off him.

“I won’t wait.” My refusal left him utterly stunned.

“Huh? Cece? Seriously, what’s—”

“That’s what I want to know!” I immediately regretted the words I blurted out in anger, but my irritation got the best of me. “Why are you holding back, Lord Lukie? Why aren’t you touching me? Why are you so quiet, when it’s clear something’s bothering you? I thought you wanted us to love each other. I am your…”

I was about to say “fiancée,” but what I saw next was so shocking I pulled up short, my mouth still open.

Um… He’s bright red. Redder than I’ve ever seen him.

The sight of that ethereal beauty blushing so deeply wasn’t just a privilege, it was beyond precious. *What should I do?! Especially since he’s struggling while he’s blushing! He’s frowning so intensely and his eyes are darting everywhere.*

I can tell he’s struggling with something, but did I do something to embarrass him? If anything, shouldn’t I be the one who’s embarrassed? But strangely enough, this sudden twist seems to have calmed me down a bit. Hold on… Did I just push my fiancé down and flip out on him? Oh, dear. I think things are far from over now!

I felt the blood suddenly drain out of my face just as he opened his mouth to speak. “I…don’t want you to hate me.”

Huh? That's also my line? I was so flustered my eyes flew wide open and I awkwardly said, "No, um. I love you, remember?" and he glared at me in a way that wasn't scary at all.

"I love you too! That's why… I don't want you to see me in a shameful way anymore…because I don't want you to hate me… Ah, damn it! I'm such a loser…" he muttered, then covered my eyes with his big hand.

Huh? Why's he covering my *eyes? Wouldn't one normally cover their own eyes in a situation like this?* I inwardly quipped. I frowned in confusion, and he continued.

"Well…back at the soiree, with my jealousy on full display, that was shameful, wasn't it? If you hadn't stopped me, I would've humiliated you right there… Though of course I would've eliminated everyone who saw it…"

Um, hearing this from my fiancé is way too scary!!

Close call, though! Humiliate me?! So he meant it when he tugged on the strings of my dress?! Not only that, but isn't it a bit reckless to say he'd kill any witnesses when he was the one about to force them to watch? Good job for stopping him, me!

My throat trembled a little from the shock, and his hand on my eyes quivered with it.

"I just go crazy when it comes to you. Nothing else makes me emotional at all, but when it comes to you, I just can't control myself. Even knowing this, I lose myself at the mere thought of someone taking you away from me. Honestly, I don't want another man to look at you Cece. It makes me want to gouge their eyes out…"

Okay, now my throat's trembling again! A sliver of self-awareness, yet my beloved is still completely unhinged! So why does he make my heart skip a beat? Or maybe that wasn't it skipping a beat? Ahh, it's no use. I'd like to be an ordinary person, but now that I've dipped my toe in these waters…

My inner voice drowned in turmoil as I waited patiently for him to put his feelings into words.

"But despite that, you behaved like the perfect princess consort. I was standing by your side, but I caused nothing trouble for you with my impulses. So when Leon told me I needed to work, I thought that I should do the best job that I could. And when we said goodbye, honestly, I wanted to take you in my arms and kiss you, but I thought you wouldn't want me to do that in public, so I held back."

M-my behavior made Lucas hold back! That in and of itself was a good thing, but why should he have to hold back on my account? Oh no, I'm so sorry!

Suddenly a nervous sweat started trickling down my back. Lucas abruptly sat up and embraced me, speaking in a sulky tone. "Once I finally got home, I found you wearing my shirt, calling my name, and acting so sexy! I was desperate to touch you, but I had to resist because of what I might do to you, and then you started seducing me! I thought I might lose control completely…if tonight ended up being worse than the other night, I thought you might end up hating me… and that's when I became afraid to touch you…"

He pressed his forehead against my chest in repentance, making my breath catch in my throat.

Why didn't I realize that? If I'm anxious about something, Lucas is probably anxious about it too. He loves only me, and that's why he fears rejection from me the most. I detested myself for forgetting, even after he'd gone so far as to inscribe a Promise Mark on me to keep me by his side.

I realized that although I wanted to accept him, I'd been too caught up in our whirlwind romance and my own anxieties to realize that his feelings were plain

before me. Once you obtain happiness you've wanted for so long, the fear that it might disappear is even greater.

"Lord Lukie," I called out, and he tightened his arms around me.

"…What is it? Even if you've become disappointed in me and want to leave, I'll never let you go."

There was a long pause before his response. *What's with that sulking voice, are you a kid or something? It's so adorable it makes my heart pound, though. It's making my lovestruck brain all feverish.*

I silenced my internal dialogue and focused on Lucas.

"I'm sorry for blaming you. I could never hate you, but if you don't tell me these things, I won't know, and I'll just get anxious."

"…I'm sorry."

He squeezed me tight as I patted his head reassuringly.

"From now on," I said, "I expect proper behavior from you at social events. Our mistakes will affect more people than just you and me. At worst, they could threaten the very kingdom…and could even separate us."

Lucas swung his head up to look at me, his golden eyes glowing. There was a dangerous glint in his eyes, as if he understood the warning I gave him.

A scandal that rocked the kingdom wouldn't spare the royal family. Since Lucas was the hero, he might make it out unscathed, but he might be forced to cut ties with me. And worst-case scenario, I could be sentenced to death.

And if that happened…

Well, if that happened, then that would only lead to unhappiness for everyone, including him.

As my thoughts traveled down those dark roads, I wondered if maybe I shouldn't have told him all that, but it was too late for regrets. Besides, I was confident that he would do his best to deal with this matter. I wanted to be

happy with the person I loved too, so that was the best choice I could've made just then.

"I told you we're going to be together until death do us part, remember? We've only just begun. Let's be happy together, okay? And if you're busy with work, next time I'll go visit you."

I smiled and kissed him, gazing at his golden eyes up close.

There was still a distorted light in them, but also a glimmer of hope for the future. I was happy that he had heeded my words.

Lucas sighed deeply and said in a tired voice, "Is there anything else you want to tell me? Having my own shortcomings laid bare is depressing, but I guess I'll hear you out." It was unusual to see him so down, but I was grateful that he was being so direct with me.

"Let's see. First, please don't ever leave marks on me that others might see—especially not bite marks. You know the style of dresses that are in fashion right now, so if you must leave marks, leave them where they'll be concealed. And stop making love to me to the point that I pass out. Women have information networks of their own, and I need to be active in high society if I want to tap into them. I can't do that if I'm too sore in the morning to get dressed for tea parties." I said all that in a single, giddy breath, and he frowned.

"I don't want you to show your neck or your cleavage off to anyone else, and having restrictions on making love to you is torture."

"Lord Lukie?"

What in the world is he saying? He doesn't feel bad at all! If he really only meant he was going to hear me out but not obey… I thought, glaring at him.

He heaved a massive sigh. "I'll do my best. Anything else?"

I gave him a suspicious look. After all, he was kissing my neck as he was responding to me.

"Am I really getting through to you, Lord Lukie?!"

“Yes. I can’t leave marks on you that a dress can’t hide, right? I can touch you there, though… Anything else?”

“I’d like to at least be able to speak to other men in social sett—Eek!”

All of a sudden, he kissed me so deeply my eyes flew open in surprise.

“Haa, mm, nngh, mpaah! Lord Lukie!”

“Sorry, I couldn’t help it. The thought of these lips speaking to another man made me lose control.”

Argh… Don’t give me that clingy look. You’re not fooling anyone! Anyway, what the heck do you think you’re doing? I’ve never heard of anyone kissing in the middle of a lecture! What happened to all that restraint he was showing?! This is just absurd! Why do I feel like I’m the one in the wrong?! Not only that, but he’s being all dramatic and sighing about it! And now he’s massaging my breasts?!

“L-Lord Lukie… Wait… I’m not done talking…”

“Hm? What else?”

“If you do that…I can’t talk… Eep!”

Suddenly I felt something very hot and very hard press against me between my legs and I looked down in surprise, my breath catching in my throat.

Come to think of it, we had been in the middle of this…

He rubbed against me again. The sight of my juices on his cock was obscene, but at the same time there was no way to hide the way my body was responding—especially the scarlet spreading across my cheeks.

“Lord Lukie, stop that right now!” I raised my voice at him for the first time.

“……”

Oh, he stopped. Huh? Hm? What? Why is he smiling? He’s positively grinning, but why?

I wasn’t expecting him to look so happy at my reprimand, so I was left

waffling in confusion.

“You can raise your voice too, hm? It’s refreshing to have you mad at me. You’re so beautiful and cute when you’re mad. I want you to be mad at me all the time,” he said with a sparkling smile and a honeyed voice. I watched in astonishment as he undid the last buttons on my shirt.

Oh no! Lucas’s lovesick brain is going haywire! How could anyone be happy when someone is mad at them? You’re supposed to feel remorse when someone’s mad! And why is he ignoring me?!

“L-Lord Lukie.”

“Taking my shirt off of you feels so erotic and exciting.”

“Ugh… Please don’t take it off…”

“If we don’t take it off, it’ll get dirty. Although having your juices all over my shirt sounds exciting too. Are you sure you want the servants to see that?” The corner of his lips perked up in amusement. I wish I could pinch those cheeks of his…

“Yes, but I said I wanted to talk first! Eek! What…ah! Hahh… Not your fingers!”

Before I could say, “If you want me angry, I’ll be angry!” he grabbed me by the waist and slipped his hand under the balled-up shirt sitting in my lap. He slowly spread open my slippery pussy and rubbed my juices up and down over my sensitive clit. I moaned while reaching out to grab onto his arm.

“We can talk, but if you keep gushing like this, it’ll get all over my shirt. Although I’d kind of like to see you dressed in my shirt once it’s soaked in your own pussy juices.”

He pulled away his sticky hand and held it up, his golden eyes narrowing sweetly, as if to show me how wet I was. I was too embarrassed to speak, but my body trembled as I stared at it, then his fingers crept back down to my wet pussy.

He slipped them inside of me one by one, using the pad of his wet thumb to make little circles around my clit, the sounds of my wetness growing louder and louder.

My hips shook with pleasure, and I tried to jerk away from him, but he held me firmly in place. I shook my head, but then he seized me there too, kissing me deeply to silence my protests.

“Haah, mm, nngh! Aah, haah, no! Not there!”

“You’re so wet now… Are you sure about this? What about the shirt? You’re gonna get it dirty,” he whispered right against my lips, one of his large hands holding the back of my head.

He smiled sweetly at me. *Argghhh!* My face turned bright red, and I glared at him with teary eyes. My hands trembled as I let go of his arm.

Still, I hesitated because I was shy, and Lucas sighed and started moving his fingers again. I couldn’t help but whimper as they rubbed a little harder both inside and out.

“Eek, n-no, w-wait, L-Lord Lukie! Ahh, I’m…haah!”

I grit my teeth, wanting him to stop, but it felt so good that I couldn’t suppress my tender moans any longer.

What should I do? I can’t believe this! There’s no way we can have a conversation now, but also the servants know I was wearing his shirt to bed, so if it turns up with the traces of our “activities” on it, they’ll see it while doing laundry and definitely get the wrong idea!

Ahhh I’m so embarrassed I want to die!

I shivered at the mortifying prospect, and at that precise moment, Lucas said, “Whoops, it got wet.” I felt the tangled shirt stick to my thighs, so I had no choice but to give up on it.

“Nngh!”

Even though it was my decision, I couldn’t help but cringe at the way he

dragged things out, peeling the shirt slowly away till I was completely exposed. I made sure to convey my displeasure with a glare and a twist of my mouth, but his only response was a light kiss, saying, “That’s a shame. I wanted to see you wear my shirt covered in your wetness. But since it’s been a while since we made love, I want to savor you anyway.” And then he started planting kisses on my breasts.

He licked the corner of my mouth with a wicked smile on his pretty face. I quickly grabbed his arm while screaming inside, *“Beautiful people look good no matter what expression they make, and it’s not fair!”* scrambling all the while to somehow cover up.

“You’re a bully, Lord Lukie!”

At the very least, I gave him a piece of my mind as I blushed furiously at him, but he laughed it right off with clear amusement.

“Aha ha, I’m sorry. It’s just so fun riling you up that I got a little carried away. I was anxious because I didn’t want my shameless actions to turn you against me… But you accepted me and forgave me. I’m happy that we’ll be able to share things with each other from now on, maybe even a fight now and then…” And then quietly, so that it set my heart aflutter, “And I never knew such a thing would make me happy.”

You little!

He opened his mouth to bite me but then closed it.

Honestly, he is so unfair. Please stop! Just how much do you think you can make my heart pound, huh?!

I was doing my best to scowl at him, but the excitement in my heart won out over my irritation, and I watched as Lucas’s lips curved up into a smirk.

“Plus, you’re the one who turned me on, remember?” His eyes burned with desire; his voice so low the whole room seemed to thrum with it.

Turned you on? No, no. I just leaned up against you and tried to take

advantage of you. That doesn't count! I mean, you saw how you were acting. What choice did I have?! W-wait a second, I think he just said something even more outrageous… What is he talking about?!

A cold sweat ran down my back as Lucas tipped his head to the side. "Right?"

"I-I don't know what you mean…" I stuttered loudly, and he smiled.

He raised one hand, fluttered the shirt as if to show it off and whispered, "You were wearing my shirt calling my name while you rubbed yourself."

My face began to boil. I lunged for the shirt, frantic, no longer bothering to hide my body.

"N-no! Give it back! Just forget all about it!"

"I can't. I'll never forget that sweet way you moaned my name while you wore my shirt. Plus, you wanted me so bad you let me watch you play with yourself," he teased. He grabbed my wrist and kissed my finger and tears welled in my eyes.

"I-I can't believe you just said that out loud! You're terrible, Lord Lukie!"

Give me back my fluttering heart! I glared at him.

"Hehe. Sorry!" he said casually—and I mean *really* casually.

Aaaaaaarrrgggghhh!

Two can play at that game!

I'll make you realize that we've already crossed the line with this playful banter! Enjoy your first ever fight with your beloved fiancée! I won't forgive you for hugging and clinging onto me this one time! You'd better get on your hands and knees and grovel in front of me, or I won't forgive you! Bursting with embarrassment, I exploded with anger in a bizarre direction.

I shook off Lucas's grip, snatched back the shirt, and put it back on. "Just forget about it! You can do what you want, but I'm going to sleep!"

I lay down in bed in a huff and was left dumbfounded when I heard a voice

saying, “I don’t think so.” Then, with incredible speed, he ripped the shirt off me again.

Lucas can do magic tricks? His sleight of hand was so instantaneous that my mind resorted to such nonsense in explaining why my breasts were suddenly jiggling right before my downturned eyes. But when he wrapped his arms around me and I felt the pressure of skin touching skin, I gasped at the sensation.

Lucas whispered sweetly to me as he lay me face down, kissing my nape, gently tracing all the way down to my shoulders, arms, and sides. My hips trembled as he gently inserted his fingers into my still-wet slit.

“We haven’t made love yet, Cece. You need to take responsibility for starting this. Or do you want to be fucked while you’re asleep?”

Eep!

As he spoke, he slid his finger through my crack and touched my asshole, making my body involuntarily stiffen. He ran his wet fingers around in circles. “Cece?” he whispered in my ear.

I shook my head. “No…”

I’m scared, I’m scared! No, no, no! I know we love each other but I just can’t get up the courage to do it there. *Can’t we save that for some day far in the future, or maybe never? Please, give me a break!* I silently screamed. I choked back tears, trying to reach out with trembling hands while muttering, “I-I’ll try my best…” in a faltering voice, as a part of me retreated into a corner of my mind. But in reality, my hand, trembling with fear, crawled upon the sheets and Lucas pinned it down.

“Cece? If you try to run away, I might panic and put it in the wrong hole.” He stuck his tongue in my ear and started making lewd wet noises which seemed to echo directly in my brain.

“I-I won’t run away! J-just do it normally, Lord Lukie!” I pleaded, my breaths

fitful and shallow.

And then his hands trailed back down to my pussy, and I breathed a sigh of relief. But it wasn't long before he started playing with me, and I was moaning again. A sweet throbbing sensation filled my lower belly and slowly spread through my whole body, making tears fill my eyes.

I basked in the sensation until Lucas, enunciating each word deliberately, said, "Hey Cece? What do you mean by 'normally'?"

What? You are really and truly a bully today! I thought, but I knew if I didn't tell him, something bad might happen so I said, "I-I mean do it how you usually do." I pushed my embarrassment aside only to have him chuckle at me.

"Heh heh. You're so greedy today, Cecilia. But let's make love." He kneaded my breasts as he kissed me on the cheek. With a thoroughly delighted expression, Lucas sneered like the villainous, handsome man he was, and I pleaded desperately, "P-please…make sure to keep your promise…" My voice quivered with pleasure as I struggled to get the words out.

I simply can't believe it! How absurd! Why am I under threat when I'm the one who started the fight? Why does Lucas get to drive me to anger, then so smoothly brush me aside?! I glared at him fiercely, trying to contain the pent-up frustration in my eyes.

And now I, Cecilia, deeply regret that I didn't voice my opinion more clearly.

I told him not to be too rough with me, but I should've defined what that meant! Lucas may have said I needed to come once, but either way, I'm already at his mercy, and who knows what trouble I'll get into with this stupid potential of mine that I never even asked for…?! Actually, the "once" he's referring to is already so intense that my body is no longer under my control…!! But then… what should I have done…?

My mind screamed as he tweaked my hardened nipples between his fingers, then my lungs followed suit as he performed even more merciless motions across my sensitive spots.

“Ahh, mm, nngh, ahh! Haah?! That hurts… Eek! No… Take out…your finger!”

My smoldering body heat kept rising from his powerful stimulation. He kept teasing me without even giving me time to catch my breath. Unable to stand it, I threw my head back and let out a series of high-pitched moans. My upper body was pressed against the sheet while Lucas held me by the waist, slowly thrusting his long cock into me from above.

“Eek, noo! No, not there! No, I’m gonna cum, ahh! Lord Lukie, stop! Ahh, nngh!”

I clutched sheets and pleaded with him.

“Nngh, Cece… I love you! Damn it, I can’t believe you make me feel so overwhelmed…” He panted hotly and his voice was hoarse as he pounded me over and over again, pushing his hips against mine. His fingers now out, the tip and edge of his smooth head filled me up. I couldn’t help but feel the merciless kneading of it. I let out another wild moan and then clenched around him.

“Haah, Cecilia… I love you. I missed you so much I couldn’t wait to fuck you!”

“Ahh, haah, Lord Lukie… No, wait, I’m…haah!”

“Nngh, let me…go deep again…!”

My vision was already sparkling from the dazzlingly sweet climax and his whispered professions of love, but then he pushed as hard and deep as he could, expelling all the air from my lungs and making my back arch against the bed. He slipped his palm out from between the sheets and my body, then grabbed my breasts and squeezed them while tweaking and rubbing my hard nipples. I felt my inner walls trembling, tightening around him as if to say, “Don’t let go!” and euphoria filled my heart that had been craving his touch for so long.

He pressed his mouth against my shoulders and neck and said, “Cece, are you extra sensitive today?”

I shook my head shyly and denied it, but my body was more forthright in its

response.

“So tight… Your body is so honest, Cece. I love you. I love you; I love only you…”

“Mm, I love you, Lord Lukie! Ahh, I love you, Lord Lukie! Ahh? Eek, no! I’m scared! Not there! Ahh!”

I clung to his arms, accepting all the pleasure he gave me. Frantically, I tried to respond to his love and my heart honestly responded to him, shockwaves convulsing through my hips. I felt a frightening throbbing feeling in my womb and clung tighter to him. He squeezed me in return, pounding me deep and hard until his heat erupted inside of me.

My vision felt like it had been fried by the euphoric sensation, then my vision turned white and all sound disappeared…

When Lucas woke me up the next morning, he was already wearing his Black Knight’s uniform. Seeing as he’d only arrived late in the night, I was surprised to see him leaving so early.

I bolted out of bed, causing him to chuckle.

“Good,” he said, smiling mischievously, “You’ve got a lot more energy than I expected. That means I can probably be a little rougher on you next time, huh?”

He planted a little kiss on me as I looked at him, speechless, but he seemed to be in high spirits—and ten times hotter in his knight’s uniform. The overall image was beautiful enough to leave me dazed. Suddenly, he grabbed my chin as he looked at me with a furrowed brow.

“I’m sorry to leave you all alone, but I don’t think I’ll be home tonight, either. I’ll leave something in my place, though. And…” he leaned close and whispered in my ear, “I don’t care if it gets dirty.”

Before I could even say a word, he draped a shirt over my shoulders, sending my brain into instant overload. I grabbed the nearest pillow at threw it at him!

“You’re horrible!”

“Ow! That hurt, Cece.”

That didn’t hurt at all, if that stupid grin is any indication! You’re the worst! Why is your evil nighttime personality showing up in the morning too? It’s unsettling, seeing that handsome, innocent face sporting such a wretched attitude! But even more disturbing is the way it makes my heart pound! And why are you smirking?! At least stick to a regular smile when I’m angry!!

It didn’t help that I was so mortified that I completely forgot to give him the standard morning greetings, which was unheard of for the daughter of a marquis. But I couldn’t hold back. The pillow might not have worked, but I still had one more weapon to unleash, one whose superior power I was sure would have an effect on him.

“You’re mean! You’re a bully! Why are you like this! You’re a jerk, Lord Lukie! You’re such a jerk I’m not going to talk to you anymore!”

“What? I’m so—mmph! I’m sorry, Cece. I went too far and got too carried away, I’m sorry…!”

Yay, that pillow hit him right in the face! And he apologized genuinely this time. Serves you right! I’m pissed that my lovesick brain can’t even manage an “I hate you,” as a lie, but that was super effective, so it all worked out in the end! Revenge accomplished! I did it! Congrats, me! I gave a thumbs-up to my inner self and sat back down on the bed as I calmed my breathing.

“I’m sorry. I said too much. Please forgive me, Cece. I’m really sorry.” Lucas was frowning and looked very upset. I glared at him and hugged the pillow.

“…That’s what happens when you say things you shouldn’t, Lord Lukie.”

“…I know. I’m very sorry.”

“Stop making fun of people’s embarrassment.”

“Okay. But you’re so cute when you’re embarrassed.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m sorry, I won’t do it again. …Probably.”

Probably?! Excuse me, but can we be a little clearer about that?! I glared at him, but he just scooped up a lock of my hair and kissed it, looking quite troubled as he did so.

“I love all the looks you give me, Cece. Knowing I’m the only one you have eyes for is enough to undo me, so I truly don’t want to make you mad. I’ll be careful not to go too far.”

Despite his uneasy expression, his half-lidded eyes and tender voice were filled with fondness. I couldn’t help but smile at him, but I caught myself and puffed out my cheeks in a pout instead.

Honestly, this man… I’m getting déjà vu from last night. He’s not doing this on purpose, is he? Where did he learn this trick? If he tries it on another woman, he’s in for it!

“Y-yes, do be careful.”

My heart clenched with affection, but that was all I could say. *Honestly, I’m much too soft on Lucas,* I chided myself, then checked to make sure I didn’t get anything on his uniform when I threw the pillow at him. His golden eyes narrowed shyly, but he looked relieved. I couldn’t help but wonder if he was feeling all right, going on campaign two days in a row. But then suddenly, I remembered what Lady Anika had said the night before.

At the same time, images came flashing back in my mind: light brown hair and a bashful brown gaze; a plain face with a brusque voice. I stared at Lucas but saw no trace of those features there. *If someone told me they were two different people, I would believe them.*

Hair the color of daybreak and the royal golden eyes. A face so gorgeous it was divine. He and Lucas were completely different.

It’s not that I was in love with that young boy. Although I did admire him a great deal, I certainly didn’t feel for him the way that I felt for Lucas now. I

couldn't even call those feelings my first stirrings of love. Perhaps I projected those feelings onto Lucas, who had similar mannerisms. Every time I saw him looking out for me on guard duty, every time he helped me, I might have inadvertently nurtured those feelings for him. That's what I thought in the back of my mind.

But now I was certain that I loved Lucas, and that I wanted to know everything about him.

The fact that he hadn't told me must mean that he didn't want to, and it wasn't nice to pry. I knew that, but if he was really Lucas, *this* Lucas, then I wanted us to be bound by a promise that bridged our pasts to our future.

My pulse quickened and I inadvertently gulped.

I placed a hand on the golden knight's emblem on his chest. "Lord Lukie. If you made me feel bad, would you make it up to me?"

He gave me a puzzled look and said, "I'd give you anything," with a smile. I chided my heart for being so timid and scared that he might hate me for this.

"There's someone I want to see," I said very quietly.

Suddenly his face froze, expressionless. He clenched his hand over mine, which rested on his cheek.

"…Who is he? Where can I find him?!" His eyes narrowed with a dangerous glint in them as he glared at me piercingly.

"The Black Knights. I met him once with Marshal Webber."

Lucas gasped, but a split second later, steeled his gaze, gold eyes flashing with anger. When he spoke, his voice was low. "…Cece, no. I can't allow it."

Then he mercilessly pushed me back onto the bed.

"Eek! Lord Lukie, please! Listen to me."

"I can't believe you're asking in that adorable voice to go see another man! Take that request back right now."

“Lord Lukie… No!”

“Didn’t you hear me? I don’t want to be rough with you. If you don’t want me to chain you up, then you’ll take back that request right now!” Fury swirled in his eyes as he glared at me, holding me down firmly as if to say he’d never let me leave this room again. I realized then that he’d completely misunderstood, but it was too difficult to explain.

“Lord Lukie, eek! No, not there! Don’t make a mark on me!”

“If you don’t want me to make a mark then you’d better take it back right now. But at least tell me the man’s name first.”

He stuck his hand in my own shirt and lightly bit down on my neck, sending shivers through my body.

I shouldn’t have been so indirect, but I never expected him to dislike talking about other men so much! I should’ve just said, “You’re Lukie, aren’t you?!” It feels like he’s ready to kill me if I don’t tell him the name! And besides, it’s not even about another man! Ahh, even though his voice sounds gentle, his pupils are dilated and scary!

Fear pierced my heart, but I somehow managed to find my voice.

“H-he tried to become a knight since he was ten years old under Marshal Webber!”

Lucas—who had pinned down my hands and pressed his teeth against my shoulder—suddenly froze.

“I-I first met him when I was eleven, when I was beginning my princess consort training. I made a promise to him, and he nodded.”

Lucas’s shoulders started visibly shaking when I mentioned the promise. He slowly lifted his gaze, looking me in the face. Encouraged by this, I continued.

“I promised him that I would become a wonderful princess for him to protect when he became a knight, and that we would meet again.”

Hey, you remember, right? Because you said it yourself that you entered the

Imperial Order to protect me!

I cupped his shocked face with my hands and looked into his teary eyes, then whispered softly, “I really want to see him. With his chestnut-colored hair and golden-tinted brown eyes. His name is Lukie.”

Lucas held his breath and sat up abruptly, covering his mouth. I could hear his trembling voice from behind his hand and I slowly sat up.

“Wh-why?”

His face gradually flushed, and I reached out to his cheek again.

“He’s you, right?”

I sensed Mini Cece nodding approvingly in the corner of my mind. I leaned in closer, on my knees to get a better look, and this time Lucas audibly gasped. He began rambling things like, “Who told you……! I’ll kill them…!” in a muffled voice, his hands covering his face.

Then he placed a hand on my shoulder. “S-sorry… I-I don’t think I hurt you, but…I’m sorry for scaring you. I-I’ll leave now,” he said, his face a deep scarlet.

But I didn’t want the conversation to end, so I said, “Wait, Lord Lukie. You promised to make it up to me, remember? If you don’t answer me, I won’t talk to you ever again!”

That caught him off guard, and his eyes darted about anxiously until, at last, they settled on me. My heart fluttered, but I managed to keep steady. *Look at him being so cute. But I won’t let him off the hook. Come on, answer me!*

I leaned forward as he tried to get off the bed, deliberately surrendering myself to his supportive hands, urging him to speak.

“Lord Lukie?”

“Y-yes…”

“Lord Lukie.”

“Y-yes…”

He was really struggling. But one more push.

“If you don’t answer me, kissing is also off-limits till I say so. Understood?”

“I-it’s me.”

I did it, I did it! Surprisingly easy. I’ve got the makings of a villainess after all! I mentally high-fived my Mini Cece and reveled in my success, smiling brightly at Lucas, who was scowling back with a rare mix of frustration and embarrassment.

He widened his eyes at my smile, then retorted, “You’re the bully here…!”

“Not as much as you are! You said you’d do anything for me!”

I pouted and stuck out my chin.

“Damn it! For the first time, your cuteness is infuriating!” Then he gave me a rough kiss, and I accepted it, thrilled to see this new side of him.

We carried on like that for some time, until an apologetic voice called from the hallway beyond the door. Blushing, I hastily smoothed out Lucas’s uniform and tie. He helped me button my shirt and groaned, “If I can’t come home tonight, I’m going to burn down the border forest…” but I patted him on the head to comfort him and saw him off.

When he returned the next evening, he predictably attacked me, and despite thinking to myself that he was a bit too much to handle with his frighteningly sweet (and naughty) words and actions, I couldn’t help but rejoice as he enveloped me in his arms. I responded to his whispered professions of love with sweet sighs of affection.

Bonus Chapter

"DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO?"

"Hm?"

"I said I'd take you somewhere, remember? I have the day off tomorrow. Since it's on short notice we can't go too far. We have to consider Finn and the others' schedules too, so some options might be off the table."

Lucas had just got out of the bath and was throwing me a rueful look from under the towel as he dried his wet hair. I stared at him blankly for a moment, combing through my mind.

Go out? I asked him to go out? Oh, right. At the soiree. So much happened that day it totally slipped my mind.

Wait, go out… Go out… Go out?!

"I-is Lady Anika coming with us? O-or are we going alone?" I asked, my eyes darting around restlessly.

Alone! Please say alone! Mini Cece pleaded in my mind.

I don't know yet, so go count some sheep! I shot back.

"This is all spur of the moment, so I didn't ask her. She's a marquise after all, so she has to coordinate her schedule with Alphonse. We can go with her another day; it's just you and me tomorrow," he said casually.

"I-I see," I replied with downcast eyes as I fiddled with the ribbon of my nightgown, tying it then untying it again.

A date! We're going on a date! Ahh, what should I do! Lucas and I will be all alone! This is my first date with someone I actually love! What should I wear? Do I have any pretty clothes to match the occasion?! Ahh, what should I do?!

"Cecilia? What's the matter? Do you have plans already?"

“Eep… N-no, I’m free…” *My voice cracked!*

Oh no, he’s looking at me all puzzled. Now he’s walking over! Calm down, Cece. You’ve been on dates in your previous life! You went window shopping and to the theater and out to eat. You’re just going to do that kind of thing…with Lucas. Ah, he’s sitting on the bed, looking at me! With that smile!

“L-Lord Luk—”

“You look really happy, Cece.”

“Huh?!”

“If you’re that happy, maybe I should threaten Leon for a bit more time off?”

What?! Am I smiling that much?! Oh god, I’m so embarrassed… But also happy. Huh? Wait, what did he just say? Threaten the crown prince?!

“Lord Lukie…”

“Calm down. It’s just a regular day off. It’s not fair if Leon gets a day to himself and I don’t, right? I went through the proper channels, and it’ll be the first day off I’ve had in a while. My assistant told Leon as much. I’ve worked hard enough that I won’t be punished for taking a day to relax with my fiancée once in a while.”

I reached out to Lucas’s shoulder as he gently cupped my cheek. I smiled with relief and happiness. “If you’re tired, we don’t have to go out. I’ll have fun anywhere, as long as it’s with you.” I patted his shoulder and suddenly felt like I was floating. He’d picked me up and set me in his lap.

Lucas kissed me, pecking me several times and narrowing his eyes to encourage me as our lips almost touched. I opened my mouth timidly and his thick tongue pushed its way in. I kissed him back, dizzy from how incredible it felt.

“Nngh, haah…”

“Then can I fuck you all day tomorrow? You don’t have plans the next day either, right?”

He pulled away and fixed me with his gaze, tongue lolling like a hungry beast's. The suggestion gave me goosebumps and he chuckled at my reaction.

"L-let's go out," I said, my flushed cheeks twitching.

"That's a shame. I was thinking about hiding in various places in the mansion and fucking you," he said with a mischievous laugh.

Oh my, that obscene suggestion's taken a sledgehammer to the tender mood… Ugh, seriously! Absolutely not!!

"I-I'm not doing that! There is no way I'm doing that with you in 'various places'!" I said vehemently.

"Really? I've always wanted to do it outside. Can you imagine how hot it would be to see you flushed under the sunlight, struggling to suppress your voice, terrified that people might see us?"

The vivid image only stoked the flames of my outrage. *Wait, 'in the mansion' didn't just mean inside the mansion? It includes around it? Why and how would we do it outside?!* I stared at him in shock.

"…You don't want to?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, we can work up to it little by little."

I will not work up to it little by little! I was about to say that out loud, but then he rolled on the bed and untied my nightgown's ribbon, then planted a kiss on my breasts. The sudden feel of his wet hair brushing against my skin made me shriek.

"Lord Lukie, your hair is cold! You need to dry it properly."

"I'm sorry."

"Honestly, what are you doing?!"

"Sorry, you're just so cute that I lost control…"

It has nothing to do with control! And why are you trying to take off my panties?! What happened to your restraint?

"Lord Lukie, if you don't dry your hair, you're going to catch a cold!"

"…I don't think I will, but I guess you might, huh?"

True, I can't picture him catching a cold, I found myself inwardly agreeing. Suddenly a gust of wind blew out of nowhere, fluttering the curtains of the canopied bed.

"Huh?!"

"Is it dry?"

I was speechless.

He ran a hand through his hair—now completely dry—and all I could do was stare.

It's nuts to use wind magic as a hair dryer! Even the slightest miscalculation in output could result in a spell strong enough to rip flesh from bone! And to top it off, he didn't even draw a magic circle first! What's with him? Maybe this sort of high-precision magic comes effortlessly to him, or maybe he's just crazy. I guess it's true what they say about geniuses having a screw loose!

Once again, Lucas's overpowered abilities sent a chill down my spine, but then he kept trying to peel off my panties, so I quickly protested.

"No, Lord Lukie! No, no, I won't do it today!" I shouted, making him freeze.

He looked up with a grumpy expression on his face.

"Why not?"

"B-because! We just did it yesterday!"

"So?"

"So…?!"

Ooh, he looks so cute with that grumpy face. I feel like he's gotten more

expressive lately. That only means that my heart pounds more, though…

"If you don't have a good reason, then we're doing it today. We don't have to get up early tomorrow."

Uh-oh! This is no time to have your heart pound! This is my warning that he's gonna fuck me to unconsciousness! I-I don't want to say it, but I need to!

"I-if you do it tonight, then I'm sure I'll be sore tomorrow, so…"

"Why?"

"Ugh…"

"I've been really gentle lately, right? You were able to get up this morning, right? What's sore?"

Why is he being so aggressive today? Stop narrowing your eyes at me, it makes my heart pound!

"W-Well, when you do it, it feels too good… I can get up, but my body feels sluggish the whole day… We're finally going out on a date tomorrow and I want to be able to enjoy it," I said, my words tumbling out in a rush by the end.

Lucas heaved a deep sigh and covered his face with his hands.

"Lord Lukie?"

"I'm sorry I made you say it, but…and I know you have no idea, but… I want to fuck you so bad. However, since you're looking forward to our date so much, how can I insist?" he muttered, hanging his head.

I sat up and reached out for him.

"Don't, Cece. You can't. I can't handle you touching me right now. I'm sorry, but I'm going to go take another bath. Go on and go to sleep. Please, go to sleep first."

Lucas dodged my touch as he leaped off the bed, not glancing my way even once. He came to a sudden stop just before reaching the door, threw a look over his shoulder, and then let out a low, rumbling noise that seemed to make

the air quake, like a fierce beast growling.

"If you're not asleep by the time I get back, then I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll be able to go out with you tomorrow. Good night," he said softly. His golden eyes seemed oddly luminous in the darkness as he left the room.

I struggled to contain the emotions welling up inside of me, hastily pulling up my underwear with trembling fingers before slipping under the covers of the spacious bed. I curled up in a ball, counted sheep, and eventually managed to fall asleep.

The next morning, I was awoken not by Lucas, but by the maids, and I froze for a brief moment.

Various boxes of different sizes had been stacked at one corner of the sofa. I couldn't believe how many there were, and even more were still being carried in. I was about to get out of bed when I felt my hand hit something. I looked down and my eyes widened.

There was a necklace with golden flowers and small, sparkling diamonds dangling from a fancy gold chain. Nearby was a pair of matching golden earrings in the shape of flowers and a bouquet of dewy pink roses that seemed to have been freshly picked. Attached to the roses was a message card that looked like it'd been folded by hand. I inhaled the sweet scent of the bouquet, tied with a familiar dark blue ribbon, and picked up the card with trembling fingers.

My beloved,

I'm grateful from the bottom of my heart that I met you. —L

I sighed and held the card to my chest. Even though we hadn't even been on the date yet, my heart was already overflowing, and I struggled to hold back the tears that threatened to fall.

Just then, I heard someone say, “Are you ready, Lady Cecilia? Let’s get you changed.” I quickly lifted the bouquet to hide the sheepish look on my face.

“Um, where is Lucas?”

“He’s getting ready in another room. Once he’s prepared, he’ll meet you in the foyer.”

“In the foyer?”

Why go to the trouble when we live in the same house?

The maids standing tall before me smirked knowingly. “Today marks your first date with Lord Lucas, Lady Cecilia.”

“Oh, I see.”

“We will accompany to provide security, but since you’ll be with Lord Lucas, we’ll make ourselves scarce. Do you know what it’s called when a young man and woman go out together? A date!”

Their penetrating stares were filled with pressure, and my eyes darted from one to the next, trying to meet their gazes in turn…

At last, they spoke. “Waiting for each other is part of going on a date. Do you understand?”

Even in that tense environment, I found myself wondering if meeting in the foyer even counted as “waiting for each other,” but I didn’t dare talk back…

“Yes…” I replied stiffly, my face turning red.

They nodded with satisfaction. “Well then, let’s get changed,” they said, opening the boxes.

For some reason, I was forced to wear intricate, fancy underwear (locking me in a battle of the wills against the maids…which I lost). As I faced my reflection in the mirror, I resolved not to let Lucas lay eyes on this lingerie, but regardless, I couldn’t help but feel a little embarrassed.

I wore a white off-the-shoulder blouse with a pomegranate lace-up corset

over it, along with a deep green ankle-length skirt and brown boots. My hair was braided off to one side, adorned with small flowers. I wore minimal makeup—just a hint of blush and pink lipstick. I thought I looked like a commoner girl one might see in the capital.

I looked much younger too. I was slightly puzzled why they had styled me like this. I adjusted the necklace Lucas gave me and turned to Anna and the others. “I don’t look odd, do I?”

“Lady Cecilia, your face is already perfectly beautiful, so light makeup suits it fine. It’s just the thing, really!”

“You’re always elegant and beautiful, but today you look so pure and charming! I hope Lord Lucas will be okay once he sees you…”

“Now, let’s go and head out to Flower Lodge imm—argh!”

Elsa collapsed on the floor again…but I was relieved to see Kate was the one dealing with her. Honestly, I wouldn’t want to see Anna like that again… I tipped my head to the side as I watched Elsa twitching on the floor.

“What’s the Flower Lodge?”

“Come on, Lady Cecilia. Lord Lucas is waiting.”

“We have to apply a transformation spell before leaving the mansion, so please hurry!”

Huh? What’s with all the rush? Don’t tell me I got tricked again. Despite my suspicions that I was being misled again, I followed them downstairs. Besides, it was clear they wouldn’t take no for an answer.

“Cece?”

“I’m sorry for making you wait…”

As I headed toward the entrance, Lucas, who had been speaking with Finn, turned around. His eyes widened when he saw me.

I couldn’t help but feel a little worried when I saw his expression, and my

naturally quiet voice shrank even smaller when I replied.

He rushed over to me without a word, placed his hand under my chin, and instead of speaking, he just stared at me.

“U-um?”

“…Finn.”

“Wait, Finn?”

Why is he saying Finn’s name instead of mine?!

“Yes, Lord Lucas?”

“It’s painful how adorable my fiancée is…”

“What are you saying? You’re always like this. I’m sure you have no intention of letting anyone else enjoy her, so the only one it pains is you.”

“Cece.”

“Yes?”

“You’re…so pretty. You look so good. You’re so, so beautiful.” A slight pink tinged his cheeks as he covered his mouth and muttered. “Ahhh, I can’t believe how cute you look today. How am I going to get through the day?”

“Th-thank you so much…”

I guess there’s no avoiding the jitters in this sort of situation… But it was my first time being complimented before a date with someone I loved.

And to make matters worse, I heard Anna and the others whispering behind us. “Wow, what’s with that mood between them?”

“I’m getting embarrassed just looking! What should I do?”

“Ahh, so bittersweet…”

“I feel like Master’s getting worse and worse…”

It was quite unbearable to hear!

I lowered my head with embarrassment and toyed with my clasped hands as Lucas took a deep breath to regain his composure.

“Cece, I’m going to cast an illusion spell, so don’t move,” he said, and then there was an overpowering burst of mana from above us. “How is it?” he asked, turning toward Finn and the others for confirmation.

“Perfect.”

“Rather than transforming her, we can just cast a glamour over her, and… Now she’s the rare House Herbst special-edition village girl!”

“It’s not fair that you’re the only one who gets to enjoy her, Lord Lucas…”

“Yes, he enjoys all our hard work… But she looks so cute under that illusion spell, so it’s fine. Plus, the spell is so flawless that no one will know it’s her. Wouldn’t it be impossible to be subtle about guarding them at that point?”

“As long as we follow at a distance, there shouldn’t be a problem. Besides, once they lose themselves in a world of their own, they won’t even notice us.”

“Ooh, right! I want to go to the crepe shop that everyone’s talking about in the capital!”

The maids apparently had no qualms about discussing their plans openly before us. Meanwhile, I couldn’t help but stare at Lucas, astounded that his magical talents extended to complex illusions as well. *Do his powers have limits?* But then I suddenly came back to myself and stared at the handsome figure in front of me.

He wore a slightly loose white shirt with a delicate decorative cord around the color, simple navy pants with a matching vest, and brown shoes. He looked like a commoner at first glance, but with his deep blue hair, golden eyes, perfect face, and tall, muscular frame, he couldn’t pass for anything other than a disguised noble. I couldn’t help but grin at him.

“What is it, Cece?”

“Lord Lukie, why don’t you become Lukie?”

“Um, well, that’s…”

“Come to think of it, you still haven’t made up for the other day. Have you forgotten? Of course you’ll keep your promise, won’t you?”

Lucas seemed to have trouble finding words to respond.

Haha, even if you blush and glare at me like that I won’t back down. Now, let’s keep our promise, shall we? I prompted him with a cheerful smile and slight tilt of the head.

“‘Lukie?’ So she found you out, huh, Master? Ha ha, serves you right!”

“Wow, Lady Cecilia has finally managed to get the upper hand with Lord Lucas. Splendid!”

“I’m curious about what she means by ‘making up for the other day,’ but more than that, what a sight Master Lucas’s embarrassed face is! We need Lord Dirk and Lady Anika to see this… Kate, Elsa, you didn’t forget to use your recording crystals, did you?”

“Absolutely not! This footage is priceless! We could sell this to Lord Dirk for a boatload of money, then buy unlimited crepes!”

As the maids excitedly chattered away, I couldn’t help but wonder why Lucas looked so embarrassed. I gave him a puzzled look and said, “Lord Lukie?”

“Damn it… All right, fine!” he said in a somewhat resigned tone. Then, with a burst of mana, he activated a spell. For a moment, it felt like time had stopped.

Light brown hair, light brown eyes. A plain, yet perfectly proportioned face stared back at me. The boy I met so many years ago was now an adult. I couldn’t help but gawk in astonishment.

He scowled sheepishly. “Is this good?”

I couldn’t stop the overwhelming emotions welling up inside of me. Tears overflowed as my throat burned, streaming down my cheeks.

Just as we’d promised, he became a knight and protected me so many times.

He'd grown up so strong, yet so gentle.

I reached out a trembling hand to Lucas, who looked at my tears in surprise. "C-Cece? What's wrong?"

"A-am I worthy of becoming your princess…? Would you be proud to protect me?"

Remembering all the times he'd come home without a single scratch or bruise, I realized just how hard he'd trained, and my heart ached.

I'm sure he'd had his own reasons for becoming a knight, ones that had nothing to do with our promise. Still, it must have been so difficult. He must've put in so much effort. How could he be so strong? Why was he so gentle? Why did he love me so much?

I was so emotionally overwhelmed it was almost painful. I couldn't help but screw up my face, unable to stop the tears. Lucas gently embraced me and whispered into my ear, "Lady Cecilia Cline, there is no one more worthy of becoming the princess consort than you. Thank you for giving me a reason to hone my strength…Thank you for giving me a future."

At those words, the floodgates finally burst.

How long had it been? Lucas held me in his big arms as I sobbed. I wiped my face with the handkerchief he handed me, and sniffled. My face was red all the way down to my neck. *Oh no, I forgot we were in the foyer!* And to make matters worse, I was sure Lucas's vest was wet from my tears. *I'm truly sorry!*

Noticing my distress, Lucas called out, "Anna!"

"Yes, Lord Lucas, I'll prepare it right away."

"Cece, are you okay? Let's get back to the room so Anna can fix you up. What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry for crying like this…and for getting your clothes wet…"

This is unbecoming of a noblewoman. What if he scorns me for this? My pride as a noble is needlessly getting in the way. I can't move my feet. I'm really

sorry…

Too embarrassed to look up at him, I clung tightly onto Lucas's vest and apologized. He gently cradled my face in his hands.

"Let's take a look at you," he said, and gazed deeply into my eyes. I thought my heart would stop!

"L-Lord Lukie?!"

"Your eyes are all red, Cece. Adorable. You're so cute when you cry."

Read the room! I look like a total mess because I cried too much, and I don't want you to see me like this!

Just as I was about to get upset, he surprised me by lifting me up gently. I clung to his shoulders, and he pressed his own face against my shoulder.

"I don't want to show your cute crying face to anyone else, so should I just take you back to the room like this? Hang on," he whispered in a deep, gentle voice, holding me like I was fragile. I realized he was giving me an excuse to cling to him and tears spilled from my eyes once again.

With trembling lips, I desperately expressed my gratitude, and wrapped my arms tightly around his neck.

"Lord Lukie, thank you for the flowers and jewelry. And for the other gifts as well."

I rode with Lucas, enjoying the view from astride his horse. He guided his mount effortlessly with one hand while holding me with the other.

"I'm glad they arrived. I was planning on buying more, but there are still items arriving from your family's house, and Anna insisted we get those sorted out before filling your closet further. I'll give you more gifts next time. If you want anything else, simply say the word and I'll get it for you," Lucas said. Then he casually added, "I can't buy anything too expensive, but something like a villa is doable."

It was quite a contrast to see a young man, to all appearances no more than a commoner, speak so casually about owning a villa…

“It’s okay. I loved all the gifts. I’ll treasure them. Thank you, Lord Lukie.”

While expressing my gratitude, I touched the earrings and necklace that were subtly swaying as we rode. The meticulously crafted flowers and the flawless, glittering diamonds were as exquisite as you’d expect of a ducal household. *Lucas has such good taste.*

“I thought they might be too plain a gift for a marquis’s daughter, but I haven’t seen you wear any flashy jewels before. I’m glad that you like them,” he said with a smile. I was about to smile back shyly when he casually kissed my ear, eliciting a startled squeak from me.

“We shouldn’t do this outside!”

“I’m a commoner today, so it’s normal.”

“O-oh, really?”

Huh? Commoners kiss in public like this? Aren’t the youth of Bern a bit lacking in decorum? The cheeks are one thing, I suppose, but kissing the ears, neck, shoulders, and whatnot with no regard to being seen by others? My eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Lady Lia, what Lord Lucas is saying is a blatant lie. Don’t be fooled.”

“Even commoners don’t engage in such behavior in public.”

“Lady Lia is so cute!”

“Lord Lucas, you’re getting too carried away.”

I listened to the maids’ warnings and then shot Lucas a strong glare. “Lord Lucas!”

“You got me. Why do you all have to interfere? Still, a little wouldn’t hurt, right? After all, we’re out in public as Lukie and Lia, not ourselves.”

“No, we cannot!”

“You got me!” he said! He took advantage of my ignorance!

Today, because we were going incognito, Lucas was Lukie and I was Lia. With our illusions and our commoner names, we were totally new people!

“But it’s a date.”

“W-well, yes! But I prefer a normal, typical date!”

Please, just a beginner-friendly, ordinary date!

“A normal date?”

“Yes!”

“A date…”

“Y-yes…”

“That lovers have?”

“Are you mocking me, Lord Lucas?!”

That grin is so galling! And why is he in such a good mood today, even showing his mischievous side?! Well, too bad for him, he looks like another person right now, so I won’t fall for it so easily! Even if his eyes do *look slightly golden when he narrows them like that. But I absolutely won’t fall for it!*

I was keenly aware of my racing heart, and I desperately glared at him. However, Lucas seemed to enjoy that. He casually replied, “I’m not mocking you. Just making sure.”

That he was so unbothered only irked me further, and I gritted my teeth, wondering how to deal with the situation…and then my eyes landed on the cord of his cloak…

“Lia…the cord…it’s tight.”

“Oh, well. You seemed a bit disheveled, so I thought I might fix it—your wretched personality, that is!” I said, holding tight to the drawstring with a mischievous grin.

“You always say that.”

I turned away slightly and snapped, “That’s your own fault.”

Unable to resist, he laughed and said, “You’re adorable when you’re angry.”

“Lord Lukie? Shall I adjust your cord again?” I reached for his throat.

He chuckled. “Sorry, sorry! Look, we’re here.”

I turned and my breath caught in my throat as the view unfolded before me. The crowd and noise overwhelmed my senses, making my head reel.

We had arrived at Kastel-Kues, the bustling heart of commerce in Bern. It was the largest economic center in the kingdom, connecting the entrance to the capital to the noble district. Knights patrolled the area, so security wasn’t bad, but the presence of imported goods attracted many foreigners and guild mercenaries. Scuffles and conflicts weren’t uncommon, so there were few noblewomen who ventured here. Those who did were only permitted to observe from a distance or pass through in a carriage.

Since books hadn’t afforded me any real insight about the kingdom and its people, I’d long wanted to see it for myself. However, I couldn’t simply act on my own whims, so I decided that was the place I wanted to visit to learn about the kingdom.

I’d asked Lucas if we could go there, and without hesitation, he answered, “Since I’m with you, and Anna and Finn are here too, it should be fine.” He was very casual about it, and his words were strangely persuasive. I secretly found myself agreeing with him.

Amid the bustling crowd, completely removed from the patrician spaces of the nobility, Lucas suddenly asked, “Are you hungry? Is there anything you don’t like? I recommend trying the sandwiches with meat stuffed between the bread.”

I was started by his question and looked at him. “Um, well…”

“You want to see all kinds of things, right? We can eat inside, but I thought

you might want to explore while walking. And it might be difficult to eat while you walk, so we can buy something from a food stall and eat it in the park."

He tipped his head slightly while speaking, and I found myself captivated by his essence. *Can he read my mind? The way he says it, he's not above passing time the way commoner couples do. I'm amazed!*

"Lukie, do you come here often?"

"Not lately, but when Andreas was training me, I came here a lot. He liked imported alcohol and often sent me to buy it for him. And in the past, when I went too far during training and broke my weapons, I'd come here to buy new ones. When I was a child, sometimes my family came here incognito."

"Y-your family came here incognito?!"

I really wish I could've seen that!

Lucas reached out his hand and I tentatively placed mine in his, feeling like he was escorting me.

"Yes, but not lately. However, today is a date," he said, smiling and slipping his fingers through mine. Then he planted a gentle kiss on the back of my hand, causing my face to flush with heat.

"Lukie…"

"Today we're just two lovers, not nobles. No one will say anything if we get close. There isn't any real danger, but there are some rough areas, so don't wander off. Well, not that I'd let you anyway." He smiled softly at me, his gaze holding a strength that took my breath away.

Despite his nondescript appearance, his light brown eyes, slightly narrowed, and soft, slightly wavy brown hair, he was still Lucas. The allure he exuded, the deep husky voice, and the heat in his eyes were all unmistakably Lucas.

My pulse quickened. *Am I nervous or abashed? Plus, I can't help but feel like I'm cheating on him!* My mind went off into weird territory again. *Can I really handle this day?*

“First, let’s head to the main street of Kastel-Kues. We can get tea, snacks, and other light fare there. There are a lot of stores selling sundries and clothes there as well, so if you see something you like, don’t hesitate to let me know, Lia.”

“W-wow…”

We went to get food, with Lucas suggesting various items from the many stalls we passed, and then brought it all to a nearby park for an early lunch. I was happy to let him lead the way, and Lucas, for his part, seemed to enjoy showing me around.

He patiently explained things to me as we went, even though I kept stopping in awe at the sights around me. He chose a few pastry shops to visit, knowing my fondness for baked goods, and when I indicated I was interested in one, he took me by the hand.

We bought round pastries called Lebkuchen and ate them together. It was my first time eating away from a dining table, but Lucas told me there was no need for plates or to break it up into bite-sized morsels. Nervous but exhilarated, I did as he said and took a bite straight out of the pastry. I stared at Lucas, surprised at how good it was. Then I noticed the Lebkuchen he’d bought was already gone. I stared at him, stunned.

Lucas noticed my gaze and leaned in closer. “Hm? What’s wrong? Don’t you like it? Should I eat yours?” He moved closer and, before I knew it, he’d taken a bite of my Lebkuchen. I was amazed at how adorable he looked while eating the pastry.

What a cutie! I want to see him stuffing his face full of pastries when he’s not transformed! I thought. *This day might turn out better than I thought!* But then embarrassment crept in when I realized he’d bitten from the same food as me. *Commoner couples are something else! Will my heart be able to handle this?!*

“Lia? There’s an apple strudel stand over there. I think you’ll like it. Let’s go check it out.”

“O-oh, okay.”

“‘Okay’?”

Lucas suddenly stared at my face, startling me. I still had food in my mouth, so I started chewing faster so I could answer. He burst into laughter, enjoying my reaction.

For a moment, I was taken aback by his unfamiliar appearance, but when the light caught his eyes and they shone like gold, it quickly reminded me of Lucas, making me feel both embarrassed and miffed—and causing my cheeks to flush uncontrollably.

“What? I’m hungry because you ate my food!” I said in a deliberately annoyed tone, trying to brush it off. But Lucas, showing his usual mean streak, came back with his typical mischief… *There he goes again, the incorrigible troublemaker!*

“You gave your half-eaten Lebkuchen to me, Lia.”

“Wh-why are you saying it like that in a naughty voice?!”

“Hm? Should I have just come right out and said it was an indirect kiss?” he whispered, his voice dipping with sensuality.

My face flushed bright red. “You little…!” Angrily, I reached for the string on his collar, but he effortlessly grabbed my hand and kissed my fingertips playfully. I pulled away, flustered, and he gave me a mischievous grin.

“Lia, your face is so red. You’re as delicious as an apple. I want a taste.”

Eek! Our date is already going in a dangerous direction! This is so frustrating! Protecting myself is first priority! I started to panic when I saw him start to lick my fingers, so I hastily opened my mouth.

“I want to eat some strudel! If you won’t buy it for me, I’ll never talk to you again!”

My childish retort made Lucas freeze. *Oh, where did my decorum as a noblewoman go?!* I grit my teeth and glared at him, but he chuckled and took my hand, pulling my body close as he stroked my cheek—something he couldn’t

do in public as a noble, even though we were engaged.

“Well, that would be a problem. I’ll have them add fresh cream to your strudel if you calm down.”

“I might forgive you if you add ice cream too,” I replied, puffing my cheeks out.

“You’re adorable, Lia,” he murmured sweetly.

Embarrassed, I squeezed his hand, and he squeezed it back. *Argh, it’s so frustrating how he plays me like a fiddle!* This time I really did pout.

We wandered around the shops, buying this and that from vendors and food stalls we passed. As we headed toward the park, we suddenly heard a commotion from behind. I turned around, stunned by what I heard.

“Hey! After him! He’s a pickpocket!”

“No, run! It’s dangerous! He’s got a knife!”

A man wearing a hat pulled down low over his eyes came running toward us, and I couldn’t help but flinch when I saw his hand. Even though I knew I should run, my feet felt like they were glued to the ground, refusing to move.

“Get out of the way! You’re in the way!” came an angry shout as the knife swung down. I clung to Lucas’s hand, unable to even make a sound.

Suddenly, my vision was blocked by a broad back, and I heard the man collapse with a thud.

I stared in bewilderment as the man lay motionless on the ground. I felt a hand on my back and looked up to see Lucas. His eyes, full of concern, and his gentle patting on my back quickly set me at ease. I let out a sigh of relief and was about to thank him when he said softly, “How dare he point a knife at my Lia.”

My throat tightened when I saw him slowly pick up the knife on the ground, my voice failing me.

There was no time to celebrate my boyfriend rescuing me from a thug, nor to think, *"Wow, he's so cool!"* As the commotion gradually mounted, people began to call for the knights to come and I started to panic. I was thinking, *"I have to use my ultimate move! You know, that thing!"* But in reality, I didn't have any ultimate moves! I wanted to cry out, *"It's not like I'm good at this!"*

Then I saw Lucas's hand that was holding the knife moving up. *Ahhh, I'm not brave enough for this!* I thought and pressed my chest against his arm, trembling in fear.

Why does this weird kind of stuff keep happening to me lately? I'm a noblewoman, aren't I…? I lamented silently.

Lucas looked at me when he saw that I was frozen, and I spoke to him in a panic. "Lucas, that knife is dangerous. Could you put it down, please?"

Throw it away! Get rid of it! It's dangerous! And way more dangerous in your hands! I looked at him frantically, then suddenly the knife vanished from his hand. *What was that frightening sound, though?* I looked fearfully and saw the knife stuck deeply in the fallen man's face.

I didn't mean for him to put it down like that… I was so scared I just clung tighter to his arm.

With brows furrowed from concern, he caressed my cheek and said, "Are you okay? You must've been scared."

"I'm fine because I was with you," I replied. *But, wait. It wasn't the thief who scared me!*

"Wow, Mister!"

"A single kick!"

"Way to show off in front of your girlfriend!"

I lowered my head in embarrassment as more and more bystanders chimed in, each one louder than the last.

"We'll take care of him!" a voice called over the din.

Oh no, that sounded bad just now… I panicked again and lifted my face to see a knight approaching with a tense expression on his face.

Keeping peace in the capital was the duty of the Azure Knights, and since Kastel-Kues was a special economic zone, there were more knights deployed here than anywhere else in the kingdom. Still, I never thought I'd encounter a familiar face in a place so crowded.

Even though the illusion magic veiling me would conceal my identity from anyone but Lucas, I couldn't shake the fear of being exposed.

I clutched Lucas's hand tightly and hid behind him, and he also shifted slightly to shield me. I let out a relieved sigh against his broad back and turned my gaze to the knight, Rolfe Kummetz.

"I heard there was a pickpocket here. Is that him?"

"Yes."

"Is the knife stuck in the ground yours?"

"It's his."

Another knight addressed Lucas and suddenly I heard someone say, "Hey you," to me.

Eek! I let out an inward shriek.

"Are you hurt, Miss?" Lord Kummetz asked with a smile. *Yeah, he's a total playboy. He's not concerned!* I thought rudely to myself.

I hesitantly spoke. "U-um, I'm fine. My boyfriend helped me." I blushed as I used the word for the first time, lowering my gaze in embarrassment.

Lucas squeezed my hand to show me his happiness, and I couldn't help but look up to see his reaction. He shyly covered his mouth with the back of his hand. Our gazes met, and in the bright daylight, I could see the gold tinge in his eyes. He squeezed my hand again, causing my body to tremble and my face to flush.

What in the world?! My heart's fluttering like crazy! I screamed inwardly.

"Wow… So innocent, yet sexy. You're really cute, what's your name? I'm Rolfe Kummetz, the second son of a marquis."

His needlessly grandiose introduction left me momentarily stunned.

The knight next to him smacked his forehead and said, "Seriously, Rolfe? You need to stop doing that."

Huh? Wait, does he always do this? But he's on duty now, right? What's wrong with this guy?

Just then, Lucas spoke in a veeeery deep voice. "Hey, can you not flirt with my girlfriend in front of me? She's not telling you her name, either. And quit ogling her."

Oooh, a fight, a fight! This is the first time I've seen two guys this big get into a fight over something so small. What should I do?! Part of me wishes I could tell Kummetz he's talking to the second prince, but part of me really doesn't! The guy in front of you is the second prince! And the next hero! But he's also the vice-captain of the Imperial Order, which means he's your boss, you idiot!

My thoughts took an uncharacteristic turn, and Lucas cast a sidelong glance at me.

"Why're you showing off your status just 'cause you're a knight? Don't you have work to do? You should be questioning the guy lying there. Get his name instead."

Lucas's words were logical, but he probably could've been more tactful about it. A vein bulged in Kummetz's forehead.

"You damn kid! How dare you run your mouth like that to me!"

"Hey, cut it out, Rolfe!"

Another knight tried to restrain Kummetz as he reached out toward Lucas, but he shouted, "Let go!" which only drew in even more onlookers.

What should I do? Our secret date is turning into a disaster!

"Ridiculous…" Lucas fixed Kummetz with a disdainful look, sighed, and then turned to the other knight. "Can we go now?"

He's holding back! Lucas is actually showing some restraint!

I couldn't help but feel slightly moved by that. I silently cheered for him in my heart, but Kummetz clicked his tongue, clearly unimpressed.

Lucas shrugged. "You know, I heard this guy was involved in a homicide case near the border of the noble district recently. The knife looks unusual, so it might be worth investigating." The knights' eyes widened as they took in the information.

Lucas ignored them and took my hand. "Let's go," he said, heading toward the park.

"That cad, always shirking his duties to pick up women while on patrol. It seems the rumors were true after all," Lucas muttered in frustration, along with assurances he would report it to the captain of the knights. Despite that, he was apparently enjoying his meal, a sandwich of roasted turkey, while I ate something called Landbrot, a bread with a sort of egg filling.

"He even knew it was you, Lia, even though you're under an illusion spell. He must have a ridiculously good sense of smell."

"Lukie."

"I think I'll kill him."

"Your sandwich looks really delicious, Lukie! Can I have a bite?!"

I sensed an ominous mood hanging over my fiancé, so I tried to defuse it with talk of food.

But Lucas didn't seem to be biting.

"Hmm? Don't you want it?"

Lucas looked at the sandwich, then me, seemingly deep in thought. *Is he already full?* I wondered, then suddenly he leaned toward me…and licked my mouth…?!

"…?!"

"Mm, delicious. There were anchovies in that. I'm gonna buy that one next time," he said in a casual voice. "One more bite." He grabbed my wrist and bit into my sandwich. I stared in astonishment as he chewed. "Aren't you going to eat it, Lia? If you don't want any more, I'll take it."

And now I feel like I'm going to pass out…

"Why didn't you just eat the sandwich in the first place?!" I shrieked with embarrassment.

"Because you had some on your mouth," he said coolly.

"Then just say that!"

"I did. With my mouth."

Not like that! And what's with that clever wordplay, anyway?! You've got the worst personality!

Still, Lucas slowly narrowed his eyes and looked at me, startling me. My throat constricted and I couldn't speak. His eyes were clearly starting to heat up, so I turned away from him. I shuddered as he leaned in closer.

"W-wait, Lukie."

"Dessert."

"What are you…"

"I want to eat dessert," he said with a grin, then grabbed my chin and started rubbing my lips with his thumb.

What is he thinking?! We are outside! Look around you! Don't you see the other couples sitting on the grass?! Wait a minute… There's nothing but couples in this park. How about that… Wait! That's not the point! Crap… I've been stuck

in this position holding the sandwich this whole time, and he might start to eat it again.

"L-Lukie, let go of me. We're outside."

"It's just a kiss. Your lips look delicious, so I think I'll have them for my dessert."

My mouth looks like dessert to you?! I think you need your eyes checked!

"Don't worry. No one's paying any attention to us."

Maybe! I guess all the couples do seem to be utterly absorbed in each other, but I'm a beginner to all this, and I've lived my seventeen years of life as a proper lady!

I shook my head in protest, and he said, "Fine, just eat the sandwich." Then Lucas immediately withdrew, leaving me confused.

"Thank you for the meal, Lukie."

"Oh, are you done eating? Let's clean up," Lucas said, with a curious air to his voice, and then stood up. He disposed of the trash in a nearby bin, then swiftly folded the picnic mat and slung it over his shoulder bag. Next, he calmly took my hand and led me toward the back of the lawn—to an area dimly shaded by trees.

As he kept walking, I realized we had moved far enough that I couldn't see the grass through the shadows. Feeling uneasy, I called out to Lucas, and he instantly pulled me toward him. I stumbled forward, then spun around until I came to a stop with the firm surface of Lucas's body behind me.

"Lukie?! Eek!"

"I found this place when I was little. Some sunlight gets in here, but this big tree hides it from view of the rest of the park, so hardly anyone notices it's even here."

"What…"

“It’s fine as long as no one sees, right?”

“What?”

Huh? Is this that popular move I read about in novels called the “kabedon”?! Well, it’s not a wall, it’s a tree… So would it be called “treedon”…? Mini Cece started thinking about ridiculous things in the corner of my mind as Lucas put both hands on either side of me, a wicked smile on his face.

“I held back in front of everyone, didn’t I? If you don’t want anyone to see, I’ll just do it where they can’t.”

“Huh? Um?”

Does he mean what I think he means? No, it can’t be… The situation was unfolding faster than I could keep up with. I stared blankly as he tipped my face upward and whispered my name sweetly. “Lia… Cecilia…”

His voice had the power to crumble anyone’s sense of logic, and I’d let my guard down. He leaned in toward my face and my body stiffened.

“Mm, your lips are tense. You’re too nervous. I swear, no one’s going to come here. Don’t worry. Lia…?”

I gasped.

“Huh? Cecilia? What’s wrong?”

I squeezed my eyes shut when I felt the sensation of his lips on mine, and Lucas gave me a baffled look.

The familiar voice drew my gaze, but my breath caught at the stranger looking back at me with unfamiliar eyes. He was touching me just like Lucas did, but he looked completely different. It felt like someone other than Lucas was kissing me, sending goosebumps over my body.

Fear welled up inside of me and my entire body froze. I frantically searched for traces of Lucas in his face, pushing against his chest to make his shadowed face tip upward.

“Cecilia? You’re really that against it?” He sounded surprised as he helped me up. The sound of concern and hesitation was Lucas’s voice, but the man who stood in the sunlight did not have the dark blue hair or golden eyes I loved.

“I-I don’t want to. I can’t.”

“But it’s just a kiss.”

“Eek! No!” He reached out toward me, but I felt all the blood drain from my face and I pushed Lucas’s hand away in fear. It smacked audibly against the tree, and I gasped, looking up at him and trembling. “I-I’m sorry, Lord Lukie, but… Eek!”

All of a sudden, he grabbed me with both hands and firmly pinned my body against the tree, giving me a rough, biting kiss. My heart was pounding wildly at the glimpse of brown hair I saw when I peeked out from beneath my lashes.

“No! Lord Lukie, Lord Lukie! I’m scared! Help me, Lord Lukie!”

It seemed I’d forgotten that the man in front of me was Lucas, and I writhed in his arms frantically trying to pull away. It sounded like I was screaming when I begged for help, but when he pinned my wrists down so fiercely, I was terrified.

“Cece… Are you sure Felix never attacked you?” Lucas asked me in a frighteningly low voice, his brown eyes glaring at me. I froze for a moment in shock.

Huh? Why did he bring up Felix?

“N-no! No one but you has ever touched me, Lord Lukie!”

“Then why?”

“Because… Ow!”

The mere suggestion that Felix had forced himself upon me brought my bewilderment to a peak. As I struggled to reason with Lucas, whose face was twisted in anger, the chain of my necklace got caught on a tree branch and scratched my skin, causing me to let out a small cry of pain.

At the sound of my voice, Lucas's body quivered, and he instantly drew away from me. He looked at me with a frightened, pained expression on his face.

"Lord Lukie…"

He stared at me without moving, and I called out to him with trembling lips, but his body was shaking and he kept his distance, even as he cast a powerful healing spell on me. My skirt fluttered with such force that I had to quickly hold it down. I called for him again, but he turned his face away.

"I-I'm sorry. I need to cool my head."

"L-Lord Lukie, it's not like that…"

Lucas was visibly shaken by the realization he'd hurt me, and offered a terse apology as he walked away, saying, "Let's go back." I wanted to reach out to him, but his hands were balled tight at his sides, and I was worried he'd reject me like he had earlier. All I could do was follow him.

I desperately wanted to find a way to resolve the misunderstanding, but I couldn't think of anything. My heart pounded with fear and agitation, but if I didn't do something, I would end up hurting his feelings and he'd end up hating me. As the bright green grass came into view, Lucas slowed down. I tried to reach out my hand, not wanting to be left behind. Suddenly I heard a female voice call out.

"Oh! Lukie! Long time no see! Where have you been?"

It was like I'd been doused in freezing water.

"What are you doing here, Bianca? Oh, right. This isn't far from the guild."

"Well, you're as cold as ever. That's part of your appeal, though. Hey, you're not on a date, are you? You have a girlfriend?"

My blood grew even colder as I listened to the conversation, but I couldn't do a thing about it.

While aware that it was impolite to stare, I couldn't help but watch as the girl placed her hand on Lucas affectionately. Suddenly, Lucas pointed toward a

bench and told me, “Lia, I’m going to stop by the guild for a bit. Stay here.” I blurted out a hasty reply as he walked away, heading for a nearby building.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Bianca,” the girl Lucas had spoken with said with a smile. “I’m a mercenary affiliated with the guild over there.”

Nervously, I bowed and introduced myself.

Bianca chuckled with amusement. “How did you meet Lukie? You seem like a typical noble lady…and a high-class one, at that. What about the maid behind you? She doesn’t seem ordinary, either. She one of yours?”

Startled, I turned around to see Anna and the others standing quietly behind the bench. “When did you get here…?” I couldn’t help but ask in a dumbfounded voice.

“We’ve just arrived, Lady Lia. Since his lordship won’t be back for some time, please have a seat for now,” Anna calmly replied.

“Now, take a seat, Lady Lia,” Kate insisted, pulling me by the hand. Elsa put a handkerchief on the bench before I sat on it, and I hastily offered Bianca the spot next to me.

“Aha ha. Amazing. You really are a noblewoman. It’s fine, I don’t have to sit,” she laughed.

I felt somewhat embarrassed, as if I had exposed my ignorance, and heat rose to my cheeks. But my blood cooled soon after, as Bianca mentioned a certain name.

“So? How did a pampered rich girl like you get to know Lukie? Did you put in a request at the guild? I’ll give you credit; you must have a good eye, picking Lukie, but I think dating a rich girl is too much baggage for him…”

It sounded like she knew Lucas very well. My stomach tightened and my throat suddenly went dry.

She knows a side of Lucas I’ve never seen. As soon as that thought materialized, I instinctively opened my mouth and clenched my hands on my

lap.

“You seem to know a lot about Lord Lukie. How long have you known each other?”

“*Lord* Lukie? Why on earth are you calling him that? Anyway, it’s been about four years now, I guess.”

Bianca tipped her head to the side, and I looked at her, clenching my hands even tighter, urging her to continue.

“He was still a kid when I met him, but he was really strong! I’d gotten myself into quite a pinch, surrounded by a pack of demon wolves. All of a sudden, he came in out of nowhere and put them in the dirt. I’ve been shooting my shot with him ever since, but he won’t look my way. Pitiful, right? How could he say no to a girl like me?” She put her hands on her waist and pushed her breasts out.

I replied, “Yes, you’re lovely.”

She had tanned skin and long black hair that cascaded down, her looks accented by her light blue eyes that sparkled with wit and maturity. She said she was a mercenary, and unlike me, she had a muscular physique and carried herself with confidence. Suddenly, my limbs grew leaden and my thoughts wandered aimlessly. I found myself picturing her standing tall beside Lucas, and I blinked rapidly, desperate to banish the image from my mind and regain my composure.

“Well, he did say yes to me, but only once. But it seems like it’s a one-off with everybody when it comes to him, so you shouldn’t take it too seriously either,” she said, her gaze slightly challenging.

At that moment, I felt my heart freeze.

Simultaneously, Anna raised her voice and said, “Please refrain from saying such things to Lady Lia, Miss Bianca.” This made me wonder if what Bianca was saying was true, causing my hands to tremble.

Observing my pale face, Bianca narrowed her eyes and sighed, as if to say, “Give me a break.”

Then she said, “Listen, don’t you understand men? A man of a certain age wouldn’t refuse the advances of a woman, would he? Especially mercenaries or knights, men who risk their lives in battle—it gets them all worked up, like instinct.”

Lucas had said the same thing after a campaign, so I could understand that rationally, but my emotions just couldn’t catch up. I dug my nails into my palm, desperately trying to prevent myself from screaming.

And even though somewhere inside of me was screaming, saying I shouldn’t ask… I said with trembling lips… “B-Bianca, have you and Lord Lukie…”

“Lady Lia!”

I heard Anna’s voice shouting, as if from far away, “No, don’t do it!” but I was focused on the curve of Bianca’s lips.

Do you know how he makes love? The gentleness of his hands, the heat of his tongue? The strength of his arms as he holds you?

“Heh heh. You seemed so naive at first, but now you have the face of a woman. I’ll give you some advice, then: Give up on Lukie. There’s a woman he likes. I don’t know who she is, but she’s the reason he wanted to become strong. And the reason he joined the guild was to protect her. He’s only had eyes for her, for a long time now. Even if you make love to him, someone else still lives inside his heart in the end. Even if you could be together, that would be tough for a young lady like you, wouldn’t it? What would be left of your pride if you gave yourself to him, knowing the whole time he was thinking of another woman?”

Her words felt like a slap across the cheek.

Even though I knew he was Lucas, I rejected Lukie. It was scary. Even though he taught me the importance of hard work, the one who protected me, saved

me, and whispered his love to me was Lucas. That was why I was looking for any trace of Lucas in the man who smiled at me as Lukie all day today.

I'm such an idiot, I thought as I remembered the way he trembled when he saw the necklace had hurt me.

He'd become strong to protect me, so he was probably very afraid that he'd unintentionally hurt me—because he knew the power he had better than anyone else.

"Haah…" I let out a small breath.

Lord Lukie was Lucas, but I never thought I would be so bothered by the difference in their appearances. Though that was no excuse. I gripped my knees tightly. I had been afraid of Lukie, rejected him, and hurt him. But even more than that, I was scared because he had rejected me a little too.

Even though I knew he cherished me, I was afraid that if I tried to talk to him right now, he'd keep me at a distance, so I just sat quietly without making any effort to resolve the misunderstanding or apologize.

But most of all, I don't think Lukie would do that. But how selfish would it be to be jealous of a woman he made love to? Maybe I am too much trouble for him. I let out a heavy sigh in my mind.

The only person I love, and the only person I would allow to touch me, was the one who had carved his name onto my body.

"Are you smiling?"

"I just realized that I'm not right for Lukie."

"Lady Lia?!" Anna cried out.

"Lady Lia, don't go! What are you talking about?!" The other maids chimed in frantically, but I paid them no mind.

"Thank you, Bianca."

"Huh?"

“It seems that the Lukie you like and the Lukie I like are two different people.” I smiled at her.

Bianca looked at me sharply and said, “What are you talking about?”

I gave her a confused look and said, “I’m a woman too, remember?”

“Yeah,” she replied.

As she said, I was a woman. And the person who made me a woman wasn’t Lukie, but Lucas.

The fact that Lukie was Lucas was an undeniable fact, but the person I fell in love with was Lucas. A frighteningly strong and beautiful man with dark blue hair and golden eyes. A kind person who conveyed his love to me so intensely that it took my breath away.

Now that I was a woman, perhaps I wasn’t as cute or beautiful as Lucas said. Perhaps I was just a woman who desperately tried to hide her jealousy, possessiveness, and her ugly heart, who begged for Lucas’s love. But that woman was stronger now for loving Lucas, and determined never to give even a piece of him to anyone else.

I couldn’t do anything without Lucas, yet I arrogantly wanted to claim all of him, even Lukie, as my own.

I would never let Lukie or Lucas touch another woman again. I wanted to be the only person who touched him. I looked at the tall man walking toward me and smiled at Bianca.

“I have my heart set on him, and I want him to love all of me.”

I’m sorry, but I won’t let you have Lucas.

“Thank you for waiting, Lia.”

“Welcome back, Lord Lukie.”

As I stood up, Lucas regarded me tensely, but held out his hand, so I smiled and placed mine in his.

“Did something…happen?”

“No, nothing at all. I was just enjoying some conversation.”

“Bianca, you haven’t been telling Lia anything you shouldn’t, have you?”

“What? I didn’t say much! Knock it off, Lukie! Since when were you like this, anyway?”

Bianca’s words tumbled out in a rush. She looked shocked at the stern look Lucas was giving her. Lucas looked over at Anna and the others to confirm, but I squeezed his hand to pull his attention back to me.

“Lia?”

“I have to talk to you about something, Lord Lukie.”

“Is it something urgent…?”

“Yes. Very urgent.”

I could still see the rejection in Lucas’s eyes, but I kept my gaze on him, unwavering.

Anna and the others called out anxiously, “L-Lady Lia…”

I smiled back at them. “I’m sorry, but I think it’s going to take some time, so go on and wait at a café. Lord Lukie and I will be back soon.”

“All right. We’ll be waiting for you.”

I smiled with gratitude for my talented maids who understood my intentions, then I turned to Bianca. “I’m sorry, Bianca. But I have something important to discuss with Lord Lukie, so please excuse us.”

“Are you really just a proper noblewoman? It’s weird that you could make Lukie so upset.”

“Miss Bianca, your misplaced curiosity will be your undoing,” growled a voice from behind me. Sensing the threat from the maids at my back, Bianca was quick to concede.

“I understand. I’m leaving now,” she said, hurrying toward the guild.

Anna and the others offered a quick bow before making their exit, leaving me alone with Lucas. The air was tense, but given what had happened, it was only natural.

Lucas wouldn’t make eye contact with me at all. It was the first time I’d seen him like that. His avoidance scared me, and even though I knew what to say, I couldn’t move because it felt like my limbs were frozen with anxiety.

Still, I took a deep breath and pushed on. I had glimpsed the future in store for us, and I wasn’t about to let it go, so I pretended not to see the slight tremor in Lucas’s shoulders and smiled at him.

“Lord Lukie, will you take me back to the place we were before?”

“Lia… Cecilia, what are you doing?”

“I’m kneeling between your legs.”

“I know, but that’s not what I mean… Your skirt… I don’t understand. What did you want to talk about? I apologize for pinning you down and hurting you earlier. I’m so sorry.”

I glanced up at him for a moment and he quickly averted his gaze. I was nervous, but I said, “It’s not your fault.”

“So what, then? If you’re not mad, then let’s go back. I won’t be able to hold back if you keep looking at me like that. No one comes by here, but we’re still outside. And you said you didn’t want to.” As he spoke, he held a hand against his head and dropped his gaze.

“Lord Lukie,” I called, gently placing a hand on his shoulders. I felt his body stiffen up and he grabbed me by the wrist.

“Cece, I’m begging you! I want to cherish you, but if you keep touching me, I won’t be able to control myself. You were afraid of me before, remember? What are you thinking? I’m not going to stop next time.” He sounded truly

irritated, and his eyes told me that he was reaching his limit. Even though I knew I shouldn't, my body tensed up—and Lucas never overlooked my reactions.

"When you look at me, you turn pale and recoil. But then you pull up your skirt like you're trying to seduce me. So which is it? What do you want to do? What do you want *me* to do?"

The pained look on his face urged me to give him an answer, so I took his cheeks between my hands and grit my teeth in determination.

"I'm sorry, Lord Lukie."

"Sorry for what?" he breathed, looking mystified.

"One more time. And this will be the last time. Please forgive me for hurting you."

"Huh? Cece, I?"

"Touch me…"

I gently took Lucas's hand, trembling as I led it to my lower belly.

Lucas raised his voice, "What are you thinking? You're shaking like a leaf in the wind! Just a while ago, it was like your body moved on its own to push me away. I told you: I won't be able to stop this time! Do you want me to hurt you?"

"Lord Lukie…"

His eyes were burning as if to say, "Enough!" but I gently kissed him. His eyes flew open, full of anger.

"If you're turning me on this much, then you're going to have to take responsibility, aren't you, Cecilia?" he whispered onto my lips.

I gave him the barest nod in response, my shoulders shaking. Lucas clicked his tongue and roughly pulled down my underwear.

It hurt at first because I wasn't wet at all, but then he glared at me and

pushed his finger inside. It was only the tip, but I felt a twitching pain and fear as my blood drained and my body trembled.

“Haah, haa…”

“What do you want? Are you showing me this attitude, this rejection, thinking I won’t be hurt… Do you want to say you don’t…like me at all? Are you offering yourself out of pity?”

Oh no, I hurt him… Even though I knew there had been no way around it, I still regretted my actions. At the same time, I chided myself for my body trembling even now and took his face in my hands.

“N-no. This is…the last time…!”

At that moment, I felt something caress my cheek. My legs started trembling before I even realized it.

“Eek, ahh!”

“I see. You’re a fool, Cecilia. You really think I’d ever let you go?”

His expressions changed rapidly: first, shock at my words, then cold hostility. His voice dripped with it, and his eyes narrowed.

Then I saw a wave of mana transform the wavy light brown hair into a beautiful dark blue, and the chestnut brown into a shiny golden color, and the divine face of the person I loved appeared in front of me.

“Ahh, I love you, Lord Lukie!” I couldn’t help but blurt out and kissed him so deeply I didn’t even see when the tension fled his face. I clung to his neck and kissed him. He suddenly moved his hand, and the stimulation startled me enough that I pulled away.

“Haah! Ahh, mm! Lord Lukie!”

“What’s the meaning of this?”

As soon as I registered Lucas’s appearance, my pussy immediately got wet. He gently buried his fingers inside to check and then rubbed the juices into my

folds with the pads of his fingers. He probed deeper with his fingers, rubbing them in little circles.

“Nngh, ahh… Wait, your…fingers…”

I couldn’t take the sensation of his callused fingers stirring me up, and I quickly tightened around them. The pleasure growing inside my body made me cling to him desperately, leaving me unable to speak.

Lucas was stunned. “How are you so wet now…when you were so dry before?”

Don’t say things like that! Besides, the way you keep moving your fingers in me, I get the feeling you’re not really interested in conversation right now.

I covered my mouth but couldn’t help letting out a whimper. My cheeks flushed with shame, and I desperately tried to meet his gaze, but he kept pumping his fingers violently inside of me, like he wanted to hear the sound of my juices spilling out.

“L-Lord Lukie, please stop! I’m going to cum!”

I can’t cum before I explain everything! I put my arms around his neck and shook my head, so he peeled me off of him with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

“Cece, do you still love me?”

“Yes, I love you! I love you so stop fingering m—mmm!”

I frantically tried to answer his question, but he kissed me so hard that the words died in my mouth. And as he did, my pleasure suddenly erupted in a flood of honey that gushed over Lucas’s fingers.

“Haah, haaa!” I coughed, desperate for air.

His tongue was entwined so intimately with mine that I couldn’t swallow. The moment I tried to take a breath, I coughed. He patted me on the back gently, impatiently. Then, with golden eyes flickering fiercely, he asked, “I’m sorry Cece, but why?”

My heart constricted at the insecurity in his expression. I once more took his face in my hands and, between desperate breaths, said, “Lord Lukie. I love you so much.”

“Ah…”

“You’re the only one I love, Lord Lukie… Lord Lucas. I admired Lukie, but I could never do this kind of thing with someone I didn’t love… Even though I know you’re the same person, I got scared when I couldn’t see the usual you. I’m sorry for hurting you. I’m so sorry, please don’t hate me!” I pleaded frantically with him, my eyes filling with tears. *Don’t cry. Don’t cry! Even though you hurt Lucas, you can’t cry!*

It was no surprise that he was shocked by all of this, but if I kept up this unsightly behavior, he might really start to hate me. So I shrank back, doing my best to sit up straight and ladylike, and looked at him. He stared back, eyes wide, and heaved a sigh halfway to a laugh.

“Oh, so that’s what it was?” he murmured, pressing his forehead against my chest. I wrapped my arms around his back, pulling him into a gentle embrace.

“Lord Lukie…”

“I was so scared.” He didn’t reach out to hug me back, so I knew he was telling the truth.

“I’m sorry, Lord Lukie.”

His shoulders trembled slightly. Unable to bear seeing him like this, I wrapped him more tightly in my embrace. Then, at last, he hugged me back.

“I’ve never been that scared before.”

Huh?

“I had no idea it would be so scary to hear you speak of ending things. Slaying an ancient dragon barehanded would be easier.”

That example’s a bit overboard. Surely a noblewoman like me isn’t scarier

than a dragon… I wasn't sure what to say to that. In the end, I decided to apologize and hugged him a little tighter.

"Heh heh," he laughed, then looked up at me. "Be careful, Cece."

"Huh? Of what?"

"When you told me it was the last time, my first instinct was to imprison you. I'd lock you up in a room, put a slave collar on you, and shackle your legs. I wouldn't care if you didn't like it; I'd fuck you all day long. I wouldn't let you see or touch anyone other than me. I would be the only person you'd ever see, and then I'd be the only person you'd cling to."

Isn't it a bit dangerous to say things like that out loud? But the grooves etched in his brow, and the intensity of his gaze told me Lucas was dead serious.

My eyes widened as I stared at him. I imagined myself living my life chained up like that.

"Why do you have that expression on your face, Cecilia?"

Lucas looked stunned. Only then did I realize I was blushing and grinning ear to ear. I hastily covered my face with my hands. "Oh, sorry. I'll try to be more careful!" I yelped.

"Wait. Show me your face."

Lucas seems incredibly enthusiastic!!

"Eek, Lord Lukie!"

Hey, don't use force like that! He pulled my hand away from my face and stared at me.

"Cecilia?"

"No…"

I tried to twist away from him, but he clasped his hands together and held me tightly. He spoke my name right into my ear, and my body felt like it was ablaze with shame.

“Why did you look happy when I said I was going to lock you up? Do you want to be locked up?”

“Not exactly!”

Being actually locked up would be kind of a pain! I’m in trouble… Lucas keeps staring at me with that possessive look on his face. That’s why I shouldn’t imagine it! What’s wrong with me? This is bad. I haven’t just dipped a toe in, I’ve cannonballed right into the deep end! Someone, hurry up and pull me out!

I was horrified to discover this new alter ego of mine, who had so completely surrendered herself to the yandere world. There were no words to describe these emotions, so I expressed them instead by compulsively shaking my head. I was mortified—but Lucas was ecstatic.

“Hm? Then what were you thinking about Cece?”

“N-nothing! I wasn’t thinking about anything!”

“That can’t be true, not with that grin on your face.”

You’re the one who’s grinning! I wanted to say, but my heart was pounding and my breathing was shallow, so I couldn’t get the words out. I was transfixed by the way his golden eyes slowly narrowed, like doors closing to a room I’d gotten trapped in.

“If it wasn’t the thought of being locked up that got you excited, what was it? Being fucked all day?”

“……”

He gave my legs a featherlight touch, and I stiffened.

“Me being the only one you see?”

“No, stop…”

He gave me a light kiss on my ear and whispered into it. His words had gotten my imagination running again, but I tried to stop myself.

“Just the two of us…alone, loving each other forever in a world where we only

have each other?”

All I could manage was a small sound in reply.

He slipped his fingers between mine and I gasped. It was so small, but the sound of our fingers entwining reached my brain, conjuring images that sent waves of pleasure arcing through my back before I could stop myself. His lips slowly curved into a smile.

“Then let’s go home,” he suggested out of the blue. I gave him a stunned look and he followed up with even more surprises. “I think we should go home now and do exactly what you want. We won’t leave the room at all, we’ll make love to each other all night long until tomorrow morning, and all we’ll see is each other.”

“Huh?!”

His words didn’t immediately register, so I reflexively questioned him. He continued speaking, and when his words finally reached my mind, they blew it like a crashing meteorite.

“I’m gonna fuck you so hard and so long you melt into a puddle of goo that’s one step away from breaking down. So let’s go home, okay?”

A puddle of goo? That sounds kind of messy. And breaking down? Like how? Wait, we’re going home now? And that’s where I’ll become a puddle of goo? I kept going over Lucas’s words in my head. *Hm? Is my fiancé talking nonsense?* I blinked and stared at him.

My favorite golden eyes were as sweet as ever, or they must have been, since his beautiful face was smiling. He tipped his head and said, “Right?” and I almost automatically replied, “Ah, yes…”

No, no! Come back to your senses and say no! My instincts screamed in the back of my mind, and I was about to speak, but then I held back. I wanted to praise myself. *His dangerous, beautiful magic is scary!!*

I opened my mouth to scream, “I’m not going home,” but Lucas smiled and

offered another terrifying option.

“If you don’t want to go home, I can fuck you right here.”

“H-here?!”

“Yes.”

“…Here?”

“That’s right. You’re the one who suggested it in the first place, remember? So there shouldn’t be a problem.”

Oh, there’s a huge problem! It was only yesterday that I heard about my fiancé’s nightmarish fantasies! And today they’ll become reality?! Once again, my alter ego was veering off in a crazy direction.

“Um, that’s not true. I never suggested that.”

“You didn’t? Not when you sat on my lap here and forced me to touch you?”

“Forced?!”

I definitely said it, but I didn’t force him! And I don’t want to tell him why I did that!

“Ah, I…had a lot on my mind…”

I tried to make excuses to Lucas, but then he said, “By the way, why did you say it would be the last time?” A direct hit in the last place I wanted him to target. I was tossed into the maelstrom of mortification again.

“Well…”

“You were being quite reckless, weren’t you? You were trembling, so caught up in the mood that you were ready to do anything. So what prompted it? You seemed awfully committed; I didn’t know what to do!” he said with a deliberately dramatic sigh.

Whaaat?!

I turned my face away from him and said, “I’m sorry. I was scared of Lukie. But

I didn't want to…"

"Didn't want to what?"

"You won't get mad?"

"…At what?"

I slowly looked up at him. His scowl urged me to continue. I started mumbling, swallowed hard, and then forced the rest of the words out. "Um, I heard you… had sex with…Bianca…so…"

"…What?"

"I-I don't blame you, but… I want all of you, Lord Lukie. Even though I was afraid of Lukie, I thought maybe if I tried hard enough I could…just for a little bit, but…" In the end, I was too embarrassed to finish my sentence, so I panicked and looked down. *Huh? No reaction? I want him to say something, anything.* Despite my fear, I looked up at him, and he let out a loud sigh that froze me in place.

Oh, no. He's creeped out and now he hates me.

In an attempt to satisfy my own jealousy, I'd ended up hurting Lucas, and now he knew it. Shaking off the ice in my veins, I stammered a frantic apology. "I-I'm sorry, Lord Lukie, I'm so sorry."

"No, it's not your fault! I'm the one who's sorry. Damn it, Bianca… I shouldn't have left you two alone. That was really stupid of me. But it's not true," he said, hanging his head.

My eyes widened as he looked up at me hesitantly. "I'm really sorry, Cecilia, but I never slept with Bianca, and that's the truth. She tried to make it happen, but I could never do that with anyone but you. So, it's just a misunderstanding! I'm really sorry for making you feel bad. Ahh, that's why I'll never make love to anyone but you, Cece, and I swear I'll never have anyone else but you in my whole life! Please don't hate me…please…"

Seeing the pleading in his eyes left me so relieved I began to laugh.

“Cece…?”

“Ahh, I’m sorry. I was afraid you hated me, but you felt the same way, and you apologized. So it feels a little weird, but I’m happy. I’m so relieved.”

“Yes, I’m sorry for making you anxious. I could never hate you, Cece.”

“I could never hate you either, Lord Lukie. I just…” As I looked at Lucas, I recalled how casually Bianca had touched his face, and a darkness weighed in my heart. Lucas tilted his head, waiting for me to continue.

I gave him a look of undiluted jealousy.

“In high society, I suppose there’s no helping it if other women touch you now and then, but outside of such social obligations, and even if the woman’s your friend, well… I hate it. You’re *my* Lord Lukie.”

I did my best to get my feelings across, fully aware of the color in my cheeks. I squeezed my eyes shut. *Am I too intense for him? Should I cut him a bit of slack when it comes to other women touching him?! What do normal people do?!* All these thoughts were making a jumbled mess of my brain…and once again, he didn’t react.

Oh no, oh no! I’m too much for him! This time he’s freaked out for sure! I anxiously opened my eyes and saw that he was hanging his head. But why?

“Lord Lukie…?” I called out his name and peeked at him to see his entire face was beet red, all the way up to his ears, and he was covering his face.

He’s embarrassed? I blinked at him in disbelief.

“Cece…” he said, making me gasp in surprise. “You really have no idea, do you?”

“Excuse me?”

No idea? About what? I blinked again. I’d rarely seen him like this, so I couldn’t tear my eyes away. *Wow, even the shape of his head is beautiful,* I thought like an idiot.

“I don’t know what to do. I’m sorry I’m so weak, but I can’t stand it anymore. Honestly, I just can’t. All right.”

He seemed to have reached some sort of resolution. Looking up, he had a troubled look on his face and said, “Hey, Cece.”

And what came next left me speechless.

“I can’t hold back anymore. I want to cherish you, and I don’t want to do anything you don’t like. But when the woman I love says something like that, I can’t stop myself. So I want you to choose: Do you want me to fuck you right now, or wait until we get home where I can fuck you until the morning? If you pick the first option, take off your panties. Otherwise get ready to be a puddle of goo when you get home.”

He lowered his brows, as if coaxing an answer from me, but the words he spoke just didn’t match the look on his face.

Why are there only two options?! Not that I’m in the state of mind to suggest a third option…

As I stewed in my anxiety, he added, “If you don’t choose, you’ll end up with both.” His tone was light, but the threat was clear.

It’s been a long time since I’ve seen him like this… I’m in danger, no matter how I look at it… But I think the lightest option for me is…

“Here…” I said.

“Take off your vest and unbutton your blouse.”

When he said that, I froze in place.

He took a rug from his bag and spread it out behind me, then took his own vest off and placed it on top of that. He tipped his chin, urging me to follow his lead.

My escape route was now completely cut off. I gripped my underwear and vest and silently protested with teary eyes. “You can’t make that face; you said you’d do it. Yesterday, and just a little while ago… I’ve been holding back for a

long time, and I can't hold out any longer," he said, leering at me.

I puffed my cheeks out with embarrassment and glared back at him. "You're so mean."

"And it pains me to be. But if you react like that, then say that I'm all yours, but stop me from doing anything about it, you must admit that you're being quite cruel yourself."

I'll admit that I'm mean. But to say I'm cruel? Why? A question mark appeared in my mind as I looked at him, pouting.

"Cece, do you realize how much I'm enduring right now? How much I love you? Think about it: When someone you love says that to you, you can't hold back. You can't stop."

My demon, who was the color of night and whose golden eyes shone beautifully in the sunlight, whispered sweetly to me.

The sight of his beautiful dark blue hair, swaying lazily in the breeze, filled my eyes. A shiver ran through my body as I was forced to accept my current situation. And as I did, my ragged breaths echoed faintly in the tranquil, sun-dappled hideaway. Lucas bit my swollen, pink nipples, and I huskily begged him to touch me.

"Haah, ahh, mm, no! Lord Lukie, no!"

"It's okay, Cece. Cum for me. Don't hold back."

No, no, no! Not that! I'm trying to tell you not to be so rough or else I'm going to cry out!

I shook my head no, but Lucas held me back and pressed his palm lightly on my Promise Mark, which made my eyes flicker.

"Haah! L-Lord Lukie! Nooo!"

Wet droplets blurred my vision, and only then did I realize I was crying tears

of pleasure.

The palm I'd been using to stifle my mouth was already damp, and if I wasn't careful, it would slip right off—and my impossibly sweet moans would echo through the trees. The thought was so terrifying, I had to suppress it.

"You're so cute when you're holding back, Cece. But I want to hear your voice," he whispered obscenely.

Stop it, we're outdoors! I'm not complaining, so please be satisfied with that! I screamed inside, shaking my head.

But Lucas smiled and ripped my hand away from my mouth. He gathered both my hands in one of his, pressed his hips deeply against mine, and gazed at me.

"No?"

"N-no, Lord Lukie… Someone…will hear…!"

He didn't move; he just stared at me. I shook my head frantically and begged him to stop. At last, he relented, pulling me into an embrace and kissing my lips. His warmth filled me with such relief that I relaxed my whole body. And to my shock, he rubbed my entrance and then thrust into me in one swift stroke.

"Nngh, mm! Haah, mm!"

"Haah, god, I'm so deep… It feels so good I never want it to end. Seeing your pale skin flushed under the sunlight, watching you struggle to keep quiet while I ravage you… It's so beautiful and sexy. Does doing it outside excite you too? It was so cute how you came right away." He licked, bit, sucked, and whispered, pulling away and showing me the saliva from his tongue. My body was still shuddering from the afterglow of my orgasm, so I glared at him.

"It's over! It…has…to be…over or I won't…be able to take it!"

Despite my insistence, his eyes flared with anger. But the next moment, he squinted at me and said, "Ooh, you're trying to turn me on again," and kissed me passionately.

"What?! Mmph!"

You liar! I am not! Why are you being so rough! I already said it was over; what's wrong with you?! I was screaming inside, but of course he didn't stop.

He slipped his hand between the rug and my body, kissing me deeply as he grabbed my rump with his other hand. He pulled our hips as close together as he could, as if to say he wouldn't allow any space between us at all.

Lucas's scorching hot cock pushed into parts of me I didn't think would allow it, and he rocked me as he slowed down. It felt so good that I subconsciously grabbed his waist and pushed him harder. My chest hurt from his tight embrace.

The heat of our skin touching each other. The whispers of love between gasping breaths. His pained, golden eyes narrowing as they looked down at me.

It was all so incredible.

Just as I thought I was going to cum again, I reached out and clung to him.

“Nngh, haah! I love you, Lord Lukie! Mm!”

“I love you too, Cecilia. I’m sorry, I’m gonna…cum, so…let go!”

He grabbed my hand which clung onto him and was about to pry it away, but I didn’t want to let go, so I begged and pleaded, “Nooo! Don’t let go of me, Lord Lukie!”

“What am I going to do with you?! Tch… I’m telling you, I can’t! You have to let go.”

“Noooo!”

“I can’t, I’m sorry!” *Why is he apologizing?* But suddenly I felt him pushing inside of me as deep as he could go, while his tongue strained against mine. The stimulation that hit me deep inside traveled up my spine and rattled my brain. Even though my eyelids were closed, my eyes rolled up in their sockets, and I let out a whimper into his mouth.

As my convulsing body gradually calmed down, he caressed my cheek and pulled away from me with concern.

“Cece, does your back hurt? I spread the rug and vest so that your body wouldn’t touch the ground, as much as we could help it… Does it hurt anywhere?!”

He cast a healing spell on me. It felt so warm and comfortable, and as I gazed at him, I thought, *He’s so kind, but I feel conflicted about his concern!*

I did protest. I knew that I had a soft spot for Lucas, so it was probably my fault that I didn’t say it out loud that I didn’t want to. And it’s probably true that I didn’t seriously refuse because I *did* want it! And in the end, I clung to him

anyway!

And since Lucas wouldn't compromise, we had to do it in a place like this?! Plus, he's acting all concerned, but I don't think he realizes he has a huge grin on his face!

I felt a sudden surge of emotion, and I reached out to grab his cheeks.

"Cece? Whadda ew doink daa hurts."

"Why, Lord Lukie! Thank you so much for your concern. I'm hurting in many ways, but most of all, in my heart."

Because you love me and because I love you, I'm losing more and more of my sense each day! We're the future second prince and princess, doing it outside like animals?! Are you kidding me?! I pulled even harder with my fingers.

"A-ah ew mad?"

"Well, yes, and not the least because your words of concern are said with such a tremendously self-satisfied grin! But I'm also quite angry at myself for not being able to refuse when someone gets too insistent," I said with a stern look, still tugging at Lucas's cheeks. I'm pulling this hard and he's still handsome? What's up with that?! And he becomes even cuter?

"I shawwy Shishi."

The way his adorable apologies are making my heart flutter is really pissing me off too!

I pulled harder, and he said mysteriously, "Lissen Shishi, I donn wanna shay dis to ew now but…" But it was so funny and cute that it took all I had to stifle my laughter and keep my gaze stern as I let go of him.

"Um, sorry, it's beyond my control…" Lucas said, puppy dog eyes peering up at me from over scarlet cheeks.

"What do you mean?" I asked firmly. *…Seriously, stop it! It's so cute when you apologize with that big body of yours and that puppy dog look, I feel like forgiving you right away! Are you doing this on purpose?! You must be! If you*

think I'm always going to be sweet to you, you're totally wrong!!

"Maybe I was so excited because I remembered that the first time we met, you were wearing lavender panties. And you've become even more beautiful since then…"

Stop kissing my neck while you're talking!

I could forgive him if he'd said it was because of the color of my dress, but of my panties?! *No, calm down, lovestruck brain!* I was truly flustered, so I started buttoning up Lucas's shirt.

"And well, you know… I'm sorry, but I…came in you."

"I see, you came in—what?"

Okay, I've hidden those amazing abs.

Satisfied, I repeated Lucas's words, but then my eyes flew open when I realized what he said.

Isn't that what you always do…? My alter ego screamed as I drifted from reality.

I was completely frozen, and Lucas timidly and hesitantly called out to me. "Cece, are you okay? Um, I know it's bad, but I didn't mean to."

I slowly turned my head toward my fiancé, who had a troubled expression on his beautiful face. *Look at the way his hair sways in the wind! Inside…inside… Inside? Out…side?*

"You idiot! Lord Lukie, you pervert! You devil! You're evil! You're rotten!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Cece! Ow, that hurts!"

I said every insult that came to mind as I grabbed the laces of his shirt with both hands and pulled them as tight as I could. *Feel the pain, Prince Pervert!!*

I can't believe he came inside of me! What am I going to do? We're outside, this is horrible! Waaaah! I tugged on the strings even harder, and Lucas said, "Wait, it's too tight, ahh, it's too tight!" and peeled himself out of my arms in a

panic.

“Damn, you strangled me! I’m really sorry. But I didn’t mean to, and I know it’s my fault for not being able to hold back, but you said, ‘Don’t let go!’ and clamped down on me! I was trying to be careful. There’s no need to get so angry.”

It was even more frustrating because I knew he was right.

Why did you say that? Why? The cause has to be because I love him too much and my lovesick brain has gone into full idiot mode! Wait, that reason pisses me off too much, I won’t accept it! I looked down a little and groaned in my mind.

Hang on a second. I said it was over, right?

“Lord Lukie, you didn’t stop when I said it was over! It’s your fault!”

What do you mean, it was unavoidable? It could’ve been prevented! No matter how you look at it! How dangerous. I almost had to shoulder the blame with you, you evil beauty!

“Well, you must’ve provoked me! How can any man stop when their woman is clinging onto them like that?!”

“I wasn’t provoking you! I had a good reason for it! Tell me what’s wrong with that!” I yelled.

Then, in a rare instance, Lucas raised his voice. “What’s wrong with that is that you told me with that dreamy face that you couldn’t take it anymore and you were going to cum! How can I hear that and not cum?! I told you before I did it that I was going to, and that I was holding back! I love you so much! And if you tell me not to let go of you, I’ll just be too happy and I won’t be able to let go! Please understand I can’t do it!” He said it all in one breath, cheeks bright red.

Then, a moment later, he added, “I’m so pathetic. I’m sorry, I said too much. I really think it’s all my fault.”

He wrapped his arms around me anxiously. I was tossed right back into that

maelstrom of shame.

Why are we having a fight about this outside? And the reasons are so silly. We're having, like, the most proper fight ever. It's kind of messed up that because I love you, I want to see you lose control. Why are you so devilish and perverted? And why is my heart pounding like this?!

In the end, it's my fault that I fell in love with you, but I'm so happy that I love someone who loves me in return! And I get so happy when he tells me he can't take it anymore. Ahh, if anyone were to sell "Willpower of Steel" I'd buy it for the highest price! Someone, sell it to me!

I reached out to Lucas, unable to suppress the swirling emotions inside of me.

"Ughh." My voice was terse, but still I snuggled against him. He was so sweet, and when he apologized again with a hint of trepidation, I could see how much this weighed on him…and that was the perfect opportunity for reconciliation.

"I'm really sorry," he said. "Please forgive me. Oww…"

"We won't do it outside anymore."

"I dunno about that."

"We won't."

"Okay. Maybe."

"No maybes, Lord Lukie."

"Fiiiine."

I watched as he struggled against himself, clenching his fists, and furrowing his brow. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he said, "I luh ew Shishi, so I'll hold back."

"He he! Oh, Lucas, you're so funny…!" I couldn't help but burst into laughter. I'm sorry, but it was just too amusing and adorable…! To hear such an otherworldly beauty whisper such things to you while you pinched his cheeks was a rare experience in this or any other lifetime, I suppose. And despite how

hard it was for him to say it, he really was trying to express himself. *He truly does love me, doesn't he?*

"He he he! Aw, your cheeks are all red… He he…"

"Cece, isn't this a bit much…? You're laughing too hard… I've never heard you laugh like this before. It's adorable, but also a bit galling…"

He pouted and turned away, but then I gently kissed his blushing cheek and whispered softly into his ear, "I love you too."

"Ahh, I lose! I'm so happy I could seriously die!"

He covered his mouth and looked away as a blush spread across his face. I looked down at Lucas with a smug grin, feeling a surge of triumph. *I'd do the same thing, you know?* Take that!

Then, taking a deep breath, I quickly put on my blouse and leaned my face against Lucas's neck…because having the person you love cum inside you in the open air is just so…so…embarrassing…! It's enough to make me want to die…!

"Um, it's…embarrassing…so, could you, um, do it quickly…?" I asked, to which Lucas responded, "R-right, um, actually, I'm finding it a bit…difficult too, so let's…get it done quickly…" I tilted my head in confusion.

Why was it difficult for him? Any way you looked at it, it was way harder and more embarrassing for me! I moaned sweetly into Lucas's neck. *Ahh, it feels so good. Why is my body like this, I hate it. Ohhh!*

I ended up coming over and over again, clinging to him each time. "Eek, ahh! I'm sorry, Lord Lukie, I'm gonna cuuum!" Lucas would gently thrust inside of me as I quaked around him, and for some reason he'd grit his teeth and say "Oh god, this is pure torture! I'm a complete fool!"

Again, I think it was way more embarrassing for me, but—and I'll never admit this—all I could think was, "Serves you right!"

"Lucas, I'm really okay."

“But your body still hurts, doesn’t it? Your legs are shaking. You could’ve fallen and gotten hurt.”

“Yes, but whose fault is that?”

“Mine. I’m really happy, but it’s painful. Even now, I’m happy but…it’s painful.”

Lucas breathed a heavy sigh. He was walking with me cradled in his arms, so I looked up at him, perplexed. Then I heard a voice saying, “Lady Lia!” so I looked in that direction.

Anna and the others were waiting for us where we’d arranged to meet earlier. They all looked relieved to see us, and we apologized for making them worry.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting. We’re, uh, fine now, though.”

They nodded in response, saying, “That’s good…” and bowed.

“We’ve already had a word with that liar of a woman. We deeply apologize for allowing you to get caught up in such a distressing situation, Lady Lia!”

“We shall do our utmost to ensure that such incidents do not happen in the future.”

“We’re truly sorry.”

They all gave me pleading looks, as if to say, “Don’t fire us!” and “Please let us continue being your maids!”

Surprised, I said, “You never know what someone else might say, so it’s really not your fault. Besides, I’ve been battling in high society for a long time now. I don’t have much resistance to outright lies like the one Bianca told. Actually, I have none at all. But if I can be mentally prepared, I think I can use that to my advantage next time. I’m glad I got to talk to Lucas in the end. So, um… situations like this probably will come up again in the future—can I count on you to take care of me?” I blushed a little.

The three of them widened their eyes and declared, “Cuteness is justice! We’ll serve you to the end!”

Yet another puzzling proclamation. Honestly, I was at a loss for words.

“Then I’ll count on you for—” I was interrupted before I could finish my response. “Mm?! Nngh?!”

All of a sudden Lucas covered my mouth. *Why?* And he was holding me in one arm like I was a child. Quite impressive, but…*Why?!* I glared at him, only to receive a stern look in return. *Why?*

“Lia, it’s not them you should be asking that from. It’s me.”

“Huh?”

“I’m the only one who can hear and say those words. Even Anna and the others can’t. I absolutely won’t allow it!” Lucas said that while glaring at the maids, and I couldn’t help but wonder if it was a bit excessive to be jealous even of my handmaids. I tried to conceal the ticklish feeling and rising heat inside of me with a stern glare, but then I noticed Anna and the others were starting to complain.

“Hey! What’s gotten into you, Lord Lucas?”

“That felt like a major win, just now!”

“Seriously! You’re a bundle of jealousy! Lia, what do you even see in Lord Lucas? What part of him do you like?!”

“Huh?” *Wait, why is this coming back on me?! What do I like about him?*

My whole body heated up when I realized what they’d just asked, and I was so flustered that I inadvertently glanced at Lucas. He adjusted his grip on me and stared intensely at me with his golden eyes, which made me blush shyly.

I was trembling so much from all the overwhelming emotions, but Lucas was totally oblivious, as usual!

“Which part?”

Now he's asking me himself?!

"Oh, Elsa!"

"Which part? Don't you want to know? He's great on the outside, but way too possessive!"

"Yeah, he's got that body going for him. Ah, Lord Lukie! Your eye color's back."

"He's doing that on purpose."

"Is he? He must really want Lady Lia to answer."

The maids had stopped filtering their words at all, and my fiancé was tipping his head and urging them on. *Someone, please help me!*

"Um…"

"Lia. What?"

"Huh?"

"Or…what do you dislike about me?"

Huh?!

Wow, asking that now takes some guts! Isn't it a little underhanded to ask for an answer then act all scared when you see me hesitate?! You'd think I have to answer, wouldn't you?!

"I don't dislike anything about you. Though it is annoying when you're mean and stubborn."

"Then what do you like?"

He's persistent! I thought, and accidentally blurted it out.

"And when you're so obtuse."

"I'm sorry."

"And how you're a bully."

“…Okay.”

“Wow, Lady Lia. You’re really giving it to him!”

“Oh my, Lord Lucas is depressed!”

“He hardly ever feels down. But isn’t it good for him to get a taste of it every once in a while?”

“Mean, persistent, and stubborn? Lord Lucas is the worst, isn’t he?”

As the maids whispered behind me, I noticed Lucas out of the corner of my eye. My heart ached at the uncertainty in those golden eyes that I loved so much, so I gently cupped his cheeks and spoke softly.

“There’s something more, but it’s a bit embarrassing to say, so I’ll tell you at home.”

Once I said that, his eyes widened. He gently lowered me to the ground and sighed, crouching down on the ground. I didn’t understand. He kept saying he was having a hard time earlier, did that mean he felt unwell? I was about to call out to him, but…

“No. It’s no good. Finn. Is the arena open today?”

“Yes, it is. Today’s when the mercenaries participate as well. Are you planning to join, sir?”

“I am. I’m having a tough time.”

“Condolences. But it’s probably your own fault,” Finn muttered with a bemused expression.

Meanwhile, Anna and the others looked on, with warm eyes and hidden mouths. *What’s with that look on their faces? And if you’re going to hide your mouths, do it properly. I can still see you smirking!* I thought as they dragged us off to the arena.

When we arrived, Lucas dashed around with abandon, displaying a level of strength that drained the blood from my face. It was like a massive mock

massacre, and he came out victorious.

After that, we had to buy clothes since ours were covered in dust. I almost got tricked into trying on clothes with him when he said, “Commoners always try on clothes together, so this would be normal for them.”

Lucas was unbearably adorable as he munched on pommes, and as if digging my own grave, I begged him to go back to being Lucas for a bit. He took me to a back alley at a whirlwind pace and deliberately ate the pastries in front of me, which evolved into a sort of game in which we ate pastries together like my old self might’ve eaten Pocky with a lover, and we ended up kissing and feeding each other, which put me in a dangerous position…

Our first date as an engaged couple turned out to be a lot more eventful than I’d expected, and I thought it had come to an end when…

“So, what do you like?”

I looked at him.

“You said you’d tell me at home.”

But as soon as I climbed into bed to go to sleep, he cornered me by the headboard. I was so embarrassed and flustered I said, “What do you like about *me*?!”

“You’ll answer if I tell you?” he smirked.

“Never mind! Please stop!” I pleaded, tears streaming down my face as he gushed with endless praise for me. And it didn’t stop there—he made sure he got his answer.

I’d ended up digging my own grave with that back-and-forth teasing session.

Maybe it would’ve been safer and less troublesome if we had done away with the disguises and gone out in our noble attire. I pondered this as I drifted off to sleep; but enveloped in the warmth of his arms, I felt blissfully happy.

Special Short Story

APPLE WINE HAS A LOW ALCOHOL CONTENT, RIGHT?

I gazed at my fiancée. Her cheeks blushed prettily, her lips pouted adorably, her lovely bright green eyes were brimming with affection as she stared at me lovingly.

I loved her more than I could express.

“There’s something I hafta say to you, Wowd Wukie!”

“What is it, Cecilia?”

She’s drunk. She doesn’t even realize she slurred my name. Not only that, but when she climbed onto the sofa, she had no idea that her nightgown was open, and she was showing me her beautiful, pale thighs.

I was well aware that heat was beginning to build up between my legs at the sight of her disheveled appearance, which under normal circumstances she would’ve never allowed me to see. I managed to set my glass down on the table, but then she said, “Are ya listenin’ to me, Lord Wukie?!”

“Yes, I’m listening.”

How can one person be this adorable?! I want to pull her onto the bed right now and turn her into a sticky mess.

Should I tell her that grabbing a man in his pajamas is as good as telling him to do as he pleases? Nah, maybe it’s best if I don’t.

With that in mind, I tried to maintain a mask of mock solemnity. She had tears in her eyes as he uttered a shocking line: “Go settle yer relationship with that woman right now.”

“Huh? Wait, I don’t remember anything about that…!”

Who’s been feeding her nonsense now?! I’m gonna find them and kill them!

But for now, I focused on soothing my fiancée, who seemed ready to burst into tears at any moment.

"I told you, I've never made love to any woman but you. I swear to the gods, and to you: there's been no one else."

"Liar!"

Why are you refusing to believe me?!

"I know about it! I know a buncha girls have invited you to tea! Even though you have me, right here!"

She's acting like I'm cheating on her! I don't want anyone besides Cece, but most importantly it would be physically impossible for me to do so, so why is she acting like I'm some sort of sleazeball?! Hang on a second—tea? Don't tell me…

"Cece… Are you talking about when another family wanted to betroth me to their daughter?"

"That's right! A beautiful girl came over every single day! It's a famous story! …Waaah, you're so mean!"

"Ahh, don't cry! Listen, Cece. I'm not sure why you see it that way, but I never had a physical relationship with those women."

No matter how you look at it, her statement can only be interpreted that way. It was just a casual tea party, so why is she taking the conversation there? I couldn't help but tilt my head in confusion, meeting her gaze as if urging her to clarify.

"You said it was only me!"

"That's right. It is only you."

Oh god, she's so adorable. This is a terrible thing to think while she's crying, but hearing her say this with tears streaking down her face is too much. Get yourself together! Right now, we need to reassure Cece!

"Then why did the women who had tea with you say it was just one time but

it was a good memory?!”

“…Huh?”

All we did was have tea together, so why would it be a good memory? That’s what I wanna know…

“Lucas, at least spend a moment talking to her. Well, with that face of yours, just be quiet and smile, and it should go smoothly. And don’t forget to keep smiling. Oh, and bringing a small bouquet to apologize won’t hurt, either.”

That was what Dirk had said, and after I rejected the marriage proposal, I kept up my fake smile and handed over the bouquet at the end of the meeting. But for some reason, those ladies looked back fondly on that event. Where exactly did they find satisfaction in that? It was baffling.

Amidst my confusion, Cece suddenly climbed onto my lap.

“I wanna do it too.”

“Um, what are you talking about?”

It probably isn’t the “it” I’m thinking about, but can you blame a guy for hoping?

“Isn’t it obvious?! A tea party!”

“…Oh, of course.”

Yep. I knew it. She’s the cutest girl in the world.

“Well, then. Let’s begin!”

Is she really doing this now? She hasn’t even realized she’s on my lap with her arms wrapped around my neck. This is the best tea party of my life, Cece. That apple wine sure is going to work.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Cecilia Cline. Thank you for inviting me here today.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, beautiful lady. I’m Lucas Herbst. I’ve been wanting to meet you for so long. I’d hate for this to be our only encounter; can we meet again?”

“Um, I’d, um…be delighted…?”

“Wonderful, then it’s settled. Lady Cline, will you marry me?”

The moment I said that, her eyes widened. She frowned, and repeated, “Lady Cline?”

The words sounded painful on her moist, trembling lips. I embraced her joyfully, whispering above her quivering mouth, “Only your fiancé can call you by name, right? Answer me, sweetie.”

“I-I will. I’ll marry you, so please call me by my name…”

Oh, she’s so cute. I wouldn’t mind having a tea party every day if they were all like this.

As I called out her name, as I showered her with kisses, she suddenly hugged me tightly and returned the kiss, causing my face to flush.

“Um, Cece?”

“When you smile at them like that, when you kiss them like that, any woman would think back on it fondly! But Lord Lukie is *my* fiancé, so I’m the only one who can do all those things with you!”

Can I take her to bed now?

“You’re such a swindler!” she said.

As for why that image came to mind, I’d investigate later. *I feel like it’s better to convey this properly. I’ll say it to her when she’s drunk, even if she might not remember tomorrow.*

As those thoughts ran through my mind, I gently turned her pouting face toward me and met her eyes.

“Cece. You’re my first everything.”

“What are you saying?”

“You’re the first woman I fell in love with, my first kiss, the first person I’ve had sex with, my first girlfriend. And you’re the first person I’ve ever asked to

marry me at a tea party.”

Cece tipped her head to the side thoughtfully then turned bright red. The corners of her mouth had begun to relax as I gazed into her glistening bright green eyes.

I lifted her left hand and kissed her ring finger, watching her trembling lips. *Ah, I want to put a ring on her and make her mine so badly.*

“I love you, and only you, Lady Cecilia Cline.”

“Yes, and I love you too.”

I tilted my face toward her lips, and she let out a bashful but happy sigh.

By the way, I checked the next morning, and of course she had no memory of this. I’d have to use the apple cider more wisely from now on.

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